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MOST ENDANGERED PLACES

2008

Announced Tuesday, May 13th, 2008
Stevens Elementary School
1050 21st Street, NW
Washington, DC

Beginning in 1996, the DC Preservation League has announced annually a list of Most Endangered Places to draw attention to Washington, DC's historically, culturally and architecturally significant places that may be threatened with ill-advised alteration, demolition through neglect, or abandonment.

The mission of the DC Preservation League is to preserve, protect and enhance the historic and built environment of Washington, DC through advocacy and education.



*The Joseph Taylor Arms Mansion in May of 2008.
DCPL Archives.*

Joseph Taylor Arms Mansion (Chancery Building of the Democratic Republic of the Congo) **1800 New Hampshire Avenue, NW**

The baroque chancery building of the Democratic Republic of the Congo was designed in 1908 by the prominent architectural firm of Hornblower & Marshall as the residence for John Taylor Arms. The simple but elegant house at the corner of New Hampshire Avenue and S Street, NW, helps to identify the tree-lined street as one of Washington's most prominent addresses.

In addition to its aesthetic appeal, the structure is significant in its associations with Joseph Taylor Arms, a renowned figure in banking and financial circles in the late 19th and early 20th century, and Hornblower and Marshall, the Washington, DC architectural firm that designed the building. Hornblower and Marshall were leaders in the American Institute of Architects, and their firm designed over 100 major commissions including the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History and the Duncan Phillips Mansion (now home to the Phillips Collection).

The building currently stands vacant and deteriorating as a classic example of demolition by neglect. The condition of the building has become so deplorable that the diplomatic staff of the embassy was forced to move to rented space elsewhere in Washington. In addition to cracked and missing windows and peeling paint, the window sashes are rotting and the tile roof is giving way in several places. The lack of maintenance threatens the condition and longevity of this monumental mansion.

The DC Preservation League supports actions to stabilize the site including issuance of citations for building code violations, securing all areas open to the elements, and the possible sale of the building.

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The Trolley Tracks on P Street NW, Georgetown, May 2008. DCPL Archives.

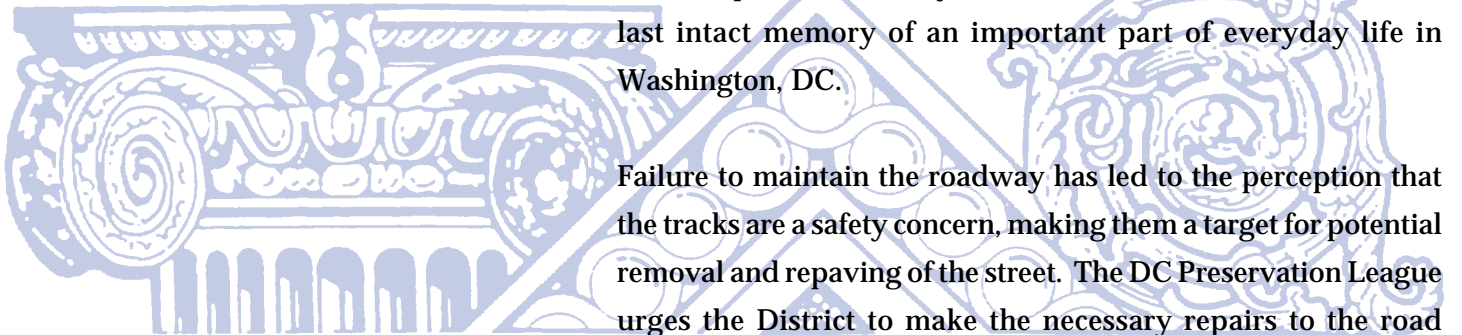
Georgetown Streetcar Tracks O and P Streets, NW

(West of Wisconsin Avenue in Georgetown)

The streetcar tracks on O and P Streets recall when Georgetown was the nexus of an extensive 200 mile streetcar system beloved by Washingtonians. For nearly a century, residents of the District traveled the city by the conduit streetcar system – unusual in its use of an underground current arrangement that allowed for operation without unsightly overhead wires. Seen as part of the Beaux Arts ‘City Beautiful’ movement, this system was found in only a few other cities, and aside from of a small stretch in London, the streetcar tracks in Georgetown represent the last visible conduit track in the world. The remaining track is nationally and internationally significant as representing a technologically innovative mode of public transportation that preserved open streetscapes from visual and aural intrusion.

