

**Testimony of the Capitol Hill Restoration Society  
before the DC Historic Preservation Review Board on July 1, 2021  
900 South Carolina Avenue, SE HPA 21-324**

My name is Beth Purcell and I am testifying on behalf of the Capitol Hill Restoration Society's Historic Preservation Committee. We reviewed the plans for the project dated June 3, 2021.

This corner brick building, dating from the nineteenth century, is a contributing building. The Hopkins map (1887) shows a brick building on the corner of South Carolina Avenue and 9<sup>th</sup> Street, SE, on lot B (later denominated lot 803), consistent with the applicants' date of construction, 1870.

We are particularly concerned about the proposed changes to the South Carolina elevation.

Boyd's City Directories show a long line of grocers living and working in 900 South Carolina; starting in 1870 with John F. Van Horn.<sup>1</sup> The last and longest-running grocery store owner was Domenic Cuozzo who opened his grocery store in September 1917 and whose family operated it until 1968. D. Cuozzo Groceries was a fixture at this corner of Capitol Hill for 51 years.<sup>2</sup> Cuozzo emigrated from Italy in 1900 and married Elvira DiNenna in 1908<sup>3</sup> Domenic started as a pushcart peddler in Capitol Hill and Kenilworth before he was able to buy his own grocery store. Cuozzo and Elvira had six children, their eldest, Tony Cuozzo, was interviewed in 2001 about his experience growing up and working at the grocery store. The family lived in the rooms in the back and above the grocery store. He remembers that the two front display windows would get too hot to put anything fresh in them, so they were often used to showcase a pyramid display of tea canisters and a black and gold coffee pot and blank cigarette cartons. He also remembers a large drop awning which went out about 10 feet in front of the store as well as a chicken coop in front of the store.<sup>4</sup> The rear stucco kitchen addition predates 1928 when Cuozzo applied to have it covered in stucco and make repairs to it.<sup>5</sup> When a robber killed Tony's younger brother at the store in July 1968, the family closed the store for good.

According to Tony Cuozzo, the front store windows were there in 1917, and always thereafter. In the 1930s the family modified the windows, added the brick base, topped by sheet glass.<sup>6</sup> (The applicants date the store windows from the 1930s.) The tapestry brick used in the window base was popular during this period. A sign permit was issued for this address in 1923 and further confirms a commercial use at that time.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the existing store windows date from the period of significance.

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<sup>1</sup> *Boyd's directory of Washington, Georgetown and Alexandria* 1871. Wm. H. Boyd, 1870. Pg 409. See Figure 3 for a list of occupants found in the Boyd's City Directories 1870-1923.

<sup>2</sup> "Parking Attendant Shot in NW Holdup," *Evening Star* (Washington (DC), District of Columbia), July 19, 1968: 1. NewsBank: Access World News – Historical and Current. Accessed 5 May 2021.

<sup>3</sup> "DC Couple to Mark Golden Anniversary," *Evening Star* (Washington (DC), District of Columbia), February 27, 1958: 9. NewsBank: Access World News – Historical and Current. Accessed 5 May 2021.

<sup>4</sup> Capitol Hill History Project. Interviews, Tony Cuozzo, [www.capitolhillhistory.org](http://www.capitolhillhistory.org). Internet; accessed 5 May 2021.

<sup>5</sup> "37 House Plans Approved this Week," *Evening Star* (online), 24 Mar 1928: 19. NewsBank: Access World News – Historical and Current. Accessed 5 May 2021.

<sup>6</sup> Capitol Hill History Project. Interviews, Tony Cuozzo, [www.capitolhillhistory.org](http://www.capitolhillhistory.org). Internet; accessed 4 May 2021.

<sup>7</sup> DC Building permit # 5383 (12/21/23), sign for lot B in square 945.

The entrance and store windows are visible in photographs from 1949 and 1968 (after the store had closed). Figures 1 and 2. The current configuration closely resembles the 1949 image. This building is a “brick front” store, and has the classic elements celebrated in HPO’s *Design Guidelines of Historic Commercial Buildings*: a recessed entry, masonry window base, display window, transom window. The guidelines state: “The original size, shape, and proportion of display windows and entrances should be maintained.” p. 7.<sup>8</sup>

The building’s historic character- defining features can be preserved as a residence.

