



Historical Research  
of  
**53 D Street, S.E.**



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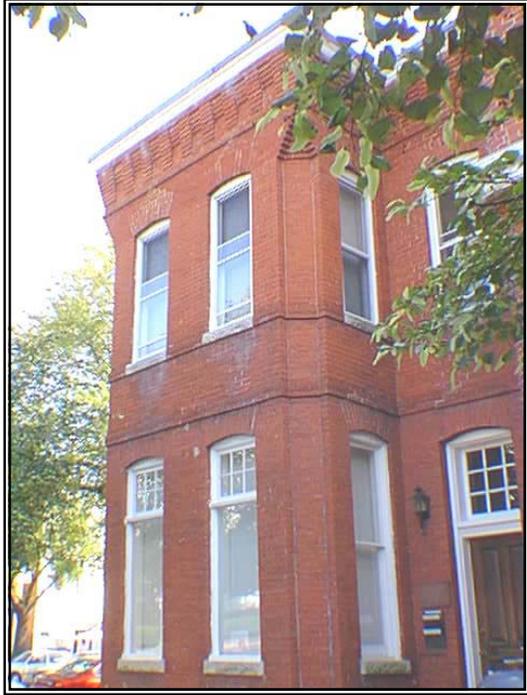


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## The Construction & Evolution of 53 D Street, S.E.

The original construction permit for the house that stands at 53 D Street has not been retained by the National Archives, but an index entry reveals that it was granted on July 6, 1898 to Elia and Margarite Chelini. It was built on part of a large lot enumerated as lot 8, and joined several older homes and businesses built along the block decades prior.

Constructed as a residential building, it was rented to a variety of families during the Chelini tenure, which lasted until 1916. A little more than twenty years after it was constructed, however, the homes ground

floor was converted to a storefront, to take advantage of its corner location and early zoning laws that encouraged grocery stores to locate in residential neighborhoods.

Later owner Jacob Rosenbloom applied for and was granted an *Application for Permit to Repair or Reconstruct Buildings* numbered 4506 on February 17, 1921 to combine two windows on the east façade into a large storefront window. His application read: "One double window in Grocery Room. Owner wants to make one window out of it so as to give more light. Window to be 6 x 8 plate glass with iron beam overhead." He indicated that contractor C.R. Schaeffer would complete the job at the estimated cost of \$150.00. Rosenbloom ran the grocery business at the site, and an inspector's note that has survived reveals that the alteration was finished on March 31, 1921.

Later resident Morris Bassin continued the tradition of a grocery store at 53 D Street in the following decade when in 1931 he applied for a sign permit that indicated the store was named "D.G.S" and sold fruits and vegetables.

No. 1004 required \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Form No. 1-2-21

### Application for Permit to Repair or Reconstruct Buildings

Washington, D. C. February 17 1921

To the INSPECTOR OF BUILDINGS:

The Underlined owner hereby applies for a permit to alter, repair or reconstruct the following building:

1. Owner's name Jacob Rosenbloom

2. House number 53 Street D Street

3. Nearest intersecting street Lot 8 D St NW

4. Number of lot 8 Square 694

5. Applicant's name \_\_\_\_\_

6. Contractor's name C. R. Schaeffer

7. Description of the Building:

7.1. For many buildings to be repaired: \_\_\_\_\_ Material of house Brick Roof Iron

7.2. No. of stories in height 3 Width of front 25 ft No. of feet deep 43 ft

7.3. How is the building to be occupied? Store If a dwelling, how many families? 1

7.4. Will the building be wired for electric lighting, heating or power? \_\_\_\_\_

7.5. Will front yard of building, which altered, project beyond the front walls of other buildings in block? No

7.6. Are alterations in building conform to every respect with the requirements of the building law? Yes

7.7. Contractor's request for above deposit, No. \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Amount \$ \_\_\_\_\_

7.8. What is the estimated cost of the improvement? \$150.00

7.9. I hereby approved before me this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ A. D. 1921

\_\_\_\_\_ who being duly sworn, deposes and says that the building and repairs contemplated on the attached application are for the purpose stated.

Notary Public, D.C.

Description of the Proposed Improvements:

One double window in Grocery Room

Owner wants to make one window out of it so as to give more light.

Window to be 6 x 8 plate glass with iron beam overhead.

