



# NEWS

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June 2011

## Vegetable Gardening in Pots and Beds— Tips From May’s Preservation Cafe

By Nancy Metzger

With all of the Hill’s community garden plots assigned and lengthy waiting lists at most, the rest of Capitol Hill’s gardeners are turning to container and backyard gardens to satisfy their urge to grow herbs and vegetables. At the May 18 Preservation Café, Pat Taylor, urban gardener extraordinaire for some 30 years and coordinator of the King’s Court Community Garden, provided pointers for residents who want to

start growing vegetables and some tips for those already dealing with a gardener’s woes and joys.

Starting off the information-packed session at Ebenezer’s Coffee House, 2nd and F Streets, NE, Pat first warned the 25 attendees, “Don’t start vegetable gardening as a way to save money.” In the first years particularly, she noted, there is likely to be a net out-flow of cash for equipment, supplies, soil amendments, etc., but for many the reward is in the process, not to mention the taste of one’s own vegetables. The second warning was that the gardener will be embarking on an unending battle with a host of enemies intent on savoring that same good-tasting produce—squirrels, birds, insects, bacteria and viruses—but it is a battle that can be won.

### Resources

One book that Pat highly recommended for those contemplating gardening in raised beds was *All New Square-Foot Gardening* (2005) by Mel Bartholomew that focuses on raised bed gardens and is a great how-to introduction for beginners. It contains a wealth of advice on best practices, etc. For on-line help she recommended joining a DC Urban Gardeners group for answers to just about any gardening question: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/DCUrbanGardeners/join>.

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Example of a raised bed garden.

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PHOTO: PATTAYLOR

# President's Column: Give Bees a Chance

By Beth Purcell

On May 20, the U.S. Botanical Garden held a meeting on protecting endangered species. The focus was on practical steps to help. Everyone on Capitol Hill can help our pollinators—hummingbirds, butterflies, moths, and bees—to thrive.

Capitol Hill has honeybees and also bumblebees. Bumblebees are very effective pollinators. Helping them to thrive is a goal for us as global citizens, but also a practical goal for Capitol Hill residents. Many of us grow vegetables in community gardens or backyards, and vegetables must be pollinated. If you grow tomatoes, read on.

Bumblebees are “generalists” and pollinate a wide variety of flowering plants. For this reason, they need a succession of flowers to sustain them through the season. In early spring they rely on maples and willows. Capitol Hill has many maples, so our bees get off to a good start. Bumblebees are the rock stars of tomato pollinators. Tomato flowers produce a lot of pollen but it’s hard to access. To release the pollen, the bees use “buzz pollination”—they rapidly move their flight muscles to vibrate the pollen out of the openings in the tomato flower anthers. Eggplants also need the same “treatment.”

Bumblebees are native bees. They nest in the ground, sometimes using cavities created by small animals. The queens emerge in early spring and the colony’s life begins. At the end of the summer all the bees die, except for the new queens, who hibernate in the ground through the winter. Some species of bumblebees are in decline in the eastern U.S.

How we can help:

- Provide food and habitat: maples, dogwood, blueberry, cherry,

plums. Go to [www.pollinator.org](http://www.pollinator.org), click on planting guides, and enter your zip code to download a free planting guide.

- Plant native plants.
- Provide clean water in a shallow dish, bowl or birdbath, with half-submerged stones for perches.
- Avoid using pesticides and herbicides.

Additional online resources:

- [www.fs.fed.us/wildflowers/pollinators](http://www.fs.fed.us/wildflowers/pollinators) (an informative source on pollinators)
- [www.xerces.org](http://www.xerces.org), click on pollinator resource center
- [www.nrcs.usda.gov/pollinators](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/pollinators) ★



PHOTO: ELIZABETH NELSON

## July 4th Parade

**Calling all marchers!** CHRS has registered to take part in the Capitol Hill 4th of July parade again this year. Marchers will meet at the intersection of 8th and I Streets, SE at 9:30 am on Monday, July 4th. The parade will begin at 10 am and last for about an hour, ending at the Eastern Market Metro Plaza. We’ll be carrying our banner, tossing Mardi Gras beads, and hope to have two classic cars in our lineup.