The protection of the tracks has been visited previously. In 1976, historians with the Historic American Buildings Survey supported the preservation of the Georgetown tracks while portions in other areas of the city were being removed by stating, “It is our concerted opinion that the trackage in Georgetown be preserved and identified, if at all possible, as a unique artifact of rail transportation history.” Since then, the tracks remain as the last intact memory of an important part of everyday life in Washington, DC.

Failure to maintain the roadway has led to the perception that the tracks are a safety concern, making them a target for potential removal and repaving of the street. The DC Preservation League urges the District to make the necessary repairs to the road surfaces to alleviate any unsafe conditions, while not adversely affecting the historic fabric of the trolley tracks. As the last visible remnant of this very important part of DC’s history, DCPL hopes to inform the public of the historic significance of the O and P Streetcar Tracks.



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The Foundry Branch Trolley Trestle. DCPL Archives.

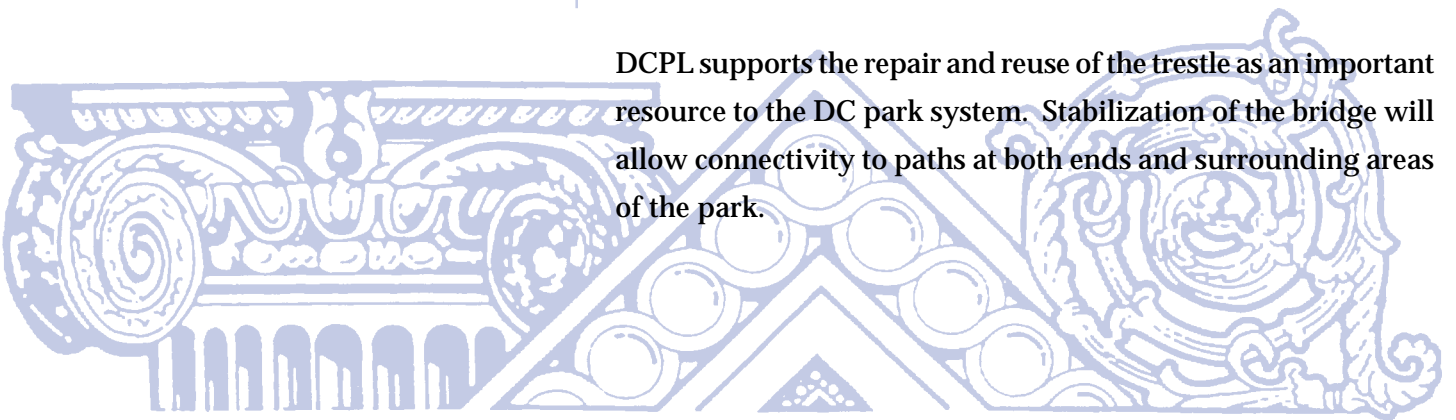
Foundry Branch Trolley Trestle

(Crossing Foundry Branch of Potomac River in Glover Archbold Park, north of Canal Road, NW.)

The Foundry Branch Trolley Trestle is one of only two remaining bridges along the former trolley line linking Georgetown to Glen Echo, Maryland. This line, constructed around 1900, provided the transportation to a 'trolley' park – hundreds of thousands of Washingtonians used the line to access the Glen Echo Amusement Park. Although all the tracks have been removed, the right-of-way continues as a trail along the Potomac River overlook through the Palisades neighborhood of Northwest Washington, DC.

