

2025: An Anniversary Year to Remember

By Angie Schmidt

This year we marked the 70th anniversary of Capitol Hill Restoration Society, and I hope that you were able to enjoy some of our special celebratory events. It was so nice to see many of you in person.

We had our usual online Preservation Cafés and committee meetings in the winter months, but boy did we get going once spring arrived! In April, we held an evening reception to celebrate 70 years in the North Hall of Eastern Market with displays of each of the decades of CHRS, complete with refreshments from the vendors in the South Hall. A week later we held a party at the Coldwell Banker offices for the winners and judges of the revamped Photo Contest.

May, of course, was the House & Garden Tour (almost 1400 attendees, the biggest in recent memory!) followed by the President's Party to thank all of the home owners and volunteers. In June, we had a weekend daytime membership meeting at Congressional Cemetery, with history tours and our very own ice cream truck for treats afterwards. September was the fall membership meeting at the Hill Center with yet another reception and some very interesting photos from our office archives as a "show and tell."

In October, we treated members to Ghost Tours with professional tour guide and CHRS member, Robert Pohl. The House Expo was November 1, with yet another good turnout and beautiful weather. And we just recently had our first in-person Preservation Café since the pandemic, and enjoyed learning all about the restoration of the building and organ at St. Joseph's Catholic Church.

All of this, plus the roll-out of our new website, a robust social media presence, spring and fall volunteer-led walking tours, the 4th of July parade and sponsorship of the Art Walk. We also continued our work to promote and protect our neighborhood through our Historic Preservation and Zoning Committees, outreach to other historic districts and participated in community meetings about the RFK site, Union Station and the DC 2050 Comprehensive Plan.

I feel proud and thankful to be part of this all-volunteer community organization—I dare say the best in DC. So many good things happen in our neighborhood when we work together.

Here's to a happy New Year! ★



IMAGE COURTESY ZACH BOONE

Attendees perused exhibits and historical documents from the CHRS archives at the 70th Anniversary reception at Eastern Market in April 2025.

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New Year's Resolution: Volunteer with CHRS!

CHRS runs on volunteers. We are busy with all kinds of projects and issues and we would like to activate more members (and also not overuse the active volunteers we already have). Depending on the role, the monthly commitment could be as little as four hours a month, with a lot of flexibility. Right now, we're most in need of the following roles:

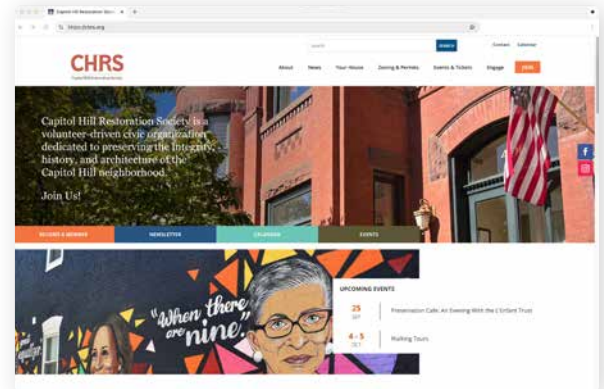
Website. We are looking for someone familiar with Wordpress to help maintain our redesigned website.

Newsletter. Miss the good old days of print? Edit the newsletter! (Both the website and newsletter positions would be in the Communications

Committee, and would have people to support/train them.)

Public safety. Public safety, as far as CHRS is concerned, focuses on matters like sidewalk/road safety, public space lighting, surveillance cameras and any issues adjacent to these. Since we do not currently have one person solely focusing on these issues, any help would be appreciated.

Interested? Get in touch with us at caphrs420@gmail.com. Volunteering with CHRS is a great way to share



your talents, meet your neighbors, and be a part of preserving the neighborhood we all call home. ★

2026 CHRS Photo Contest

By Matt Handverger



Gary Mintz took last year's winning photo, *Wednesday Night at Mr. Henry's*.

The 2026 CHRS Photo Contest is (almost) upon us! More details will follow in our next newsletter issue, but we can share that once again, the contest will be open to all ages, *and* the winning photos will be displayed

in the windows of the Coldwell Banker office. The deadline for entries will be March 1, 2026. So, if you see something particularly interesting around the neighborhood, please capture it in a photo! ★



Halloween 2025 was very fun and very crowded, as usual! Many thanks to Bobbi Krengel, Jean Marie Neal, and Kathryn Powers who joined Beth Purcell and Elizabeth Nelson at the CHRS table. We entertained the children, handed out trick-or-treat bags and talked with the chaperoning adults about CHRS.

