



CHRS CELEBRATING 60 YEARS OF PRESERVATION

NEWS

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June 2021

June Membership Meeting: Voices from Our Past— Researching Oral Histories of Capitol Hill

By Beth Purcell

The Overbeck Oral History Project has interviewed more than 200 Capitol Hill residents about their lives and posted the interviews on its website. Bernadette McMahon will explain this vital resource and how to search these oral histories on June 22nd at 6:45 pm via WebEx.

Another historian, Brian Kraft makes the details of our history more accessible and readily understood by converting historical resources into data and then mapping them. Each

point on Brian’s new DC Oral History Map links to an oral history. Different point symbols are used to represent the locations of residences, schools, churches, and other sites. Pan and zoom, click and point, then click the link in the popup. For more information on the use of this important resource, visit: chrs.org/oral-histories-map.

The presentation will be preceded by a brief Membership Meeting, which will include election results for the Board of Directors.

Bernadette McMahon is a Project Manager at the Capitol Hill History Project. She and her husband raised two sons on Capitol Hill. During her 50+ years in the neighborhood, she volunteered with St. Peter’s Church and school, Boy Scouts, and other community efforts, including past service on the CHRS board of directors. She now volunteers in the Capitol Hill Village office. She is retired from careers as a Food

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A front yard pond by Robert Weinstein took First Place in our 2021 Capitol Hill Home Photo Contest. See more winners throughout this issue!

IMAGE COURTESY CHRS



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2021 Mother's Day "Tour of Tours"

By Elizabeth Nelson on behalf of the Tour Committee

There's nothing like a pandemic to nudge one out of one's comfort zone and into uncharted waters! Last year, we were on the very cusp of staging our annual in-person house tour when—poof!—that was not happening. We took a deep breath, pivoted—and released a series of web-based, self-guided walking tours and a virtual House Tour (still online at: chrs.org/vht-2020).

This year, the Tour Committee wanted to do something "real"—but safe—and settled on a guided walking tour extravaganza. Walking tours are not new to us, of course, but this time we wanted to emulate the scale and production values of the traditional House and Garden Tour.

It also gave us the incentive to try out new ticketing procedures.

I'm happy to report that the event was a success. Tickets were sold out by the tour weekend. The guides reported that our guests were interested and engaged—learning about our historic neighborhood while having a fun, shared experience. We've gained several new members and are enjoying a stream of emails offering thanks and congratulations. Many are suggesting that we reprise the tours—and add new ones. We have tentative plans to oblige them in September.

Another innovation was our Artists at Home self-guided tour. This turned out to be a great opportunity to introduce our organization to community members who hadn't known us well before. Over 20 artists set up at a dozen locations to share their work with the public. The weather could have been better but the feedback from the artists has been very encouraging. Their contact information and samples of their work can be found at: chrs.org/tour-of-tours-artists-at-home.

A few additional photos are posted at: chrs.org/tour-of-tours-2021-photos.

Many thanks to everyone who assisted in getting this project over the finish line:

Tour of Tours Planning and Development Team

Mike Canning, Fynnette Eaton, Joanna Kendig, Jackie Krieger, Nancy Metzger, Elizabeth Nelson, Carey Paquette, Beth Purcell, Heather Schoell, Karine Semple

Tour Guides

Mike Canning, Fynnette Eaton, Joanna Kendig, Nancy Metzger, Elizabeth Nelson, Gary and Trudy Peterson, Robert Pohl, Beth Purcell, Angie Schmidt

Tour Assistants

Nick Alberti, Doriann Apice, Mary Case, Maygene Daniels, Tom and Mary Edsall, Gene Imhoff, Joanna Kreiselman, Ken Jarboe, Barbara Johnson, Ruth Oyen, Tina May, Marcia Montgomery, Chris Mullins, Undine Nash, Alison Ross, Heather Schoell, Drury Tallant, Muriel Wolf, Judy and Zip Zippin

Communications

Jennifer Cate, Carey Paquette, Karine Semple

Management and Ticket Sales

Karine Semple ☆

IMAGE COURTESY CHRS



The Capitol fence was the subject of the image by Nathaniel Liu which earned Special Mention in the 2021 Capitol Hill Home Photo Contest.

