



# NEWS

www.chrs.org

September 2015

## The Many Lives of the Supreme Court Site

By Nina Tristani

The history of the site of the Supreme Court, today found opposite the U.S. Capitol between East Capitol, 1st and 2nd Streets, NE and Maryland Avenue, NE, is a fascinating one. It begins with the well-known resident William Tunnicliff announcing (with encouragement and a loan from George Washington) on May 21, 1799 that his large and commodious new house known as the Washington City Hotel, near the Capitol, was ready to receive guests (one of which was President Adams.) Washington City Hotel was located on A Street, east of the southeast corner of 1st and A Streets, northeast. Tunnicliff would not own the hotel very long.

Just five years later, in 1804, Pontius D. Stelle bought the hotel and renamed it Stelle's Hotel. It became a DC landmark and was part of a



LEFT: Row houses referred to as Trumbull's Row (1869). RIGHT: Civil War prison at 1st and A Streets, NE (1860s).

neighborhood of rooming houses catering to the U.S. Congress. Stelle's Hotel hosted events including a party thrown by Thomas Jefferson to celebrate the Louisiana Purchase. The hotel would later be torn down and replaced with a brick building to house a temporary Capitol.

On August 24, 1814, the British burned the U.S. Capitol. This led



PHOTOS COURTESY LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

to a call to move the Capitol from the city or inland but landowners, worried that the value of their property would drop sharply if this happened, chipped in to build a temporary Capitol across the street

*Continued on page 4*

### September Members' Meeting: The Value of Residential Historic Districts

The guest speaker for our September meeting is John Sandor, President of the DC Preservation League. Hear about the value of historic preservation beyond Capitol Hill. His talk will be preceded by a members' meeting at which we vote on proposed bylaw changes and the budget for fiscal year 2015-16.

Meeting will be held Tuesday, September 29; Members' Meeting begins at 6:45 pm, program begins at 7 pm. Northeast Neighborhood Library, 330 7th Street, NE, lower level. All are welcome!

#### Also in this issue

##### ARTICLES

- Proposed CHRS Budget ..... 2
- Lincoln Park Walking Tours ..... 3
- Capitol Hill's Coliseum ..... 4
- Kennedy Bros. Rowhouses ..... 5
- Groff Court Walking Tour ..... 7

##### COLUMNS

- CHRS Supporters ..... 6

##### LOOKING AHEAD

- Overbeck Lecture ..... 6
- Mark Your Calendar ..... 8

# Proposed 2015–2016 CHRS Operating Budget

The CHRS Board of Directors has approved a budget for the upcoming 2015–2016 fiscal year. A summary of the proposed budget is as follows. Members will be asked to vote on the budget at the September

members' meeting. Copies of the complete budget are available upon request. Please contact the CHRS office at caphrs@aol.com or (202) 543-0425. ★

## Proposed 2015-2016 CHRS Operating Budget

October 1 - September 30

	<u>Oct '13 - Sep '14</u>	<u>Oct '14 - Sep '15</u>	<u>Proposed 2015-2016</u>
<b>Income</b>			
40000 · Revenue			
41000 · Operating Revenue			
Total 41100 · Membership	15,795.41	17,959.53	18,500.00
Total 41200 · General Contributions	9,715.58	1,611.00	5,000.00
Total 41300 · House Tour Revenue	70,491.99	68,640.48	86,000.00
Total 41600 · Interest on Checking	153.75	111.93	140.00
Total 41700 · Transfer from Operating Account	0.00	0.00	8,696.00
<b>Total 41000 · Operating Revenue</b>	<b>96,156.73</b>	<b>88,322.94</b>	<b>118,336.00</b>
<b>Total 43000 · Restricted Funds</b>	<b>381.62</b>	<b>1,215.47</b>	<b>5,575.00</b>
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>96,538.35</b>	<b>89,538.41</b>	<b>123,911.00</b>
<b>Expense</b>			
50000 · Expenses			
<b>Total 51000 · Administration</b>	<b>35,985.71</b>	<b>47,460.40</b>	<b>58,161.00</b>
<b>Total 52000 · Outreach</b>	<b>20,787.75</b>	<b>14,539.10</b>	<b>16,900.00</b>
<b>Total 53000 · 2016 House Tour</b>	<b>13,736.90</b>	<b>22,077.04</b>	<b>34,000.00</b>
54000 · Committees			
Total 54110 · Historic Preservation	6,612.83	375.35	1,450.00
Total 54120 · Zoning	0.00	0.00	100.00
Total 54120 · City Planning	0.00	0.00	100.00
Total 54140 · Environment	0.00	0.00	200.00
Total 54150 · Public Safety	0.00	0.00	200.00
Total 54160 · Beyond the Boundaries	0.00	0.00	900.00
Total 54170 · Dick Wolf Lectures	0.00	2,890.30	3,650.00
Total 54210 · Community Development	0.00	0.00	100.00
Total 54220 · Community Relations	348.74	650.94	600.00
Total 54230 · Membership	1,285.76	364.31	1,800.00
54300 · Special Projects			
Total 54310 · 60th Anniversary	0.00	8,817.97	0.00
Total 54320 · Rebranding Campaign	0.00	0.00	3,000.00
<b>Total 54000 · Committees and Special Projects</b>	<b>8,247.33</b>	<b>13,098.87</b>	<b>12,100.00</b>
<b>Total 55000 · Fundraising</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>2,750.00</b>
<b>Total Expense</b>	<b>78,757.69</b>	<b>97,175.41</b>	<b>123,911.00</b>

