



CHRS CELEBRATING 60 YEARS OF PRESERVATION

NEWS

www.chrs.org

December 2020/January 2021

DDOT Planning Projects Featured at December CHRS Membership Meeting

By Beth Hague

Please join us on December 16 for a virtual membership meeting on Webex. Two District Department of Transportation (DDOT) planning officials will join us to discuss the planning and environmental process on Capitol Hill for the Pennsylvania Avenue SE and Maryland Avenue NE projects.

The main focus will be on how the planning process was initiated; how the community/ neighborhood was involved; and historic/preservation factors that were considered. The speakers also will outline whom they worked with at the Office of Planning and how they factored in the different

transportation needs (pedestrians, bikes, and buses included). They will discuss current progress on the projects and answer any questions members might have.

George Branyan, Active Transportation Branch Manager in DDOT's Planning and Sustainability Division, will discuss the Pennsylvania Avenue SE project, and also can discuss the initial phases of the Maryland Avenue NE project. Abdullahi Mohamed, Supervisor Civil Engineer in DDOT's Infrastructure Project Management Division, will provide updates on the Maryland Avenue NE project. ★

The Doors of Capitol Hill

By Maygene Daniels

The evocative, colorful image of Capitol Hill doors on the CHRS 2020 Virtual House Tour poster is an artful combination of photographs created by journalist and photographer Walter (Wally) Dean. As an experienced journalist, writer and educator, Dean has traveled internationally, including several semesters teaching future journalists in Portugal. While exploring Lisbon, he came to love the city's distinctive, but disappearing, historical doors.

When COVID arrived in Washington, Wally could no longer travel abroad, but instead had time to explore the streets of Capitol Hill, eventually visiting every corner of the neighborhood. During his long walks, he created detailed photographs of beautiful, colorful and historic doors everywhere he found them. Inspired again by Lisbon, he combined 45 of his photographs of Capitol Hill doors into a single image that evokes the variety and character of our own historic neighborhood, a fitting image for the 2020 Virtual House Tour.



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November Preservation Café: Lost Farms and Estates of Washington, D.C.

By Christine Mullins

On November 18, Kim Prothro Williams, author and architectural historian from the D.C. Historic Preservation Office, treated CHRS members with a discussion of the farms and estates that once graced the Washington region. Williams discussed her recent book, *Lost Farms and Estates of Washington, D.C.*

Williams said her curiosity was initially piqued when a springhouse that was part of the Fenwick Farm during the mid-1800s was discovered on the property of the Lowell School two blocks off today's Wisconsin Avenue. Intrigued by the historical significance of finding the remnants of a farmhouse in our midst, Williams eventually identified and mapped 91 original properties and resources located on the outskirts of Georgetown and the Federal City (the area designed by Pierre Charles L'Enfant).

Williams and her team faced several challenges as they tried to identify and follow up on the stories of their farm houses. First, several buildings had been physically moved to align with the new street grid that was created long after the farms had been built. Some owners also moved these buildings great distances to live in new locations. For example, in 1923 the Samuel and Harriet Burrows house which had been built in 1850 near River Road and Fessenden Street was moved about a mile to 4624 Verplanck Place NW. Williams said the movers even had to sit the entire house on its side after they had moved the house while they poured the foundation.

Many houses were difficult to identify because they had been physically altered over the years due

to repair work and new additions. Williams shared photos of the Deane House at 4421 Jay Street NE, which had undergone several transformations since it was built before 1878, including when the original farmhouse was changed into a church in 1981. The house had been owned by Julian Deane, a descendant of Levi Sheriff who was one of the largest tobacco farmers and slave owners in pre-civil war Washington. Deanwood is named after this wealthy family.

Williams described the three main themes of her book: the cultural landscape of the area when the federal city was established in 1791, the major changes the farms and farmland underwent during the Civil War, and the divisions that occurred during the suburbanization period that followed the war.

In 1791 the federal government had carved the capital city out of Maryland and Virginia, including the port of Georgetown on the Maryland side, and the port of Alexandria in Virginia (this portion of the District was returned to Virginia in 1847). Washington County in the northern section, Georgetown, and the Federal City were combined to form the District of Columbia.

Apart from Alexandria, Georgetown, and Tenleytown, which was really a stopover for farmers on their way to Georgetown, the entire area was rural and heavily wooded with several large farms. The buildings included plantation houses for the socially elevated and tenant houses for those who rented and farmed their land. Yeoman farmers who had purchased small parcels of land which they owned and farmed

themselves, lived in small modest houses throughout the area. The farmers mainly grew tobacco, with some wheat.

