
HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD

Historic Landmark Case No. 13-09

Chapman Coal Company Stable and Garage 37-57 N Street; 54-64 and 66-76 Hanover Place, NW Square 0617, Lots 214 and 215

Meeting Date: March 28, 2013
Applicant: D.C. Preservation League
Affected ANC: 5E
Staff Reviewer: Kim Williams

After careful consideration, the Historic Preservation Office recommends that the Board revise the boundaries of the proposed landmark application to include only the garage and stable building at 37-57 N Street, NW on Square 617 Lot 215, and that the Board designate the building a Historic Landmark to be entered into the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites. Staff recommends that the Board forward the nomination to the National Register with the identified revised boundaries. Staff further recommends that the property name be Chapman Coal Company Stable and Garage to more fully reflect the history of the property.



Historical Background

The Chapman Coal Company Stable and Garage is a complex collection of commercial buildings that were constructed in several building campaigns over the course of two decades from 1906 to 1929. The complex covers two large consolidated lots in the south-central quadrant of Square 617 located between N and Hanover Streets and North Capitol and First

Streets, NW. As counted today, the nominated property includes three buildings, yet these buildings incorporate remnants of former buildings on the site and later additions, contributing to the complexity of the site's architectural history. The three defined buildings represent the most visually prominent phases of their development, and as such, were all built by J. Edward Chapman as he progressively developed the site from its initial use as a coal yard with stables into a bustling commercial establishment replete with stables, a box factory, and car and bus garages.

To simplify and summarize the various phases of development, it seems that J. Edward Chapman purchased his first lots on the square in 1906 and thereupon constructed a three-story stable along Hanover Street and established a coal yard and wagon shed between the stable and N Street with one-story offices facing N Street in front of the coal yard. In so doing, Chapman overcame several legal battles brought on by unhappy neighbors of Hanover Place. Then, in 1908-1909m, he built another stable on the property, this one a two-story building that extended longwise in a way that separated the coal yard from the rear stable yard. At that time, the rear stable building housed at least 103 horses on the lower stories, and a box factory in the third story. Chapman rented the stables principally to Russ and Bayly, identified as the contractors for cleaning the streets of the city, and the third story to the J.E. Smith Paper Box Company.

The coal yard and stable complex was an active enterprise when, in 1910, the three-story stable suffered a devastating fire. Despite the loss of 27 horses and burned-out stables, the building was repaired and continued to serve as a box factory until 1928. At that point, the building was re-modeled into the one-story structure it is today, serving primarily as a storage warehouse after that. This building has the present-day address of 54-64 Hanover Place and although it appears to be a one-story warehouse, closer inspection reveals evidence of its stable past in its bricked-in horse stall window openings.

In 1912, at the cusp of the transition from the horse-drawn to automobile era, J. Edward Chapman built a two-story garage on the site of his coal yard, moving his coal yard back to what had been the stable yard. This garage is the public-facing, two-story brick building with round-arched windows facing N Street and having the present-day address of 37-57 N Street, NW. Chapman hired architect Nicholas T. Haller to design this structure, and incorporated the one-story brick coal offices at the east and west ends of the N Street frontage and the two-story stable behind his coal yard into the building.

In 1929, Chapman largely took down two, pre-existing 1890 stables at the western end of Hanover Place and built, in their place, a one-story bus garage, completing his multi-phased building campaign on the site. This is 66 Hanover Place and is the third of the three established buildings on the site. Like the two other buildings, this 1929 structure includes remnants of the former stables on the site, and it also includes a later 1932 wing.

When J. Edward Chapman began construction of this complex in 1906, he was an already well-established coal dealer and local developer-builder. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Chapman regularly advertised his coal for sale in local newspapers and also apparently held important and sought-after government contracts, including that of supplying coal to Saint Elizabeths Hospital. At the same time that he ran his coal dealership, Chapman was also

engaged in speculative development, building residential and commercial buildings across the city. Prior to establishing his coal yard on the site and building his stable buildings in 1906, Chapman had already built more than 20 residential buildings nearby and in other parts of the city. Chapman would continue as a builder until the early 1920s, building a total of 85 buildings according to the D.C. Historic Building Permit database. Of particular note, in 1912 Chapman built a row of five dwellings at 22-30 Hanover Place, just opposite his commercial/industrial complex, simultaneous to construction of his garage building on N Street.

