

A detailed historical map of Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., showing a grid of streets, buildings, and landmarks. The map is rendered in a dark, monochromatic style with white lines and text. Key features include the U.S. Capitol building, the U.S. Supreme Court, and various streets like Constitution Avenue and Independence Avenue. The map is overlaid with a semi-transparent dark layer containing text.

Capitol Hill Memories: W. Milton Sladen's Historical Account

A journey through early 20th-century Capitol Hill's neighborhoods, landmarks, and residents.

DEVELOPMENT OF EAST CAPITOL STREET
AS AVENUE OF THE STATES

1929

FIRST PROPOSAL FOR DEVELOPMENT EAST OF THE CAPITOL
NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

W. Milton Sladen Interview, August 28, 1974

This historical interview provides a firsthand account of life in Capitol Hill during the early 1900s, offering valuable insights into the neighborhood's development, culture, and prominent figures.

- 📄 This interview serves as an important primary source document for understanding the evolution of Capitol Hill and its surrounding areas during a transformative period in Washington DC's history.

Early Life and Career

In addition to the Metzeroths, the Rossback family lived in the first house on the south side of Independence at 12th. Mr. Rossback worked for Carry as a brewmaster; there were three children in the family. Lincoln Park was a family gathering place with meandering walks and many benches. It seemed an escape from the city and I used to read Horatio Alger and G.A. Henty books there in the summertime. There was no ball playing in the Park. It was a pleasant oasis, and there was, at that time, no violence or vandalism in the area. Once or twice a year there would be a black ceremony at the foot of the Lincoln Statue. D.C. officials were seldom seen in the Park or in the neighborhood.

One dramatic event occurred when the WWII Germans who were captured in a submarine off Long Island were tried in the D.C. Courts; they were incarcerated in the D.C. Jail. There was a great show of military force when they were transferred from the jail to the courts and all the neighbors turned out to see the Army trucks and jeeps as they sped around the park.



Mr. Sladen: I was born at 203 C Street SE, about a block from the construction site of the Library of Congress. My mother would take me as a child to see the construction. This area was the center of Capitol Hill life in the early 1900's. I lived across the street from the Lincoln School at Second and C Streets; this was a black school. In heavy snows, a chain gang wearing convict stripes with guards and dogs from the D.C. Jail would come to clear the snow away—this made a great impression on me as a child.

Early Education

I first went to school at the old Dent School at Second and Garfield Park. When we moved to Sixth Street SE, I went to the Hilton School (which is now razed) on Sixth Street NE between Constitution and C Street, and then to the Towers School and the Wallach School, and finally to the Old Eastern High School, all of which are now demolished. I received my B.A. from George Washington University.

Publishing Career

In 1935 I moved to New York with Mrs. Rinehart, and I became a member of the book publishing firm of Farrar and Rinehart which later became Rinehart and Company. I was Secretary and Assistant Treasurer of the Corporation. I worked with Mrs. Rinehart until her death in 1958. I stayed with the company until 1962. In 1960 we merged with Henry Holt and Company and the John C. Winston

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2

3

Early Career

I planned to go on to graduate school and was studying shorthand at Strayer College when I received a call for a part-time job in the office of Dr. Stanley Rinehart in the Munsey Building. Dr. Rinehart was the husband of writer Mary Roberts Rinehart who also had an office in the Munsey Building. Dr. Rinehart had retired from medicine and acted as his wife's business manager until he died in 1932. At that time, I took over the operation.

The Carry Properties and Lincoln Park Area

The Carry Properties

Albert Carry had many small properties throughout the city of Washington. He would buy a building, put a saloon in the first floor and have apartments above. One piece still standing is the property at the northwest corner of Seventh and Independence. He founded the German American Building Association which in WWI became the American Building Association. He also owned property at 13th and K Streets, on the southwest corner. He owned property on G Street NW, east of the Epiphany Church; this is now demolished.

