



NEWS

www.chrs.org

July/August 2011

Capitol Hill by Bike: *The Way to See the Sights, for Residents and Tourists*

By Roberta Gutman

Knowing that I cycle frequently in the National Arboretum (and all over the city and beyond, for that matter), friends asked if I'd be willing to lead a tour to the Arboretum as part of a one-week Washington-area Bicycle Adventure Club ride. BAC is a volunteer-run organization based in San Diego that organizes domestic and foreign bike tours. I agreed, with one proviso: that the day would also include a bike tour of Capitol Hill, which I knew the cyclists would enjoy. The organizers readily agreed.

Since moving to Capitol Hill from Chicago 22 years ago, I get endless pleasure walking or cycling all over the Hill, often making new discoveries. I knew that I'd want to highlight certain features: East Capitol Street, the variety of traditional (and not) architecture, alley dwellings, one-block streets that constitute their own little neighborhoods, old buildings with new condos, the Marine Barracks, the Navy Hospital/Hill Center, Eastern Market, the Navy Yard, Lincoln and other parks—and more. I had to curb my enthusiasm.

Armed with maps and brochures from the Capitol Hill Restoration

Society, I boned up on architectural terminology and Capitol Hill history, and pedaled around the neighborhood planning a route so that I could show it all off to the U.S. and Canadian cyclists on the tour.

I met the group at the new Capitol Visitors Center Plaza on a sunny, cool morning in late April. We set off down East Capitol Street and then pedaled to Brown's Court. The visitors were astounded at how people could live in such small homes. I assured them that for many, doing with less stuff is a modest price to pay for living in such an exciting, convenient, and family-friendly neighborhood.

We made our way to the relatively larger homes in Duddington Place, which met with more oohs and aahs, especially when I noted that homes there sold for half a million dollars or more. We backtracked to Archibald Walk, where, in the late 1940s, the drive to rehabilitate the till-then substandard



PHOTO: CHARLENE PATTON

Roberta Gutman on her Specialized Sequoia, wearing a helmet.

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President's Column: Sleeping Beauty and Resident Evil

By Beth Purcell

Capitol Hill has one of each: a sleeping beauty, and a zombie from the *Resident Evil* films.

Reservation 13 (also known as the DC General campus or Hill East Waterfront) is our sleeping beauty. This is some of the most valuable land on the east coast: Capitol Hill location, its own Metro stop, and river views. The city promised to select a master developer in 2009 and 2010. Many on Capitol Hill urged the city to select the Hunt development team as the master developer. Nothing has been done. Anne Archbold Hall, a beautiful landmark building, is vacant and deteriorating. The city promised repeatedly to stabilize the building so it could be returned to productive use. We hoped the Anne Archbold Hall would become a KIPP charter school, as Hunt suggested. Instead, the city has done nothing and the building is being demolished by the city's neglect. It's time for the city and our Council members to step up.

And we have a really bad zombie with almost as many lives as there are *Resident Evil* sequels. Last summer we wrote about DC government's plans for one of the 11th Street bridges. The current 11th Street bridges are "out-dated, deficient infrastructure." These bridges will soon be replaced with a new commuter bridge and a local bridge with pedestrian and bicycle access. The construction is on schedule and on budget. After the new bridges are opened, the old bridges are to be demolished, as called for in the bridge construction contract. There are funds to pay for this. However, it appears that some in DC government once again dream of keeping one of the old bridges as some type of park. This "park" will be expensive: a new spiral pedestrian

ramp would have to be built to reach the old bridge, the city must pay to maintain an aging structure and also pay for cleaning, lighting and public safety. In an era of tight budgets, public funds should be spent on our real green spaces—parks, recreation centers, and schools. For all these reasons, we thought that this bad idea was dead. But like a zombie, it's back. It's time for this zombie to leave for good. ★

