

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

### 525 8TH ST, SE (Phase One)

HABS No. DC-883

Location: 525 8th St., SE, Washington, District of Columbia

The coordinates for this building are 38.525519 N, -76.594254 W and were obtained through Bing maps ([www.bing.com/maps/](http://www.bing.com/maps/)) on August 4, 2016. There is no restriction on the release of the locational data to the public.

Significance: 525 8<sup>th</sup> Street, SE is a two-story, flat-roofed brick building in Washington, DC's Capitol Hill neighborhood. Constructed in 1896, the building served as a store for a number of businesses before being opened as Phase One, a women's bar, in 1970. The bar was one of the few women-centric establishments within the District's queer nightlife scene. When it closed in January 2016, Phase One had earned the distinction of being one of the oldest continuously-operating women's bars in the United States.

Description: 525 8<sup>th</sup> St, SE is a two-story, flat-roofed brick structure built in 1896 as a store and dwelling. The building sits near the center of a row of fourteen connected commercial buildings fronting 8th St., SE between E and G Streets, SE. Its rear (west) entrance faces an alley. The structure's walls are primarily running-bond brick, which is painted white on the front façade's upper level and dark red on the front façade's lower level.

The storefront level has a black metal flush door with a diamond-shaped vision light, a paneled door painted black, and two store windows that project out approximately three feet from the building line. The store windows have been covered with wood paneling painted dark red and topped by a shed roof that extends across the building. Affixed to the paneling covering each show window is a sconce and a circular wood sign with the words "Phase 1/Est. 1970" inscribed in cursive script. Above the doors and display windows, there is a row of four irregularly-spaced rectangular openings, including a louver vent and a clerestory window.

The front façade's upper floor and gable feature Renaissance Revival detailing dating to its 1896 period of construction. The second story has three arched, single-hung wood windows that are evenly spaced, equal sized, and topped with segmental brick arches. A brick belt course serves as a sill for each of the windows. Other decorative elements include hood molding, two bands of dentilated molding, and an entablature with several layers of decorative brickwork layered onto pressed brick. The front façade is topped by a pointed pediment decorated with dentilated molding and a brick circle in the center.

The structure's rear (west) elevation opens onto a concrete patio enclosed by a brick wall with a wrought iron gate. A stairway runs along the façade's southern edge, connecting the patio to a door on the second story. Other openings include four irregularly-spaced and differently-sized windows that are topped with segmental brick arches. All the rear window openings have been refitted with smaller wood or aluminum windows. The windows on the first story are covered with wrought iron bars. A brick chimney spans the height of the building between the windows and the second story door. The elevation's roof line slopes downward from north to south.

History: 525 8th St, SE was constructed in Capitol Hill in 1896.<sup>1</sup> The building was designed by Clement August Didden, a local architect, for Albert Carry, a prominent real estate investor, banker, and the co-founder and president of the National Capital Brewing Company (NCBC). Carry and Didden collaborated on a number of NCBC-owned taverns, including the building at 525 8<sup>th</sup> St, SE.<sup>2</sup> NCBC, however, did not remain there for long. By 1901, the building was being occupied by Eugene Schwab, a liquor wholesaler who produced a "high-class, thoroughly aged, satisfying, health-giving whisky" that he dubbed Farragut Whiskey.<sup>3</sup> Schwab remained at 525 8<sup>th</sup> St, SE through the 1910s. After prohibition, the building was occupied by a number of other businesses, including a dry goods store, a delicatessen, and two restaurants.<sup>4</sup>

In 1971, the building was leased to Allen Carroll and his partner Chris Jansen, who opened the women's bar Phase One. The strip of 8th Street, SE surrounding the bar was already home to a considerable number of LGBTQ establishments, leading a local newspaper to dub the commercial corridor "Gay Way."<sup>5</sup> Among the pioneering LGBTQ-friendly bars and restaurants on Capitol Hill were Johnnie's (500 8<sup>th</sup> Street, SE), Dobkin's Grill (1104 8th Street, SE), and Mr. Henry's (601 Pennsylvania Avenue, SE). These post-World War II establishments were eventually joined by newer institutions like Phase One that were operated by queer entrepreneurs and proudly served queer customers. Among these new institutions were community organizations like the Metropolitan Community Church (705 7<sup>th</sup> Street, SE) and Lammas Bookstore (713 8<sup>th</sup> Street, SE); gay

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<sup>1</sup> Application for Permit to Build, Permit No. 1670, May 15, 1896. Washington, DC Building Permits, Washingtoniana Room, Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Library. Microfilm.

<sup>2</sup> *George Didden III Lecture*. [http://www.capitolhillhistory.org/interviews/2000/carry\\_didden.html](http://www.capitolhillhistory.org/interviews/2000/carry_didden.html); (accessed August 13, 2016); Garrett Peck, *Capital Beer: A Heady History of Brewing in Washington* (Charleston: American Palate, 2014), 45-6; Peck, *Prohibition in Washington, DC: How Dry We Weren't* (Charleston: The History Press, 2014), 51-3.

