On this self-guided walking tour of Columbia Heights, historical markers lead you to:

- The place where Marriott got its start
- The city’s “Latino Intelligence Center”
- The blocks that once were home to a “Who’s Who” of African American leaders
- The address where Washington’s “Al Capone” ran a nightclub
- The site of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s Poor People’s Campaign headquarters
- The building that housed DC’s longest-operating gay bar
- The site of one of Washington’s earliest racetracks

This lively city neighborhood began as an elite suburb on the high ground overlooking Washington City. Follow this trail to experience both the old and new Columbia Heights and meet people who changed our world with new technology, revolutionary ideas, literature, laws, and leadership.
Welcome.

Washington’s historic neighborhoods are rich in stories that reflect our nation’s history and describe how we became who we are as communities. This self-guided walking tour is the tenth in a series that invites you to discover and enjoy a good walk through a great place.

Columbia Heights has welcomed every group to ever leave its mark on the city. This keepsake guide summarizes their stories, taken from the 19 signs of Cultural Convergence: Columbia Heights Heritage Trail.
Cultural Convergence
Columbia Heights Heritage Trail

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As you walk this trail, please keep safety in mind, just as you would while visiting any unfamiliar place.
Soon after the Civil War, new settlements arose, including Mount Pleasant Village near 14th Street and Park Road, settled by white newcomers, and a predominantly African American community on College Hill, where the new Wayland Seminary trained formerly enslaved men and women to be teachers and preachers.

In 1892, a new electric streetcar line scaled the 14th Street hill for the first time. When another line came to 11th Street the easy transportation led to a residential building boom. Soon fashionable homes covered the hill. Senator John Sherman laid out his subdivision, Columbia Heights, around the site where years earlier soldier Winthrop had admired the view.

Eventually Sherman's development gave its name to an entire neighborhood. At its western edge an embassy district grew, thanks to landowner Mary Henderson, the resident of a castle-like mansion at Florida Avenue and 16th Street. Henderson also pushed the U.S. Congress to establish the formal Meridian Hill Park, in the process displacing the old College Hill settlement and its working-class residents.

The new residential developers restricted commercial activities to the streetcar routes. Soon the 14th Street corridor became an important, large-scale business district. In addition to small shops, a huge indoor market/sports arena/amusement palace called the Arcade drew customers from across the city. The arrival in the mid-1920s of the
grand new Riggs Bank building and the 2,500-seat Tivoli Theater sealed the area’s future.

These imposing buildings reflected the status of Columbia Heights’s new residents, who were mostly white and upper-middle class. Among them were senators, Supreme Court justices, and an enclave of successful Jewish business owners. Some builders wrote race-restrictive covenants into deeds to keep residential areas west of 13th Street white. In the 1920s upper-crust African American families, many of them associated with Howard University, began moving onto the blocks just east of the “divide.”

Columbia Heights’s Central High School, at 13th and Euclid Streets, was considered the gem of DC Public Schools’ white division. But by 1949 the neighborhood’s complexion had changed and Central’s student population had dwindled. At the same time, nearby “colored” schools were practically bursting at the seams. After intense lobbying by African American parents, and despite strong
resistance from white citizens and Central alumni, the school board transferred Central’s students elsewhere, and moved the African American Cardozo Business High School into Central’s building.

A few years later legal school segregation ended. Soon most of the neighborhood’s remaining white residents, and much of the white business capital, had left for the Virginia and Maryland suburbs. Hard times followed, compounded by the riots that began at 14th and U Streets in response to the 1968 assassination of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Many businesses were looted and burned; others closed as their customers fled the neighborhood. The 14th Street corridor was devastated.

But from despair grew hope. Dozens of community-based arts, social services, and political organizations developed. Over time new immigrants, attracted to the affordable rents, found shelter in the neighborhood and built strong communities. Drummers and soccer players found a home in Meridian Hill Park, which also became known as Malcolm X Park.

Four decades after the 1968 riots, shoppers once again crowd 14th Street. A Metrorail station connects the neighborhood to the rest of the city. New residents join old in the cultural convergence that marks today’s Columbia Heights. And the neighborhood still spreads over the hill, commanding the city below.
FOURTEENTH STREET has always been the business backbone of Columbia Heights. Beginning in the 1890s, electric streetcars dropped passengers at nearly every corner, attracting commerce. By 1925 storefronts occupied the blocks between Euclid and Otis Streets.

Most stores, often less than 20 feet wide, were family run and offered one line of products. In 1925 on 14th Street between Irving Street and Park Road alone, you could find hats, bicycles, men’s clothing, ladies’ clothing, automobiles, hardware, musical instruments, candy, cigars, paint, meats, baked goods, and real estate. Larger establishments included drug stores, restaurants, movie theaters, and the Arcade, a granddaddy to the modern shopping mall, with food stalls and family entertainment. After World War II, nightspots featured “hillbilly” music and catered to migrants from rural states.

