



CHRS CELEBRATING 60 YEARS OF PRESERVATION

# NEWS

www.chrs.org

December 2022 / January 2023

## CHRS Membership Changes Coming in 2023

By Maygene Daniels

This year the Membership Committee reviewed CHRS membership and benefits comprehensively and developed recommendations for modest changes, which the Board approved in November.

Based on these proposals, the cost of annual memberships in CHRS will remain the same, \$35 for individuals and \$55 for a household of one or two members. Contributions for joining or renewing members will be simplified by combining two donation levels into a single Bronze level at \$100.

The membership process also will be clarified to show that online donation levels also include CHRS membership.

Beginning in 2023, all CHRS members will be able to purchase

an unlimited number of discounted advance House Tour tickets via Eventbrite. We hope that members will use this benefit to introduce new friends and neighbors to Capitol Hill and to the Society via the House Tour. As in the past, CHRS members at the Silver, Gold and Platinum levels will receive complimentary tickets in thanks for exceptional support. Tickets for the 2023 House Tour are not yet available but members will receive information well in advance.

Membership in the Society has tangible and intangible benefits. In addition to discounted house tour tickets, all members receive a subscription to the CHRS Newsletter in print and online, advance notice of walking tours, information on

Preservation Cafés, an invitation to the CHRS fall Garden Party, and the privilege of voting and participating in CHRS initiatives. Intangibly, members can know that they are helping to preserve our historical Capitol Hill neighborhood and the community that it nurtures.

We particularly encourage CHRS members to reach out to friends and neighbors to join us. New members receive copies of the informative CHRS Preservation Guidelines which provide essential information on city rules and best practices for caring for houses within the Capitol Hill Historic District. ✧

### The 2023 House & Garden Tour

We have started to “collect” a group of homes for this year’s House and Garden Tour and it’s looking pretty good! The area of focus seems to be in the southeastern corner of the Historic District—south of East Capitol and east of Eastern Market.

Are you in that area and have ever considered having your home on the Tour? Or do you feel that your garden has really come into its own after all that pandemic-trapped loving care? Or maybe you had a complete redesign of your deck/patio and think it has made your home the best place to entertain? We welcome all volunteers.

We will also be looking for docents and house captains for the tour, so please mark your calendar for Mother’s Day weekend, May 13–14, 2023!

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# A Message from the President

As the year comes to an end, I have many things for which to be thankful, one of which is being able to head this wonderful community organization! The volunteers of CHRS are the most dedicated, hard-working and talented group of people I have ever met. There are preservationists, lawyers, politicians, artists, journalists, large and small businesspeople, archivists (oh so many archivists!), community activists and myriad other professionals. We have retirees, newcomers, old-timers and families of all shapes and types.

Looking back on the past year, we have been busy! We have had

a house tour, garden parties, a photo contest, all kinds of walking tours, online preservation cafes, a house expo and membership meetings. Each week, we field and answer calls and emails to our office about all sorts of things—window replacement, neighborhood construction projects, DC zoning rules, permits, and sometimes even answers to the mystery photo series. Our volunteers represent your interests at community meetings held by developers and government entities and advocate for policies that enhance our neighborhood and quality of life.

When it comes to end-of-year giving, please consider CHRS. We are very careful with our budget and watch every penny, yet we are still recovering from the pandemic that took away two years of our main source of funding—the Mother’s Day house tour. Your gift will help us keep Capitol Hill the vibrant historic neighborhood we all love.

Thank you for your membership and support. Here’s to a happy and healthy 2023! ☆

— Angie Schmidt

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## “The Capitol Hill Home” Photo Contest Returns

By Elizabeth Nelson

Once again, CHRS is sponsoring a photo contest to whet our appetites for the annual Mother’s Day House & Garden Tour: We’re waiting for you to submit images that exemplify your vision of “The Capitol Hill Home.”

Certainly, there’s plenty of “eye candy” competing for your attention. Can’t decide which image you like best? Let us be the judge and send both!