CHRS to Host Architect of the Capitol at September 22 Forum

PHOTO COURTESY ARCHITECT OF THE CAPITOL



Thursday, September 22, 2011

Hill Center (Old Naval Hospital)
921 Pennsylvania Avenue, SE

Reception at 6:45 pm
Remarks at 7:00 pm
Open to all

Stephen T. Ayers, Architect of the Capitol (AOC), will be the guest speaker at the CHRS September membership forum. The AOC is responsible for the maintenance and operation of the Capitol Building, the

care and improvement of more than 450 acres of Capitol grounds, and the operation and maintenance of 16.5 million square feet of buildings including the House and Senate Office Buildings, the U.S. Capitol Visitor Center, the Library of Congress, the U.S. Supreme Court Building, the Thurgood Marshall Federal Judiciary Building, and the U.S. Botanic Garden. Mr. Ayers also serves on the three-member U.S. Capitol Police Board, which is responsible for the Capitol Police who patrol parts of the residential areas of Capitol Hill. Mr. Ayers will discuss the AOC's activities and projects.

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www.CHRS.org

Celebrating more than 50 years helping to preserve and protect Capitol Hill's residential character, the Society is the largest civic association on Capitol Hill, and one of the largest in the District of Columbia. From the beginning, the Society has played a key role in maintaining the diverse, residential character of our neighborhood. With your participation, we will continue to do so for many years to come.

To start or renew a CHRS membership:

- ★ On the web at www.CHRS.org
- ★ Call (202) 543-0425; choose option 2
- ★ Pick up a form at one of our meetings

Starting at just \$25 per year for a single membership, it's a great deal.

Volunteer at the CHRS Preservation Cafés!

If you have attended any of the CHRS Preservation Cafés in the past, you already know how popular and useful these short, information-filled events are for Capitol Hill residents. Members of the CHRS Historic Preservation Committee plan the Cafés, and Committee chair Nancy Metzger and member Shauna Holmes have taken the lead for 12 years in selecting topics, organizing the programs, securing speakers, reserving event space, and publicizing the Cafés.

They would love some help! Duties range from setting up chairs and audio-visual equipment to greeting the attendees, distributing handouts, and straightening up the room when the Cafés are over.

The 45-minute Preservation Cafés are held in the spring and fall on the third Wednesday of

the month, September through November and March through May at Ebenezers Coffeehouse from 6:30 to 7:15 pm. Ebenezers is conveniently located two blocks from the Union Station Metro stop at 2nd and F Streets, NE, making the Preservation Cafés easy to fit in on the way home from work.

Please consider giving a little of your time to help with these outstanding CHRS events. E-mail shaunaholmes@yahoo.com for more information and to offer your assistance. We'd like to build a list of volunteers to ensure there will always be enough people on hand for each Preservation Café to run smoothly.

We look forward to hearing from you and THANK YOU for your membership and your generosity. ★

CHRS Officers Elected

The newly elected CHRS officers for 2011–2012 are:

| | |
|------------------------------|--|
| President | Beth Purcell |
| First Vice President | Michelle Pilliod Carroll |
| Second Vice President | Shauna Holmes |
| Secretary | Janet Quigley |
| Treasurer | Sharon Ivy Weiss |
| At Large Members | Catherine Davis, Chuck Burger, Drury Tallant, Maurice Walters |

Thank you to everyone who voted!

Update on Hine Development Review

By Nancy Metzger

On June 30, the Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB) took a second look at the plans for the redevelopment of the Hine School site in the 700 block of Pennsylvania Avenue, SE. Only part of the site was considered in June's review of architectural direction: height and massing for the Eighth Street residential building, Eighth & D residential building, Pennsylvania Avenue office building, and Seventh Street office building. CHRS sent a letter to the HPRB about the proposal, which can be read on the CHRS website, www.chrs.org; testimony was also given at the meeting. Since this newsletter was at the printers when the meeting was held, those interested in the HPRB's decision can check the Historic Preservation Office (HPO) website, www.planning.dc.gov/hpo, for a summary about 10 days after the June 30 meeting or review the video recording of the meeting accessible through the HPO website.

