



*The Charles Sumner School, 17th and M Streets, NW, 1872*

**Historic Preservation  
Solutions for  
Adolf Cluss Buildings  
1962-2005**


FROM GERMANY TO AMERICA

**Shaping a  
Capital City  
Worthy  
of a Republic**




## **Historic Preservation Solutions**

### **For Adolf Cluss Buildings 1962-2005**



In March 1962, *Washington Post* architectural critic Wolf Von Eckardt noted that bulldozers would soon attack the Portland Apartment Hotel--Washington's elegant first apartment building. "The building seems to sail into Thomas Circle like an ocean liner. By summer she will have sailed into oblivion. There'll be a parking lot in her place. And a little later, maybe, another office building." He also observed, "the name of the architect has slipped into the crevices of history."



The Portland was one of German-American architect Adolf Cluss's most innovative projects. Between 1862 and 1890 Cluss had played a major role in shaping the city. But by

1962, his name--and many of his buildings--had indeed "slipped into the crevices of history."

The post-World War II building boom changed the character of our cities as suburban "bedroom" communities proliferated, the highway system expanded, and commercial activity moved from downtown to the suburbs. As citizen protest developed over the heedless and unnecessary destruction of historic buildings, the federal government responded with an enhanced preservation plan.

### **THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS**

The National Capital Planning Commission (NCPCC) and the Commission of Fine Arts (CFA), two federal design review groups, established the Joint Committee on Landmarks (JCL) in 1964. Comprised of a group of architects, historians, and citizen activists, the JCL was to identify Washington buildings of historical and architectural significance and recommend the means to preserve them.

The JCL completed a preliminary list of approximately 300 Landmarks of the National Capital in 1964. The list included four Cluss buildings--Franklin School, Eastern Market, the Old Masonic Hall, and the Smithsonian's Arts and Industries Building. The Smithsonian Castle and the Old Patent Office, with portions of each reconstructed by Cluss after devastating fires, were also on the list.

The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 increased and strengthened governmental and private historic preservation programs and activities, establishing historic preservation offices in the states and District of Columbia, expanding the National Register of Historic Places to include properties of state and local as well as national significance, establishing the President's Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and providing preservation grants-in-aid to the states and the National Trust For Historic Preservation.

In 1968, the JCL became the professional review board for purposes of this act. The District of Columbia's 1973 delay-in-demolition regulation required consideration of preservation alternatives before demolition of historic buildings. In 1978, the Historic Landmark and Historic District Protection Act strengthened legal protection for historic properties and created the DC Inventory of Historic Sites. A Mayor's

Agent was appointed to hear appeals. In 1983, the DC Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB) replaced the JCL. In the years that followed, the surviving Cluss buildings reflected various solutions to preservation problems developed in response to citizen activism and governmental programs.

## **THE FRANKLIN SCHOOL**

In the early 1950s, the Board of Education contemplated sale of several old school buildings to finance construction of an administrative headquarters building. In 1953, the proposed sale and demolition of award-winning Franklin School (1864-69) brought an immediate public outcry. School Board president C. Melvin Sharpe commented: "My 95-year-old mother can remember seeing the Franklin School model at the Philadelphia Exposition. She's not so delighted to know that the same building may fall down over her son's ears--any day now."

By 1968, as plans for the building's sale and demolition were proceeding, the American Association of School Administrators organized a group to find the means to preserve the building. A feasibility study prepared by Richard J. Passantino AIA of McLeod, Ferrara, Ensign & Partners was completed in 1969.

Don't Tear It Down, Inc. (DTID), a citizen action group and predecessor of the DC Preservation League (DCPL), was founded on Earth Day in 1971. In 1972, a Bike-in for Buildings was organized by DTID with support from the National Trust For Historic Preservation and others. The 140 bikers rode through the city to call attention to historic buildings slated for demolition, ending with a rally in front of Franklin School. The event pressured the Mayor, City Council, and Board of Education to rehabilitate and reuse Franklin rather than selling it as surplus property.