Email your high resolution images (> 1MB), exterior shots only, to [HouseTourCHRS@gmail.com](mailto:HouseTourCHRS@gmail.com); cell phone photos can be texted to (202) 329-7864. Be sure to include your name and address, email address, and the address of the property in the photo. The winner will be awarded two complimentary passes to the House Tour. If you need inspiration, please visit [chrs.org/photo-contest-2023](https://chrs.org/photo-contest-2023)



Patrick Serfass submitted this shot of an architectural detail in 2022.

for details and links to past winning entries. Entries are due Sunday, March 5, 2023. Early notice gives you more time to take that winning shot—

and our next newsletter doesn’t come out until February. ☆

# Capitol Hill Restoration Society (CHRS)

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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## NEWSLETTER

Angie Schmidt and Kelly Vielmo, Editors

## WEBMASTER

Elizabeth Nelson

## OFFICE MANAGER

Jill Uvena Cullinane

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

# A Win for Preservation

By Angie Schmidt

In the July / August 2022 edition of this newsletter, we noted that the DC Preservation League had included the Main Reading Room in the Jefferson Building of the Library of Congress on its most endangered list, mainly due to a proposed change to cut a hole in the center of the room to add a window so that the dome could be seen from a lower level. This oculus would have removed the historic and functional librarian's desk in order to create a viewing window for tourists, even though the dome is currently viewable from the Main Reading Room overlook.

CHRS sent a strongly worded letter to the Architect of the Capitol, J. Brett Blanton on July 22, 2022, pointing out the damage this would create to this historic building and urging them to reconsider this part of their plan for renovating the Reading Room. We have learned, through internal Library communications, that the plan for this oculus has been scrapped. Here's to hoping that the Main Reading Room gets moved from the most endangered list to merely the threatened list! ☆



## Halloween: Tons of Fun!

This year's Halloween celebration was "off the charts"—more kids than in many, many years. Delightful weather was a contributing factor, for sure, but it was also very well publicized. We gave out every last Trick-or-Treat bag and lollipop we had.

Per usual, we had productive conversations with the adults while the children strung their beads. It was a great opportunity to promote the House Expo scheduled for the following day. Many thanks to everyone who helped staff the table!

# Historic Preservation Briefs

By Beth Purcell

The Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB or the Board), considered the following cases at its virtual hearing on November 3 and 17, 2022. 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.

**117 12th Street SE, rear, HPA 22-373.** Two-story alley structure to be built on lot 807 in Square 989, at the rear of 117 12th Street, Lot 807 is also adjacent to Sladen’s Park, lot 804, owned by the District of Columbia (source: [otr.dc.gov](http://otr.dc.gov) property assessment database). The existing shed, a noncontributing building, would be demolished. In the new building there would be parking for two automobiles on the first story

(with garage doors on the west and south elevations) and an apartment on the second story.

Sladen’s Walk is a wide alley, and the project would be partly visible from 12th Street SE. The applicants re-designed the project in response to neighbors’ opposition. We believed that the windows should be reduced in size, but that the project was compatible with the Capitol Hill Historic District.

Board members decided that to better blend with the existing alley buildings, the mixed brick and wood cladding should be revised with brick as the predominant material with wood detailing, and that the large Chicago-style windows should be replaced with smaller punched windows. The project will return to the Board.

**616 Lexington Place NE, HPA 22-486,** concept/ third floor addition on roof. We noted that the plans were so deficient that it was impossible to evaluate the project. The Board did not vote, and instructed the applicant to return with improved, detailed plans.

**1332 Independence Avenue SE, HPA 23-038,** repairs and addition to rooftop. This rowhouse has been severely neglected -- two trees are growing out of the front elevation. We urged that special care be taken to stabilize the house during rehabilitation. This case was taken off the calendar and referred to staff.



TOP: House at 616 Lexington Place SE.  
BOTTOM: Neglected rowhouse at 1332 Independence Avenue SE.

On November 3, the Board approved the following case on the consent calendar:

- **813 Massachusetts Avenue NE, HPA 22-438,** concept/ third floor addition on roof. ★

Interested in learning more about historic district designation?  
Contact CHRS at [info@chrs.org](mailto:info@chrs.org).

ALL IMAGES COURTESY BETH PURCELL



Rear of 117 12th Street SE to be replaced by two-story alley dwelling.

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# November Preservation Café: Learn to Recognize the Ghosts of Capitol Hill

By Christine Mullins

**Y**ou don't need to be an expert to see the many ghosts who continue to live in our houses on Capitol Hill, said Justine Bello, longtime-resident, architectural conservator, and lover of all things related to old buildings during the November CHRS Preservation Café. Just open your eyes!

Create a new way of looking at the buildings that surround us to learn about their stories, suggests Bello. You don't need expertise, you just need to expand your awareness, build a new vocabulary, and practice.

Capitol Hill is old. Today, we can see the same fundamental street system L'Enfant laid out in 1791.

