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March 2010

## Streetcars for Our City

by Monte Edwards

Our city plans to construct a 37-mile streetcar system. There are fundamental planning and routing questions that need to be addressed, but there is also a technology issue that is of unique significance to Washington—whether to use overhead wires to power the system.

Overhead wires would introduce an element that has been intentionally avoided and prohibited for over a century. The distinct, wireless character of the L'Enfant Plan and Georgetown areas of our

city has been protected in planning doctrine since the late 1800s. That has allowed Washington's downtown streets to be clear of projecting infrastructure and wires that would interfere with our viewsheds and clutter our streetscapes. Even traffic lights and street signs have been installed on posts at the curb rather than on cantilevered arms or cables across traffic lanes, as in other cities. As presently designed, our streetcar system would use overhead wires except when crossing or traveling on

a route with a view of major federal buildings or monuments. To protect these "monumental viewsheds," the proposed system would not have overhead wires in those areas, but rather would be powered by batteries. The question that needs to be answered is whether our system needs to have any overhead wires at all.

Last month the city of Charlotte, NC, sponsored a Streetcar Technology Showcase that focused on non-overhead-wire technology for streetcars. Five of the six participating companies were

### Streetcar Community Forum

The Capitol Hill Restoration Society will host a Community Forum on Thursday, March 18, at St. Peter's Parish Hall, Second and C Streets, SE. The subject will be the District's proposed 37-mile streetcar system, including routes and technology that might allow the system to operate with few, if any, overhead wires. Two experts will discuss streetcars and how they would relate to our city.

Jeff Boothe is Executive Director of the Community Streetcar Coalition, Vice Chair and founding board member of Reconnecting America, and an attorney who represents cities and transit authorities seeking to construct streetcar systems. Meg Maguire is a Trustee of the Committee of 100 on the Federal City, Chair of their Transportation Committee, and past-President of Scenic America. Monte Edwards, CHRS Board member, will moderate and share information about the recent streetcar technology conference.

The doors will open at 7:00 pm for fellowship and light refreshments, with the meeting to start at 7:20. The event is free, and the public is encouraged to attend. Reservations are not needed.

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# President's Column: Welcome Spring!

by Beth Purcell

It's always nice to be reminded how pleasant it is to live on Capitol Hill. After the snow, neighbors organized block parties to shovel out all the parking spaces on their block. Spring will be here soon, and we can look forward to enjoying more new trees and flowers, thanks to our neighbors. Trees for Capitol Hill added new trees to triangle parks last fall. Casey Tree Foundation recently planted multiple

New Harmony elms at the triangle park at 15<sup>th</sup> Street and South Carolina Avenue. There will be still more flowering bulbs in our public spaces, thanks to the Capitol Hill Garden Club. It seems that a snowy winter is followed by a great gardening season. This is not scientific, but it seems to be true, and I hope it will happen again this year.

Spring is also a time for renewal, and spring cleaning is part of that. Come to the Preservation Café on March 17 and be inspired to "take back your closets." It's very satisfying to conquer our terra incognita and then give away what we don't need. Many schools and charities will hold yard sales this spring, and they can use our items. ★

## Streetcars, *continued from cover*

international companies, but all of the exhibiting manufacturers have supplied streetcar/rail equipment to U.S. customers. Ansaldo Breda of Italy supplied 466 of our Metro cars, and CAF of Spain supplied 192. Bombardier of Canada supplied Amtrak with the Acela equipment. The three remaining exhibitors have supplied equipment to streetcar and light rail systems in other U.S. locales.

Battery and ultra-capacitor technology is advancing rapidly. Ultra capacitors that can recharge in 20 seconds (CAF) and batteries that can run for 3 km (Kinki Sharyo of Japan) offer the possibility of recharging at the passenger stops with no need for overhead wires or other means to supply power between stops. In fact, the CAF system that will enter service this fall in Saragossa, Spain, will do exactly that. Ultra capacitors also offer the ability to capture and store braking energy to provide faster acceleration without requiring increased electric capacity. Non-overhead power can be supplied by conductors mounted on the surface of the street (Ansaldo Breda) or under the pavement, and thus are immune from weather and snowplows (Bombardier).

