

Hill East History: The Big Three Rowhouse Builders: Howenstein, Jameson, and Kite

By Beth Purcell

The Craftsman magazine (1901-1916, edited by Gustav Stickley) had a major influence on popular taste and home design in the early 20th century. Stickley advocated an aesthetic based on functionality, simple design, excellent workmanship, and visible and beautiful construction. (Not surprisingly, he despised Victorian houses with their chopped-up little rooms, clutter, and garish colors.) Many issues of the magazine had house plans, including bungalows, which became very popular.

In the 1920s, middle class homebuyers in DC wanted Craftsman bungalows with their wide front porches, horizontal orientation (two stories), light-filled rooms, and dormers. DC land prices were too high to build detached houses for the middle class market, but these buyers could afford rowhouses. The challenge for builders was to offer rowhouses that “read” like Craftsman bungalows. They succeeded. These rowhouses, sometimes called “daylighters,” are two rooms deep, with windows in each room so that sunlight flows into the entire house. The typical floor plan is a living room in front, dining room in back, a narrow kitchen on the side, and a front porch and back porch. Upstairs are two-three bedrooms, a sleeping porch in back, and a bathroom. These rowhouses typically have several Craftsman features:

- a wide front porch with substantial columns;
- a mansard roof with a dormer and window;
- the rafters and supports for the porch and dormer are visible; and
- windows with six-panes on the upper sash over one pane on the lower sash to let in ample light, but no glare.

Hill East has many daylighter porch-front rowhouses, primarily from three major builders: Herman R. Howenstein, Thomas A. Jameson, and Harry A. Kite.

Herman R. Howenstein (1877-1955) was a major Washington developer in the early 20th century. He built many daylighter brick porch-front rowhouses (including many on Capitol Hill), beginning in the early 20th century. His rowhouses are usually beige brick (occasionally red brick), with a basket-weave design over the second story windows. Many houses feature a straight slate mansard roof with a gable dormer and a basketweave design over the windows.

Later, he and a partner built and owned a number of large apartment buildings, including 1301 and 1321 Massachusetts Avenue, NW; as well as the Wakefield, Potomac Park, Chatham, Highview (2505 13th Street, NW), and the Embassy (1613 Harvard Street, NW). In 1933 and 1934, lenders foreclosed on Highview and the Embassy.¹ The foreclosure sale proceeds were less than the mortgage balances. Howenstein and his partner had personally guaranteed the mortgages, and were liable for this deficiency, which they could not pay. As a result, they both went bankrupt in 1935. At that point, Howenstein had \$13.80 in cash plus the stock in H. R. Howenstein Co. (also bankrupt) and owed his creditors almost \$400,000. He died in 1955, after a long illness.²

¹ “\$400,000 Paid at Public Sale of Embassy,” *Washington Post*, 30 Aug. 1933, 22.

² “In re: Herman R. Howenstein, Bankrupt,” Supreme Court of the District of Columbia, Docket No. 3190 (1935).

Thomas A. Jameson (active 1910s -circa 1930) built hundreds of brick porch-front rowhouses in the 1910s and 1920s. His rowhouses typically feature beige brick, and full width porches, brick columns, flared slate mansard roofs with shed dormers (and exposed rafters), in contrast to Howenstein’s straight mansard roofs with gable dormers.

Comment [KV1]: ?
Is this trying to saying “sometime in the 1910s” until “approximately 1930”?

Harry A. Kite (1882-1931) was a prominent Washington developer who built many daylighter porch-front rowhouses all over Washington, as well as apartment buildings (e.g., Kew Gardens, 2700 Q Street, NW). He developed cardiac problems, and died suddenly from a heart attack.³

For more information on rowhouses, see Sharon McDonald’s MA thesis, George Washington University, “Row House Construction in Washington Between the World Wars” (1995). *The Craftsman* is available on CD from www.historicalworks.com.

Chart: Rowhouses by builder⁴

Comment [KV2]: While interesting, I think it takes up too much real estate. People should simple be redirected to the website where this chart will exist.

Street	Howenstein	Jameson	Kite
13 th Street, SE		308-314 13 th St., 1928	328-332-13 th St., 1916
14 th Street, SE	318-322 14 th St., 1925 518-522 14 th St., 1916 919-925 14 th St., 1923 947-957 14 th St., 1921	514-516 14 th St., 1920	112-118 14 th St., 1917
15 th Street, SE	717-721 15 th St., 1911 726-730 15 th St., 1916	100-114 15 th St., 1908 235-241 15 th St., 1917 726-730 15 th St., 1916	242-248 15 th St., 1921 416-420 15 th St., 1923
16 th Street, SE	712-718 16 th St., 1919	201-219 17 th St., 1909	231-257 16 th St., 1922 200-220 16 th St., 1924 201-211 16 th St., 1923 309-323 16 th St., 1914 325-337 16 th St., 1915
17 th Street, SE	701-715 17 th St., 1929 801-811 17 th St., 1922	210-212 17 th St., 1928	2 17 th St., 1921
18 th Street, SE		225-233 18 th St., 1928 315-317 18 th St., 1928 411-421 18 th St., 1924	112-118 14 th St., 1917 1 18 th St., & 7 18 th St., 1921
A Street, SE	1426-1430 A St., 1923 1505-1507 A St., 1908		1421-1439 A St., 1917 1731-1745 A St., 1924
Barney Circle, SE	5, 6, 7, 8 Barney Circle, 1922		

²“Herman Howenstein,” *Washington Post*, 27 Mar. 1955, sec. B, p. 2.