If you would like to join the fun, e-mail Elizabeth Nelson at: [elizabeth\\_knits@yahoo.com](mailto:elizabeth_knits@yahoo.com) with “4th of July” as the subject line. The more the merrier!

# Capitol Hill Restoration Society (CHRS)

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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.

www.CHRS.org

Celebrating more than 50 years helping to preserve and protect Capitol Hill's residential character, the Society is the largest civic association on Capitol Hill, and one of the largest in the District of Columbia. From the beginning, the Society has played a key role in maintaining the diverse, residential character of our neighborhood. With your participation, we will continue to do so for many years to come.

To start or renew a CHRS membership:

- ★ On the web at [www.CHRS.org](http://www.CHRS.org)
- ★ Call (202) 543-0425; choose option 2
- ★ Pick up a form at one of our meetings

Starting at just \$25 per year for a single membership, it's a great deal.

# Zoning Briefs

By Gary Peterson

The CHRS Zoning Committee met on May 12 and considered the following cases:

**18208.** Capitol Hill Day School seeks relief from the Zoning Regulations for temporary placement of modular classrooms on a vacant lot located at 1000 5th Street, SE, between K and L Streets. The temporary time period is from May 2011 to March 2012. The temporary space is needed while the Day School can rehabilitate the Dent School. The Committee voted unanimously to support the application.

**18213.** 1317 East Capitol Street, SE. The applicant proposes to extend the existing deck and increase the lot occupancy from 60% to 70%. The applicant brought letters of support from the neighbors. The committee voted unanimously to support the application.

**18218.** 1426 K Street, SE. The applicant wants to build a garage and increase his lot occupancy to 74%. The property once had a very small garage that was demolished long ago. The applicant also needs a variance to put his garage on the rear property line, seven feet closer to the centerline of the alley than permitted. The committee voted to oppose the

application because the property did not meet the test for a variance.

**18221.** 123 10th Street, SE.

This is the case of a simple special exception application becoming a very complicated variance case. The applicant wants to fill in a small portion of an open court (dogleg) to enlarge the dining room. The lot is substandard and has a 66% lot occupancy. The addition changes none of this because the open court is already counted against the lot occupancy. As part of the application the owners obtained an official surveyor's plat and based all calculations on the measurements on the plat. The day of the committee meeting the owners were called by DC's Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs (DCRA) to say there was a 10-foot error in the measurement of the house and they now needed variances. The committee voted to support the existing application and to defer action on any amendments until the owner consults further with DCRA. We advised them that we probably would not support an application for the 72% lot occupancy.

The next Zoning Committee will be held on June 9 at 7:30 pm. ★

## Upcoming Preservation Cafes

The May Preservation Café concludes the 2011 spring season, and Preservation Cafés are not scheduled for June, July, and August. CHRS greatly appreciates the hospitality of Ebenezer's Coffee House at 2nd and F Streets, NE, and the use of the community room. The Preservation Café series will begin again on September 21 with a topic to be announced. If you have an idea for a topic you'd like to know more about, please contact the Historic Preservation Committee through the CHRS Office at CapHRS@aol.com or 543-0425.

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# Hine Development Review at the HPRB: Part I

By Nancy Metzger

Since February, the development team of Stanton Eastbanc has participated in a series of community meetings seeking to answer questions and hear comments from individuals and groups. CHRS sponsored one of these meetings on April 5, and members were encouraged to send their comments to CHRS for consideration as the CHRS position regarding the Historic Preservation issues of this site was developed by the Historic Preservation Committee and the CHRS Board.

On April 28, the Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB) took its first look at the proposal that encompasses “over 3 acres, 7 buildings and 17 different facades,” as pointed out by Ken Golding of the Stanton Eastbanc team. After architect Amy Weinstein made her presentation, about 20 people spoke to the HPRB about various points of concern or support. HPRB also received many letters from community members and groups. As reported in the May *CHRS News*, CHRS sent a letter to the HPRB and Shauna Holmes, representing CHRS, also testified at the hearing.