<sup>3</sup> *Polk's Washington (District of Columbia) City Directory* (Richmond: R.L. Polk, 1901), 159; Farragut Whisky advertisement, *Washington Herald*, November 23, 1906.

<sup>4</sup> *Polk's Washington* (Richmond: R.L. Polk, 1940); *Polk's Washington* (Richmond: R.L. Polk, 1954); *Polk's Washington* (Richmond: R.L. Polk, 1960); *Polk's Washington* (Richmond: R.L. Polk, 1970).

<sup>5</sup> "Bar Fliers," *Washington Blade*, December 1970.

men's bars like Plus One (529 8th, SE) and Equus (639 Pennsylvania Ave, SE); and women's bars like Club Madame (500 8th Street, SE).<sup>6</sup>

When it opened, Phase One filled a pressing need for public women-centric social spaces. The Phase, as the bar came to be known, gained a local and national reputation as an intimate, no frills bar for queer women. Linda Berdine remembered the Phase as one of two bars that she "lived in."<sup>7</sup> A *Blade* reporter elaborated on the bar's importance among locals, calling it "a meeting place for women's softball team members, college students, politicians, and feminists" and "a 'must' stop on any weekend round of women's bar hopping."<sup>8</sup> Phase One's popularity would be tested by other women-centric establishments like the nearby Club Madame and the Other Side (1345 Half Street, Washington, DC).<sup>9</sup> Women sometimes risked physical violence in order to patronize the Phase One, which was the site of a spate of sexual assaults in the late 1970s.<sup>10</sup>

Despite these challenges, Phase One remained an enduring anchor of Capitol's Hills queer nightlife scene and was one of the few women-centric spaces in the District to survive into the twenty-first century. By the time it closed in January 2016, the Phase had earned the distinction of being one of the oldest continuously-operating lesbian bars in the United States. The building was advertised for sale or lease in July 2016, but a new occupant has not yet been announced.

Sources:      Published Sources and Reports

*George Didden III Lecture.*

[http://www.capitolhillhistory.org/interviews/2000/carry\\_didden.html](http://www.capitolhillhistory.org/interviews/2000/carry_didden.html); (accessed August 13, 2016).

Peck, Garrett, *Capital Beer: A Heady History of Brewing in Washington* (Charleston: American Palate, 2014).

Peck, Garrett, *Prohibition in Washington, DC: How Dry We Weren't* (Charleston: The History Press, 2014).

Rainbow History Project, *Gay D.C. Walking Tours: Capitol Hill* (Washington, DC: Rainbow History Project, 2003).

Collections, Repositories, and Archives

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<sup>6</sup> Rainbow History Project, *Gay D.C. Walking Tours: Capitol Hill* (Washington, DC: Rainbow History Project, 2003).

<sup>7</sup> Linda Berdine interview, March 28, 2001, transcript, Oral History Collection, Rainbow History Project, 10.

<sup>8</sup> Lois Schwartzberg, "A Bar for Women: The Phase", *Blade*, September 1976.

<sup>9</sup> The Other Side was also owned by Allen Carroll and Chris Jansen. Opened in 1978, the club provided women with an alternative to the city's most popular gay super discos, which were plagued by allegations of racial and gender discrimination.

<sup>10</sup> Untitled article, *Blade*, October 1975; Thomas Morgan, "The Battle of Capitol Hill: Gays vs Leathernecks," *Washington Post*, August 24, 1980; Linda Bernidine interview, 10-11; "Rape!", *Blade*, November 1975.

Library of Congress: newspapers

ProQuest: newspapers

Rainbow History Project: oral history interviews

Washingtoniana Room, Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Library: building permits, maps, and directories

Historian: Amber Bailey, Sally Kress Tompkins Fellow, 2016

Project

Information: Written Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) documentation of the commercial structure at 1824 Half Street, SW was undertaken as part of the 2016 HABS-SAH Sally Kress Tompkins Fellowship. The Fellowship is jointly sponsored by HABS and the Society of Architectural Historians (SAH) to allow a graduate student to work on a HABS history project. Amber Bailey (Loyola University Chicago), 2016 Fellow, produced historical reports for several buildings related to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) nightlife in Washington, DC. HABS is within the Heritage Documentation Programs (HDP) division of the National Park Service (Catherine Lavoie, Chief, HABS; Richard O'Connor, Chief, HDP). Project planning was coordinated by Lisa P. Davidson, HABS historian and Chair, HABS-SAH Sally Kress Tompkins Fellowship Committee.



Figure 1: The front (east) façade of 525 8th St, SE (Commercial). Photograph by Lisa P. Davidson, 10 June 2016.



Figure 2: The rear (west) façade of 525 8th St, SE (Commercial). Photograph by Lisa P. Davidson, 10 June 2016.