



CHRS CELEBRATING 60 YEARS OF PRESERVATION

NEWS

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December 2019/January 2020

Outside the Historic District: More Rowhouse Demolition in Northeast

By Patrick Lally

It used to be that residential demolitions on a large scale—that is, more than one home at a time—were rather unheard of on Capitol Hill. But, the juggernaut of development in the surrounding neighborhoods, particularly in Northeast, has made the once unthinkable, well... thinkable. In fact, multi-property demolitions are refocusing attention on the merits of historic preservation safeguards in areas that remain unprotected.

Last month, after parceling up three contiguous houses on 13th Street NE, the owner of 425, 429, and 431 between D and E Streets filed for a raze permit to demolish all three properties. These handsome porchfront units were built in 1926 by Thomas Jameson and designed by George Santmyers. It remains to be seen what is proposed to replace these dwellings, all in sound and habitable condition, but a large multi-unit condo or apartment building is likely.

While there is nothing wrong with new development or high-density residential housing, loss of a substantial portion of a block's historic fabric irrevocably alters that neighborhood forever. The domino effect of tearing down rowhouses is



IMAGE COURTESY ELIZABETH NELSON

Three of the four houses in this row on the 400 block of 13th Street will be razed.

especially acute when incompatible development adversely affects adjacent dwellings and increases the threat of their loss as well.

This is why residents in the Capitol Hill Historic District's "Swampoodle addition" worked with the developer of Station House to garner historic preservation protections and minimize the adverse effects of large-scale development.

In 2010, when the Louis Dreyfus Company had discreetly bought up the entire western half of Square

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House Tour: House Recommendations Requested

By Elizabeth Nelson

The House Tour Committee is actively planning the 2020 Mothers Day House and Garden Tour. We've settled on a general "footprint" (Independence Avenue, between 4th and 13th Streets SE) and reached out to many neighbors living in this area. We've had a few interested parties but need to identify several more homes and gardens—perhaps yours—to provide the experience our guests have come to expect.

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." This year, we're hoping to include some pre-Civil War homes and have put a hold on space at Hill Center at the Old Naval Hospital for the refreshment break.

If you know of a house that others would enjoy seeing, please let us know at Elizabeth_knits@yahoo.com, (202) 329-7864. If it is not your own,

provide us with contact information and we'll do the asking. If it's outside the proposed tour area, let us know: we may adjust the boundaries and we are also thinking ahead to 2021. We are also soliciting paid advertisements and sponsorships, if you have a suggestion.

I'd like to take this opportunity to introduce you to the House Tour Team: Maygene Daniels, Jackie Krieger, Joanna Kendig, Heather Schoell, Betsy Rutkowski, Fynnette Eaton, Nancy Metzger, Etta Fielek, and Beth Purcell. They are all giving their best effort to make our signature event a success. ★

Demolition, *continued from cover*

752 adjacent to the H Street bridge, residents learned that 26 structures would be demolished to make way for the 378-unit apartment building. Nineteen of those to be razed would have been protected as contributing buildings in a designated historic district. At that time, however, Square 752 and the neighboring three squares were two blocks outside the boundary. Residents had little recourse than to watch the nineteenth century rowhouses come down.

Proposals to extend the historic district to this area had come and gone for years, but the demolition galvanized the community to demand meaningful mitigation for the extensive loss of the area's historic fabric. The Capitol Hill Restoration Society and the local Advisory Neighborhood Commission assisted in negotiations that led the developer to pay for a building-by-building survey of all the blocks north of the existing historic district up to H Street. This

was a key ingredient paving the way to extending the boundary north five years later. Now, demolitions would be almost impossible in this section.

And the motivating factors behind the "Swampoodle addition" are not unique. In 2017, just a block from the 13th Street NE site where the three raze permits are pending, residents of Emerald Street NE (13th/14th/E/F Streets) sought historic district protection to safeguard their street. ANC 6A sponsored the application, which CHRS supported. After much hard work by the residents, the Historic Preservation Review Board approved the new historic district, noting that Emerald Street is "one of the most beautiful streets in the whole city" and has a "wow factor."

