

## **Funkstown: Foggy Bottom History No. 3**

### **By Frank Leone**



#### **The George Washington University and Foggy Bottom**

The George Washington University first arrived in the Foggy Bottom/Old West End in 1912 and is here to stay. But it has had a peripatetic history. First envisioned as a Baptist Institute in Philadelphia in 1818, it was founded as Columbian College in Washington D.C. in 1821. In the same year, Congress granted a Charter to the university (as Congress did for other colleges in D.C.). It was first located in College Hill, just north of Boundary Street (Florida Ave.), which marked the border between Washington City to the south and Washington County to the north. Following the Civil War, the College occupied several buildings in mid-town D.C. (15th and H Streets NW), with the law and medical schools located elsewhere. In 1904, as part of a plan to obtain funding from the George Washington Memorial Association and relocate to Van Ness Park (17th St. & Constitution Ave.), the institution adopted the name of The George Washington University. The relocation plan however, fell through due to insufficient funds.

Through the efforts of GW Trustee General Maxwell Van Zandt Woodhull, whose house (1855) at 23rd and G Streets is still stands as part of the GWU Museum, GW rented and later bought the vacant St. Roses Industrial School at 2023 G Street (1910). In 1920s, GW constructed additional buildings nearby and grew to occupy University Yard. Under the aggressive leadership of Presidents Cloyd Heck Marvin (1927-1959) and Stephen J. Trachtenberg (1988-2007), the University continued to

expand. It grew to occupy 43 acres in Foggy Bottom, resulting in the demolition of numerous older buildings, including scores of row houses and the original St. Paul's Parish Church (1866-1944), as well as repurposing of other buildings.

As part of negotiations with D.C. that resulted in its 2007 Campus Plan, GW agreed to establish the George Washington University/Old West End Historic District and nominate several buildings outside of that district for DC Historic Landmark Status. (ANC 2A had first proposed a historic district for the GWU campus in 1984.) The plan was adopted and the GW/Old West End Historic District (which is separate from the Foggy Bottom Historic District) now comprises portions of 13 blocks generally within boundaries of 19th and 23rd Streets and E Street and Pennsylvania Avenue. In addition to the University Yard, the protected area includes the oldest houses in Foggy Bottom (Lenthall Houses, 1800, moved to current location in 1978), the first dormitory (Strong Hall, 1937, with its awesome roof deck), former apartments turned residence halls (e.g., Lafayette (formerly Calhoun) Hall, 1925; Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy Onassis (formerly Milton) Hall, 1938), and the striking stripped-classical cube of Lisner Auditorium (1941).

One historical building – which GW plans to demolish soon – is the 1886 Waggaman Row House at 22nd and I Streets – the last remaining row house in that area of what is now GW. See John Kelly 6/1/21 WaPo article ([https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/gw-foggy-bottom-history/2021/06/01/b39b6bac-c2f2-11eb-93f5-ee9558eef4b\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/gw-foggy-bottom-history/2021/06/01/b39b6bac-c2f2-11eb-93f5-ee9558eef4b_story.html))

Sources: GWU Walking Tour, <https://hr.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs3571/f/GW-Historic-Walking-Tour.pdf>; Kayser, Elmer Louis, Bricks without straw: The evolution of George Washington University. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts (1970); GW/OWE Historic District Nomination (2013), <https://planning.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/op/publication/attachments/George%20Washington%20University%20Old%20West%20End%20HD%20Nomination.pdf>.

The Foggy Bottom Association **History Project** seeks to collect, document, and share Foggy Bottom history. In addition to the newsletter articles, 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.