

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

FOR FEDERAL PROPERTIES

FOR NPS USE ONLY  
RECEIVED JAN 19 1977  
DATE ENTERED AUG 25 1978

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens

AND/OR COMMON

Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

Kenilworth Avenue and Douglas Street, N.E.

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Washington

VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT  
Walter E. Fauntroy  
District of Columbia

STATE

District of Columbia

CODE  
11

COUNTY

District of Columbia

CODE

001

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

- DISTRICT
- BUILDING(S)
- STRUCTURE
- SITE
- OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

- PUBLIC
- PRIVATE
- BOTH
- PUBLIC ACQUISITION**
- IN PROCESS
- BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

- OCCUPIED
- UNOCCUPIED
- WORK IN PROGRESS
- ACCESSIBLE**
- YES: RESTRICTED
- YES: UNRESTRICTED
- NO

PRESENT USE

- AGRICULTURE
- COMMERICAL
- EDUCATIONAL
- ENTERTAINMENT
- GOVERNMENT
- INDUSTRIAL
- MILITARY
- MUSEUM
- PARK
- PRIVATE RESIDENCE
- RELIGIOUS
- SCIENTIFIC
- TRANSPORTATION
- OTHER:

4 AGENCY

REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS: (If applicable)

National Capital Parks

STREET & NUMBER

1100 Ohio Drive, S.W.

CITY, TOWN

Washington

VICINITY OF

STATE  
District of Columbia

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

National Capital Parks

STREET & NUMBER

1100 Ohio Drive, S.W.

CITY, TOWN

Washington

STATE  
District of Columbia

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

National Park Service survey in compliance with Executive Order 11593

DATE

1972

FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

National Capital Parks

CITY, TOWN

Washington

STATE  
District of Columbia

# 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED      DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

## DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens are located in marshland on the east shore of the Anacostia River of Washington, D.C. The gardens are composed of a series of irregularly sized and shaped ponds, formed by diking parts of the Anacostia River flood plain, a wetland habitat of swamp marshes.

In all, about 75 varieties of lily are on display at the gardens. In mid-June the hardy, day-blooming lilies are at their peak; in July and August, the night-blooming tropical water lilies open.

Among a number of unusual exotic water lilies is the giant water platter Victoria Cruziana, with immense leaves, up to 6' in diameter capable of floating a small child. Two ancient lotus plants were germinated at the Aquatic Gardens in 1951. The seeds were unearthed in an ancient lakebed near P'u-lan-tien, Manchuria, by a Japanese Botanist in the 1920's. Estimates on the age of the seeds have varied widely; Carbon-14 tests, and geological and historical evidence indicate that the seeds in this deposit germinated at about 1,900 years.

The Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens also house 40 other species of pond and marginal plants, including poppy, bamboo, water-hyacinth and a number of native trees. The gardens also grow swamp-marsh plants such as wild rice, cattail, loosestrife and cardinal flower.

The area is also a refuge for waterfowl, fish and forest animals. Least bitterns, longbilled marshwrens, heron and red winged blackbirds nest in the marsh. Muskrat, raccoon and opossum are active inhabitants as well as a variety of frogs and toads.

The extent of the gardens remains essentially unchanged from 1938, the year they ceased operation as a commercial enterprise and became part of the National Park System. Some dikes have been added inside the two largest pools in the northwest section to facilitate their use with limited personnel. Another addition of seven tiny pools was also constructed in the marshy area along the southwest corner. These minor alterations are indicated in red on the sketch map. The first three ponds Shaw began with are marked in green. The entire pond area is included since it was the growth of the gardens throughout the 1882-1938 period which contributes to the significance of Shaw's work and discoveries. Recreational structures like picnic areas, restrooms, and new greenhouses are not included in this designation.