Eighth Street Residential Building

Between the April and June meetings, architect Amy Weinstein transformed this apartment building from a building inspired by a street of Capitol Hill houses to one inspired by 19th-century "terrace houses," such as Capitol Hill's Grant's Row that was torn down in 1929 for the Folger Shakespeare Library. Three-story bays help to visually reduce the height of the building; rounded forms help reduce the angularity of the ensemble, and the set-back garden spaces provide some visual breaks along the street. The row is now unified by a palette of common materials and a base of rusticated stone. Individual entrances to some units have been retained. CHRS

supported the change in architectural direction and noted some of the same features to be studied as the design development continues, as did the staff in its report, quoted below:

"As the design continues to be developed, the entrances should be given greater prominence and distinction, the fenestration should be refined with the goal of introducing some additional variety, and the site plan for the public space front yards developed. The use of rounded bay elements on several of the buildings helps break up the rectilinear character of the row: the use of additional curvilinear and non-rectilinear elements—windows, dormers, oriels, ironwork—should be explored."

Eighth and D Streets Residential Building

This building, too, received some significant design changes but retained its contemporary interpretation of panelized brick and two-over-two windows. Four-story bays have been introduced to break the flatness; window and façade panels have been arranged in a more regular pattern; and, most importantly, the sixth floor has been pushed back on the front and side elevations. Many of the comments in the CHRS letter were also reflected in the staff report:

"As the building continues to be developed, further evaluation should be given to the materials and coloration, perhaps to include additional color or contrast to the brick work. The pattern of fenestration has benefited from being regularized, but perhaps should be further rationalized, particularly in the tower element. The 8th Street elevation should be developed with comparable fenestration in the bay as the D Street elevation so that it doesn't read as the back of the building."

Pennsylvania Avenue Office Building

As the staff report notes, some changes were made to the "signature" office building at the corner of Seventh Street and Pennsylvania Avenue:

"The seventh floor was set back 12 feet from the east, west, and south elevations, the height reduced by several feet and a slate edge introduced on the top floor to provide a definite top. The penthouse has been reduced in size, shifted further back from Pennsylvania Avenue, and designed as a slightly canted roof feature clad in slate. The twisted brick armature wall surface has been reordered with a slightly lower base, thicker proportions and a reduced height top floor to provide greater weight and solidity. The top floor projection of the armature has been eliminated on Pennsylvania Avenue and the projection above the sixth floor on 7th Street has been made more prominent with a slight projection out from the building face. The underlying glass curtain wall has been revised to include precast and slate supporting the glass (rather than metal panels) and with a quieter, more staid pattern of vertically oriented windows and transoms. The entrance element, recessed from the street wall, would be clad in slabs of slate."

While the design changes do address some of the concerns that CHRS has expressed over the past several months, CHRS continues to find the approximately 90' height (plus penthouse) very problematic as it far exceeds the 58' "benchmark" established by the original and present Hine Schools and the nearby buildings in the 600 block of Pennsylvania Avenue that are already the largest buildings in the area. The repetition of two-story "boxes," framed in brick and stacked one above the other against the



TOP: Proposed Eighth Street residential building as of April 14, 2011. BOTTOM: Revised design as of June 17, 2011.

vertical glass windows, serves to highlight rather than diminish the scale difference with its neighboring buildings. CHRS asked that the Board not give this building conceptual approval.

However, the staff report only suggested that “further study should be given to providing greater ‘weight’ to the first floor, such as solid bases to the storefronts, and the use of storefront projections and/or awning that would provide a three-dimensional character to the building at the pedestrian level. Elimination of the roof deck should also be studied; if removing this feature would negate the need for the elevators and second stair coming up to the roof, the penthouse could be substantially reduced in size and pulled further back from Pennsylvania Avenue.”

Seventh Street Office Building

This review was really the first time that the Board considered the Seventh Street façade of the Office Building. There will be an entrance off Seventh Street for the loading dock, and the mass of the building is broken down into

smaller units, with an architectural vocabulary of punched window openings in red brick (different than the corner building) and precast trim elements. Expressing concern about the overall height on narrow Seventh Street, CHRS urged that the building continue to receive careful study, particularly the expression of different “buildings” and elements used to break up the massing. The letter also cautioned that the repeated emphasis on and use of bays breaks into the much-needed “green space” (public space) that is an integral part of the current streetscape. The letter stated, “The present design and configuration of the Seventh Street Office building is not nearly as successful in bridging the ‘demands’ of the new construction with the historic streetscape as is the terrace housing model on Eighth Street for the residential building.”