Capitol Hill Restoration Society (CHRS)

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To reach any of the above, please contact the CHRS office at (202) 543-0425 or via e-mail at: caphrs420@gmail.com.

ABOUT CHRS

The Capitol Hill Restoration Society is a nonprofit, volunteer organization devoted to protecting, preserving, and celebrating our historic Capitol Hill neighborhood.

Founded in 1955, CHRS is a pioneer in the urban preservation movement. CHRS was instrumental in securing Capitol Hill's designation in 1976 as a national historic district. Since then, CHRS has worked continuously to protect historic spaces and to enhance life on the Hill.

CHRS is driven by members who love their neighborhood and want to preserve and share the dynamic story of Capitol Hill for future generations. Come join us!

Learn more and join at chrs.org

CHRS Zoning Briefs

By Nick Alberti

On November 5, 2025, three members of the CHRS Zoning Committee met to discuss two cases. Representatives from both cases participated to present their proposals. The Committee voted to support all requests for relief.

BZA #21388, 617 Massachusetts Avenue NE. The Committee voted to support (2-1) the applicant's request for a special exception for the rear addition requirements of Subtitle E § 207.5 and to support (3-0) the applicant's request for a special exception for the lot occupancy requirements of Subtitle E §210.1. The applicant is proposing to construct a two-story plus basement rear addition to an existing, attached two-story with basement principal dwelling in the RF-1 zone.

The rear of the house currently extends 6.4' beyond the inner rear wall of the dog leg of the adjacent property to the east. The proposed rear addition will extend an additional 9.1' beyond that wall, for a total of 15.5', which is 5.5' beyond the maximum allowed by right (10'), but will not extend past the furthest rear wall of the adjacent residence.

Lot occupancy will increase from 51.4% to 62.3%, which is consistent with the 70% maximum allowed by a special exception in the RF-1 zone. To date, three letters of support from neighbors have been filed, including both adjacent neighbors.

The BZA hearing is currently scheduled for December 10, 2025.

BZA #21391, 1231 F Street NE.

The Committee voted to support (3-0) the applicant's request for a special exception for the maximum building area requirements of Subtitle E §5003.1, and to support (3-0) the applicant's request for a special exception for the accessory apartment use requirements of Subtitle U §301.1(e). The applicant is proposing to construct a second-story accessory dwelling unit to an existing, detached accessory garage in the rear of an existing, attached two-story with basement principal dwelling unit in the RF-1 zone.

The Committee notes that proposed construction will not change the front façade and footprint of the building. Also, the proposed height is within zoning regulations, and sun-shadow studies show no adverse impacts on adjacent properties. The Committee feels that the proposed addition is consistent with the character of the neighborhood.

The owner's agent informed the Committee that there are two residences in the principal building. With the addition of a dwelling unit in the accessory building, there would be three dwelling units on the lot. This total exceeds the number allowed by right. However, the BZA notice does not indicate that relief is required for this deviation from matter of right uses. The Committee was curious about this apparent inconsistency with matter of right uses and will convey this concern to the BZA.

The BZA hearing is currently scheduled for December 10, 2025. ★

Historic Preservation Briefs

By Beth Purcell

Interested in learning more about
historic district designation?

Contact CHRS at info@chrs.org.

The Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB or the Board), considered the following cases at its virtual hearings on October 30 and November 20, 2025. 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.

605 Constitution Avenue NE, HPA 25-281. This contributing building, together with its twin, 607 Constitution Avenue NE, was built as a semi-detached one-story brick building in 1915 for A. C. Spalding and L. Ciatto. F. Dibbella added a second story in 2021 pursuant to Permit B2111670. The second story is minimally visible from the north side of Constitution Avenue.

In 2025 the applicant proposed to add a third story. At the HPRB hearing on June 26, 2025, the Board directed the applicants to study a proposal from staff:

“The staff found the June plans to be ... incompatible with the height, massing and proportional relationship with the underlying building and would encourage the applicants to develop a second story that extends forward to be flush with the first floor [a popup] (and, if desired, a third floor set back to where it is not visible from street view).”