The steel bridge span crossing Foundry Branch in Glover Archbold Park is one of the few remaining early transport bridges in the city. However, rust and weathering have seriously damaged the structure, and the trestle is barely standing with the help of improvised cables. The derelict condition of the structure impedes its ability to be a valuable recreational resource for the city.

DCPL supports the repair and reuse of the trestle as an important resource to the DC park system. Stabilization of the bridge will allow connectivity to paths at both ends and surrounding areas of the park.



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Top: Center Building at St. Elizabeths, designed by Thomas U. Walter. Bottom: Administration Building by Shepley, Ruten & Coolidge Architects. DCPL Archives.

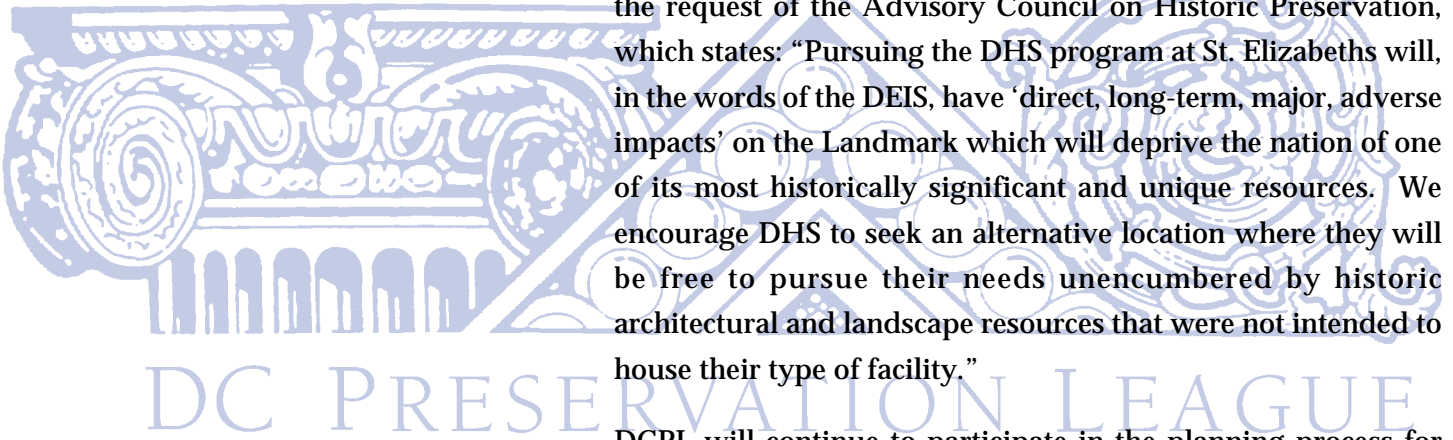
St. Elizabeths Hospital West Campus 2700 Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue, SE

The west campus of St. Elizabeths Hospital, a National Historic Landmark, is composed of more than 176 acres on a high plateau in southeast Washington, overlooking the confluence of the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers. Considered to be the preeminent panoramic view of the capital city and northern Virginia, (from “The Point”) the site was chosen for its bucolic setting by Dorothea Dix and the first Superintendent Charles H. Nichols. The west campus consists of 61 buildings, the oldest and most magnificent of these being the Center Building, built in 1852 and designed by Thomas U. Walter, then Architect of the Capitol. Specimen trees gathered from around the world over a century ago and planted to enhance the treatment of the patients grace the grounds.

The site is well known and prominent in the mental health field. St. Elizabeths was the first large-scale government-run insane asylum, the result of Dorothea Dix’s persistent lobbying of Congress. The entire campus was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1979, designated a National Historic Landmark in 1990, and placed on the DC Inventory of Historic Sites in 2005.

The pressure to develop the vacant property for use as the proposed consolidated headquarters of the Department of Homeland Security remains a significant threat to this historic site. The National Park Service has issued a Section 213 report at the request of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, which states: “Pursuing the DHS program at St. Elizabeths will, in the words of the DEIS, have ‘direct, long-term, major, adverse impacts’ on the Landmark which will deprive the nation of one of its most historically significant and unique resources. We encourage DHS to seek an alternative location where they will be free to pursue their needs unencumbered by historic architectural and landscape resources that were not intended to house their type of facility.”