The staff report noted: “Copies of color renderings can be imprecise in conveying the true intent of a proposal, but like the 8th and D residential building the material coloration of this building should continue to be studied;

as rendered, it looks a little grim and foreboding. The design and setback of the seventh floor should also be reevaluated. The elevation up to the sixth floor — composed of two primary six-story blocks and three-story bays — is strong, well-composed and consistent in spirit with the straightforward Victorian commercial buildings on which the elevation is based. However, the seventh floor, composed in the same architectural vocabulary, is neither sufficiently set back to disappear nor really engaged in the façade. ... Alternative setbacks and architectural treatments should be explored.”

Next Steps

HPRB conceptual review continues with the north end of the site next: C Street residential building, plaza and North building, tentatively scheduled for July 28 HPRB meeting.

Zoning review: Planned Unit Development process: Fall 2011. ★

alley housing in the District began. As we walked our bikes around its U-shaped configuration, there was more astonishment at the size of the homes—and delight at the charm of this almost-secret corner of the Hill. (I *love* these nooks and crannies!)

The Ellen Wilson redevelopment project brought out admiring comments at how successfully the new homes incorporated traditional Hill architectural styles. Then it was off to Barracks Row and Eastern Market to pick up sandwiches before heading to the Arboretum for a picnic and a ride in that soothing green oasis, so close to home.

We took off northward in the bike lane on 6th Street, NE, passing Stanton Square (named for Lincoln's secretary of War, Edwin Stanton, but featuring an equestrian statue of Revolutionary War hero Nathanael Greene—go figure). Someone called out, "This is better than Georgetown!" Don't we Hillsters know it!

There is *no* safe and easy way to cycle from the Hill to the Arboretum, but BAC riders are seasoned and fearless cyclists—and they wear helmets (as should every cyclist). Avoiding cycling down busy Bladensburg Road, we got there via West Virginia and Montana Avenues, NE (and a few more streets).

I've been cycling the Arboretum's 446 beautiful acres for years, and have developed a five-mile circuit that hits many of the Arboretum's highlights. After our picnic, I took them on a shortened circuit in the Arboretum, and then headed back to the Hill the way we came.

In preparing for the tour, I discovered charming Pickford Place, in Northeast, which I felt compelled to share with the group. From there we cycled to the Lovejoy Lofts, a grand example of a decommissioned

Hill building (and, in this case, expansion) converted into condos and lofts. From there we made our way to one of the sweetest little streets on the Hill, Park Street, and then to Lincoln Park, which I think of the Hill's Central Park, and its "original Lincoln Memorial." I noted the location's role as a Civil War hospital.

We headed south on 11th Street, SE, quickly turning into Sladen's Lane and its beautiful little park, and then back on 11th Street past the 19th-century Philadelphia Row houses. Heading west on South Carolina Avenue, SE, I pointed out the Grace Church condos—more Capitol Hill ingenuity in preserving our architectural heritage while providing unique and updated housing. Arriving at the construction-strewn Naval Hospital, I noted its historic link with the Navy Yard and conversion to the almost-finished Hill Center.

Having worn out most of the group, who took off down Pennsylvania back to their motels, I cycled with the die-hards (and naval history enthusiasts) down 8th Street, SE to M St. and the Navy Yard. Just the day before, I had been assured by the guard at the 7th and M Streets, SE entrance that a photo ID (plus helmet) was all that was needed for cyclists to enter the Yard. But on the day of the tour, the guard said we needed a federal ID because we were "a group," which fortunately one of the BAC tour organizers had with her. The Naval Museum's treasures were worth the hassle. (Someone at the Museum also said that a federal ID was *not* needed for a group to enter by bike—you never know.)

We wound up our tour on East Capitol Street, where the group headed west and I cycled east to my home on Lincoln Park.

I was delighted with the group's enthusiasm and gratitude, and I believe I incited a bit of "urban living" envy in at least some of them. The friends who organized the tour said that for many, the Hill tour was the highlight of the week.