Even our square numbers are the same as those assigned some 200 years ago. In a simple yet profound way, this street map has impacted how we have built our buildings, alleyways and parks. For example, are our row houses long and narrow like they are in New York or square like they are in Chicago? It probably depends on the shape of your block.

Bello says we can increase our awareness by learning how to read an old building. Cast your eyes upward when you walk through your alley. What is "hidden in plain view"? If you are lucky, a cast iron marker may tell you when the structure was built or restored. Can you see any holes or

changes in the color of brick that may signify a missing porch, the letters of a partial sign, or windows or doors that previous homeowners may have bricked in? Did the owner try to artfully use the same kind or color of brick? Or did they simply fill the hole in with cinder blocks because price or time may have been an issue?

Different layers of use could indicate cohabitation or a prior business. What about the shutters an owner did not bother to remove prior to painting, or porches propped up with all kinds of materials. Water always wins, cautioned Bello, when owners layer foreign materials on top of brick, whether it is paint or faux stone siding.

Try to increase your old building vocabulary. Remember, says Bello, that form follows function. "The shape of the building or object usually relates to what it did." Of 302 stables identified in Washington's alleyways, Capitol Hill has 82 former stables in its midst. During her presentation, Bello showed a photo of a building that had several windows positioned at the perfect height for horses to poke their heads out and get some fresh air.

Do you see a long beam above a doorway that could have held a pulley system to hoist hay for storage on the second story? In many old stables, garage doors have replaced the carriage entrance. Why did Capitol Hill have so many stables? Compared to other parts of the city, like Georgetown, Capitol Hill has many long, wide alleys, such as between 13th and 14th streets, that provided enough room to house horses, carriage houses, alley homes,

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## Office Cleanup Continues

By Angie Schmidt

**S**ince this summer, we have undertaken a major cleanup of our office space, which has led to some interesting discoveries. We have been printing "mystery photos" in this newsletter of large-sale photos we have found in our office that we don't have explanations for (more on that in the next issue).

We have also found a complete printed second set of "Beyond the Boundaries," which is a survey of all the buildings in the general Capitol Hill area, both inside and outside of the Historic District. It is a great research tool (we also have it in digital form on our website), but it is enormous—a full set is over twenty 4-inch wide binders.

We contacted Gelman Library at George Washington University, where

the CHRS archives already reside, and much to our delight, they were excited to take possession of our extra set. They were particularly happy that it was in print, as so many things are only available online. So I loaded up my car and brought them over on November 2, 2022. A win-win—we have more space in our small office and Gelman has another bit of Capitol Hill history in their catalogue!

If anyone is interested in this research, it can be found digitally via [chrs.org](http://chrs.org) or, if you don't feel like a trip to Foggy Bottom, you can contact us at [caphrs420@gmail.com](mailto:caphrs420@gmail.com) and we can make arrangements for an in-person session with the printed material in our office. ★

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*Continued page 6*

# Thank You, CHRS Supporters!

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

## Contributors

### *Annual Appeal*

Douglas Thomas

## Memberships

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Michael Singer

### *Bronze*

Scott Davis and Jennifer Cate

### *Silver*

Delia and Michael Neuman

### *Platinum*

Jack and Micky Penkoske

## Preservation Café, *continued from page 5*

and other sorts of dwellings. To learn more, take a moment to read this great overview, The DC Historic Alley Buildings Survey at <https://planning.dc.gov/publication/dc-historic-alley-buildings-survey>.

Take a look inside your Capitol Hill house. For example, exposed brick which is newly fashionable may uncover holes in the brick and masonry walls that indicate prior floor joists or ceilings. Did the owners cover the transom with wood or brick, or open it up to let more light inside? Take a look in your yard. Can you see where an owner may have moved the fence line? Bello says that when we make renovations, we tend to dump the stuff we remove nearby because we are too busy or can't be bothered to move it. These remnants provide clues to a not-so-distant past.

In addition, said Bellow, as you walk around Capitol Hill you will see several obvious large ghosts.

We now treasure the Old Naval Hospital, which was built in 1864, but quickly outlived its use and was later left in disrepair. The Hill Center was re-purposed in 2011 and has become a vibrant center for our community.

The Commandant's House in the Marine Barracks is an interesting place because it is one of the few buildings in Washington that survived the War of 1812. Supposedly, while most of the city was burning, people were eating dinner inside. You wouldn't know how old this precious building is by looking at it since it is so well maintained and has undergone several renovations. Bello said she was part of an historic paint study and found some walls had been painted to look like they were brick.