³“Rites for H.A. Kite to be at Residence,” *Washington Post*, 4 Feb. 1931, 3.

⁴All addresses are in SE. Addresses and dates reflect building permits; some rowhouses are no longer extant.

Bay Street, SE		1700-1740 Bay St., 1925 1701-1737 Bay St., 1925	
C Street, SE		1725 C St., 1927	1343-1349 C St., 1922 1527-1541 C St., 1914
D Street, SE		1326 & 1330 D St., 1930 1700-1704 D St., 1923 1706-1732 D St., 1924 1734-1744 D St., 1925 1701-1709 D St., 1924 1800-1820 D St., 1925 1801-1821 D St., 1925	1308-1326 D St., 1915 1522-1546 D St , 1912
E Street, SE	1327-1337 E St., 1924 1617, 1619, 1625, 1627 E St., 1923 1700-1722 E St., 1922	1601-1611 E St., 1919	
East Capitol Street, SE	1413-1417 E. Capitol St., 1918 1431-1435 E. Capitol St., 1913	1519-1523 E. Capitol St., 1918	1601-1617 E. Capitol St., 1916 1705, 1711, 1717, 1723, 1729 E. Capitol St., 1921
G Street, SE	1318-1336 G St., 1340-1354 & 1426- 1428 G St., SE, 1911 1438-1442 G St., 1925 1601-1631 G St., 1918	1418-1420 G St., 1920	
H Street, SE	1600-1614 H St., 1919 1616, 1618 H St., 1925 1601-1625 H St., 1922		

Independence Avenue, SE	1351-1361 Indep. Ave., 1912 ⁵		1424-1432 Indep. Ave., 1917 1611-1625 Indep. Ave., 1924 1721-1743 Indep. Ave., 1925
K Street, SE	1328-1330 K St., 1925 1346-1362 K St., 1925		
Kentucky Avenue, SE	255-265 Kentucky Ave., 1925 539-543 Kentucky Ave., 1921 523 Kentucky Ave., 1926 801-805 Kentucky, Ave., 1923 810-824 Kentucky Ave., 1922 813-833 Kentucky Ave., 1924	301-311 Kentucky Ave., 1922 501-517 Kentucky Ave., 1920	301-311 Kentucky Ave., 1922
Massachusetts Avenue, SE		1631-1633 Mass. Ave., 1909 1700-1742 Mass. Ave., 1925 1727-1745 Mass. Ave., 1927 1801-1847 Mass. Ave., 1927 1820-1844 Mass. Ave., 1928	1402-1426 Mass. Ave., 1917 1501-1537 Mass. Ave., 1922 1526-1538 Mass. Ave., 1923 1602-1640 Mass. Ave., 1924
Pennsylvania Avenue, SE	1312-1318 Penn. Ave., 1911 1347-1353 Penn. Ave., 1923 1433 -1439 Penn. Ave., 1911 1430, 1434-1440 Penn. Ave., 1911		
Potomac Avenue, SE	1322-1326 Potomac Ave., 1931 1369-1371 Potomac Ave., 1922 1375-1381 Potomac	1512-1526 Potomac Ave., 1921 1600-1614 Potomac Ave., 1919 1724-1740 Potomac	

⁵ Designed and built by Howenstein for A.C. Moses.

	Ave., 1918 1415-1421 Potomac Ave., 1910 1435-1439 Potomac Ave., 1911 1500-1510 Potomac Ave., 1917 1616-1628 Potomac Ave., 1923	Ave., 1923 1801-1825 Potomac Ave., 1926	
South Carolina Avenue, SE	1344-1356 S. Carolina Ave., 1912 ⁶ 1401-1415 S. Carolina Ave., 1910		

[newsletter editors: please see photos of Howenstein, Jameson and Kite rowhouses]

Photo captions:

Photo credit for all: CHRS Beyond the Boundaries Project

Caption: 1609 E St, SE [please be sure to include this photo]

1609 E St. SE: Jameson (1919). Brick porch-front house with mansard roof, fish-scale slate tiles, shed dormer with overhanging eaves and exposed rafter ends. Windows: 6 over 1 double-hung windows.

Caption: 1500 Potomac Ave SE – front view [please be sure to include this photo]

1500 Potomac Ave. SE: Howenstein (1917). Brick porch-front house with straight mansard roof with fish-scale slate tiles, gable dormer. Basketweave brick design above first and second story windows. Windows: 1 over 1 double-hung windows.

Caption: 1500 Potomac Ave SE – side view [please include this photo if there is space]

1500 Potomac Ave. SE: Howenstein (1917). Side view showing straight mansard roof with two gable dormers and basketweave brick design above first and second story windows.

Caption: 418 15th St SE [please be sure to include this photo]

418 15th St. SE: Kite (1923). Sloping roof without a dormer, 1 over 1 double-hung windows.

⁶ Designed and built by Howenstein for A.C. Moses.