Cycling on the Hill (and the rest of Washington), with its many bike lanes and now the Bikesharing stations, is *the* way to take care of daily business and a grand way to show off the Hill and its many charms to visitors. But why wait for visitors to take in the endless charms of the Hill by bike? ★

Welcome CHRS Supporters

We thank the following new members, patrons, and sponsors.

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Streetcar Movie and Popcorn at June Membership Forum

By Beth Purcell

Over 40 people attended the forum on the history of DC Streetcars at Maury Elementary School on June 7. After the results of the CHRS election were announced, Monte Edwards emceed the program. Laura Trieschmann, with EHT Traceries, spoke about the history of DC streetcars from horse-drawn omnibuses in the 1860s to the electricity-powered system used until 1962. She explained the function of the car barns as maintenance facilities. We saw historic photographs of the East Capitol Street and the Navy Yard car barns. The East Capitol Street car barn was designed in 1896 by the well-known architect Waddy B. Wood. This car barn is now condominiums. The Navy Yard car barn, now the "Blue Castle," designed in 1891 by Walter C. Root, was originally red brick with limestone trim. Both car barns are now landmark buildings. There was also a car barn at 13th and D Streets, NE, built in 1894 and later destroyed by fire.

Monte Edwards explained the streetcar technology: a "trolley" is not a streetcar, but rather the pole that contacts the overhead wire, and the connection to the underground power supply was through a "plow." He also previewed some of images in the upcoming film, such as the stands in the center of the street where passengers would enter and exit the streetcars. On Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, the stands were wood, so that they could be removed for Presidential Inaugural Parades. The film shown was "Raleigh D'Adamo's Washington Streetcar Films." D'Adamo was a streetcar enthusiast in New York City. In the 1950s he recognized that DC



Washington, DC streetcar barn, 1932.

streetcars would be discontinued, and began to systematically film all the routes. Between 1956 and 1961, in good weather, he drove to DC in his Volkswagen Beetle and documented the entire streetcar system on 8 mm film. The film shows several routes terminating on Capitol Hill: Routes 30 and 54 going down the Pennsylvania Avenue median, Route 92 from Gallaudet down 8th Street, Route 42 single-tracking on D Street and Route 90 going around Union Station. It was fascinating to see the streetcars in operation, and the traffic (now-vintage cars and much less traffic than now).

Meg Maguire, with the Committee of 100, explained that the old streetcar system served the Washington region, and the new proposed system has a DC-local focus. Several members offered their personal experiences riding the streetcars. One recalled taking the

streetcar to Gonzaga High School with other students. One day they saw Harry Truman taking a walk near the White House. ★

PHOTO: SHORPY.COM

Earth Sangha's Chris Bright Interviews Rod Simmons

Rod Simmons is the Plant Ecologist for the City of Alexandria, a contract botanist for the National Park Service and for the international conservation-science organization NatureServe, a board member of the Virginia Native Plant Society, and Botany Chair of the Maryland Native Plant Society. He is also a life-long resident of northern Virginia—so it is not surprising that he has an encyclopedic command of the local flora. Earth Sangha's Chris Bright recently spoke with Rod about local conservation. Excerpts of their conversation follow.

CB: From a naturalist's perspective, what are the most valuable things about the DC region?

RS: Within about a 50-mile radius of the center of DC, we have one of the richest floras in the United States. Just within that relatively small area, we have the richest parts of both Virginia and Maryland. Alexandria and Arlington County alone contain a third to 40 percent of all the naturally-occurring native plants in those two states. That's pretty remarkable when you think about it: Virginia is close to 43,000 square miles; Maryland is 12,400 square miles, and Alexandria and Arlington together only cover about 40 square miles. And this region used to be even richer than it now is. We know that from old herbarium records—we have records for species that no longer occur here. A ballpark figure of our current species diversity might be 1,000 or so naturally-occurring native vascular plants. But it's not just the species-count. We also have a very diverse set of plant communities.

We have prairie-like formations; we have various types of forest, and we have some very interesting and unusual wetlands as well.

CB: Why should our area be so diverse?

RS: There are two big, overlapping reasons. In the first place, we are living in a kind of botanical crossroads. Many of the species that occur here are at the northern or southern limits of their natural distribution.

There are also plant migration routes that extend through this region.

