

Scenes from the Past...

Although all of the squares and blocks south of today's Florida Avenue were laid out by architect Pierre L'Enfant in 1792, most were not developed into rows of town houses until nearly 100 years later. However, they were utilized for a variety of purposes such as orchards and gardens, and one in particular, surrounded by U, V, 13th and 14th Streets, once served as a large cemetery for St. Matthew's Catholic Church. It was also home to noted poet, naturalist, and writer John Burroughs, who built a house at 1332 V Street in 1867. Today the square is site of the Ellington apartment project, the Harrison recreational playground and baseball field, and scattered homes along 13th Street.

Historian John Clagett Proctor wrote about both the cemetery and the John Burroughs house in the *Evening Star* newspaper in 1945, when it was still standing. St. Matthew's church had begun using the square for "cemeterial" purposes shortly after it was established in 1837. Hundreds of graves were to have been relocated by the time that row of houses was being built on the square in the 1870s, but several were still being unearthed as late as 1945.

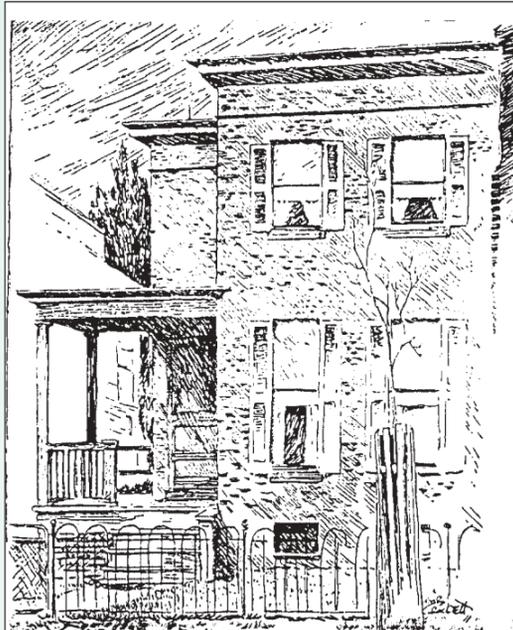
Fortunately, due to Burroughs' published writing on a wide variety of nature issues, a fascinating record exists of his home's construction, his interaction with interred graves, and the area's rural nature. In 1867, Burroughs (who lived from 1837 to 1921) moved from a home on Capitol Hill to a new, 10-room brick house he had built at 1332 V Street. According to his writing, he raised tomatoes and corn, which proved to be difficult: "There'd been an old Catholic cemetery on the spot, and what with original digging of the graves and the more recent removing of the bodies, dirt had been thrown up on top that ought to have been below."



photo—Prints and Photographic Division, Library of Congress.
John Burroughs

Burroughs went on to write about the construction phase of his house, which was supposed to have been on vacant land. "The removal of the bodies hadn't been done very thoroughly, and when we were putting in a cistern we unearthed two coffins. They were decayed, but not broken, and we buried them alongside the fence. While we were building the chimney and had it completed up to the second floor, it settled on night nearly two feet. Evidently it was right over a grave and had gone down on the body. We kept on. The man under the chimney was held down by great weight, and I expected to hear him groan, but never did, and I never saw any spooks on the premises."

Burroughs had first come to Washington in 1863, with the intention of going into the Army, but changed his mind once he witnessed the mangled and injured



1332 V Street N.W., where John Burroughs resided from 1867 to 1877 in the square once occupied by St. Matthew's Cemetery.

drawings—courtesy Washingtoniana Division, Martin Luther King, Jr. Library.



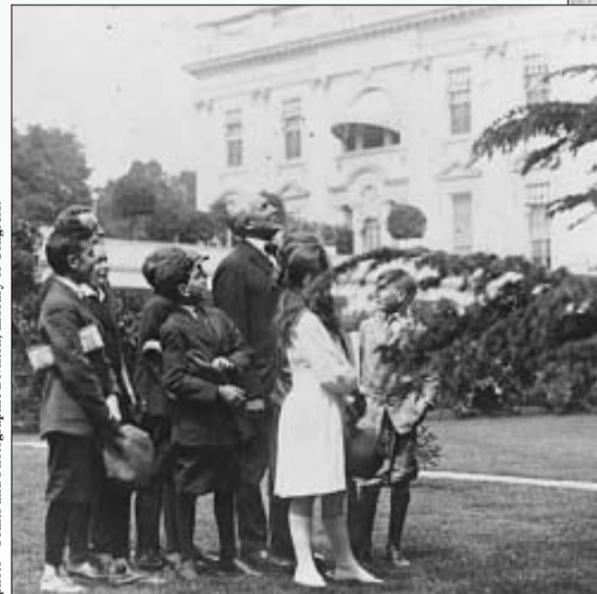
Shown on the left is a sketch of John Burroughs' house still standing at the end of World War II which was published in the *Washington Star* newspaper on February 4, 1945. The sketch on the right, drawn in 1850, shows Florida Avenue between 13th and 14th Streets, which was within a stone's throw of Burroughs' home when the area was still extremely rural.



photos—Paul K. Williams—The InTowner



Shown here is the site of the Burroughs house and the St. Matthew's Catholic Cemetery, which today is occupied by the Garrison School ballfield and playground. The view looks south from V Street toward the rear of the Ellington Apartments now under construction on U Street; in the photo on the left, one can see through an alleyway to a building on the south side of U Street, adjacent to Polly's Cafe.



photo—Prints and Photographic Division, Library of Congress.

Seen here with President Harding in 1921 are some students from the Elementary School named in honor of John Burroughs. The President was pointing out to them an owl's nest in the tree on the lawn.

arriving at local hospitals from the field. He secured a clerk position at the Treasury in 1864, earning a salary of \$1,200 per year. He moved to 1332 V Street along with his wife and a cow named Chloe, adding two additional cows and chickens a short time later.

