

# Second Northeast Capitol Hill Walking Tour

## Beyond the Boundaries on Tennessee Avenue, Warren Street, and Constitution Avenue

by Beth Purcell

On March 15, 2008, thirty neighbors joined Elizabeth Nelson, Donna Hanousek, and Beth Purcell for our second historic walking tour of North Lincoln Park.

On the 200 and 300 blocks of Tennessee Avenue and Corbin Place, we saw multiple Flemish bond rowhouses constructed in the 1910s by Harry A. Kite. Excellent examples of “daylighter” rowhouses include Kite’s 1916 porch-front houses at 221-235 Tennessee Avenue, NE. During this time, middle class buyers wanted bungalows. Although land on Capitol Hill was too expensive to build and sell detached houses like bungalows, these buyers



Tour participants listen to Beth Purcell (dark shirt, pointing) explain house features along the 200 block of 14th Street, NE.

could afford rowhouses. Architects successfully incorporated bungalow-style elements (e.g. porches and dormers) into rowhouses. For example, these Tennessee Avenue rowhouses have a front porch over the full width of the house and a mansard

roof with gable dormers (some of the most spectacular dormers on Capitol Hill — three sets of windows, each with nine lights).

The one-story brick rowhouses at 1337-1353 C Street, NE, were designed and built by Charles Gessford in 1886. They are 11 feet wide and 25 feet deep, with a stepped design at the cornice. His other small houses at 257-261 Warren Street, NE, have been demolished. Gessford is one of the best known Capitol Hill architect/builders. Other small, two-story narrow houses are nearby (e.g., 310-334 14th Street, NE (1912); 1348-1360 C Street, NE (1911); 1362-1378 C Street, NE (1912)). Early real property tax records suggest that these small houses were once rental properties.

The rowhouse development at 1400-1434 C Street, 311-319 14th Street, NE, and 310-340 15th Street, NE, was designed by Albert H. Beers in 1910. These rowhouses have Flemish bond brick. The houses also have a two-bay front porch, with a projecting cornice in front of the parapet wall in two alternating designs: an eyebrow raking cornice on center and a stepped pediment with the step in the center. Beers

## Thank You, Beyond the Boundaries Volunteers

by Donna Hanousek

CHRS would like to thank the volunteers who have submitted their survey forms and/or photos as part of the effort to survey northeast and southeast of the Capitol Hill Historic District.

Just in case you haven’t heard, CHRS is working with the ANCs 6A and 6B to survey the buildings outside the Capitol Hill Historic District. Architectural historians from the firm Tracerics will undertake the archival survey work (like assembling building permits) and will create an informational database on the buildings. We’ve had volunteers performing the on-site survey work, which provides detailed descriptions of each building, along with a photograph.

Thanks to all of our dedicated survey and photography volunteers—**Larry Janezich, Bryan Cassidy, Jeff Davis, Pat Taylor, Mark Williams, Sam Manivong, Elizabeth Nelson, David Holmes, and Gary Peterson**—who have met the requested March deadline.

We also give special thanks to a trio of talented architectural historians from the Trust for Architectural Easements—**Heather Massler, Cathy Sellers, and Jennifer Brennan**—who provided both volunteer survey and photographic assistance to our effort.

For those of you have not yet turned in your assignments—we hope to be thanking you next month! ✧

is credited with Harry Wardman's breakthrough designs for porch-front rowhouses. This design, for another builder, is an example of early porch-front houses.

The flat-front brick rowhouses at 241-245 Warren Street, NE, were built for Herman R. Howenstein in 1907. This was early in his career, before he had his own construction company. In the 1910s-1920s, he built many daylighter porch-front rowhouses all over Capitol Hill. His rowhouses have a special look: beige brick, with a basketweave design over the windows and a straight mansard slate roof with a single gable dormer.

The final stop was 1345-1363 Constitution Avenue, NE, designed

and built by the famous architect B. Stanley Simmons in 1892. These houses combine design elements from Richardsonian Romanesque (coursed ashlar stone and foliate carving) and Queen Anne (gable roofs, oriel windows, belt coursing). Although these houses are just inside the historic district boundaries, four of them would have been demolished in the 1990s. Vigilant neighbors used the historic district protections to successfully block the planned demolition and saved them for us to enjoy.

More tours are planned – watch the News for a schedule. Please let us know if you and your neighbors would like a walking tour of your Beyond the Boundaries

area. Contact Elizabeth Nelson, Elizabeth\_knits@yahoo.com.

See [www.chrs.org](http://www.chrs.org) for more photos from the tour, as well as summaries of historical building permits for eastern Capitol Hill. ✧

## Please Note

CHRS has reconsidered its acceptance of financial assistance for our Beyond the Boundaries survey effort from the Trust for Architectural Easements. We will instead fund the work through our usual fundraising efforts, so as not to give the appearance of endorsing either the preservation easement program or any specific easement-granting organization.

## ARCHITECTS AND BUILDERS

**Albert H. Beers**, architect (1859-1911). Beers worked extensively with Harry Wardman, and two of their projects appear on the National Register of Historic Places. Beers designed many rowhouses for Wardman and is credited with Wardman's breakthrough designs for daylighter rowhouses. He also worked with other builders, including Harry A. Kite, Chris Cox Dawson, George Barkman, and T. J. McCubbin.

**Charles Gessford**, architect/builder (1831-1894). Gessford (who lived at 661 South Carolina Avenue, SE) is one of the best-known builder/architects on Capitol Hill. His work includes Queen Anne-style brick rowhouses (e.g., 824-832 D Street, SE (1892); 638-642 East Capitol Street (1890)). He also built alley dwellings (e.g., Gessford Court). He borrowed to build his houses; when the Depression of 1893 hit (the stock market crashed when U.S. gold reserves fell), he was left with houses no one would buy. He died a year later and was buried at Congressional Cemetery.

**Herman R. Howenstein**, builder (1877-1955). Howenstein was a major Washington developer. He built many daylighter porch-front rowhouses,

including many on Capitol Hill, beginning in the early 20th century. His rowhouses often have a straight slate mansard roof with a gable dormer. Later, with a partner, he 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. 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 creditors almost \$400,000. He died in 1955 after a long illness.

**Harry A. Kite**, builder (1882-1931). He 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).

**George T. Santmyers**, architect (1889-1960). He studied architec-

ture at the Washington Architecture Club Atelier (1908-1912), worked as a draftsman for Harding & Upman, Washington, DC, and began his own practice in 1914. He designed many apartments and hundreds of rowhouses, including many on Capitol Hill, for Thomas A. Jameson and Harry Kite.

**B. Stanley Simmons**, architect (1872-1931). He came to Washington as a child, and later studied architecture at M. I. T. He was one of the most prolific architects in Washington, and worked with every major developer, including Harry Wardman and Lester Barr. He started designing and building houses in the 1890s, before he moved on to bigger commissions. His rowhouses at 1345-1363 Constitution Avenue, NE, date from his early career. Simmons designed more than 60 apartment buildings between 1890 and 1926, including The Wyoming (1810 Wyoming Avenue, NW, considered by some to be his masterpiece), and the Embassy and the Highview for Howenstein. He also designed the National Metropolitan Bank, 15th and G Streets, NW (1905); the Barr Building at Farragut Square (1929); the Elks Club, 919 H Street, NW (1908, demolished); and the Fairfax Hotel, 21st and Massachusetts Avenue, NW (1921). ✧