Plant species migrate in response to changes in climate, and in our region these shifts have occurred both in a north-south orientation, and east-west. So there's a lot of complexity in plant distribution here.

The other big reason is our geology. I don't know of any area in the eastern United States that is as geologically-diverse as the DC region.

Most people probably know about the Fall Line—the break from Appalachian Piedmont to Coastal Plain. But there are a lot of other features as well. A great example is the Triassic Basin out in western Fairfax County. This area is part of an ancient rift valley, and over millions of years, as that valley opened up, the upper crust of rock was stretched thinner and thinner, until eventually magma erupted through it and produced these extensive diabase outcrops. The outcrops weathered into soils with very high calcium and magnesium levels, and that created conditions for very rare plant communities—probably the most species-diverse communities anywhere in the eastern United States. That's a great example of how geology affects botany.

It's also an example of plant communities that are naturally rare.

CB: But are there also "artificially rare" communities—groups of plants

that were once common and that are now largely gone?

RS: Oh, sure—lots of them. For example, there were vast areas of upland forest, a community called "Terrace Gravel Forest," that occurred along the Fall Line. But that's nearly all gone now because these areas are high and dry, and therefore prime development spots.

The few examples that remain are still in good condition, and when you go into them it's like walking back in time. These places have stayed more or less the same for millennia—it's hard for invasives to get a foothold in them and they weren't any good for farming, which is why they survived into our era.

Another example is this gorgeous woodland-grassland complex called "Basic Oak-Hickory Forest." "Basic" refers to soil type. These are diabase communities—they occur on mafic and ultramafic soils, which are high in those calcium and magnesium base ions. They're sparse woodlands with a very diverse ground layer that includes lots of grasses or grass-like plants. Where it's more open, you have this prairie-like formation dominated by Indian grass, little bluestem, purpletop, and so on. There used to be so much of this out in the west—in the Centreville area, for example. Now it's largely gone.

If you drive south through the Virginia coastal plain in July, there are places where you'll see lots of butterflyweed, milkweeds, native grasses, even orchids. Places that are all native, and all clean—maybe one or two exotics, if that. That's the way our roadsides were here, when I was growing up in Fairfax County in the '60s and '70s. We didn't have this junk—all these invasives. And we didn't have the intense deer browsing. The extreme damage from invasives and deer is fairly recent;

and of course that's also true of the huge losses to development.

CB: What would you say are the biggest obstacles to conservation in our region? What are the really fundamental problems?

RS: I would say they're cultural, not technical. If you look at tropical deforestation, for example, obviously there are many causes for that but one of the biggest factors has been poverty—small-holder farmers cutting forest to feed themselves. That's biodiversity-loss driven by desperation. In this region, we have biodiversity-loss driven by a culture of excess. We're wealthy, and a lot of that wealth was created by trashing our surroundings through development. That's the norm here, and changing it looks like a political

threat. That's why politicians always talk about "balance," as if we were in danger of tipping the scales too much towards conservation! It's also why we're so quick to accept museum pieces as a way out—a bit of nature that's basically stuffed in a box, as a substitute for fully functioning nature. But despite all the damage, there are still many valuable properties that could be protected—and they should be. We should be conserving the best of what's left, even if it's expensive. That's the most important thing to do. Much has been given to us, and much should be expected. ★

The Virginia Native Plant Society is dedicated to the conservation of native plant species. Reprinted with permission from the March 2010 Acorn, the newsletter of the Earth Sangha.



2nd Annual Fun Fall Auction

Do you have items taking up space that you'd like to get rid of for a worthy cause? CHRS will once again be hosting a Fun Fall Auction! We are looking for furniture, artwork, household items, etc., both for our live auction and our silent auction.

All items that are donated are tax deductible. The auction will take place in the Fall; the date has not been determined yet. We will start collecting items in October, but if you have an item that you need to get rid of before then, please call Michelle Carroll at (202) 544-7900.

We look forward to seeing you at the Fun Fall Auction!

The Story of Hill East Historic Alley Dwellings

By Donna Hanousek and Beth Purcell

This past fall, Beth Purcell and Donna Hanousek led a walking tour of Hill East Alleys called “Where Once There Were Dwellings.” Here is a brief summary of alley housing in D.C., with a focus Hill East. Future issues will profile the five individual alleys mentioned in this article.