The information presented at the Charlotte conference demonstrates that the District of Columbia can have an effective non-overhead-wire streetcar system. As such, it would be a showcase system, likely to attract the best of the streetcar suppliers as well as substantial congressional funding. Most importantly, it would afford residents the same protected viewsheds throughout the city that DDoT plans to provide tourists in "monumental" viewsheds. ★

## Seeking Nominations for 2010–2011 CHRS Board

The Nominating Committee is seeking recommendations for individuals who wish to be considered for positions on next year's CHRS Board of Directors. These positions include President, First Vice President, Second Vice President, Treasurer, and Secretary for one-year terms and three At Large Members for two-year terms. Nominations for the 2010–2011 CHRS Board will be announced in the late spring.

If you wish to be considered, to recommend someone, or to find out more about the responsibilities, please contact one of the members of the Nominating Committee: Dick Wolf ([richwolf1@verizon.net](mailto:richwolf1@verizon.net), 543-4353), Nancy Metzger ([nancymetzger@verizon.net](mailto:nancymetzger@verizon.net), 546-1034), Barbara Eck ([eckbarbara@yahoo.com](mailto:eckbarbara@yahoo.com), 544-0840), or Paul Cromwell ([paulcromwell@verizon.net](mailto:paulcromwell@verizon.net), 543-7530). You may also volunteer to serve on a Committee by contacting a member of the Nominating Committee.

## Capitol Hill Restoration Society (CHRS)

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Gloria Junge

To reach any of the above, please contact the Society offices at (202) 543-0425 or via e-mail: CapHRS@aol.com.

www.CHRS.org

Celebrating more than 50 years helping to preserve and protect Capitol Hill's residential character, the Society is now the largest civic association on Capitol Hill, and one of the largest in the District of Columbia. From the beginning, the Society has played a key role in maintaining the diverse, residential character of our neighborhood. With your participation, we will continue to do so for many years to come.

Start or renew a CHRS membership:

- ★ On the web at [www.CHRS.org](http://www.CHRS.org)
- ★ Call (202) 543-0425; choose option 2
- ★ Pick up a form at one of our meetings

Starting at just \$25 per year for a single membership, it's a great deal.

# Timely Preservation Café Highlighted Home Energy Audits

by Shauna Holmes

With all the shivering on Capitol Hill during last month's below-average temperatures, the February Preservation Café about *How to Get a Free Home Energy Audit* provided timely and useful information. The speaker was Jim Conlon, president of Elysian Energy, one of two companies authorized by the city to conduct its free energy audits. According to Mr. Conlon, a 2008 Brookings Institute study ([tinyurl.com/bk3lzf](http://tinyurl.com/bk3lzf)) found that the average DC resident emits nearly two tons of carbon emissions from residential energy use alone, which is more than double the U.S. average and puts Washington dead last on per capita carbon emissions. Considering the financial costs of such heavy usage to homeowners, as well as the attendant environmental effects, taking advantage of the city's free home energy audit program is a good way for us to learn from professionals how energy-intensive our homes are and what the most cost-effective remedies are for improving energy efficiency.

The DC Department of Energy (DDoE) makes the free home energy audits available to owners of single-family houses and rowhouses (though not condos) with funding from PEPCO's sustainable energy program. We all pay PEPCO a dollar or two each month to support this program—it's a line item on the bill—so benefiting from an audit is a direct dividend. You can find an on-line application at [www.ddoe.dc.gov](http://www.ddoe.dc.gov). Under the "Energy" heading on DDoE's home page, click on the "Free Home Energy Audits" link. Then click on the "Get a free home energy audit from DDoE!" link under the headline, and then select the red "Online application" link. There is a

backlog of a couple of months right now, but Hill residents who have had an audit say it's worth the wait.

There are two phases to the audit process. First, to provide a baseline assessment of a home's energy efficiency and use, city-approved auditors will go to a house and conduct an on-site inspection, talking with owners about their energy usage and measuring such energy characteristics as insulation levels, air leakage, mechanical equipment efficiency, windows and doors, and lights and appliance loads. They may also use a pressure test to determine the house's total air leakage and identify the point sources of such leakage. Auditors are not there to criticize owners, but rather to perform an objective analysis.