DCPL will continue to participate in the planning process for this site and encourage a re-use incorporating rehabilitation of historic structures and landscapes, sensitive new construction and public access to “The Point”.





The General Hospital at Walter Reed. DCPL Archives.

Walter Reed 6900 Georgia Avenue, NW

This 110-acre campus was named for Major Walter Reed (1851 – 1902), the famous US Army medical doctor. The hospital opened its doors on May 1, 1909 to ten patients. Fourteen years later, General John J. Pershing signed the War Department order creating the Army Medical Center. In September 1951, the complex of 100 rose-brick Georgian buildings became known as the Walter Reed Army Medical Center in further tribute to this hero of medical science. The Center was built due to the untiring efforts of Colonel William Cline Borden who was the initiator, planner and effective mover for the creation, location, and first Congressional support of the Medical Center; it is still referred to today as “Borden’s Dream.”

World War I saw the hospital’s capacity grow from 80 patient beds to 2,500 in a matter of months. During World War II, the Korea and Vietnam Wars, and the two Gulf Wars hundreds of thousands of soldiers were treated at Walter Reed. Today, the Walter Reed Army Medical Center continues to serve the military community from the Washington, DC area, and around the world, admitting 16,000 patients a year, and houses the National Museum of Health and Medicine with odd specimens such as Gen. Daniel Sickles’ leg.

Announced for closing in 2005, through the Base Realignment and Closure endeavor, the services provided by the medical center will be moved to the Bethesda Naval Hospital 7 miles away. A proposal has been created to create a “diplomatic campus” on the site, however the impact is unclear. DCPL continues to encourage the Federal and District Governments to create a preservation plan for the buildings. This plan will assist officials in planning for the future so that we don’t encounter the same neglect or proposed overdevelopment that has plagued the other major campuses in Washington, such as St. Elizabeths, Armed Forces Retirement Home and the McMillan Reservoir.



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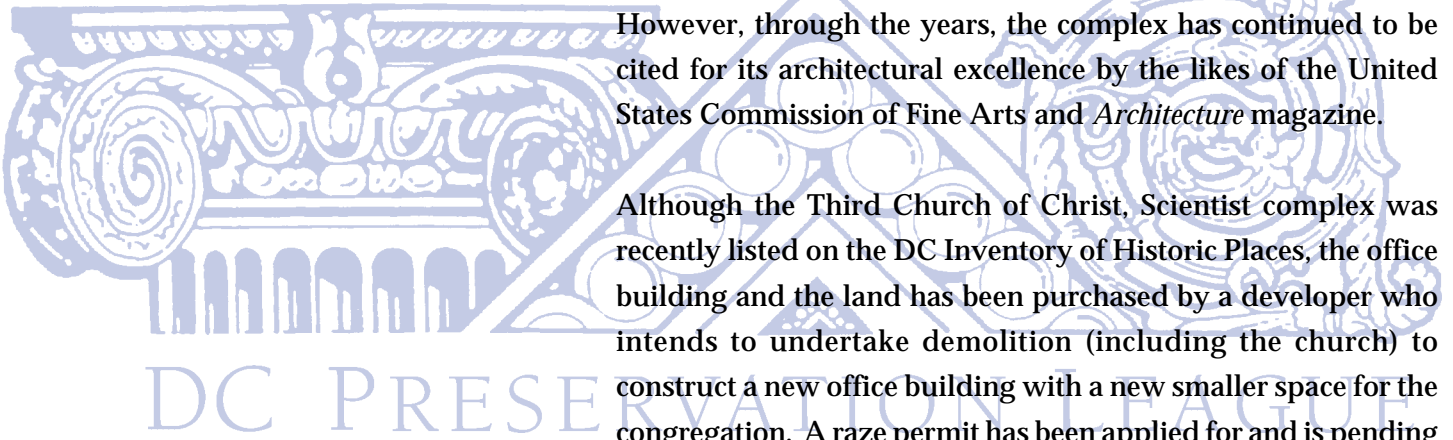
Third Church of Christ, Scientist. DCPL Archives.

