



CHRS CELEBRATING 60 YEARS OF PRESERVATION

NEWS

www.chrs.org

October 2019

Don't Miss the CHRS 2019 House Expo!

By Chuck Burger

All of us want to properly maintain and protect our home investment or are planning improvements. And everyone wants to find qualified people to do this work. Often the best contractor is a local contractor, and you can meet them at our third annual House Expo, Saturday, October 26, 10 am–4 pm in the Eastern Market North Hall.

Join the fun with free exhibitor gifts, tours of the Market plus three live presentations: Home Energy Performance 101—Save Money and Be Comfortable, given by Max Insulation at noon; Historic Masonry and Chimney Repair, given by Gary Barnhart at 1 pm; and Window Restoration, given by Neil Mozer at 2 pm. We hope to see you there! Visit this website for more information: chrs.org/house-expo-2019. ★



IMAGE COURTESY ELIZABETH NELSON

The CHRS House Expo is a great way to talk to local contractors about your home projects.

Eastern Market History Tour at House Expo

By Monte Edwards

Take a private tour of Eastern Market with docents discussing its history, architecture and place in our community. The Eastern Market Community Advisory Committee (EMCAC) is sponsoring the tours; stop by their House Expo table to talk about the Market and sign up. Additionally, you can contribute to Eastern Market by purchasing bronze replica reproductions of the Market's historic plaque or distinctive Market polo shirts!

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October Preservation Café: The Ghosts of Capitol Hill

By Christine Mullins

Have you ever seen a ghost? Chances are you have without even realizing it. As one of DC's oldest neighborhoods, Capitol Hill is rich with built history—both the buildings that survive, and stories from those that have been lost.

On October 16 at 6:30 pm, architectural conservator and Capitol Hill denizen Justine Bello will introduce some Capitol Hill buildings that once graced our neighborhood. She will discuss the phenomenon of architectural “ghosts”—the physical evidence that remains of buildings that are now gone—to help the audience better understand their homes and neighborhood. Walking is not required to celebrate the season with this ghostly tour of Capitol Hill!




Preservation Cafés are free to CHRS members and non-members alike. We hope to see you at our new location at East City Bookshop, 645 Pennsylvania Avenue SE! ✨

Right now we are in a tree-watering emergency. It is really dry out there! Anything rescue-watering CHRS members can do on their block is enormously helpful right now, especially recent plantings (indicated by two stakes and a watering bag). If people cannot reach a garden hose to the green Tree Gators to fill them up, bucketed water is better than nothing. Trees with leaves hanging limp, or starting to turn yellow or brown, are the highest priority.



Side view of house with many stories to tell about its former neighbor.

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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: caphrs420@gmail.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

Zoning Report

By Gary Peterson

Report of the CHRS Zoning Committee meeting of September 5, 2019. The Committee considered the following cases:

BZA #20090, 224 South Carolina Avenue SE. The applicant needs a special exception to increase the lot occupancy from 60% to 64% in order to build a small (10 x 5 feet) balcony at the rear of the home. Neighbors on both sides have signed letters of support and the committee voted to support the application.

BZA #20091, 609 H Street NE. The applicant needs a special exception to open a franchise massage salon. The entrance will be on H Street and, other than the entrance, the space to be used will be in the basement of the mixed use building. The committee voted to support the application.

BZA #20092, 224 C Street NE. The applicant proposes to expand an existing nonconforming accessory building. The one story garage contains 731 square feet and will be increased to 849 square feet. An accessory building in excess of 450 square feet needs a special exception to construct an addition. The addition will also need a special exception to increase the lot occupancy to 67%. The new accessory building will house one parking space, storage, a powder room, and a 452 square foot party room with accordion doors that open the whole room to the backyard.

The owner is the major partner in a 40-person, Ashburn, Virginia, political fund raising firm that intends to use the property for "events." None of the five partners of the firm live in DC.

