

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE



HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
APPLICATION FOR HISTORIC LANDMARK OR HISTORIC DISTRICT DESIGNATION

New Designation X

Amendment of a previous designation —

Please summarize any amendment(s) _____

Property name Pan American Health Organization Headquarters

If any part of the interior is being nominated, it must be specifically identified and described in the narrative statements.

Address 525 23rd Street NW, Washington, DC 20037

Square and lot number(s) Square 59, Lot 825

Affected Advisory Neighborhood Commission 2A

Date of construction 1963-1965 Date of major alteration(s) N/A

Architect(s) Román Fresnedo Siri

Architectural style(s) MODERN MOVEMENT/Modernistic

Original use Pan American Health Organization Headquarters

Property owner Pan American Health Organizer


Legal address of property owner 525 23rd Street NW

NAME OF APPLICANT(S) DC Preservation League

If the applicant is an organization, it must submit evidence that among its purposes is the promotion of historic preservation in the District of Columbia. A copy of its charter, articles of incorporation, or by-laws, setting forth such purpose, will satisfy this requirement.

Address/Telephone of applicant(s) 1221 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20036

Name and title of authorized representative Rebecca Miller, Executive Director

Signature of representative  Date 10/24/2019

Name and telephone of author of application DC Preservation League, 202.783.5144

Date received 1/6/2020
H.P.O. staff TJD
Case No. 20-05

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: Pan American Health Organization Headquarters

Other names/site number: _____

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location

Street & number: 525 23rd Street NW

City or town: Washington State: DC County: _____

Not For Publication: Vicinity:

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this ___ nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

 national statewide local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

 A B C D

<p>_____ Signature of certifying official/Title:</p> <p>_____ State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</p>	<p>_____ Date</p>
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<p>In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.</p>	
<p>_____ Signature of commenting official:</p> <p>_____ Title :</p>	<p>_____ Date</p> <p>_____ State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</p>

Pan American Health Organization
Name of Property

District of Columbia
County and State

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

Pan American Health Organization
Name of Property

District of Columbia
County and State

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN MOVEMENT/Modernistic

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: marble, granite, glass, concrete

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) headquarters building consists of two distinct volumes: a gracefully curved ten-story administrative building that hosts the organization's main offices, and an adjoining four-story cylindrical annex that serves as the congress hall for formal assemblies of the PAHO member state delegates, as well as other meetings and events. It is situated on a triangular lot of just over one acre between Virginia Avenue, E Street and 23rd Street, Northwest, in the Foggy Bottom neighborhood. Constructed of reinforced concrete over a steel frame, the administrative building features a stark, vertically-oriented façade featuring dark ribbons of windows and spandrels separated by concrete fins. Raised a full floor above ground level on concrete pilotis, the administrative building also features blank east and west façades paneled in white marble. The adjoining cylindrical annex is encased in a concrete grill that contrasts strikingly in texture as well as mass with the administrative building. Additional contrast is provided by the black Mexican granite used as rim at the ground level of both buildings. Designed by Uruguayan architect Román Fresnedo Siri, the PAHO headquarters complex represents one of Washington's outstanding examples of Midcentury Modern architecture. The building has remained fundamentally unaltered externally since its completion in 1965 and possesses a very high level of integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship,

Pan American Health Organization

Name of Property

District of Columbia

County and State

feeling, and association. It retains a high level of integrity of setting. The only significant design changes have been to landscaping around the base of the building.

Narrative Description

The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) headquarters building is located on a triangular lot of just over one acre between Virginia Avenue, E Street and 23rd Street, Northwest, in the Foggy Bottom neighborhood. It is surrounded by George Washington University to the north and east, the Columbia Plaza office/residential complex to the west, and the State Department to the south across the E street expressway.

The building complex consists of two interconnected volumes that form a single building: a tall, curved administrative building and a cylindrical annex. The nine-story, 170,000-square-foot main volume's primary façade faces southwest and forms a sweeping concave curve that appears to cradle the cylindrical Congress Hall annex with which it connects. An array of 51 soaring, white, evenly-spaced vertical fins separate panels of dark gray glass, which provide fenestration for the interior office spaces. Individual windows are separated by dark glass spandrels, which blend in with the windows to create a sense of seamless vertical strips of tinted glass between the concrete fins. Horizontal lines separating spandrels from windows are muted and subservient to the façade's emphatic verticality. The vertical fins terminate at "blind gables" along an invisible roofline, avoiding any indication of a frame around them. The same arrangement of elements is repeated on the north, rear façade of the building, which faces Virginia Avenue. The building's relatively slender, windowless west and east façades are each clad in 20 rows of 22 white American marble panels. The primary south façade is adorned with a row of 29 bronze medallion plaques made by American artist Michael Lantz.¹ Each medallion is set against a black marble spandrel separating the second and third floor windows and represents the national seal of each PAHO member state. A horizontal, white concrete penthouse is set back in the center of the rooftop of the main volume and is masked by a grilled façade that discreetly encases the building's mechanical systems. The penthouse structure is only visible at a distance from the building.

The main volume stands on 20 rounded *pilotis* (columns) that lift it a full story above ground level. The ground level is open, paved in flagstone, and publicly accessible, other than a small central area that is encased in glass curtain walls. A shallow flight of five flagstone stairs at the eastern end creates a level base for the building on its lot, which slants slightly towards the east. A ramp to underground parking sinks beneath the building at its eastern end, which is the least publicly-prominent side of the building. Short, black Mexican granite walls frame the ground floor elements, including the entry portico, the ramp to the underground garage, and the reflecting pool and garden elements. Reflecting pools originally stood beneath the main volume and ringed the circular Congress Hall in a broad, flagstone-paved courtyard. Two of the

¹ PAHO press release, "Fifty Years After its Opening, PAHO's Iconic Modernist Headquarters Building is Honored," Nov. 1, 2018.

Pan American Health Organization

District of Columbia

Name of Property

County and State

reflecting pools originally featured bronze sculptures (no longer present).² A row of 42 flag poles (representing each PAHO member state) stand in a row at the northeast corner of the building, echoing the building's vertical symmetries while also delineating the northeastern edge of the property site.

Inside, the main volume's sixth floor is dedicated to a library and research center with capacity for 30,000 volumes, designed to serve as a central repository for scientific research and technical information on public health throughout the Americas. The building's other floors contain offices for PAHO professional staff, and the tenth floor hosts the executive suites of the organization's leadership. The building includes three formal meeting rooms, one with capacity for 110 people and two more for up to 75. These rooms, along with the Congress Hall, are equipped with simultaneous translation equipment integrated into the design by architect Fresnedo Siri. Two underground parking levels have a capacity for 110 vehicles.

The main volume is connected to the Congress Hall annex by a two-story passageway that is hidden from view when the building is seen from the southwest, creating the illusion that two independent buildings stand next to each other. Because the main volume is elevated on pilotis, primary access to the Congress Hall is through the passageway from the second-floor lobby of the main volume. The passageway provides a broad connection between the two buildings. The original architectural plans called for two escalators crossing this space to facilitate this passage from one building to the other. These were replaced in the final design by a dramatically curved staircase from the second-floor passageway to the ground floor of the Congress Hall. The staircase features steel balusters, mahogany handrail, and white marble treads that appear to "float" without any visible risers.³

The Congress Hall annex is about 92 feet in diameter and features a large open meeting room that seats up to 300 people and fills the three main levels of the building (which are on the same level as the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th floors of the main office portion of the building). The cylindrical volume is encased on the outside by a lattice-like grill of diamond-shaped hexagons. Fresnedo Siri's original design called for the external grill to be made of bronze. However, the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts rejected that plan, leading the architect to opt instead for an architectural concrete composed of white marble, quartz and Portland cement.⁴ The concrete has the virtue of blending more seamlessly with the similarly composed and colored external ribbing of the main volume. A spider web-like steel structure supports the building, allowing the entire interior space to be free of any supporting columns.⁵ The recessed ground floor platform is finished in the same Mexican black granite used for the site's ground-level exterior elements,

² Portner, Stuart, "El Edificio de la Sed de la Oficina Sanitaria Panamericana" in the *Boletín de la Oficina Sanitaria Panamericana*, (Feb. 1965).

³ Weizenmann, J., *Arquitectura de Román Fresnedo Siri* (1938-1971), doctoral dissertation, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre, Brazil, (2004), p.250.

⁴ Wolf Von Eckardt, "Space Squeeze Put on New Health Building Mars Its Beauty: A Critique," *Post*, Sep. 27, 1965, A3.