Second, the auditors input the data into architectural modeling software to generate an individualized report for the homeowner that provides an energy rating, outlines the home's energy performance at the time of the visit, estimates annual costs based on usage type, recommends the most cost-effective measures to improve energy efficiency, and states the benefits to be gained from each recommendation. The reports, which usually take about ten days to prepare, provide actionable information in accessible terms so owners can consider and evaluate options to improve comfort and reduce energy usage.

According to Mr. Conlon, most DC homes are under-insulated and can become more comfortable with additional insulation in critical locations. Further gains in comfort can be achieved with caulking,

*Continued on page 5*

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# Historic Preservation Briefs

by Nancy Metzger

## Security Upgrades Approved by Preservation Board

At its February hearing, the city's Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB) approved changes in the public space in front of the Marine Commandant's House in the 800 block of G Street, SE, as part of security upgrades. In a consultation process that stretched almost two years and involved reviewing agencies (Historic Preservation Office, Commission of Fine Arts, National Capital Planning Commission) and neighborhood groups (ANC 6B, CHRS, Barracks Row), the plan changed from one that was heavily bollard-dependent to one that provides security upgrades in a number of different ways. One of the most visible changes is that the front garden (space presently limited to the area in front of the house) will be extended toward 8th and 9th Streets in front of the wall, thus reducing the bricked area that has been used for parking in the past and providing for more green space along the sidewalk. Inside the expanded garden area will be newly designed guard posts (for use in inclement weather) and some bollards placed inconspicuously behind the historic iron fence that

will be relocated from its present position in front of the house. There will be a new, slightly taller metal fence and a wider gate (of similar design as the original) in front of the house. The chain-link fence on top of the brick wall will be replaced by a metal fence similar to the other fencing. An integral part of the plan is an innovative approach to use parked cars—specially permitted neighbors' and Marines' cars—instead of bollards along the curb line. It is being developed in consultation with DDoT and other parties.

## Modernization Plans Approved for Wilson High, City's Newest Landmark

Many Capitol Hill families whose children attended Wilson High School, or will in the future, will be interested to know that the building was designated a city landmark at the February HPRB hearing and that a modernization plan for the 75-year-old building was also approved minutes after the designation. Cited as a reflection of the "ongoing commitment to high-quality public facilities in the nation's capital even during times of hardship," the staff report on the designation nomination also noted that

the school has "played an essential role in the growth and development of the suburban neighborhoods of northwest Washington." The campus was also deemed to exemplify the "high standard of architectural quality that characterized Washington's public school design and construction until the mid-twentieth century... The high school was carefully designed to suit its unique site and its architectural expression makes it an excellent example of academic Colonial Revival architecture."

After the designation vote, the Board then moved quickly to support the modernization plan proposed by the DC Public Schools and the Office of Public Education Facilities Modernization that will provide an athletic complex as well as a performing and visual arts center through adaptive use of historic buildings and new construction, create additional parking, and make building improvements to meet ADA requirements, educational standards, and other program needs. One of the most visible changes will be the creation of a new semi-circular entrance at the original rear entry, which is now the one most frequently used as it is closer to Metro and the bus queuing area. A skylight enclosure will turn the interior court yard into a usable space, and new gym and existing facilities will be co-located and renovated, as will facilities for the visual and performing arts on the other side of the main academic section.

## Nominations Sought for 2010 DC Preservation Awards

The DC Historic Preservation Office is accepting nominations for the Eighth Annual District of Columbia Awards for Excellence in Historic

## Call For 'Remuddled' Houses

At the April 21 Preservation Café, Judith Capen and Nancy Metzger, Historic Preservation Committee members, will be taking a look at some of the more egregious misfortunes that have been visited on Capitol Hill houses—and what is involved in reversing the damage. They already have some cases, but if you've been wondering about what's wrong with your own house, they would like to hear from you. Contact them through the CHRS Office, 543-0425, CapHRS@aol.com by March 31. (In case you're wondering what a 'remuddled' house is, it is a remodeled house gone seriously wrong.)

## St. Patrick's Day Preservation Café: Take Back Your Closets!

Are you wishing you could blame St. Patrick's Day leprechauns for your messy closets, cupboards, cabinets, pantries, and drawers? Is reading *Real Simple* magazine just not enough to give you that functional closet...or two...or three you keep dreaming about?

