

Real Estate

Father, Dear Father

A Corner Bar on Capitol Hill

BY ROBERT POHL

Father, dear father, come home with me now!

-Henry Clay Work (1864)

Work's poem and its story of the dissolute father drinking away his children's food money recalls an era when there were corner bars in every neighborhood, when drinking with friends and colleagues in the "third place" was the accepted way of unwinding from the day's work on your way home.

Capitol Hill was no exception, and there used to be bars scattered throughout the neighborhood, along with other retail outlets. Some of the buildings boast obvious signs of having once been stores, while others hide their past from all but the most inquisitive. One of the latter is the building at the southeast corner of 10th and C Streets SE which for many years at the beginning of the 20th century housed one of the now long-gone corner bars, remembered now by only the oldest of our city's inhabitants.

"Born on the barroom floor"

Fortunately, one of these oldest inhabitants is Abe Genderson, and at 92 years of age, he still has memories of growing up on that corner. He was, in his words, "born on the barroom

floor." His father, Ruben, had been running the bar since shortly after Abe's brother Milton's birth in 1915 and the family lived on the ground floor, where the bar itself was. Ruben had moved to DC from Baltimore, to take over the bar from Theodore Walter, who had

which sat a number of spittoons. Behind the bar, a hatchway led to the cellar cold room, where beer was stored. In short, this was just the place to drop by for a quick drink on your way home.

What name Ruben Genderson ran the bar under is something that his son could not remember. He does remember the day in 1923 when builders showed up in the empty lot across the street to begin building 26 new homes, filling up the southern half of the square across C Street from the bar. He also recalls trips taken to Baltimore in the family car, outings that were not nearly as simple as today, but required careful planning – and the packing of a picnic lunch.



Ruben Genderson inside his bar. (Courtesy Rick Genderson)

bought the 1884-vintage building in 1911. After Walter bought the bar, he added two signs with his name and the words Nat. Capt. Brew. Co. Beer – he was selling the local beer brewed only a few blocks down the street.

Inside, the dark wood bar ran all along the back wall, with a mirror behind it. There were no bar stools, just a brass rail to rest your feet on, behind

Prohibition

Meanwhile, a little over a year before Abe's birth, the life of a DC bartender became quite a bit more complicated by the passing of the Sheppard Act which made illegal the sale, manufacture, and importation of liquor into the District. Ruben Genderson was forced to begin selling Piel's Dark Near Beer, a swill that contained less than 1/2 a percent of

real estate | changing hands

Changing hands is a list of most residential sales in the District of Columbia from the previous month. A feature of every issue, this list, based on the MRIS, is provided courtesy of Don Denton, manager of the Coldwell Banker office on Capitol Hill. The list includes address, sales price and number of bedrooms.



The outside of the former bar today (RSP)

alcohol, and was (according to the famed food writer Waverley Lewis Root) “such a wishy washy, thin, ill-tasting, discouraging sort of slop that it might have been dreamed up by a Puritan Machiavelli with the intent of disgusting drinkers with genuine beer forever.” (Root & de Rochemont Eating in America: A History Morrow, NY, 1976.)

According to Rubin’s grandson, Rick Genderson, the real stuff continued to be brewed – upstairs in the bathroom, though Abe himself does not remember this. However, there was no doubt that illegal beverages were being sold there, and every now and then, the police would come by, haul the bartender down to the police station, fine him \$25 - \$250 in today’s dollars - and let him return to his business.

A New Broom

In 1928, the citizens of the United States elected Herbert Hoover as their new president. In contrast to the previous incumbent, Hoover felt that prohibition was the law of the land – and should be enforced as such. By federalizing the pursuit of illegal alcohol, acts that had previously been either ignored (such as in Maryland) or dealt with lightly (as in DC) were now subject to real penalties.

Fortunately for Rubin Genderson, he was out of the liquor business by this time, having moved his family to the Stanton Park area, where he ran a laundry. His brothers, however, took this opportunity to divest themselves of a business that was likely to get them thrown in jail at any time.

Abe Genderson returned to the

liquor business in 1949 when he opened Schneider’s liquor store with his father-in-law Max Schneider. Today his two sons run this Capitol Hill institution, and his grandson Josh now also work for the business. Of the old corner bar, only the oversize window overlooking C Street gives a hint to those hurrying home from work as to the oasis that was once within.

Robert Pohl is a local historian and tour guide living on Capitol hill. If you are interested in taking one of his tours, see wolakingsbtick.com.



The original door of the beer cellar, leading to the main cellar under the house. (RSP)



Neighborhood	Close Price	BR	Address	Price	Bedrooms
			1328 FARRAGUT ST NW	\$215,100	3
			1221 INGRAHAM ST NW	\$205,000	3
FEE SIMPLE			ADAMS MORGAN		
			1680 KALORAMA RD NW	\$399,999	2
16TH STREET HEIGHTS			AMERICAN UNIVERSITY PARK		
	\$820,000	5	1613 MADISON ST NW	\$817,000	4
	\$780,000	5	1539 UPSHUR ST NW	\$765,000	4
	\$265,000	5	1235 INGRAHAM ST NW		