⁵ The steel for the spider-web like structure that sustains the cylindrical conference center was fabricated by Mimsco Steel Corporation of Lorton, VA and was erected by the Heron Todd Steel Construction Company of Arlington, VA (*Star*, Oct. 30, 1964, F-1).

Pan American Health Organization

District of Columbia

Name of Property

County and State

creating a striking contrast with the white honeycomb grill of the upper levels, which “floats” above it.

The interior space, naturally lit by windows throughout the cylinder’s full 360 degrees, achieves an impressive sense of openness and purity of design. The Congress Hall auditorium is nested within this space. The backdrop to the presidium of the Congress Hall features “floating” vertical slats of six different woods, including Honduran mahogany, Brazilian jacaranda, American walnut and oak, arranged, in the architect’s words, “to accentuate the dimension of the space and the importance of the function it served.”⁶ Fresnedo Siri also designed the central chandelier of the Congress Hall, which he referred to as “a sculpture in light.” Measuring 20 feet in diameter and weighing 16,000 pounds, it is comprised of 3,000 rectangular pieces of Lucite, the translucent acrylic resin which was considered a “space age” material for vanguard furniture and art in the 1960s.⁷ The light hangs from a recessed circular opening at the center of the round, white ceiling surface, which, like the other major elements of the auditorium, appears to “float” at the top of the room, punctured by an array of pot lights that have the look of stars in the heavens.

The entire building possesses a very high level of integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. It retains a high level of integrity of setting. There have been no additions to the main volume or Congress Hall Annex, nor any substantial alterations to the building’s exterior elements. However, the original reflecting pools with fountains and two sculptures have all been removed. The original black granite retaining walls that framed the pools remain intact and are now filled in with planted gardens.

⁶ Boronat, Y. and Risso, M., *Román Fresnedo Siri, un Arquitecto Uruguayo*. Montevideo: Editora de la Universidad de la República, Facultad de Arquitectura, Instituto de Historia de la Arquitectura (1980), p.108.

⁷ PAHO, *Report on Buildings and Installations*, Apr. 16, 1966.

Pan American Health Organization
Name of Property

District of Columbia
County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

Pan American Health Organization
Name of Property

District of Columbia
County and State

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ARCHITECTURE

HEALTH/MEDICINE

Period of Significance

1963-1965

Significant Dates

1963-1965

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Román Fresnedo Siri (architect)

American Construction Co. (builder)

Pan American Health Organization
Name of Property

District of Columbia
County and State

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Pan American Health Organization Headquarters building meets DC Criteria B (History), D (Architecture and Urbanism), and E (Artistry) and similar National Register Criteria A and C. The building is distinctive for its dramatic Modernist design as well as for the history and achievements of the distinguished organization it houses. From this building PAHO has led campaigns for improving health and fighting infectious diseases that have affected all the peoples of the Americas. Thus, the building has both local, national, and international significance. The building embodies the distinguishing characteristics of the Modernist architectural style, and represents a unique building type associated with the headquarters of large organizations. It also epitomizes the materials and methods of construction associated with the mid 20th century, including the use of pre-cast concrete and an innovative steel-frame technique to create the large, open Congress Hall auditorium in the building's annex. It represents the unique role of the District of Columbia in hosting and supporting large international organizations, and the attendant planning and urbanism features of such activity. The building also possesses high artistic value in its display of Modernist aesthetic and building values. The period of significance is from 1963 to 1965, based on the dates of the building's construction. Finally, the building retains a high degree of integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. It retains a high level of integrity of setting. The building has had only minimal modifications since its initial construction.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

The PAHO Headquarters meets National Register Criterion A (DC Criterion B – History), because it is highly significant to the development of cultural and international institutions in the District of Columbia, particularly in the post-World War II era. That optimism for the future is reflected not just in the building's architecture but in the ambitious mission of the Pan American Health Organization to promote universal health and eradicate disease throughout the Western hemisphere. The organization's dynamism found a receptive counterpart in the youthful optimism of the Kennedy administration and a Cold War-driven impetus for ambitious partnership, resulting in the U.S. government's donation of the land for the PAHO building and support for its construction. The Kennedy Administration's "Alliance for Progress" initiative with Latin America, for example, was launched the same year as the PAHO building architectural competition was held. In addition to the historical resonance of the building's construction and design, it also became the spot for numerous international assemblies that led to historic gains in improving the health and well-being of the people of the Americas. The resolution on eradicating smallpox, for example, which was adopted in the PAHO Congress Hall in 1967, led to its elimination in the Western Hemisphere several years later and paved the way

Pan American Health Organization

District of Columbia

Name of Property

County and State

for global eradication of the disease in 1980. The building stands as a lasting symbol of international cooperation in the fight against infectious diseases.

The PAHO Headquarters also meets National Register Criterion C (DC Criteria D – Architecture and Urbanism, and E – Artistry). It is a distinctive artistic masterpiece of the Modernist movement. The building curves dramatically across its triangular site, cradling its circular auditorium, which appears to be a freestanding structure, and creating a commanding presence within its Foggy Bottom setting. The stark contrast in shape and texture between the smooth, verticality of the tall façade of the administration building and concrete “grill” that encases the squat, round annex heighten the drama of the building’s design and the sense that it is something monumental. This, in turn, is fitting for the building’s role as headquarters of an international institution committed to universal health. Inside the Congress Hall, the “floating” interior architectural elements—the grand staircase, the richly paneled walls, the stark white ceiling—demonstrate the distinctive verve of Modernism and echo the sense of dynamism and optimism uniquely characteristic of the age in which the building was built. The building’s design, unique in the District of Columbia, harkens to the design of the United Nations Secretariat Building in New York City and serves as a visual link between the two international organizations. It also thematically links the two cosmopolitan cities in a way no other building does. While other Modernist buildings have been constructed in Washington, few exceptional examples of Formalism still stand. This building is the only example of Fresnedo Siri’s work anywhere in the United States.

History of the Pan American Health Organization

Founded in 1902, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) is the world’s oldest international public health agency.⁸ Its core mission is to strengthen national and local health systems and improve health outcomes for all people in the Americas.

In the mid to late 1800s, infectious diseases—including bubonic plague, yellow fever, and cholera—were increasingly spreading around the globe as a result of the era’s vastly increased global trade. Various organizations were founded to address these health threats, but none gained unanimous or sustained support across the Americas. At the time, international public health was often fragmented and ineffective, and the transmission of infectious diseases was not well understood. Even quarantines instituted to protect cities from epidemics often failed. New Orleans, for example, experienced deadly yellow fever epidemics several times despite instituting quarantines. But by the late 1800s, advances in science and public health converged with an increasing concern about the widespread suffering caused by infectious diseases, paving the way for better international cooperation on urban health issues.⁹

In response, the First International Sanitary Convention of the American Republics was held in December 1902 at the Willard Hotel in Washington, D.C.¹⁰ The chief topic discussed among the

⁸ “Key Facts About PAHO” factsheet, PAHO, 2012.

⁹ Marcos Cueto, *The Value of Health. A History of the Pan American Health Organization*. Washington, D.C.: PAHO, 2007.

¹⁰ “Sanitary Conference Today,” *Post*, Dec. 2, 1902.

Pan American Health Organization

District of Columbia

Name of Property

County and State

delegates was quarantines with a view to establishing “such sanitation of seaports as will cause epidemic diseases to disappear, and to make such diseases more manageable and capable of suppression in the event that they should be introduced.”¹¹ The meeting’s first session was opened by Walter Wyman, a physician from St. Louis who by 1902 was the Surgeon General of the [US] Marine Hospital Service, the highest-ranking office of its kind at that time. Wyman was emblematic of a generation of intellectuals, politicians, and other public officials who were convinced that human ability and knowledge could dominate nature, rationally direct commerce, and improve public health. Wyman had already contributed decisively to public health by promoting the National Quarantine Act of 1893, which entrusted his office with the authority to intervene in the maritime public health affairs of any U.S. state, especially with regard to quarantine regulations. The convention at the Willard Hotel established the Pan American Sanitary Bureau—PAHO’s predecessor—as a permanent coordinating body to promote the consistent implementation of such regulations across countries of the Western Hemisphere. “The creation of a permanent bureau empowered to deal with all sanitary questions of an international character will be welcomed as a legitimate development,” the *Washington Post* observed.¹² President Roosevelt met with the delegates of the 11 foreign countries that attended the meeting: Chile, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, and Uruguay. Over the three days of the conference delegates presented reports on the status of public health efforts in each of their countries. The conference adopted resolutions concerning time of detention and methods of disinfection to be used for quarantines at seaports, measures for eradicating the mosquitoes that spread yellow fever, and other means for controlling fever and cholera.¹³