Contractor's name C. R. Schaeffer

Estimated cost \$150.00

Completed by \_\_\_\_\_

Submitted to \_\_\_\_\_

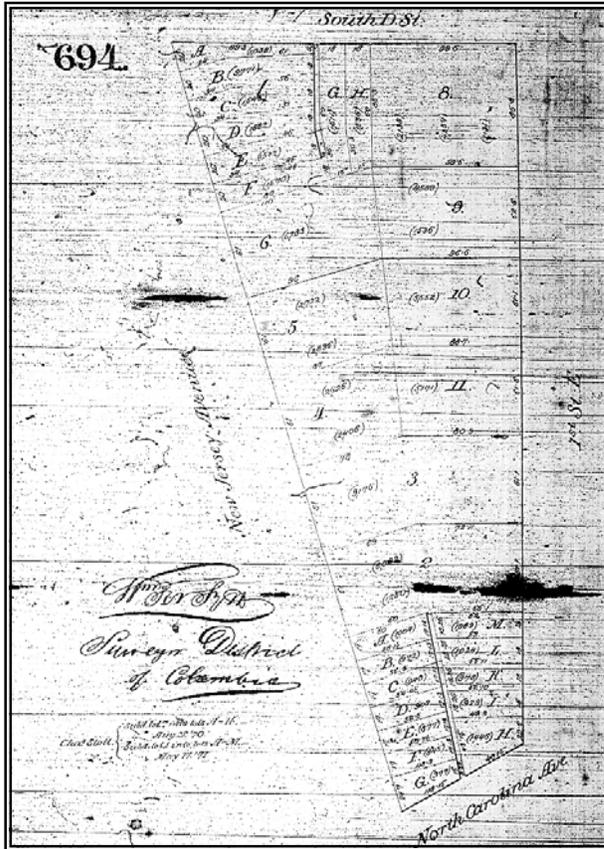
RECOMMENDED FOR PERMIT FEB 17 1921 A. F. MCGONIGAL INSPECTOR OF BUILDINGS

APPLICATION MUST BE SIGNED BY OWNER OF PROPERTY AND APPROVED BY INSPECTOR OF PLUMBING.

SIGNATURE OF OWNER: J. Rosenbloom

APPLICANT: \_\_\_\_\_

## The Development of Square 694



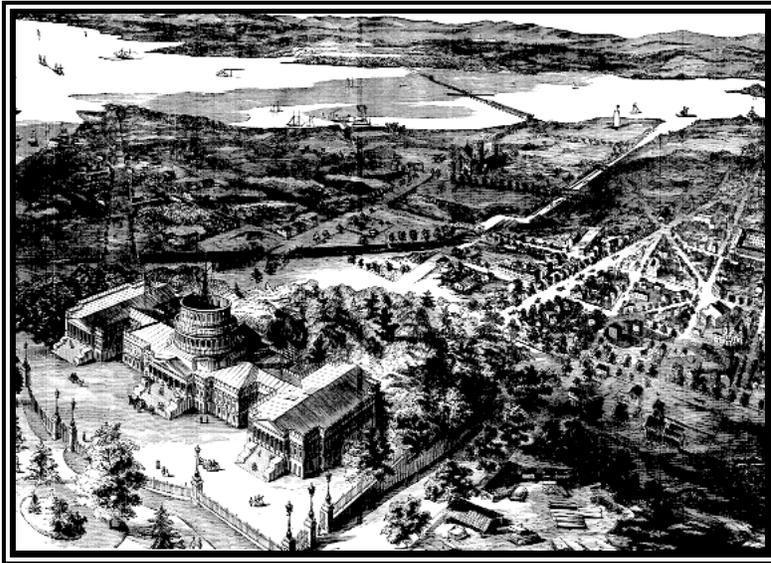
Despite its close proximity to the Capitol building, the large lots on Square 694 were not subdivided into lots suitable for individual townhouse development until 1870, although a few homes existed on the block at that time. That year, Charles Stott subdivided lot 7 at the corner of D Street and New Jersey Avenue into eight lots lettered A to H. A year later, in 1871, he subdivided lot 1 at the point of 1<sup>st</sup> Street, North Carolina Avenue and New Jersey Avenue, into 12 lots numbered A to M.

