

Scenes from the Past...

photo—"The Book of Washington" (Washington Board of Trade), 1929; courtesy, Kelsey & Assoc. private collection.



1929 view of the row of four large homes in the 2900 block of 14th Street occupied for many years by the S. H. Hines Funeral Home.

The four large and abandoned former dwellings at 2901-2907 14th Street, located between Harvard Street and Columbia Road, often invoke inquires and stares from pedestrians and drivers alike, wondering about their current fate and perhaps what they had served in the past.

Built as dwellings about 1910 on busy 14th Street, they were joined and converted into a funeral home only 15 years later. The S.H. Hines Funeral Company was established in 1873 by Stephen H. Hines, and after a period at various locations, settled into a building at 1715 14th Street, N.W., just after the turn of the 20th century. It then operated as a casket company, wholesaler of funeral supplies, embalmer and undertaker. His son, W.R. Franklin Hines, had joined the firm by 1914, when it was re-named S.H. Hines & Sons Company. The family itself lived close by at 1330 Riggs Street. After 1920, the company grew and purchased the homes at 2901-2907 14th Street.

By the time the Hines Company had relocated to spacious accommodations in the four homes on 14th Street, its 1930 Board of Trade listing indicated that the business "possesses facilities for accommodating four services, if necessary, at the same hour. Included in its modern equipment is a pipe organ, an adjunct which sets this firm apart."

In addition to the mortician activities, the company operated an ambulance service, maintaining two ambulances in 1930 "which not infrequently are called to distant cities to bring an ailing or injured person to Washington, or on the other hand, to take an incapacitated person to his or her home in some other city." Its advertising for this service further stated, "The limousine-type ambulances are equipped with heaters and electric fans and embody every convenience for the comfort of the patient, yet these cars cannot be distinguished from a private limousine. They are available all hours day and night."

The 1930 Board of Trade listing also included rather poetic language of the era highlighting the services of the company: that it was then "equipped to conduct funeral services in keeping with the dignity and stateliness of the Capital City, wherein dwell the nation's great" and went further to attempt to explain to the potential customer that "the mortician is not an ordinary businessman. He must temper his operations with a touch of understanding and delicate regard. In the discreet handling of a vital service, the Hines firm has been able to give its clients a feeling of gratification in rendering the mortuary services to loved ones. It is this type of mortician activity that has served to give the public a kindly regard for the position of this profession in the modern world."

The four homes were listed as being owned by the DC Redevelopment Land Agency in 1984, and have languished in abandonment for over 10 years. According to Ward 1 Councilmember Jim Graham's Office, the DC Urban League has signed an exclusive rights agreement to renovate the buildings within the next year, and then will relocate from its present headquarters at 14th and Oak Streets. The buildings would also house an employment office staffed by the DC Department of Employment Services. The Hines funeral business, however, is still extant today, known as the Hines-Rinaldi Funeral Home, and located at 11800 New Hampshire Avenue in Silver Spring, Maryland.

—Paul Kelsey Williams
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image—Boyd's Washington City Directory, 1914.

This 1914 advertisement for the Hines funeral home appeared in the City Directory that year when the institution was located at 1714 14th Street, N.W.



photo—National Photo Company; courtesy, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

This elegant wooden hearse was pictured in front of the Capitol Building in 1923 as a publicity stunt.



photo—Paul K. Williams, June 6, 2001.

DC Department of Housing and Community Development sign from 10 years ago still announces the city's stewardship of this property.



photo—"The Book of Washington" (Washington Board of Trade), 1929; courtesy, Kelsey & Assoc. private collection. This 1929 advertisement appeared in that year's edition of "The Book of Washington."



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This image of W. R. Frank Hines was taken in 1930 when he ran his family funeral business at 2901-2907 14th Street.



photo—Paul K. Williams, June 6, 2002.

The severely dilapidated and abandoned state of the four homes formerly occupied by Hines attracts homeless people and vagrants to dwell under its protective covering day and night.