In addition to hearing from the community, HPRB members also had the benefit of an 8-page staff report that outlined the historic preservation issues and made some recommendations regarding the site plan, architectural direction, and height and massing. The staff recommendations included:

*Site Plan:* “Approve the general site plan in concept as compatible with the character of the Capitol Hill Historic District, with further study and development of the sidewalks and plaza adjacent to the North Residential Building and the overall treatment of public space.”

*Architectural Direction:* “Approve the general architectural direction in concept as compatible with the character of the Capitol Hill Historic District, with further study being given to the North Residential Building and the Pennsylvania Avenue Office Building as discussed [in the staff report]. The 7th Street and plaza buildings should be further developed prior to the next review.”

*Height and Massing:* “Approve the height and massing as proposed in concept for the North Residential Building, the 8th Street residential building, the Plaza building and the 8th and D corner building as compatible with the character of the Capitol Hill Historic District, and direct the applicants to continue studying the height and massing of the Pennsylvania Avenue office building in conjunction with its design as noted above. Conceptual approval of the height and massing is not recommended to include the penthouses, which warrant further study.”

The issues specifically before the HPRB at its April meeting were the site plan, general architectural direction, and height and massing. Because the consideration of the Hine case was delayed due to a morning case, the HPRB ran short of time needed to adopt a position on all three issues but did approve the proposed site plan and overall architectural direction in concept, with continued study of the issues outlined in the staff report. No position was taken on proposed height and massing. HPRB members did, however, make comments about aspects of the plan, ranging from concern about general size and shape of the new plaza to a discussion about the size of the courtyard

and its role within the site. Several HPRB members called for a restudy of the height of buildings fronting Pennsylvania Avenue while another felt the site plan and architectural directions were “brilliant.” In the end, there were enough comments for the architect and staff to have a sense of the HPRB’s concerns when working further on the designs for the 8th Street Residential Building and the office building at the corner of 7th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue that will be considered at the June 30 meeting. The North Residential Building, Plaza, and 7th and C residential building will be the focus of the July 28 HPRB meeting.

## Next Steps

June 6—CHRS’s Historic Preservation monthly meeting. May have some sense of the changes contemplated by Stanton Eastbanc, even if plans and drawings are incomplete.

June 13—Likely date of submission of plans by Stanton Eastbanc to Historic Preservation Office for staff discussion. Check Stanton Eastbanc website or CHRS web site for link to plans.

June 22—Deadline for submission of letters to HPRB about 8th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue buildings (see CHRS website for Tips on submitting letters and testimony as well as relevant addresses.)

June 30—HPRB meeting at 441 Fourth Street, NW, (#1 Judiciary Square), Suite 200 South. Time to be announced on Friday, June 24, when the timed agenda is posted on Historic Preservation Office website.

July 28—HPRB meeting at 441 Fourth Street, NW, (#1 Judiciary Square), Suite 200 South, focusing on

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*Continued on page 8*

# Gas Repairs at Eastern Market

By Monte Edwards

**W**e have seen the recent digging and disruption of the differentiated street paving in front of the Market. It was about three years ago that our redesigned streetscape was installed with its unique customized paving that indicates that the street is a closed festival space on Saturdays and Sundays.

But in the past several months Washington Gas has dug up various portions of the street to repair gas leaks and made temporary repairs by filling the holes they created with asphalt. Permanent repairs have been made with the wrong pattern and color of pavers, resulting in further scarring of the streetscape and threatening to destroy an investment made by the City and a space that is admired and loved by the community.

EMCAC, Councilmember Wells' office, and ANC 6B contacted Washington Gas, the Public Service Commission, and DDOT about the problem. Washington Gas has responded responsibly and thoughtfully in deciding that to minimize the occurrence of future gas leaks, the existing businesses in the 200 block of 7th Street will be converted from the existing, old, low pressure gas main to a newer, high pressure main that is already in the street. The excavations in the middle of 7th Street are to accomplish the conversion and, they hope, the new gas lines to serve the 7th Street businesses can be inserted in the old, larger services, obviating the need to excavate all the way from the gas main to each customer's wall. Washington Gas estimates that all of the service changeovers will be completed by June 3.