## Capitol Hill Restoration Society (CHRS)

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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### NEWSLETTER

Justine P. Bello and Kelly Vielmo, Editors  
Jean Kohanek, Layout

### WEBMASTERS

Donna Breslin, Elizabeth Nelson

### OFFICE MANAGER

Carl Spier

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](http://www.CHRS.org)

# Free Walking Tours North and East of Lincoln Park

By Elizabeth Nelson

Many of the rowhouses in the North Lincoln Park neighborhood are over 100 years old and were built by well-known architects and developers. Participants will learn about the architectural styles and building materials of these homes, who built them and when during the two free walking tours CHRS will offer this month.

The first tour will begin in front of Maury Elementary School at 13th Street and Constitution Avenue, NE on Sunday, September 13. This tour will include the 200 and 300 blocks of 14th Street, NE, 200 and 300 blocks of Tennessee Avenue, NE, 1300 blocks of C and D Streets, NE and Constitution Avenue, Corbin Place and Warren Street, NE. Topics of discussion will include: brick coursing, Colonial Revival and Craftsman styles, Charles Gessford's small 1-story houses and architects/builders Harry Kite, Albert E. Landvoight, Albert Beers, Herman R. Howenstein and B. Stanley Simmons.

The second tour will begin in the triangle between the 1400 blocks of North Carolina Avenue and Constitution Avenue, NE on Sunday, September 27 and will focus



Gessford houses on C Street, NE.

on homes within a one or two block radius of that location, including the 200 blocks of 14th Street and 14th Place, NE the 1400 blocks of C Street and Ames Place, NE and the 100 block of 15th Street, NE. Topics of discussion will include: brick coursing, foliate carving, Craftsman-inspired rowhouses, The Nock\* and architects/builders Harry Kite, Albert Beers, Herman R. Howenstein, Kennedy Bros., A.H. Sonneman and Lewis Wentworth Giles.

The walks will begin at 10 am, rain or shine. No reservations are required. Additional information is available on the Calendar page of our website, [www.chrs.org](http://www.chrs.org). ★

\* A 500-acre parcel granted in 1686 to Walter Thompson, parts of which are now considered "Hill East."

## Volunteers Needed for Barracks Row Day

This annual street fair is not to be missed. As always, CHRS will host a booth with activities for children to enjoy while we share our mission with the adults. Society members are invited to help staff the activity, September 26 from 11 am–5 pm on 8th Street, SE between D and I (Eye) streets. This is an important community outreach activity and volunteers are more than welcomed—they are truly needed. Not only will your help be greatly appreciated, it's also a lot of fun. Contact Elizabeth Nelson at [elizabeth\\_knits@yahoo.com](mailto:elizabeth_knits@yahoo.com) or (202) 543-3512.