In those days brewers would own saloons like franchises so that they could control the beer going in. Albert Carry was one of the biggest brewers in the city. The other big brewers were Abner Drury and Christian Heurich. When prohibition took effect in the 1920's, Carry went into the ice cream business and became very successful. He made a real cream ice cream, called "Carry's Special" for the B&O Railroad dining cars.

Kentucky Avenue was a dirt road when I moved into this house, and the area below D Street was known as "cowtown". East of 13th Street the area was known as "The Commons" and was open country with few buildings. We would wander through the paths of weeds much like cutting trails through a jungle. Between 13th Street and the D.C. Jail there was practically nothing there. It was mostly relatively cheap farm land. On the north side was a big dairy farm where we used to watch the cows and buy milk in a bucket. Out North Carolina Avenue at 16th Street was a big lumber yard owned by a man named Taplett. North of Constitution was pretty much unsettled.



Lincoln Park Boundaries

Lincoln Park is a phrase coined by real-estate men. Lincoln Park had considerable prestige. I would say Lincoln Park could be defined as 10th Street to 14th Street and from Constitution to Independence Avenues. Capitol Hill is from First and East Capitol to 14th Street and south on 14th Street to Independence and east [ed: west] on Independence to First and up First to East Capitol. There was no name to the area south of Independence, although many said it was part of Capitol Hill.

Recreation and Sports in Early Capitol Hill

1

Car Barn Baseball Field

There was the big car barn at 13th and D Streets NE and south of it was a baseball field. The East Washington Sunday School league played there, and a feat of left-handed batters was to knock the ball across the block into the car barn door.

2

14th and A Streets Field

Another baseball field at 14th and A Streets NE was used by another Sunday School league.

3

17th and D Streets Field

There was a baseball field at 17th and D Streets SE. The season ran from early June to mid-August.

4

Union League Park

Union League Park was at 15th and H Streets NE. High School and semi-professional teams such as Rex Athletic Club played there. Union League Park was moved from the west to the east side of Bladensburg Road. The site is now occupied by Sears Company; Sears built there in 1927.

The old Benning racetrack was on Benning Road near the Pepco power plant. It was a very social racetrack. Edward McLean was active there. After racing was banned in the District in the early 1900's, it was used as a training ground, until the track was destroyed by a large fire in 1910.

On the Eastern Branch, there were marshes which were used for shooting birds during the hunting season, and when September 1st came around, I would awaken to the crackling of guns.

I would like to read from a letter that I wrote to Michael Franch. Mr. Franch had asked me about well-known people who had lived on the Hill. In 1893 there were 37 members of the House living on Capitol Hill, most of them unknown to me with one exception: as a young member of the House, William Jennings Bryan lived at 131 B Street SE. This house was torn down when this block was demolished for the Madison Library Building. Some well-known men who lived on Capitol Hill in 1893 were the following: William H. Marlow who lived at 310 B Street NE. Marlow was a large landowner in D.C. and Maryland and was in the coal business. His office building at Eighth and E Streets NW was demolished a year or two ago. He owned all the land in what is now known as Marlow Heights.

Neighborhood Distinctions and the Navy Yard

Stanton Park and H Street

Stanton Park had the same kind of activity as Lincoln Park—band concerts and so on. H Street was a popular shopping area, but it was never considered a part of Capitol Hill. Nothing north of Constitution would be considered part of Capitol Hill. Capitol Hill was a very restricted area in the early 1900's.

The Navy Yard Area

The Navy Yard area was considered separate. It was south of Pennsylvania Avenue at M Street. Men in our area who were employed in the Navy Yard would ride their bikes to work. The Navy Yard at that time was open and anyone could go in. I was a pigeon fancier, and I would take my crates of pigeons there to the Naval tug which left everyday for Indian Head. The sailors would release the birds and they'd fly home. In the evening I would go down and pick up the empty crates.



