



CHRS CELEBRATING 60 YEARS OF PRESERVATION

NEWS

www.chrs.org

December 2015–January 2016

Capitol Hill Restoration Society: 60 Years

By Lisa Dale Jones

In January of 2015 CHRS celebrated its 60th birthday with a party at St. Mark’s Church. Maybe you were there! As the evening progressed, we heard about the successes and occasional defeats we experienced on the road to making Capitol Hill what it is today. Every step of the way, CHRS was a major player in saving Capitol Hill from destruction.

We learned how the Sewell-Belmont House was almost demolished for a larger Senate office building. How all the homes and other structures between Constitution and Independence Avenues, from the Supreme Court down East Capitol Street to the river, were almost bulldozed to put in an avenue of federal government buildings. We heard from Mimi Wolf about proposed office buildings that almost made our end of Pennsylvania Avenue like K Street downtown. And from Hazel Kreinheder we heard about the demolition of Mary’s Blue Room. We were told about the highway that almost ran up North Carolina Avenue through Lincoln Park and then up 11th Street.

Doug Wheeler then explained how Capitol Hill becoming an historic district in the 1970s had an impact on the District as a whole. CHRS was able to get a large part of Capitol Hill not only listed as

an historic district—but protected. CHRS fought for the District to enact its historic preservation law, setting in motion the establishment of the Historic Preservation Review Board and its staff, the Historic Preservation Office.

Those past activities laid the foundation for all that CHRS does today. The public and our members are mostly aware of our public activities and programs that include:

- Annual Mother’s Day House and Garden Tour
- The Dick Wolf Memorial Lecture
- Preservation Cafés
- Walking Tours
- Booths at community events
- Quarterly guest speakers
- Informational booklets on historic preservation

But there’s a huge amount of work that goes on in the background that’s essential to maintaining Capitol Hill as a desirable place to live, work and play. Here’s a short list:

- Studying and writing official comments on draft Environmental Impact Statements for large construction projects
- Studying and writing official comments on the Section 106

reviews for projects with a potential impact on historic resources

- Developing relationships and working on coalitions with other preservation groups
- Studying and commenting on proposed zoning regulations
- Attending public meetings about proposed projects by developers and District officials
- Giving testimony before DC Councilmembers
- Helping homeowners and architects understand what they’re able to do to their

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Groff Court Alley Dwellings

By Beth Purcell

In the 19th century, there was a big demand for low-cost rental housing. Investors built alley dwellings to rent to tenants, primarily African-Americans. Alley dwellings built in the city between 1870 and 1892 were usually of brick or frame construction, two stories tall. The typical floor plan for a Washington alley house included a kitchen and one other room on the first floor, two bedrooms on the second floor and, in the back yard, a water hydrant and an outhouse. The Groff Court alley dwellings were much like these in terms of their origin and tenant demographics. Also similar to other alley dwellings of this time period, few examples survive intact.

In 1890, Diller B. Groff built nine brick dwellings in Groff Court for a total cost of \$4,500. Each building was two stories with dimensions of 12.33 by 28 feet. These houses resemble Groff's two-story brick houses at 324-328 E Street, NE, also built in 1890; the alley dwellings are the same height, feature the same segmented arch window openings and similar corbeled brick at the cornice, but are generally simpler and smaller (only two bays wide) and without a basement.

These buildings, like many alley dwellings, were built as rental housing. Groff still owned all nine houses as of 1893 and sold them before 1899. Real estate advertisements in 1894 and 1895 show 506 and 518 Groff Court offered for rent at \$9 per month. From US Census records, we know that all nine houses were rented as of 1900 and 1910. In 1922, five of the houses were offered for rent at \$60 per month or sale for \$5,000. Between 1902 and 1976, the houses were owned by investors. A

neighborhood cleanup in 1978 suggests that people had begun to buy houses in Groff Court to live in; tax assessments in 1980 and beyond show owner-occupants on Groff Court. Five of the original nine dwellings (512-520 Groff Court) remain. Three dwellings south of 512 disappeared between 1985 and 1990 and were replaced by 501 and 503 Groff Court.

Early Groff Court residents were typical of alley residents during the early 20th century: African-American tenants working in unskilled occupations. Most were originally from Maryland although some were from Virginia or DC. Men worked at unskilled occupations including laborer, wagon-driver and butcher. Many women worked as cooks or servants in the houses of others or as laundresses at home. By modern standards, conditions were crowded: there were an average of five residents per house, with a high of ten and a low of one.