Alley Dwellings in Washington, D.C.

During the Civil War era, alley dwellings typically came about when one lot was subdivided into two lots: one fronting on the street, and another fronting on the alley. The alley dwelling was often a rental property owned by a landlord who lived on the street fronting the alley. By the 1880s and 1890s, when the Hill East alley dwellings were built, this had pattern changed. Numerous small developers constructed alley dwellings on a speculative basis and no longer lived near their alley dwelling rental properties. Hill East alleys were constructed during the later speculative building period. There were five groups of dwellings identified in Hill East alleys: 15-1/2 Street (Square 1075); Guethler’s Court (Square 1042); Harrison Alley / Harrison Court (Square 1041); Fitzhugh Court (Square 1058); and King’s Court / 14-1/2 Street (Square 1060). In general, these alley dwellings were built between 1886 and 1892. Most alley dwelling owners were professionals, business owners, and contractors. There were a few government workers and one U.S. Army officer, and the demographics of Hill East alley dwelling owners appear to track the city as a whole.

Building Materials

Alley dwellings built in the city between 1870 and 1880 were usually brick or frame consisting of two

stories. Roofs were shingle or tin. Frame houses had weatherboarding on the exterior, and many had plaster on the interior walls. In general, alley dwellings in the city and in Hill East were approximately twelve feet wide and 24- to 30-foot deep. Five of the Harrison Court dwellings were wider, at 15x24 feet. The typical floor plan for a Washington alley house was a living room and dining room on the first floor, two bedrooms on the second floor, and in the back yard, a water hydrant and an outhouse. Some houses had concrete steps, and many appeared to have had fences.

The Rise and Fall

Between 1877 and 1892, 2,549 building permits were issued for alley dwellings in the city: In 1883 there were 20 building permits requested for alley dwellings in the entire city. Building permits jumped to 102 in 1884, 205 in 1884, and averaged between 250-300 per year between 1886 and 1891. They then surged to 490 during the first six months of 1892, likely to avoid the new federal legislation set to take effect in 1892. The 1892 law imposed new requirements for construction of alley dwellings:

1. The dwelling must be at least 20 feet back from the center line of the alley (to allow a minimum 30-foot roadway with five-foot wide walkways on each side);
2. The alley where the dwelling is to be constructed must run straight to and open onto a public street at right angles;
3. At least one exit opening onto the public street must be a minimum of 15 feet wide; and
4. Sewers, water mains, and lights must be supplied.

The majority of the Hill East squares with alleys in 1893 could satisfy the roadway and right angle requirements. However, the Fitzhugh Court alley, with its 12–24 foot roadway, would not have satisfied the 1892 law. And there was another legal barrier to alley dwelling construction. As of 1893, there were no water or sewer lines serving any of the five alleys in Hill East that contained alley housing. Therefore, no new alley dwellings were constructed in Hill East after 1892.

The End of Alley Dwellings

The Alley Dwelling Authority for the District of Columbia advocated replacing alley dwellings with businesses or garages.

Alley dwellings and alley life came to be viewed as unsafe, unsanitary, and for these reasons, undesirable. A 1906 statute provided for inspection, repair and demolition of deteriorated alley dwellings. After inspection, an alley dwelling in unsanitary condition was ordered to be repaired. If repairs were not made, the dwellings could be demolished. But deteriorated frame dwellings worth less than one-half of the original value were required to be demolished (without any opportunity for repair). Building permit applications for repair of Hill East alley dwellings suggest that inspectors applied this standard fairly, and that the alley dwellings were in acceptable condition for repair. Between 1907 and 1913, hundreds of alley dwellings citywide were inspected and 502 were demolished. However, it appears that no Hill East alleys were demolished between 1907 and 1913.

Government and private agencies studied the health of alley residents.

