

Funkstown: Foggy Bottom History No. 5

By Frank Leone



Western Market Reborn

Foggy Bottom residents now shop for food at Whole Foods or Trader Joes, but from 1803-1967, they would have shopped at Western Market. The

Market was originally located in the triangle park north of the 2000 block of I St. NW. That block of I St. retains the original 19th century building facades backed by a new office building. The ground floor interior of that building will soon host a new “Western Market” food hall.

Almost from the beginning, DC was served by three food markets. Center Market – one of largest in the country – opened in 1801 at 7th St. NW, bordered by Pennsylvania Ave., and the Washington Canal (which was covered and converted to Constitution Ave. in 1871). Adolf Cluss designed a huge market building in 1872, which was demolished in 1931 and replaced by the National Archives. Eastern Market began in 1805, but the current Cluss-designed building opened in 1873 and still operates today, offering arts and crafts as well a prepared and fresh foods. (O St. Market, at 7th St. NW, built in 1881, is now operating as a Giant Foods.)

In 1803, Western Market was built on the triangular lot south of Pennsylvania Ave. between 20th and 21st Sts. Originally a one floor wood frame building, in 1822 it was enlarged and a second story was added to serve as a town hall and meeting place for Foggy Bottom. The hall functioned as a school room, polling place, and as a gathering spot for temperance rallies, balls, parties, fairs, and gospel, political, and fraternal meetings. The market burned in 1852 and in 1855 what remained of it was torn down. An 1857 map shows a park on the site and one remains there today. A temporary market was set up on K St., between 19th and 20th Sts.

A new brick building on the southeast corner of 21st and K Sts. NW was constructed in 1873. The Market had 107 stalls and a long central hallway. Starting in about 1950, a large Safeway and small retailers shared the space with 32 produce areas, and a sidewalk flower stand area. Despite community opposition, D.C. sold the property for \$3M and the market was demolished in 1967, replaced by parking lot and then office buildings.

At the time of its closing in 1967, merchants included Joseph L. Cannon, who recently moved his seafood stand from the SW waterfront; Preston Burroughs, who sold meats from nearby farms for 33 years; Robert M. Pittle, who took over the 30-year old Hudson Brothers fruit stand; Paul L. Muir and his cheese stand, featuring a 63 pound wheel of New York Cheddar; and Freddy and Sarah Phillips, who offered French bread and pastries and pies for 24 years. These merchants were part of a small group who relocated to a market on Grace Street in Georgetown.

Meanwhile, back at the 2000 block of I St., because of the proximity of the original market, most of the people who lived on the block were merchants and artisans, and a number of them kept shops in their homes giving it a

mixed commercial and residential character. By the 1970s, there remained 13 buildings on the block that had been built between 1831 and 1896. They included two houses (2022 and 2024 I St.) that were developed by DC territorial governor Alexander Robey Shepherd between 1874 and 1875. The block became known as Red Lion Row, after Lindy's Red Lion Pub (which now houses the Puglisi barber shop).

The buildings were owned by a developer who began demolishing 2022 I St. in 1976. Don't Tear It Down (now the DC Preservation League), attempted to preserve the buildings and succeeded in having them listed on the DC Inventory and National Register of Historic Places in 1977. The group twice obtained court orders to stop the demolition and its effort were aided by the passage of DC's Historic Landmark and Historic District Protection Act of 1978. Eventually, the George Washington University purchased the properties and reached an agreement with preservation groups to retain the facades, backed by a new eight story building, containing office, commercial, and retail space.

The new construction was completed in 1983. GW christened the area "Shops at 2000 Penn," but is now re-branding it as "Western Market" – a rebirth that Foggy Bottom should welcome.

Sources: Red Lion Row Register Nomination Form, 1977, <https://web.archive.org/web/20150406194805/http://pdfhost.focus.nps.gov/docs/NRHP/Text/77001496.pdf>; John Sherwood, "Market Merchants all Smiles at New Stands," Evening Star, Feb. 2, 1967, p. 21; John Claggett Proctor, "City Gained by Old Market, Sunday Star, Dec. 12, 1937, p. 44.

Photo: top left -Western Market (1950s)@western market, Twitter, Feb. 17, 2020

Photo: top right-Red Lion Row (1950s)<https://www.loc.gov/item/dco419/>

Photo: bottom -Red Lion Row (2014)
<https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital-Library/Main%20Index/President's%20Neighborhood/1111616.tif.info>