The new Bureau established by the conference initially was headquartered at the Pan American Union building, an elegant Beaux-Arts structure on 17th Street NW that was completed in 1910 and is now listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The Bureau initially consisted of six part-time officers and two full-time clerks, funded by a budget of \$5,000. The next conference, in 1905, was also held in Washington, followed by conferences at other Latin American cities. The first conference of all the directors of public health services of the member nations was held at the Pan American Union building in Washington in 1926, addressing topics such as the pan-American sanitary code, the prevention and treatment of leprosy, yellow fever, dysentery, malaria, smallpox, typhus, venereal diseases and other diseases, as well as narcotic addiction. The Bureau dedicated a new library at the Pan American Union building during the 1926 meeting.¹⁴

Civil unrest, including the Chaco War between Paraguay and Bolivia in the 1930s contributed to public health setbacks that the Sanitary Bureau struggled to overcome.¹⁵ The global upheaval of World War II likewise raised concerns about public health. Addressing the 1944 Pan-American Conference of National Directors of Health, held under the auspices of the Pan American Sanitary Bureau, Assistant Secretary of State Adolf Berle warned that even though the Americas

¹¹ “Plan War on Disease,” *Post*, Dec. 1, 1902.

¹² “Health of Western Hemisphere,” *Post*, Dec. 2, 1902.

¹³ “Mosquito Human Foe,” *Post*, Dec. 5, 1902; “Republics Send Health Delegates,” *Post*, Sep. 26, 1926.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ “Wars Raise Peril of Yellow Fever,” *Star*, Aug. 21, 1932.

Pan American Health Organization

District of Columbia

Name of Property

County and State

were not suffering the way that Europe, Africa, and Asia were, that public health was still suffering from the heightened traffic of soldiers around the globe and that the dangers of malaria, typhus, and malnutrition had been heightened.¹⁶

After World War II, an increased push toward global cooperation led the United Nations to establish the World Health Organization, which was the first specialized agency of the U.N. that all members joined. It came into being in 1948 and the following year designated the Pan-American Sanitary Bureau as its regional arm for the Americas.

With increasing responsibilities for maintaining sound public health practices, proper sanitation, and medical care, the bureau staff increased, and its old quarters at the Pan American Union Building became insufficient. In 1951, the Bureau established its new headquarters in two mansions off of Dupont Circle, the Hitt House at 1501 New Hampshire Avenue NW and the adjoining Blodgett House at 1515 New Hampshire Avenue (both later demolished). The houses were close to the embassies of a number of Latin American embassies. The bureau purchased the houses with a loan from the Kellogg Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation. The new space temporarily met the needs of the growing Bureau as it began planning to construct a larger, permanent headquarters elsewhere in the city.¹⁷

In 1958, the bureau changed its name to the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) to align more closely with its role as part of the World Health Organization. PAHO also serves as the health component of the Inter-American System, whose other entities include the Organization of American States, the Inter-American Development Bank, and the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture.

History of the Site and Its Selection

At a 1950 meeting of the Pan American Sanitary Conference, the U.S. delegation pledged to make available to the Bureau a site for a permanent headquarters. The U.S. government followed up by proposing a site on Wisconsin Avenue in Bethesda, Maryland that had been set aside for the National Institutes of Health. After reviewing the proposal, the Bureau decided in a 1951 meeting of its Executive Committee to defer a new building project for a few years citing anticipated difficulties in obtaining building materials in a world still struggling with post-war reconstruction, and concerns that the proposed site might be too remote from its principal institutional partners in the city.¹⁸ The temporary Dupont Circle location would serve as a stopgap for the organization's 250 employees.

The dawn of the 1960s ushered in a new era in Latin America's political development and in hemispheric relations. The Cuban revolution of 1959 placed the region in the forefront of Cold War priorities, and the U.S. government recognized a strategic need to focus more resources on deepening regional ties, not only in the political and economic spheres but also in support of the

¹⁶ "Wartime Health Aids Stressed by Berle at Pan-American Parley," *Star*, Apr. 24, 1944.

¹⁷ "Pan-American Unit Buys Houses At Dupont Circle," *Post*, Feb. 7, 1951.

¹⁸ Minutes of the 13th Executive Committee meeting of the Pan American Sanitary Bureau, March 30, 1951 (CE13/16, Topic 16: Permanent Headquarters Building).

Pan American Health Organization

District of Columbia

Name of Property

County and State

region's social development priorities. In June 1959, Rep. William C. Cramer of Florida proposed a bill to Congress to authorize the General Services Administration to purchase a triangular plot located at the corner of Virginia Avenue and 22rd Street Northwest in Foggy Bottom, a block away from the then-new U.S. Department of State building and just a few blocks away from the Organization of American States headquarters building. The site measured just under 46,000 square feet (just over one acre), and had an estimated value of \$875,000. Part of the lot was covered by parking lots, while 22 townhouses—some recently remodeled—filled the rest.¹⁹ The *Washington Post* endorsed the proposal, noting that PAHO's "good works in the health field are a matter of proud record, and it is appropriate that Washington be chosen as a headquarters site because this city is a center of public health activity as well as of inter-American diplomacy."²⁰ In March of 1960, Congress approved the measure, and President Eisenhower signed it into law.²¹

The new offer came at an auspicious time for PAHO. The organization was looking toward the future with fresh ambition and vision, reflecting the spirit of the region as well as that of its new director, Abraham Horwitz of Chile—the first Latin American to head the organization.²² Previously the American Surgeon General had served in that role. While there was much enthusiasm and optimism, Cold War friction was also always present, lending urgency to the creation of building a permanent headquarters building that could signal the solidity of international cooperation on public health. In June 1961, for example, before construction of the new headquarters building began, vandals struck PAHO's Dupont Circle buildings, spray-painting them with anti-Communist slogans.²³ PAHO's headquarters project would serve to defy politically-motivated opposition such as this.

At the meeting of its Executive Committee in April of 1960, PAHO formally accepted the offer of the Virginia Avenue site and set forth parameters for proceeding with construction of the headquarters building. Under the terms of the donation agreement, PAHO was responsible for any preparatory studies required for the new building project.

PAHO decided to use an international open competition as the means of selecting an architect for the project, following the recently successful model of other international organizations (most notably the United Nations New York headquarters inaugurated in 1952, and the UNESCO Paris headquarters in 1953—both resulting in landmark designs of modernist architecture). PAHO framed the competition based on standards developed by the International Union of Architects, and determined that the competition should be open to architects from all countries of the

¹⁹ "Bill Seeks U.S. Donation of Pan-Am Health Site," *Post*, Jun. 6, 1959; *Report on Buildings and Headquarters* (Document CE41/3, Jul. 29, 1960) submitted to the 41st meeting of the Executive Committee meeting of the Pan American Health Organization.

²⁰ "Headquarters for Health" (editorial), *Post*, Jun. 18, 1959.

²¹ Public Law 86-395, Mar. 28, 1960; funding subsequently appropriated by Public Law 86-678, Aug. 31, 1960. See also "Foggy Bottom Site Voted for OAS Health Unit," *Post*, Mar. 23, 1960.

²² Cueto, p. 98.

²³ "Vandals Mar Pan American Buildings," *Post*, Jun. 2, 1961.