Washington Gas and DDOT are also aware that the situation requires



PHOTO: KENNETH GOLDING

Gas line repairs at Eastern Market.

more than the technical solution described above. Recognizing that the businesses were subjected to the extensive street work just three years ago, the Washington Gas will minimize service disruptions by providing a form of "bottled" gas (compressed natural gas) during the time (perhaps hours) that it will take for each service conversion. Each evening, traffic flow and on-street parking will be restored, and each Friday there will be a special inspection to ensure that the street is ready for weekend vending.

The last area requiring special attention is the permanent restoration of the paving.

Although the exact same pavers that are now installed have been ordered, they will be discernibly different because the color and texture of the existing pavers have changed due to use and weathering. If the new excavations were repaved

with straight-across patches it would impose a mismatched patchwork on the existing diagonal pattern of the paving. To avoid this, the repaving will be in diagonal sections, to match the existing herringbone pattern, and thereby reinforce the original idea of diagonal paving instead of conflicting with it and calling attention to the patches. ★

## Containers

If you think that, for your space, containers are a better option than a raised bed, then Pat recommends big containers over small ones and plastic over terra cotta (big plastic-based containers will hold moisture better). A web page with good guidelines for container gardening is [www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/hil-8105.html](http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/hil-8105.html). And for some low-cost container alternatives, visit: [www.technologyforthepeople.com/UrbanAgriculture/garden.htm](http://www.technologyforthepeople.com/UrbanAgriculture/garden.htm). Gingko Gardens (911 Eleventh Street, SE) ordered sturdy 7-gallon black plastic nursery pots that Pat thought were very good choices for vegetables. Some of those might still be left. Tomatoes and eggplants, for instance, definitely need big pots.

## Fill for Containers

Use only soilless mixes, often called “potting mix,” as topsoil is too heavy and stays wet. Although there are a number of varieties of these soilless potting mixes in plastic bags (choose ones formulated for vegetables), Pat pointed out that you’re also paying for the moisture in the bag. If you can find it, the most cost-efficient product is dry, baled, soilless mix, such as Pro-Mix compressed bales. You break it apart and add the moisture yourself. Gingko Gardens put in a special order for Preservation Café attendees who wanted some, so there may be some still left.

## Backyard and Raised Beds

If you want to garden using your backyard soil, before planting have your soil tested for nutrient balance and acidity but especially for lead and other heavy metals before planting. Many DC soils have been contaminated from years of leaded gas fumes falling to the ground. Pat recommends the University

of Massachusetts soil testing lab, which has a winning combination of good instruction on their web site for taking soil samples, a good reputation for lab work, a useful explanation of results, and the right price—under \$20. ([www.umass.edu/soiltest](http://www.umass.edu/soiltest); order the “Standard Soil Test.”)

## Bulk Fill for Raised Beds

Pat had specific recommendations for both sources of the frames and for the bulk fill. These will be on the information sheets she posted on the CHRS web site ([www.chrs.org](http://www.chrs.org)). She cautioned that you should buy only from a source that has its fill tested at a lab and can show you the lab results. Be sure it has a low level of lead and that it does not contain sewage sludge.

Although it is a little late in the spring season to plant lettuce (which prefers cool weather), Pat notes that she grows some lettuces and other salad greens in window boxes that sit on her patio. Leaf lettuces require

just a few inches of soil and can be cut when they are about 4 inches long. If about ½” of leaf is left above the soil level, the lettuces will regrow and multiple crops can be harvested. Seeds can be planted early spring and late summer (late August) for two growing seasons during the year. (Both Fragers and Gingko Gardens carry seed packets.)