Most of the small houses the tenant and yeoman farmers owned did not survive because they were built with perishable log or frame construction. Many did not even have foundations. The one exception is the oldest building in Washington, D.C., the rear wing Rosedale stone farmhouse which was built around 1730.

Williams shared paintings she had discovered that depict two of the larger plantation houses from the 18th century, the Notley Young Mansion lot which overlooked the Potomac River and the Gesborough Planter's house on the Anacostia River. These farms had water access so their owners could send their tobacco to the inspection centers in Bladensburg or Georgetown. Farmers who lacked water access would load their tobacco in a hogshead and roll these large casks down a "rolling road" to the river port. Today's Wisconsin Avenue is an example of a rolling road.

The establishment of the Federal City brought major changes to the more centralized areas of the city. Since the city did not have any money to purchase land, George Washington was able to convince the city's 19 proprietors to deed 30 tracks of land to the new federal government in exchange for 50 percent ownership of the lots held as public reservations.

On Capitol Hill, Daniel Carroll owned most of the land north and south of the Capitol building, while Abraham and William Young owned

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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

Ask CHRS: Repairing Retaining Wall or Concrete Coping

CHRS encourages members and nonmembers to email questions about historic district guidelines. Email info@chrs.org. We try to answer questions as best we can.

Q. How do you get a DDOT public space permit for repairing coping or a retaining wall? (Coping, or edging stone, is often seen retaining the turf around many of Capital Hill's triangle parks and can also be regular rectangular curbing.)

A: The repair or replacement of either the retaining wall, coping, or both, requires a public space permit from DDOT. In the Capitol Hill Historic District, Historic Preservation approval will be required as part of the online public space permit review process. The maximum height for a retaining wall is 42" as measured from the sidewalk grade. Engineering plans for any repair or replacement may be uploaded to DDOT's TOPS (Transportation Online Permit System) as part of the online application process: tops.ddot.dc.gov/ddotpermitsystem/ddotpermitonline. TOPS also has a useful FAQs.

A public space permit may be applied for on TOPS. After the application is approved and the fees are paid online, the public space permit may be printed out on a home or office printer. ☆

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150 Years of Public Space

By Beth Purcell

A recent public space application by the owners of 205 15th Street NE seeking permission to erect an accessory building (garden shed) in the “public parking,” a product of the L’Enfant Plan, illustrates the history and uses of these public spaces which we see everywhere on Capitol Hill.¹

History, purpose, and definition of parking: visible public space for trees, greenery and safety

The law on parking, beginning in 1870 and continuing through the present, defines “parking” and mandates preserving it as open public space used for trees, greenery or parks. DC Code § 10-1101.01(4) provides:

“Parking” means that area of public space which lies between the property line and the edge of the actual or planned sidewalk which is nearer to such property line, as such property line and sidewalk are shown on the records of the District.

The regulations add:

“Public parking means that area of public space devoted to open space, greenery, parks, or parking that lies between the property line ... and the edge of the actual or planned sidewalk that is nearer to the property line DCMR § 24-102.8.

Parking was created in the Parking Act of 1870. By the Civil War, the L’Enfant Plan streets had turned out to be too wide to be maintained at public expense.² In response, Congress created “parking,” authorizing the District government “to set apart from time to time, as parks, to be adorned with shade-trees, walks and enclosed

with curbstones, not exceeding one half the width of any and all avenues and streets in the said city of Washington.”³

Parking continues in the DC Code. DDOT’s *Public Realm Design Manual* adds that the District government later allowed bay windows, oriel windows, corner towers, and porches to project into public space (p. 1–2). All projections are a privilege and may not be claimed as a right. They require a permit from the code official. DCMR § 12-3202.1.

In opposing the application, CHRS argued to the Public Space Committee that:

- An accessory building is not an architectural projection from an existing structure (such as a bay, porch or window well) and is therefore not included in the list of permissible exceptions.
- Furthermore, the building would occupy a significant portion of the parking and would block the view of additional green space, undermining the goal of a visible public park.
- Finally, approval of this application would open the door to innumerable future similar structures which would further erode public parking, city-wide.