Pan American Health Organization

District of Columbia

Name of Property

County and State

Americas. The vision was that “the new building should be a monument to international health cooperation.”²⁴

PAHO’s Permanent Subcommittee on Buildings and Installations set forth criteria for the project, including that the new building should accommodate not only the organization’s current staff of 250 employees but allow for a projected staff growth to 395 by 1980; parking for up to 50 vehicles; “a sizeable and handsome reception area in order to accommodate tourists and visitors properly”; and space for a library “to serve as a central repository for Latin American public health literature.” The organization had maintained a library since 1926, when it was first established in the Pan American Union building. The project’s criteria also called for a main chamber designed with multi-use flexibility to host the meetings of the organization’s governing bodies as well as technical conferences and other events that the organization might sponsor, accommodating up to 500 people and equipped to support simultaneous translation and other technical needs. The Subcommittee’s initial 1960 projection was for a 90-foot-tall, seven-story building. In 1962, two years later, a surge in PAHO programs under President Kennedy’s Alliance for Progress initiative²⁵ prompted PAHO to expand these space requirements by an additional floor. The final height approved by Washington, D.C. zoning authorities was 110 feet, plus a recessed penthouse of 11.5 feet to accommodate HVAC and elevator utilities.²⁶

PAHO initially estimated that the project would cost \$4.5 million. The organization planned to roll over the proceeds from the sale of their existing Dupont Circle buildings and raise the rest of the amount through contributions from the organization’s member states and/or donations from foundations, private groups or individuals. The Kellogg Foundation, a long-standing partner of the organization, subsequently stepped forward with a grant of \$3.75 million to support the project.²⁷ The foundation supplemented that amount with an additional \$1.25 million in 1962. In exchange for this support and in lieu of repaying the sum as a loan, PAHO agreed to dedicate \$250,000 annually over the next twenty years to regional health services and programs.²⁸

In December of 1960, PAHO selected Leon Chatelain, Jr. to serve as Professional Architectural Advisor to prepare the background engineering and site information for the project, and to direct the international competition. Chatelain was a distinguished partner in the Washington-based firm of Chatelain, Gauger and Nolan, and had been the National President of the American Institute of Architects from 1956 to 1958. Chatelain developed the conditions for the competition, with approval by the International Union of Architects and the American Institute of Architects. The competition was opened on February 15, 1961, with a winner slated for announcement in September of the same year. As jury for the competition, PAHO selected a panel of distinguished architects from the Americas: Augusto Guzman Robles (Peru); Luis Gonzalez Aparicio (Mexico); Hector Mardones-Restat (Chile); Samuel Inman Cooper (USA);

²⁴ 1960 *Report of the Subcommittee on Buildings and Installations*, Annex I, p.2.

²⁵ Cueto, p. 104.

²⁶ 1962 *Report of the Subcommittee on Buildings and Installations*, Annex II (Document CE46/13, Apr. 20, 1962), p.2.

²⁷ “Foundation Offers Grant For Health Offices Here,” *Post*, May 21, 1961.

²⁸ 1960 *Report of the Subcommittee on Buildings and Installations*, Annex I, pp 2-6.

Pan American Health Organization

District of Columbia

Name of Property

County and State

and Abraham Horwitz (PAHO Director). The winner was to receive a \$10,000 prize, serving as an advance fee to be supplemented by 6 percent of the project cost.²⁹

Following a review of 58 entries,³⁰ PAHO in October, 1961, declared Román Fresnedo Siri the winner of the competition. The widely-respected, 58-year old Uruguayan architect had a significant body of work in his home country and other parts of South America, but this would be his first and only commission in the United States. At the award ceremony announcing Fresnedo Siri's selection, PAHO Director Abraham Horwitz said "this beautiful building will become a monument to the ideal of better health for the peoples of the Americas." He described the winning design as one of "both grace and utility," and said "it reflects the high ideals of the Pan-American spirit in an age when we must move ahead to build a better future for our peoples." He closed with a quote from Churchill: "We shape our buildings, and afterwards, they shape us."³¹

Design and Construction

Fresnedo Siri designed the PAHO headquarters building as a distinguished landmark that fits into the conservative architectural context of Washington, D.C. In stressing formalism and attention to symmetry, Fresnedo Siri said he was trying to stay true to the "classic spirit of the city of Washington."³² The Congress Hall annex, for example, can be seen to emulate classical models such as the Pantheon and the Jefferson Memorial.³³ Nevertheless, the signature elements of his design are Modernist. For example, Fresnedo Siri raised the main building's mass on first-floor pilotis, a signature element of Modernist design intended here to maximize the open pedestrian plaza space on the relatively small and unusually shaped lot, while enhancing visual transparency and flow. He added reflecting pools with fountains at the base of each building; his vision was that the cylindrical congress hall in particular would appear to be "emerging from the water."³⁴ The thin vertical streams of water spurting up from the fountains were meant to echo the symmetry of the pilotis and vertical ribbing of the main building.

Fresnedo Siri purposefully placed the convex side of the crescent-shaped main office building to the north, smoothly integrating it into the urban streetscape of similarly sized office, university and residential buildings. This allowed the concave side of the building to face the open side of the lot, gently cradling the congress hall annex while framing the contours of the pedestrian plaza area that flows toward the site's open southern side.

Based on conditions at the time of Fresnedo's initial design, the southern side of the plaza was meant to face a larger green space. Unfortunately, that green space was reduced as part of the contemporaneous E street expressway project, which became an underpass on the southern edge

²⁹ 1961 *Report of the Subcommittee on Buildings and Installations* (Document CE43/7; Apr. 11, 1961).

³⁰ *Quadrennial Report of the PAHO Director*, Jul. 1962, p.78.

³¹ Cueto, p. 106.

³² Von Eckardt, op. cit.

³³ Robinson & Associates, 84.

³⁴ Artigadi, Juan, *Propuestas Urbanas de Roman Fresnedo Siri*, (Doctoral thesis, Universidad Politecnica de Madrid and Universidad de la Republica – Uruguay, 2004), p.27.

Pan American Health Organization

District of Columbia

Name of Property

County and State

of the PAHO site, opening three months before the PAHO building in July 1965. The expressway project forced a reduction of 13 feet from the southern side of the PAHO site, forcing Fresnedo Siri to reduce the size of the plaza and eliminate part of the reflecting pool originally intended to fully surround the cylindrical annex.³⁵

For the three-story-tall interior of the dramatically soaring Congress Hall annex, Fresnedo Siri chose a classic Modernist design vocabulary. After studying the main diplomatic congress halls at the United Nations, State Department, Organization of American States (OAS), and elsewhere, he devised a “floating seat” solution that makes the chairs appear to be suspended in mid-air, achieving what he described as “a great functional and aesthetic purity.” The seats are all anchored to the floor in the rear by curved latitudinal support elements running behind each row (and serving as hidden conduits for the simultaneous translation cabling). This “floating” appearance echoes the overall appearance of the façade of the administrative building, which floats above the first floor pilotis, as well as details within the Congress Hall, such as the floating treads on the grand staircase and the floating wooden slats that line the interior walls. All of the furnishings for the congress hall and the meeting rooms in the main building were designed under his specifications by Knoll Associates, a leading New York-based producer of Modernist furniture whose designs included Modernist icons such as the Saarinen womb chair and Mies Van de Rohe’s Barcelona chair.

Fresnedo Siri was as attentive to a building’s systems and engineering as he was to the external aesthetic. Both buildings are hermetically sealed, taking advantage of mid-century technical improvements in air conditioning and window materials. Fresnedo Siri had made early use of these technologies in one of his earlier signature buildings in Uruguay, the Palacio de la Luz (1948—discussed in more detail below). The windows were all heat-absorbent and dark gray, chosen not only to insulate against the sun’s heat but also to provide an external contrast to the white color of the vertical fins that line the main office building’s façade. Fresnedo Siri also took care to concentrate the building’s sanitary facilities in two central cores supported through vertical pipe work, thereby minimizing the need for horizontal pipe ducting and maximizing interior workspace. He provided longitudinal and transverse duct paths throughout the building’s interior structural slabs to maximize flexibility in desk/workspace location. The building’s air conditioning and other building mechanical utilities were housed in a recessed penthouse floor on the roof, at the time a relatively novel solution that reduced demands on interior or basement space. By recessing the 11.5 feet high mechanical penthouse floor, it was allowable within the city’s zoning height limit of 110 feet (although staying within that height limit did ultimately require the architect to adjust his intended height of the ground floor columns by about a meter, a concession he lamented as slightly undermining the elegant proportionality he had originally envisioned.³⁶

The American Construction Company of 261 Constitution Ave., NW in Washington was contracted in August 1963 as the builder for the PAHO project.³⁷ Groundbreaking took place in

³⁵ Von Eckardt, op. cit.

³⁶ Boronat and Risso, p.106; Von Eckardt, op. cit.

³⁷ “Health Unit Awards Building Contract,” *Post*, Aug. 24, 1963, E8.

Pan American Health Organization

District of Columbia

Name of Property

County and State

September 1963.³⁸ The PAHO design competition had required that the winning architect be licensed to practice in Washington, D.C. or associate himself with such a firm. For this purpose, Fresno Siri partnered with the Washington firm of Justement, Elam, Callmer and Kidd.³⁹ To both facilitate and leverage his period in Washington to oversee the PAHO building construction, the government of Uruguay appointed Fresno Siri as Cultural Attaché to its Washington embassy in 1964. He also used that time to design the Uruguayan Pavilion at the 1964 New York World's Fair.