As of 1912, there were 258 inhabited alleys in the city with 3,148 houses. There were 30 inhabited alleys in Northeast with 336 houses. A series of reform movements starting in the late nineteenth century worked toward improving or eliminating alley dwellings. Alley dwellings and alley life had come to be viewed as unsafe, unsanitary and, for these reasons, undesirable. Reformers argued that alleys were hotbeds of crime and that alleys fostered prostitution,



IMAGE COURTESY BETH PURCELL

Groff Court Alley dwellings built in the 1990s.

drunkenness and disease. There is some anecdotal evidence to support these contentions. In 1904 and 1958, women fought in the alley. In 1922, Daughtery Stewart, 516 Groff Court, was accused of possessing intoxicants unlawfully; he was later cleared. In 1973, a man living at 516 Groff Court was accused of killing a child. By the 1970s, people were buying houses in Groff Court to live in. In the 1970s, people began to buy the houses to live in. In the 1990s, Fred Mashack and a partner built additional alley dwellings in Groff Court.

For additional reading on alleys, see: James Borchert, *Alley Life in Washington: Family, Community, Religion, and Folklife in the City, 1850-1970* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1982.) and HPRB, "DC Historic Alley Buildings Survey," www.planning.dc.gov > HPRB > DC History. ★

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To reach any of the above, please contact the Society offices at (202) 543-0425 or via e-mail: CapHRS@aol.com.

ABOUT CHRS

Capitol Hill is a special place. We promote, preserve, and enhance the character of our historic neighborhoods.

Since its founding in 1955, CHRS has worked continuously to make Capitol Hill the desirable location it has now become. Due to CHRS's efforts, Capitol Hill won designation as a historic district in 1976. Today, that legacy of standing up for the community continues with our work in planning, zoning, historic preservation, and public safety.

CHRS is a volunteer organization, made up of Hill residents who love their historic neighborhoods and want to ensure that the unique character of the Hill is around for future generations. Come join us!

To learn more or join, please visit:
www.CHRS.org

January Members' Meeting: Historic Preservation and Community-Building on Capitol Hill

By Susan Burgerman

The guest speaker for our January Members' Meeting is Rhonda Sincavage, Director of Publications and Programs at the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Ms. Sincavage will explore the relationships between historic preservation, quality of life and the continued vibrancy of our community. Capitol Hill is on the cusp of rapid change and as a community we are forced to confront and question the economics, diversity and environmental sustainability of the Historic District. In a 2011 TED Talk, Ms. Sincavage

very effectively addressed these and other relevant issues for historic preservation in the national context and will bring the discussion home to Capitol Hill at the January meeting.

The event will be held on Monday, January 25, 2016, at Maury Elementary School, 1250 Constitution Avenue, NE; entrance is on the 200 block of 13th Street. Doors will open at 6:30pm; the Members' Meeting will begin at 6:40pm and the presentation will begin promptly at 7:00pm. As always, it is free and open to the public, so please bring your friends and neighbors! ★

The Capitol Hill Photo Project: Volunteers Needed!

The Capitol Hill Photo Project needs you! We're continuing our efforts to photo-document the homes that comprise our Historic District. Go to <http://capitolhillbuildings.org> to see the squares completed so far. More squares will be added during the 2015/16 "leafless season" (November–March). If you enjoy walking the Hill and have a bit of the photo bug, then here's an opportunity to help photo-document the Historic District. For more information, contact Norman Metzger via e-mail at normanmetzger@gmail.com or at (202) 445-5436.

Historic Preservation Briefs

by Beth Purcell

Interested in learning more about historic district designation?

Contact CHRS at caphrs@aol.com.

The Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB or the Board) considered the following case on October 22 and November 19, 2015. HPRB is responsible for determining if proposed changes to a building are consistent with the DC Preservation Act. A “concept review” is a preliminary determination of a building owner’s plan to alter the building and if the concept is approved, the owner will return to the HPRB for a final review. In these reports, “staff” refers to the staff of the Historic Preservation Office (HPO), which serves as the staff of the HPRB. There was only case on the calendar (and no calendar cases):

801 Virginia Avenue, SE, HPA 15-629, concept/new construction. The site is currently a parking lot and is located very near some of the oldest buildings on Capitol Hill (such as 1003 8th Street, SE [1824]). The applicant proposes to construct a new 22-unit condominium and mixed use building, to be four-stories, constructed as a matter of right. (The project is within the 8th Street Overlay Zone [45-foot height limit]. The proposed building is within the height limits, with a permissible penthouse). The building will maintain continuity with the existing streetscape and contribute to revitalizing 8th Street south of the freeway. The building will have a green roof and the roof deck will be set back from 8th Street; deck appurtenances should not be visible from 8th Street.

The exterior will be glass, including operable glass windows and a garage door that may also be glass; the facade will be enlivened at each floor level and at the parapet with painted metal bands. Any brickwork will feature struck mortar joints. The applicant showed an image of the

building in red brick although the applicant is considering either red or brown brick. CHRS supported the project and testified that red would be more compatible with the nearby historic buildings. HPRB approved the concept, with the requirement that the amount of glass, which wraps around the corners of the bays, be reduced because this weakens the building. Landscaping will be finalized after CSX and DDOT produce landscape plans for Virginia Avenue as part of the Virginia Avenue Tunnel project.