An 1874 tax assessment map, illustrated at left, records that at the time, the block had only twenty-two homes located within its boarder. The

most highly taxed property stood at the corner of New Jersey Avenue and D Street, a brick house valued at \$3,500. Seven other houses in the Stott subdivision were also composed of brick, two facing D Street valued at \$2,000 and five facing New Jersey Avenue valued at \$3,000 each. Stott had built seven brick houses on his other subdivision on the square, all facing 1<sup>st</sup> Street near the corner of North Carolina Avenue. They were each valued at \$2,200.

Seven other houses were located on the block in 1874, all built of wood. They were valued between \$200 and \$800, and most likely later torn down for more substantial brick structures that exist today. The townhouse at 47 D Street was constructed in the spring of 1887, while the one located at 43 D Street was built following issuance of its permit on July 11, 1891. 51 D Street was built in the winter of 1893, and the two houses at 49 and 51 D Street in the summer of 1895.





## Capitol Hill: A Brief History

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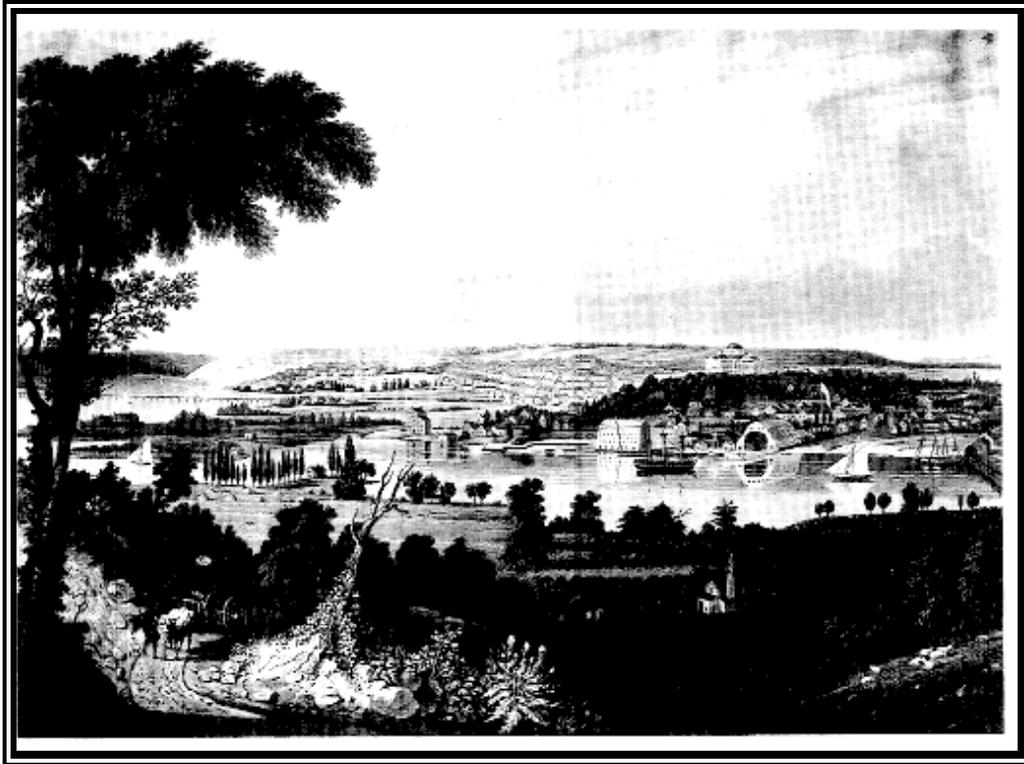
While the name of the current neighborhood derives its name from the proximity to the United States Capitol, it is actually is not located on a hill. The Capitol is situated on the highest point of land between the Anacostia and Potomac Rivers, hence its name Capitol Hill. However,

the Capitol Hill neighborhood developed on the high plateau extending east from the crest of the hill and originally it was hoped that the deep waters of the Anacostia at the time that the city was designed in 1791 would support a significant port.

Pierre Charles L'Enfant planned East Capitol Street to be 160 feet wide, to accommodate a major commercial street deriving its existence from the series of ports that never were developed along the shoreline. Siltation from early urban development had caused the river to become marshy, and by the time the McMillan Plan of 1901-1902 was implemented, it was recommended that the shoreline be filled in for much needed parkland. By the 1920s and 1930s this new formed parkland was mostly built upon due to increased housing needs, which serves to explain the newer building stock close to the present day river edge.

