



CHRS CELEBRATING 60 YEARS OF PRESERVATION

NEWS

www.chrs.org

April 2021

2021 Mother's Day "Tour of Tours"— It's Almost Time!

By Elizabeth Nelson on behalf of the House Tour Committee

The Tour of Tours is just a few weeks away! We hope you'll peruse the offerings and sign up for at least one of these guided, outdoor, walking tours.

From the early 19th-century to contemporary times, some of the most fascinating politicians, activists, artists, writers, and others have made Capitol Hill their home. Curious to know where that famous Washington

power couple, James Carville and Mary Matalin, made their nest? Or where Senator Gary Hart engaged in "monkey business"? We can show you on the *Notable People* tour.

Few squares on the Hill have seen more change than the one that includes Logan School at 3rd and F Streets NE. Imagine the impact of building the magnificent Union Station just two blocks away. Consider the difficulties posed by nearby Reedy Creek, once a major impediment to building in the area. It took determination and perseverance to establish Logan School, which has expanded from 1892 to the present day. Sign up for *Community Evolution Near Logan School* and learn more.

The *Whimsy of Capitol Hill* is the perfect outing for the young and young at heart. Tour-goers will be guided through streets and alleys near Lincoln Park, with a scavenger hunt list of fun-to-find items. These

A stop on the Whimsy Tour.

include murals, yard ornaments and water features—the special touches beloved by Capitol Hill neighbors.

Capitol Hill was once home to many industrial and commercial operations including manufacturing, beer brewing, coal yards, and other now-vanished businesses. Join the *Our Industrial Past* tour to learn about this fascinating aspect of our shared history.

When Pierre Charles L'Enfant developed his 1791 plan for the City of Washington he established a network of public spaces to serve as

Continued on page 2

IMAGE COURTESY ELIZABETH NELSON



Also in this issue

ARTICLES

- March Preservation Café..... 3
- Southeast Branch Library 5
- Kingman Park Historic District..... 7

COLUMNS

- Historic Preservation Briefs 4
- CHRS Supporters 5
- Zoning Report 7

LOOKING AHEAD

- Upcoming Preservation Cafés 6
- Mark Your Calendar..... 8

social centers of the neighborhoods. On the *Parks: Treasures of Capitol Hill* tour, you'll hear stories of buildings, organizations and people near Marion and Garfield Parks.

Mike Canning has reviewed movies for the Hill Rag newspaper in DC for over 25 years. Love the flicks? Make a reservation for *Hollywood on the Hill*. Mike will lead a tour of filming location sites and offer both historical lore and cinematic anecdotes. Autographed copies of his book will be available for sale during the tour.

Take the *Resistance* tour to visit the Capitol Hill institutions and residences, and hear the stories of a diverse set of people and groups who have stood up for political, social, and cultural change in the area of civil, women's, and LGBTQ+ rights. Some names are well known, like Frederick Douglass and John Lewis. Others, including Belva Lockwood and John Paynter, are less familiar. Robert Pohl, local professional tour guide and author, will lead this tour.

The size of tour groups will be capped at 10 to 15 people and masks covering both the mouth and nose are required. As the number of reservations is limited, we're sending an email blast to members, notifying them that the system has opened so they can get ahead of the general public. If you didn't receive this notice it's likely that we don't have your current email address. Please contact the office at CapHRS420@gmail.com if you'd like to be added to the list for future announcements.

We're using Eventbrite to manage the reservations so we don't exceed the cap on any of the tours. Prices are \$10 for adults and \$2 for children 12 and under and can be made at chrs.org/2021-mothers-day-tour-of-tours.

Artists at Home

We're also organizing an *Artists at Home* gallery, inviting local artists to display (and sell) their work in outdoor spaces at their own homes from 1–5 pm on both tour days. This is free to both exhibitors and visitors. Willing to participate? The deadline for registration is officially April 11, but we'll accept CHRS members a few days later. Email HouseTourCHRS@gmail.com. ★



ABOVE, TOP RIGHT: Little Ebenezer Church and the Furies House, both part of the Resistance Tour. MIDDLE, BOTTOM RIGHT: The homes of Benjamin Latrobe and John Philip Sousa, both part of the Notable People Tour.