134 11th Street, NE, HPA 15-633 concept/new garage. The applicants propose to remove existing balconies on the first and second stories of this rowhouse and construct a new brick garage with roof deck in the vacant space at the rear of this rowhouse. In the alley, several lots have no structures at the rear of the lot and there are at least six single-story garages and several two-story carriage houses. As far as CHRS could determine, there are no roof decks on any existing structures on the rear of lots on the alley. The roof deck would have a green roof, reducing the deck’s size and instead of guard rails, a brick wall wrapping around the deck, rising up from the garage wall as a parapet wall (low protective wall at the edge of a roof). Two height alternatives are offered, one at 13 feet and one at 15 feet. CHRS supported the new garage at 13 feet, but not the roof deck. A recent HPO publication notes that Capitol Hill has a significant number of garages and describes them as such:

- **Building Style and Characteristics:** The standard garage form—a small, one-story, single-bay structure—was fully developed and widely built by the 1910s. Typically, the garage is purely utilitarian with a garage

door opening on the front, sometimes a window on one side wall, flat roof and little or no ornamentation. Garages were built as freestanding structures and as attached structures, both independently and together. HPO, DC Historic Alley Buildings Survey, 22.

Garages are utilitarian buildings, not locations for recreation. The project would introduce a recreational element for the first time, alter the alley scape and also set a precedent for allowing roof decks on garages visible from the alley. For these reasons, we believe that a garage roof deck is not compatible with the Capitol Hill. In a prior case, 1102 Park Street, NE, HPA 15-198 (March 3, 2015), because the roof deck was not visible from the alley, the utilitarian character of the alley was preserved. CHRS and a neighbor who testified in opposition were both concerned that this project would set a precedent and that other owners with a single-story garage will seek to add a roof deck, visible from the alley and possibly from the street.

HPRB found that the garage with roof deck was compatible, at a height of 13 feet, but said that that the garage should be either one story or two stories, not the in-between amalgam in the current plans extending the parapet wall higher above the first story.

The following case, in which CHRS participated, appeared on the HPRB consent calendar:

- **602 A Street, NE**, HPA 15-629, concept/second story addition on existing first story. ★

C100 Dismisses Virginia Avenue Tunnel Lawsuit; Vows to Continue Pressure for Commuter and Passenger Rail Expansion

By Monte Edwards

The Committee of 100 on the Federal City (C100) has elected to dismiss its Virginia Avenue Tunnel lawsuit and to pursue its objective of alleviating commuter and passenger rail congestion through ongoing transportation planning processes. To do so, the Committee is currently actively engaged in development of the D.C. Rail Plan, DC's Multi-Modal Transportation Plan (MoveDC) and the Federal and DC Elements of the

Comprehensive Plans related to transportation.

The Committee of 100 brought suit in the United States District Court for the District of Columbia just over a year ago claiming various violations of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and that NEPA approval of the Virginia Avenue Tunnel expansion failed to consider and assess security and safety issues, cumulative

environmental impacts and adverse impacts on commuter and passenger rail, including rail travel over shared lines and the Long Bridge. Since the onset of the litigation, new long range policy opportunities have surfaced that could result in achieving the goals of the lawsuit.

Questions? Contact Monte Edwards monte.edwards@verizon.net or (202) 543-3504. ★

CHRS: 60 Years, *continued from cover*

homes to comply with historic preservation and zoning regulations

- Studying and commenting on the DC Comprehensive Plan

These essential activities take hours of work each month by dedicated volunteers and a very small office staff.

And we're looking ahead to the future!

Capitol Hill will certainly change in the years to come: more homeowners will want alternative forms of energy; more may want to make their homes wheelchair accessible. Parking will either be more of an issue—or less, depending on new transportation options. Security will be a big issue, as will housing costs. Will the area around RFK stadium become more community-oriented, or will the NFL come back? These are all issues that CHRS is preparing to address as

we move into our next decade. As we work with District and federal officials on these coming changes, it's good to know we have CHRS members on board.

We deeply appreciate your support! ★

To make an end-of-year tax donation, please use the form on page 6, or visit our website: www.chrs.org.

Thank You, CHRS Supporters

We thank the following new members and donors.

MEMBER

James Hoon

DICK WOLF LECTURE FUND
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Jeff Fletcher & Tara Hamilton

Support the Capitol Hill Restoration Society With a Gift to the Annual Fund

Like the old commercial, when CHRS speaks, people listen. Whether it's a zoning hearing, a planning commission or a city council meeting, CHRS's voice carries the weight of expert knowledge and considered opinions. But more than that, CHRS carries the voice of Capitol Hill.