No letters of support were provided at the meeting and one neighbor has filed objections with the

BZA. The committee voted to oppose the special exception on the grounds that the special exception is not for a residential use. The committee believes that the applicant needs a use variance as well as the special exception.

BZA #20097, 310 5th Street NE. The owner proposes adding a 100 square foot rear addition and needs a special exception to increase the lot occupancy from 61% to 69%. Letters of support from neighbors were not available and the committee voted support subject to letters of support.

BZA #20100, 1356 North Carolina Avenue NE. The applicant needs a special exception to add a one-story rear addition above an existing one-story structure. The applicant provided letters of support from abutting neighbors and the committee voted to support the application.

BZA #20101, 114 15th Street NE. The applicant is constructing a 93 square foot rear addition and needs special exceptions to increase the lot occupancy from 61% to 70% and to reduce the rear yard from 19 feet to 15 feet. The applicant provided letters of support from abutting neighbors and the committee voted to support the application.

BZA #20102, 1429 D Street SE. This case involves an applicant that was caught having a garage built without a building permit and applicable zoning relief. The applicant needs a special exception for lot occupancy relief and a variance from the alley centerline setback. Despite the letters of support from neighbors, the

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Matthew Gilmore Explains Swampoodle at September CHRS Membership Meeting

By Elizabeth Hague

From an 1852 newspaper clipping: “A place called Swampoodle (in the Northern Liberties) and a disreputable locality, was late last night the scene of a lamentable occurrence...”

DC history specialist Matthew Gilmore spoke at the Capitol Hill Restoration Society’s September 25 membership meeting on Swampoodle, a small neighborhood just northeast of Union Station. Following his presentation, participants engaged him in discussion. The membership meeting voted to approve the budget immediately before Mr. Gilmore’s talk.

What’s in a Name?

Matthew Gilmore presented several theories regarding the history of the name “Swampoodle.” According to Gilmore, newspapers used evocative labels to refer to dangerous places in articles on crime—names such as “Cowtown,” “Murder Bay,” “English Hill” (where Judiciary Square is now located), “Swampoodle,” and “Northern Liberties,” an area that included both Swampoodle and the larger surrounding neighborhoods. Mr. Gilmore pointed out that variations on the name “Swampoodle” has been used in other cities around the country, using alternative spellings such as “Swamp Poodle,” “Swamp-poodle,” or “Swamppoodle.” Washington’s Swampoodle was a rough Irish Catholic neighborhood with a reputation for crime and gangs.

The origin of the name is unknown, and Mr. Gilmore suggested a few possibilities. “Swamp poodle” could be a euphemism for someone from a swampy place using a “poodle” suffix similar to “Liverpudlian,” or it could have



IMAGE COURTESY ELIZABETH NELSON

Matthew Gilmore talks Swampoodle at the September CHRS Membership Meeting.

taken on the name of a gang of people associated with the place. The name also could have been imported from Philadelphia, perhaps as a result of the two cities’ fire-fighting cooperation. Philadelphia, like Washington, had places named “Swampoodle” and “Northern Liberties.”