6  
LEEDOWN  
3.27.77

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INDIVIDUAL STRUCTURES

Directly southwest of the gardens themselves are the original administration building and two original greenhouses. These three structures were used by W.B. Shaw and Helen Shaw Fowler in their commercial aquatic plant operations. The buildings are valuable in the interpretation of the site as an early aquatic plant business. The Administration Building is now used by the National Park Service as an interpretive center for visitors to the Gardens. The two original greenhouses are especially used in the wintertime to show visitors living aquatic plants when there are none growing in the pools of the garden. The greenhouses are also used for the propagation and winter carryover of tropical water lilies used in the aquatic pools and at various pools in the National Capital Region of the Park Service. These three simple structures constitute a harmonious architectural setting and illustrate the original Shaw operation.

1. Administration Building

This small board and batten building consists of a two story central portion with shed-like wings extending out on three sides to the southeast, the southwest, and the northwest. The central, two-story portion contains public restrooms accessible from the northeast exterior side and is crowned by a simple gable roof. The building is painted brown with white trim. The doorway on the southwest side is reached by two concrete steps. Incised in the concrete of the second step is: "W.B. Shaw, 1912". This dates the building.

2. North Greenhouse

This greenhouse is built into the side of a hill. It consists of three distinct parts: a large greenhouse room, an adjoining, smaller greenhouse room with shed roof, and an adjoining wooden shed containing the heating boiler for the greenhouse. The larger greenhouse room consists of concrete walls to accommodate the interior concrete waterponds and a roof once covered with panes of glass but now covered with translucent plastic. Vandals have torn holes in the plastic roof. The roof structure supporting the plastic roofing material is of wood and metal bars and is in poor condition. The smaller, shed roof, greenhouse room is attached to the southwest side of the larger greenhouse room. This smaller room is entered by its own door on the northwest side facing the water ponds. The larger greenhouse room is reached by the shed-like board and batten extension on the side facing the water ponds. This shed extension is of identical construction as the Administration Building. It contains a small, wooden flight of stairs giving access to the large

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greenhouse room. The interior of each greenhouse room consists of concrete floors and concrete tanks around the side walls and back containing the water plants. The roof structure of the smaller greenhouse room is also in poor condition. The whole building dates from 1913.

3. South Greenhouse

The south greenhouse is a long narrow, one-story structure built into the side of a gently sloping hill. Its foundations and walls are of concrete to accommodate the water tanks within. It is also covered by translucent plastic. Vandals have ripped holes in the plastic. To the northwest end facing the water ponds is attached a board and batten wooden shed extension of the same construction style as the Administration Building. The greenhouse room itself is entered through this shed extension which also contains the heating boiler. The interior of the long greenhouse room consists of a concrete floor and long concrete water tanks on each side to hold the aquatic plants. The roofing beams are of wood with metal bars and are in poor condition. The greenhouse dates from 1913.

4. Exterior Tank

To the rear of the south greenhouse is a concrete, rectangular water lily tank dating from the same period.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY) Botany
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1882-1938

BUILDER/ARCHITECT W. B. Shaw

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Although Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens are locally important today as a part of Washington's Park System its greater significance lies in its contribution to the botanical study and development of water plants and gardens under the direction of its founder, W.B.Shaw and his daughter, L.Helen Fowler, It continues today as a noted water garden under the National Park Service.

The Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens are situated on the east shore of the Anacostia River in the northeast section of Washington, D.C., about seven miles upstream from the Anacostia's junction with the Potomac River. After the Civil War, 37 acres of this land was bought as a farm by W.B. Shaw, a war veteran who had come to Washington to work in the Treasury Department. Shaw pursued his hobby, the growing of water lilies, on the marshy sections of his land. He imported 12 hardy American white lilies from his native Maine and grew them in an abandoned ice pond. As the lilies thrived, Shaw dug more ponds and began to experiment in hybridization. In 1912, Shaw and his daughter, Helen Shaw Fowler began to sell their lilies commercially and daily shipped thousands of hand-picked lilies, of 63 different varieties, to Chicago, Boston, and New York. During his lifetime, Shaw was responsible for developing many new varieties of lily, among them the Pink Opal and the W.B.Shaw and the Helen Fowler water lily varieties, all still grown commercially today. The "Shaw Gardens" produced lilies available nowhere else in the country in the marsh's 35 different types of soil.