We believed the staff’s recommendation was misguided and that the existing additions already max-out the expansions to this small building. In addition, the proposed popup would definitely be visible from public space.

The staff report cites 1323 and 1331 Constitution Avenue NE (HPA 12-260, 13-186) as authority for adding a popup on this one-story commercial building. It is important to understand

the context and reasoning for the decisions in 1323 and 1331 Constitution Avenue. These two buildings were the last in a row of 10 one-story commercial buildings, eight of which were in poor condition. The applicant

there argued successfully that the row had lost its integrity, and therefore the Board should allow transforming these one-story buildings into two-story buildings, and the Board granted applications to enlarge these eight one-story buildings.

1331 Constitution Avenue, which had retained its integrity, was the last remaining one-story commercial building in this block of 10 one-story commercial buildings which one-by-one had been lost or transformed by large additions.¹ The Board’s approval of a pop-up at 1331 Constitution Avenue should be viewed in this sad context. The Board never viewed these popups at 1323 and 1331 Constitution Avenue NE as examples of design excellence that should be emulated. Instead, the results in 1323 and 1331 Constitution Avenue NE should be viewed as a loss to the historic district and should not be celebrated or followed.

If a popup at 605 Constitution Avenue is approved, this case would set a precedent for building popups on other one-story buildings in the Capitol Hill Historic District,² which we listed in our comments:

- 1220 Pennsylvania Avenue SE (HPA 16-441)
- 1211 and 1213 E Street SE
- 201–207 13th Street SE
- one-story commercial buildings on the 700 block of F Street NE (staff report)

We believe that there are additional one-story buildings on Capitol Hill.

ANC 6C opposed the project and several neighbors testified against the project. The Board was favorably influenced by the heavy cornice spanning both twins, which would be

IMAGE COURTESY/BETH PURCELL



The twin houses at 605–607 Constitution Avenue NE.

¹ Two one-story Shotgun houses at 518 and 520 9th Street SE received much more sympathetic treatment: rear two-story additions (not over the historic building).

² The one-story laundry at 601 Massachusetts Avenue NE, a noncontributing building, was replaced by a new building. HPA 23-040.

A “Wireless” Solution

By Matt Handverger

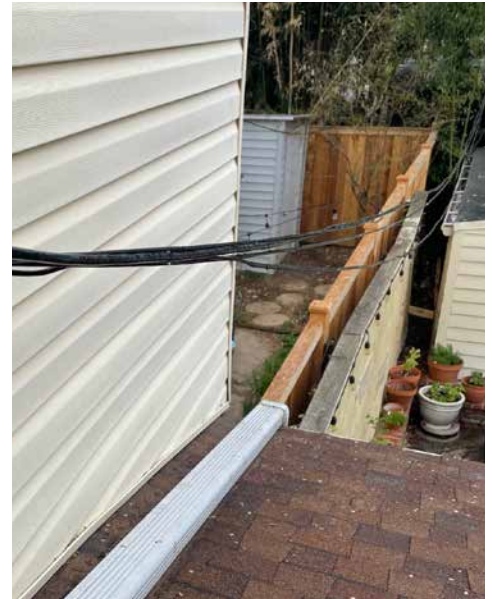
If you look in any alley in DC, you might see a jumble of wires. It's no wonder it's called “spaghetti in the sky” by some local cable installers in DC. And if your house is anything like mine, you probably have a handful of wires coming to your house from that alley. When you take a closer look, you might notice they're not actually going into the house; they're only attached to an eye hook or screwed in place, not serving any purpose other than a highway for squirrels and a hangout spot for some birds. That was just like my house, and I didn't want them there anymore.

Now, I'm handy, but I'm no electrician and I know my limits, so I wasn't going to tackle this myself. But did you know there's a DC agency that can help with this? The Office of Cable Television, Film, Music, and Entertainment (OCTFME) will handle it quickly. I made one phone call, and about 24 hours later, the wires were gone! I asked the

tech what they were—it was from a phone company that had gone out of business more than 40 years ago!

My backyard is now wireless, and my view of the sky is starting to look

like it did when my house was built more than 150 years ago. Yours can too—visit entertainment.dc.gov or call (202) 671-0066. ★



HP Briefs, *continued from page 4*

preserved. The Board approved the application with the popup.