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

March Preservation Café: Preserving the US Botanic Gardens

By Christine Mullins

On March 24, Mathew Gilmore, a Washington historian and scholar, gave CHRS members a detailed look at how competing political and other forces created today's conservatory.

In 1818 Congress passed the Act that would give the private Columbian Institute for the Promotion of Arts and Sciences a five-acre tract of land to create a botanical garden at the east end of the National Mall. By the 1850s, the US Patent Office saw this space that the institute had left unused as the perfect place to house the botanical artifacts that the US Exploring Expedition of 1838-42 had gathered during its voyages in the Pacific Ocean. The Patent Office needed the space to expand its buildings, and the plants and flowers in its greenhouses from this global trek were overflowing.

In 1856 the US Botanic Garden was established, under the jurisdiction of the Congressional Joint Committee on the Library. A 300-foot-wide grand conservatory was built to rival London's expansive Kew Gardens, and the magnificent Bartholdi Fountain was installed outside with its enormous 93-foot-diameter base. Tropical plants filled the center of the grand botanical conservatory, with hardy, northern plants on the east side of the greenhouse, and those from the southern hemisphere on the west side. Ten separate, smaller, parallel greenhouses were constructed to the south of the main conservatory.

By the 1880s, the garden had become a splendid recreational space for visitors and lawmakers alike and was called the "bouquet garden"



A photo of the US Botanic Garden, circa 1887.

of Congress. During each session as many as 2,000 bouquets were harvested from the collections and sent to the wives and "fair friends" of the congressmen. At the end of the session each congressman was also entitled to "take home one large box of choice plants, shipped free," which was a clever way to preserve the collection's funding and existence in congressional Washington!

In the 1900s several plans threatened to move the Botanic Garden to other areas of the Mall. Many of us are familiar with the Senate Park Commission (or McMillan) Plan of 1902 which would transform the Mall into a single, unified composition. All of the individual segments east of the Washington Monument would be brought into harmony, to unify the agriculture, Smithsonian, Armory, and Botanic Gardens grounds.

The commission proposed creating a "great systematic collection of living plants," whose primary purpose was not recreational, under

Continued on page 6

Historic Preservation Briefs

By Beth Purcell

The Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB or the Board), considered the following cases at its virtual hearing on March 4, 2021. 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.

631 G Street SE, HPA 21-177, concept/second story addition to garage. The applicant plans to add a second story (an apartment) to an existing one-story garage, in an alley with several one- and two-story garages of varying age, mostly brick and in a somewhat industrial aesthetic. The houses on the rear of Ellen Wilson Place SE (built in 2000) facing this alley are two stories with symmetrical gable roofs. The new garage roof would be an asymmetrical gable roof and while it differs from the more typical flat roofs on other garages in this alley, we believed that it is appropriate in this context. The garage would be 20 feet tall, within HPRB height guidelines. The Board found the design solution for the second story addition compatible and appropriate for the specific context of this alley.

Consent calendar. CHRS participated in these cases:

- **320 9th Street NE, HPA 21-180,** concept/two-story addition at rear.
- **515 10th Street SE, HPA 20-518,** concept/second story addition to garage. ★



IMAGE COURTESY BETH PURCELL



IMAGE COURTESY STUDIO L'VEW

TOP: Current view of 631 G Street SE garage. BOTTOM: Rendering of garage with additional one-story addition.

Interested in learning more about historic district designation?
Contact CHRS at info@chrs.org.

Southeast Branch Library to Be Listed on the DC Inventory of Historic Sites

By Beth Purcell

CHRS nominated the Southeast Branch Library to be a historic landmark on the DC Inventory of Historic Sites. On March 25, 2021 the Historic Preservation Review Board voted to approve the library as a historic landmark.