A copy of the handout Pat developed for the meeting is posted on the CHRS website. It has local sources for a number of needed supplies as well as information on Capitol Hill’s community gardens and about an interesting project to identify “orphaned” lots that could potentially be used for new community gardens. ★

## George Washington’s Garden Reopens at Mount Vernon

If you’d rather look at a garden than dig in the dirt, George Washington’s Upper Garden at Mount Vernon has been restored and is now open to visitors. As reported in *The National Gardener*, a publication of the National Gardening Association, the Upper Garden received one of the most extensive and intensive studies of an 18th century garden that has been conducted to date in this country. “...The picture that emerges suggests that George Washington’s 1799 garden incorporated large beds, bordered by wide straight paths that moved the visitor through the garden in a predetermined way.” It is thought that the geometric layout was probably designed to show off the greenhouse and large beds integrated with flowers, trees and vegetables. For more information on visiting Mount Vernon, check [www.mountvernon.org](http://www.mountvernon.org).

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# CHRS Provided Comments on South Capitol Street Project's FEIS and MOA

By Shauna Holmes

**W**ith federal environmental and preservation review nearing completion for the South Capitol Street Project, CHRS provided comments last month to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the DC Department of Transportation (DDOT) on the project's Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and a Section 106 draft Memorandum of Agreement (MOA). The environmental impact review and analysis are required under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and the federal historic preservation review process is required under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA).

Goals of the proposed project are to improve safety, mobility, and accessibility and support economic development throughout the project area. Major project efforts include:

- Streetscape improvements on South Capitol Street that will rebuild the street as a 6-lane grand urban boulevard with a landscaped median, at-grade intersections, and a new traffic oval at South Capitol Street, Potomac Avenue, and Q Street (behind Nationals Stadium);
- Streetscape improvements on New Jersey Avenue that include new sidewalks and wheelchair ramps between E Street SE and the SE/SW Freeway, as well as widening the avenue between the freeway and M Street SE to 40 feet (closer to its intended width in the L'Enfant Plan) with two travel lanes, two parking lanes, and loading and planting zones;
- Replacement of the existing Frederick Douglass Memorial

Bridge with a new arched bascule bridge just south of the existing bridge that will include pedestrian and bicycle access and unifying landscape features to visually anchor the two ends; and

- Numerous new features, including ramps, interchanges, signed bicycle routes, overpasses, and a traffic circle at South Capitol Street, Suitland Parkway, and Howard Road.

Along with other persons, organizations, and members of the public, CHRS took advantage of the opportunity to provide DDOT and FHWA with its comments on the project's FEIS. A chief theme of CHRS' comments was to support and underscore the importance of the Environmental Commitments made by the two agencies in the FEIS, including the expectation that all of those commitments and mitigation measures be carried forward into the Record of Decision (ROD) that is expected to be issued in the coming months. This is particularly important to CHRS because a number of Environmental Commitments in the 11th Street Bridges Project FEIS, including some that pertained to historic resources, were omitted from that project's ROD, and CHRS does not want that to happen again with the South Capitol Street Project. CHRS said, "We are relying heavily on good-faith implementation of the Environmental Commitments for all categories shown in Table 4-56 under both 'General Mitigation Measures' and 'Construction Mitigation Measures'... We are taking the representations made by DDOT and FHWA in these commitments very seriously."

CHRS comments also:

- Emphasized the importance of the agencies' intent to develop and implement "Maintenance of Traffic Plans" during construction and recommended the frequent traffic advisories from DDOT regarding traffic impacts of the 11th Street Bridges construction as a good notification model;
- Strongly urged thorough and thoughtful additional analysis of long-term traffic operations during final design and following construction, development of mitigations measures as necessary, and ongoing communication of the analysis findings and recommendations to the affected communities and neighborhoods;
- Emphasized completion of additional analysis of temporary and long-term noise and potential abatement measures and requested implementation of noise abatement measures for the school at 10 Eye Street, SW where interior noise levels are expected to exceed the impact threshold;
- Recommended drought-resistant tree species for certain areas and ways to improve health of street trees;
- Expressed concern that air quality impacts on neighborhoods in the immediate project area were not sufficiently assessed and analyzed; and
- Recommended that DDOT form a committee similar to its 11th Street Bridges Project's

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*Continued on page 8*

## Welcome CHRS Supporters

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

### NEW MEMBERS

Victoria Cardone & Martin Reiser  
Cindy Cota & Ed Hertwig  
Beth Houser  
Phillip & Jane Ross

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Robert Mackey & Melissa Merz  
(new members)  
Charles & Susan Parsons  
(new members)

### Hine Development, *continued from page 4*

the North Residential Building, Plaza and 7th and C Building.