Some of our ghosts have completely disappeared. Providence Park, also known as X Park, was the site of Providence Hospital from

1861 until it moved to Varnum Street in NW in 1956. The hospital that remained was demolished in 1962, divided into 14 land parcels, and transformed into the green space, where many Hill children have learned to play soccer and t-ball, after several development plans fell through. But take a look at most maps and you will see a fact that points to the hospital's roots: the park is not featured in green as most other parks. Bello mentioned that the Washington Brewery in Navy Yard suffered a similar disappearance.

Bello showed photos of how remnants of the US Capitol—both the campus and the building itself—have been dispensed with to different quadrants of the city. For example, two gate houses and eight gate posts dating to the Charles Bullfinch period have survived: the gatehouses and four gate posts are along Constitution Avenue, NW; another four gate posts are located at the New York Avenue entrance to the National Arboretum.

Most of us have seen the 22 massive columns, originally part of Capitol's East Portico. The Aquia Creek sandstone columns were removed in 1956 when the East Front of the Capitol was substantially remodeled. They laid in purgatory at the Capitol Power Plant until 1987, when they were finally relocated to the Arboretum. Similarly, hikers in Rock Creek Park are privy to a small mountain of the Capitol's sandstone blocks from the original quarry, scattered behind a hidden maintenance yard. But the Architect of the Capitol still owns the stones just in case they need to use these precious stones in a future renovation!

Visit the CHRS website to watch a recording of Bellos full presentation at [chrs.org/architectural-ghosts-pc](https://chrs.org/architectural-ghosts-pc). ★

# November Walking Tours: A Tale of Two Seasons

The November walking tours were definitely “a tale of two seasons” — Saturday was almost balmy, with several participants in short-sleeved shirts. Sunday started out just a bit chilly but half-way through the SE Alleys Tour, the wind howled in. Both the leaves on the trees and the walkers were shivering, for the first time in months. You never know what weather you are going to get when initially scheduling the tours!



The tour guides reported enthusiastic attention and probing followup questions. Interest in the walking tours continues, so we'll offer them again in the spring, including the new, family-friendly Capitol Hill History Tours. We want to build another generation of Capitol Hill appreciators! Thanks to the guides: Undine Nash, Elizabeth Nelson, Beth Purcell and Angie Schmidt. ★



ALL IMAGES THIS PAGE COURTESY ELIZABETH NELSON



## 2022 CHRS House Expo

We had a great time at the 2022 CHRS House Expo and enjoyed seeing so many of our neighbors!



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 or postponements will be posted as they are known.*



CHRS CELEBRATING 60 YEARS OF PRESERVATION

### DECEMBER

**14** Wednesday, 6 pm  
Board meeting, Northeast Library,  
330 7th Street NE.

**15** Thursday, 7:30 pm  
Zoning Committee Meeting, Kirby  
House, 420 10th Street SE. Co-Chairs: Beth  
Hague, (202) 714-9523, and Nick Alberti.

#### **Please consider joining CHRS!**

Annual membership is only \$35 and includes the newsletter, a set of historic guidelines, and early access to events, including our annual House and Garden Tour. Visit: [chrs.org](http://chrs.org).

### JANUARY

**2** Monday, 6:30 pm  
Historic Preservation Committee meeting,  
420 10th Street SE, first floor conference  
room. The Chair is Beth Purcell, 544-0178.

**17** Tuesday, 6:30 pm  
Preservation Cafe: “The Story Behind Our  
Schools” with Kimberly Springle,  
Executive Director, Charles Sumner  
School Museum and Archives, and Jen  
Harris, Executive Director. Hosted on  
Zoom. Details and Zoom link: [chrs.org/  
story-behind-our-schools-pc](http://chrs.org/story-behind-our-schools-pc).

**18** Wednesday, 6 pm  
Board meeting, Northeast Library,  
330 7th Street NE.

**19** Thursday, 7:30 pm  
Zoning Committee Meeting, Kirby  
House, 420 10th Street SE. Co-Chairs: Beth  
Hague, (202) 714-9523, and Nick Alberti.

### MARCH

**5** Sunday  
Photo Contest 2023: “The Capitol Hill  
Home.” Entries due Sunday, March 5,  
2023. Detail: [chrs.org/photo-contest-2023](http://chrs.org/photo-contest-2023).