The result is that we have an augmented bad precedent for a popup on a one-story building (1331 and now also 605 Constitution), and a decision that could be cited for adding a popup to a two-story building.

The Board approved these cases on its consent calendar:

- **1105 10th Street SE**, HPA 25-419, concept/four story addition.
- **603–605 Pennsylvania Avenue SE**, HPA 26-53, subdivision
- **409 East Capitol Street SE**, HPA 25-323 (rear addition approved) reconsideration requested. The Chair made a motion to reconsider the case but the motion was not seconded. As the motion failed, the Board will not reconsider the case. ★

Are you following CHRS on social media? We're always active—keep up to speed while you wait for the next newsletter!



CapitolHillRestorationDC



@CapHRS

November Preservation Café: Reviving an Historic Capitol Hill Pipe Organ

By Libby Quaid

Our November Preservation Café featured an up-close—and inside!—look at the newly restored 1891 pipe organ at St. Joseph's Catholic Church.

Attendees were invited to climb the narrow, twisting staircase to the organ loft to see reinstallation work in progress and examine the beautiful wooden exterior case, inner workings and towering pipes along with the manuals (also known as keyboards) and pedalboard.

The historic instrument is one of perhaps 200 surviving organs built by Boston-based Hook & Hastings in the 19th Century. Fewer still are in largely original condition like the one at St. Joe's, a Gothic Revival church built of red Seneca stone by the German immigrant community on Third Street NE just steps from the U.S. Capitol grounds.

The St. Joe's organ has endured generations of wear and environmental changes the original builders could not have anticipated, such as extreme swings in humidity



IMAGES COURTESY LIBBY QUAID

levels and generally drier air from modern heating and cooling systems that result in cracking and splitting of organ parts.

By the time Music Director and Organist Maria Balducci arrived in 2020, the organ was increasingly unreliable. Notes would continue sounding after a key was released. Deteriorating components led to wind leaks and other trouble, she said.

"The wind pressure was never big enough to really play with its full stops," said Balducci, who frequently

found herself climbing inside the organ, sometimes scaling the 130-year-old ladder that came with it, to find and fix problems.

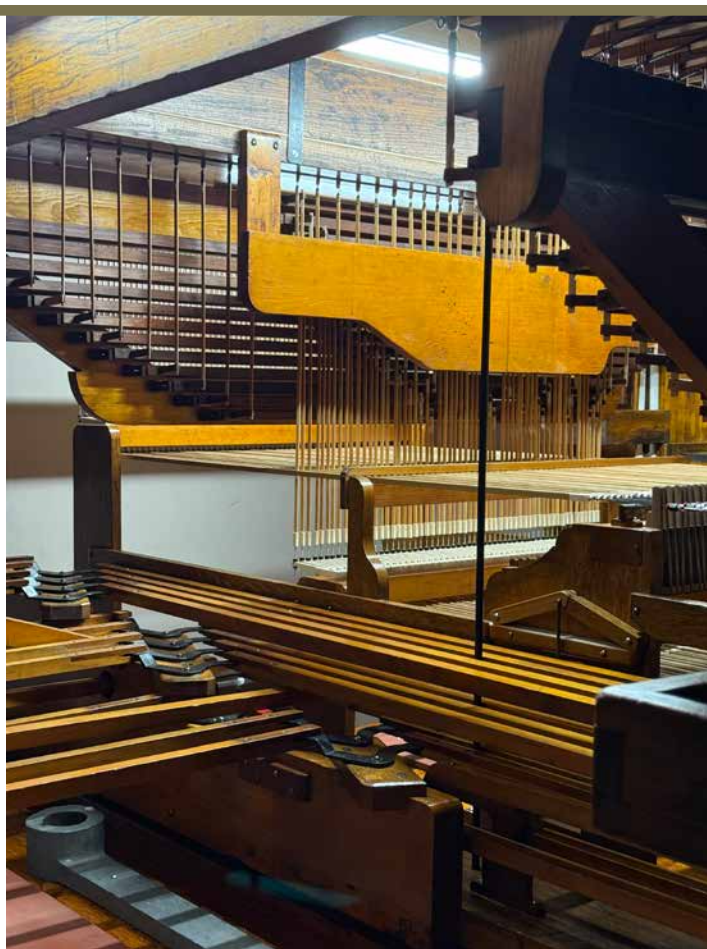
The need for maintenance kept growing, and the long-term survival of the organ was at risk.