For more information, contact the CHRS office at [CapHRS@aol.com](mailto:CapHRS@aol.com) or 543-0425. CHRS encourages its members to e-mail comments to the Historic Preservation Review Board and to the CHRS Historic Preservation Committee. ★

### South Capitol Street, *continued from page 7*

Community Communications Committee (11-CCC) to provide a good vehicle for keeping affected communities informed about the project as design and construction move forward.

This spring, DDOT and FHWA also solicited comments from Consulting Parties on their March 23, 2011, draft Memorandum of Agreement, which concludes the federal historic preservation review process under Section 106 of NHPA and stipulates measures the agencies will take to avoid, minimize, or mitigate adverse effects to historic properties and districts. Two years ago FHWA invited CHRS to participate in the review process as a Consulting Party, and CHRS has previously offered comments several times on earlier MOA drafts. We have been very pleased that a number of measures previously requested by CHRS are now included in the MOA, along with other measures that CHRS endorsed earlier.

Our MOA comments commended provisions that ensure that CHRS and other Consulting Parties will be included in continued consultation at key project milestones and other stipulated circumstances, and will have further opportunities to receive notifications and provide comments as the project progresses. We also noted that a number of the FEIS' Environmental Commitments that pertain to historic resources were not reflected in the MOA and requested that they be included. Such commitments included:

- Mitigation measures to avoid or minimize adverse effects on Garfield and Anacostia Parks;
- Retaining the linear integrity and character of "other roads" included in the Plan of the City of Washington;

- Context-sensitive design for the new bridge that will carry Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue over Suitland Parkway which is compatible with the architectural characteristics and visual appearance of the original, historic bridge that will be demolished;
- Historic recordation of areas northwest of the Anacostia River that will be dramatically changed by the project; and
- Streetscape enhancements to improve the surrounding neighborhood's historic residential character.

The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP), the federal agency that oversees the Section 106 preservation review process, also submitted comments on the MOA and asked FHWA to incorporate revisions the ACHP requested. In concluding its comment letter, the ACHP also went on to say that if other Consulting Parties submitted "substantive comments" on the March 23, 2011, draft, FHWA should "share these comments with all consulting parties and propose means of resolving concerns and finalizing the MOA." ★



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# The 54th Annual House and Garden Tour

By Paul Cromwell

**T**hank you! Thank you! Thank you to those who participated in the 2011 Tour: those who purchased tickets, served as docents and house captains, sold tickets, advertised, donated and worked before and during the Tour. And the folks who provided their homes and businesses, without which there would be no Tour. While final numbers are not yet available, we believe that we reached our projected goal of \$50,000.

Those businesses who sponsored homes were Megan Shapiro & George Olson (“Your Neighborhood Realtors”); Coldwell Banker real estate (Don Denton); Fragers Hardware (Ed & John); and Tech Painting (“Preserving the rich history of Capitol Hill since 1987”). Those businesses providing full page ads were The National Capitol Bank (“Washington’s Oldest Bank”); Riverby Books (Steve Cymrot); The Smith Team (Prudential Carruthers Realtors); and Splash Carwash (Tim Temple). Thanks to all of our advertisers, including Schneider’s of Capitol Hill and Hello Cupcake Barracks Row (have you taken your Tour brochure there for a free cupcake?).

Donations were received from 18 sources, mostly private individuals. We particularly note the donations from Dick & Mimi Wolf, Gary & Trudy Peterson, and Beth Purcell. The brochure contains a complete list of donors, save one: sponsors Peter & Sandy Clark were not included due to a mail snafu.

Tour staff, who put in many hours of hard work over the past six months, also are listed in the brochure, but we call attention to an error: photos were by Rosina Memolo of Rosina Photography (not “Rosa Memolo”).



