GREATER FOURTEENTH STREET AND LOGAN CIRCLE

HISTORIC DISTRICTS

WASHINGTON D.C.

LOGAN CIRCLE

The bronze equestrian figure and memorial to Major General John A. Logan was sculpted by Franklin Simmons in 1901. Allegorical figures of War and Peace and scenes from the general's life are portrayed on the monument's base.

Cover inset photo: LeRoy O. King, Jr.

The Greater Fourteenth Street Historic District is located within the boundaries of the original City of Washington. The neighborhood is characteristic of Victorian era urban expansion, reflecting the rapid growth of the city immediately following the Civil War.

The program of city improvements and modernizations undertaken by the Territorial Government (1871-1874) and guided by Commissioner Alexander "Boss" Shepherd brought amenities such as public sewers, water and gas mains, street grading and paving projects, and the first street car lines to this emerging neighborhood. The cumulative effect of these changes made the area attractive to speculative developers who constructed houses for Washington's growing middle class, including government bureaucrats, office workers and small business owners. Local builders and architects designed an eclectic mix of Victorian architecture in the Italianate, Second Empire, Queen Anne and Romanesque styles, composed of readily available mass-produced components.

...the cast iron railings twist, turn, flower, circle, star, twine, and tangle in such contortions the eye cannot always follow what the hand wrought...
Sarah Booth Conroy, 1987

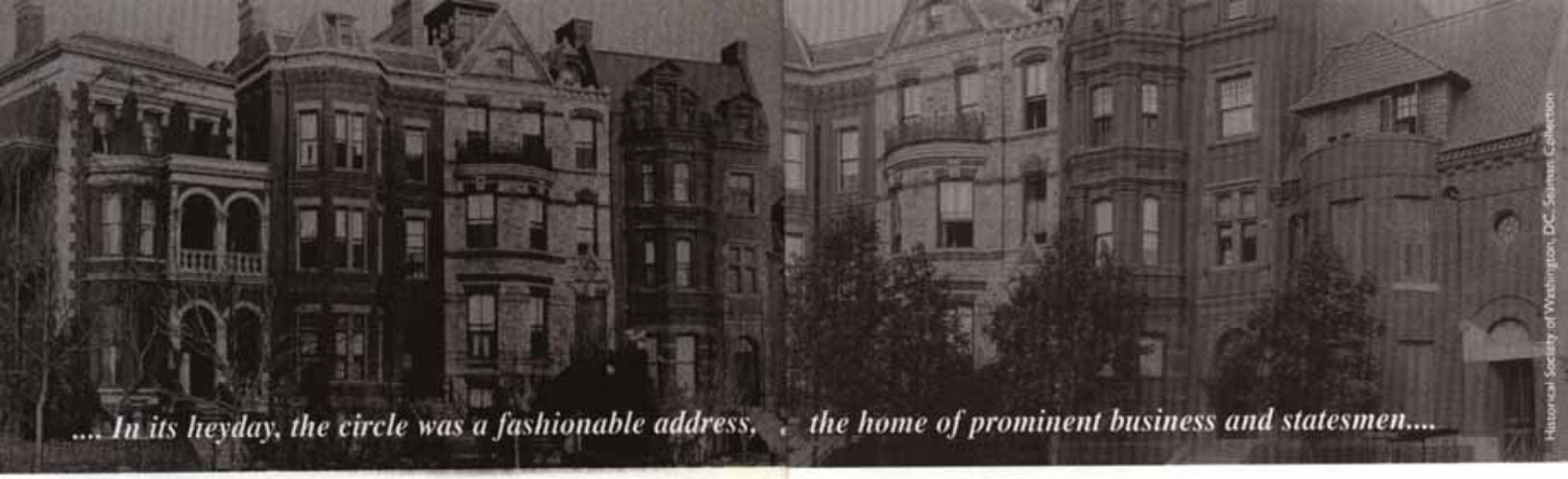
The development of the Greater Fourteenth Street area followed no formalized land-use plan, resulting in an area with a variety of house sizes, income levels, and uses that conform to the city's street plan and municipal building codes. The area reflects the economic and racial diversity that was typical of nineteenth century urban development. The wealthy generally gravitated to the widest streets such as Vermont and Rhode Island avenues and Logan Circle, middle-class residents lived along the lettered and numbered streets, and working class residents occupied the narrower streets and alleys such as Kingman Place. Commercial uses were located primarily along the heavily-travelled commuter route on Fourteenth Street.