After two years of work, the public health ministers of the Americas gathered for the dedication of the new building together on September 27, 1965, the opening day of the XVI meeting of PAHO's Directing Council. Since that day, the flags of the member nations and the PAHO flag have flown on the free-standing flagpoles that form a line along the eastern end of the plaza.⁴⁰

The PAHO Headquarters Building: Critical Reception

Tributes to the building's design abounded on the day of its inauguration on September 27, 1965. "Health is akin to beauty," said John Gardner, then U.S. secretary of health, education and welfare. "It is fitting that a building dedicated to the ideal of better health for the people of the Americas should express that beauty in its form and design." He described the building as a "jewel which adds grace and beauty to the Washington landscape." PAHO Director Horwitz added that "without failing to pay tribute to the restrained and elegant lines of the building's façade, we are even more moved by its ideal form and conception, which give living expression to the humanitarianism that dominates our endeavors." Horwitz praised Fresno Siri as "an artist with a clear vision of [PAHO's] destiny who has found in it a source of inspiration."

Mexico's Minister of Health and Welfare Dr. Rafael Moreno Valle said "this building represents one of the major achievements of the PAHO in the course of its long and fruitful existence over a period of sixty-three years. We feel sure that it represents the realization of the dream of those who came before us and who ardently believed that there would come such a day as this when all the nations of the Americas would be represented, not only to participate joyfully in the inauguration of this splendid Headquarters but also to reaffirm their determination to continue their unremitting and untiring efforts to improve the health of all the peoples of the Hemisphere." The Director-General of the World Health Organization said the "building symbolizes the spirit of the countries of the Americas and their ability to cooperate together in overcoming their health problems. It is a symbol of friendship, understanding, and mutual respect."⁴¹

³⁸ "Hemisphere Health Office Begun Here," *Post*, Sep. 19, 1963, D20.

³⁹ Louis Justement designed many notable Washington buildings, including Sibley Memorial Hospital, the Longfellow House Office Building, and the Howard University Medical School. His 1946 book, *New Cities for Old*, made him an early proponent of radical urban revitalization, advocating widespread demolition of slums in order to make way for "revitalized" neighborhoods. The book served in part as the basis for a Southwest Washington redevelopment plan he co-authored with Chloethiel Smith in 1952.

⁴⁰ Cueto, *Op. Cit.*, as cited in PAHO's brochure commemorating the building's 50th anniversary.

⁴¹ PAHO press release commemorating the 50th anniversary of the building, Sep. 28, 2015.

Pan American Health Organization

District of Columbia

Name of Property

County and State

Non-official observers were also impressed. The *Evening Star* effused that “the building is already a Washington landmark. Eyes dulled by conventional government architecture open wide to the organization’s new structure. It’s a ‘*What’s that?*’ building.”⁴² The *Washington Post* extolled the building’s “superb detailing and excellent craftsmanship,” and praised the interior design and furnishings, noting they were the product of a “meticulous attention that we in this hurried country are hardly accustomed to, particularly in our recent government buildings,” and singling out Fresno’s “sculpture in light” chandelier in the main hall as “ingenious” and “particularly handsome.”⁴³

The Washington Building Congress bestowed three of its 1965 Craftsmanship Awards on the PAHO building, including one to Cecil V. Sisk of Harry Alexander, Inc., for the electrical work; to John Moore (*Huber Stone Setting Co., Inc.*) for the stone and tile work; and to Gustav I. Dahlberg (*American Construction Co., Inc.*) for woodworking excellence.

Modernist Architecture in the U.S. and the District of Columbia

As a major example of Modernism in Washington, the PAHO headquarters building, though designed by a foreign architect for an international client, conformed to the overall design trends of the 1960s. Modernist office buildings had become commonplace in Washington and across the United States after World War II. While articles on Modernist architecture appeared in the American press as early as 1927, European modernist principles were only slowly applied by American architects.⁴⁴ In 1932, the Museum of Modern Art’s Alfred Barr suggested that American architecture was experiencing modernism as a series of shocks; the first jolt had been Eliel Saarinen’s runner-up entry in the 1922 *Chicago Tribune* design competition. For a decade, according to Barr, American architects had reacted to this philosophical, technological, and aesthetic challenge superficially, “ornament[ing] their buildings with zig-zags and chevrons instead of Gothic crockets and Classical modeling.”⁴⁵ However, Modernist influences had by 1922 coalesced into “a genuinely new style which is rapidly spreading throughout the world. Both in appearance and structure this style is peculiar to the twentieth century and is as fundamentally original as the Greek or Byzantine or Gothic.”⁴⁶

Barr delineated the style’s principles as:

...based primarily upon the nature of modern materials and structure and upon modern requirements in planning. Slender steel posts and beams, and concrete reinforced by steel have made possible structures of skeleton-like strength and lightness. The external surfacing materials are of painted stucco or tile, or, in more expensive buildings, of aluminum or thin slabs of marble or granite and of glass both opaque and transparent.

⁴² *Star*, Sep. 27, 1965.

⁴³ *Post*, Sep 27, 1965, A3.

⁴⁴ David Handlin. *American Architecture*. (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2004), 197.

⁴⁵ Alfred Barr, Jr. “Foreword,” in *Modern Architecture: International Exhibition* (catalogue). (New York; Museum of Modern Art, 1932), 13.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

Pan American Health Organization

District of Columbia

Name of Property

County and State

Planning, liberated from the necessity for symmetry so frequently required by tradition is, in the new style, flexibly dependent upon convenience...

The modern architect working in the new style conceives of his building not as a structure of brick or masonry with thick columns and supporting walls resting heavily upon the earth but rather as a skeleton enclosed by a thin light shell. He thinks in terms of volume—of space enclosed by planes or surfaces—as opposed to mass and solidity. This principle of volume leads him to make his walls seem thin flat surfaces by eliminating moldings and by making his windows and doors flush with the surface.

Two other principles which are both utilitarian and aesthetic may be called regularity and flexibility. The architects of the Classical and Renaissance, and often of the medieval periods, designed their façades and plans in terms of bilateral symmetry, that is of balanced masses on either side of a central axis. They also usually divided their façades horizontally in three parts: the bottom or base, the wall or middle section and the top or cornice... The modern architect feels it unnecessary to add an elaborate ground floor and an elaborate crowning decoration to his skyscraper, or a gabled porch in the center and at either end of his school or library. He permits the horizontal floors of his skyscraper and the rows of windows in his school to repeat themselves boldly without artificial accents or terminations. And the resulting regularity, which may in itself be very handsome, is given accent by a door or ventilator, electric sign, stair tower, chimney, or fire escape, placed asymmetrically as utility often demands, and the principle of flexibility permits...

Intrinsically there is no reason why ornament should not be used, but modern ornament, usually crass in design and machine-manufactured, would seem to mar rather than adorn the clean perfection of surface and proportion...

Barr's text accompanied the MOMA exhibit "Modern Architecture," a watershed event in twentieth century American and international design, which opened in New York in February 1932. The exhibit catalog explained that "just as the modern architect has had to adjust himself to modern problems of design and structure, so the modern public in order to appreciate his achievements must make parallel adjustments to what seems new and strange." To this end, "Modern Architecture" sought to present a unified perspective on the spectrum of buildings which represented this new "International Style." Philip Johnson's and Henry Russell Hitchcock's eponymous book, published in conjunction with the exhibit, further defined its architectural vocabulary, including elements such as unembellished industrial materials (especially reinforced concrete), flat roofs, pilotis, ribbon windows, and asymmetrical massing.

Johnson and Hitchcock built on a foundation that had been developing in Europe since the end of World War I. Swiss-born architect Charles-Edouard Jeanneret, known as Le Corbusier (1887-1965), had been a key contributor to the intellectual framework for the Modernist movement in the post-war years. That framework included an insistence on volume rather than mass, functional analysis and rationalization of buildings rather than reliance on traditional arrangements, "free-form" building plans which exploited material and engineering technology, and the substitution of form and proportion—rather than ornament—to achieve beauty. A

Pan American Health Organization

District of Columbia

Name of Property

County and State

theorist who designed and built relatively few structures, Le Corbusier embraced “free form” design elements—free façades, free ground plans, and free supports in his works. A signature design element of Le Corbusier’s that Fresno Siri adapted to the PAHO headquarters building was the use of pilotis to raise the structure above the ground level.⁴⁷

For his public buildings, Le Corbusier typically decomposed the major functional elements of the structures into separate interconnected modules. This is evident in his unbuilt design for the League of Nations Building in Geneva (1927) as well as the United Nations Secretariat building in New York (1947), which he designed with Oscar Niemeyer of Brazil and American architect Wallace K. Harrison. In each of these, tall linear bars rise up, filled with grids of offices, while contrasting rounded volumes serve as public meeting spaces.⁴⁸ This was another of the signature Le Corbusier elements that Fresno Siri embraced and replicated in his PAHO Headquarters design.