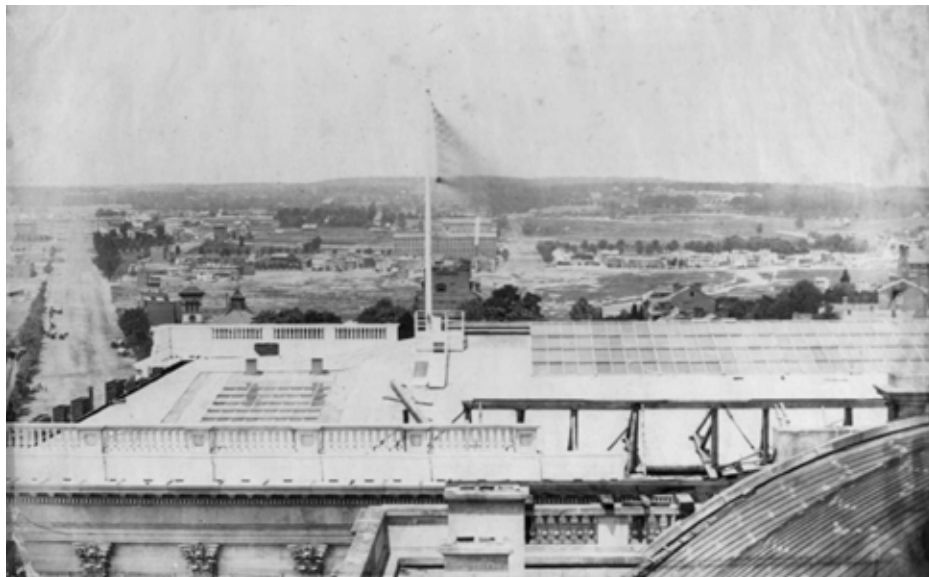
These and other slang names morphed and shifted over time, shrinking and expanding to encompass new institutions such as a school, a nunnery, a church, and a hospital—institutions in the tight knit Irish Catholic community. Mr. Gilmore pointed out that although Protestant Irish and Presbyterian Irish came to the United States first, they assimilated quickly into the main fabric of American life. By contrast, the Irish Catholic immigrants arriving later built more insular communities similar to other ethnic communities revolving around a distinct church, language or traditions.

“Swampoodle” was situated along the Tiber Creek. Early in its history, it included about a block’s

area just north of the Capitol in low ground called the Swampoodle Grounds. At its height, Swampoodle included an expanded area that now encompasses the Union Station complex and the portion of North Capitol Street housing the General Printing Office, Swampoodle Grounds, the B&O Station, the original location of Sibley Hospital, a school, a nunnery, and Saint Aloysius Catholic church. Of these major institutions, only St Aloysius remains, and much of the former Swampoodle has been incorporated into the current Union Station. The name now refers to a small neighborhood just northeast of the station.

Swampoodle: Cartography as History

A map from 1800 shows a swampy area (depicted by grass clumps in Lot) along Tiber Creek, lightly drawn topographic lines outlining Capitol Hill, and an area on the right bank of Tiber Creek of orchards. This area was mostly comprised of



Detail from Architect of the Capitol Benjamin Brown French's "View looking N from the Capitol Roof, 27 June 1861."

open fields, with a few scattered settlements, as mapped out by Thomas Jefferson. According to some accounts, in the 1850s and 1860s, cows from nearby English Hill were brought to Swampoodle's low-lying areas to be milked.

These low-lying areas were not desirable, in contrast to hills where water would run off and residences would not flood, and so places like Swampoodle were considered affordable places to live. Through the decades, as the Irish moved out, African American communities

moved in. Though this transition occurred mostly in the early 1900s, records show that African American residents--labeled 'contraband' in the Civil War-era records--lived in the area as early as during the Civil War.

By the 1890s, planning commenced to replace the General Printing Office building, and a debate followed over whether the area was a suitable location for a large building. Building Union Station around 1903 required a massive undertaking--despite the smaller-scale existence of the B&O railroad on the site--and 20

feet of fill to raise the station above the valley and stream. Building the station also took out an enormous swath of Swampoodle. To this day, six houses in the 600 block of 2nd St NE date from this period, and the houses' front doors enter at the second floor, a full story above the alley entrance. ★

Matthew Gilmore is an expert on urban planning, cartography, GIS, and library science. He writes a monthly DC history column for The InTowner and has published books and articles on DC history. He was the former reference librarian at the Washingtonia Division of the DC Public Library and chaired the Annual Conference on DC Historical Studies for four years. He can be reached for follow-up questions on his Swampoodle research at matthewbgilmore@gmail.com.

Zoning Briefs, *continued from page 3*

committee voted to take no position in this case, rather than support it as might otherwise have been the case, because of the applicant's misconduct.

BZA #20106, 328 Kentucky Avenue SE.