Enter David E. Wallace & Son Pipe Organ Builders of Gorham, Maine. With guidance from an expert in Baltimore, David Storey, the parish reached out to several organ builders and ultimately chose Wallace & Son, which had experience with organs of the same era and big enthusiasm for the project, which took more than a year and cost around \$600,000. St Joe's has used a smaller 1875 Hook & Hastings organ throughout the renovation.

"We were overjoyed," said Nick Wallace, the eponymous "& Son," to find that an 1891 organ had escaped alterations, however well-intentioned, that alter an instrument's historic craftsmanship.

St. Joseph's Music Director and Organist Maria Balducci (left) and organ builder Nick Wallace (right) speak about the intricacies of the repair to the church's historic pipe organ.





Organ Rededication Concert

St. Joseph's Catholic Church will hold an organ rededication concert in January, kicking off a series of monthly organ concerts throughout 2026:

Sunday, January 11, 2026 • 4 pm
313 2nd Street NE

The performance of eight works will include the hymn "O God, Our Help in Ages Past" and Johann Sebastian Bach's Prelude and Fugue in E-flat Major, BWV 552, known as the "St. Anne."

He described the dismantling of the organ and its transportation to and from Maine. But he focused on the months of work to fully clean and repair the organ, restore the feeder bellows and handpump, restore and

repaint the towering pipes, add a trombone pedal stop, refinish the exterior case and much more. He said the project was joyful and deeply meaningful, choking up as he explained its impact on himself and the restoration team.

Some of the work required making new tools to do repairs. Wooden parts that needed replacement were

recreated from salvaged wood in some cases and new wood in others. Many types of wood were used in the organ's original construction, including poplar, cedar and cherry.

Nick's father, David, repainted the soaring facade pipes by hand, recreating their historic patterns and colors. "What we see now is as close as possible to the original design," Nick said. ★

House Expo 2025 Helps Homeowners

By Angie Schmidt

We had a great turnout for the 2025 House Expo held November 1 at Eastern Market's North Hall. It was nice to see so many of our neighbors and to hear about your upcoming projects. ★

THANK YOU TO OUR 2025 HOUSE EXPO VENDORS

Abay Ironworks
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Coldwell Banker Realty
Chris Cox,
First Savings Mortgage
Tory Hunnicutt,
Home Inspection
Image Painting
International Dark Skies
Joel Truitt Builders
Maggio Roofing
Merlino Construction Group
Mike Jones,
State Farm Insurance
N&M House Detectives
Connor Ryan, Handyman
Sierra Club Happy Houses
Studio Lyew
Sunshine Brickpointing
W.S. Jenks
Wilcox Electric
Woodland Estate & Title

Capitol Hill Village
DC DOB
DC DOEE
DC Fire and EMS
EMCAC
Hill Center
Metropolitan Police



IMAGES COURTESY MATT HANDVERGER AND ELIZABETH NELSON

2026 House and Garden Tour: Spotlight on Southeast

By Fynnette Eaton, Jackie Krieger and Angie Schmidt

The House Tour Committee is looking for a few good houses in the area of SE between 1st and 10th Street, south of East Capitol Street. We have been reaching out to members and neighbors, but if we haven't contacted you and you would like to have your house considered, please contact us. Or if you have a green thumb and a big plan for this spring's garden, we would love to hear about your project. Send us a note at: caphillhousetour@gmail.com.

And as always, we will be looking for docents and house captains for the Tour. No experience is required and all training will be provided. All docents will receive a complimentary pass for the Tour. Please mark your calendar for May 9–10! ★



Thank You, CHRS Supporters!

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

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Jack & Micky Penkoske

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Platinum

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Review: *The Row House in Washington, DC: A History*

By David Pelizzari

Alison K. Hoagland's *The Rowhouse in Washington, DC: A History* covers a favorite CHRS topic in four ways: architecturally, municipally, economically and sociologically. Despite these weighty perspectives, she offers a brisk and appealing read, filled with surprising background tidbits, absorbing details and clear explanations.