Capitol Hill Restoration Society (CHRS)

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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 Beth Hague

In April and May, the Zoning Committee met virtually to consider a large number of cases, often following a presentation and question and answer session with the applicants. The cases and the CHRS Zoning Committee's decisions are summarized below.

BZA #20445, 106 13th Street NE.

The applicant is applying for a use variance in order to expand the existing first floor restaurant on Lincoln Park to use the cellar level and the second story. The CHRS Zoning Committee supports the Office of Planning's position opposing the proposal. We note that expanding the restaurant to the second floor would result in a capacity that is too large for this location. There are currently significant parking pressures in the neighborhood which would be exacerbated by a larger restaurant than currently exists. This case is now scheduled for May 26, 2021.

BZA #20333, 1165 3rd Street NE. The applicant is applying for a special exception for lot occupancy (from 50% to 60%) and for setback (this would be reduced to 15'10"; the minimum is 20') in order to build a three-story rear addition on an existing two-story row house. Others on the street are two-story dwellings. The plans have been revised several times and ANC6C has been engaged in the case (first opposing and then ultimately supporting). The CHRS Zoning Committee opposed this case on the basis of opposition from two neighbors to the north. This case has been rescheduled three times at the applicant's request and now is due to be heard virtually on June 23, 2021.



IMAGE COURTESY NICK ALBERTI

106 13th Street NE.

BZA #20449, 117 3rd Street NE. The applicant seeks special exception from rear yard requirements of subtitle E 306.1 and an area variance from the lot occupancy requirements of Subtitle E 304.1 in order to raze the existing attached principal dwelling unit (except for the party walls) and to construct a third-story addition with both roof deck and rear deck additions, as well as a a cellar and a carport below the rear deck addition in the RF-1 Zone. The three-story row dwelling with rooftop deck would occupy roughly 70% of the lot; the rear elevated deck would bring that occupancy to more than 82%. The CHRS Zoning Committee supported the ANC's unanimous position opposing in its entirety the proposal, now rescheduled for July 28, 2021. We noted that the case lacks shadow studies, lacks letters of support from neighbors, and does not meet the requirements for the variances requested.

BZA #20450, 211 13th Street NE. The CHRS Zoning Committee supports this proposal. The applicant is requesting a special exception for lot

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Historic Preservation Briefs

By Beth Purcell

The Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB or the Board) considered the following cases at its virtual hearing on April 22, 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.

135 13th Street NE, rear, HPA 21-212. The applicants plan to demolish an existing one-story garage, approximately 20 x 20 feet (400 square feet) in footprint and replace it with a new two-story dwelling, 20 x 37 feet, clad in corten steel. At the hearing on March 25, 2021, the Board approved the new building's height and massing based on the size of the lot and the alley's context. As requested the applicants returned to the Board on April 22, 2021 regarding preserving some materials from the garage in

the new design, and installing the corten steel panels.

The Board ended up approving the original design. CHRS raised the issue of a possible roofdeck and asked that the Board require that any roofdeck be set back three feet from the edge, as had been required in 1120 Park Street NE, (HPA 16-014). The applicants represented that they planned no roofdeck, that solar panels would be installed, and that they had a large yard and did not need any additional space. The Board did not address a roofdeck in its order. For prior coverage, see CHRS News (May 2021).

Consent calendar. CHRS participated in these cases:

- **17 9th Street NE, HPA 21-254,** concept/two-story rear addition. Brick paper on front to be removed, replaced with wood siding compatible with the building's age.