The raze permits currently pending for 425, 429, and 431 13th Street NE, were filed in October and should have gone to ANC 6A for review by now. That review period

should have expired on December 6, 2019. With no opposition, the city offices responsible for permit approval will sign off on the demolition. Once the applicant secures clearance letters from all agencies and utilities responsible for review and submits these along with proof of liability insurance, the District's Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs will issue the actual permit to take down the buildings.

Without historic district protection, there is no recourse to saving these rowhouses, and another piece of our irreplaceable historic fabric will be lost forever. ★

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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

During a meeting held on November 21, 2019, the Capitol Hill Restoration Society Zoning Committee considered the following cases:

BZA #20162, 400 3rd Street SE. The applicant needs special exceptions to increase the lot occupancy from 60% to 67% and to construct an accessory structure with a second story dwelling unit. The applicant wants to build a garage with a second floor apartment. The committee voted to support the application.

BZA #20167, 233 ½ 9th Street SE. The applicant needs a variance from the lot occupancy requirements and a special exception to create a unit above an existing garage. In addition to the dwelling and existing garage with a roof deck, the rear yard also has several sheds, walkways and stairs that total 89% lot occupancy.

To achieve the project the applicant will demolish the smaller structures, expand the footprint of the garage, and end up with a reduction of the lot occupancy to 86%. The committee did not want to approve a variance but voted to take no position on this application.

BZA #20171, 803 Maryland Avenue NE. This case involves the addition of a second floor to an existing garage. The property is zoned commercial, MU-4, and requires a special exception to exceed 60% lot occupancy for any residential portion of the property. The lot occupancy is currently 74% and the new rear stairs will increase the lot occupancy to 78%.

The applicant proposes to have only two units on the property, fewer than allowed in the MU-4 zone. The applicant also needs a special exception for set back from the

centerline of the existing 15 feet wide alley. The existing garage would have to be setback from the rear property line an additional 7.5 feet.

The committee voted to support the application provided no more units are added. The committee strongly recommends the removal of the paved rear yard and replacement with a pervious surface.

BZA #20185, 727 7th Street NE. This property abuts an alley that runs along the rear of properties on H Street NE. The applicant proposes a one story infill of the dogleg that is next to an alley. Part of the reason for the infill is to buffer the noise from the alley and adjacent H Street rooftop bars. The applicant needs a variance to increase the lot occupancy from 67% to 72%. The committee was understanding of the desire for a buffer and decided to take no position on the variance.

BZA #20163, 719 6th Street NE. The applicant did not appear and the committee voted to oppose. The applicant can appear at the next meeting and request that the case be reconsidered. ★

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Historic Preservation Briefs

By Beth Purcell

Interested in learning more about historic district designation?

Contact CHRS at info@chrs.org.

The Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB or the Board) considered cases at the hearings on October 31 and December 5, 2019. HPRB is responsible for determining if proposed changes to a building are consistent with the DC Preservation Act. A “concept review” is a preliminary determination of a building owner’s plan to alter the building, and if the concept is approved, the owner will return to the HPRB for a final review.

716–718 L Street SE, HPA 20-037, concept/addition; rear addition, fourth story addition, and penthouse addition. These are contributing three-story brick buildings, constructed in 1925. In 2017, the Board considered an application (HPA 17-658) for an addition to the existing three stories, and also to add a fourth floor, and a large penthouse.

We believed that the primary issue in the 2017 case was the overwhelming size and visibility of the proposed fourth story and penthouse. The proposed additions, at 8,081 square feet, would have overwhelmed the historic building (4,731 square feet). In the 2017 case the Board’s findings included “The rooftop addition should be pulled back from the front elevation a minimum of 20 feet to ensure that it is not visible from directly in front of the building on L Street.”

A new applicant filed for concept approval for a four-story plus penthouse multi-family apartment building. We believed that the primary issue in this case was the very large proposed additions, a new third story and penthouse, and a rear addition extending back 44 feet, which would overwhelm and disrespect these modest buildings,

and that to be compatible, the additions must be scaled back.