In November 2020, ANC 6A voted to oppose the application. The application is pending before the



IMAGES COURTESY ELIZABETH NELSON

Public Space Committee. The letter to the DDOT Public Space Committee and the DDOT Public Realm Design Manual are posted under: chrs.org/category/issues/public-space. ★

- ¹ Public Space Permit Application No. 358240: 8x10 foot garden shed in the public parking adjacent to lot 803, in square 1068SE (205 15th Street NE).
- ² DDOT, *Public Realm Design Manual*, 1-1, 1-2. <https://ddot.dc.gov/PublicRealmDesignManual>.
- ³ Chap. XLVII – An Act establishing the Corporation of the City of Washington to set apart Portions of Streets and Avenues as Parks for Trees and Walks. 16 Stat. 82 (41st Cong., 2d Sess. (1870)).

Enclosing Public “Parking”

By Elizabeth Nelson

As outlined in the accompanying article, public parking refers to the area between the sidewalk and the property line – what is commonly thought of as front and side yards on Capitol Hill.

Having established parking with the Parking Act of 1870, the government assigned responsibility for maintenance to the owners of the adjacent properties.

In exchange, the owners were granted use of the parking, with limitations such that its purpose—public greenspace—is not compromised. Landscaping, easily removable items such as lawn furniture and sandboxes and low, open fencing are generally allowed. It can be difficult to locate the relevant regulations; here is a synopsis of those pertaining to enclosing the spaces.

The rules on walls and open-design fences preserve the parking as open park space. Per DCMR § 24-103.1, *Public Realm Design Manual*, Landscaping and The Public Parking Area, requires that fences have an open design of at least 50 percent. “Low retaining walls and fences are required to maintain site [sic] lines along city streets, particularly at intersections.” “The rules on walls and open-design fences preserve the parking as open park space. DCMR § 24-103.1 provides:

After obtaining a permit from the District, the owners or occupants of land abutting a public parking may enclose the parking with any of the following:

(a) Walls of an approved type not exceeding three feet by six inches (3 ft. x 6 in.) in height;

(b) Wooden fences of colonial design of an approved type not exceeding three feet by six inches (3 ft. x 6 in.) in height...

(c) Open fences of an approved type not less than three feet (3 ft.) or more than three feet by six inches (3 ft. x 6 in.) in height, constructed of iron, ornamental wire, or woven wire ...”

There are restrictions on hedges as well. Per DCMR 24-102.4:

“Hedges on parking shall not exceed three feet (3 ft.) in height, nor project more than six inches (6 in.) over the sidewalk. On corner properties, if hedges are placed at the back of the sidewalk, they must be planted not more than ten inches (10 in.) above the sidewalk grade.”

Property owners may file a public space application requesting exceptions to the fence requirements. Additional materials are posted on DC.gov. ★

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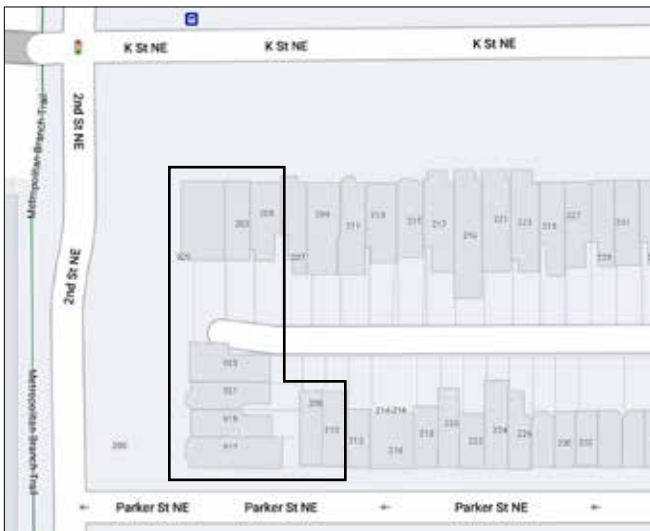
Jack and Micky Penkoske

Raze Permit Application for Houses Near Second and K Streets NE

By Beth Purcell

District government has received applications for raze permits for the following houses outside the Capitol Hill Historic District: 203 K Street NE, 205 K Street NE, 917 2nd Street NE, 919 2nd Street NE, 921 2nd Street NE, 923 2nd Street NE, 929 2nd Street NE, 208 Parker Street NE and 210 Parker Street NE (Square #0750).