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# Capitol Hill's Coliseum

By Beth Purcell

**B**etween 1901 and 1905, North Lincoln Park was a destination for outdoor games and races.

On March 4, 1901, President McKinley was inaugurated for the second time. After the festivities and parade were over, the parade grandstands remained. Two entrepreneurs realized that they could use these grandstands to open a profitable recreation center on Capitol Hill. To that end, they leased Square 1056 (14th/15th/A/Ames Place/North Carolina, NE), then vacant. The location was perfect: on Capitol Hill, on the streetcar line next to the streetcar barn. On March 20, 1901, they applied for a building permit to move the grandstands to Square 1056 (pointing out that the structures

had already passed a government safety test). They planned an oblong cycle track 1/6 mile in length, the first in the Washington area. In 1901, bicycle racing was becoming a popular spectator sport with its own organization and racing circuit. Bowl-shaped oval tracks, like the Coliseum, were the perfect venue for bicycle and motorcycle races. The Coliseum had an impressive entrance, a grandstand seating 2,000 people and thousands of electric lights for night-time events. On opening day, spectators watched bicycle and motorcycle races. In 1902, a large crowd gathered to see Albert Champion, a French motorcyclist, set an unofficial one-mile record of 1 minute, 23 seconds. The Coliseum also hosted track meets and many baseball games.

African-Americans held events at the Coliseum. Nearby residents complained of "nuisances" to the Commissioners (who governed DC before home rule). The Commissioners responded that if people objected to these events, they should sue in court.

The Coliseum must have been a financial success because the lessees invested in improvements in 1902 and 1905, adding a dancing platform facing 14th Street. When the Coliseum promoters began operations, they stated that it was "not permanent." Sometime between 1906 and 1907, Kennedy & Davis purchased square 1056 and built 79 rowhouses (see article on next page for more information on Kennedy & Davis). ★

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## Supreme Court, *continued from cover*

from the destroyed building. The temporary Capitol built on the site of the former Stelle's Hotel was used from December 15, 1815 until 1825, during which time James Madison was inaugurated on its steps.

With the start of the Civil War in 1861, the Union re-purchased the building to use as a prison for captured Confederates as well as political prisoners, Union officers convicted of insubordination and local prostitutes. Many people arrested following the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln were held here. They included Dr. Samuel Mudd (who was later pardoned by Andrew Jackson), Mary Surratt (who was later moved to the Washington Arsenal), Louis Weichmann (chief witnesses for the prosecution) and John T. Ford, a good friend of John

Wilkes Booth and owner of Ford's Theater, where Lincoln was shot.

The adjoining row of houses, Duff Green's Row, was also used as part of the prison. Famous inmates of the prison included Rose Greenhow (a Confederate spy), Belle Boyd (a Confederate spy) and Confederate General John Mosby (pardoned by Ulysses Grant.) On November 10, 1865, Henry Wirz, the commander of the Andersonville confederate prisoner of war camp, was hanged at the prison.

After the war, the temporary capitol went into a serious decline. In 1867 the government sold the Old Capitol Prison to George T. Brown, then sergeant-at-arms of the U.S. Senate, who converted the building into three row houses collectively known as "Trumbull's Row."

In the 20th century, the site was used as the headquarters of the National Woman's Party. Finally in 1929, former President William Howard Taft, who was Chief Justice of the Supreme Court from 1921 to 1930, persuaded Congress to authorize a permanent home for the Court. The Supreme Court building that stands today was constructed between 1932 and 1935 and was designed by noted architect Cass Gilbert, who is best known as the architect for the Woolworth Building in New York. ★



# Kennedy Bros. Rowhouses on Capitol Hill

By Beth Purcell

The major Washington construction company, Kennedy Bros. (and its predecessor, Kennedy & Davis) constructed hundreds of rowhouses on Capitol Hill in the early 20th century.

Kennedy & Davis built out all of Square 1056 (14th/15th/A Streets, NE, Constitution/North Carolina Avenues, NE including Ames Place, NE) by way of 79 brick rowhouses between 1907 and 1908. These rowhouses come in three variations: (1) flat front with porch, (2) angled bay with Palladian window transom and (3) angled bay with eyebrow and drop over front door. Entry porches were later added to some angled bay houses. These rowhouses, which offer porch fronts and bay fronts, may represent a transition from Victorian bay fronts to the porch-front houses popular in the 1910s through 1920s.

