

DC PRESERVATION ADVOCATE



Spring 2008

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.

DCPL Annual Fundraiser at Hotel St. Regis: A Great Success

Just under \$100,000 was raised to benefit the DC Preservation League at the annual fundraiser on Thursday, February 7th at the recently reopened St. Regis Hotel. The evening's cocktail reception included a short program to commemorate DCPL's accomplishments over the past year, the contributions of numerous supporters, and the work of countless volunteers. The event drew people from all over the city to focus on the role that historic preservation and DCPL play in shaping the character of Washington's unique neighborhoods and its historic downtown. More than 300 friends of DCPL including architects, engineers, developers, preservationists, and community activists attended. Also in attendance were representatives of Claret Capital, the hotel's current owner.



At 257 rooms, the modestly sized Carlton Hotel cost \$3,500,000 to build. In keeping with Beaux Arts ideals, the limestone building displays a classical vocabulary. The first floor, or base, features floor-to-ceiling arched windows, rusticated masonry and simply detailed pilasters. Rusticated quoins extend from the base over the relatively unadorned middle comprising the second through sixth floors. A bracketed cornice articulates the top two

Left: Rendering of the St. Regis by artist Maria Morga. Below: Photograph CA 1926, courtesy of Mesrobian Family Architectural Archives.

floors which also incorporates pilasters of an Ionic/Corinthian blend and arched window hoods.



During the late 1930s, the Carlton became the residence of Secretary of State Cordell Hull, who transacted much of the government's business at the hotel. Ever since, the Carlton has been popular with members of Washington's political elite including presidents and their families. Successive administrations turned to the Carlton to host high level diplomatic meetings and glamorous galas, including several inaugural banquets.

The St. Regis, Washington, DC first opened its doors in October, 1926 as the Carlton Hotel. Mirroring the ambitions of the St. Regis founder, John Jacob Astor IV, Washington real estate developer Harry Wardman wished to create a sophisticated establishment that would surpass the very best European luxury hotels of the day. To do this, Wardman enlisted his construction company's architect Mihran Mesrobian.

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...Continued on page 6

DC Public Schools Subject of Presentation

Renovation, repair and reuse were the “Three R’s of DC Public Schools,” discussed at the District of Columbia Building Industry Association (DCBIA) Evening Meeting on Thursday, March 27th at the National Press Club. DCPL co-hosted the event with president John Bellingham moderating the discussion.

David Maloney, DC Historic Preservation Officer, Josh Adler of Lakritz |Adler, and Allen Lew, the recently appointed Executive Director of Public Education Facilities Modernization, participated in the discussion. Given the major initiative to improve DC Public Schools and the announced closure of many buildings, the fate of some potentially historic buildings is “up in the air.”

In his remarks, Adler addressed the challenges in turning historic school buildings into profitable development opportunities. Citing the unique architectural conditions, he said that their most probable use would be for residential projects. He noted that due to their layout, conversion to other uses would be extremely difficult. Charter Schools, in recent years, have been an excellent potential redevelopment option, however, many are currently waiting to see what incentives they might be available as a result of the school closure and reuse program.



From left: Josh Adler, David Maloney and Allen Lew.

Maloney provided the audience with an overview of DC Public School Building history, citing several major periods of development from pre-Civil War to the Modern Era. Noting the fact that 21 schools have been listed in the DC Inventory of Historic Sites and that 65 are still eligible, he recommended that those interested in developing or rehabbing a school building consult with the Historic Preservation Office early in the process.

Lew, enthusiastic about his new role, described Mayor Fenty’s desire to make quick progress with school improvements, saying he “wants it done yesterday.” He described the effects of years of deferred maintenance on the buildings that, in the end, will end up costing the District more than the savings realized by their neglect. In some cases basic services such as bathrooms, heat and lighting, are completely non-functioning or substandard.

This program has received Federal financial assistance for the identification, protection, and/or rehabilitation of historic properties and cultural resources in the District of Columbia. Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the U.S. Department of the Interior prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, or disability in its Federally assisted programs. If you believe that you have been discriminated against in any program, activity, or facility as described above, or if you desire further information, please write to: Office of Equal Opportunity, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1849 C Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20240.

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DC Preservation Advocate is a quarterly publication of the DC Preservation League. DCPL’s mission is to preserve, protect, and enhance the historic and built environment of Washington, DC, through advocacy and education. Readers are encouraged to submit information and opinions.

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HPRB Awards Third Church of Christ Scientist Landmark Status

Much has been said and written about the designation of the Third Church of Christ Scientist at 16th & I Streets NW as a DC Landmark. Reaction has ranged from appreciation to vehement opposition. Therefore, the DC Preservation League, would like to take the opportunity to explain its position in support of historic designation.

Once upon a time, Victorian architecture had few champions. Viewed as ugly, garish and impractical, few people were ready to stand before a wrecking ball to save what today would be readily embraced. With the passage of time and a greater appreciation for the past, we have grown to accept and appreciate the whimsical features, once so readily despised, as representative of the time in which they were built.

