

Finding Historic Photographs of Capitol Hill Buildings

By Beth Purcell

Photographs of Capitol Hill houses from the past may be available from several sources. This article focuses on photographs of existing buildings.

Photograph collections

It's a big universe. You may want to start by searching these collections online, and then visit the libraries and consult librarians for additional help. The box shows contact information for Library of Congress (LOC), Washingtoniana, and Historical Society of Washington, DC (HSW).

Online searches

- Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS): Photographs and information on buildings. This is an important LOC collection.
- Other LOC photograph collections: Brady-Handley views of DC; Civil War; Farm Service Administration; Harris & Ewing; Gottscho-Salinger; Hordczak Collection; Lilienquist Collection; Stereograph Cards, Miscellaneous Items in High Demand.
- Wymer Photograph Collection of HSW: In 1949 and 1950 John Wymer systematically photographed every neighborhood in Washington. Note: HSW has multiple additional photograph collections.
- See also www.shorpy.com and www.ghostsofdc.org.
- www.dclibrary.org[search 'dig>dc'] Willard R. Ross postcard collection (1910s-1930s) (digdc.dclibrary.org/cdm/landingpage/collection/p16808coll3).
- *Washington Post* online: See July-August 2014 CHRS *News* on accessing *Post* articles/photographs. The *Evening Star* is also available at www.dclibrary.org. Real estate advertisements, in addition to articles, may have photographs.
- www.capitolhillhistory.org. See for example, Lorraine Reid's 1947 photographs.
- www.chrs.org has some house histories (chrs.org/history-and-preservation/house-histories/), and the annual CHRS House and Garden Tour brochures (chrs.org/house-and-garden-tour/tour-brochures/) with information about houses on that year's tour. Some photographs (taken after 2000) of houses outside the Capitol Hill Historic District are available in the Beyond the Boundaries documentation (chrs.org/history-and-preservation/beyond-the-boundaries-map/).

Search tips:

- See library's website for search tips.
- If your house is near a well-known building, a photograph of that building may also show your house. Examples include the Capitol, churches, schools, fire stations, commercial buildings, the Navy Yard, streetcar barns.
- Search by street name, in addition to searching by address.

- Street names have changed. B Street NE and SE became Constitution Avenue, NE and Independence Avenue, SE. Georgia Avenue, SE became Potomac Avenue, SE.

Visiting libraries:

There may be additional photographs which the librarians can help you find. Contact information is below. For LOC you may need to get a free researcher's ID. For each library, it's a good idea to find out in advance how to pay for copies of photographs and what formats are available. Bringing a flash drive is a good idea.

Washingtoniana at the MLK Library has a large collection, including indexes and past issues of the *Washington Star* on microfilm and also has vertical files on many topics.

Books and periodicals

Records of the Columbia Historical Society. HSW

Robert Reed, *Old Washington, D.C. In Early Photographs 1846-1932* (New York, N.Y.: Dover Publications, Inc, 1980)

Physical archives

Library of Congress (LOC) Prints and Photographs Collection
(Madison Building)

Independence Avenue SE between 1st and 2nd Streets

The entire LOC collection is at the Madison Building; a subset has been digitized and is available online at www.loc.gov> Prints and Photographs

Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Library

Washingtoniana Division

901 G Street NW (3rd floor)

www.mlkjrlibrary@dc.gov

202 727-1213

Historical Society of Washington, DC (HSW)

Kiplinger Research Library

801 K Street, NW

www.historydc.org

202 249-3955