L'Enfant also designed at the midway point along East Capitol Street a park (now Lincoln Park) to house a "historic column from whose station, (a mile from the Federal House), all distances of places through the Continent, are to be calculated." While the column never materialized, the park that served as the outer boundary of the neighborhood in 1876 received Thomas Ball's Emancipation Monument erected solely from the contributions of freed slaves.

The first neighborhood called "Capitol Hill" was a small cluster of homes located at first and Second Streets along New Jersey Avenue, S.E. around 1800. Few Congressmen preferred to establish permanent residence in the city during the early years of the Republic, and choose instead to rent rooms in one of the numerous boarding houses located within walking distance of the Capitol. This cluster remained the major residential area of the neighborhood for the next several decades. Two houses remain from this period, at 20 and 22 Third Street, S.E., dating from around 1820.

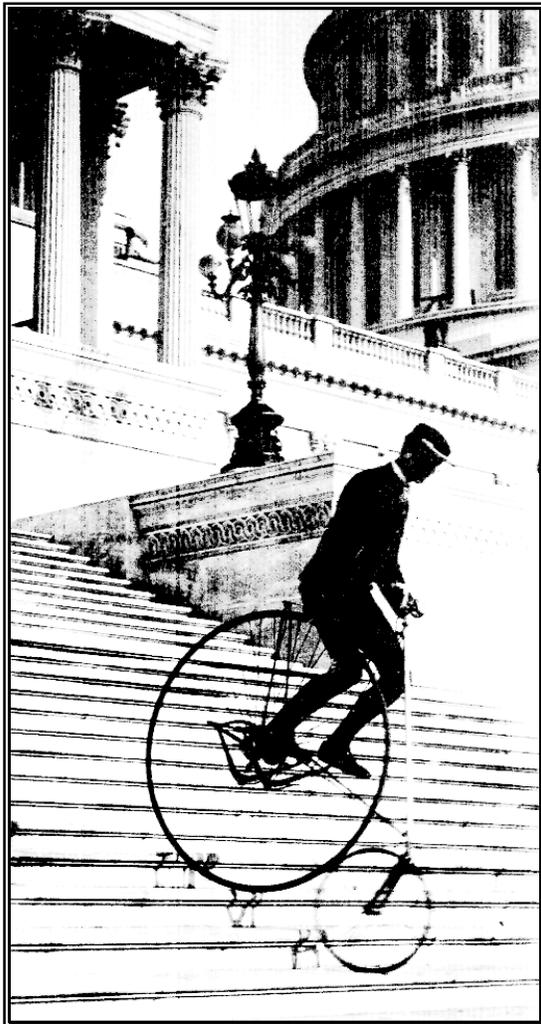


Other areas began to witness development shortly thereafter, including the Navy Yard and the nearby Marine Barracks. The illustration above, from an 1834 drawing by George Cooke, shows the Navy Yard and sparse development beyond. In addition to the formal military architecture, many low quality homes were constructed in the surrounding areas to house skilled and unskilled construction labor. Construction in southeast Washington remained slow during the first half of the nineteenth century, however. The boarding house area close to the Capitol began expanding somewhat by 1850, and several merchants had begun to construct stores to serve the growing residential population around the Marine Barracks.

A few of the homes from the mid nineteenth century remain on Capitol Hill, perhaps the best known at 326 A Street, S.E. It was built around 1850, and was the home of Constantino Brumidi, an Italian artist who was responsible for most of the decoration of the U.S. Capitol, including the large rotunda frescoes.

Many homes on Capitol Hill served as hospitals and boarding houses during the Civil War, when new construction was rare. An attempt was made by speculative builder Captain Alfred Grant to develop an area of the Hill into a lavish and desired residential neighborhood in 1871 when he constructed a row of sixteen mansions along A Street and fourteen mansions on East Capitol Street. They were designed to sell for an impressive \$75,000 each, and were leveraged as was much of the speculative development at that time. The project failed, and they were eventually demolished and replaced by the Folger Shakespeare Library beginning in 1928.

