
HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD

Historic Landmark Case No. 01-05

**Capital Traction Company Car Barn (Decatur Street Car Barn)
4615 14th Street, NW (aka 4601-4611, 4701 and 4729 14th Street, NW)
(All of Squares 2811 and 2815, aka Square 2811, Lot 802)**

Meeting Date: September 27, 2012
Applicant: The D.C. Preservation League
Affected ANC: 4C
Staff Reviewer: Tim Dennee

After careful consideration, the HPO recommends that the Board designate the Capital Traction Company Car Barn, at 4615 14th Street, NW, a historic landmark to be entered in the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites, and that the nomination be forwarded to the National Register of Historic Places with a positive recommendation for listing as of local significance. It is further recommended that it be designated with a period of significance of 1906 to 1959, from the date of the building's construction to the end of its use for the storage and repair of streetcars. The property meets National Register Criterion A and D.C. designation Criterion B for history, that is, for being associated with a particular historical period and a business enterprise that helped to develop, and to determine the development patterns, of the District of Columbia. It also meets National Register Criterion D and National Register Criterion C for architecture, as an architecturally outstanding example of a rare building type. As such, it is eligible for designation under the multiple-property document *Streetcar and Bus Resources of Washington, D.C., 1862-1962* as an excellent specimen of the property sub-type "Car Barns and Yards".

The Capital Traction Company Car Barn, frequently referred to as the Decatur Street Car Barn and more recently designated the Northern Division Bus Garage, was constructed in 1906-1907, opening during the latter year. At the time, the streetcar company was replacing an older barn in what is now Columbia Heights in order to extend its line to northern suburbs just beginning to develop. Capital Traction itself was a recent product of the first wave of consolidation in Washington's streetcar transportation industry. In its case, it combined the oldest crosstown route with newer suburb-to-downtown radials. Because these more speculative routes necessarily followed the major roads to the outlying areas, the large car barns were very conspicuous, and their builders often designed them to a high aesthetic standard suited to their neighborhoods or to help promote the image of their lines.

Like the best of the designated car barns—those at Georgetown and East Capitol Street—the Decatur Street barn is a very high-style and sophisticated piece of architecture, Italian Renaissance Revival applied to what is essentially a warehouse and offices. Designed by the prominent local firm of Wood, Donn & Deming, it was at once historicist and thoroughly modern: it housed two turntables and the most up-to-date electrified rolling stock powered by underground conduit, and its simple, punched window openings, horizontal limestone detail, and sometimes-curved corners evoke the kind of streamlining popularized decades later. The building is massed and detailed as two complementary villas side by side, one the administrative

offices and the other the repair shops and storage barn itself, topped by a grand tower or campanile. (There is also a sound wall around much of the property's perimeter and a large garage structure that wraps the sides and rear of the historic building, both erected in the 1980s).

Even before the car barn was complete, the newspapers were attributing to the extension of the Capital Traction line the rapid development of several new subdivisions, with Harry Wardman leading the way in construction.

Of nearly thirty known, there are only seven streetcar barns remaining in the District of Columbia, only two others of which have not been protected by historic designation. Architecturally, the Capital Traction Company Car Barn stands among the best, including those lost. While its integrity suffers somewhat from replaced windows, a largely restructured roof, and the partial encapsulation of the north side and half the rear wall, the building still very much retains the features that have defined its character since its design, with a beautiful façade unobscured by later alterations, its original massing, and the vehicular openings. Indeed, the compatible reuse of the building as a bus garage likely contributed to the retention of much of its original character.

The multiple-property document *Streetcar and Bus Resources of Washington, D.C., 1862-1962* acknowledges car barns as the most significant extant property type related to the former streetcar system.

The car barn... is a significant property type for its role in the early public transportation system of the District of Columbia. Within the general context of Historic Streetcar Resources in Washington, D.C., the car barn holds a principal role as the most prevalent [and prominent] example of a property type constructed during the reign of the streetcar. The car barns, which are often quite imposing on the streetscape, represent the transportation system's direct influence on the growth of the city, as well as the development and the social/economic status of its residents.

With regard to the eligibility of car barns for listing in the National Register (and by implication, their consideration for local designation), the multiple-property document, as amended and adopted by the Board, states that:

For the period between 1862 and 1962, the car barn resources are eligible under Criterion A. Properties eligible under Criterion C include those resources exhibiting the high-style architectural designs of the period, elements of the functional industrial vernacular, or the mechanical equipment necessary for the movement of the streetcars. The eligible property must retain its original form or shed-like appearance, as well as the streetcar entry openings.

The Capital Traction Company Car Barn thus meets both criteria.

Georgetown Car Barn (Capital Traction Terminal)	3600 M St., NW	1895/1912	11
Navy Yard Car Barn	770 M Street, SE	1891	13
East Capitol Street Car Barn	1400 East Capitol St., NE	1896	9
Eckington Car Barn (2 nd)	5 th & T Sts., NE	1899	10
14 th & Boundary (Florida) Streets Car Barn & Stable (Manhattan Laundry)	1346 Florida Ave., NW	1877	1
14 th Street and Colorado Ave. Terminal	5409 14 th St., NW	1937	2
Capital Traction Company Car Barn	4615 14 th St., NW	1906	3
Benning Road Car Barn and Shop	Benning Road & Kenilworth Ave., NE	1941	4