A product of the late-19th century, the area developed as a rowhouse neighborhood served by one of the city's first and most important streetcar lines. Always mixed in its social makeup, the area includes both custom-designed and speculative housing erected for residents of all income levels.

Greater Fourteenth Street and Logan Circle Historic Districts

The Greater 14th Street and Logan Circle Historic Districts cover an area of about 24 city blocks bisected by 14th Street, N.W. just north of Massachusetts Avenue and the edge of downtown. The area includes more than 750 residential, commercial and religious buildings.

The Logan Circle Historic District was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1972. The Greater 14th Street Historic District, which overlaps the Logan Circle district, was listed in 1994.



.... In its heyday, the circle was a fashionable address, the home of prominent business and statesmen....

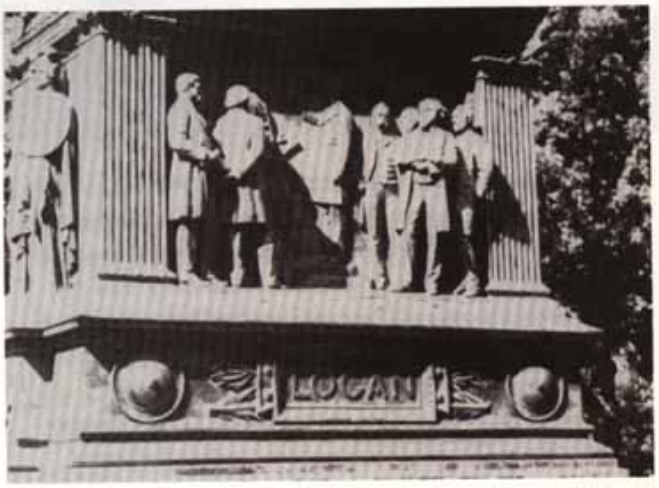
Historical Society of Washington, DC, Seaman Collection

LOGAN CIRCLE

The primary focal point of the neighborhood is Logan Circle, a major element of L'Enfant's 1791 plan of the Federal City, and the only circle in Washington D.C. which retains its Victorian architecture.

The 136 buildings within the Logan Circle Historic District (now incorporated within the Greater Fourteenth Street Historic District) are located on the eight city blocks that front on the circle.

As late as 1857, Logan Circle was still an open field and the area immediately surrounding only sparsely inhabited. The civic and public improvements which occurred immediately after the Civil War transformed Logan Circle into one of the most fashionable addresses in Washington. Paved in 1873, it was known as Iowa Circle until 1930, when an act of Congress officially changed its name to Logan Circle to honor the memory of General John A. Logan.



The intersection of the city's grid streets and diagonal avenues with the circle created the irregularly-shaped building lots that led to the imaginatively-designed houses found on Logan Circle. Most of the three-and four-story brick and stone houses were built between 1874 and 1887, when the Second Empire, High Victorian Gothic, and Romanesque Revival styles were in vogue. Although diverse in style, these individually-designed rowhouses share a common scale, height, texture, and setback from the street. Together they create an elegant and unique streetscape distinct from the more modest rowhouses built in repeating designs on the adjacent streets.

Washington Post, reprinted by permission of D.C. Public Library

Logan Circle was formally landscaped in the 1870s, but has been altered several times to accommodate increasing automobile traffic. The roadway was widened in 1933, and traffic lanes for 13th Street were cut through the circle itself in 1950. The circle was restored to its original condition in the 1970s.

Two of the first apartment buildings were the Hawarden and Gladstone (1419-23 R Street). These twin buildings, both DC landmarks, were designed by G.S. Cooper in 1900, in an eclectic style with Victorian and classical elements.

Residential Architecture

Residential architecture in the Victorian era (1870-1900) drew on a variety of sources for inspiration. It was a period of creative design experimentation in which builders and architects moved away from classical styles, drawing on more picturesque, often medieval historical sources, such the English Gothic and Queen Anne, the Romanesque, the Italianate, the French Second Empire, and even Japanese design motifs. Houses tend to have asymmetrical forms – emphasized by towers, turrents, bay windows and oriels – and a dark, multi-colored palette of red brick, brownstone, black cast iron, and wood and metal trim painted in somber tones. The finer buildings are richly detailed, both inside and out.