Kennedy & Davis also built rowhouse flats at 103–123 15th Street, NE in 1903. These are economical buildings for two families with two street-level entrances and simpler ornament than their other rowhouses. The market for these buildings

**Alexander H. Sonneman, architect** (1872–19??). He was born in Montgomery County, Maryland and attended high school in Rockville. He studied architecture with his father (who had taught architecture at the University of Giessen, Germany) and began practicing architecture in 1901. He worked with Kennedy Bros., and also worked extensively for Harry Kite, designing rowhouses and apartment buildings including Kew Gardens, 2700 Q Street, NW. In 1910 he designed two-story Mediterranean Revival rowhouses with front porches and over-hanging red tile roofs for the entire Square 862 (Seventh/Eighth/D/E Streets, NE, including Lexington Place, NE). Sonneman remained active through 1954.

included primarily investors or homeowners who needed a rental unit to help defray housing costs. Over the years, many owners covered one of the entrances to convert them into single-family houses. The house located at 109 15th Street, NE retains its original two entrances.

Edgar S. Kennedy (1862–1953) arrived in Washington in 1884. After working for builder Isaac N. Davis, Kennedy and his brother, William, founded Kennedy Brothers in 1909. He built thousands of rowhouses, including in Mount Pleasant and North Lincoln Park, and 118 houses on E Street, NE (1914). The rowhouses at 308–314 E Street, NE (1890) and

the 79 rowhouses in Square 1056 (1907–1908) represent his early career. His best-known project may be the Kennedy-Warren, the renowned Art Deco apartment building at 3131–3133 Connecticut Avenue, NW (1930). Like many other developers, he went bankrupt in the 1930s. He is buried at Elmwood Cemetery. ★



PHOTOS COURTESY BETH PURCELL

LEFT: 115–117 15th Street, NE. Rowhouse flats with outlines of original second entrances on the far left and far right. RIGHT: 1425–1427 Constitution Avenue, NE. Note the angled bay with eyebrow and drop over front door on house at left and porch front on house at right.

# Overbeck Lectures Move to Hill Center September 21 with a Look at Duke Ellington's Washington

By John Franzen

Washington proudly hails Duke Ellington as a native son, but what was it about this city and its U Street neighborhood in the early twentieth century that produced and inspired the world's greatest jazz composer?

On Monday, September 21, at 7:30 pm, the Overbeck History Project kicks off its new lecture season in a new venue – Hill Center's Lincoln room – with an exploration of Duke Ellington's Washington. John Edward Hasse, curator of American music at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History, will present an illustrated tour of the saloons, soda fountains and other performance venues where the young Duke Ellington's ears were tuned to a new kind of music.

Widely regarded as the nation's leading Ellington authority, Hasse is the award-winning author of *Beyond Category: The Life and Genius of Duke Ellington* and editor of the illustrated history *Jazz: The First Century*. He led the Smithsonian's acquisition

of the 200,000-page Duke Ellington archive, including virtually all of the composer's unpublished music, along with countless other papers, recordings and artifacts from the early days of jazz.

This lecture will be the first event for the Overbeck series at Hill Center after thirteen years at the Naval Lodge a few blocks west along Pennsylvania Avenue. The new relationship will streamline reservations and other event logistics and also provide lecture-goers easier access from the Eastern Market Metro station.

The Overbeck History Lectures are an initiative of the Capitol Hill Community Foundation. Admission is free but a reservation is required due to limited seating. Please visit [www.HillCenterDC.org](http://www.HillCenterDC.org) or call (202) 549-4172.

Copies of Hasse's *Beyond Category* will be available for sale and signing at the end of the event. ★

## September Preservation Café: Brick Rowhouses—To Paint or Not to Paint?

Painted brick rowhouses are ubiquitous throughout Capitol Hill and the District at large. But this aesthetic decision may have ramifications for the integrity of your historic home. Architectural conservator Justine Posluszny Bello will discuss the advantages and disadvantages of painting exterior brickwork at our next Preservation Café, Wednesday, September 16, 2015. This will include a discussion of the aesthetics and historical precedent of painting brick as well as the technical issues associated with this trend.

Bring your questions! The presentation will begin at 7 pm at the Kaiser Permanente building at 700 2nd Street, NE. Enter on the street level and turn immediately to your left after you pass through the front doors.