Today, as we become more accustomed to looking at buildings and objects in a more historic context, it is understandable that many of us begin to question what from our era will endure the test of time. Increasingly, those interested in historic preservation are beginning to wrestle with the question of the “more recent past.” Traditionally, a 50-year rule-of-thumb has been applied when considering historic designation. However, when we look at buildings such as the 1967 Watergate complex in Foggy Bottom (designated a historic landmark in 2005) and recognize its significance, it becomes hard to apply such an arbitrary date of construction to the equation. After all, if a building is truly significant, is age not irrelevant? The buildings that survive from our past are often not retained by accident, but because at 10 years, 30 years, 100 years, or more, they were deemed worth saving.

The Third Church of Christ Scientist complex, exemplifies this 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 inception. 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 shortly after its completion. The local chapter of the American Institute of Architects 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, at the same time, 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 still is, its “brutalistic,”



Left: The Third Church’s unique shape and projecting bell assembly. Below: The plaza separating the Church and the Monitor office building. Both photos property of DCPL.



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 has its champions and 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. However, through the years, the complex has continued to be sighted for its architectural excellence by the likes of the United States Commission of Fine Arts and *Architecture* magazine.

...Continued on page 4

Third Church Designation

Continued from page 3

In 1991, when faced with the possibility of sale and demolition, the Committee of 100 and the DC Preservation League completed a Landmark Nomination for the Third Church. This nomination was tabled with the agreement that the two organizations and the church would meet to try and reach a compromise. Sixteen years later those discussions yielded no results and, to clarify the criticism levied against the Historic Preservation Office, the HPRB, and the nomination's sponsors, the application was further delayed at the request of the church. Contrary to the words of a *Washington Post* columnist, there were no "untold billable hours" involved in the case. There were few developments until 2007 when ICG Partners purchased the property (the office tower and the land the church building rests upon) and, despite being aware at the time of purchase that a Landmark Nomination was on file, submitted a plan proposing full demolition of the site.

Regardless of one's personal taste, there is no doubt that the Third Church is significant. It is the work of a master architect, of noteworthy design, representative of a specific style of architecture, and a property distinctive in comparison to the traditional architecture of Washington DC. Therefore, DCPL believes the HPRB correctly made the decision to place the Third Church on the DC Inventory. At this point discussions should, therefore, be focused not on whether or not it is worthy of landmark status, but what to do about it. More productive conversations need to occur with the Third Church congregation and ICG to discuss any options or alternatives short of total demolition. The concerns of the church are the same concerns expressed by any organization facing the stewardship of a historic building. The unusual circumstance of this case, however, is that the Church made the decision to build it. It would be ironic if, after so carefully working to create a piece of monumental architecture worthy of its very public location, they should choose to turn their backs on it and allow it to be torn down.



DCPL Welcomes New President

In January 2008, **John Bellingham** became the 14th President of the DC Preservation League. John

joined the Board of Trustees in 2003 and has participated on both DCPL's Project Review and Development committees and had served as DCPL's Treasurer since 2005.

John, a fellow in the Chartered Institute of Building and the American Institute of Construction, founded Monarc Construction Inc. in 1987. He has extensive experience in the construction industry through his work for large general contractors, both in England and in metropolitan Washington, DC. Some of Monarc's notable renovation projects include the restoration of the Forrest Marbury House, the Bond Building, European Community Ambassador's Residence, British Ambassador's Residence, The George Washington University Faculty Club, the Folger Shakespeare Memorial Library Education Center and the Tivoli Theater.

Are You A Member? Has Your Membership Expired?

Visit www.dcpreservation.org or call the office at 202.783.5144 today. Your DCPL Membership ensures a bright future for our built environment.

Interested in Volunteering?

DC Preservation League is always looking for new volunteers. For more information, contact Erik Hein at erik@dcpreservation.org or at 202.783.5144.

May is Preservation Month

WALKING TOUR:

MT. VERNON, DC

MAY 10, 10:00 A.M. - 12:30 P.M.

FREE TO MEMBERS, \$20 NON-MEMBERS

Join DCPL for a walking tour of the Mount Vernon neighborhood to view first-hand the results of the \$1 million Convention Center mitigation fund targeted to historic preservation initiatives as part of the convention center development. Free to DCPL Members; Non-members, \$20. Reservations required. Contact the DCPL office or email rsvp@dcpreservation.org.