Rowhouses in the Greater 14th Street area tend to be a floor or two taller than houses constructed before the Civil War, reflecting the increased affluence of the middle and wealthy classes. An additional floor was often gained through the use of an English basement, allowing additional living space on the narrow urban lots. While floor plans varied, a typical rowhouse in the historic district had its kitchen, and often its dining room, in the English basement; double parlors on the main floor; and bedrooms on the upper floors. Indoor plumbing, coal burning furnaces and gas lighting were standard in new houses constructed after 1875.

The availability of mass-produced components from pattern books and hardware supply catalogues allowed local builders access to the most fashionable architectural elements. Brackets, finials, molded bricks, windows, paneled doors, and cast iron elements, as well as interior details and moldings were all ready-made and would be assembled together by the builder.

Washingtoniana Division, D.C. Public Library

This major commercial and transportation corridor is flanked by intact rows of Victorian housing and commercial buildings punctuated by handsome churches and a rich variety of 20th century auto-related structures.

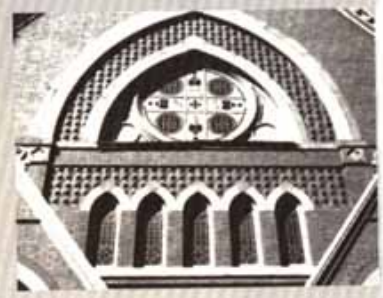
In the late-nineteenth century, apartment buildings emerged as an alternative to row house living. In the fifty-year period from 1870 to 1920 population pressures had forced, first, the development of row houses, and later as pressures intensified and land space became precious, the development and widespread construction of the apartment building.

By the 1920s, the land forming the Greater Fourteenth Street Historic District was fully developed and well-established as a residential area. The lack of unimproved lots forced apartment development northward, which caused the area to remain primarily a nineteenth-century residential neighborhood punctuated with examples of early-twentieth-century architecture.

Religious Architecture

In the nineteenth century, the construction of numerous churches anchored and sustained the growing residential community. Churches hurried to accommodate their expanding congregations, while taking advantage of low real estate prices in the developing area around Fourteenth Street. Between 1867 and 1902, seven churches were built in the area; two additional churches were constructed in the mid-twentieth century.

The oldest church in the neighborhood is Luther Place Memorial (1867), constructed as a memorial of thanks for the ending of the Civil War. The Gothic Revival styled church with its prominent spires is located just north of Thomas Circle. In the 1870s and 1880s, churches constructed in the area include: St. Luke's Episcopal, John Wesley Methodist, Vermont Avenue Baptist and Mt. Olivet Lutheran. St. Luke's (1879) designed by African-American architect Calvin Brent, served as a small neighborhood church. Constructed of rusticated stone, Mt. Gilead Baptist (1896) stands as an important visual terminus to the row of brick dwellings on Corcoran Street. Grace Reformed (1902) is noted as a memorial to the Reformed Church in America and as having President Theodore Roosevelt as one of its members.



Whether a large, imposing structure such as Luther Place Memorial or a small neighborhood church such as St. Luke's Memorial, the churches of the Greater 14th Street area contribute significantly to the architectural quality of the community.

Library of Congress

PUBLIC ARCHITECTURE

Historically, the public buildings that served the Greater Fourteenth Street and Logan Circle neighborhoods dated to the late nineteenth century, and were modest in scale and architecture. While the firehouse, YWCA and schools were constructed to serve the local community, the hospitals and orphanages such as the Washington City Orphan Asylum on 14th Street and Louise Home on Massachusetts Avenue were generally established to serve the entire city. These institutions not only provided much needed social services, but offered an employment base for local residents.

Most of the governmental, institutional and educational buildings that once flourished in this area have been demolished and replaced by residential buildings. The exception, the Berret School, stands at 14th and Q streets. The three-story, red brick building with corbelled brickwork was built in 1889, and named for D.C. Postmaster Gabriele Berret.

The Washington City Orphan Asylum (above) was erected in 1865 on land donated by philanthropist W.W. Corcoran. Located on the southeast corner of 14th and S streets, the asylum was demolished in 1963.