I used to watch the men at work in the shops; some of them would make toy brass cannons for the neighborhood boys. The father of one of my friends was Steward on the Presidential yacht Mayflower, and we would spend hours wandering around on it. The Naval Gun Factory Band gave concerts once a week in Leutze Park. Leutze Park was named after Cap. Emmanuel Leutze who was Captain of the yard. His son was a famous naval artist.

Southeast Definition

Everything south of East Capitol was thought of as southeast; this included Lincoln Park. Now you think of Southeast as across Anacostia River. Car tracks went first only to Ninth Street (there was a turn-table there), and later to the car barn at 14th and East Capitol. They were discontinued in the early 1960's.

Notable Residents of Capitol Hill

William Jennings Bryan

As a young member of the House, William Jennings Bryan lived at 131 B Street SE. This house was torn down when this block was demolished for the Madison Library Building.

John G. Nicolay

John G. Nicolay lived in 212 B Street SE in a cream-coloured brick house. As you know, he was Lincoln's secretary and, with John Hay, wrote an authorized biography of Lincoln. Miss Helen Nicolay, his daughter, lived in this house. She was the author of a biography of her father.

George M. Oyster

George M. Oyster lived at 210 East Capitol Street; he was the founder of the Chestnut Farms Dairy, the leader in that business around the turn of the century. It was located on Connecticut Avenue where Sloan's now is.

As you know, he (John G. Nicolay) was Lincoln's secretary and, with John Hay, wrote an authorized biography of Lincoln. Miss Helen Nicolay, his daughter, lived in this house. She was the author of a biography of her father. Dr. George Custis lived at 110 East Capitol Street; Dr. Samuel Chew lived at 226 East Capitol Street, and Dr. Wm. P.C. Hazen lived at 511 East Capitol. George M. Oyster lived at 210 East Capitol Street; he was the founder of the Chestnut Farms Dairy, the leader in that business around the turn of the century. It was located on Connecticut Avenue where Sloan's now is. Henry P. Blair lived at 213 East Capitol Street in Grant Row. His father was a member of Congress, and Blair, an attorney, was one of the Hill's most prominent citizens. In the early 1900's, he was president of the Board of Education. Mayor and Mrs. G. C. Cornish lived at 224 Fourth Street SE. I can't identify him, but he may have been the Mayor of the city before Shepard.

In 1909 there were 78 members of Congress living on the Hill. Knute Nelson, Senator from Minnesota, lived at 647 East Capitol Street, J. T. Robinson lived at the old Congress Hall Hotel on New Jersey Avenue SE, William Sulzer, a New York Democrat in the House, lived at 131 B Street SE, where Bryan lived. He served in the House from 1893 to 1912 when he ran for and was elected governor of New York on the Democratic ticket. In 1913 he was impeached for irregularities in his campaign expenditures. William Levering DeVries lived at 327 East Capitol Street. He was a prominent Episcopal clergyman of Capitol Hill, rector of St. Mark's Episcopal Church, and later was elected one of the canons of the Washington Cathedral. Dr. Charles Luce, lived and practiced medicine at 215 Second Street SE. He was one of the District's World War I heroes—on his return, the grateful citizenry presented him with a horse named "Ypres" after the much fought-over town in Belgium. John Donahoe [ed, 2003: Donohoe] lived at 220 Second Street SE—he was Capitol Hill's largest and best-known real estate dealer. He was the man whose son Milburn lived on Kentucky Avenue.

Conclusion of the Interview

This interview provides a valuable glimpse into Capitol Hill's past through the eyes of W. Milton Sladen, who experienced the neighborhood's transformation firsthand during the early 20th century. His recollections of local landmarks, notable residents, and everyday life paint a vivid picture of a community that has evolved significantly over the decades.

The detailed descriptions of boundaries, recreational areas, and prominent figures offer historians and residents alike a deeper understanding of Capitol Hill's rich heritage and development.



i This interview was conducted on August 28, 1974, and signed by Milton Sladen on November 25, 1974. It serves as an important historical document preserving memories of Capitol Hill from the early 1900s.