

Beyond the Boundaries Survey: Capitol Hill Southeast

EHT Traceries

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SLIDE: The *Beyond the Boundaries* survey began in January 2008. It is a multi-phase architectural survey of the greater Capitol Hill area of Washington, D.C. The first assignment of the project was the training of volunteers. The first survey area to be completed was the H Street Corridor. This portion of the project included two phases that documented the architecture to the south of East Capitol Street and east of the existing Capitol Hill Historic District known as Capitol Hill Southeast. 19th Street at Congressional Cemetery and Potomac Avenue to Kentucky Avenue are the eastern borders. L Street at Interstate 295 serves as the southern edge of the survey area. Most of those properties fronting Barney Circle were excluded as they have been previously documented as part of a proposed Barney Circle Historic District. The survey of Capitol Hill Northeast is currently being conducted.

The goal of the project was to survey and describe each property, including all primary and secondary resources, noting date of original construction, architects, and builders. It was purely an architectural survey and did not include any historic research. The historic documents used included the original building permits, tax assessment records, and maps.

SLIDE: The first phase of the survey of Capitol Hill Southeast was conducted by volunteers, who were trained by EHT Traceries on what to record while on-site. The volunteers documented 24 squares, with 1101 properties. The second phase was performed in its entirety by the architectural surveyors of EHT Traceries. We recorded 28 squares, with 1311 properties.

SLIDE: We recognize and thank the many volunteers and professional surveyors, who you probably saw walking around the neighborhood.

SLIDE: We created a multiple-choice survey form, with pictures and names of what is expected to be found on the buildings of Capitol Hill Southeast. The survey includes recording the type of resources (house, apartment, store), architectural style, building materials, forms, roofs, porches, windows, entablatures, doors, additions, alterations, and all outbuildings like garages and sheds, and describing the landscape, including fences, setback, alley access.

SLIDE: So in total, the project documented 2412 properties on 52 squares. The process, while most certainly overwhelming because of the area to be covered, the number of resources to be recorded, and the variety of architectural styles and stylistic influences. So we begin with the on-site survey, which also includes digital photography of the building as much as possible from public right-of-way. Once that is completed, we collect the maps, permits, and assessment records, and then begin the data entry. All information collected is put into the database so that we can study the development of the area, the varied types and styles of buildings, and the

owners, architects, and builders involved. Finally, when completed, we print out the survey forms and put them in binders by square and address.

SLIDE: The printed survey forms are typically three to four pages long, and include the digital photographs.

SLIDE: Overwhelmingly, the primary resources documented were domestic, providing single- and multi-family housing for residents of Washington, D.C. Construction in this area began with freestanding single-family dwellings in the mid- to late 19th century. Rowhouses, which are linear housing with party walls between, begin to appear at a steady rate in the mid-1880s and came to dominate the urban landscape throughout the first half of the 20th century. Although the rowhouse was the domestic form of choice beginning in 1886, the first examples in the survey area date from sometime between 1869 and 1871 (1345-1353 K Street, S.E.). Construction of rowhouses continued in earnest during the first two decades of the twentieth century, resulting in over 2,000 attached houses.

Major changes in building regulations enacted in the 1870s greatly affected the siting, materials, and forms of domestic architecture in Capitol Hill Southeast, which visually assists in documenting its development. The streets of the survey area, as planned by Pierre L'Enfant in his 1791 plan for the City of Washington, were generously wide—90 to 160 feet—and grading and paving them required immense resources. The expense became an acute problem with the city's rapid expansion in the decades following the Civil War. In response, Congress passed a law in 1870 narrowing the roadbed and allowing much of the remaining strips on either side to be "parked." The public land extending between the sidewalk and front building line became *defacto* private gardens, although it is still, to this day, technically owned by the District of Columbia. This initial blurring of the division between public and private was intensified by a second law passed in 1871 by the short-lived territorial government (1871-1874) under Alexander "Boss" Shepherd that permitted the extension, first, of bay windows and, later, other types of projections beyond the front edge of the lot line out into the newly designated, quasi-private gardens. As much a practical outcome to capture additional square footage as an aesthetic one for builders and buyers, by the 1880s, few residential buildings were built without some projection beyond the building line. Then, with the revision of municipal building regulations in 1877, construction of wood-frame buildings was prohibited. While new laws eliminated a staple method of [wood-frame] construction, they encouraged the use of another, which, until then, had been used primarily for costly houses. Now brick was employed for exterior walls almost exclusively. Although wood-frame buildings continued to be built until the late 1880s, brick construction dominates the urban landscape of the survey area, utilized in the erection of the structure itself and as the ornamentation.