Washington, of course, has always been conservative in the architectural style of its commercial buildings, reflecting the desires of building owners who generally want to convey permanence, prudence, and sound (i.e., conservative) business practices. Innovative Modernist designs would be slow to arrive here. In 1939, there was an early hint that a progressive, Modernist building might make an appearance on the National Mall. The father-and-son team of Eliel and Eero Saarinen submitted the winning design in a competition for the proposed Smithsonian Gallery of Art. The museum featured long, unornamented planar façades, a flat roof, and ribbons of windows. However, opposition from the Commission of Fine Arts led Congress to defer funding the project, and it was never built.⁴⁹

In 1940, William Lescaze (1896-1969), a noted Swiss-born New York architect, designed Washington’s first Modernist office structure, the Longfellow Building, at 1741 Rhode Island Avenue NW. Stripped of ornament, the building featured horizontal ribbons of windows, and balconies facing Connecticut Avenue that ran the full length of the building. Robinson & Associates notes that the building was a speculative, private-sector venture and that the private sector would take the lead in developing Modernist structures in D.C. in the 1940s.⁵⁰

After the war, architects who had received their training on wartime government projects began designing the city’s stock of Modernist buildings. The Wire Building at 1000 Vermont Avenue NW, designed by Alvin L. Aubinoe (1903-1974), was among the “first wave” of Modernist office buildings to be constructed in the District. Like the Longfellow Building, the Wire Building features ribbon windows that emphasize horizontality. In this case, the ribbon windows wrap cleanly around the prominent corner of the building at Vermont Avenue and K Street, NW. Similar in style were the nearby Washington Post Building (1523 L Street NW, demolished), completed in 1951, and 1001 Connecticut Avenue, completed in 1952 and designed by Edwin

⁴⁷ Peter Gay, *Modernism: The Lure of Heresy* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008), 306-307.

⁴⁸ Alan Colquhoun, *Modern Architecture*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 153.

⁴⁹ Robinson & Associates, 15.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

Pan American Health Organization

District of Columbia

Name of Property

County and State

Weihe. Of these, the Wire Building is a D.C. historic landmark and is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.⁵¹

Use of new materials and construction techniques enabled innovative designs in the Modernist era. For example, the “curtain wall” technique, whereby the exterior walls of a building do not provide structural support, freed architects to design futuristic buildings clad in glass. The main office building of the PAHO Headquarters complex features such a curtain wall. The dark vertical strips of windows appear to float around the building, and the mass of the building seems to hover in mid-air, raised on the Le-Corbusier-style pilotis.⁵²

The 1950s and 1960s saw a burgeoning of corporations, associations, and international organizations establishing their headquarters in Washington to be close to federal agencies and Congress. The result was a steady demand for new office buildings, many of which would be built to Modernist designs. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, millions of square feet of office space would be constructed in the new downtown, much of it by private developers.⁵³ It was in this context that the PAHO building emerged.

While many different sub-genres within Modernism can be defined, four main divisions are generally accepted, according to the D.C. Historic Preservation Office.⁵⁴ Two of these, Expressionism and Formalism, are applicable to the PAHO Headquarters building:

- The **International Style**, characterized by large rectilinear forms, the complete absence of ornamentation, smooth wall surfaces, expansive banded windows, flat roofs, and cantilevered building extensions. The Martin Luther King, Jr., Memorial Library, designed by Mies Van der Rohe and completed in 1972, is cited as an example.
- **Brutalism**, characterized by weighty massiveness, exposed concrete walls, expansive surfaces, and deeply recessed windows. The FBI Headquarters on Pennsylvania Avenue, designed by C.F. Murphy Associates and completed in 1975, is an example.
- **Expressionism**, identified by sweeping, curved wall surfaces and rooflines, bold use of geometric forms often with faceted, concave, or convex surfaces and arched or vaulted spaces. The landmarked U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) building, designed by Marcel Breuer and completed in 1968, is given as an example. Another example is the Washington Hilton, designed by William B. Tabler and completed in 1965. The Hilton was listed in the District of Columbia Inventory of Historic Sites in 2008.

The PAHO headquarters building is clearly an Expressionist structure. Although it is smaller than either of the above examples, it shares with them a dramatically curved

⁵¹ Wire Building *National Register of Historic Places* nomination form, 2010.

⁵² Robinson & Associates, 71.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁵⁴ District of Columbia Office of Planning, *Modernism in Washington*, 2009, a brochure is based on the Robinson & Associates work previously cited.

Pan American Health Organization

District of Columbia

Name of Property

County and State

central façade. Its honeycomb-screened, circular congress hall is likewise starkly dramatic. Like the HUD building, the PAHO Headquarters features unfenestrated elevations on the sides of the main building that serve to “bookend” the façade.

- **Formalism** is a style also applicable to the PAHO Headquarters building. According to the HPO, “Formalism is characterized by strict symmetrical elevations, flat projecting rooflines, smooth wall surfaces, and columnar supports. Forms are generally self-contained as a free-standing block, and ornament is often employed in the form of patterned screens or grilles of metal, cast stone or concrete, and stylized columns or piers.”⁵⁵

Edward Durell Stone’s National Geographic Society Building, at 1145 17th Street NW, is cited as an example of Formalism. Like the PAHO building, National Geographic structure features a symmetrical design with white vertical fins separating thin strips of dark windows and spandrels. In 1982, architectural critic Benjamin Forgey called the building “conceivably the most popular private office building in Washington, and the best remembered.” He observed that “Stone’s secret was simple. By dressing up an ordinary curtain wall structure in white marble and by calling to mind the conventions of the classical orders—base, column, capital—in a most straightforward way, he supplied a convenient marriage between modern architecture and the city’s image of itself.”⁵⁶ That building has been nominated by the DC Preservation League as a D.C. historic landmark.

Despite the proliferation of Modernist office buildings from this era, many are boxy and undistinguished. Few outstanding examples of Formalism remain, despite the style’s eminent suitability to the conservative tastes of Washington, as Benjamin Forgey observed. In addition to the National Geographic building, other D.C. examples of Formalism include the National Association of Broadcasters building at 1771 N Street NW (1969), the original exterior design of the U.S. Department of Transportation Building at 7th and D Streets SW (1969, rebuilt in 2007), the Montgomery Building at 1776 K Street NW (1968), and the National Center for Higher Education at 3 Dupont Circle (1969). Of these, the PAHO headquarters building and the National Geographic Society building are the most distinguished. Both are cited in the DC Modern historic context study prepared by Robinson & Associates for the D.C. Historic Preservation Office in 2009.⁵⁷

The PAHO Building’s Architect: Román Fresnedo Siri

Román Fresnedo Siri was born in 1903 in Salto, Uruguay, a small river city about 300 miles northwest of Montevideo on the border with Argentina. He left behind no autobiography or significant writings; little is known of his early life. He spent his primary and secondary school years a few hundred miles upriver from Salto in Asunción, Paraguay. In 1920, he received

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Benjamin Forgey, “Miracle on M Street,” *Post*, Dec. 12, 1981, C1. See also Mary Anne Hunting, *Edward Durell Stone: Modernism’s Populist Architect* (New York: Norton, 2013), 138.

⁵⁷ Robinson & Associates, 82-85.

Pan American Health Organization

District of Columbia

Name of Property

County and State

certification in Paraguay as a surveyor—background that surely informed the deep integration of site, landscape and building that would inform his later architectural work. At the age of 20, Fresnedo Siri returned to Uruguay, to its capital city of Montevideo, to pursue a degree in architecture.