In 1927 J. Willard and Alice Marriott, a young couple from Utah, chose a storefront on the west side of 14th Street for their first business. They opened an A&W Root Beer franchise at 3128 14th Street, added spicy Southwestern style food, and dubbed the enterprise Hot Shoppe. It grew into the Hot Shoppes chain, and by 1957, Marriott food services and hotels.

The riots following the assassination of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in April 1968 devastated 14th Street. Most of the businesses that weren’t actually burned out closed, setting off a downward spiral. While immigrants and activists brought some new enterprises in the 1980s, it took the opening of the Columbia Heights Metrorail station in 1999 to begin the latest revival.
The intersection of 14th Street and Park Road has been the center of community life since at least 1871, when the neighborhood was called Mount Pleasant and storekeeper George Emery made his living on the northwest corner. Emery’s emporium, the first on upper 14th Street, marked the end of the line for the horse-drawn omnibus (coach) that carried residents to and from downtown. “Its stock ranged all the way from mowing machines to dry goods,” wrote Emery’s son Fred.

In 1892 the Washington and Georgetown Railroad Company began running electric streetcars up 14th Street to Park Road, and built a Romanesque “car barn” on the west side of 14th. After the line was extended in 1907, investors, including gramophone inventor and neighbor Emile Berliner, transformed the car barn into the Arcade, a combination market and amusement park.

Best known for its street-level vendor stalls, the Arcade over time boasted a movie theater, sports arena, bowling alleys, skating rink, and dance hall upstairs, not to mention carnival fun in the Japanese Maze and the House of Trouble. “The big Arcade building was crowded from end to end with one of the happiest throngs imaginable,” wrote the Washington Post about opening night.

In November 1925 the newly organized American Basketball Association inducted DC’s Palace Five. The Five (also called the “Laundrymen” for their first sponsor, Palace Laundry) played their first home-court, Big League game at the Arcade. Some 2,500 fans watched them beat the Brooklyn Five, 18 to 17.
Columbia Heights by the mid-1920s was a center of white elite activity and commerce. The elegant, Neoclassical style Riggs Bank branch and the Italian Renaissance style Tivoli Theater opened to great acclaim. Soon after, radio station WRC moved into the bank building, its rooftop tower advertising the wondrous new technology.

Harry Crandall’s Tivoli was among the largest and grandest theaters in Washington. People literally danced in the streets the day it opened. The 2,500-seat theater hosted live shows as well as films. It was Washington’s first movie house equipped for “talkies,” movies with sound.

With these two anchors, Columbia Heights in 1928 was “practically independent of downtown Washington,” proclaimed the Washington Post. Then the housing demands of the Great Depression and World War II led some people to subdivide the larger houses. New residents in the 1950s demanded more affordable goods and services. Soon the discount department store Morton’s arrived, and the number of night spots increased.

Like many other DC theaters, the Tivoli was segregated until forced by the Supreme Court in 1953 to desegregate. In the 1960s its programming shifted to attract local audiences in the now-predominantly African American community. Children enjoyed Saturday matinees for 25 cents, with 15-cent popcorn and 10-cent sodas. Despite the civil disturbances of 1968, the Tivoli remained a neighborhood anchor until it closed in 1976. Thanks to preservationists and area residents, the landmark was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1985 and was carefully restored in 2006.
Four days after Dr. King’s assassination, firefighters continued to battle smoldering buildings along 14th St.

Library of Congress

When the smoke cleared after the civil disturbances of April 1968, Columbia Heights lay devastated. Many residents and businesses simply left. Others remained to pick up the pieces. But who would help rebuild?

Citizen groups, church leaders, and the federal government — which controlled the city’s purse-strings — initially answered the call. The Cardozo Heights Association for Neighborhood Growth and Enrichment (CHANGE), Inc., also responded with housing programs, a health clinic, a “street academy,” and other assistance.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development bought, or took by eminent domain, hundreds of properties, giving some to the city for public housing. Some damaged buildings, and many rowhouses that were simply old, were razed. Soon, on this block, only the Tivoli Theater remained.

In 1976–77 CHANGE—All Souls Housing Corp. built the Columbia Heights Village complex along 14th Street. However most of the land between Irving and Monroe Streets sat vacant for decades as city officials and community groups argued, and investors looked elsewhere.

Though damaged, the grand Riggs-Tompkins Building escaped demolition, thanks to neighborhood preservationists. The Kelsey Temple Development Corp. added apartments for seniors above the original building.