Mrs. Fowler who ran the business after Mr. Shaw's death in 1921, agreed to permit the public to view the lilies on Sunday mornings during the height of the season. During the 1920's and 30's visitors numbered as many as 5-6,000 per day. Even though it was one of the largest lily farms in the world, the Shaw property was particularly attractive because it had been left almost entirely in its natural state.

In 1924 Mrs. Fowler was persuaded to permit local residents to attempt to have the ponds brought under public ownership; among their most enthusiastic supporters was Mrs. Calvin Coolidge, who along with President and Mrs. Wilson, was a frequent visitor to the gardens.

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Office Files, Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens, National Capital Parks, 1100 Ohio Drive S.W.

Newspaper File, Washingtoniana Collection, D.C. Library, Martin Luther King Branch

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 9

UTM REFERENCES

A	18	331 331640	4308 740	B	18	331560	4308 620
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C	18	331340	4308 630	D	18	331360	4308 760
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The boundary of the area to be registered is drawn around the outer edge of the path which encircled the ponds as indicated on the sketch map in black.

*see newer information* *LEBRON 8/11/78*

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

revised by Patricia Heintzelman

Helen Dillon, Historian, List of Classified Structures May 1976

ORGANIZATION

DATE

National Capital Parks

June 1, 1973

STREET & NUMBER

TELEPHONE

1100 Ohio Drive, S.W.

426-6957

CITY OR TOWN

STATE

Washington

District of Columbia

# 12 CERTIFICATION OF NOMINATION

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER RECOMMENDATION

\* See letter - YES  NO  NONE

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

In compliance with Executive Order 11593, I hereby nominate this property to the National Register, certifying that the State Historic Preservation Officer has been allowed 90 days in which to present the nomination to the State Review Board and to evaluate its significance. The evaluated level of significance is  National  State  Local.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE 1-17-77

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

ATTEST:

DATE 8/21/78

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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Significance (Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens)

Initial attempts for government purchase were unsuccessful, and in 1929 a court decree was required to prevent their outright condemnation and destruction by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers while dredging the Anacostia River. The issue of purchase was revived in March 1937, by the Kenilworth Citizens Association in hearings before the House Sub-Committee on Appropriations. In 1938, the gardens were purchased from Mrs. Fowler by the Federal Government for \$15,000.

The Shaw Gardens, renamed the Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens after purchase, continue to be important. Still botanically important, the Gardens are also significant for their holdings of large fish, reptiles and amphibians, and their tropical growth. Area schools and colleges and universities use the Gardens for field trips and instruction for their biology and botany classes.

SKETCH  
OF  
**WASHINGTON IN EMBRYO,**

Previous to the Survey by Major L'ENFANT.