Fresnedo Siri trained at Uruguay's University of the Republic in Montevideo between 1923 and 1930. The university's architecture school was then dominated by professor Joseph Paul Carré, a French architect who lived and taught in Uruguay from 1907 until his death in 1941. Carré had graduated in 1900 from the *École des Beaux-Arts* in Paris, influenced by the eclectic neo-classicism of the Paris school but also the emerging rationalist rejection of historicism and excessive ornamentation. Carré was not captive to any specific doctrine, in fact worrying that the new ideas could represent a stifling "new form of academism as troubling as the one that preceded it."⁵⁸ He believed that good architecture needed to combine functional imperatives with the emotion of art: "architecture, like the other arts, should adhere to the qualities of composition. Scale, contrasts, rhythm, proportion, the combinations of forms and volumes—all the qualities that define a work of art cannot be arbitrarily grouped; they must co-exist in intimate and harmonious relation. To do otherwise results in things of no artistic interest—rigid, cold, dead." Fresnedo Siri seems to have absorbed a similar point of view, and throughout his career his projects evinced a keen attention to not only exterior and interior building design, but also to building systems, the site and landscape, furnishings and art. He was himself a multi-faceted artist, with avid interests ranging from painting, photography and music, to boat and furniture design.⁵⁹

Uruguay's architectural community closely followed emerging trends in Europe and the U.S. In his essay for the New York Museum of Modern Art (MOMA)'s catalogue for its 1955 exhibition "Latin American Architecture since 1945," Henry-Russell Hitchcock described Montevideo's national university architecture faculty as "the most advanced in Latin America."⁶⁰ Amid these flourishing intellectual currents, Fresnedo Siri would surely have been impacted by the 1929 visit to Montevideo of famed modernist architect Le Corbusier. Modernist architectural ideas were fast moving from theory to implementation in the region, as Latin American governments backed ambitious expressions of the new ideas earlier than did their counterparts in Europe and elsewhere. An iconic early example of the movement was Brazil's Ministry of Education and Health building (1937), designed by Lucio Costa and Oscar Niemayer with Le Corbusier as consultant.⁶¹ A decade later, Niemayer and Julio Vilamajo of Uruguay (who had joined the architecture faculty in Montevideo during Fresnedo Siri's final year of study) would be the sole Latin American representatives on the design team for the United Nations headquarters building

⁵⁸ Quotes and background on Carré drawn from Boronat, Y. and Riso, M., *Román Fresnedo Siri, un Arquitecto Uruguayo*. Montevideo: Editora de la Universidad de la República, Facultad de Arquitectura, Instituto de Historia de la Arquitectura (1980), p. 4.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p113; Betolaza, Alberto, *La Representacion Moderna de las Instituciones hacia 1940: el Aporte de Roman Fresnedo Siri*, Doctoral thesis, Universidad Politecnica de Madrid and Universidad de la Republica de Uruguay. 2004, p. 22.

⁶⁰ Hitchcock, Henry-Russell, essay for the New York Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) catalogue, *Latin American Architecture Since 1945*, (1955), p. 17.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, p.30; Aristimuno, Ignacio "Today's Relevance of Latin American Modern Architecture," *Ritsumeikan Journal of Asia Pacific Studies*, Volume 24, March 2008, p. 63.

Pan American Health Organization

District of Columbia

Name of Property

County and State

in New York. Another decade beyond that, Costa and Niemayer's design for Brazil's new capital city of Brasilia, now a UNESCO world heritage site often cited as an exemplar of modernist architecture, would be inaugurated just months before PAHO launched its design competition in Washington.

In 1938, together with fellow Uruguayan architect Mario Muccinelli, Fresnedo gained his first major commission by winning the competition to build a new complex for his alma mater's School of Architecture in Montevideo. The ambitious project spread over several city blocks and today stands alongside the early work of Costa and Niemeyer as one of the important early examples of Latin American modernist architecture. The Government of Uruguay declared it a national historical monument in 2000. The graceful curve of its main faculty building would be echoed later in Fresnedo Siri's design for PAHO.

During his period of study in the 1920s, Fresnedo Siri was an enthusiast of Frank Lloyd Wright's work, embracing the ideas of "organic architecture": the harmonious integration of the built environment with its natural setting so that a building's design and placement, its furnishings and landscaping together comprised a unified whole.⁶² In 1940, New York's Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) sponsored a contest challenging designers from the United States and Latin America to submit furniture, lamps, and textiles of "Organic Design," which curator Elliot Noyes described as a "harmonious organization of the parts within the whole, according to structure, material, and purpose... with no vain ornamentation or superfluity, but the part of beauty is none the less great in ideal choice of material, in visual refinement, and in the rational elegance of things intended for use."⁶³ Fresnedo Siri was one of the five Latin American winners for his design of chairs using Uruguayan leather and skins on a steel frame. Fresnedo Siri and the other winning designers had their work exhibited in the 1941 MOMA exhibition, *Organic Design in Home Furnishings*, and several were also awarded contracts for manufacture and distribution with major department stores. It was this landmark exhibition that introduced the world to Eero Saarinen and Charles Eames, who worked together as a team and won in both the chair design (the now-iconic Organic Chair) and living room categories.

Thanks to the MOMA's \$1,000 prize and an invitation to its award event in New York, Fresnedo Siri was able to make his first trip to the U.S. in 1941. He was at the time serving as chief architect of Uruguay's national power and telephone utility company (UTE), which was developing plans to build a new company headquarters complex. He spent the next five months touring the United States to study examples of modern office buildings. In addition to New York City, his stops included Boston, Chicago, San Francisco, and Washington, as well as the Cranbrook Academy in Michigan—the first building designed in the U.S. by fellow modernist Eliel Saarinen.⁶⁴

⁶² Fresnedo Siri acknowledged the influence of Wright on his work in an interview conducted by Juan Villaverde, for a feature article published as "A Sculpture in Light and Concrete," in *Revista Américas*, (Washington, DC: Organization of American States, 1965), cited in Artiacadi, p.7.

⁶³ Noyes, Elliott, Catalogue for New York Museum of Modern Art exhibition "Organic Design in Home Furnishings," 1941.

⁶⁴ Artiacadi, p. 12.

Pan American Health Organization

District of Columbia

Name of Property

County and State

Returning to Uruguay, Fresnedo Siri worked on the UTE project between 1942 and 1948. It entailed the development of what was essentially an entirely new “company town” in Montevideo’s Arroyo Seco district, with worker housing and schools, retail spaces, company workshops, service centers and warehouses, a thermo-electric plant, and a company headquarters building. For the latter, he was inspired by the example of the Rockefeller Center complex in New York. The centerpiece of his own design was known as the *Palacio de la Luz* (Palace of Light, a play on words denoting not only the light-filled building but also the power company itself - “luz” is the word commonly used by Uruguayans to refer to electricity in general). The 11-story *Palacio de la Luz* fills a full city block with its rectangular form of perfect symmetry, marked by soaring white vertical columnar ribs evenly separating dark vertical columns of glass—a design that Fresnedo would repeat in the main PAHO building. The *Palacio de la Luz* was an early example in Uruguay of a large, centrally air conditioned building with hermetically sealed windows. Fresnedo Siri located the mechanical systems in a central core to maximize natural light in all of the building’s functional space, and engaged leading Uruguayan artists to contribute monumental mural and sculpture elements to the building. The building was awarded a Gold Medal in 1948 at the VI Pan American Congress of Architecture in Lima, Peru.⁶⁵

Another signature Fresnedo Siri building from the same period, Montevideo’s *Sanatorio Americano* (American Hospital) of 1946 represented a new approach to hospital design, inverting the traditional model through which the patients were isolated inside within buildings that formed a barrier between the healthy outside and the sick inside. Fresnedo Siri wanted patients to be in visual contact with green spaces, and to feel integrated into the city around them. As with the earlier Architecture School main faculty building and the later PAHO design, his use of a long curve in the *Sanatorio Americano* building exemplified his consistent interest in blending expressionist elements into his architecture, just as his attention to the integration of landscape and building in the project reflected his enduring commitment to principles of organic architecture. The success of the *Sanatorio Americano* project won him recognition as a regional leader of hospital design. He would devote much of the 1950’s to work in this area, including several large hospital facilities in Uruguay, another in Sao Paulo, Brazil and the National Hospital of Asuncion, Paraguay.⁶⁶

Sporting clubs and arenas formed another side specialty for the versatile architect, with projects dating back to 1930. Horseracing was then among the most popular sports in the region, with thousands crowding the tribunes from all social classes. The arenas were also important centers for elites, offering a weekend fresh-air outing with private club dining and social areas, and usually linked to an exclusive downtown “Jockey Club” location. In 1951, Fresnedo Siri won an international competition to design a horse racing complex in Porto Alegre, a major city of southern Brazil. The resulting *Hipodromo do Cristal*’s flamboyant modern design and engineering innovations make it one of his most notable achievements. Brazilians today regard it

⁶⁵ For detailed analysis of the UTE project and the *Palacio de la Luz*, see Weizenmann, J., *A Arquitectura de Román Fresnedo Siri* (1938-1971), doctoral dissertation, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre, Brazil, (2004), pp.104-122; Boronat/Risso, Op.Cit., pp. 36-47; Artigiani, Op.Cit., pp.14-25.

⁶⁶ For detailed analysis of the *Sanatorio Americano* project, see Weizenmann, J., Op.Cit., pp.123-137; and Boronat/Risso, Op.Cit., pp. 47-53.