The largest enterprise to survive the disturbances was the Giant Food store, then located at 3460 14th Street. It had opened in 1966 as a model facility after citizens complained that “inner-city neighborhoods” had inferior stores. In the difficult days after the riots, Giant joined Sacred Heart Church and St. Stephen and the Incarnation Church in distributing needed provisions.
Harry Wardman, Washington’s prolific developer, built nearly all of the 300 houses around this sign between Monroe Street and Spring Road. The English immigrant and self-made millionaire became known for his rowhouses, whose front porches allowed neighbors to visit easily. These date from 1907 to 1911.

Adjoining Wardman buildings at 3501–3503 14th Street once housed the Danzansky Funeral Home, originally opened in 1921 by Bernard Danzansky on Ninth Street, NW, as DC’s first Jewish funeral home. Soon after, he moved his residence and business here, as affluent Jews moved uptown from the old city. The Jewish Social Service Agency as well as a mikvah—a ritual purification bath—were nearby.

Danzansky helped found the Hebrew Home for the Aged and the Hebrew Academy of Washington. His wife Nettie was a leader in charitable work, and his son Joseph was president of Giant Food and headed the city’s Board of Trade.

When the funeral home relocated to Maryland, the Washington Urban League moved in, remaining for 30 years before moving to 14th and Harvard Streets.

Across 14th Street is Hubbard Place apartments. Long known as the Cavalier, the originally ritzy building was constructed by Morris Cafritz, a top DC developer. It was later converted to low-income housing, and in 2009 was renamed to honor the late community activist Leroy Hubbard.

In the 1980s growing crime led to the formation of the “red-hat” Citizen Organized Patrol Effort (COPE) to walk the neighborhood and alert police to loitering, vacant properties, burnt-out streetlights, and other conditions that contributed to crime.
Holmeads’ Legacy
MONROE AND 13TH STREETS NW

Holmead descendants built this house in 1883, which can be seen at 3517 13th St.
The Historical Society of Washington, D.C.

This spot once was the center of the Holmead family estate, “Pleasant Plains.” The property stretched from today’s Spring Road to Columbia Road, and from Georgia Avenue to Rock Creek. In 1740 the Holmeads built a house near here.

In 1802, two years after Congress arrived in Washington, Col. John Tayloe leased land from the Holmeads to open the city’s second racetrack (the first was walking distance from the White House where the Organization of American States is today on Constitution Avenue, NW). Congress regularly recessed to make post time at the one-mile track, which extended from today’s 10th to 16th Streets, bordered on the south by Tayloe’s Lane, now Columbia Road.

During the 1800s Holmead descendents gradually sold off Pleasant Plains. In 1883 William and Mary Holmead laid out Holmead Manor, with 50-foot-wide building lots. For themselves they built a large house at 3517 13th Street. That structure remains today, adapted for apartments. Its original carriage house remains, as well, tucked into the alley behind the house.

In 1909, shortly after 11th Street was built, the Anacostia & Potomac River Railroad’s 11th Street line ended at Monroe Street. Added to existing lines on Georgia Avenue and 14th Street, the new line made this DC’s best-served “streetcar suburb.”

At 11th and Monroe is a small park where, until 1961, streetcars turned around to head back downtown.
FOR NEARLY 50 YEARS this corner was home to Nob Hill Restaurant, one of the nation’s first openly gay bars for—and run by—African Americans.

Started in the 1950s as a private social club, Nob Hill went public in 1957. Patrons enjoyed entertainment ranging from male dancers to weekly “Gospel Hours” with local church choirs. One regular called the low-key club “a house party that charged a cover.” When Nob Hill closed in 2004, it was considered DC’s longest-enduring gay bar.

Across Kenyon Street are the playing fields of Harriet Tubman Elementary School. The school opened in 1970 amid controversy over whether it would destroy the neighborhood’s essential character. Despite resident efforts to block the school, construction went ahead, displacing 17 long-standing businesses along 11th Street and fine, three-story rowhouses on 13th, Irving, and Kenyon Streets.

The remaining single-story commercial strip between Kenyon and Lamont dates back to the early 1910s, shortly after the 11th Street streetcar line arrived and increased foot traffic here.

On the way to Sign 8 is Columbia Road, where Ralph Bunche lived at number 1123 in the early 1930s. Bunche later founded Howard University’s Political Science Department and served as a U.S. diplomat. For his work on establishing the state of Israel, Bunche received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1950, the first African American so honored.
The 1100 and 1200 blocks of Girard Street once were home to a “Who’s Who” of African American leaders.

This and nearby “double-blocks” are the heart of John Sherman’s Columbia Heights subdivision. By placing houses 30 feet from the street’s center, Sherman created a gracious and inviting streetscape. The elegant rowhouses, built mostly between 1894 and 1912, echoed the social and economic class of their first, white residents.