He was visited by a number of literary figures, including Walt Whitman, with whom he carried on an affair, with both gentlemen confessing love for one another in myriad stories and writings. Whitman stayed at the Burroughs house for weeks at a time.

John Burroughs earned his place in the Ecology Hall of Fame with a million-and-a-half copies of his 23 volumes of essays extolling nature and encouraging people to experience the natural world. While he wrote for adults, teachers found his work both challenging and interesting to students. In 1863, John Burroughs wrote of the area between Piney Branch Road and Georgetown:

"There is perhaps not another city in the Union

that has on its very threshold so much natural beauty and grandeur, such as men seek for in remote forests and mountains. A few touches of art would convert this whole region into a park unequalled in the world. There are passages as wild and savage and apparently as remote from civilization as anything one meets with in the mountain sources of the Hudson or on the Delaware."

In a letter to Lucy Warner Maynard, author of *Birds of Washington* in 1898, Burroughs wrote on November 3rd of that year that "the happiest years of my life were spent in Washington and the fields and woods about it. I hope the birds there have brought you as pure a joy as they did me." Burroughs died in 1921.

Clagett reported that Burroughs house still stood at 1332 V Street in 1945, the year additional bodies were uncovered elsewhere in the square, prompting his investigative column.

—Paul Kelsey Williams
Historic Preservation Specialist
Kelsey & Associates, Washington, DC

RESERVATIONS RECOMMENDED

By Alexandra Greeley*

GABRIEL Redux

At most places brunch is not an endangered species. But with a major kitchen upheaval at Gabriel, would that still hold true there? We wondered: Our last brunch encounter at Gabriel was a Lucullan kind with countless dishes winking at guests from their various serving stations. Talk about food casting a "come hither" spell!

If you haven't heard yet, the once-chef at Gabriel, Gregory Hill, now has his own place, the now famous David/Greggory Restau/Lounge (as it is styled) on M Street. An award-winner with interesting gastronomic visions, Hill made his DC mark at Gabriel, and the new chef there, Antonio Burrell, has some rather large shoes to fill.

Who is Burrell? Is he that fey young man peeking out in the promo snapshot from behind a plated presentation of cheese and corn salad? Since no one answered Gabriel's phone recently, I can't say for sure. But according to restaurant pledges, he is implementing new menus, new recipes, and new flavors at Gabriel.

Worry. Worry. A new brunch?? No, fortunately, the restaurant has had the good sense to leave brunch well enough alone. My friend and I brunched here recently, and he declared the event one of the best meals he'd had in a long time. Coming from a real foodie and an avowed vegetarian, that speaks volumes, for this brunch came after his weekend-long feeding frenzy during which time outrageously good food was the norm.

Secure in the knowledge that the Gabriel brunch still shines with splendor, take a look at what's on the table. Our obliging waiter walked us through the various stations—my friend had never eaten a Gabriel brunch, so didn't know the ropes. The waiter pointed out the carving station: roast lamb and roast pig, carved into slices that could easily fold into fajitas tortillas assembled by the carvers themselves. He took us to the breakfast dishes line, dismissing the routine scrambled eggs, bacon, sausage, and fried potatoes, but stopping at one of the chafing dishes to exclaim, "This is our signature dish." Under the cover steamed a creamy white mixture, which, he explained, was polenta with mascarpone, the Italian triple-cream cheese whose American counterpart is a cross between sour cream and an expensive cream cheese. Needless to say, Gabriel has every reason to tout this as its superstar: it is

outstandingly smooth, creamy and just-sweet. And probably could deliver a walloping calorie overload.

The waiter then pointed out the baked goods station, with its heaping plates of muffins, scones, sweet breads, croissants, Danishes, cinnamon rolls and ramekins of jams and jellies. Around the corner along another long display station were positioned bowls and platters of salads and grains. Here my vegetarian friend found the mainstays of the meal: polenta squares, mushroom with beans, green beans, nuts and olives, garbanzo bean salad, fried yuca, tabbouleh, and mushrooms with beans, plus assorted other dishes, including a toothsome paella and an outstanding sauté of spicy black beans with chorizo sausages. Vegetarian or no, you could always find enough substantial salad fare to forego anything else.

Our final tour stop was the dessert display. Without hesitation, he pronounced the bread pudding as not only the signature dish, but also really totally addictive. He waved his hand at the crèmes brûlées, tarts, cakes and cheesecake as contenders for the must-eat category, but repeated, "You must try the bread pudding." Of course, it really is outrageous, more custard than bread and accompanied by a vanilla-spiked crème anglaise, a sauce that adds even more moisture and richness to the pudding.

Well, yes, Virginia, there really is still a drop-dead brunch at Gabriel. Bests—for carnivores—are the roast lamb and roast pig; fortunately, you may return time and again to the carving station for extra portions. The black beans with chorizo, the polenta with mascarpone, and the bread pudding—plus the cinnamon rolls—just gild the lily. □

Gabriel, 2121 P St., NW; tel., 956-6690. Sunday Brunch, \$26.75 per person; two seatings, 11am & 1:30pm. Other meals: breakfast, Sat. & Sun., 7-10am, and Mon.-Fri., 6:30-10:30am; dinner, Tue.-Thu., 5:30-10pm, and Fri. & Sat., 5:30-10:30pm; lunch, not offered. Major credit cards accepted.

*Alexandra Greeley is a food writer, editor and restaurant reviewer. She has authored books published by Simon & Schuster, Doubleday, and Macmillan. Other credits include food editor of Vegetarian Times, restaurant reviews and food articles for The Washington Post and The Washington Times, as well as former food editor/writer for the South China Morning Post in Hong Kong.

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