Compiled from the rare historical researches

of  
**D<sup>r</sup>. JOSEPH M. TONER,**

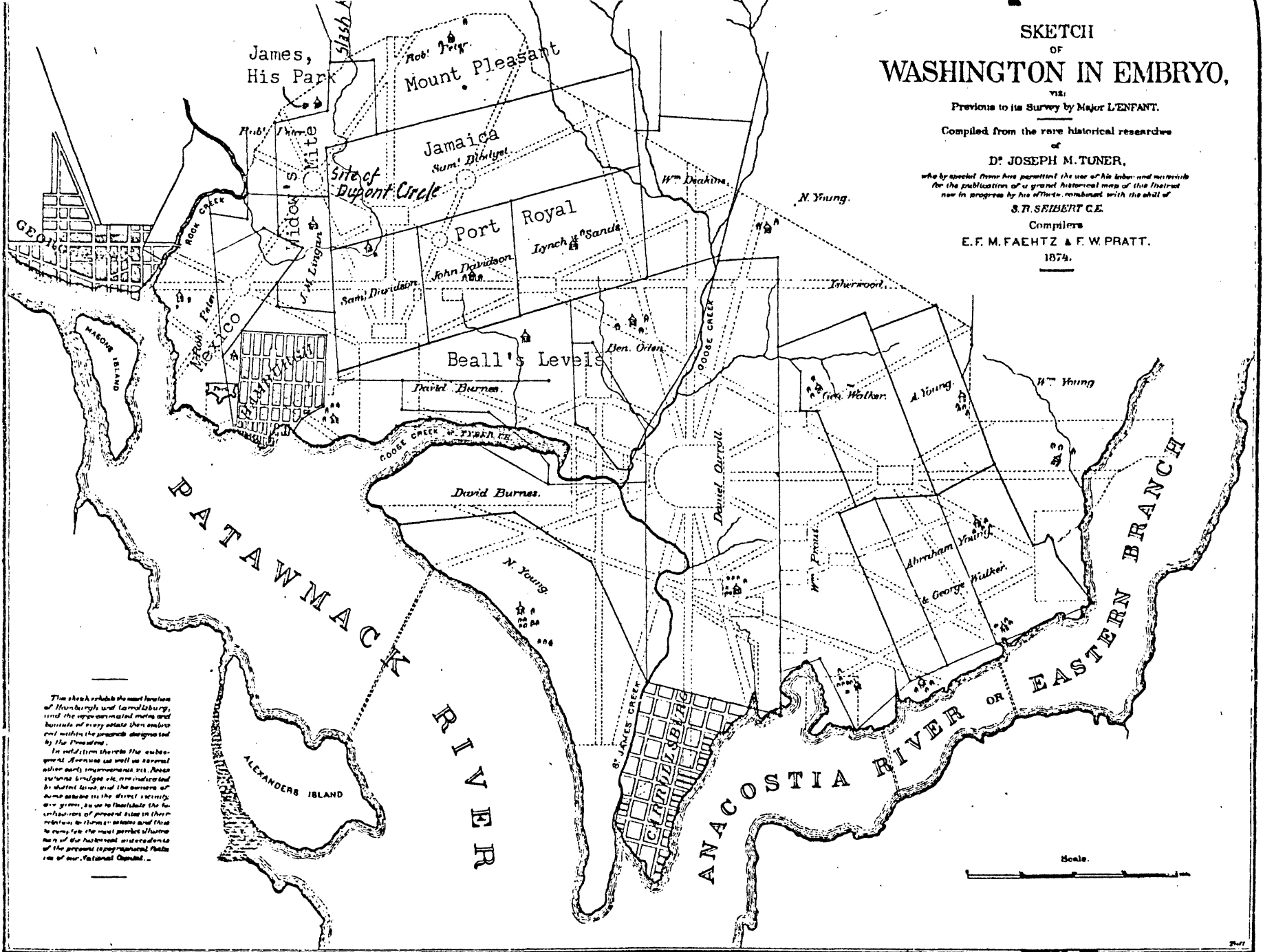
who by special favor has permitted the use of his labor and materials  
for the publication of a grand historical map of the District  
now in progress by his efforts combined with the skill of

**S. R. SEIBERT C.E.**

Compilers

**E. F. M. FAEHTZ & F. W. PRATT.**

1879.



The sketch exhibits the most favorable  
of Mount Vernon and Landonburg,  
and the represented maps and  
burrows of every estate then subject  
and within the ground designated  
by the President.  
In addition thereto the subsequent  
avenues as well as several  
other early improvements are shown  
various bridges are indicated  
by dotted lines and the names of  
some estates in the district  
are given, as we illustrate the  
facilities of present day in their  
relation to those of 1791 and thus  
to supply the most perfect illustration  
of the historical antecedents  
of the present topographical  
plan of our National Capital.

Figure 6. Map Showing the Division of Land on the Site of the National Capital: 1791

Names of the land grants comprising the Dupont Circle area have been added.