The applicant has requested a new BZA hearing date to make changes in the plans. The committee voted to oppose the application but will consider the revised plans at the next meeting on October 17. ★

September Preservation Café Provided Tips on Maintaining Capitol Hill's Trees

By Gabrielle Oliverio

On September 18, Steve McKindlely-Ward and Alex Grieve from DDoT's Urban Forestry Administration (UFA) answered questions, provided helpful tips, and discussed how you can help preserve and maintain a diverse tree canopy on Capitol Hill. Steve is responsible for the trees in our neighborhood south of East Capitol Street, while Alex manages the area to the north.

Call 311 or visit 311.dc.gov to submit a work order request to ask UFA to:

- Plant a tree in an empty public space,
- Prune large branches that are blocking a public sign or threatening to fall on the sidewalk,
- Inspect a street that may be diseased (such as if you see any weird-looking fungi growing) or otherwise in danger, or
- Remove a dead or diseased tree from a public space.

Maintaining tree spaces (tree boxes).

The DC Municipal Regulations prohibit the short little retaining walls we see in so many Capitol Hill tree spaces—made of brick, metal and wood—because they actually damage our trees. They prevent much needed water from flowing from the sidewalks to the tree and often accumulate too much soil which can smother the tree roots. Mulch should not be higher than two to three inches. Beware of the dreaded mulch volcano piled in a cone shape against the trunk!

Plants in the tree spaces are fine (they are so pretty!), but should be no higher than 18 inches at maturity

since they compete for precious water and nutrients (no vegetables please). Report or remove any vines that climb up the tree trunk since they can severely damage the tree.

Likewise, remove any wires or strings wound around the trunk and take care not to cut into the bark when mowing or edging. These seemingly small wounds to the bark can kill an otherwise healthy tree.

UFA plants trees that blend into our neighborhood. Some Capitol Hill blocks are graced by stately oaks, ginkgos, and elms down the entire street. UFA tries to plant trees that blend into the landscape, but must avoid diseases and bug infestation that affect certain species, such as Dutch elm disease, Ash borer beetles, and the spotted lanternfly. They are also conscious of the hazards of monoculture. When requesting a tree planting, it is fine to suggest a favorite species: UFA will do their best to accommodate the request if they believe the tree will be suitable to the location.

Preserving Heritage Trees. A permit from DDoT is required to remove a tree between 44 and 99.9 inches in circumference. Any tree greater than 100 inches in circumference is a Heritage Tree and cannot be removed, unless it is diseased.

Improving tree enforcement. DDoT recently hired an arborist to help enforce our rules and regulations in the Capitol Hill neighborhood. UFA can issue tickets to those who violate the law. Call 311 if you see a utility company, developer, or anyone else removing more than five percent of a tree's branches.

Repairing damaged sidewalks. Call 311 to report a tree root that is uplifting the sidewalk. DDoT can repair the damage and protect the tree.

Expanding the DC urban canopy. UFA conducts an assessment every five years to make sure we reach our goal of 40 percent tree canopy coverage by 2032. UFA typically plants 8,000 trees each winter (from October–April), while 2,500 are removed each year.

Young trees need lots and lots of water. Please fill any empty water bags or containers you see. Trees need at least five gallons of water each week during the spring, summer, and fall: it is nearly impossible to give them too much!

Find more information from UFA at ddot.dc.gov/page/ddot-urban-forestry. Thanks also to our friends at Trees for Capitol Hill and Casey Trees! ★

The next CHRS Preservation Café is on October 16 where you will learn about The Ghosts of Capitol Hill (see page 2). The November 20 Preservation Café will focus on the Tools and Materials of DC's Historic Masonry Buildings. East City Bookshop, 645 Pennsylvania Avenue SE, 6:30 pm.

House Tour Team Forming—We're Looking for a Few Good Homes

By Elizabeth Nelson, Tour Chair

It's early, but not too soon to look ahead to the 2020 Mothers Day House and Garden Tour. The Tour is CHRS's signature event, our most visible interaction with the community, so we must do our best to make it memorable. I'll be chairing the event this year but will need the assistance of as many of our members (and their friends) as we can muster. "Many hands make light work," the adage goes, and I promise to make serving on the committee an enjoyable experience and a fun way to spend time with people you know—or are just getting to know.