Construction of the garage at 37-57 N Street provides further evidence of Chapman's entrepreneurial spirit and reveals his desire to engage in a newly emerging business model that was of particular interest to him. According to the local press, it seems that Chapman was an automobile enthusiast from the early years of the rise of the automobile. He regularly entered a float in the Motor Truck Parade, and in 1912, was named to the Board of Governors of the Washington Automobile Dealers' Association. Chapman represented the White Line Universal Truck and GMC Trucks in Washington. According to maps of the site, the garage was a public garage and housed 75 cars on the first story and an auto painting business and other auto-related concerns on the second story. City directories indicate that Chapman also continued to run his coal business out of the building (this may be the one-story office as shown on maps at the west end of the N Street façade.)

Architectural Description

The largest and most visually prominent of the three buildings is the 1912 garage building facing N Street at 37-57 N Street designed by local architect Nicholas T. Haller. It is a two-story, concrete frame structure with brick walls. The building is characterized by its round-arched windows in the second story, grouped in threes, and by its projecting metal cornice that extends the full length of the building. The first-story front wall shows evidence in the brickwork of older buildings being incorporated into the 1912 structure, just as more recent projecting bays obscure the original garage door openings. The main entry to the building is located off-center below an elevator tower projecting above the roofline. This elevator tower once housed an elevator that carried cars from grade to the shop at the second floor. Original iron stairs lead to the second story from the exterior. At the rear of the building, the 1908 two-story stable is legible only on the alley façade where a corbelled brick cornice and a hay loft door indicate the building's original use. On the interior, this building is divided longitudinally into three sections—front shop rooms, rear open space that would have provided unencumbered storage area for cars, and the former stable. The shops are divided from the storage area by metal sash windows at the rear wall, allowing natural light to reach the storage area. A line of structural concrete columns divides the end of the 1912 building from the 1908 stable forming the back wall. The upstairs is similarly arranged with front work rooms. Skylights at the second floor level similarly allow natural light into the space.

The warehouse at 54 Hanover Place, remodeled about 1928 out of the former three-story stable, is a one-story brick structure covered with a flat roof and painted with public art across its facades. An examination of the Hanover Place wall and the wall that historically faced the coal yard reveals stable stall windows, now bricked-in, confirming that the building incorporated the first-story walls of the former 1906, three-story stable on the site. The bricked-in horse-stall windows are the only distinctive feature of the building.

The bus garage building, constructed in 1929 is a single-story brick structure with a large garage door opening on the Hanover Place façade, and a large opening next to it, now filled in. The west alley side of the bus garage indicates that this building, too, incorporated the exterior walls of the older 1890 stables on the site. This building lacks distinguishing architectural features of note.

Evaluation

The Chapman Stable and Garage property holds historical value as a relatively rare example of an early 20th-century commercial service and workshop complex consisting of a series of buildings spanning from the interior of a square to its public street. During the 19th and early 20th centuries, the interior squares, including alleyways, were teeming with businesses that housed local industry and that provided important services to the city, such as coal storage, stabling horses and housing automobiles such as occurred in Square 617. Since the mid-20th century, much of this interior square infrastructure has been eliminated as the industry and businesses stationed there became obsolete and as larger buildings came to fill the city's lots from the front street to the rear alleyways. A current survey of the city's historic alleyways indeed documents that such commercial complexes no longer exist, or only exist as remnants of larger establishments.