The resulting domestic form of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was a masonry structure veneered in brick with a square or canted bay projecting from the façade. This form and the use of brick were ideal for rowhouse construction, with buildings typically 12 to 18 feet wide and 24 to 28 feet deep. The houses stand two stories in height above a slightly raised basement with a flat roof trimmed by an ornate, often corbeled, cornice of brick. The main entries of these symmetrically fenestrated houses are located in the side or end bays, reached by a raised stoop with stairs. Outdoor living space was minimal, relegated to the private back yards, sometimes with porches hidden from public view.

SLIDE: As the need for housing increased because of the population explosion caused by an influx of military and federal government workers, new domestic building types were introduced to the growing neighborhood of Capitol Hill Southeast, which had become a suburb of Capitol Hill. Higher density housing began modestly, under the guise of a multiple dwelling that closely resembled the rowhouse in size, massing, and ornamentation. First appearing in the survey area just after the turn of the twentieth century, multiple dwellings are typically wider than a single rowhouse unit, stretching three to five bays wide. It is an attached structure like a rowhouse that commonly provides four housing units within one building. The use of projecting bays and/or front porches that are reminiscent of more high-style porticos easily married this multi-family building with neighboring single-family dwellings.

Yet, by the close of World War II in 1945, the population of the District of Columbia had reached 876,000, which was a 27% increase in just five years. The need for housing forced a reassessment of traditional housing types in an effort to find a more appropriate alternative. Urban centers such as New York City, Boston, and Chicago offered the best option—the apartment building. This distinctive, purpose-built domestic form first appeared in Washington, D.C. in the late nineteenth century, but was constructed solely for an upper-class clientele, providing full-service staff much like a hotel. The luxury apartment building ultimately gave way to a more modest structure targeted towards middle-class residents, and by the twentieth century became a Washington institution. Between 1900 and 1919, over 750 apartment buildings had been constructed citywide. The efforts and materials restrictions during World War I caused a decrease in the construction of apartment buildings, which accelerated once again after the war in the early 1920s. Architects, builders, and developers rushed to fill the increasing demand for housing, resulting in the construction of an additional 741 apartment buildings throughout the city in the ten years between 1919 and 1929. During this period, only a few apartment buildings were constructed in the Capitol Hill Southeast neighborhood. Those that were built were typically located on primary roads such as Pennsylvania Avenue, Massachusetts Avenue, Independence Avenue, and 16th Street, S.E.

Citywide as construction of apartment buildings began to parallel that of single-family housing, competition among apartment building developers became fierce. Not only were developers scrambling to provide enough housing for the new federal workers but they also attempted to build more attractive apartment buildings by offering the latest technological advances as well as novel interior designs that would appeal and attract residents. By the time the United States entered World War II, the apartment building was a standard fixture of the residential landscape in both suburban and urban neighborhoods of Washington, D.C. By this time, construction of apartment buildings was equal to that of single-family housing in the Capitol Hill Southeast neighborhood, with more than half of the total number of apartment buildings constructed during the 1940s and 1950s.