The entrance to 228 9th Street, SE on tour weekend.

Each year we work to provide a quality Tour, but one that is a little bit different from the last few. There usually is a mix of homes that have been restored and those that have become completely modernized (inside!). We also try to provide some variation in terms of unique homes that are in the process of upgrading, commercial sites, and—with the assistance of the Capitol Hill Garden Club—gardens. Of note were six Barracks Row businesses that provided a free drink or discount with the Tour ticket on Tour weekend.

If you have impressions that you would like to share—particularly about future tours—please contact a CHRS Board member or e-mail CHRS at [CapHRS@aol.com](mailto:CapHRS@aol.com). For those of you who missed the Tour and would like to have a brochure, please e-mail a request to CHRS with your name and address. ★

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# Looking Back on Capitol Hill

By Nancy Metzger

Visiting Eastern Market in the summer can provide a sensory overload—sights, sounds, and aromas are at their highest. The aromas provide the first clues about what is at the peak. In April, lilacs herald the start of the growing season; local strawberries perfume the air in May, followed in turn by tomatoes and peaches during the hottest months. The Fowler family, farmers from nearby Maryland, has been a part of the Eastern Market farmers' line for at least five generations. The family still has the permit issued in 1913 to George Alfred Fowler of Bennings, Maryland (the location of the original family farm, about two miles over the District line on Route 4 or Marlboro Pike). The permit for space #27, about where the present Fowler stall is, grants him the right to sell "produce of his own raising on Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday of each week."

In an interview in 2009 with Sharon House, David Fowler talked about his family, which has been coming to the Market for nearly 150 years, by wagon and truck, bringing vegetables and other products to sell. His mother Martha and wife Valarie join him at the Sunnyside Farm stand on Seventh Street, north of the main entrance door.

HOUSE: Do you know what they grew in those days? [talking about great-grandparents George and Rosetta Fowler, on the farmers' line in the early 1900s]

FOWLER: Well, in those days, market hunting was allowed. So, they sold... you were allowed to go out and kill wild game and bring it in and sell it... Such as rabbits, ducks, birds... Deer, if you could find it. There wasn't too many of them around here at that

time, contrary to what it is now. And wild geese and things like that. You could also sell meat, pork, and any other farm products that you had. He probably had, sold more of a variety of things than what we sell right now in the line of vegetables and farm products. Because there was milk, there was butter, there was eggs, there was cheese. They used to make cottage cheese. It was quite a variety of things...

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**"Now, when they used to come up to the Market, there used to be a line of people waiting for them to arrive all the way down to Pennsylvania Avenue. We used to have a policeman there to keep the people in line...."**

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HOUSE: And do you have any stories that were handed down from your grandparents? Or maybe you knew them.

FOWLER: Oh, I knew my grandparents. Yes. Now, there's a lot of stories that was handed down by them... We used to dress and sell a lot of chickens and turkeys during both World Wars. Now, when meat was rationed and people had to have ration cards to get their meat and their sugar and their flour and other things... If I remember correctly

[poultry] was one of the only things that wasn't rationed. However, the government got the first choice of the poultry and what was left was able to be sold. Now, when they used to come up to the Market, there used to be a line of people waiting for them to arrive all the way down to Pennsylvania Avenue. We used to have a policeman there to keep the people in line....

HOUSE: Do you have a working farm now?

FOWLER: Yes, we do. ... Mechanicsville, Maryland, which is in St. Mary's County. We have just about 200 acres there.

HOUSE: You must sell at places other than the Market....

FOWLER: Well, we do wholesale—we send cattle to market and things like that. But... we're pretty much tied up so that we can't run all over the place selling; it's down to either you got to do one or the other. You got to either raise it or you got to sell it. And you can't do both efficiently if you're running from farm to market because it's—to come to market is an all-day thing.

HOUSE: What time does your day start on Saturday when you come to market?

FOWLER: Four o'clock. Sometimes earlier.

HOUSE: And what time do you get home at night?

FOWLER: Oh, when I get home, my day's not ended. We get home about seven thirty, eight o'clock.