Following the War, however, Capitol Hill and the rest of Washington experienced a tremendous growth period, as new workers and freed slaves poured into Washington to work for the newly expanded Federal Government. Notorious vice president of the Board of Public Works Alexander “Boss” Sheperd, proposed a civic improvement scheme for Washington in 1871 that had a budget of \$6 million dollars that stimulated new construction all over the city before it ultimately failed under numerous allegations of scandals and kick-backs. The housing market could not keep up with this new influx of workers, however, and many



Capitol Hill homeowners built additions or rented rooms throughout the 1880's.

Local building associations advertised the need for masons to gather and construct new housing as quickly as possible. The new wave of employment in the Federal government was prompted by the Pendleton Act in 1883, which eliminated the previous method of hiring by appointments, and inaugurated one based upon competitive merit. Thus, the quality and social stature of the employees increased sharply, and the top salary for the government that year increased to \$4,000, a substantial sum for the time.

The area that is now known as the Capitol Hill Historic District was primarily built up in the 1880's and 1890s for speculative housing on a more modest scale. Several developers and architects collaborated to construct homes often one entire block at a time. These included such men as Diller B. Groff, Nicholas T. Haller, Nicholas Grimm, J.T. Walker, T. Franklin Schneider and countless others.



## Residents of 53 D Street, S.E.

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The house that stands at 53 D Street, S.E. today was built in July of 1898 by Elia and Margarite Chelini. They took out a \$2,500 mortgage with the Arlington Fire Insurance Company, with full payment due in 3 years and an annual interest rate of 5%. Although Elia listed no occupation in early City Directory's, members of his family lived close by and included Eugene M. Chelini at 106 D Street, S.E., an employee of the bureau of printing and engraving, and Eugene V. Chelini at 300 9<sup>th</sup> Street, S.E., a grocer. It joined an impressive array of early homes built along the block, the land of which was once part of the large estate of the Carroll family.

Interestingly, the Chelini's apparently rented 53 D Street, S.E. during their tenure of ownership while they resided at 115 H Street, N.W. They owned 53 D Street until 1916. The 1900 census indicates that they first rented the property to Walt McDonald and his wife Sarah. He was then age 41, had been born in Virginia, and worked as a cook. His wife was then age 70, and they had been married just one year by the time the census information was gathered in 1900. She had been a widow and had been married for 50 years to her first husband, with whom she had seven children. Both were listed as African Americans in the census.

The 1908 City Directory reveals that beginning that year, the house was rented to George Soter, a grocer. He would operate his grocery business from the first floor of the house, and would reside there along with his family until 1914. The 1910 census reveals additional information on the Soter's; George and his wife Amelia. He was of German decent, and ran the grocery business in the first floor along with his 18 year old son George, Jr. George Sr. was then age 63, and his wife age 41. They had married in 1891, and had two children, only one of whom was alive in 1910.

53	67	7s	Soter, George F	head	H	m	w	63	m2	19
			Amelia	wife	W	f	w	41	m1	19
			George F jr	son		m	w	18	s	

Owner Eugene Chelini was listed as a grocer in the 1902 City Directory, with a store at 115 H Street, N.W. His son Eugene, Jr., resided close by at 106 D Street, S.E., and worked at the bureau of Printing and Engraving. On June 8, 1916, they sold 53 D Street to grocer Jacob Rosenbloom, who would continue to run his business on the ground floor and reside upstairs until 1924.

The 1920 census reveals that the Jacob Rosenbloom was then age 45, having been born in Russia in 1875. He had immigrated in 1908, the same year his wife Sarah immigrated to this country. She was age 35 when the census was enumerated in 1920, had also come from Russia. Both had become naturalized citizens in 1917. Their daughter Katie had been born in 1904, and had journeyed to this country via Canada along with her parents in 1908. Another daughter named Eva resided with the Rosenbloom's at 53 D Street. She was age 12 when the census information was gathered, and had been born in Canada in 1908.



Rosenbloom applied for and was granted a permit in the winter of 1921 to install a large picture window on the east façade to accommodate his grocery business on the site. He would continue to own 53 D Street until 1925, when he sold it to I. Joseph Mazo. He rented it beginning that year to grocer Benjamin Kotz.