Franklin School was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1973. In 1977, the DC Board of Education voted to preserve its historic buildings and sites and named Richard L. Hurlbut as its Historic Preservation Officer. Franklin and Sumner Schools were among those targeted for preservation.

In 1990, a Planned Unit Development negotiated with the city allowed increased density for the Prudential Building, then under construction on the adjacent K Street site, in exchange for nearly \$3 million--largely for the exterior restoration of Franklin. Oehrlein & Associates was selected as architect of the exterior restoration. Working in compliance with the Secretary of Interior's

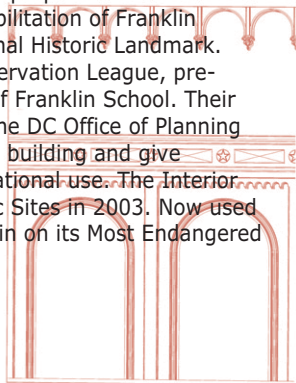




Standards for the Restoration/Rehabilitation of Historic Buildings, repairing or replacing in-kind deteriorated and missing elements--returning the exterior of the building to its historic appearance.

In 1992-96, historic architect Marc Fetterman AIA of Fetterman Associates PC and architectural historian Tanya Edwards Beauchamp prepared an historic structures report for the interior restoration and rehabilitation of Franklin School and its successful 1996 nomination as a National Historic Landmark.

Fetterman and Beauchamp, on behalf of the DC Preservation League, prepared a Landmark designation application for the Interior of Franklin School. Their conceptual architectural reuse analysis of the building for the DC Office of Planning in 2002 recommended that the city retain ownership of the building and give primary consideration to developing it with a cultural/educational use. The Interior of Franklin School was listed in the DC Inventory of Historic Sites in 2003. Now used by the city as a homeless shelter, the DCPL included Franklin on its Most Endangered list in 2004-05.



## **THE CHARLES SUMNER SCHOOL**

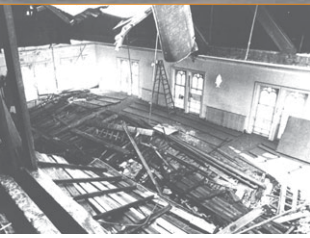
In June 1972, the *Washington Post* editorialized: "We will miss the Sumner Elementary School, that jubilant fairy tale castle at 17th and M Streets, NW, which the city is about to declare "surplus," which means, of course, wham...crunch... crumble... parking lot... and eventually another glass-and-concrete human filing box."

Sumner (1871-72) was listed in the DC Inventory of Historic Sites in 1978, and in the National Register of Historic Places in 1979. As plans for the restoration and rehabili-

tation of Sumner proceeded, a portion of the roof collapsed. The DC government ordered immediate demolition, erecting demolition fences in preparation for the wrecking ball. The DC Superior Court halted demolition when structural engineer Carl C. Hansen PE testified that, although the roof had collapsed due to lack of maintenance, the structure itself was sound and should be rehabilitated and restored.

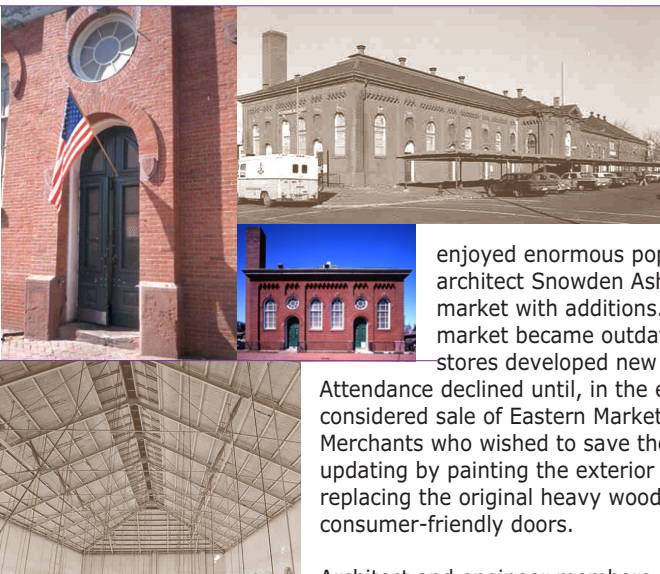
In 1981, the 17M Associates--comprised of Boston Properties, the First City Properties, and the Metropolitan A.M.E. Church--won an competition for their innovative development plan for the large combined Sumner-Magruder School site. The plan provided for an eighty-year ground lease as well as the complete restoration/rehabilitation and maintenance of Sumner School without public funding.

