

Scenes from the Past...



With the escalating home prices in and around Dupont Circle and its neighboring communities, it can be easy to forget that many parts of the area had

humble beginnings, with traces of these remaining well into the 20th century. Citywide, the Police Census of 1897 revealed that there were 3,303 alleys and that most had socially unacceptable and unsanitary housing. In fact, that year 16,828 African-Americans and 2,150 Caucasians called an alley dwelling home in Washington.

While some were well-maintained and represented a working class community, the vast majority were extremely substandard, disease-infested, and an overall health hazard to those who lived there or that might have been unfortunate enough to have a house that faced such an alley. Surprisingly, several of these were in Dupont Circle, the West End, and in Bloomingdale, all of which were described in a book authored by Charles Weller in

This 1908 photograph, above, depicts "Chinch Row" in Queens Court.

all photos—Charles Weller, *Neglected Neighborhoods* (Philadelphia: The John Winston Co., 1909); courtesy, Kelsey & Associates private collection.



Shown above is the 40-foot covered passageway that led into Logan Court in the Bloomingdale neighborhood.

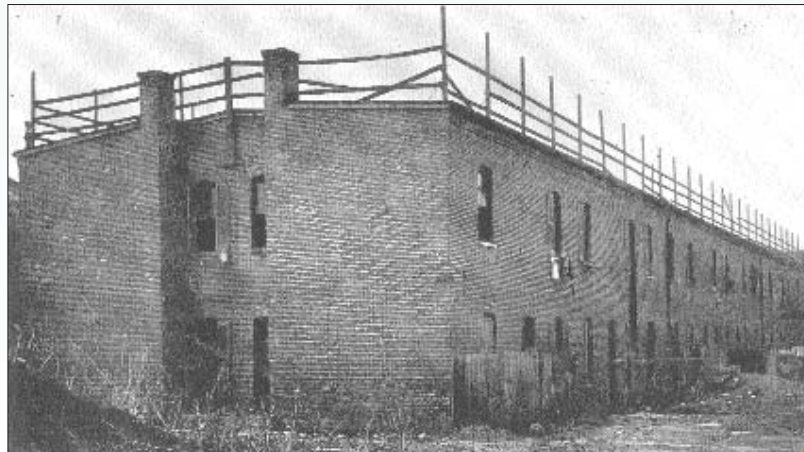
This alley dweller, at left, was photographed in 1908 inside the West End neighborhood's Douglas Flats.

1909, titled *Neglected Neighbors*. Some of these were later converted into "minor" streets that divided large squares and remain some of the most desirable residential blocks today.

The largest tenement discovered in the city in the 1897 census was the "Douglas Flats" which had been built like a livery stable, with 60 stall-like rooms housing a total of 40 families. It was located on 25th Street between M and N Streets, and featured 30 rooms on each of its two floors. The building measured 40 feet wide by an astonishing 208 feet long. Incredibly, the entire building had only six toilets per floor, all located in one small room together; three for men, and three for women. A single spigot provided water for cooking and cleaning. Over 100 people called the building home, paying rents from \$2.50 to \$6.00 per month in 1908.

In the Bloomingdale neighborhood, a curious alley named "Logan Court" had been accessible only via a narrow passageway measuring 40 feet long by just over 7 feet high, until several homes were torn down to allow a more traditional opening. It was located within the block of North Capitol and 1st Streets, L and Pierce (P) Streets. Health department officials had tallied an average of five people living within each room of the tenements, including the kitchen.

Within the block bounded by L, M, 18th, and 19th Streets, in the shadow of Dupont Circle, was an alley known as "Chinch" or Queens Court. It housed a series of wooden shacks directly amidst the wealthy neighboring blocks that all shared only a few outhouses. Weller described them as "leaning over so much as they could



Exterior view of the Douglas Flats in West End.

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RESERVATIONS RECOMMENDED

By Alexandra Greeley*

PIZZERIA PARADISO Pizza Reprise

Take it from a devoted pizza eater: Tucking into an oven-hot pie is one of life's big treats. On the other hand, picking out the best pies in town is a pizza puzzle. Probably one of the all-time winners in the pizza parade is the often-crowded, regularly praised Dupont Circle destination, Pizzeria Paradiso.

Well, guess what. PP has cloned its menu to open up in Georgetown to a gaggle of instant fans. Look for it on M Street, in a location that is three times larger, cozier, sunnier, and more efficient than its original store. Even on a hot Sunday afternoon—when the streets of Georgetown blaze with foot and auto traffic—you can find seating. And the setting is cheery, with yellow woods, brick walls, expansive front windows, and a laid-back ambience.

If you like the sheer drama of watching pizza cooks at work, ask for a stool at the back counter overlooking the big ovens. Otherwise, you have a choice of three distinct seating areas: the front bar and two separate dining sections, all of which add up to the elimination of those long lines that plague the Dupont Circle location.

As for the pie, we still love the Atomica with its salami, black olives, mozzarella and crushed red pepper.

You will also find any one of your other favorites, including the Siciliano—with its embellishments of tomato, zucchini, egg-

plant, peppers, red onion, capers, and mozzarella—and the more streamlined Genovese, with potato, pesto and Parmesan. And if you want it your way, put together your own pie from among the 31 different topping selection, which range from basil to Prosciutto di Parma and goat cheese.

But don't forget to ask about the specials of the day. That way you may find the pizza of your dreams.

We nearly did with the pizza topped with tomatoes and ricotta cheese with its tamed tastes—though I am personally a devotee of the Atomica, with its own bold and brassy flavors. You may also find seasonal treats, such as the asparagus spears topped with a jumble of wild mushrooms. That was an elegant treat.

The classic panini (sandwiches), served on house-baked rolls, put the average sandwich to shame. Maybe it's the lure of really good bread or perhaps the fillings are over the top. But the Tonno, a tuna salad intensified with anchovy and capers, would make the standard tuna sandwich blush with shame. But for sheer indulgence, what about the roast pork marinated with hot peppers, garlic and rosemary tucked neatly into a roll?

If you're taking a leisurely meal, consid-

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Alley dwellers are seen here attempting to salvage discarded cinders in front of "Jones' Sunken Row," which once stood on 25th Street near M.

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without collapsing . . . blackened plaster within, and the walls broken in so many places that one might almost say they were translucent." Residents slept in rags, with the first floor often filing with water after every rain storm.

Perhaps the most unusual alley documented by Weller was one coined "Jones' Sunken Row" that was located on M Street near 25th Street (near the Douglas Flats). The banks of earth had grown so high from the re-grading of streets and the dumping of ash and cinders from neighboring homes that by the time the alley was documented in 1908 the entire first floor of the row of wooden buildings was located well beneath the ground. None of the houses had water and shared only one box toilet located in an

outhouse. Weller noted that garbage was piled high and human refuse was often carried in buckets from each house and spread out in the rear yards. They were still standing until well after 1909.

With the city's alleys traditionally ranging from that of a dilapidated tenement condition to a working class environment and tidy appearance, laws enacted following the turn of the 20th century, combined with urban renewal efforts later in that century, ensured that these alley dwellings were systematically obliterated. Ironically, many of the smaller streets and alleys today have become tony addresses, with several former tenement homes in Georgetown fetching nearly \$1 million.

—Paul Kelsey Williams
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