By the 1920s black families began arriving. Many had ties to Howard University. Dr. W. Montague Cobb of 1221 Girard, a foremost physical anthropologist, headed Howard Medical School’s Anatomy Department and helped lead the NAACP. Dr. Roland Scott, of 1114 Girard, chaired Pediatrics and led the fight against sickle cell disease. Dorothy Porter Wesley, of 1201 Girard, developed the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, the eminent library of the African Diaspora. Educator Paul Phillips Cooke, former president of D.C. Teachers College and leader of the American Veterans Committee, lived at 1203 Girard from 1928 until 2006.

Across Girard Street is Carlos Rosario Public Charter School, originally the white Wilson Normal School (teachers college) and later part of the University of the District of Columbia. One block away is Fairmont Street, where jazz pianist, composer, and educator Billy Taylor grew up at number 1207. Music teacher Henry Grant, mentor to both Taylor and Duke Ellington, once lived at 1114. Home rule activist Rev. Channing Phillips lived at 1232 Fairmont before becoming, in 1968, the first African American nominated for U.S. president at a major party convention.
The Columbia Heights Heritage Trail, Cultural Convergence, is an official Washington, DC Walking Trail. The 2.9-mile route is defined by 19 illustrated historical markers, each capped with an H.

Sign 1 is found at the southeast corner of 14th and Irving Streets, just across from both entrances to the Columbia Heights station on Metrorail's Green line, but you may begin your tour at any sign. The walk offers two hours of gentle exercise.
These elegant 13th Street houses were constructed at a time when racial separation was legal and widely accepted. In 1910 the deeds for many houses on the west side of 13th Street included covenants banning “any negro or colored persons.”

By the 1930s, 13th Street divided black from white. Then, in 1941, African American educator Mary Hundley and her husband Frederick bought 2530 13th Street, on the white side, despite its restrictive covenant. (Hundley was the granddaughter of William Syphax, founder of the nation’s — and Washington’s — first public high school for African Americans.) White neighbors successfully sued the Hundleys for breaking the covenant, but a higher court overturned the ruling. In 1948 the U.S. Supreme Court cited the Hundley case as precedent when it decreed that racially restrictive covenants were unenforceable.

Supreme Court Justice John Marshall Harlan once lived at 14th and Euclid Streets. In 1896 Harlan was the only justice to dissent when the Court ruled in *Plessy v. Ferguson* that “separate but equal” facilities were constitutional. That ruling helped justify the covenants that Hundley helped neutralize.

Economic discrimination spurred further activism in the 1970s. Protesters rallied for low-income tenants who faced eviction by speculators seeking to convert their homes into condominiums.

Across Euclid Street, at number 1236, once was the Afro-American Institute for Historic Preservation and Community Development. Established in 1970 by Robert and Vincent DeForest, the institute helped obtain National Historic Landmark status for more than 60 African American historic sites across the nation.
On March 12, 1967, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., spoke at Cardozo to a public meeting on urban renewal plans for the Shaw neighborhood.

Star Collection, DC Public Library; © Washington Post

In the days of legally segregated public education (1862–1954), this school building was Central High, the gem of the School Board’s white division. But by 1949, it had few students, as the post–World War II suburban housing boom had drawn whites away. Consequently African American families outnumbered whites around Central.

Nearby “colored” high schools—especially Cardozo at Ninth Street and Rhode Island Avenue—struggled with overcrowded, outdated facilities. When activists pressed the city to move Cardozo’s black students to Central, the white community resisted. But the School Board could not justify the waste of space. So in September 1950, with white students relocated to other schools, Central became Cardozo, the business high school for black students. Four years later, with Brown v. Board of Education, the Supreme Court nominally integrated all DC schools.

Long before there was a school here, though, this fabulous view was enjoyed by a sculptor and engraver named William J. Stone. In 1835 Stone moved into the Federal style “Mount Pleasant” house, once the centerpiece of the prominent Peter family’s thousand-acre estate here. In 1881 Senator John Sherman bought 121 acres, then laid out a subdivision between 11th and 14th Streets, naming it Columbia Heights. His contemporary, Senator John A. Logan of Illinois, a Civil War general, co-founder of Memorial Day, and future vice presidential candidate (1884), bought the old mansion and renamed it Calumet Place. Later, Logan’s widow Mary rented it to Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan.
On the southwest corner of this intersection once stood Belmont, an impressive stone mansion built in 1883 by entrepreneur Amzi L. Barber, “America’s Asphalt King.” Barber, who was white, headed the Education Department at Howard University at the time of its founding in 1867. He soon bought land from the university to build the exclusive LeDroit Park neighborhood. Next he entered the asphalt paving business, and came to dominate it nationwide. Barber also helped develop the Columbia Heights subdivision.

For years Belmont was a landmark that greeted streetcar riders cresting the 14th Street hill. Justice William R. Day was one of the powerful men who lived nearby.