Historical Society of Washington, D.C., Wymer Collection

COMMERCIAL ARCHITECTURE

Small commercial concerns developed to serve the growing community from the southern end of Fourteenth Street around old downtown to its northern border at Florida Avenue. Between the 1870s and 1880s, the number and variety of commercial enterprises serving the community multiplied. Grocers, dealers of dry goods, fancy goods and coal, carpenters, druggists, confectioners, retailers, undertakers, tin smiths, and boot and shoe makers competed for business along the Fourteenth Street corridor.

In general, the commercial buildings were designed by architects for a given commercial purpose and reflect a variety of Victorian styles. Often, the stores and light manufacturing buildings were designed as combination commercial storefronts with dwellings above. Although some of the buildings were built as pairs or in small groups, most of the commercial buildings along Fourteenth Street were individually designed.

During its many manifestations from Victorian era commercial strip to Washington's Automobile Row, 14th Street has continued as one of the city's most active commercial corridors.

Library of Congress

As the automobile rose in importance and popularity, Fourteenth Street became a center of automotive activity in Washington, D.C. The machine age and its new form of transportation required new structures for the storage and display of automobiles. In 1898, the first car sales shop was opened by Rudolph Jose at 1614 Fourteenth Street, N.W. where he distributed the Kensington Electric Car. Many Victorian residential and commercial buildings were razed in the first decade of the century to make room for more prominent garages and automobile showrooms. The appearance of these showrooms on either side of the street led to the adoption of Fourteenth Street's nickname, "Automobile Row."

Perpendicular to and behind the elegantly lined Fourteenth Street, side thoroughfares developed into automobile service districts. Many repair stations and shops arose on Church Street, Johnson Avenue, and P Street. Typically, these structures are brick, multi-storied, and industrial in appearance.

Library of Congress

Library of Congress

Washington's automobile showrooms --such as the first showroom at 1711 14th Street (1904) and one of the finest at 1526 14th Street (1925)-- were designed in a restrained classical style.

As a result of Fourteenth Street's transformation from an important nineteenth century streetcar line to "Automobile Row," the physical character of the artery is defined by the cohabitation of small Victorian commercial buildings with larger twentieth century structures. The different building forms illustrate the change in transportation methods, not only in Washington, but nationwide.

....The influx of motor cars due to war conditions has nearly thrown Washington into a panic. There is now one passenger auto for every 25 persons. Dealers and garage men are waxing fat and the traffic police are going crazy...

Literary Digest, March 2, 1918.

Mary McLeod Bethune Council House, NHS

Mary McLeod Bethune distinguished herself as an organizer of the women's movement, civil rights advocate, and government official. As founder of the National Council of Negro Women, she used her home at 1318 Vermont Avenue, as the Council's office. The building now serves as the National Archives for Black Women's History.

RESIDENTS

The Greater Fourteenth Street area was settled by middle-class government employees, merchants and others, who constructed houses on unimproved lots or purchased speculatively built houses in the area. Comments in the local press extolled the benefits of a residence "that is far enough away from the noise and bustle of communal activity to secure quiet and moderate seclusion, yet near enough to enjoy the luxuries of the city as well as the society of friendly neighbors."

While most of the new houses constructed in the area were targeted for a white, middle-class clientele, the Greater 14th Street area has always contained a mix of races and income groups. The Freedman's Hospital and the three black congregations in the area --Metropolitan Baptist, Vermont Avenue Baptist, and St. Luke's Episcopal -- provided an understanding community for African-Americans coming to the city.

Census records from 1880 and 1900 illustrate both the area's racial and economic make up, and demographic changes that took place over time. In 1880, the 1300 block of Corcoran Street was entirely occupied by whites, including three lawyers, a dentist, four government clerks, a druggist, a retired army officer and other professionals. The block was also home to several widows, some of whom took in boarders to help supplement their incomes.

