

**Transcript from CHRS's 60th Anniversary Celebration
January 28, 2015**

Muriel (Mimi) Wolf

(Last part of intro by Doug Wheeler): But we do have some semblance of order for you. I thought I would simply provide an overview, somewhat like the one you just heard, and introduce the two specialists here, whose long history on the Hill will be of interest to you, I'm sure. In terms of specific episodes around the time in which we had all been involved. I'd like to conclude by describing for you the legal and policy response – I'm a lawyer, I'm sorry – to the episodes which they will recount. The reason that all of us who came to love and appreciate this place, understood that it was not as a result of what you're about to hear, adequately protected. So I'll close by explaining why it is we did what we did and why it's important for you to be as vigilant as we were those many years ago. So Mimi will start.

Mimi Wolf : I'm the wife of Richard Wolf and much of what I'm going to talk to you about is related to things that Dick was involved with over the many years that we lived on Capitol Hill. We came to Capitol Hill in 1964. And I'm actually interested to hear what Cindy said about the freeway, because it was my understanding that the freeway would only have taken down the West side of 11th Street and the East side of 10th Street and that Philadelphia Row was going to survive.

Cindy Janke: They moved it and then it was going to be on the West side of the bank and I think it became the Anacostia freeway on the East bank.

Mimi: Well, when Dick and I looked at buying our house on Capitol Hill in the Philadelphia Row, he called the Architect of the Capitol – we didn't know anything about the freeway at the time, but he was concerned about what was going on. And he called the Architect of the Capitol and he called transportation folks and he said 'Is there anything planned for 11th Street South East?' and they said 'No, there's nothing planned' and shortly thereafter – well, actually it had already been decided and later we talked to the [?] about what had transpired. But actually, when we bought the house, it has just been decided that there would not be an East leg of the inner road, so it was fascinating to hear what you had to say.

I'm going to talk to you about things that happened in the 1960's and 70's, the early years when we were on the Hill and also at the time when it was not a historic district. And some of the things that I'm going to talk about will explain to you why there was such a push, and why Dick was so concerned about pushing for historic district. He was also President – some of you probably didn't know him – but he was President of the Restoration Society for 3 years, and I don't know exactly the dates, but it was early on and then more recently again he was President, so I lived through many years of being a widow too early when he was really involved with so many things related to the historic district.

The first thing that I would like to talk to you about is the Pedestal Club. How many of you know about the Pedestal Club? Please raise your hands. Monte does – anyone else know about the

Pedestal Club? The Pedestal Club was planned by staff members of Congress. In fact, Bill Richards who lived on the Hill was one of the people who helped to plan it, but there were staff members of Congress and actually some Congressmen who were involved, and the hope was to have a club on Capitol Hill where people could retire to off of the Congress per se. And essentially, the Pedestal Club was going to be put on 10th Street between North Carolina and Independence Avenue, which is a lovely, very narrow street. And the goal was to acquire the Organ Factory. Now how many of you know what the Organ Factory was?

The Organ Factory, by that time, had been bought and made into a private home. And the Pedestal Club folks thought that they would buy that property and have a club – we used to call it the Drinking Club – but whatever it was supposed to be. Anyway, the neighbors on 10th Street were really up in arms, and I remember Dick coming home one night and saying ‘We’ve got to go to this meeting which is being held over on 10th Street to talk about this Pedestal Club’ and the neighbors were really quite outspoken about it and felt that they had to oppose it. And actually their concerns were parking, which we all talk about so often – it’s a very narrow street, no.1; no.2 if it wasn’t parking, if the cars would just double park, it would be very difficult to even get down that street. Thirdly, people did not want all the noise that would happen, particularly if it was a loud vociferous club.

So people decided that they were going to oppose it. And they did go down and there were hearings held and people talked about what I said, in terms of parking and the narrowness of the street – this was a residential area, this was no place for a drinking-, for a club like this. So people were really quite outspoken and I remember – I don’t know if any of you were at the hearings – but I was there, there was this very elegant, very small, very elderly – much older than I am lady who came in, who lived actually on 10th Street. She came in with her white hat on, in her white gloves, in her white shoes, and her white pocketbook, very elegant lady and they asked her about what she felt about the drinking-, I mean about this club. And she said she didn’t think it belonged there, she felt that it would be too noisy and that there would be too much problems with parking and all, and she felt that it was a neighborhood and it should not be disturbed by having that club.

And then the people who were asking us questions said ‘Well, we understand it would be a nice place, there’s a swimming pool in the front of that building’. And she said ‘Oh yes, it’s there- it’s really a lovely little swimming pool – in fact, if you have three people, that’s about all that could fit in it, and they would have to be good friends to be able to swim in that pool.’ Needless to say, the variance was not granted and we never had the Pedestal Club. And I don’t know if it ever ended up anywhere else, but it certainly was not on 10th Street South East.