If you're having difficulty organizing storage space and keeping it neat, go to the CHRS St. Patrick's Day Preservation Café *Take Back Your Closets!* on Wednesday, March 17, for creative ideas and tips that will equip you to tackle that spring cleaning.

Jill Lawrence, of Jill-of-all-Trades Professional Organizing Services, will show you ways to deal effectively with the piles, stacks, and "overload" that clutter brings into a home. She will share steps to get you past that feeling of not knowing how or where to start, and will provide

tips for approaching, tackling, and creating functional closets and storage solutions. Jill was the first person in Washington, DC, to become a Certified Professional Organizer in Chronic Disorganization (CPO-CD), and since 1996 she has been helping people overcome inertia and feeling overwhelmed to create easy, visible, and accessible storage systems.

For St. Patrick's Day tips to help launch your spring cleaning and de-cluttering, go to the CHRS Preservation Café *Take Back Your Closets!* on Wednesday, March 17, at Ebenezers Coffeehouse, Second & F Streets, NE, in the downstairs community room. The Preservation Café runs from 6:30–7:15 pm, and is free and open to all in the Capitol Hill community; no reservations are needed. ★

## Preservation Café, *continued from page 3*

weather-stripping, improving window and door seals, and small but important steps like insulating wall plugs. The audit reports equip owners to "get more bang for their buck" by identifying which are the simplest and cheapest measures that will provide the most improvement. He believes, for instance, that replacing windows is typically the furthest thing from cost-effectiveness and should usually be a last resort because they cost so much and people often see little improvement in their home's comfort level afterwards. Rather, actions like improving insulation and sealing leaks to reduce drafts should be undertaken first, both for cost effectiveness and for more immediate payoffs. ★

Preservation. The 2010 awards program, slated for November, will honor significant contributions by individuals, organizations, and businesses promoting historic preservation in the District of Columbia.

Award categories are listed below:

**Archaeology:** Recognition of outstanding achievements in contributing to the understanding of the past through archaeology.

**Advocacy and Community**

**Involvement:** Recognition of individuals, volunteers, or organizations involved in neighborhood preservation issues, plans, projects, or initiatives.

### **Design and Construction:**

Recognition of exceptional design work in restoration, rehabilitation, and/or new construction affecting a landmark or property in a historic district. Projects of all sizes and levels of complexity are encouraged. Projects must be completed to be eligible.

**Education:** Recognition of innovative and exceptional educational programs, curricula, or informational tools that focus on preservation and history. Outstanding media coverage by reporters, writers, publishers, and publications are also eligible.

**Stewardship:** Recognition of efforts on behalf of a significant

resource listed on the DC Inventory of Historic Sites or the National Register of Historic Places that exemplifies superior stewardship and preservation.

### **Lifetime Achievement:**

Recognition of an individual who has made significant, long-term (20+ years) contributions to the preservation of Washington's architectural and cultural resources.

The application deadline is 5 pm Friday, April 30. Additional information on the program is available on the Office of Planning website at <http://planning.dc.gov/hp> (followed by selecting "Preservation Awards") or by contacting Bruce Yarnall at 442-8835 or [bruce.yarnall@dc.gov](mailto:bruce.yarnall@dc.gov). ★

# Wells Creates Task Force to Study Eastern Market Management and Governance

Councilmember Tommy Wells has created a Task Force to review and make recommendations on a framework for management and governance of Eastern Market, with special consideration to ensure the preservation of its character.

Wells stated, "With the one year anniversary of the re-opening just around the corner, this is a great time to review what has been working and what needs improvement at the Market. We have come a long way since the terrible fire, and I'm looking

forward to solid recommendations from the Task Force that will ensure the sustainability of the Market for many years to come."

Sponsored by former Ward 6 Councilmember Sharon Ambrose, the law that created the current governance of the Market has been in effect since its passage by the Council in 1998. It was instrumental in addressing the needs of many diverse populations and stakeholders and developing a system of management for the Market.

Added Wells, "We have learned a lot in the last ten years. The city has expressed its desire to get out of the business of managing Eastern Market, and we can take this opportunity to make improvements to build consistent hands-on leadership and administration of the day-to-day details."