Pan American Health Organization

District of Columbia

Name of Property

County and State

as a landmark example of South American modernist architecture; the municipal government of Porto Alegre listed it as protected cultural historical patrimony in 2003.⁶⁷

Following the success of the PAHO building in Washington, the organization again commissioned him in 1971 to design its regional headquarters in Brazil. PAHO requested a similar design, seeking a sort of organizational “branding” through architecture. The resulting Brasilia complex is similarly anchored by a curved main office building with an attached cylindrical annex containing the main meeting hall. He supervised an additional PAHO project in Lima Peru in 1973, the PAHO Center for Sanitary Engineering and Environmental Sciences. Fresnedo Siri died in 1975.

PAHO Achievements Since the Construction of its Headquarters Building

The scientific, technical and administrative personnel based out of PAHO’s Washington, D.C. headquarters oversee the operations of 27 country offices and three specialized scientific centers. PAHO also partners with nearly 200 PAHO/WHO collaborating centers in 15 countries of the Americas. PAHO promotes evidenced-based decision-making to improve and promote health as a driver of sustainable development.

PAHO works in partnership with ministries of health and other government agencies, civil society organizations, other international agencies, such as the World Bank, and Inter-American Development Bank, universities, social security agencies, community and philanthropic groups, and other partners to promote the inclusion of health in all public policies and the engagement of all sectors in efforts to promote longer, healthier lives of all people in its region. PAHO’s priorities and policies are set by its 52 member countries and territories, through governing bodies such as the PAHO Directing Council, which meets annually in the great meeting hall of the PAHO headquarters building, and the Pan American Sanitary Conference, which meets every five years. PAHO receives funding from member states, WHO, and voluntary contributions from governments, international organizations, and private and public sector groups.⁶⁸

The organization provides technical cooperation in epidemic alert and response, disaster preparedness, health services organization and financing, immunization, nutrition, environmental health, mental health, road safety, health legislation, access to medicines and technologies, regulatory capacity, and other areas. Its many accomplishments over more than a century include a gain of life expectancy of 30 years for residents of its member countries, eradication of polio in the Americas, and major reductions in infant and child mortality.

In 1967, two years after the new PAHO headquarters building had opened, the organization’s directing council passed a resolution on the eradication of smallpox in the western hemisphere,

⁶⁷ Weizenmann, J., Op.Cit., p.175; Maia, Guilherme Rene, *Jockey Club do Rio Grande do Sul: Patrimônio Moderno e Requalificação Urbana*, Master’s thesis, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre, Brazil, (2012).

⁶⁸ PAHO.org website, accessed Mar. 22, 2019.

Pan American Health Organization

District of Columbia

Name of Property

County and State

urging cooperation and strenuous efforts among all nations.⁶⁹ At that point, under PAHO's leadership, the disease had already been eradicated in all of the Americas except for Brazil. The PAHO achievement sparked other countries to act, and finally in 1980 the World Health Organization declaring the disease officially eradicated worldwide, a tremendous accomplishment.⁷⁰

PAHO, with its partners, has a long history of fighting tropical diseases now virtually unknown in North America (such as yellow fever, malaria, and leprosy) but still prevalent in the majority of PAHO member countries, and others that have re-emerged (such as cholera, dengue fever, and tuberculosis). All these diseases particularly affect the poorest and most vulnerable populations. Thus, PAHO promotes health care strategies to expand access to health services and improve their efficiency to tackle new health challenges as well, such as the non-communicable diseases of cancer, heart disease, and diabetes, all of which are on the rise in all countries of the Americas.⁷¹

Technical expertise for disaster preparedness is another important PAHO role, as is epidemic alert and response, and health services organization and financing. Among PAHO's accomplishments was the establishment of an annual Vaccination Week in the Americas beginning in April 2002. The publicity campaign is a reminder to the general public, health care workers, and donors and decision makers that everyone has an important role to play in supporting vaccination and keeping deadly diseases at bay. The campaign has gained heightened importance now that diseases that were formerly easily controlled through vaccination, such as measles, are once again reaching epidemic levels.⁷²

PAHO has also had an important role in the reduction of neglected tropical diseases such as leprosy, Chagas disease, onchocerciasis (river blindness), and schistosomiasis. For example, four countries in the Americas have endemic schistosomiasis: Brazil, Saint Lucia, Suriname, and Venezuela, and approximately 25 million people are at risk of contracting the infection. Nearly 1.6 million school-aged children are currently estimated to need preventive medicine, particularly in northeastern Brazil and central Venezuela. Thanks to the efforts of PAHO and its partners, transmission of the disease has been reduced in Suriname and Saint Lucia, and these countries may be able to halt the spread of the disease in the near future.⁷³

At the other end of the spectrum are diseases like HIV, which has been the focus of massive global research since 1981, but which is disproportionately still affecting developing areas. In Latin America and the Caribbean, PAHO has helped people with HIV obtain the highest rates of coverage with antiretroviral treatment of any middle/lower-income region in the world.

⁶⁹ PAHO 17th Directing Council, Resolution CD17.R22, *Status of Smallpox Eradication in the Americas*, Washington, DC: Oct. 1967.

⁷⁰ Daniel Epstein, "PAHO: A Century of Healthy Achievements," *Americas*, Jul.-Aug. 2002.

⁷¹ Accomplishments drawn from "Key Facts About PAHO" factsheet, produced by PAHO in 2012.

⁷² <https://www.paho.org/vwa/> accessed April 14, 2019.

⁷³ https://www.paho.org/hq/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=9474:schistosomiasis-factsheet&Itemid=40721&lang=en accessed April 14, 2019.

Pan American Health Organization
Name of Property

District of Columbia
County and State

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Name of Property

District of Columbia
County and State

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Pan American Health Organization

Name of Property

District of Columbia

County and State

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Pan American Health Organization
Name of Property

District of Columbia
County and State

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other
- Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property 1.048

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates (decimal degrees)

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 38.896534 | Longitude: -77.049131 |
| 2. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 3. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 4. Latitude: | Longitude: |

Pan American Health Organization
Name of Property

District of Columbia
County and State

Or

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or NAD 1983

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| 1. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 2. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 3. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 4. Zone: | Easting : | Northing: |

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The Pan American Health Organization Headquarters is situated on a triangular shaped lot. It is bounded to the north and east by Virginia Avenue NW, to the south by E Street NW and the E Street Expressway, and to the west by 23rd Street NW.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

These are the original and present boundaries of the PAHO Headquarters lot.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Jefferson T. Brown, John DeFerrari, Jacqueline Drayer, and Sandra J. Hecker
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date: September 26, 2019

Pan American Health Organization
Name of Property

District of Columbia
County and State

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property: Pan American Health Organization Headquarters

City or Vicinity: Washington, D.C.

County:

State:

Photographer: See list below

Date Photographed: See list below

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

1 of 16.

View from southwest. (Photographer: John DeFerrari, April 13, 2018).

2 of 16.

View from the west. (Photographer: John DeFerrari, April 13, 2018).

Pan American Health Organization

District of Columbia

Name of Property

County and State

3 of 16.

View from southwest. (Photographer: John DeFerrari, April 13, 2018).

4 of 16.

Architect's sketch. (Source: PAHO, undated).

5 of 16.

View from southeast. (Photographer: John DeFerrari, April 13, 2018).

6 of 16.

View from the east, circa 1965. (Source: PAHO, undated).

7 of 16.

Detail of fins and medallions on administrative building. (Photographer: Jefferson Brown, February 8, 2019).

8 of 16.

Detail of concrete grill on annex (Photographer: Jefferson Brown, February 8, 2019).

9 of 16.

Detail of entrance to annex (Photographer: Jefferson Brown, February 8, 2019).

10 of 16.

PAHO headquarters construction viewed from the east. (Source: PAHO, April 15, 1964).

11 of 16.

PAHO headquarters construction viewed from the south. (Source: PAHO, August 18, 1964).

12 of 16.

PAHO headquarters construction viewed from the southwest. (Source: PAHO, December 2, 1964).

13 of 16.

PAHO headquarters construction viewed from the east. (Source: PAHO, October 14, 1964).

14 of 16.

PAHO Headquarters Annex shortly after completion. Note water fountains. (Source: PAHO, undated).

15 of 16.

Interior view of the Congress Hall auditorium. (Photographer: John DeFerrari, January 14, 2006).

16 of 16.

Pan American Health Organization
Name of Property

District of Columbia
County and State

Staircase to Congress Hall with “floating” marble treads. (Photographer: John DeFerrari,
January 14, 2006).

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