After Barber’s death, developer Harry Wardman bought Belmont, only to replace it in 1915 with Wardman Courts, then the city’s largest luxury apartment complex. In 1921 new owners named it Clifton Terrace. The once-glamorous complex did not age well, and succeeding owners deferred maintenance and crowded more tenants into the units. By the 1960s, the situation was so bad that, with help from Change, Inc. and others, tenants organized and stopped paying rent. When the landlord tried to evict them, the tenants sued. In a landmark 1970 ruling by the U.S. Court of Appeals, Javins v. First National Realty Corporation established the right of tenants to withhold rent payments when conditions violate housing codes.

Social activist Rev. Channing Phillips’s Housing Development Corporation renovated Clifton Terrace in the late 1960s. In 2003 the complex, once again named Wardman Courts, reopened as condominiums and rental units.
FOLLOWING THE APRIL 4, 1968, assassination of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., rioting broke out when angry crowds gathered at 14th and U Streets. The disturbances, here and around the city, lasted four days. At least 10 people were killed with hundreds injured, and property damage was extensive.

Across 14th Street was Smith’s Pharmacy, owned by Larry Rosen. The pharmacy’s staff and customers were predominantly African American, “and everyone got along,” Rosen recalled. So he was stunned when, on April 4 and 5, Smith’s was looted, then burned. “We merchants had nothing to do with Dr. King’s murder,” Rosen reflected later. “Why were we being attacked?” Smith’s never reopened.

A few weeks after the disturbances, Howard University historians interviewed people who had participated in the violence. One 21-year-old explained that, upon hearing the news of Dr. King’s death, he headed out, looking for friends who shared his horror and outrage. But the streets were filling with angry people breaking into businesses. Looting seemed a way to strike back at a system in which “the white man can come in here and set up stores..., take his money, and then go out to the suburbs and deny the black man the opportunity to come out there.”

For 25 years afterward, private developers shunned this and many riot-damaged areas. In 1993 the Nehemiah Group, a coalition of nonprofits led by the Development Corporation of Columbia Heights, broke ground on retail spaces and affordable housing.
Until 1890, today’s Florida Avenue was called “Boundary Street.” That’s because Washington City planner Peter Charles L’Enfant ended his city here at the foot of this daunting hill. The rest of DC north of Boundary Street and across the Anacostia River was called “Washington County” until 1871, when it merged with Washington City to become Washington, District of Columbia. This segment of the trail follows the old city boundary.

The two buildings with glass-block windows, at 1326-46 Florida Avenue, once belonged to Manhattan Laundry. The red-brick building originally opened in 1877 to house the streetcars and horses of the Washington and Georgetown Railroad Company.

Joe Turner’s (later Capitol) Arena once stood near the corner of 14th and W Streets. For 30 years Turner’s presented boxing, wrestling, big bands, and dances. In the mid-1950s it hosted Jimmy Dean’s Town and Country Jamboree TV show.

In 1966 the New School for Afro-American Thought opened at 2208 14th Street. Founded in the Black Power era by poet Gaston Neal and 11 others, the school was a national leader in Afro-centric education.

Back in the 1940s, Club Madre occupied 2204 14th Street. Owner Odessa Madre, known as the Al Capone of Washington for her involvement in bootlegging, prostitution, and numbers running, operated a legitimate nightclub there.

Since 1944 the Florida Avenue Grill has stood at the corner of 11th Street, dishing up North Carolina-style home cooking to cabbies, notables including Dr. Martin Luther King, and all comers.
The Pitts Motor Hotel, formerly located at 1451 Belmont Street, lingers in memory for two reasons. In the 1960s it was a gathering place for Civil Rights movement leaders. Later it became a “welfare hotel.”

In March 1968, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., reserved 30 rooms at the Pitts Hotel to house leaders of the Poor People’s Campaign he planned to lead that May. He chose the facility because it was both comfortable and black owned.

Despite Dr. King’s April 1968 assassination, the Poor People’s Campaign went ahead, demanding jobs and income as a civil right. In late May and June thousands camped in “Resurrection City” on the National Mall where, due to excessive rain, conditions deteriorated quickly. Resentful campers marched on the Pitts where the leaders were housed, demanding (unsuccesfully) that the leaders exchange their comforts for the muddy Mall.

In its heyday, the Pitts Hotel housed the Red Carpet Lounge. “Everyone would be there,” remembered activist Bob Moore. But its popularity masked an unstable financial situation. Owner Cornelius Pitts and other African American entrepreneurs (and would-be homeowners) at the time often were refused bank loans or offered unfavorable terms. In the 1980s, when Reagan administration cuts to social programs led to widespread homelessness, Pitts took the opportunity to turn around his fortunes, converting his hotel into a shelter. The city rented all 50 rooms, but the prices were so inflated that a congressional investigation resulted. In 2004 a condominium building replaced the hotel.
Wayland Seminary opened in Foggy Bottom just after the Civil War to train formerly enslaved people and others as “preachers and teachers for the South” and as missionaries to evangelize Africa. In 1875 it moved here, later merging with Richmond Theological Seminary to become Virginia Union University in Richmond. Among Wayland’s distinguished alumni was Booker T. Washington.