SLIDE: The success of Capitol Hill Southeast as a stable and unified residential neighborhood is due not just to the domestic architecture, and of course the residents and property owners, but the religious, commercial, and social buildings. As the area first developed, it was supported by commercial stores that were typically one story in height. The stores were generally located on corner lots, thus more visible to passersby.

One of the earliest examples of a commercial building is part of a row of eleven residential buildings dating from 1897. Architect Nicholas T. Haller designed this residential row for owner John R. McLean with the end building

at 1401 E Street, S.E. as a store to serve the immediate area. With frontage on 14th Street as well, the building provided a private entrance to the residential space on the second story. The two-story building at 1364 E Street, S.E. was erected circa 1878 with a corner entry that opens onto 13th Street. The row of six buildings at 116-126 15th Street, S.E. was completed in 1923 by owner/architect Charles E. Wire with six stores on the first story and residential space above.

Construction of commercial buildings is minimal, but has been essential to the success of the neighborhood. Less than five extant purpose-built commercial buildings were constructed in the 1910s, with many additional stores built in the 1930s and 1940s as the neighborhood grew.

SLIDE: The development of Capitol Hill Southeast, like many suburban neighborhoods in the District of Columbia, was not the work of any one builder, developer or property owner, and as such reflects the fundamentals of speculative development of the larger Capitol Hill.

Despite the extensive modernization projects being undertaken in select and more prosperous parts of the District of Columbia by the short-lived Board of Public Works between 1871 and 1874, the infrastructure necessary for the success of Capitol Hill Southeast did not fully materialize until after the turn of the twentieth century (although portions of Pennsylvania Avenue and East Capitol Street were paved in the 1870s). The development of Capitol Hill Southeast coincided with the arrival of the streetcar, specifically the extension of the Pennsylvania Avenue line in 1901 through the survey area to Barney Circle. Operative and merchant builders, who platted and improved the area for their own financial gain, quickly recognized the benefits of erecting modest residential housing that because it was similar in style, form, and materials could be offered to the middle-class residents who would travel to and from work and nearby commercial centers via the streetcar.

Those involved in the construction of buildings in the Capitol Hill Southeast neighborhood were also responsible for developing other areas of Washington, D.C., and thus were prolific in recognizing the potential clientele, stylistic fashions and trends, and construction material availability/restrictions. These included several of the city's most well-known architects, including Albert H. Beers, John R. Cadle, Hunter & Bell, Albert E. Landvoigt, Alexander H. Sonnemann, Appleton P. Clarke, Nicholas T. Haller, Marcus Hallett, H.R. Howenstein, Nicholas R. Grimm, and William S. Plager, to name a few.

By far the most active architect in the Capitol Hill Southeast neighborhood was George T. Santmyers, who practiced architecture in Washington, D.C., for fifty years. The work produced by his office was by far more proficient than those of any other Washington, D.C. architect. Santmyers designed nearly 16,000 buildings by 1949, while only a handful of other architects designed more than 1,000 buildings and no other listed in the permit database designed more than 1,600. While Santmyers is credited with the design of commercial buildings, banks, churches, public garages, and thousands of private residences, he is most celebrated for his contribution to apartment building architecture in the nation's capital. His work in Capitol Hill Southeast, which include only one apartment building, shows his devotion and skills in the designing of fashionable rowhouses specifically for middle-income residents.

All these architects were well-versed in the presentation of the most fashionable architectural styles, dressing the buildings of Capitol Hill Southeast in the Colonial Revival, Classical Revival, and Italianate styles. Many of the

stylistic expressions were mixed, rather than a high-style example, and often modestly infused with elements of another popular style such as the Craftsman style. Although each architect was subtly manipulating the pure expressions to create his own, the use of a standardized domestic form, common materials, and utilization of the modest architectural styles ultimately produced the cohesive residential neighborhood of Capitol Hill Southeast.

