

Funkstown: Foggy Bottom History No. 1



Foggy Bottom's History Makes It Unique by Frank Leone

Foggy Bottom is a charming and wonderful community in which to live, but its ever present history makes it unique, even in Washington. “Foggy Bottom” lacks legal boundaries, but generally is situated between the White House and Rock Creek Park and between the Potomac and Pennsylvania Avenue. The area was occupied by Native Americans 1,500 years ago, then Maryland planters. German immigrant Jacob Funk sought to build a new town (Hamburgh or **Funkstown** (hence the name of this column) in 1791, but that little-occupied development was incorporated into the new federal city of Washington in 1800.

In the 1800s – and especially after the Civil War – industries developed in Foggy Bottom. These included glassworks, breweries, and the Washington Gas works, industries whose smoky odors – added to the fog present in low lying areas – contributed to the name “Foggy Bottom.” The industries were replaced over time by governmental and international facilities, like the State Department, which made their own impacts on the area. In the 1880s, row houses (including alley houses) were built – working class for Irish and German laborers west of 23rd St, middle class government workers and others to the east of 23rd St. The area then saw an influx of African-Americans, until gentrification began in the 1950s.

Much of historic Foggy Bottom has been lost over the years. The George Washington University, which moved into the neighborhood in 1912, has expanded from a few

buildings to 43 acres. Highway I-66, part of a planned and never built inner-loop beltway, wiped out most of the neighborhood west of 26th Street leaving only three row houses by the entrance to the interstate. And new apartments, office buildings, and governmental and cultural institutions were built.

But much of historic Foggy Bottom remains - in the Foggy Bottom and the George Washington University/Old West End Historic Districts, in individually landmarked buildings, and in structures that lack historic designations, but still speak to the area's history. Despite the changes over time, the neighborhood remains a community that has worked to preserve its history, character, and quality of life.

The new Foggy Bottom Association **History Project** seeks to collect, document, and share Foggy Bottom history. We are starting with a regular column in our newsletter, but please visit the FBA website for more information.

<https://www.foggybottomassociation.org/history-new-info>. We invite your participation in discovering and communicating Foggy Bottom's history.