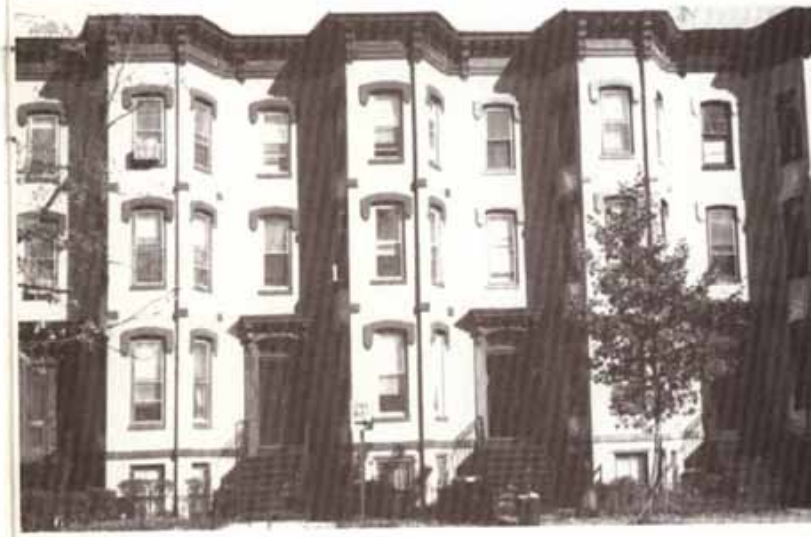
Conversely, the nearby 1400 block of Church Street was occupied primarily by African-Americans. The street was home to a musician, a shoemaker, a driver, a sailor and a laundress. One of the few integrated blocks in 1880 was the 1500 block of P Street, which was home to a black post office clerk, a dressmaker,

Library of Congress

a driver, a servant, a church sexton, and a seamstress, who lived side by side with white carpenters, clerks, engineers, and a naval officer.

By the turn of the century, the Greater 14th Street area was becoming increasingly African-American. Blocks that had been entirely occupied by whites in 1880 were becoming more integrated. By 1920, the neighborhood had become an important center of African-American life in the city.

After 1920, the neighborhood became home to many prominent African-Americans. John Lankford, an accomplished black architect who designed several houses in the area, as well as the True Reformer Building on U Street, lived at 1448 Q Street. Attorney Belford V. and Judge Marjorie M. Lawson lived at 8 Logan Circle from 1938 to 1958 while renting the third floor to Congressman Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. "Sweet Daddy" Grace, founder of the United House of Prayer for All People, lived at 11 Logan Circle during the 1950s.



The Greater Fourteenth Street Area Today

As Washington expanded northward along the streetcar lines, and the automobile made the newly-developing suburbs accessible to the middle class, the Greater 14th Street neighborhood began a period of decline. Houses, many divided up into rooming houses and apartments, suffered from neglect, while the commercial area along 14th Street stagnated. The neighborhood was hard hit by the riots of the late 1960's which resulted in the destruction of many businesses and buildings along 14th Street.

However, the neighborhood's attributes — its architecture, history and affordable prices — began to attract new residents in the 1970s interested in restoring its old houses. In 1972, Logan Circle received recognition and a level of protection through listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Since 1977, the Logan Circle Community Association has sponsored an annual house tour to foster appreciation of the neighborhood's architecture. More recently, the 14th Street commercial corridor has begun to rebound. In the 1980s, the street was designated as an arts district, spurring the relocation of local theater groups to the street's old auto showrooms. The Studio, Woolly Mammoth and Source Theaters have all renovated historic commercial buildings, and have helped to anchor old and new restaurants and shops. While renovation work remains to be done, 14th Street continues to provide local residents with needed neighborhood services while also attracting a regional audience to its theaters, nightclubs and restaurants.

Logan Circle Community Association

In 1973, concerned area residents established the Logan Circle Community Association to bring improvements to their historic neighborhood. Since then, the LCCA has helped make streets safer by addressing street prostitution, drug sales, and other street crime; fighting for stricter zoning regulations; supporting historic preservation and affordable housing; sponsoring regular environmental cleanups; and serving as a political force in the city.

The Greater 14th Street Historic District represents the culmination of more than five years of research and fundraising by LCCA members that followed the demolition of important buildings in the community during the winter of 1989. The new district joins the 16th Street Historic District on the west, and embraces, but does not replace, the existing Logan Circle Historic District.

❖ ❖ ❖

This brochure was developed by the Logan Circle Community Association, D.C. Preservation League, Traceries and the D.C. Historic Preservation Division as part of a series, to provide information for residents and visitors on the social, cultural and architectural history of Washington's historic districts. This project was funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Interior, National Park Service, through the D.C. Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs, Historic Preservation Division.

Information used in this brochure is based on the National Register nomination for the Greater Fourteenth Street Historic District (1994). Uncredited photos by Traceries.

Printed 1997
Historic Preservation Division
Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs
Government of the District of Columbia

MARION BARRY JR., *Mayor*
HAMPTON CROSS, *D.C. Historic Preservation Officer*