The Southeast Branch Library, built in 1922, was the third Carnegie library and the second branch library to be constructed in the District. Brainard H. Warner, a successful real estate developer active in civic affairs, persuaded Andrew Carnegie to fund the first public library in the city, at Mount Vernon Square. Carnegie promised to pay for branch libraries. The library, with its children's reading room and story space near a welcoming fireplace, emphasized reading and education for children from the beginning, including a children's librarian, books for children, coordination with schools to supply books on schools' reading lists, plus story time. Through the decades, continuing into the present, children's education has remained an essential goal for librarians,

Friends of the Southeast Branch Library, and residents.

The Southeast Branch Library is an excellent example of Classical Revival design applied to library building, and an excellent example of the work of Edward L. Tilton, who worked for McKim, Mead & White while the firm was designing the Boston Public Library (1887 to 1895), who mastered the Classical Revival style, and designed many Classical Revival libraries. The Southeast Branch Library embodies the Classical Revival style in its symmetry, entrance portico, reading rooms on the piano nobile, large semi-circular windows on the main story, children's reading room, and shallow hip roof. Tilton succeeded in adapting the library to its constrained and irregular site.

The design, staffing, and operation of the Southeast Branch Library prioritized children's learning from the beginning. The library featured a children's reading room and story space next to a fireplace, where a children's librarian told stories. Shortly after the library opened, librarians realized that they needed more children's books, and quickly obtained them from the central library. The librarians coordinated with neighborhood schools to ensure that the library stocked the books on schools' reading lists. Elementary and high school students had their own spaces; the librarians stocked periodicals for high school students to read about current events. The library was a welcoming place for white and African-American children to read and do their homework. Through the decades,

continuing into the present, children's education has remained an essential goal for librarians, Friends of the Southeast Branch Library, and residents.

The Southeast Branch Library joins two other nearby historic landmarks, the Hill Center and Eastern Market. ✧

Thank You, CHRS Supporters!

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IMAGE COURTESY BETH PURCELL

The Southeast Branch Library.

the direction of the Department of Agriculture. The plan also wanted to place a “large botanical working museum” with a “pleasing landscape character” in Potomac Park.

These three characteristics hardly described the existing Botanic Garden: it did not house a research collection, was in fact recreational, and was located in a confined space at the base of the Capitol. Again, the planners envisioned a greenhouse facility that would rival Kew Gardens, the sprawling, 330-acre botanical research conservatory located outside London.

During his presentation, Gilmore went into greater detail on how best intentions, stubborn bureaucracy, limited funding, political feuding, and memorial trees all stood in the way of the Senate Park Commission’s goal. A compromise was reached

and the Botanic Garden moved only slightly south, bringing it in line with the Mall plan, and led to its present form. The most resistant opponent was the Botanic Gardens itself, led by William R. Smith (1853–1912) and George Hess (1912–1934).

At the end of his presentation, Gilmore noted that in 1993, the Botanic Gardens completed its Production Facility which features nearly two acres of greenhouses divided into 34 bays and 17 environmental zones located in southwest Washington. While not open to the public, its annual open house is highly recommended. You can find this year’s COVID-unfriendly, virtual tour at: usbg.gov/production-facility-virtual-open-house.

The presentation was followed by a membership meeting at which CHRS President Beth Purcell

presented a report from the House Tour Committee and a reminder from the Elections Committee that nominations for board positions would be open until March 26. ★

Matthew Gilmore is an independent scholar who specializes in the history of Washington, D.C. He has published several books and articles, edits the H-DC discussion list, and blogs irregularly at [matthew gilmore.wordpress.com](https://matthewgilmore.wordpress.com).

If you missed Matthew Gilmore's presentation, a recording is available on the CHRS website at: chrs.org/botanic-gardens-pc.

Upcoming Preservation Cafés

April

Building with Mosaics

Wednesday, April 21 at 6:30 pm

Join CHRS for a virtual chat with Jim Miller, local artist, historian, and renovator, who has transformed his Capitol Hill home into an elaborate oasis of mosaic design—a stunning tribute to time spent studying in Ravenna and Venice Italy. During his presentation, Jim will showcase the mosaics he has created in his beautiful house which you may have visited on the 2019 CHRS House and Garden Tour.