IMAGE COURTESY BETH PURCELL

- **223 5th Street SE, HPA 21-261,** concept/roof addition for attic storage.
- **508 Seward Square SE, HPA 21-266,** concept/three-story rear addition.
- **602 E Street SE, HPA 21-256,** concept/enclose rear second-story balcony. ★

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

June Meeting, *continued from cover*

and Drug Administration chemist and, later, as a consulting database developer.

Brian D. Kraft, a Geographic Information Systems (GIS) specialist, is joining us for another CHRS meeting. He has been researching, writing, and speaking about DC history since 1997. He has a BS in computer science and a post-baccalaureate certificate in GIS, both from Pennsylvania State University. He is the creator of HistoryQuest DC; the DC Oral History map is his latest project. ★

The 2021 Capitol Hill Home Photo Contest Third Place image by Stephanie Cavanaugh.



May Preservation Café: Adapting and Preserving Our Capitol Hill Alley Buildings

By Christine Mullins

On May 19, Justine Bello, architectural conservator, took CHRS members on a virtual tour of how Capitol Hill residents and business owners have revised, adapted, and preserved the buildings that grace our many alleyways. While these Capitol Hill buildings do not adorn our typical street views, Bello explained that they have contributed to the footprint and function of our community since they were built in the 19th century. They possess great value and make our community unique and special.

Bello praised The DC Historic Alley Buildings Survey which Kim Protho Williams, architectural historian and National Register coordinator, completed for the DC Historic Preservation Office in 2014. Bello explained that this project documents the importance of the need to preserve our historic cultural alley buildings.

Protho Williams registered 1,249 alley buildings that fall within, and just beyond, the boundaries of the original L'Enfant Plan. Their numbers are dwindling and the Capitol Hill historic district is the location for 517, the vast majority, of the city's remaining alley buildings. Georgetown follows with 253, Dupont Circle has 101, U Street has 82, Shaw has 74, and 14th Street has 74.

Bello invited attendees to open their eyes the next time they walk down one of our historic alleys. She stressed that you do not need to be an expert to witness the defining features, and salient characteristics of the buildings: the general maxim holds true that "form follows function." Our alleys were designed to provide access to the rear of the large lots and housed

the kitchens, stables, carts, wagons, and animals, along with other dependency buildings, equipment and storage areas.

The oldest alley buildings, constructed before 1878, were almost exclusively stables. Most were privately built by and for individual homeowners and speculative builders, located in the alleys behind primary residences. Bello explained that horses were housed, harnessed, and fed in the stables, while the carriage houses were used to store the carriages and serve as the living quarters for the coachmen, grooms, and stablemen.

Most stables were two-story, brick structures with a wide carriage door and pedestrian door on the first floor, and a hayloft opening and windows on the second story. Take a look upwards and you can sometimes see a short beam above the large window-like opening, which was used to hold the block and tackle that would hoist the hay bales up to their storage place on the second floor. You can often see small window openings built along the side of the building, so the horses inside could poke their heads out of their stalls to get some fresh air and take in the view.

As car ownership began to rise after 1920, some Capitol Hill homeowners replaced the stables behind their houses with a second type of alley building: car garages. While some repurposed the stables in their alleys, others built new structures to store their new automobiles.

These garages were typically modest, utilitarian affairs. Most were one-story buildings with a large garage door opening at the front, perhaps a window on a side wall, a flat roof, and little-to-no

ornamentation. These garages were built as freestanding and attached structures, independently and together.

Some of the larger garages were built to house commercial enterprises. These businesses were built with fireproof materials, such as concrete and brick, so they could safely store the gasoline needed to fuel the cars that they would also maintain and repair.

While stables and garages were most popular, Bello's third typology of alley building includes commercial warehouses, workshops, and other buildings used for storage. Her fourth typology includes studios, sheds, and other small buildings that were functional, unadorned, and had limited openings.

Bello explained that she could not really categorize Washington's alley dwellings as "adaptive reuse" since they were designed to serve as homes, which they did until so many were later destroyed as we'll see below. However, these homes constituted an important part of the Capitol Hill alley community and need to be preserved.