SLIDE: Recommendations

SLIDE: Southeast Branch of the Boys Club of Washington, D.C. at 261 17th Street, S.E. is an imposing Classical Revival-style building that stands two stories in height. The building, designed by architect Clarence L. Harding, was constructed in the summer of 1937.

The Southeast Branch of the Boys Club of Washington is recommended eligible for the District of Columbia Inventory of Historic Sites and the National Register of Historic Places. The building is recommended eligible under Criteria A and C for its contribution to the history of the Boys Clubs of American and the Boys Club of Washington and its notable architectural design. Further it is recommended eligible under the District of Columbia Criteria a (Events), b (History), d (Architecture and Urbanism), and e (Artistry).

SLIDE: The club house, designed to accommodate 3,000 boys, included a 75-foot swimming pool, large gymnasium, game rooms, library, Boy Scout room, Senior club rooms, woodwork shop, print shop, art class room, projection room, an exhibit hall, and administrative offices. A playground was located on the roof, and a penthouse provided space for the health clinic. The site was “selected on the basis of a scientific study made by the Field Department of the Boys’ Clubs of American, of which the Washington association is a member.”[1] Eleanor Patterson and Boys Club president Frank R. Jelleff were responsible for donating the funding for the construction of the building, which was described in newspaper articles as costing \$200,000. Construction of this landmark building was touted in the local newspapers on a regular basis. The articles recounted that the “the new building will be the largest and most complete club for boys in the city” and “the most modern south of New York.”[2]

[1] “Boys Club Ground Breaking Ceremony Tuesday; Frank R. Jelleff to Start \$200,000 Project, *Washington Post*, 11 July 1937, 8.

[2] “Boys Club House Building to Begin,” *Washington Post*, 10 July 1937, 11; “Boys Club Ground Breaking Ceremony Tuesday; Frank R. Jelleff to Start \$200,000 Project, *Washington Post*, 11 July 1937, 8.

SLIDE: The laying of the cornerstone in November 1937 was attended by “more than 1,500 youngsters....” The cornerstone held “copies of Washington’s newspapers, a copy of the by-laws of the club and the minutes of the first meeting of the board of trustees in 1920.”[1] Three local boys, who assisted with the ceremonies, also placed items into the cornerstone, including a top, three marbles and a toy truck. The building opened to much fanfare in March 1938; its success was celebrated on the front page of the *Washington Post*. Membership was exclusively available to boys from ages 7 to 17, “living in Southeast Washington or within the northeast boundaries as far north as H street and as far west as Twelfth.”[2] Over 1,200 applications were received within days of the clubs opening.

[1] "1,500 Boys Aid Dedication of Southeast Club," *Washington Post*, 20 November 1937, 17.

[2] "Southeast Unit of Boys Club Opens Tuesday," *Washington Post*, 13 March 1938, M14.

SLIDE: The imposing, high-style St. Matthew's Lutheran Church at 527 Kentucky Avenue, S.E. was constructed in 1929, just as construction in the neighborhood of Capitol Hill Southeast was reaching its peak. The Colonial Revival-style building has a rectangular form with a raised foundation veneered in stone. The main block, faced in brick, is covered by a gable roof with wide overhanging eaves. The modest form is augmented by the semicircular-shaped apse, which is topped by a half-conical roof. The building is entered through double-leaf openings with semicircular arches framed in stone. The entry is located in a gabled projection on the side elevation that is set parallel to the wood-frame lantern on the roof.

The St. Matthew's Lutheran Church is recommended eligible for the District of Columbia Inventory of Historic Sites and the National Register of Historic Places. The building is recommended eligible under Criteria A and C for its contribution to the ecclesiastical history of church in Washington, D.C. and its architectural design, which was inspired by a 1788 church. Further it is recommended eligible under the District of Columbia Criteria b (History) and d (Architecture and Urbanism).