The Task Force will be co-chaired by Ms. Ambrose and Peter Waldron. The Task Force is expected to provide a recommendation by November. ★



PHOTO COURTESY DISTRICT DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

An aerial photo of Barney Circle, circa 1948.

## Streetcar terminus at Barney Circle

Streetcars had a major effect on the development of Washington communities—new streetcar lines led to new homes and businesses along their routes. This was true in Barney Circle. In 1901, the streetcar line was extended east from Eighth Street, SE, on Pennsylvania Avenue to Barney Circle. In 1905, the first rowhouses were built on Barney Circle, followed by many more in the 1920s. The Tenleytown streetcar line began and ended at the Barney Circle terminus (shown in this photo). Older residents remember riding the streetcars to work and to Glen Echo on weekends and miss the restaurant in the circle. Streetcars were discontinued in 1962.

# The 53rd Annual House & Garden Tour, May 8–9

Save Mother's Day weekend (May 8–9) for the 53<sup>rd</sup> Annual CHRS House & Garden Tour. This year's theme is "Community Experiences/ Cosmopolitan Stories." The footprint of the Tour is the area bordered by Pennsylvania Avenue and East Capitol Street between Third and Eighth Streets, SE. As always, we will feature a wide variety of house styles, from the most traditional to the fabulously renovated with all of the newest in home décor. More details, with photographs, will follow in upcoming issues of *CHRS News*.

Funds from the tour provide the largest annual source of unrestricted funding that CHRS receives. Much of the money will be used to support our Beyond the Boundaries effort, which seeks to catalogue and describe historic properties in areas adjacent to the Capitol Hill Historic District.

While tickets will not be available until early April, **Gift Certificates may be obtained for \$25** by calling the CHRS office at 543-0425. The Gift Certificates are exchanged for Tour tickets when the tickets become available in early April. (The actual Tour tickets will have a map and a complete list of houses.) CHRS members will receive a mail offer to purchase up to four discounted \$20 member tickets; additional tickets will cost members \$25. ★



*Capitol Hill Restoration Society*

## 53rd Annual House and Garden Tour

May 8-9, 2010

[www.chrs.org](http://www.chrs.org) | [caphrs@aol.com](mailto:caphrs@aol.com) | 202-543-0425



### Volunteers Needed

Over 150 volunteers are needed to produce a successful House and Garden Tour each year. We need your help! If you would like to help in advance of tour weekend by doing research on houses (we will teach you how to do this) or assisting with write-ups on tour houses, please let us know. Or, if you can work a 2–3 hour shift as a docent at one of the tour homes on either Saturday, May 8, 4–8 pm or Sunday, May 9, 11–5, please send us an e-mail at: [CapHRS@aol.com](mailto:CapHRS@aol.com) and write "tour volunteer" in the subject line.

# Sale of the H Street Playhouse

*The following is a note from Adele Robey, in response to a question from CHRS News.*

**O**n February 1, 2010, I completed the sale of the H Street Playhouse. This is strictly a building sale and one which Bruce and I had been working on for almost two years. As many people know, when we built the Playhouse we put just about all of the cash reserves we had into it. We never regretted doing that for one minute. However, it had become time to try to recoup some of those funds while attempting to keep the Playhouse as a functioning theater. The deal that was entered into is a leaseback in which I no longer own the building but will lease it from the new owners for three years and will continue to rent and manage it per usual. To assure this will happen, I have given the new owners all three years of rent in advance.

The new owners are choosing to become theater people and will be working hard to develop a sustainable model for the theater into the future. I do not know specifics of their plans, but the theater seems to be central to them. It's important that people know that there will be absolutely no change at the Playhouse for the duration of the lease back situation. The name H Street Playhouse LLC is mine and will continue as the rental agent for the space.

Bruce and I had tried hard to negotiate this sort of deal so that H Street would not be in danger of losing its dynamic small theater space. He would be very happy that it finally came to pass. As for the companies we host, Theater Alliance will be there for the foreseeable future. And although Forum Theatre has moved to Silver Spring (where the rent is free), we now have Scena Theatre on a regular basis, Madcap Players, Restoration Stage, a new theater company called No Rules Theatre, and others. Coming later this year we hope to add exciting open mic nights on the off-nights, and more music. We are here to stay.

Thank you to everyone for their support during this incredibly difficult time. It gives me some solace to be able to keep "the house that Bruce built" open for business.