PRIVATE TOUR/RECEPTION:

CITY TAVERN CLUB

MAY 21, 6:30 PM - 8:30 PM

FREE TO MEMBERS, \$50 NON-MEMBERS

The City Tavern Club, at 3206 M Street NW, is located in one of the oldest buildings in Washington, City Tavern, built in 1796. John Adams used the building as his headquarters while supervising the construction of the then new national capital, and countless other presidents and dignitaries have met and dined on the premises. The City Tavern Club, a private organization founded in 1959 to preserve the building has graciously agreed to open its doors for one night to DCPL members for a private tour and wine reception. Reservations required. **Business Attire**

ANNOUNCEMENT:

MOST ENDANGERED PLACES

MAY 13, 12:30 PM

Since 1996, DCPL has announced a list of Most Endangered Places to draw attention to Washington, DC's historically, culturally and architecturally significant places that may be threatened by ill-advised alteration or demolition through neglect or abandonment. Join DCPL for the media announcement of the Most Endangered Places for 2008 at Stevens Elementary School, 1050 21st Street NW.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM:

HISTORIC PRESERVATION 101

MAY 30, 9:00 A.M. - 12:00 PM

Speakers from the DC Historic Preservation Office and the L'Enfant Trust will join DCPL for an overview of historic preservation in Washington, DC, including a brief history of the movement, advice on how to navigate historic district requirements and tips on historic preservation funding and the value of easements. Registration required.

Gallaudet University, Kellogg Conference Center

800 Florida Avenue NE

On-Site Parking

**Free for Members of the Board of Real Estate and
the Board of Appraisers (CEC Available)**

\$40 for DCPL members; \$60 non-members

DCPL Member Authors Book

DCPL Member **Helen Tangires** has authored a new book entitled *Public Markets: A Norton/Library of Congress Visual Sourcebook*.

Focused on the historic exchange of food and other commodities in cities and towns, the book spotlights the variety of formats of public markets throughout the world. More than 800 illustrations are provided from collections including the Historic American Buildings Survey and Historic American Engineering Records.

Tangires holds a Ph.D. in American Studies from the George Washington University. She is a frequent contributor to books and journals on urban foodways and is the author of *Public Markets and Civic Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (2003). Dr. Tangires is also the administrator of the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC.

DCPL Current Issues

Historic Preservation Review Board

DCPL, along with several local preservation organizations, has expressed concern over recent nominations to the HPRB. DCPL provided testimony at the confirmation hearings on February 14th and succeeded in delaying a vote until the organization was able to meet with the candidates. To read DCPL's testimony, visit the "In the News" section of our website.

Office of Planning Oversight Hearing

In February, DCPL provided testimony to the DC Council's Committee of the Whole during the OPA Oversight Hearing. Among the items presented was concern over the HPRB nominations, the City's stewardship of buildings, the need for tax incentives for preservation, and legal support for the Historic Preservation Office. To read DCPL's testimony, visit the "In the News" section of our website.

14th and U Streets NW Proposed Development

A large mixed-use construction project has been proposed for the southwest corner of 14th and U Streets. Although contributing buildings to the historic district will be retained, the scale of the development has prompted some concern. To read DCPL's testimony before the HPRB, visit the "In the News" section of our website.

Fundraiser Success *...continued from page one*

During the 1950s, President Truman was a constant fixture at the hotel and would often need to enter through a side window in order to preserve protocol while receiving official guests. Ronald Reagan was a regular visitor to the hotel's barber, Milton Pitts, who cut the hair of several presidents. Robert Kennedy professed the Carlton's chocolate parfait to be his favorite dessert.

The hotel has also been a hub of the capital's social scene. During the 1940s, famous Washington socialite Perle Mesta hosted her celebrated pink-themed galas at the Carlton. Joan Crawford, Jacqueline Onassis, Audrey Hepburn, Elizabeth Taylor, Cher and countless other luminaries have been loyal guests. Howard Hughes kept a permanent suite at the Carlton during World War II, which he famously made available at no cost to uniformed servicemen during his absence.

In December 1987, the Carlton shut its doors for an extensive \$16 million renovation, reopening on October 2, 1988, its 62nd birthday. The renovation enlarged guest rooms, as well as enhanced bathrooms and improved the hotel's communications infrastructure.

In 1999, after 73 years as the Carlton Hotel, the property assumed a new mantle as The St. Regis, Washington, DC, the first hotel to share the legendary St. Regis name with the flagship New York hotel.

In December 2007, the St. Regis Washington, DC reopened following a landmark 16-month renovation to become, once again, the capital's most luxurious hotel. The renovation provided a complete makeover of guest rooms and all public areas, including the lobby, ballroom, the Astor Terrace, St. Regis Athletic Club and meeting rooms.

All photographs by Beckha Drake & Kyle Samperton



From left: John Bellingham, DCPL President; Rebecca Miller, DCPL Executive Director; Representatives from Claret Capital, owners of the St. Regis Hotel, Paul Geaney and Jim Kane.



From left: DCPL Board Members Edward Dunson and Shalom Baranes.



From left: Caroline Mesrobian Hickman, granddaughter of architect Mihran Mesrobian; Melissa Keshishian; Douglas Jemal.



Approximately 300 people enjoyed the evening's festivities.

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