Just two blocks up the hill is the former site of George Washington University’s predecessor, Columbian College. Founded by Baptist missionaries in 1821, Columbian gave the area the nickname “College Hill.”

Some 24 years before Wayland Seminary’s arrival, landowner Col. Gilbert Livingston Thompson and his wife, Mary Ann Tolley Thompson, attended a Prince George’s County slave auction and purchased Emily Saunders Plummer and three of her children to serve them here. After Emancipation, Plummer’s son Henry returned to attend Wayland.

The Thompson home, which stood where 16th Street is today, was built in the early 1800s by Commodore David Porter, who called his estate “Meridian Hill.” During the Civil War Union troops occupied it.

By the 1870s Thompson’s land was subdivided into building lots, and a working-class community of mostly African Americans developed. “Residents depended entirely upon wells and the rain barrel for water,” wrote local historian John Clagett Proctor, who lived nearby after the Civil War. “There were no streets or sidewalks.” Around 1912 the federal government forced the residents out and razed their houses to make way for Meridian Hill Park (later also known as Malcolm X Park).
AT 2437 15TH STREET is the Josephine Butler Parks Center, home of Washington Parks & People, a network of groups devoted to DC and its parks. This 1927 mansion, which once housed the Hungarian delegation, was part of an embassy row envisioned by Mary Foote Henderson for this area. Henderson built a “castle” across 16th Street for her family, and commissioned important architects to create an enclave worthy of important residents. Meridian Hill Park was also a result of her influence.

In the 1980s, the park (by then also called Malcolm X Park) had become forbidding and dangerous, and the mansion was vacant. Then Friends of Meridian Hill Park came together in 1990. By the end of the decade, when Parks & People bought the mansion, the park again thrived. The first phase of the National Park Service’s restoration of the park to its original design was completed in spring 2009.

The Parks Center, housing nonprofit groups, honors Josephine Butler (1920–1997), a union and political activist and educator who led Washington Parks & People at the time of her death.

At the corner of Euclid Street is the Embassy of Ecuador, formerly the Netherlands Embassy. On the way to Sign 17 is the Warder-Totten House at 2633 16th Street. George Oakley Totten, Jr., architect of the Parks Center, salvaged parts of a house designed by his teacher, renowned architect H.H. Richardson, and rebuilt it here in the 1920s. It is the only Richardson building left in Washington.
All Souls Church, Unitarian, has long been known for its social activism, starting with abolitionism in the 1820s. During segregation, All Souls was one of the few places in DC where integrated groups could meet. During the 1980s and ’90s it (and other neighborhood churches) hosted concerts by DC’s influential punk bands Bad Brains, Fugazi, Minor Threat, and others.

In the early 1960s, the church launched the model Girard Street Playground Project in response to growing neighborhood crime, and after the 1968 riots, built housing on 14th Street, in cooperation with Change, Inc. All Souls’ first African American senior minister, Rev. David H. Eaton, opened the church’s doors to Antioch Law School and other groups. Eaton also became president of the DC Board of Education in 1982.

Others shared All Souls’ commitment. Sojourners, a Christian social justice community, ran summer and after-school programs at 1323 Girard Street and at Clifton Terrace, and helped form the Southern Columbia Heights Tenant Union. Sojourners organizes nationally for social change.

The Community for Creative Non-Violence grew out of anti-Vietnam War protests at George Washington University. Later CCNV opened soup kitchens, free clinics, and shelters. Eventually the group moved its headquarters to 1345 Euclid Street. Led by Mitch Snyder, CCNV won political influence for its causes.

The Mexican Cultural Institute, at 2829 16th Street, offers exhibits and murals on Mexican life and history. The institute succeeded the Mexican Embassy in the 1911 building originally the residence of Chicago socialite Emily MacVeagh.
The house at 1422 Harvard was built in 1893 for P.B.S. Pinchback, a Reconstruction era politician and lawyer from Louisiana. Pinchback briefly served as Louisiana’s governor, the only African American governor in the country until Virginia elected Douglas Wilder in 1990. Pinchback also won seats in the U.S. House and Senate, but white politicians prevented him from claiming them.

Here on Harvard Street, Pinchback raised his grandson, future author Jean Toomer. Toomer’s time here provided material for his 1923 masterpiece, *Cane*. “Dan Moore walks southward on Thirteenth Street,” Toomer wrote. “The low limbs of budding chestnut trees recede above his head…. The eyes of houses faintly touch him as he passes them. Soft girl-eyes, they set him singing.”

Almost four decades later novelist Marita Golden also found a rich setting in Columbia Heights for her novel *Long Distance Life*.