This past November, her expertise packed the house at the Overbeck lecture, and that event now prompts this closer look at her book, which addresses the unique flavor of the DC rowhouse in all of the District's quadrants, not just Capitol Hill. That said, the Hill is repeatedly featured in Hoagland's review, and CHRS readers will encounter, again and again, our own allies, addresses and issues as the story unfolds.

The book follows a topical structure that is very different from our usual way of discussing Hill houses. Hoagland hones in on interior layouts rather than the cosmetic façades we often highlight. Of course stylistic schemes from Georgian through every kind of revival to modernist all get their mention, but the power of her study derives from the floorplans just behind those street-facing differences. She is looking at the functional guts of the houses that

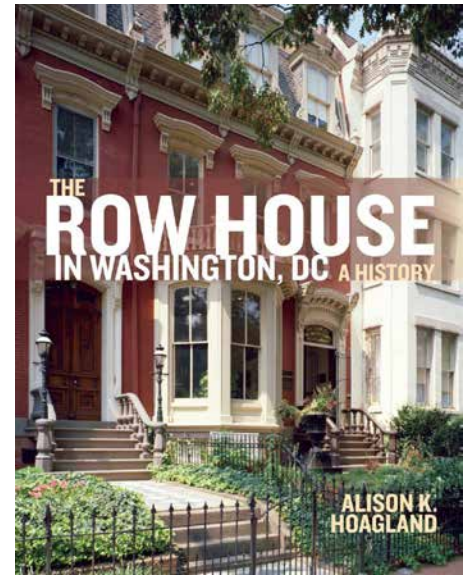
originally made them marketable at the moment they were built.

The hierarchy of her chapter titles makes the point: "Six Plans" is the opening chapter, and shows us six generalized layout diagrams that provided the chief appeal for initial buyers—and still today offer the clearest way to understand the evolution of the rowhouse. That first chapter is followed by "Constraints" (tight squeezes of geography and urban planning); "Façades" (only third in importance); "Health and Comfort" (interior necessities and amenities); "Building and Selling" (how a "rowhouse" becomes a "townhouse" through up-labeling); and finally "Owning and Renting" (where race and economics add their pains and pressures to the story).

Three insightful themes run throughout—"insightful" because we need a clear explainer like Hoagland to teach us what was really very obvious all along.

First, virtually all rowhouses on Capitol Hill and elsewhere in DC were built speculatively for the middle class. Period. One-, two-, three-, four-, or five-story—it really doesn't matter. These magnitudes of size, which we use now to measure the prestige and value of our houses, are all part of one giant middle segment in the

housing spectrum. Outside that middle spectrum lay, at one end, shanties and huts for the impoverished (now largely vanished), and, at the other, bespoke Gilded Age mansions for patricians (now largely repurposed as embassies and elite institutions). Rowhouses—no matter how many floors,



no matter how ornamented—were devised and built on spec, individually or in clusters, to tempt that big middle of homebuyers who led their working lives between the humblest and most grandiose extremes.

Second, it was those floorplans mentioned above that triggered sales and triaged potential first buyers. It was not the fancifying effect of façades that made the rowhouse evolve, but floorplan innovations. Of course floorplans entailed their own demographic filtering: one floor = humblest working class; five floors = bourgeois bureaucrat with servants to make the house function. But since virtually all rowhouses were built on spec, the ballooning population of buyers had to choose what suited their circumstances from among pre-designed and ready-made residences. They didn't individually sit down with an architect/builder over tea to discuss dream-house fantasies before the shovel went into the ground.

Third—an ancillary, interesting fact—rowhouses inherently required rackets and unceasing neighborhood

IMAGE COURTESY DAVID PELIZZARI



Capitol Hill Greenscapes: That Time the Nathanael Greene Statue Fell Over

By Libby Quaid

A CHRS member, after reading about the history of Stanton Park in the October issue of this newsletter, reminded us that the Nathanael Greene statue once toppled off its pedestal.