Two surviving commercial facilities that can be compared to Chapman's have been recently acknowledged through historic designation, namely Dorsch's White Cross Bakery in the 600 block of S Street and Wiltberger Street and its alleys, and William Beuchert's facility in Prather's Alley (part of Mount Vernon Triangle Historic District) that included a blacksmith shop, two warehouses and an auto repair shop. Like Chapman's business that moved from the alley to the street, Dorsch's White Cross Bakery began as a bake oven on Wiltberger Alley and expanded to include the more architecturally distinctive White Cross Bakery building facing S Street. Beuchert's business similarly grew from his blacksmith shop and warehouses on Prather's Alley to his large Central Auto Works building fronting the 400 block of I Street, N.W. In a similar fashion, Chapman culminated his collection of vernacular buildings with the architecturally distinguished front garage building.

In addition to its interest as a commercial complex, the Chapman Stable and Garage also holds historical value as one of the city's earliest known commercial garages. Commercial garages, as a building type, emerged as automobile use and ownership became more prevalent in the first decade of the 20th century and a need to house, fuel, maintain and repair cars became necessary. For this reason, early commercial garages were generally multi-functional and included storage areas for cars (live and dead storage for frequent and infrequent comings and goings); battery charging rooms for charging battery-supplied cars; fueling rooms with gasoline storage tanks for gasoline-operated cars; repair facilities for the maintenance and repair of cars; car wash rooms for washing cars; and employee lounge rooms for repair technicians and chauffeurs. In some instances, garages also included display areas for the display of cars for sale. Commercial garages generally charged a monthly fee for storage and additional fees for other services.

While hundreds of private and commercial garages were built in the city beginning around the turn of the 20th century, Chapman's Garage is one of a handful of known surviving early

purpose-built commercial garages. The other known early garages include the Belmont Garage at 1711 14th Street, (built 1904, B.Stanley Simmons, architect), and the Mount Pleasant Garage Company garage (built 1912 and 1916 at 2412 (Rear) 18th Street and 2424 18th Street, respectively).

The Chapman Stable and Garage is significant in terms of the city's historic commercial development and as an important representation of the rise of the automobile on the city's built environment. However, of the three principal buildings making up the Chapman complex, only one—the 1912 garage—is both readily recognizable for its original use and has distinguishing characteristics defining that use. The 1906 three-story stable and box factory was converted around 1928 into a storage warehouse leaving only the first floor walls of the original stable structure intact. The building is not recognizable as a stable and other than the stall window openings (now bricked in) no longer retains any of the distinguishing features of a stable building. As a storage warehouse, the building has minimal distinguishing characteristics and no artistic distinction.

The 1929 bus garage building is clearly a garage, based upon its large garage door opening facing Hanover Place. However, the building has no distinguishing features and lacks architectural value.

In contrast to these rear buildings, the garage at 37-57 N Street, N.W. does embody the distinguishing features of an early commercial garage and is notably associated with the growth of the automobile in the District of Columbia. In particular, the Chapman Garage features large arched windows on the second floor which would have provided essential natural light into the repair shops; monitor skylights on the roof to allow light into the storage areas; open floor space on the interior to allow for the easy maneuverability and storage of cars; an elevator tower indicating an elevator that carried cars to the various levels of the building. The large garage doors which historically opened on N Street have been filled in, but those bays are clearly readable as such and could be readily returned.

Based upon these observations, HPO has determined that Chapman Stable and Garage meets D.C. Designation Criterion B for History and D.C. Designation Criteria D for Architecture and Urbanism. The property is associated with the city's commercial development particularly as it pertains to the rise of the automobile industry, and it provides a good example of an early, purpose-built garage building. It is recommended that only the 1912 garage (and its incorporated stable) and the lot upon which it sits be designated as a Historic Landmark as the other buildings included in the designation lack distinguishing characteristics and do not retain sufficient integrity of feeling or association with their specific uses to be clearly associated with their commercial past.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board find the property meets the designation criteria for listing in the DC Inventory, but that the boundaries of the proposed landmark designation be revised to include the Chapman Stable and Garage at 37-57 N Street on Square 617, Lot 215 only. The HPO further recommends that the Board forward the nomination with its revised boundaries to the National Register of Historic Places for listing.