Third Church of Christ, Scientist 900 16th Street, NW

The Third Church of Christ, Scientist complex exemplifies the dilemma of the preservation of the recent past. Built in 1971 and designed by renowned architect Araldo Cassutta while a partner in the firm of I.M. Pei & Partners, the Third Church complex won accolades from its very beginning. According to a Visitor Guide once passed out by the church itself, the complex was cited for architectural excellence by the Washington Board of Trade. The local chapter of the American Institute of Architects, shortly after its completion, dubbed the church “perhaps the most satisfying new complex in the city.” Of course not all critics approved entirely of the design. The Washington Post’s architectural critic of the time called it “rude and disorderly.” However, he also acknowledged the fact that the building, with its “great shafts of light,” was “unquestionably ingeniously designed.”

At issue with the design of the Third Church was, and continues to be, its “brutalistic” expression. Imposing, exposed poured-in-place reinforced concrete, minimal glazing, and a deliberately inward-looking design continue to be characteristics of the “brutalist” style of architecture popular in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s that have their champions and their critics. The generally “cold” feeling of the building and the empty plaza between the church building and its companion L-shaped office tower have received their share of criticism. Some believe the building to be a programmatic failure and expensive to maintain. However, through the years, the complex has continued to be cited for its architectural excellence by the likes of the United States Commission of Fine Arts and *Architecture* magazine.

Although the Third Church of Christ, Scientist complex was recently listed on the DC Inventory of Historic Places, the office building and the land has been purchased by a developer who intends to undertake demolition (including the church) to construct a new office building with a new smaller space for the congregation. A raze permit has been applied for and is pending review by the HPRB. DCPL will continue its efforts to try to work with the developer and church congregation to find a solution for this site.





Stevens Elementary School , May 2008. DCPL Archives.

Historic DC Public School Buildings Citywide

DC Public School buildings have played an important role in shaping the lives of countless past and present DC residents. Representing well over one hundred years of history, many of these buildings were designed by noteworthy architects and represent a wide variety of architectural expressions from Elizabethan to Modernist. Of the 165 public school buildings, 86 are eligible for listing on the DC Inventory of Historic Sites but only 21 have so far been acknowledged.

Years of deferred maintenance as a result of budget cuts and mis-management have left many school buildings in an advanced state of disrepair. Some are vacant and rapidly deteriorating while others are being renovated for new purposes.

Last year the Mayor and the new Chancellor of Public Schools announced the closure of several schools and a major new initiative to rehabilitate the rest. For those whose fate is closure, their future rests entirely upon what new use, if any, can be determined. For those facing rehabilitation, careful consideration should be made of the key elements worthy of preservation.

DCPL has been actively monitoring the plans of the DC Public School System and working to encourage the implementation of the recently legislated project review program for DC Government-owned buildings. DCPL's Landmarks Committee has also been actively pursuing the nominations of undesignated schools to the DC Inventory of Historic Sites.



Top: 827-833 Kentucky Avenue SE. Bottom: 712-718 16th Street SE. DCPL Archives.