Corner stores are an important part of the cultural landscape in Capitol Hill. The building at 900 South Carolina Avenue was purpose-built as a grocery store and served as one for nearly 100 years. Throughout its various additions, it still reads as a corner store. Recent owners ran an art gallery there for nearly 20 years called “The Corner Store Arts” and did extensive research into the store’s different owners and renters.<sup>9</sup> Cultural landscapes study buildings as they have changed over time, and values those changes. One example is Montpelier, James Madison’s plantation operated by enslaved people, reconfigured in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by the duPont family, as “a grander, more varied, and more genteel landscape than it was in Madison’s time.” The property was restored as “James Madison’s Montpelier,” subordinating the duPonts’ Montpelier, and returning “Montpelier to its 1820 appearance: it demolished additions made to the house by the duPont family, removed the stucco exterior to reveal the original brick, restored the original brick exterior, and reconstructed the house’s interior as it appeared during Madison’s tenure as owner.” Some preservationists believed that the duPonts’ contributions should have been better valued.<sup>10</sup> HPO’s *Design Guidelines of Historic Commercial Buildings* support that view. For all these reasons, we believe that the store windows from the 1930s should be preserved.

The applicants’ proposed front elevation reflects what they believe to be the earlier form of the store windows. But because the 1930s store windows date from the period of significance, are supported by eyewitness testimony, two historic photographs, and are a type recommended for preservation in *Design Guidelines of Historic Commercial Buildings*, we believe that the 1930s storefront should be preserved.<sup>11</sup>

The changes to the accessory buildings are appropriate, creating a uniform, attractive look. The proposed metal hairpin fence is a typical Capitol Hill fence. We believe that if the 1930s store windows are preserved, the project will be compatible with the Capitol Hill Historic District.

Thank you for considering our comments.

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<sup>8</sup> Similarly, HPO’s *Introduction to the Historic Preservation Guidelines* quotes the Secretary of the Interior’s regulations: “4. Most properties change over time; those changes that have acquired historic significance in their own right shall be retained and preserved.”

<sup>9</sup> Roy H Mustelier and Kris Swanson. “History/Background of 900 South Carolina Ave, SE (circa 1870) Washington, DC” <http://cornerstorearts.org/History/900SC/History.pdf> Accessed 10 May 2021.

<sup>10</sup> Richard Longstreth, ed., *Cultural Landscapes: Balancing Nature and Heritage in Preservation Practice* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2008). Pp. 1, 4. “Montpelier,” wikipedia. Internet; accessed 4 May 2021.

<sup>11</sup> Applicants’ June 3, 2021 plans, p. 23, include a photograph of a 1930s storefront, with the notation, “This storefront in New York City designed by Raymond Lowy typifies the streamlined look of the 1930’s. Added to an earlier building the front utilizes glass, stainless steel and neon to make a modern statement. This is a good example of a later storefront which has acquired significance and should be retained in any rehabilitation.”



Figure 1. 900 South Carolina Avenue, SE , John P. Wymer, # WY1494, (1949) Historical Society of Washington, DC (DC History Center).



Figure 2. 900 South Carolina Avenue, SE, Emil A. Press, 1625 B, Historical Society of Washington, DC (DC History Center). (1968)



Figure 3: List of Occupants at 900 S. Carolina Avenue found in Boyd's City Directory from 1870-1923

1870 - Van Horn John F, grocer  
1877 - Van Horn Jno F, grocer  
1881 - Van Horn John F, grocer  
1883 - Van Horn John F, grocer  
1887 - Van Horn John F, grocer  
1896 - Hooper Charles R, grocer also Hooker Charles R grocer  
1901 - Gettings Charles B, grocer  
1903 - Gettings Charles A, grocer  
1905 - Roberson Harry C, grocer  
1909 - Roberson Harry C, grocer  
1912 - Roberson Harry C, grocer  
1923 - Cuozzo Dominic, grocer