Additions to historic buildings must not be visible from public space, as measured from across the street (HPO, Additions to Historic Buildings, p. 13). The new fourth story and penthouse, set back only 12 feet, six inches (less than the 20 feet the Board required in the previous case), would be visible from across L Street. The Board voted to approve the concept if the penthouse was eliminated, and the setback on the fourth story was increased to 20 feet.

1355 A Street NE, HPA 19-608, concept/two-story rear addition and second-story addition to garage; new basement entry. This brick porch-front rowhouse, a contributing building, is one of 10 built in 1916 by H.R. Howenstein, a prolific Capitol Hill builder.¹

The plan to infill the dogleg was the primary issue in this case. A perennial problem for rowhouse builders was maximizing natural light inside. Doglegs are character-defining features of Capitol Hill rowhouses because they allow additional natural light to enter the house, not just from the front and rear, but also from the side. Mirror-image doglegs facing each other in adjoining rowhouses, such as this one, add even more natural light to both rowhouses.

The rhythm of doglegs, viewed from the rear, is a pleasant pattern. Because these are two-story houses, sometimes the pattern is easily seen from the alley, at other times, it appears from oblique angles.

The applicant planned to infill the dogleg, which would be the first infill in this intact row of doglegs. In 316 G Street NE (HPA 17-22) the applicant sought to infill a mirror-image

dogleg, one of 14 intact doglegs on that street. The Board asked that “the applicant better maintain the existing dog-leg.”

In contrast, in 732 4th Street NE (HPA 18-248), three doglegs had already been infilled prior to the extension of the historic district to include this house, and for that reason, infilling this fourth dogleg was allowed. We argued that based on these precedents, this dogleg in an intact row of doglegs, should be retained, and the Board agreed.

Consent Calendar

The following cases, which CHRS supported, were approved on the consent calendar on October 31, 2019:

1363 A Street NE, HPA 19-535, concept/new two-story garage.

1365 A Street NE, HPA 19-536, concept/new two-story garage.

333 9th Street SE, HPA 19-599, concept/rear two-story addition and interior renovations.

138 11th Street SE, HPA 19-603, concept/two-story carriage house

148 11th Street SE, HPA 19-602, concept/two-story rear addition. ★

¹ DC Building permit #5506 (14 June 1916).

Photo Contest 2020: The Capitol Hill Home

In anticipation of the 63rd anniversary of the Mother's Day House and Garden Tour (May 9 & 10, 2020), the Society is sponsoring a photo contest: "The Capitol Hill Home."

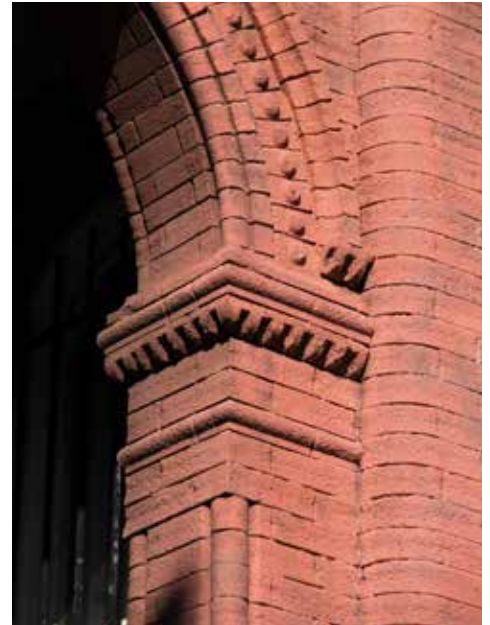
You know it when you see it, the quintessential Capitol Hill home. It could be a bay-front Victorian with arched windows and a tall double door front entry or iron steps. It may not be the house itself but some almost hidden feature that steals the show: a small, round window overlooking an alleyway; an old corbel architectural adornment has no structural function, brick detail over the front door, the stained glass transom window, or the rusted fountain in the yard. For each of us, it's a different answer.

