

Tourist Homes on East Capitol Street

By Beth Purcell

Visitors to Washington fifty years ago could stay in a “tourist home” where they were offered a furnished room with a bed and access to a bathroom on the same floor. They would eat their meals elsewhere. Amenities could include running water in the room, extra showers, oil heat, hot water, air conditioning, and parking spaces or a garage. Some tourist homes doubled as rooming houses and welcomed long-term residents. Large houses on Capitol Hill, especially on East Capitol Street, convenient to the Capitol and other points of interest, were suitable for tourist homes. Tourist homes flourished approximately between 1920 and 1960.

We found advertising postcards for two tourist homes: The Senate Tourist Home, 320 East Capitol Street and Cochran’s Tourist Home, 625 East Capitol Street.

Mrs. Mary J. Wilkerson built the house at 320 East Capitol Street in 1877 and lived there with her maid. By 1893 she was suffering from insanity and died by suicide by jumping off a moving steamship. Earlier residents also included Mrs. Ada M. Bittenbender, active in the temperance movement (1890). The house was a tourist home as early as 1905.¹ Frank L. Sizer and his wife Mary K. Sizer operated the Senate Tourist Home at 320 East Capitol Street from 1932 to 1951. It had 10

furnished rooms, six bathrooms, plus hot water heat and air conditioning.²

625 East Capitol Street was a tourist home as early as 1909.³ Between approximately 1940 and 1959 Avonia H. Cochran and his wife Emma Sanders Cochran ran Cochran’s Tourist Home, “a home away from home.” They advertised modern conveniences and air-cooled rooms. At some point 625 and 627 (both built in 1887) were combined. When offered for sale together in 1961, they had 25 attractively furnished rooms and seven baths. By 1981 625 East Capitol Street housed 15 male high-school age Congressional pages. Investigations revealed shortcomings in supervising



IMAGE COURTESY BETH PURCELL

LEFT: Postcard of the Senate Tourist Home, 320 East Capitol Street, NE [The Dexter Press, Pearl River, NY (1932–1951). Cardcow.com 731280].
RIGHT: 320 East Capitol Street NE today.

the pages, who allegedly skipped school and attended wild parties. The Congressional page system ended in 2011.⁴

Today both houses are private homes.

Tourist homes operated at other locations in the city and on Capitol Hill. Other East Capitol Street tourist homes included: 304 (Hammond's Tourist Home), 317, 608, 631, 640 (Money's Tourist Home), and 643.⁵ ★

¹ "Frenzied Leap to Death," *Washington Post*, 3 Sept. 1893, 3. "Personal Paragraphs," *Washington Post*, 16 Oct. 1890, 4. "Visitors Blew Out the Gas," *Washington Post*, 4 Mar. 1905, 3. (Visitors accidentally inhaled gas from gas lights.)

² "Frank L. Sizer, 75, Tourist Hotelman," *Evening Star*, 22 Sept. 1957, 62. Cardcow.com 731280.

³ Cardcow.com 855266. "Tourist Center Woman Robbed of \$12,000 Ring," *Evening Star* 7 Oct. 1959, 73. "Hospitals are kept busy," *Evening Star*, 4 Mar. 1909, 18. (An out-of-town visitor staying at 625 East Capitol Street was injured while boarding a streetcar.) Classified advertisement, *Evening Star*, 18 June 1961, 63.

⁴ Walter Pincus and Joe Pichirallo, "Allegations Focus Congress' Attention on Reforms in Supervision of Pages," *Washington Post*, 19 July 1982, A2. "Pages of the United States House of Representatives." *Wikipedia*. Internet; accessed 19 Apr. 2023.

⁵ *Evening Star* classified advertisements, *City Directories*.



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LEFT: Postcard of Cochran's Tourist Home, 625–627 East Capitol Street SE c. (1940–1959). [MWM Co., Aurora, MO. Cardcow.com 85526.] RIGHT: 625–627 East Capitol Street NE today.



Celebrating the Fourth of July on the Hill

As part of our ongoing outreach efforts, Society volunteers fielded a contingent in this year's Capitol Hill 4th of July Parade. Out of concern for the environment, we substituted consumable lollipops for the plastic Mardi Gras beads flung in days of yore. These were well received and are much lighter to carry and pull along in our garden cart.

Hip-Hip-Huzzah! to event organizers, the Jeanne Phil Meg Team at Compass Realty—they made it look easy. And many thanks to everyone who marched with us. More photos can be seen at chrs.org/capitol-hill-july-4th-parade-2023.