## Thank You, CHRS Supporters

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

### NEW MEMBERS

Alan & Kate Apton  
Gary Robinson II

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# Groff Court Walking Tour

On June 20, 2015, Greg Holeyman and Beth Purcell led a walking tour of the Groff Court alley dwellings. Attendees learned much about the history of the original builder, the buildings themselves and their residents. Diller B. Groff (1841–1910) built nine alley dwellings in 1890 as low-cost rental properties. In 1900 and 1910, people living in Groff Court were typical alley residents: African-American renters working in unskilled occupations. Most of them were originally from Maryland though some from Virginia or the District. Men worked as laborers or wagon-drivers; one was a butcher. Many women worked as cooks or servants or as laundresses at home. By modern standards, conditions were crowded: median occupancy was five residents per house, with a high of ten and a low of one.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup> 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, drunkenness and disease. Groff Court appeared to have been relatively quiet compared to other Capitol Hill alleys, with only a few anecdotes suggesting



PHOTO COURTESY BETH PURCELL

1990s alley dwellings in Groff Court.

problems: In 1904 and 1958, women fought in the alley. In 1922, a resident at 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.<sup>3</sup> In the 1970s, people began to buy the houses to live in. Fred Mashack described how he and his partners bought lots in Groff Court at auction and then built new alley dwellings in the 1990s. Five of Groff's alley dwellings remain. ★

For additional reading see:

James Borchert, *Alley Life in Washington: Family, Community, Religion, and Folklife in the City, 1850-1970* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1982.)

HPRB, "DC Historic Alley Buildings Survey," [www.planning.dc.gov](http://www.planning.dc.gov) > HPRB > DC History.

1 Census 1900 (ED 115), Census 1910 (ED 171).

2 Monday Evening Club, *Directory of alleys, Washington, D.C.* (1912).

3 "Words, Blows, and Knife Thrust," *Washington Evening Star*, 12 Jul. 1904, 9. "Wrong Address Upon Warrant Frees Suspect," *Washington Evening Star*, 12 Aug. 1922, 24. "Woman Indicted in Ear-Biting," *Washington Evening Star*, 7 Aug. 1958, 4. "Guard Charged With Killing Boy," *Washington Evening Star*, 12 Dec. 1973, 334.





CHRS CELEBRATING 60 YEARS OF PRESERVATION

## Capitol Hill Restoration Society

420 Tenth Street, SE  
Washington, DC 20003

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## Mark Your Calendar!

### SEPTEMBER

**8** Tuesday, 6:30 pm

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

**10** Thursday, 7:30 pm

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

**13** Sunday, 10 am

Historic Walking Tour, North Lincoln Park: Tennessee to Constitution. Meet at Maury School. Rain or shine. Free and open to the public, no reservations needed. Details: CAPHRS@aol.com or (202) 543-0425.

**15** Tuesday, 6:30 pm

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

**16** Wednesday, 7 pm

CHRS Preservation Café: "Brick Rowhouses—To Paint or Not to Paint?" Kaiser Permanente Building, 700 2nd Street, NE. Details: Elizabeth Nelson, (202) 543-3512.

**21** Monday, 7:30 pm

Overbeck Lecture by John Edward Hasse on Duke Ellington's Washington. The Hill Center at the Old Naval Hospital, 921 Pennsylvania Avenue, SE. Details: The Hill Center, (202) 549-4172.

**26** Saturday, 11 am–5 pm

Barracks Row Day, 8th Street, SE between D and I Streets. Volunteer at the CHRS booth or just come join the fun. Details: Elizabeth Nelson, (202) 543-3512.

**27** Sunday, 10 am

Historic Walking Tour, North Lincoln Park: 14th/15th to Constitution Avenue, NE. Meet at the triangle park at 14th Street and Constitution Avenue, NE. Rain or shine. Free and open to the public, no reservations needed. Details: CAPHRS@aol.com or (202) 543-0425.

**29** Tuesday, 6:45 pm

Members' Meeting; program at 7pm. Speaker: John Sandor, DC Preservation League President, on the value of historic preservation. Northeast Library, 330 7th Street, NE. Details: CHRS, (202) 543-0425.

### OCTOBER

**5** Monday, 6:30 pm

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

**8** Thursday, 7:30 pm

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

**20** Tuesday, 6:30 pm

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

**21** Wednesday, 7 pm

Preservation Café: "Energy Code Fundamentals for Residential Construction." Kaiser Permanente Building, 700 2nd Street, NE. Details: Elizabeth Nelson, (202) 543-3512.