Unfortunately, only 108 remain across the city, which is a tremendous loss since a city-wide inventory counted 3,337 inhabited alley dwellings in 1912. You can see two fine clusters of the 18 alley dwellings that remain on Capitol Hill on F Street Terrace and Gessford Court.

Bello explained that the white property owners who built these cheaply-constructed alley dwellings rented them out to unskilled workers and members of

Continued on page 7

occupancy requirements and year yard requirements to construct a three story plus cellar rear addition and roof. We note that the applicant has engaged with and obtained support from all of the most affected neighbors and that the third story addition is set back from the street. The hearing is now scheduled for June 9, 2021.

BZA #20455, 1101–1107 H Street NE. The applicant proposes to raze the existing non-historic buildings and to construct a six-story, mixed-use building with 53 residential units and ground floor retail and services use in the NC-17 Zone. The applicant seeks special exception under the new building development requirements in Subtitle H 910.1 and an area variance from the loading berth requirements of Subtitle C 901.1. The ANC approved on condition that the developer abide by the agreement regarding the development's traffic management plans, commitment to place Residential Parking Permit restrictions in condo bylaws, and agree to inclusion of 39 indoor bike parking spaces as well as 8 outdoor bike parking spaces. The CHRS Zoning Committee supported the proposal on the basis of engagement with neighbors, who support, and the ANC, which also supports the case. The hearing date is now scheduled for May 26, 2021.

BZA #20461, 1525 K Street SE. The CHRS Zoning Committee supports this proposal. The applicant is requesting a special exception for lot occupancy requirements (from the existing 56.6% to proposed 70%) to construct a rear one-story addition to an existing attached single family dwelling unit in RA-2 Zone. We note that neighbors generally support the project in part because the owner will keep the building a single-family unit (there is a letter of support from the next door neighbor at 1523; the other

adjacent property at 1527 is currently unoccupied). The hearing is now scheduled for June 16, 2021.

BZA #20471, 135 13th Street NE. The CHRS Zoning Committee supports this proposal on the grounds that the case meets the requirements for a special exception. The owners seek a special exception to expand an accessory building to the dwelling. The owners want to build a two-story dwelling unit over their garage. They have a large lot, which makes it possible for them to seek relief related to lot size requirements. The HPRB has approved the plans, and neighbor letters on file are in support.

BZA #20486, 647 A Street SE. The applicant seeks a special exception from the lot occupancy requirements to construct a two-story rear addition to an existing, attached, two-story with basement, principal dwelling unit in the RF-1 Zone. The CHRS Zoning Committee supports the request, which has support from both adjacent neighbors and meets the requirements for a special exception.

BZA #20487, 207 3rd Street SE. The CHRS Zoning Committee supports the ANC 6B's appeal of the issuance of building permits which allowed conversion of the property at 207 3rd Street SE from a single family dwelling to a six-unit apartment house without undergoing a zoning relief process. The ANC filed a letter of appeal stating the need to review zoning regulations in detail on three grounds: (1) the building's nonconformity: conversion of a single family dwelling to six unit apartment house is a nonconforming use in RF-3 Zone; (2) expansion of dwelling area that would include structural underpinnings in basement; and (3) lack of neighbor notification. ★

Thank You, CHRS Supporters!

CHRS wishes to thank the following donors for their invaluable support:

Contributors

DICK WOLF

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HOUSE TOUR

2021 Tour of Tours

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Memberships

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Jeff Fletcher and Tara Hamilton
Carol Sadler and Steve Geimann
Lou Ivey

SILVER

Lynne Church
Beth Hannold and Doug Delano
James and Bernadette McMahon

GOLD

Barry and Sandra Harrelson

2021 Capitol Hill Home Photo Contest Winners

By Elizabeth Nelson

We're delighted to announce the winners of the photo contest celebrating the 64th Anniversary of our Mother's Day Tour. We challenged members, friends and neighbors to show us, with an exterior shot, what they think "makes a home a Capitol Hill Home." And the responses were delightful, not just the images but the notes that came with them:

- Accompanying Serena Bolliger's photo of her dog, "What defines a Capitol Hill home is who is waiting for you inside of it."
- "What defines a Capitol Hill home? The front door, especially during the Christmas holidays," per Walter Dean.