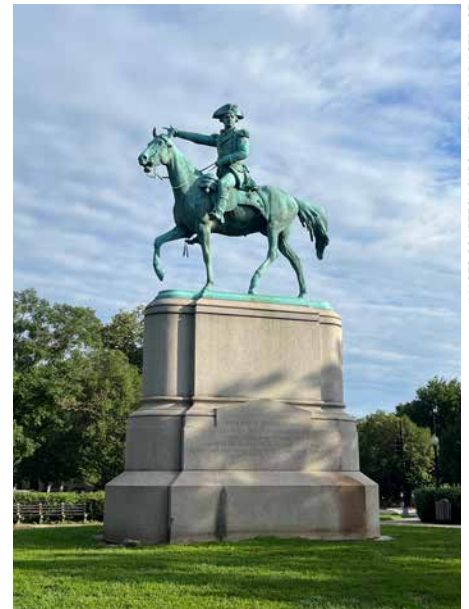
It happened in June 1930, when a “freakish gust of wind,” according to newspapers, blew hard enough to push the equestrian statue over, burying its head and shoulders in the ground. The rivets that had held it in place were found to have corroded since its installation in the late 1870s.

Local historian and CHRS member Robert Pohl recounted what happened in his “Lost Capitol Hill” column in The Hill is Home blog. Poll wrote that “just six bolts were used to anchor it to its pedestal: three in its front left hoof, three in the back right. (The other two hooves are in the air, and no, Greene was never injured in battle.) Over the years, two of the

bolts in the rear hoof had sheared off, presumably due to the normal freeze/thaw cycle, and about 3:00 PM, the other four followed suit, which precipitated horse and rider off the top of the pedestal, tip over, and fall to the ground. Green’s entire head was buried in the soft ground next to the pedestal, all the way to the shoulders.”

The statue was soon lifted back in place using a derrick, according to the Smithsonian Institution. ★

Have you heard about the Stanton Park clean ups? A new group, Revive Stanton Park, has been hosting regular clean-ups at the park with the National Park Service. To get on the list to be notified, go to revivestantonpark.com.



IMAGES COURTESY CHRS, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE



Review, continued from page 6

bustle. Nowadays, we prize Capitol Hill for its quietly staid atmosphere. That’s not how it once was. The front and back entrances, the streets and alleys, were constantly hopping. “The early milk and bakery wagons were followed by the ice man, coal and wood wagons and the hucksters who brought produce and game from the truck farms east of the Eastern Branch. The housewives and their cooks came out to buy and gossip.... At any moment one or more wagons, pushcarts, or a peddler with a basket on his head would be passing by....

The Standard Oil wagon came once a week to peddle ‘coal oil’—actually kerosene—for lamps and stoves.” And we can add to the list the annual tarwagon coming through to re-tar flat roofs, and omnipresent clanging horseshoes, only gradually replaced by revving car engines.

Hoagland handles all this material—every bit of it scrupulously referenced in almost 50 pages of notes—in crisp prose that is wonderfully readable. Should we want to see how our own house fits into the larger District mosaic, we can enjoy the pleasures of a book so articulate, concise and intelligent.

The Row House in Washington, DC: A History is available in several formats from all book sources, and can be consulted free at the Library of Congress, or borrowed from the circulating collection at our own Northeast Neighborhood branch of the DC Public Library. ★



Capitol Hill Restoration Society

420 10th Street SE
Washington, DC 20003

chrs.org

Mark Your Calendar!

Please check chrs.org for current information—cancellations or postponements will be posted as they are known.



Capitol Hill Restoration Society

DECEMBER

16 Tuesday, 10 am
Communications Committee Meeting,
420 10th Street SE (basement level).

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

JANUARY

7 Wednesday, 7 pm
Zoning Committee Meeting,
420 10th Street SE.

5 Monday, 6:30 pm
Historic Preservation Committee meeting,
420 10th Street SE.

13 Tuesday, 10 am
Communications Committee Meeting,
CHRS Office, 420 10th Street SE.

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

FEBRUARY

2 Monday, 6:30 pm
Historic Preservation Committee meeting,
420 10th Street SE.

4 Wednesday, 7 pm
Zoning Committee Meeting,
420 10th Street SE.

10 Tuesday, 10 am
Communications Committee Meeting,
CHRS Office, 420 10th Street SE.

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

Enjoying this newsletter? Please consider joining CHRS!

Annual membership starts at only \$35 and includes the newsletter, a set of historic guidelines, and early access to events, including our annual House and Garden Tour. Scan this QR code or visit chrs.org for more information.