HOUSE: ...If you have animals, you have farm chores every day, probably.

FOWLER: Every day. The cattle's got to be fed and watered. The truck's got to be cleaned out. Stuff that needs to be kept cool has to be put in a cold box. And it's just on and on and on. ... At one time [until about 1963], we raised all the corn, we ground it, made feed out of it. We got five hundred baby chicks every three weeks. We had five chicken houses, six chicken houses full of chickens. We had our own feed mill. After we finished at Eastern Market, that was only half a day. Because when Eastern Market closed at six o'clock, we would pack up everything and go to Florida Avenue Market and stay over there 'til one or two o'clock in the—Sunday morning."

The complete interview with David Fowler can be read at [www.capitolhillhistory.org](http://www.capitolhillhistory.org). As part of the documentation following the fire in April 2007 at Eastern Market, the Ruth Ann Overbeck Oral History Project launched a special effort to record the stories and observations of many of the vendors, administrators, community members who could help provide a view of the Market during years before the fire and the reconstruction. Many of these interviews have been transcribed and are now on the web site. ★



PHOTO: SHORPY.COM

1939: Streetcars at the corner of 14th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, NW.

## Historic Streetcars Film

June 7 at 6:45 pm • Maury Elementary School

The CHRS June 7 membership forum, moderated by Monte Edwards, will feature Washington's historic streetcars. Laura Trieschmann, from EHT Traceries, will talk about the history of Washington's streetcars, including its car barns. We will see a film showing Washington's streetcars in operation during the 1950s, and Monte Edwards and Meg Maguire will answer questions about historic streetcars. Please come and enjoy the evening, and, if you rode the old streetcars, share your experiences with the gathering.

Maury Elementary School on the corner of Constitution Avenue and 13th Street, NE, has offered its multi-purpose room for the occasion. Please enter on 13th Street. The doors will open promptly at 6:45 pm with the presentation to begin after light refreshments and a very short business meeting.

This event is free and the public is encouraged to attend; no reservations are necessary.

For more information, e-mail [CapHRS@aol.com](mailto:CapHRS@aol.com) or call 543-0425.



**Capitol Hill Restoration Society**  
420 Tenth Street, SE  
Washington, DC 20003

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## Mark Your Calendar!

### JUNE

**6** Monday, 6:30 pm  
CHRS Historic Preservation Committee, Kirby House, 420 10th Street, SE, first floor. Details: Nancy Metzger, nancymetzger@verizon.net, 546-1034.

**7** Tuesday, 6:45–8:30 pm  
CHRS membership forum featuring a film of Washington's historic streetcars and presentations by experts. Maury Elementary School multipurpose room, corner of Constitution Avenue and 13th Street, NE (enter on 13th Street). The doors will open promptly at 6:45 pm with the presentation to begin after light refreshments and a short business meeting. Details: CapHRS@aol.com, 543-0425.

**9** Thursday, 7:30 pm  
CHRS Zoning Committee, Kirby House, 420 10th Street, SE, first floor. Details: Gary Peterson, PGarylaw@aol.com, 547-7969.

**21** Tuesday, 6:30 pm  
CHRS Board of Directors, Capitol Hill Townhomes, 750 6th Street, SE, second floor. Details: Beth Purcell, eap1@mindspring.com, 622-4303.

### JULY

**5** Tuesday, 6:30 pm  
CHRS Historic Preservation Committee, Kirby House, 420 10th Street, SE, first floor. Details: Nancy Metzger, nancymetzger@verizon.net, 546-1034.

**19** Tuesday, 6:30 pm  
CHRS Board of Directors, Capitol Hill Townhomes, 750 6th Street, SE, second floor. Details: Beth Purcell, eap1@mindspring.com, 622-4303.

Saturdays, April 16–November 19  
9 am–noon (rain or shine)  
H Street NE Freshfarm Market,  
625 H Street, NE (across from H Street  
Self Storage). Fresh fruits and vegetables,  
pasture-raised meats, local dairy, breads  
and baked goods, cut flowers and more.  
[www.freshfarmmarkets.org](http://www.freshfarmmarkets.org)