The second incident I’d like to report about was related to a potential for a building where Harris Teeter is now. Everybody hopefully knows where Harris Teeter is, at 14th and Pennsylvania Avenue. And there was a group of business men and developers who decided that they would acquire that property and they were going to put up – I forget what it was – and unfortunately Dick isn’t here – an 8 or 10 story building which would have been for commercial use and it was going to be lovely cause it was all going to be glass – all 8 or 10 stories and it would sit right on that corner of 14th and Pennsylvania Avenue. Needless to say, people who were interested in keeping the Hill’s character were not excited about this building at all. In fact, the Restoration

Society folks became very concerned about – I think it was the time when Larry Monaco may have been president at the Society.

At any rate – I can remember Dick being really upset. And essentially, what they did was they got together – the Restoration Society got together and there were pro-bono lawyers who heard what was going on and they actually were willing to support the Society in opposing this building. The people who were the developers or the business people, had a lot of money. Unfortunately, the Society didn't have much money to oppose them. But the pro-bono lawyers helped. But it turned out that it became a much more complicated case than had been expected. So they had to raise money to oppose this building. And one day I got a call – Dick was working on this with other folks –one day I got a call from the House Tour saying 'Mimi, can we put your house on the House Tour?' and I thought oh gosh, this was after the riots. And this was a couple of years after the riots when they opposing this. This building was actually proposed in the late 60's. And I said 'No, I'm not sure I want to have the house on the House Tour' because I just don't want all these people that don't know us walking through the house.

Well, needless to say, Dick in his impassioned way said 'We need the money and we should really put our house on the House Tour' so I finally gave in and we did put the house on the House Tour and actually, I will say one thing: if you want to put your house on the House Tour, it's wonderful. Because what you do is you clean up your house much better than you would. And the other thing was they wanted to have our garden on the house tour, but our garden wasn't a very good garden at that point. Everybody in the neighborhood brought us flowers, we had things hanging from the trees, we had things hanging from the fences – it was the most beautiful garden. Of course, 6 or 8 hours later it was back to its original state.

At any rate – this was the preparation for the actual opposition for the building which was going to go up at 14th and Pennsylvania Avenue. Fortunately, the outcome of that crisis was that the building was denied. After that happened, I remember Dick coming home and saying, We need to really have a historic district because if we don't, what's going to happen – well, the concern had been if this building went up, this glass 12 story building just like you have on K Street or L Street, whatever it is downtown – he said if we have that happen on Pennsylvania Avenue, what will happen is it'll be all the way down Pennsylvania Avenue, all the way to the Capitol. So it was felt that this was going to be the predecessor to a lot of other buildings. So it was very important to win this particular battle. And so we're glad that it actually ended up as it did.

The third incident I'd like to report – and there are a lot more, I mean I can go on for a lot; because living with Dick you can imagine things were going on all the time. This was our life for a long time. The third thing I'd like to talk to you about is the episode when St. Mark's Church and other parts of this area were going to be torn down. The Architect of the Capitol was instructed by Carl Albert. [He] had decided that rather than the Madison Building was not as important as having another building for the House of Representatives. So the area which had been cleared for the Madison Building, he decided should be given to the House for the House of Representatives offices. And the thought was that then they would move east and take some property which was on Capitol Hill and essentially, the goal was to take between 3rd Street and 4th Street South East – we're sitting between 3rd Street and 4th Street South East – and East

Capitol Street and Independence Avenue. So there are a lot of wonderful houses in that area, and this building, this church was going to be taken as well and torn down.

Well, we learned about this on a Thursday night. It happened in 1971 and essentially, what happened was, when we learned about it from someone who actually read the Congressional Record, it turned out – and this was important – it turned out that there was going to be a vote on Tuesday after Memorial Day. So we learned about it on Thursday, the day before Memorial Day weekend. Needless to say, our vacation, Dick and my vacation over that weekend, was cancelled and Peter Powers at that time was president of the Restoration Society. Peter called everybody together and we met in this church, in this room. Actually, we met in the vestry. And people began to say ‘How are we going to oppose this from being torn down and all of these other houses from being torn down?’

It was finally decided, and we met on Saturday, we met on Sunday – it was finally decided everybody who knew anybody in Congress, whether a Congress person, whether a staffer or a secretary – they had to be contacted to get this vote not to happen so that the area would not be acquired for this potential new building. It was unbelievable what transpired and I will tell you that I remember Dick Wolf talking to Ruth and Leonard Greenup. I don’t know how many of you remember the Greenups, they’re no longer around – but he went to talk to them because Ruth Greenup had gone to college with the Speaker of the House Carl Albert. And he went to her and he said ‘We need your help – you need to talk to this family’. So they got on a horn and they called Mrs. Albert and they called his children, and sure enough they prevailed on their dad and so many other people talked to their dads or their friends or their whatever. And the vote took place on Tuesday after Memorial Day and it was turned down.

So this was the third challenge of many challenges which I can share with you, which said to us ‘We need a historic district.’ And by that time, we were beginning to work on historic – acknowledging which houses were historic and the histories of them. So I will turn the microphone over to you.