All these houses were built in 1894 by J.B. Collier for owner/architect Carl B. Kerferstein. These houses are zoned MU-4 or MU-5A, and would be replaced by apartments. ☆



IMAGES COURTESY ANGIE SCHMIDT



Clockwise from top left: Map showing area of raze permit application; rowhouses on K Street NE; corner of 2nd and Parker Streets NE; rowhouses along 2nd Street NE.

The DC Historic Districts Coalition

By Scott Roberts

A group of citizens seeks to reconvene the DC Historic Districts Coalition. The DC Historic Districts Coalition is an informal alliance of organizations and individuals representing D.C.'s historic districts—those that have been designated under the provisions of the Historic Landmark and Historic District Protection Act of 1978 (D.C. Public Law 2-144)—as well as others interested in historic preservation, including residents of undesignated neighborhoods and representatives of neighborhood organizations, historic preservation organizations, and preservation-related businesses.

Since its formation under a different name in the 1990s, the focus of the Coalition has been on issues of importance to historic districts. The rationale underlying its operation is that the collective strength of a group of neighborhood historic preservation organizations carries greater weight and is more effective in articulating positions and needs than that of single voices from individual neighborhood groups working separately.

The group met informally semi-annually until it went dormant in recent years. In the meantime, new historic districts have since been established, including Emerald Street and Kingman Park on Capitol Hill

and others elsewhere in the city. There are now historic districts in every ward in DC.

There is interest in “getting the band back together” by reconvening meetings of individuals, businesses, organizations, and historic district representatives interested in historic preservation in our city. The group supports advocacy, education, cross-pollination and increased community engagement.

For more information on upcoming meetings and plans, please contact info@dcpreservation.org. ★

Preservation Café, *continued from page 2*

the land east of the Capitol. Williams noted that the last of the proprietor's houses at 15th and C Streets NE, which was owned by Benjamin Stoddart who owned Cool Spring Farm, was demolished in 1912.

Despite the changes that occurred within the city, the land that surrounded the Federal City and Georgetown remained the same as before, composed primarily of rural farmland and woodlands. This peaceful quietude came to an abrupt and destructive end with the advent of the Civil War. The military seized most of the farmland, forcibly removed any and all occupants, and demolished most of the farm buildings to create 164 forts and batteries to encircle and protect the capital city.

The creation of 68 major forts was not the only cause of disruption. The soldiers also cleared the surrounding farmland and wooded areas to create open areas so they could see

and anticipate attacks from military combatants.

The army seized land from all farmers, regardless of their prestige or social standing and occupied many of the large houses they found, which were often suitably built on elevated land, such as the Brooks Mansion and army headquarters at Fort Lincoln. The destruction the military caused took an especially heavy toll on the region's poorest residents, including free Black farmers who eventually lost everything they had worked for. The soldiers not only destroyed the farm buildings they occupied, but they set fire to many houses in anticipation of any confederate soldiers who might return to occupy them.

Williams concluded her presentation by describing how much of the farmland that surrounded Washington was subdivided after the Civil War for the new residents who came to live and work in the city. Many of these newcomers traveled in

and around the city by a new system of streetcars. Developers divided the former farmland while the old farm houses and estates were demolished to create new subdivisions, avenues, and streets.

CHRS members can buy copies of *Lost Farms and Estates of Washington, D.C.* by Kim Prothro Williams at local bookstores. Williams recommended also taking a look at the essays in *Creating Capitol Hill: Place, Proprietors, and People*, a great book that may be of interest to local residents.

Be on the lookout for future virtual CHRS Preservation Café events starting again in early 2021. ★



CHRS CELEBRATING 60 YEARS OF PRESERVATION

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

Mark Your Calendar!

Please check website for current information—cancellations and postponements are expected and will be posted as they are known.

DECEMBER

16 Wednesday, 6:30pm

Membership Forum: “DDOT Planning on the Hill,” with a focus on the Pennsylvania and Maryland Avenue projects. A WebEx link and call in number will be posted prior to the meeting: chrs.org/ddot-planning-on-the-hill. A brief Membership Meeting will precede the presentation.

Historic Sites Tour 2020

To celebrate Capitol Hill’s rich and diverse history, we’ve arranged a self-guided walking tour of 46 sites, a small sampling of the hundreds of other cultural treasures available to enjoy: chrs.org/historic-sites-tour-2020/#more-8734

63rd Annual Capitol Hill (Virtual) House Tour

Starting September 12, 2020

Our free, 3-D, #StayAtHome House Tour has gone virtual!

Visit: chrs.org/house-garden-tour-2020

#StayAtHome
House Tour