Many skill sets will be needed, folks to promote the event, sell

tickets or advertising, write for the catalog, and most importantly, identify houses whose owners will open them for the Tour. We have not yet decided on a footprint for the tour; we first need to determine where there is a "critical mass" of potential homes within walking distance of each other.

Houses (and condos) do not have to be "grand" or formally decorated to be on the tour. Our guests enjoy visiting a variety of homes. What we look for is a house that is *interesting*. It could be its size (large or small), or an unusual floor plan. Perhaps the owner has collected art or souvenirs from a lifetime of travel. Maybe a

well-known person once lived there (or still does). A fabulous kitchen, a meticulous restoration, or unusual interior detail—any of these make a home "tour worthy."

If you know of a house that others would enjoy seeing, please let us know. If it's your own, so much the better! If not, provide us with contact information and we'll do the asking. I look forward to hearing from you! ★

Elizabeth_knits@yahoo.com,
(202) 329-7864

Join CHRS at Hilloween

By Elizabeth Nelson

On October 25, we will have a table at that beloved annual celebration: Hilloween! In addition to the children's activities, we'll be distributing "treats" with a holiday theme. Costumes are encouraged, but not required. This is a great opportunity to introduce CHRS to young families and explain who we are and how we support the quality of life on Capitol Hill.

If you can volunteer, please contact Elizabeth Nelson, elizabeth_knits@yahoo.com. Volunteers are always welcome—and are truly needed. And it's a lot of fun to be out and about greeting old friends and meeting new ones. ★



IMAGE COURTESY ANGIE SCHMIDT



CHRS CELEBRATING 60 YEARS OF PRESERVATION

Capitol Hill Restoration Society
420 10th Street SE
Washington, DC 20003

Mark Your Calendar!

OCTOBER

15 Tuesday, 6:30 pm
CHRS Board of Directors, Capitol Hill Townhomes, 750 6th Street SE, 2nd Floor board room. Details: caphrs420@gmail.com.

16 Wednesday, 6:30 pm
Preservation Café: "Ghosts of Capitol Hill." East City Bookshop, 645 Pennsylvania Avenue SE. Details: (202) 543-0425, caphrs420@gmail.com.

17 Thursday, 7:30 pm
CHRS Zoning Committee. Kirby House, 420 10th Street SE, first floor. Details: caphrs420@gmail.com.

25 Friday, 5:30–7 pm
Halloween 2019. Eastern Market. Contact Elizabeth_knits@yahoo.com to volunteer. Details: (202) 543-0425, caphrs420@gmail.com.

26 Saturday, 10am–4pm
House Expo 2019. Eastern Market North Hall. Details: (202) 543-0425, caphrs420@gmail.com.

NOVEMBER

4 Monday, 6:30 pm
CHRS Historic Preservation Committee. Kirby House, 420 10th Street SE, first floor. Details: Beth Purcell, (202) 544-0178.

19 Tuesday, 6:30 pm
CHRS Board of Directors, Capitol Hill Townhomes, 750 6th Street SE, 2nd Floor board room. Details: caphrs420@gmail.com.

20 Wednesday, 6:30 pm
Preservation Café: "Tools and Materials of DC's Historic Masonry Buildings." East City Bookshop, 645 Pennsylvania Avenue SE. Details: (202) 543-0425, caphrs420@gmail.com.

21 Thursday, 7:30 pm
CHRS Zoning Committee. Kirby House, 420 10th Street SE, first floor. Details: caphrs420@gmail.com.

If you received a complimentary copy of this newsletter, please consider joining CHRS!

Annual membership is \$35 and includes a subscription to the newsletter, a set of historic guidelines, and discounted tickets for the annual House & Garden Tour. Learn more at:

www.chrs.org