Our village on the Hill owes much of its charm and appeal to the historic character saved and protected by CHRS. And that's because CHRS volunteers work tirelessly to preserve and restore Capitol Hill's historic

fabric. Success comes more often than not in the day-to-day deliberations over seemingly small matters: arcane proposals and modest variations on historic standards.

But continuing that fight depends on CHRS continuing to be the voice of Capitol Hill. That's why CHRS's community outreach and educational efforts are so important. CHRS strives to keep the community informed about what is important and why it is important. An educated public is its own best advocate.

While volunteers research and advocate for free, operating costs are not free. These outreach efforts are critical to ensuring that CHRS hears the community and the City hears CHRS. Our success in these efforts is why we are the voice of the Hill; it's why people listen. Please join us today to support CHRS and keep Capitol Hill the village we all know and love.



I/we would like to make a 100% tax-deductible contribution to support the Society's ongoing efforts to preserve and protect the historic fabric of our neighborhood.

Enclosed is a donation in the amount of:

- \$1,000 \$500 \$250 \$100 \$50
 \$ _____ (other amount)

Please make your check payable to CHRS, Inc.



Name(s)

Address

City, State, Zip

Preferred phone

E-mail

▶ Send a Check

Please fill out this form and mail it with your check to:

Capitol Hill Restoration Society
P.O. Box 15264
Washington, DC 20003-0264

▶ Donate on-line

Prefer to pay by credit card?
Please visit www.chrs.org and click on the blue **Join/Donate** button.

**Thank you
for supporting
CHRS!**

In Memoriam: Lucinda (Cindy) Prout Janke

IMAGE COURTESY: JOHN JACK PHOTOGRAPHY



As you may have heard, our friend Cindy Janke died in October after a bad fall at her home. Cindy was a long-time member of CHRS and wrote a number of articles for our newsletter. She also spoke at our 60th birthday event last January.

Her family has asked that donations in her honor either go to the Historical Society of Washington, DC or to the Old Naval Hospital Foundation in support of the Hill Center Preservation Fund. ★

Cindy Janke speaks at the CHRS 60th anniversary party, January 2015.

Out and About in the Neighborhood

By Elizabeth Nelson

Always a popular event, the annual Hilloween street fair at Eastern Market was busier than ever this year, perhaps because it came a day early and didn't compete with Halloween. CHRS volunteers hosted a children's activity table with temporary tattoos and beads to string--tons of fun for all. We've been invited to bring our "act" back to the North Hall on December 6 and join local businesses and community groups in a seasonal crafts fair for our younger neighbors. Those beaded bracelets will make lovely holiday gifts!

As part of our "Beyond the Boundaries" program, CHRS volunteers are engaging in a variety of outreach activities, which includes identifying new opportunities to introduce our organization to others in the community. We're always on the lookout for members who can



IMAGE COURTESY: ELIZABETH NELSON

CHRS staffed a table at Hilloween 2015.

volunteer their time at these events. If you would like to support these efforts, keep an eye on the Calendar page of the website or our newsletter. Volunteer participation is a key part of our success as an organization! ★



CHRS CELEBRATING 60 YEARS OF PRESERVATION

Capitol Hill Restoration Society

420 Tenth Street, SE
Washington, DC 20003

Mark Your Calendar!

DECEMBER

7 Monday, 6:30 pm

CHRS Historic Preservation Committee, Kirby House, 420 10th Street, SE, first floor. Details: Beth Purcell (202) 544-0178.

7 Monday, 4–8 pm

Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) will conduct a public scoping meeting on the proposed Washington Union Station Expansion Project. Washington Union Station's Presidential Room, located in the east hall, in the former B Smith's Restaurant space. Formal presentations at 4:30–7 pm. Details: info@WUSstationexpansion.com.

10 Thursday, 7:30 pm

CHRS Zoning Committee, Kirby House, 420 10th Street, SE, first floor. Details: Gary Peterson (202) 547-7969.

JANUARY

4 Monday, 6:30 pm

CHRS Historic Preservation Committee, Kirby House, 420 10th Street, SE, first floor. Details: Beth Purcell (202) 544-0178.

14 Thursday, 7:30 pm

CHRS Zoning Committee, Kirby House, 420 10th Street, SE, first floor. Details: Gary Peterson (202) 547-7969.

19 Tuesday, 6:30 pm

CHRS Board of Directors, Capitol Hill Townhomes, 750 6th Street SE, second floor. Details: Lisa Dale Jones, (202) 543-0425.

25 January, 6:30 pm

Members' Meeting, Maury Elementary School, 1250 Constitution Avenue, NE. Doors at 6:30 pm; Members' Meeting at 6:40 pm; presentation at 7 pm. Details: Lisa Dale Jones, (202) 543-0425.