SLIDE: The architectural partnership was formed by Delos Hamilton Smith (1884-1963) and Thomas Rivas Edwards (1893-?). Both men were accomplished architects, recognized as leaders for their ecclesiastical designs. Smith and Edwards were both graduates of George Washington University, studying architecture there together between 1914 and 1916. While Smith was training in the Office of the Supervising Architect of the Treasury and with several of the city's most prominent architectural firms, Edwards was serving as a draftsman for the Department of the Navy, where he later worked as an architect. It is through Delos Smith's extensive surveying and photographing of historic buildings, many from the colonial era, that much of the firm's designs were born. He conducted the first survey of historic buildings in Annapolis, Maryland, and published articles and monographs on the colonial architecture of Maryland, in *American Architect* and in *The Monograph Series: Recording the Architecture of the American Colonies and the Early Republic*, better known as the White Pine Series of Architectural Monographs. Between 1918 and 1930 Smith studied, measured, and photographed about 250 colonial churches, including the Bethabara Moravian Church in North Carolina. This extensive body of work was deposited at the Library of Congress and has become one of the antecedents of the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS).

SLIDE: The James Buchanan Public School for white elementary children of Capitol Hill Southeast was constructed in 1895 at 1325 D Street, S.E. The high-style building, reflecting the Romanesque Revival style, was designed by the Office of the Building Inspector, with Architect of the Capitol Edward Clark supervising the plans. Currently known as the International Graduate University, the building was enlarged in 1922 by the construction of an eight-room wing that reflected the growth of the neighborhood. In 1929, an assembly room and gymnasium designed in the Colonial Revival style were added.

SLIDE: Although a product of standardized designs for public school buildings, the James Buchanan School was recognized immediately upon its completion for its unusually prominent window bays, which are similar to

those projecting from the rowhouses of Capitol Hill Southwest. Antoinette Lee, in her survey and documentation of D.C. Public Schools, calls out the building because “its elaborate arched entranceways on the side elevations are unique among public school buildings in the District.”[1]

The James Buchanan Public School is recommended eligible for the District of Columbia Inventory of Historic Sites and the National Register of Historic Places under the Multiple Property Documentation (MPD) Form entitled “Public School Buildings of Washington, D.C., 1862-1960” (adopted 2001). The resource meets the Register Requirements outlined in the MPD and is recommended eligible under Criteria A and C for its contribution to the history of public schools in Washington, D.C. and its architectural design. Further it is recommended eligible under the District of Columbia Criteria b (History) and d (Architecture and Urbanism).

[1] Antoinette Lee, “Historic School Buildings Survey of D.C. Public Schools,” (Washington, D.C.: D.C. Historic Preservation Office, 1989), 9.

SLIDE: The two phases of survey in the Capitol Hill Southeast neighborhood is solely an examination of the extant architecture. This study does allow for an understanding of how and why the neighborhood developed but does not fully capture the historic context of the development and subsequent growth. A cursory examination of historic maps and knowledge of such events as the arrival of streetcar in 1901 do contribute to the historic context, but in no way can be substituted for a full study. Thus it is recommended that a historic context study be prepared before any recommendations for an historic district can be made.

Yet, based on the architectural development and its current physical integrity, the preliminary determination is that an historic district can and should be created that represents the Capitol Hill Southeast neighborhood. Defined by late-nineteenth- and twentieth-century residential development, an historic district in this neighborhood would meet the District of Columbia Inventory of Historic Sites Criteria b (History) and d (Architecture and Urbanism) and the National Register of Historic Places Criteria A and C. It would most likely be significant under the themes of architecture and community planning/development with the period of significance extending from the mid-nineteenth century, when construction first began, to 1949, when speculative construction begins to wane.

The boundaries of an eligible historic district have thus not been determined or recommended. An historic context must be prepared prior to an examination or determination of boundaries. It is recommended that the historic context include the Capitol Hill Northeast neighborhood, which is currently being surveyed, in order to better understand the development of Capitol Hill East.

SLIDE: Thank you