Jim will discuss his growing fascination with mosaic artistry and the time he spent studying this ancient craft in Ravenna and

Venice, Italy, which are famous for the colorful mosaics that adorn their many buildings and cathedrals. Jim will explain what mosaics are, talk a bit about the materials he uses, briefly discuss the history of mosaics, and offer friendly advice for how to create your own mosaic designs. Details: chrs.org/mosaic-design-pc.

May

Adaptive Reuse of Our Alley Buildings
Wednesday, May 19 at 6:30 pm

Since the 19th century, alley buildings have contributed to the footprint and function of Capitol Hill. Although they are not visible from the street, these structures have served varied and important roles in

neighborhood life. The last several decades have, however, witnessed rapid and substantial reimagining of these buildings. Changes in the real estate market, public perception, and zoning have collided to create new spaces within old buildings. Join CHRS for a virtual chat with architectural conservator Justine Bello. Details: chrs.org/adaptive-reuse-alley-buildings-pc. ★

Our CHRS Preservation Cafés are free to CHRS members and non-members. You can access the presentation links at chrs.org.

Kingman Park Historic District Expansion

By Beth Purcell

In September 2020, HPRB approved expanding the Kingman Park Historic District (first approved in 2018). The 2018 staff report explained the significance of Kingman Park:

HPRB designated the Kingman Park Historic District under DC Designation Criteria A and B for its association with historical periods, social movements, groups, institutions, achievements and patterns of growth and change that contributed significantly to the heritage, culture and development of the city, particularly as Kingman Park is a neighborhood that was developed for and nourished by African Americans during a period of entrenched racial segregation. With its houses, schools, recreational facilities, businesses, and religious institutions, Kingman Park residents lived together in this area of the city that was deliberately separated from white Washington, and in an area that would become the scene of important events in the fight to end legally sanctioned racial segregation.

The Board voted to expand the boundaries to include the blocks to

the southwest of the original historic district, including Squares 4526, 4527, 4549, 4550, 4558 and 4559 but not to include Squares 4514 and 4515 along Benning Road. The Board also extended the period of significance for the Kingman Park Historic District to 1968. ★



Zoning Report

By Gary Peterson

The CHRS Zoning Committee considered three cases that requested the same relief, a special exception from the lot area coverage. You are allowed to cover 60% of your lot as a matter of right but to cover between 60% and 70% requires a special exception. Anything over 70% requires a variance. The cases were:

- **BZA #20407**, 307 A Street SE, 60% to 70% proposed increase.
- **BZA #20415**, 515 10th Street SE, 63% to 65% proposed increase.
- **BZA #20422**, 610 South Carolina Avenue SE, 53% to 67% proposed increase.

In all of the cases there were letters of support from adjacent neighbors. The Committee voted to support the applications. ★



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.

APRIL

16 Friday

The Mother's Day Tour of Tours (May 8 & 9) will include an "Artists at Home" component. Sign up by Friday, April 16, 2021. If you have questions or you'd like to participate, please email: HouseTourCHRS@gmail.com.

21 Wednesday, 6:30pm

Preservation Café: "Building with Mosaics." A WebEx link and call in number will be posted prior to the meeting. Details: chrs.org/mosaic-design-pc.

MAY

8–9 Saturday & Sunday

Mother's Day "Tour of Tours." Visit chrs.org/2021-mothers-day-tour-of-tours to learn more.

19 Wednesday, 6:30pm

Preservation Café: "Adaptive Reuse of Our Alley Buildings." A WebEx link and call in number will be posted prior to the meeting. Details: chrs.org/adaptive-reuse-alley-buildings-pc.

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.

House & Garden Tour 2020

Our free, 3-D, #StayAtHome House Tour has gone virtual! chrs.org/house-garden-tour-2020.

Mural Tour 2020

We've been slipping down alleys and craning our necks to document as many Capitol Hill murals as we can locate. The Tour can be enjoyed from the comfort of your own home but the scale of the art makes it much better in person: chrs.org/mural-tour.