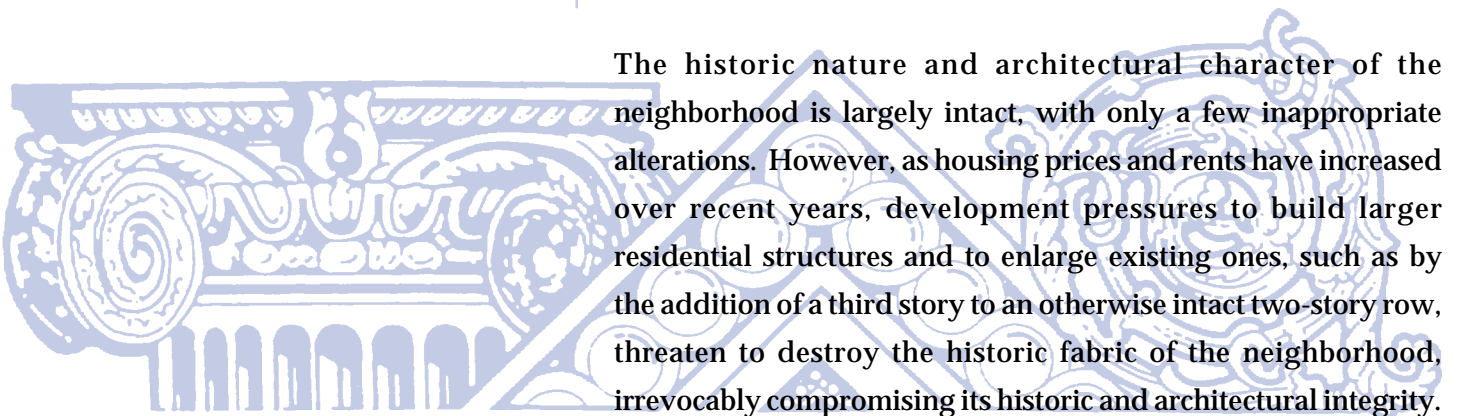
Barney Circle Neighborhood

(Bounded by Potomac Avenue, SE to the north, 17th Street, SE to the east, Kentucky Avenue, SE to the west, and Pennsylvania Avenue, SE to the south.)

Located to the east of the Capitol Hill Historic District in southeast Washington, Barney Circle is a residential neighborhood, roughly triangular in shape, developed around the time of the First World War to provide affordable housing for people moving to Washington to work in the war effort. The neighborhood is comprised of uninterrupted rows of single-family brick rowhouses that typify the area and give it character and identity. Largely unadorned and modest in scale and style, these two-story rowhouses are wider and shallower than their nineteenth century precedents and are characterized by their horizontal orientation, front porches and yards, and such details as overhanging eaves, mansard roofs with dormers, and brick stringcourses. Known as “daylight” rowhouses because they were designed to be only two rooms deep, ensuring that each room had windows which allowed sunlight and fresh air into the house, the rowhouses are set back from the street and read as a cohesive unit along the streetscape.

The historic nature and architectural character of the neighborhood is largely intact, with only a few inappropriate alterations. However, as housing prices and rents have increased over recent years, development pressures to build larger residential structures and to enlarge existing ones, such as by the addition of a third story to an otherwise intact two-story row, threaten to destroy the historic fabric of the neighborhood, irrevocably compromising its historic and architectural integrity.

The DC Preservation League supports the preservation of this historic neighborhood and encourages the community’s recent efforts to secure its historic designation and to educate the public about this architecturally and culturally significant neighborhood.



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The 300 Block of E Street NW. DCPL Archives.

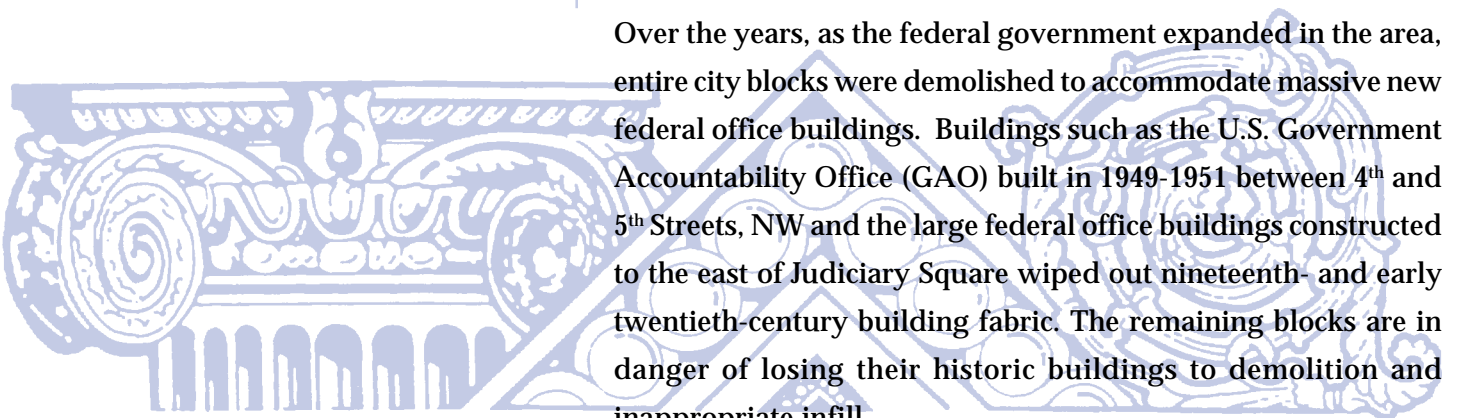
Judiciary Square Clusters 300 Block of E Street, NW