The great Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes, son of a diplomat assigned to the Mexican Embassy on 16th Street, relished life here in the 1930s. Washington had “one of the best public school systems in the world,” he recalled, “and I profited from it.”

The Drum and Spear, Washington’s first Afrocentric bookstore, operated three blocks from here, at 1371 Fairmont Street, from 1969 until the mid 1970s.

From 1917 until 1972 the Hines Funeral Home occupied the former private residences at 2901–2907 14th Street, before the buildings became home to the Greater Washington Urban League.
The Latino Intelligence Center
COLUMBIA ROAD AND 14TH STREET NW

This block is home to some of the largest Latino organizations in the city, all founded as migration from Central America and the Caribbean increased in the 1970s. Several began with a boost from Calvary United Methodist Church at 1459 Columbia Road.

Since 1974 the Latin American Youth Center, now at 1419 Columbia Road, has supported youth and their families with education, employment, and social services. LAYC’s Art & Media House is around the corner at 3035 15th Street. CentroNía, in the former C&P Telephone Company building at 1420 Columbia Road, emphasizes early education, and the Central American Resource Center (CARECEN) has offered legal, housing, education, and citizenship assistance since 1981. La Clinica del Pueblo at 2831 15th Street provides affordable medical care. Most of the neighboring schools and churches offer bilingual or multilingual programs.

Almost 100 years before Latino groups made this their “intelligence center,” renowned German immigrant Emile Berliner lived here. Berliner invented a microphone that proved crucial to the Bell telephone’s operation. In 1883 he built a large house and laboratory at 1458 Columbia Road, where he also invented the gramophone (record player). With an interest in public health, Berliner founded the Bureau of Health Education and built its headquarters at 1460 Columbia Road (now CARECEN offices).

The Fernwood apartments replaced Berliner’s house in 1926. In 2000 Fernwood tenants faced eviction when the DC government condemned the building. Led by six Latinas, all named Maria, residents bought, renovated, and created Las Marias Condominiums.
THE PROCESS OF CREATING a Neighborhood Heritage Trail begins with the community, extends through story-sharing and oral history gathering, and ends in formal scholarly research. For more on this neighborhood, please consult the Kiplinger Library/The Historical Society of Washington, D.C., and the Washingtoniana Division, DC Public Library. In addition, see the following selected works:


DC Historic Preservation Office, Building Permits Database, 2008, Washingtoniana Division, DC Public Library.


Don’t Miss These Other Neighborhood Heritage Trails!

1 **Battleground to Community: Brightwood**
Here, along the city’s first farm-to-market road, is where Union and Confederate troops met in the only Civil War battle to be fought in the District.

Metro: Georgia Ave-Petworth, 70-series Metrobuses north to Sign 2 at Madison St. and Georgia Ave., or Columbia Heights, 50-series Metrobuses north to Sign 1 at Colorado Ave., 14th and Jefferson Sts.

2 **City Within a City: Greater U Street**
Discover the historic center of African American DC, where Duke Ellington got his inspiration, Madame Evanti composed, and Thurgood Marshall strategized.

Metro: U St/African-Amer Civil War Memorial/Cardozo. Sign 1 is at 13th St. exit.

3 **Civil War to Civil Rights: Downtown**
Follow the footsteps of Abraham Lincoln, Frederick Douglass, Walt Whitman, and the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., whose lives intertwined with the history of the nation. Download the free audio tour from CulturalTourismDC.org.

Metro: Archives-Navy Mem’l-Penn Quarter. Sign 1 on Seventh St. across Pennsylvania Ave.

4 **Midcity at the Crossroads: Shaw**
Immigrants and old-timers, the powerful and the poor have mingled in Shaw since DC’s earliest days.

Metro: Mt. Vernon Square/7th St–Convention Center to Sign 12.

5 **River Farms to Urban Towers: Southwest**
Visualize historic, ethnic Southwest amid today’s now-classic Modernist architecture, the result of mid-20th-century urban renewal.

Metro: Waterfront-SEU to Sign 1.

6 **Roads to Diversity: Adams Morgan**
Explore Adams Morgan’s grand mansions and apartments, the location of the first Toys ‘R’ Us, and commerce from around the globe.

Metro: Woodley Park-Zoo/Adams Morgan. Ride Circulator to first stop: Calvert St. and Adams Mill Rd. Sign 9 is across Adams Mill Rd.
7 **A Self-Reliant People: Greater Deanwood**
Small, wood-frame houses and lush green spaces evoke this traditionally African American neighborhood’s rural past where Nannie Helen Burroughs and Marvin Gaye made their names.

Minnesota Ave to Metrobus U8 (Capitol Heights) to Sign 1 at Division Ave. south of Nannie Helen Burroughs Ave.