—Adele Robey, Phoenix Graphics, H Street Playhouse

## Residential Street Sweeping Resumes March 22; Ticketing Begins March 29

On Monday, March 22, daytime mechanical street sweeping will resume in residential neighborhoods where signs are posted indicating when this will take place. Now that the snow has melted, quite a bit of litter and debris has accumulated.

Alternate-side parking restrictions in these areas will go into effect as well. Parking tickets, which carry a \$30 fine, will be issued beginning March 29 to vehicles parked during street sweeping hours in areas posted with "No Parking/Street Cleaning" signs. Also beginning March 29,

illegally parked cars may be towed to allow the sweepers access to the curbside.

DPW street sweepers cover about four thousand lane miles monthly, removing litter and pollutants. The sweeper also emits a fine spray of water to help control dust. Street sweeping is suspended during the winter because the sprayed water can freeze and make the street icy. Commercial corridors are swept year-round. For more information about street sweeping, visit the DPW website at: <http://dpw.dc.gov>. ★

## Welcome CHRS Supporters

*We thank the following new members, patrons, and sponsors.*

### NEW MEMBERS

Andrew Walsh & Alison Sheedy

### PATRONS

Nobuo & Carol Akiyama  
Tom Grahame & Jan Kern  
Peter & Christina May  
John Smeltzer & Catherine Flanaan

### SPONSORS

Marie Hertzberg  
John Franzén

## Did You Know?

- ★ **The National Marathon will be held on Saturday, March 20.** This annual event closes off north-south traffic across East Capitol Street for several hours. It also encloses a loop of northern Capitol Hill from East Capitol Street north to H Street, and much of Ward 6 from Kennedy Stadium to west of the White House. There is freeway access north of East Capitol Street at Fourth and D Streets, NW.

The South Capitol Street Bridge, the westbound lanes of the East Capitol Street Bridge, and Pennsylvania Avenue at Minnesota Avenue, SE, will be closed to traffic for hours. Residents south of East Capitol Street will be able to access the SE/SW freeway. Residents north of East Capitol Street will be able to exit the Hill via Benning Road Bridge before 7:40 am and after 10:15 am. Crossing East Capitol will be very difficult from 6:45 until 11 am. Residents should plan in advance for any trips to the airports, sporting events, shopping, appointments, etc. Leaving a car parked south of East Capitol Street should work. The police are supposed to allow occasional cross-traffic at designated streets, but last year southbound traffic at Eighth Street was backed up past H Street, as crossing is not permitted when runners are near, and there are 12,000 runners.

- ★ **DDOT introduces online permits for public space occupancy.** TOPS is a new online system of the District's Department of Transportation to enable homeowners, tenants, and businesses to apply for the specific type of public space occupancy, construction, excavation, or other permit required for use of public space. This can include occupancy of metered or unmetered curbside parking (for moving pods or trash dumpsters), sidewalk, alley, or travel lane areas for your activity or construction-related work. Once you have registered, the system allows you to log into your account any time to apply for a permit, edit your application, upload plans electronically, or check the status of your application.
- ★ **DCRA is moving.** The Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs (DCRA) will be moving from its North Capitol Street location to 1100 Fourth Street, SW. The new location is on top of the Waterfront-SEU Metro Station on the Green Line. DCRA's last day at its current offices will be Friday, March 19. Go to: <http://dcra.dc.gov/moving> for further information on office location.
- ★ **WASA is holding a public session on combined sewer overflows into the Anacostia.** A second public meeting will be held on May 27 from 6–10 pm at Watkins Elementary School to report on comments received and changes suggested to the Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) projects. The older sections of Washington use a drainage system that mixes sewage with storm water runoff, leading to trash and waste water flowing directly into the Anacostia. An Environmental Assessment is being completed for the projects located between Kennedy Stadium and Blue Plains wastewater treatment plant. The CSO projects are intended to capture and store sewer and storm water overflows that occur during rain and snow events and then pump the water from deep tunnels to Blue Plains when the system is once again able to handle the volume.



A carpet of trash by the CSX bridge.