We'd like to hear how you define "The Capitol Hill Home." Even better, show us—take a high-resolution (1MB+) exterior shot of what you think makes a home a Capitol Hill home.

Frager's Photos

In honor of their 100th anniversary in 2020, Frager's is looking for photographs of their store, staff, community (photos of families or friends gathered at Frager's for events or shopping) and neighborhood (pictures of the streets where the store has been located) to feature throughout the year.

Anyone interested in sharing their photos of Frager's throughout its 100 years of Capitol Hill history should please send their submissions to info@acehardware.com with the subject line "Frager's Photos" along with a photo credit or attribution.



IMAGES COURTESY CHRS



Photos can be emailed to HouseTourCHRS@gmail.com, or texted to (202) 329-7864. Be sure to include your name and address, email address, and the address of the property in the photo. Entries are due February 29, 2020.

The winning images will be awarded two complimentary passes to the 2020 CHRS Mother's Day House & Garden Tour and displayed on the website. For more details (and photos of past winners) visit: chrs.org/photo-contest-2020. ★

Restoration Tools and Materials of DC's Historic Brick Buildings

By Christine Mullins

On November 20, a group of local residents gathered at East City Bookshop to learn about the history and specialized work Gary Barnhart, a local historic brick mason, practices here on Capitol Hill.

Most of our Capitol Hill row houses were built during a 20-year period between 1906 and 1920, explained Barnhart. A typical Capitol Hill row house required up to 100,000 modular bricks to construct, or 120-200 “cubes” of 500 bricks each. In his article, “What are those odd and distinctive brick buildings near the National Arboretum?”, John Kelly from *The Washington Post* confirms Barnhart’s suspicion that many of these bricks were made with sand, water, and clay dug up from the banks of the Anacostia River.

Kelly writes, “[a] small train called a dinkey carried the clay to a chamber, where it was pulverized. Water and sand were added, and the concoction was mixed in a pug mill. The wet clay was extruded into long, rectangular logs that were cut into bricks by wire. The bricks spent time in a drying shed before being transferred to the site’s most distinctive feature: the domed structures known as beehive kilns. The bricks were fired for four or five days, the heat supplied first by coal and later by oil. It took two to three days before the bricks were cool enough to handle.” The bricks were shaped, dried, and fired to temperatures of 1,000°F.

This brickyard, which opened in 1910 and was bought by United Brick Corporation in 1930, eventually turned out nearly 145,000 bricks every day until it officially closed in 1972. Although the beehive kilns are

too unstable for close inspection, you can see three remaining kilns on the grounds of the National Arboretum today. In addition to this New York Avenue brickyard, Barnhart said the Library of Congress reports that more than 100 brickyards operated in the DC area in 1900.

While they are labor intensive to create, bricks are strong, cheap, reusable, and fire resistant. They have a high compressive strength even though their primary ingredients are mud and clay. Bricks make it easy to build structures in multiple forms: they have a versatile size, shape, and texture. Brick is also an excellent building material because it is resistant to sun damage—take a look at any wooden deck and you will see the havoc that direct sunlight can wreak on wooden structures. In addition, Barnhart noted that early brick kiln operators were able to find plenty of trees in the city’s surrounding forests to heat their furnaces.

Most importantly during this time, bricks are fire resistant. Washington’s city planners had established strict building codes to prevent the fires that had engulfed so many urban centers at home and abroad. While Washington had pretty much recovered from the devastating fires the British troops had set in 1812, there were plenty of recent examples of urban destruction, including great

fires that had occurred in New York in 1835 and 1845, Chicago in 1871, Boston in 1872, and San Francisco in 1906.

Barnhart described several different types of brick and brick patterns. On Capitol Hill, we see a great deal of “common” brick which was used to build many of our homes. However, contractors began to use smoother, more uniform, “pressed” brick when it was introduced in the late 1800’s to grace the front of many of our homes and give a more stately and elegant look. The materials in pressed brick is more-filtered than common brick, and fired at a higher temperature which makes them much stronger. The brick requires a harder mortar to fill the narrow gaps. While these refinements made the bricks more expensive, they are stronger and longer-lasting.