8 **Tour of Duty: Barracks Row**
Capitol Hill’s Navy Yard and Marine Barracks district is one of the city’s oldest. Hear the Marine Band rehearsing and explore historic Eastern Market.

Eastern Market to Sign 1.

9 **Village in the City: Mount Pleasant**
Trace the path from country village to fashionable streetcar suburb, working-class neighborhood, Latino barrio, and hub of arts and activism.

Columbia Heights. Two blocks west to Sign 1 at 16th and Harvard Sts.
Walk It.  
Hear It.  

A treasury of voices and sounds to expand your experience walking the Downtown Heritage Trail.  

Cultural Tourism DC’s Audio Journeys presents  
Civil War to Civil Rights Audio Tours  

Download the free, award-winning Downtown Heritage Trail Audio Tours at www.CulturalTourismDC.org
**Another Good Walk: Art on Call**

Art on Call re-uses obsolete police and fire call boxes as mini-showcases for community art and history. Go to CulturalTourismDC.org for call box locations in these neighborhoods:

1. **Capitol Hill**
   Boxes in various media evoke icons of times past, including an old movie theater and the “March King,” John Philip Sousa.

2. **Cathedral Heights**
   Four artists reveal key moments including U.S. Navy women in World War II and origins of the Washington National Cathedral.

3. **Cleveland Park**
   An engaging tour of distinguished residential architecture and notes on the Washington Ballet, the late, lamented Roma Restaurant, and more.

4. **Dupont Circle**
   Twenty-two artists’ clever and whimsical interpretations of the Dupont Circle fountain plus neighborhood history and fire tales.

5. **Forest Hills**
   Four artists present neighborhood lore on restored Peirce Mill, Native Americans who lived in Soapstone Valley, and more.

6. **Georgetown**
   The fabled community’s history and recent past, complete with quips, Kennedys, and colleges.

7. **Glover Park**
   Six artists explore the story of Charles Carroll Glover, the community’s wartime “victory gardens,” punk music roots, and more.

8. **Golden Triangle**
   An array of artistic styles evoke the lively spirit of this downtown area in the shadow of the White House.

9. **McLean Gardens**
   The fabulous Evalyn Walsh McLean, her Hope Diamond, and her Friendship Estate (replaced during World War II by McLean Gardens).

10. **Mount Pleasant**
    Compelling, original bronze sculptures by Michael K. Ross envision historic events.
When it comes to serving this community, we’re all on the same track.

We believe communities are built on the goodwill and energy of the people who belong to them. That’s why we are pleased to support the Columbia Heights Heritage Trail.

Park Road Branch
3300 14th Street
202.835.5722

11 Sheridan/Kalorama
Gilt-edged boxes display sculpture, paintings, and other artwork honoring the neighborhood’s diplomatic and cultural pasts.

12 Southwest
The National Cherry Blossom Festival inspired the art by six artists.

13 Tenleytown
Artist Lena Frumin celebrates the Hot Shoppes, Tenleytown’s 1903 firehouse, schools, and Fort Reno and the Civil War.

14 Woodley Park
Artist Nancy McGill highlights landmarks including Taft Bridge, the Wardman Park, and Woodley mansion (Maret School).
As a Nonprofit Social Services and Civil Rights Organization, The Greater Washington Urban League is Membership driven and shows its commitment to the community by serving 65,000 persons annually with programs in Education, Employment and Training and Housing and Community Development.

For Membership, Donation and Program information Visit our website at www.gwul.org

The Greater Washington Urban League
2901 14th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20009
202-265-8200

Jerry A. Moore III
Chair, Board of Directors
Maudine R. Cooper
President and CEO

Discover the Mexican Cultural Institute!

Its ample spaces and striking décor are the perfect setting to enjoy the richness and diversity of Mexican culture through exciting activities and events. Our calendar of events includes art exhibitions, concerts, book presentations and culinary presentations.

The Mansion underwent renovations during 2009 to ensure that the common heritage and historical value of the Mansion are preserved for many generations to come.

Admission to the building is free and it is open to the public Monday through Friday from 10:00am until 6:00pm and Saturdays from 10:00am until 4:00pm. Guided tours for groups and schools are available by appointment.

We look forward to your visit!
Visit us at: www.instituteofmexicodc.org

Mexican Cultural Institute
2829 18th Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20009
Acknowledgments


Cultural Tourism DC is an independent, nonprofit coalition of more than 230 culture, heritage, and community organizations throughout the nation’s capital. We help metro-area residents and visitors experience Washington’s authentic culture and heritage. Neighborhood Heritage Trails are the Official Walking Trails of the District of Columbia.

The Columbia Heights Heritage Trail Working Group is an ad-hoc, diverse coalition of neighborhood residents, business owners, activists, artists, scholars, and others organized to develop the Columbia Heights Heritage Trail in cooperation with Cultural Tourism DC.

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