The architectural firm of Hartman-Cox with Warren Cox FAIA as partner-in-charge, designed the overall Sumner





Square project, including both office and commercial elements. Cox's award-winning design created an entire contextual streetscape that echoed the growth of the city itself--a new direction in historic preservation. Mary Oehrlein FAIA with Marc Fetterman AIA, of Building Conservation Technology/The Ehrenkrantz Group, headed the design team for the restoration/rehabilitation of Cluss's Summer School. Marc Fetterman AIA, then of RTKL Associates, Inc., administered the construction.



## **EASTERN MARKET**

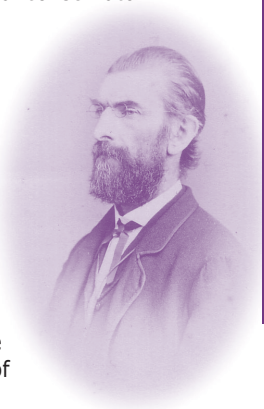
Cluss's Eastern Market (1871-73), designed as a prototypical neighborhood market during the improvements of the Board of Public Works,

enjoyed enormous popularity. In 1908 municipal architect Snowden Ashford expanded the market with additions. Soon, however, the market became outdated as grocery chain stores developed new marketing techniques.

Attendance declined until, in the early 1960s, the city considered sale of Eastern Market as surplus property. Merchants who wished to save the market suggested updating by painting the exterior walls a pastel green and replacing the original heavy wooden doors with more consumer-friendly doors.

Architect and engineer members of JCL recommended that the District Government should retain, rehabilitate, and continue public market use of the building. The Eastern Market was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1971. The DC government matched a generous brick-and-mortar Historic Preservation Fund grant from the National Park Service. Planning for exterior preservation work on the south hall began in 1971 with Hans Ullrich Scharnberg as architect. Historic architect Mary Oehrlein FAIA worked as architectural conservator on the project--the first of her many Cluss projects.

In the years following, a seemingly endless number of planning studies for the continued use and rehabilitation of Eastern Market were initiated by community groups and the DC Government. In the early 1990s, consultants for the Friends of the Eastern Market prepared an historic structures report. In 1991, the interior of Eastern Market was listed in the DC Inventory of Historic Sites. In 1992-93, Oehrlein & Associates with Cooper-Lecky Architects provided a plan for the interior and exterior restoration and rehabilitation of Eastern Market. The conceptual design for this work was substantially approved by the HPRB in 1994, but opponents blocked some elements of the plan. Lack of maintenance has undermined the preservation work of the 1970s, and the market is urgently in need of rehabilitation.





## **OLD MASONIC HALL**

When the cornerstone of the Old Masonic Hall was laid amid public fanfare in 1868, Grand Master B. B. French expressed the hope that the building would “add new luster to our honored city and endure for many ages.” A fraternal/commercial building of rare architectural merit, located in the fashionable downtown U. S. Patent Office neighborhood, it was a symbol of awakening civic consciousness in Washington City following the Civil War. Its elegant second story public hall and dining room became the site of concerts and balls.

The building’s demise began in 1908 when the Masons moved to new quarters at 13th Street and New York Avenue, NW. In 1921, the Julius Lansburgh Furniture Co. leased the building, purchasing it in 1926 and converting it for retail use. The old

Masonic Hall was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1974. In January 1979, a new owner applied for a permit to raze the building. The JCL found that demolition should be delayed. In August 1979, the case was heard again, under the new Historic Protection Act, and again denied. Don’t Tear It Down led this action, advancing decisively beyond simple negotiation and establishing the DC Historic Protection Act as one of the strongest preservation laws in the nation.