Gary Barnhart presenting at the November Preservation Café.

IMAGE COURTESY ELIZABETH NELSON



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Barnhart noted that brick does not require a lot of maintenance and care, and bricks can last for 50 to 100 years. However, the mortar

joints deteriorate much faster and are the focus of most restoration and repair work. When the joints need to be repaired, the characteristics of the mortar must be similar to that of the brick. This affects the strength and permeability of the mortar joint and the wall as a whole.

Tuckpointing is the most common repair done to brick facade: it entails raking and removing the outermost 3/4 to 1 1/4 inches of existing mortar and replacing it with new mortar. He cautioned against “scam pointing,” when unscrupulous or improperly trained masons cover old mortar with cement or an inappropriate mortar mix on top of the brick. The new mortar will not adhere properly to the old mortar and brick when contractors take these shortcuts, such as failing to sufficiently rake the old mortar away or failing to insert enough new mortar between the joints at the proper depth.

Similarly, if you use cement with historic brick, hard points between the brick will form and cause cracking when the brick is exposed to naturally-occurring thermal energy forces. Moisture will also collect between the existing mortar joints. Since cement is less permeable

than lime-enriched mortar, moisture will build up inside the wall and cause cracking known as “spalling.”

Barnhart described several other common problems that can occur in our historic brick houses, such as uneven structural settlement, and header and lenth failure due to segmented arches. Improper water drainage can cause damage to retaining walls, a phenomenon called rising damp, and brick efflorescence.

Some conservators advise against painting brick since it can create an impermeable barrier and prevent moisture from moving in and out of the wall, but Barnhart said he has not seen this in his practice. However, he warned that painting softer historic brick can create issues with moisture movement. The mortar joints need to allow moisture to move across the membrane.

Barnhart prefaced his talk by noting that Washington has one of the highest concentrations of historic brick buildings in the United States: preserving the historic value of our masonry makes good sense. In May 2019 the Washington Business Journal estimated the building portfolio in this city is worth more than \$250 billion. Real estate values may go through their ups-and-downs, but it is easy to see why proactive preservation and preventative maintenance are worth the cost.

Our thanks go to Gary Barnhart for his insightful historical and practical tour of the bricks and mortar that form the very foundation of our Capitol Hill homes! ★

Preservation Cafés are free to CHRS members and non members alike. We will go on a three-month winter break and hope to see you when we return in the spring on March 18, April 22, and May 20 at East City Bookshop, 645 Pennsylvania Avenue SE, at 6:30 p.m.



CHRS CELEBRATING 60 YEARS OF PRESERVATION

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

Mark Your Calendar!

DECEMBER

17 Tuesday, 6:30 pm
CHRS Board of Directors, Capitol Hill Townhomes, 750 6th Street SE, 2nd Floor board room. Details: info@chrs.org.

19 Thursday, 7:30 pm
CHRS Zoning Committee. Kirby House, 420 10th Street SE, first floor. Details: info@chrs.org.

JANUARY

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

16 Thursday, 7:30 pm
CHRS Zoning Committee. Kirby House, 420 10th Street SE, first floor. Details: info@chrs.org.

21 Tuesday, 6:30 pm
CHRS Board of Directors, Capitol Hill Townhomes, 750 6th Street SE, 2nd Floor board room. Details: info@chrs.org.

FEBRUARY

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

18 Tuesday, 6:30 pm
CHRS Board of Directors, Capitol Hill Townhomes, 750 6th Street SE, 2nd Floor board room. Details: info@chrs.org.

20 Thursday, 7:30 pm
CHRS Zoning Committee. Kirby House, 420 10th Street SE, first floor. Details: info@chrs.org.

MARCH

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

17 Tuesday, 6:30 pm
CHRS Board of Directors, Capitol Hill Townhomes, 750 6th Street SE, 2nd Floor board room. Details: info@chrs.org.

Thank you, CHRS Supporters!

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