**APPLICATION FOR PERMIT TO ERECT SIGN**

Name of owner of building M. Bassin FOR CLERK Use Pl

Premises No. 53-D St SE Lot 825 Square 644 Height 60

No. to be erected 1 Material Metal Size 14' x 2' Area C

Date 8-20-31

Applicant is required to show, in space below, the wording, etc., of proposed sign or signs:

Fruits & V S

Will sign be flat against the building line wall? yes

Will it be erected at an angle to wall? no If so, extent of projection none

Will it be erected on any part of building beyond building line? no

If so, where? none Extent of projection none

Will it be a repeated sign? no Will it be placed on roof? no

Height of sign above sidewalk 12 ft How fastened? hooks

Will sign advertise a business conducted on premises? yes Occupancy permit No. 22364

Will lights be used in connection with the sign? no

Number of lights to be used \_\_\_\_\_ Candlepower \_\_\_\_\_

Name of electrical contractor \_\_\_\_\_

Name of sign painter Spiggle Sign Service

Give approximate size of each sign now on building none signs have been removed

If a dentist's sign, will it comply with the Act of Congress of June 7, 1924, regulating the practice of dentistry? yes

**NO SIGN WILL BE PERMITTED TO EXTEND MORE THAN 42 INCHES BEYOND THE BUILDING LINE.**

**A PERMIT MUST BE OBTAINED FOR EACH SIGN THAT EXCEEDS 144 SQUARE INCHES IN AREA.**

**IF LIGHTS ARE TO BE USED, APPLICATION MUST BE MADE IN DUPLICATE AND APPROVAL OF THE ELECTRICAL DEPARTMENT MUST BE OBTAINED BEFORE THIS APPLICATION IS SUBMITTED TO THE INSPECTOR OF BUILDINGS.**

I hereby certify that proposed sign has not yet been erected. Signature of owner M. Bassin Address of owner 53-D St SE

Beginning in 1931, the store and residence was rented to grocer Morris Bassin. He lived upstairs along with Max Bassin, a clerk at the Federal Farm Bureau. Owner Joseph Mazo sold the house and store to George B. Williams on June 14, 1935.

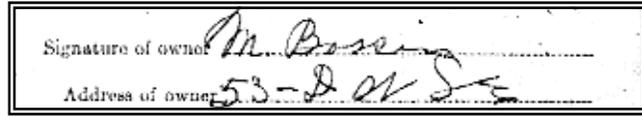
After a four-year rental period, Morris Bassin was able to purchase 53 D Street from its new owner George Williams, on November 29, 1935. He would own and reside there for the following ten years.

Morris Bassin applied for and was granted an *Application for Permit to Erect Sign* numbered 143565 on June 10, 1931 for his grocery business at 53 D Street. The application revealed that one sign would be affixed to the building, and would measure 2 x 14 feet and composed

of metal. It was to read "D.G.S" with the words "fruits and vegetables" along the side. The sign was not electrified, and was to be painted by the Spiggle Sign Service. Bassin resided above his store that year, and an inspector's note dated August 20, 1931 reveals

that the sign was installed as planned. Interestingly, he listed himself as the owner of the building, even though he would not legally hold title for nearly four more years.

Morris Bassin sold 53 D Street on March 8, 1945 to Benjamin M. Chasen, who would own it until 1962.



Chasen rented 53 D Street to Louis Friedman throughout his tenure of ownership. Friedman was listed as both a grocer operating a business on the ground floor, and the occupant of the house above.

Owner Benjamin Chasen sold 53 D Street on August 6, 1962 to Willard W. Garvey. He in turn sold it less than a year later, on March 29, 1963 to J.A.E.M. Incorporated. That entity sold eight equal shares of the property to members of the Garvey family on June 14, 1963. They included "W.W.," James W., Jean K., John K., Ann E., Emily J., Juloe R., and Mary Lyn Garvey.

The City Directory for the year 1967 reveals that the house was converted to strictly office use and occupied by the Congressional Personnel Service, an annex office of the Republican National Committee, and the *Washington World Magazine*. It was listed as vacant in the 1973 Polk Directory, but owned by William L and Mary Oakley by 1984. They rented the premises to Holt and Ross, Incorporated, the National Federation of Republican Women, and an office of Mr. Oakley's throughout the next decade.

In the fall of 2000, the former house and business at 53 D Street, S.E. became the home of the Associated General Contractors of America.





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Information and research provided in this report was completed by Paul K. Williams during the summer of 2000.