PHOTO COURTESY WASA

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# Looking Back on Capitol Hill

by Nancy Metzger

Admittedly, it was a rough month in February, but to put a fresh perspective on the weather, let's go back 150 years to see what Michael Shiner had to say about the weather in his time. Shiner (1805–1880) worked in the Navy Yard for most of his life, as both a slave and a free man. He left behind a manuscript that provides an unusual look at life in the Navy Yard from the perspective of a worker – not an officer. Shiner's diary is held in the Library of Congress's Manuscript Division, but it has been difficult for the public to fully appreciate it since it is (naturally) a hand-written document, and the spelling and punctuation are not standardized. However, in 2007, John G. Sharp finished a transcription of the Diary with notes, accessible through the Navy Department Library and found on <http://www.history.navy.mil/library/onliner/shinerdiary.html>. In the passages cited below, I've changed the spelling and punctuation to facilitate ease of reading—the words and expression are those Michael Shiner chose (or Mike, as he often referred to himself).

## 1815

Ice commenced early in November 1814 and continued freezing until the middle of March 1815. January 1815 they hauled wood across the Eastern Branch [Anacostia] by wagon loads with six horses.

## 1821

I never forget it, for that very night it snowed and me going back home next morning the snow had fell to the depth of six inches and better. The bottoms of my shoes came off nearly and I had to go home barefooted nearly and this was the first day of January 1822.

## 1829

[About a fire at the Marine Barracks on February 20, with snow on the ground] We went out to the fire a little before the bell rang for twelve and stayed at the garrison until between 1 and 2 o'clock in the night and the coldest night I ever felt in my life. The hose were led from the Garrison to reservoir at the market house. It were so cold that the hose freeze up. They formed lines in different sections, passed the water with a bucket to the

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**“ . . . the snow had fell to the depth of six inches and better. The bottoms of my shoes came off nearly and I had to go home barefooted nearly and this was the first day of January 1822.”**

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fire; they worked like men. [Shiner may be referring to officers previously named who joined the fire line.] There were a little disturbance occurred between a fireman from the city and Samuel Briggs, a fireman of the Anacostia [name of the fire company established near Eighth and L streets, SE; intense rivalry had developed among the fire companies of the city] but that was soon settled by Captain William Easby interfering, which at that time was the Master Boat Builder of the Washington Navy Yard. That were a hard winter. There wasn't 2 cords of wood on the commercial wharf; there wasn't no wood in the Navy Yard; and there was not ten

ton of coal in the yard. . . With about 1 o'clock that night we came in the yard and it were so cold that our feet were wet and stiff that we didn't know hardly whether we were walking on the ground or no. After we came in we went down to the cook house. There was not as much fire in the cook house as you could hold in your two hands. We looked in our chest and tinder box and the flint and struck a light. We looked around out doors to see if we could find anything to make a fire. We couldn't find anything out doors and the snow was banked up all around the house. We came in and there was a long bench setting before the fireplace. There was a man laying on it by the name of James Sims. We found that we could not get any wood and we rolled him off and he fell off on the floor like a log – drunk and half frozen together. We take an ax and split the bench up and we made a fire out of this bench and warmed and dried our feet. After we warmed and dried our feet, the man who was laying on the bench got up and then he wanted to fight us but we cooled him off. . . On the 21 of February 1829 on Saturday we were outside gathering up the hose and getting things in the yard. It snowed on the 22nd of February 1829 on Sunday.

## 1831

The 16th day of December 1831 on Friday night, the wind blowed from the north west without intermission. It blowed so that night the window blinds got loose from their buckles and they shattered six or seven large lights [panes] of glass twelve by 18½. On the seventeenth of December 1831, the wind continued to blow and it came with a hurricane and in puffs. The bell rang as usual at sunrise on the 17th and after all the fires were made, Commodore Hull had them



PHOTO COURTESY NATIONAL PHOTO

Photo taken after the storm of January 28, 1922, when the Knickerbocker Theatre collapsed under the weight of 26–29 inches of snow, killing 98.

“With this city almost snowbound the street-cleaning department today will depend upon its regular force of approximately 200 men to keep the principal lanes of travel open...With shovels and wagons, the (street cleaning) force split into several gangs, will begin operations at the street intersections where there are car tracks. Narrow streets are given precedence over wide streets by the street cleaners. The snow is transported in wagons to the nearest sewers.”