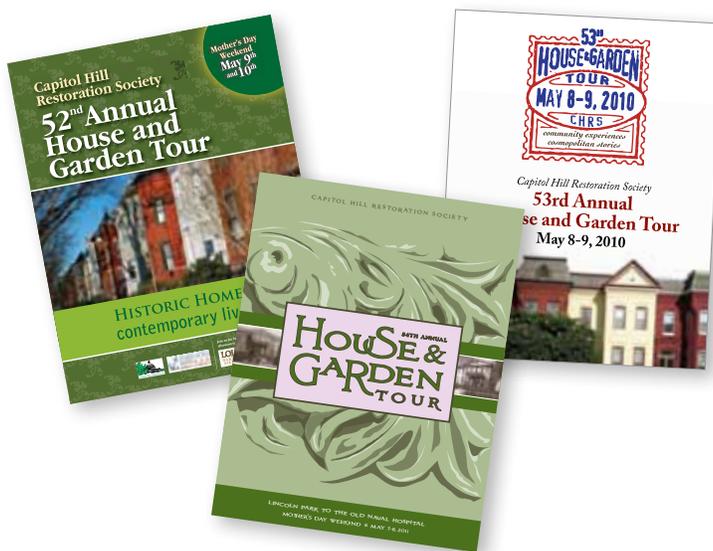
In 1910, the city's death rate per 1,000 inhabitants for all ages was 17.56 for residents living in street-fronting houses and 30.09 for alley residents. In 1910, the death rate for children under one year (infant mortality rate) for street-fronting houses in the city was 158.66 per 1,000, slightly better than the infant mortality rate (165 per 1,000) for the nation as a whole in 1900. But the infant mortality rate for alley children was 373.49 per 1,000, a shocking death rate. The principal causes of death for young children were pneumonia, tuberculosis, whooping cough, and diarrhea. Hill East alley families were among the sufferers. In 1902, the Whitaker family in Fitzhugh Court lost their daughter Elsie at age nine months.

Her cause of death was listed as "teething."

The Monday Evening Club issued a 1912 report noting that some alley dwellings had favorable features, such as brick construction, running water and sewer service and that many alleys were paved. The report nevertheless attributed the differences in alley residents' health exclusively to living in the alley and in the "seclusion from the helpful criticism of the passer-by" and from police and building inspectors. The 1912 report does not consider other possible causes for the differences in health outcomes, including crowding, poverty, or access to health care.

Alley dwellings disappeared for other reasons as well: conversion to

other uses including stables, garages, and commercial uses. Hill East alley dwellings followed the overall city pattern. In 1920, 313 Harrison Court was converted to a garage and, in 1921, four of the Guethler's Court dwellings were razed to build garages. The brick dwellings lasted the longest. The Harrison Alley dwellings existed until the mid-1960s when they were razed to build Kentucky Courts senior citizens public housing. The houses on 15-1/2 Street appear on the 1967 Sanborn map. By 1968 they were gone. ★



Volunteers Needed to Scan Historic House and Garden Tour Brochures

CHRS has held the House and Garden Tour for 54 years. The Tour brochures from all those years contain a wealth of information on Capitol Hill history. We would like to put all of them on our website—but almost all exist in hard copy only, so they need to be scanned. If you would like to help with this important work, please contact Gloria Junge at CapHRS@aol.com.



Capitol Hill Restoration Society
420 Tenth Street, SE
Washington, DC 20003

Mark Your Calendar!

JULY

5 Tuesday, 6:30 pm

CHRS Historic Preservation Committee,
Kirby House, 420 10th Street, SE, first
floor. Details: Nancy Metzger,
nancymetzger@verizon.net, 546-1034.

19 Tuesday, 6:30 pm

CHRS Board of Directors, Capitol Hill
Townhomes, 750 6th Street, SE, second
floor. Details: Beth Purcell,
eap1@mindspring.com, 622-4303.

SEPTEMBER

22 Thursday, 6:45 pm

Membership forum: Stephen T. Ayers,
Architect of the Capitol. Hill Center,
921 Pennsylvania Avenue, SE.
Details: CapHRS@aol.com.

Saturdays, April 16–November 19
9 am–noon (rain or shine)
H Street NE Freshfarm Market,
625 H Street, NE (across from H Street
Self Storage). Fresh fruits and vegetables,
pasture-raised meats, local dairy, breads
and baked goods, cut flowers and more.
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