- And from Jan Zastrow, "I guess my images are 'anti-glamour'... But still, I think, a legitimate reflection of many unique Capitol Hill homes."

First Place: Robert Weinstein's unique image of a front yard pond, itself a home for fish, reflecting the house behind it (front cover).

Second Place: Stephen Morris's charming photo of twin houses, a common theme on Park Street NE (back cover).

Third Place: Stephanie Cavanaugh's portrait of an ideal garden home, with just a glimpse of the Chippendale railings at 154 11th Street SE (page 4).

Special Mention: Nathaniel Liu's brooding reflection on the fence surrounding the U.S. Capitol—the Home of Democracy (page 2).

These and other images taken by the "runners-up" (Serena Bolliger, Gabrielle Doyle, Patrick Crowley, Mary Lischer, Richard McGarrity, Louise Holland, Crina Mallos, Walter Dean, and Jan Zastrow) are available at: chrs.org/2021-photo-contest-winners.

Many thanks to the *Hill Rag* for co-sponsoring the competition. And thanks to each and every person who submitted an entry. ★

Preservation Café, continued from page 5

the working class at a great profit. By 1871, 81% of their tenants were African Americans who worked across the Washington community.

According to the 2014 DC Historic Alley Buildings Survey, the first alley dwellings were of frame construction with no indoor plumbing or heat. The residents shared water pumps and outhouses, and the lack of a sewerage system contributed to unhealthful and insanitary conditions which later attracted the attention of housing and social reformers.

In 1871, the city's first Board of Health condemned the alley dwellings as unfit for human habitation. They reported that many alleys were "lined on both sides with miserable dilapidated shanties, patched and filthy." The city condemned and demolished

more than 300 alley dwellings and recommended hundreds more for rehabilitation.

During the past several decades, changes in the real estate market, public perception, and zoning have collided to create new spaces within old buildings. During her presentation, Bello shared her notes, photos, and observations from her many walking tours of Capitol Hill alleys.

Careful preservation includes retaining the salient features that define the character of buildings so we can "see a connection with its predecessor." For example, by retaining the stable stall windows, we can see that this building was once a stable that housed horses. She hopes architects also maintain the historic hayloft "window," the vehicular entrance on the bottom,

and accommodate the living space on the second floor.

In addition to preservation, Bello hopes that homeowners and future developers realize the environmental issues that are "too great to ignore." She said that "we should repurpose old buildings and reuse materials to the greatest extent possible because this planet cannot afford not to." She asked, "why tear down a building when you can purpose it?"

Bello ended her presentation by quoting the title of an article by Robert Adam, a fellow architectural historian, "The Greenest Building is the One That Already Exists" (Architect's Journal, 2019). An interactive map with locations of alley dwellings referenced in the May Preservation Cafe has been posted at: chrs.org/adaptive-reuse-alley-buildings-pc. ★



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.

JUNE

22 Tuesday, 6:45 pm

CHRS June Membership Meeting. Bernadette McMahon and Brian Kraft present “Voices From Our Past—Researching Oral Histories of Capitol Hill.” For The WebEx link and more information: chrs.org/researching-oral-histories-mm.

Coming in October: CHRS 2021 House Expo

The CHRS House Expo will be held Saturday, October 30, 2021, from 10 am–4 pm at the Eastern Market North Hall, featuring a wide variety of home service exhibitors. More details at: chrs.org/house-expo-2021.



IMAGE COURTESY CHRS

Houses on Park Place NE were the subject of the Second Place 2021 Capitol Hill Home Photo Contest image by Stephen Morris.