The Judiciary Square Clusters comprise a mix of historic buildings located in the Judiciary Square area as typified by the 300 block of E Street, NW, that serve as cohesive reminders of the living neighborhood that existed in the eastern part of downtown Washington before the expansion of the federal government in the area. The surviving structures include a variety of building types and architectural styles dating from circa 1850 to 1959 that reflect the neighborhood's development from a vibrant late-nineteenth-century community with its blend of residential, commercial, and religious architecture to a government center with little trace of its nineteenth century and early twentieth century historic fabric.

The 300 block of E Street, NW contains several of the area's remaining buildings. At the northwest corner of 3rd and E Streets, NW, stands Trinity Arms Apartments (formerly known as the McKinley Apartments), the 1908 four-story-plus-basement apartment building designed by notable Washington architect Mathew G. Lepley. It mirrors the neighboring four-story apartment building, built in 1907, located on 3rd Street, NW. Adjoining the apartment building to the west is the the last single-family dwelling on the block with a long history of distinguished residents.

Over the years, as the federal government expanded in the area, entire city blocks were demolished to accommodate massive new federal office buildings. Buildings such as the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) built in 1949-1951 between 4th and 5th Streets, NW and the large federal office buildings constructed to the east of Judiciary Square wiped out nineteenth- and early twentieth-century building fabric. The remaining blocks are in danger of losing their historic buildings to demolition and inappropriate infill.

DCPL will prepare a landmark nomination on this cluster and urges the city to take the necessary steps to protect these historic resources and to mitigate the adverse effects of unsympathetic development and improvements.



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2700 Wade Road SE. DCPL Archives.

Barry Farm Frame Houses 2700-2800 Block of Wade Road, SE

The three frame houses located along the 2800 block of Wade Road in southeast Washington represent the only surviving dwellings of the Barry Farm neighborhood which developed east of the Anacostia River in the mid-nineteenth century. Constructed on land purchased from the heirs of James D. Barry and located between St. Elizabeths Hospital and Uniontown, the community of Barry Farm was planned as part of an initiative after the Civil War to provide homes for former slaves. Larger than the original Barry Farm residences of the 1860s and 1870s, these three remaining dwellings represent the types of residences that were built at the beginning of the twentieth century as the African-American community became more settled and affluent. Standing at the edge of the dense growth of vegetation separating Barry Farm from St. Elizabeths, these houses are remnants of the historic community that thrived in this semi-rural area in the mid-nineteenth century through the early twentieth century.

Today, these frame houses are unprotected historic resources in an area with little vestige of the historic community that existed. As 1954 redevelopment efforts destroyed nineteenth century historic fabric and replaced houses with several public housing projects, these remaining buildings stand in a community further fragmented by the construction of the Suitland Parkway.

The DC Preservation League will work with the community to encourage the city to protect these historic resources and other clusters of historic frame houses located east of the Anacostia River as further redevelopment plans are entertained for the area and the Barry Farm community.