—*Washington Post*, January 28, 1922

The following day, the *Post* called upon the moral fiber and sinews of the citizenry:

“The municipal government, through its head officials, has admitted that the regular street cleaning force is inadequate in personnel and equipment to meet the situation caused by the storm.

“Therefore is it the duty of every citizen to lend a helping hand and perform whatever service he may. Every resident of Washington, whether a home owner or tenant, is appealed to remove the snow from in front of his premises.

“The city can not compel a citizen to remove snow from in front of his house. In a situation such as now exists in Washington, a citizen should need no compelling.

“It is his moral and civic duty to lend a hand. Do it the first thing today.”

—*Washington Post*, January 29, 1922

all put out and there was no work in the yard that day. Commodore Hull had the yard closed that day for fear of fires taking place. Commodore Hull had 3 or 4 large holes cut in the river and the engines put out in case fire should take place, right below the Commodore’s office...Mr. Phillip P. Inch and myself held the ladder while Mr. Inch put those large light of glass in. It was cold enough that day to freeze anything that fell...

## 1851

[Perhaps the most depressing entry of all...] It snowed on the 5 day of May 1851 on Monday. ☆



**Capitol Hill Restoration Society**  
420 Tenth Street, SE  
Washington, DC 20003

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## Mark Your Calendar!

### MARCH

**11** Thursday, 7:30 pm  
CHRS Zoning Committee,  
Kirby House, 420 10<sup>th</sup> St., SE, first floor.  
Details: Gary Peterson, 547-7969.

**16** Tuesday, 6:30 pm  
CHRS Board of Directors, Capitol Hill  
Townhomes, 750 6<sup>th</sup> Street, SE, second  
floor. Details: Beth Purcell, 622-4303.

**17** Wednesday, 6:30–7:15 pm  
CHRS Preservation Café on de-cluttering:  
*Take Back Your Closets!* with Jill Lawrence  
from Jill-of-all-Trades Professional  
Organizing Services. Ebenezers  
Coffeehouse, 2<sup>nd</sup> & F Streets, NE,  
downstairs. Free, no reservation required.  
Details: Shauna Holmes, 546-5211.

**18** Thursday, 7:20 pm  
CHRS Community Forum on Streetcars.  
Two experts—Jeff Boothe, Executive  
Director of the Community Streetcar  
Coalition, and Meg Maguire, a Trustee  
of the Committee of 100 on the Federal  
City—will discuss streetcars and how  
they would relate to our city. Monte  
Edwards, CHRS Vice President, will  
moderate and share information about  
a recent streetcar technology conference.  
St. Peter’s Parish Hall, 2nd & C Streets,  
SE. The event is free, and the public is  
encouraged to attend. Reservations are  
not needed. Refreshments will be served  
at 7:00 pm; business meeting at 7:20 pm;  
Forum begins promptly at 7:30 pm.

**25** Thursday, 10:00 am  
Historic Preservation Review Board,  
441 4<sup>th</sup> Street, NW, Room 220 South.  
Details: Nancy Metzger, 546-1034.

### APRIL

**5** Monday, 6:30  
CHRS Historic Preservation Committee,  
Kirby House, 420 10<sup>th</sup> St., SE, first floor.  
Details: Nancy Metzger, 546-1034.

**10** Saturday, 10:00 am–3:00 pm  
Fragers’s Spring Convention. Eastern  
Market, North Hall. Details: Captain  
Apollo, 543-6157; Apollo@fragersdc.com.

**20** Tuesday, 6:30 pm  
CHRS Board of Directors, Capitol Hill  
Townhomes, 750 6<sup>th</sup> Street, SE, second  
floor. Details: Beth Purcell, 622-4303.

**21** Wednesday, 6:30–7:15 pm  
CHRS Preservation Café: *Re-Muddling:  
Reversing Misfortunes That Have Been  
Visited on Capitol Hill Houses.* Ebenezers  
Coffeehouse, 2<sup>nd</sup> & F Streets, NE,  
downstairs. Free, no reservation required.  
Details: Shauna Holmes, 546-5211.

**22** Thursday, 10:00 am  
Historic Preservation Review Board,  
441 4<sup>th</sup> Street, NW, Room 220 South.  
Details: Nancy Metzger, 546-1034.