Demolition denied by law, the building was then left vacant for several years. Little remained of the historic interior, and the appearance of the exterior had been substantially altered. In 1988, as part of a larger downtown development project, Oehrlein & Associates Architects restored and rehabilitated the building in strict adherence to the Secretary of Interior’s Standards—qualifying the project for tax incentives as a certified historic building under the Tax Reform Act of 1986.



## **CALVARY BAPTIST CHURCH**

Cluss & Kammerhueber designed Calvary Baptist Church (1864-66) for an abolitionist congregation. Reconstructed in 1869, after a devastating 1867 fire *The Washington Morning Chronicle* described its 160-foot-high dominating tower as “flanked by tapering buttresses, and crowned by a pyramid of ornamental iron work,” which “loomed in its solitary grandeur high up to the blue empyrean.” The spire survived until destroyed by hurricane-force winds in 1913. The congregation flourished, expanding the church along Eighth Street with the Old Sunday School building, designed by James G. Hill (1893-94); the Greene Building, designed by Arthur B. Heaton (1925-29); and the Abernathy Building, designed by Elmer Cappelman (1960).

Though not individually listed in the DC Inventory of Historic Sites, Calvary Baptist Church, including the Hill and Heaton additions, is considered a contributing building within the Downtown Historic District. This historic district was surveyed and sponsored by Don’t Tear It Down. Beginning in 1979, eighty volunteers donated an estimated 4,500 hours over a year and a half to complete the project. Though the



Downtown Historic District was listed in the DC Inventory of Historic Sites in 1982-84, it was not listed in the National Register due to owner objection--although determined eligible for listing.

In 2000, the Calvary Baptist Church joined with the Trammell Crow Company to redevelop the church properties for office and retail use, with reorganized church facilities in new construction behind the Greene façade. When partial demolition of the Greene building was denied in hearings before the HPRB and Mayor's Agent, the church agreed to set aside funds from sale of its remaining development rights for full exterior restoration of

Calvary. Quinn | Evans Architects was selected for this work with Baird M. Smith AIA FAPT as senior project manager. In July 2002, the Board and the Mayor's Agent approved reducing much of the preservation work, including restoration of the polychrome slate roof, due to cost overruns. Accurate reconstruction of the tower and missing spire became a priority. Using historic photographs and other documentation, the spire was reconstructed in lightweight fiberglass and aluminum and installed on February 12, 2005.



## **THE NATIONAL MUSEUM**

The Smithsonian's National Museum, now known as the Arts & Industries Building, was designed by Cluss and Schulze (1877-82) to receive the collections of the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia. Our first purpose-built museum on the National Mall, it welcomed the public to 17 natural light-filled galleries of varying height and size, freely interconnecting through walls constructed as arcades. Over the years, the Smithsonian has increasingly filled in these arcades, dropped ceilings to obscure natural light, and converted former galleries to other uses--such as offices, shops, theatre, storage, and equipment rooms. Only the axial bays and central octagon have remained open as exhibition areas. Architect Hugh Newell Jacobsen FAIA elegantly restored these areas in preparation for the celebration of the Bicentennial in 1976. In 1980-82, Mary Oehrlein FAIA with Baird M. Smith AIA FAPT of Building Conservation Technology/The Ehrenkrantz Group, were selected to restore and rehabilitate the exterior of the building. Its maintenance seriously neglected in recent years, the building has now been mothballed and faces an uncertain future.



Restoration of the Cluss interiors of the Smithsonian's Old Patent Office building is now in progress with Oehrlein & Associates and Hartman-Cox as architects.





## **The Adolf Cluss Project**

A cooperative project of

Charles Sumner School Museum and Archives

German Historical Institute, Washington, D.C.

Goethe-Institut Washington

Historical Society of Washington, D.C.

Smithsonian Institution's Office of Architectural History and Historic Preservation

Stadtarchiv Heilbronn

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### **Historic Preservation Solutions for Adolf Cluss Buildings 1962-2005**

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Carl W. and Olive M. Tiller, *At Calvary, A History of the First 125 Years of Calvary Baptist Church Washington D.C., 1862-1987.*

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