



Newsletter

May 2024

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2024 DC Awards for Excellence in Historic Preservation

Nominations Due Friday, May 31, 2024



[Nomination Form](#)

Landmarks Update

Old Chinese Legation and the On Leong Chinese Merchants Association



The Old Chinese Legation building at 19th and Vernon streets NW in the Washington Heights Historic District. Photo by John DeFerrari.



The On Leong Chinese Merchants Association building on H Street NW in Chinatown. Photo by Karen Yee.

The DC Preservation League (DCPL) and the DC Historic Preservation Office have been working to document underrepresented communities in the District. In collaboration with the [1882 Foundation](#) and through a National Park Service grant, an Asian American Historic Context Study focused on DC's Chinese and Korean communities has been produced and will soon be finalized.

These efforts also included a landmark nomination for the [Old Chinese Legation \(2001 19th Street NW\)](#), which DCPL cosponsored with the property owner, The Chinese

Embassy Condo, and a landmark amendment for the [On Leong Chinese Merchants Association \(618-20 H Street NW\)](#), submitted by DCPL. On April 25th, the Historic Preservation Review Board approved both the landmark nomination and the amendment.

The Old Chinese Legation is the newest addition to the DC Inventory of Historic Sites and will now be considered for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. Designed by prolific DC architect Waddy B. Wood in an Elizabethan/Jacobean Revival style and completed in 1903, the building was only the second purpose-built legation in DC (after the old British Embassy, which has since been demolished). The building, which included both a residence and chancery, would serve the Qing Dynasty until 1912, at which time it became the Legation of the Republic of China. In 1935, the legation was elevated to embassy status. In 1937, the ambassador moved out, followed by the chancery in 1943. The Republic of China (Taiwan) sold the property in the early 1960s. The old legation was almost demolished for a parking lot before its conversion to apartments later that decade. In 1987, further renovations were completed and the building became condominiums.

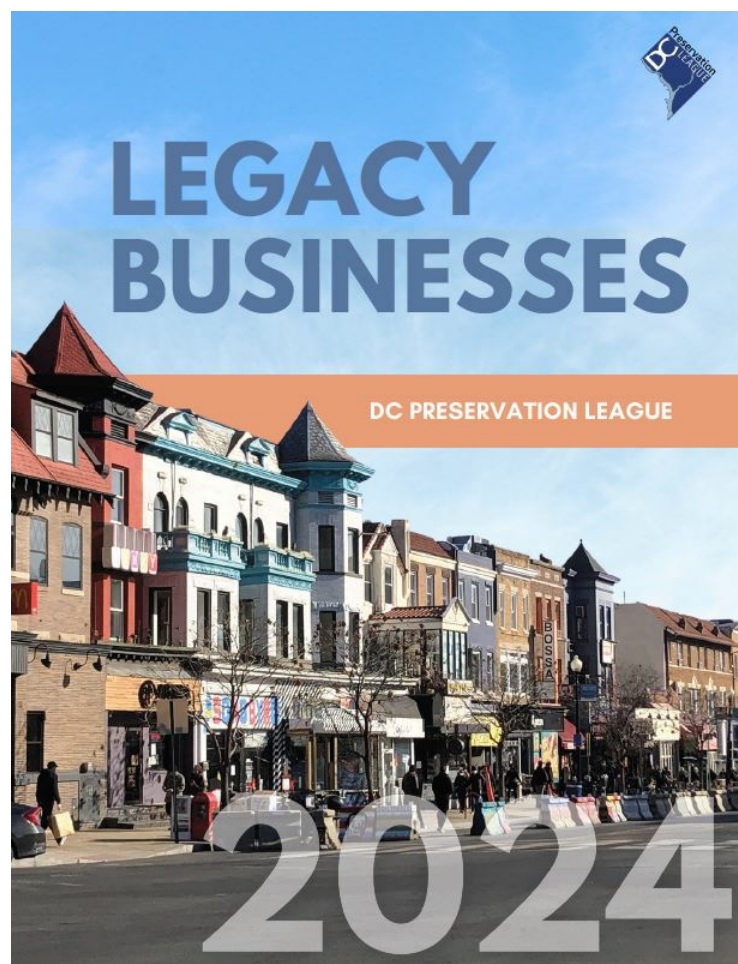
The amendment for the On Leong Chinese Merchants Association adds important documentation for the property, which has been listed in the DC Inventory since 1996. The amendment also expands the property's period of significance. The building was the home of On Leong Tong, a benevolent society, from 1932 to 1997. On Leong was instrumental in Chinatown's relocation from Pennsylvania Avenue NW to H Street NW in the early 1930s when DC's Chinese community was displaced by the Federal Triangle project. In 1931, On Leong purchased two 1850s era rowhouses at 618-20 H Street NW and the following year they were extensively remodeled and combined. Most notably, Chinese Eclectic architectural elements were added.

You can read more about both landmarks at the below links.

[Old Chinese Legation](#)

[On Leong Chinese Merchants Association](#)

DC Preservation League's 2024 Legacy Business Report



People often become attached to places and spaces across the city, not only for their history and architecture, but also for their social and cultural values. The store where you framed your wedding photos, the antique shop where you bought that funky lamp you've had for fifteen years, or the diner that makes your perfect comfort food. As people-focused preservationists, the DC Preservation League views legacy businesses as important historical and community markers across the city.

In 2023, the DC Preservation League (DCPL) launched a promotional and educational legacy business program designed to raise awareness of longstanding businesses in the District. In 2024, DCPL is continuing the program through documentation and outreach. Click below to read the 2024 Legacy Business Report or sign up for DCPL's new Legacy Business Newsletter.

[Read the 2024 Report](#)

[Sign Up for the Newsletter](#)

Historic Preservation & Affordable Housing: Myth vs. Reality

Wednesday, May 29th, 12:00 - 1:00 pm
Virtual/Webinar



Headshot of PlaceEconomics Director of Research & Analytics, Alyssa Frystak.

Join DC Preservation League online to bust some preservation myths! In this presentation, speaker Alyssa Frystak of [PlaceEconomics](#) will address some of the common misconceptions surrounding historic preservation and affordable housing using data-driven findings. She will demonstrate how historic preservation and older housing can play a key role in helping to alleviate the affordable housing crisis.

This program is free and open to the public. Please register online to participate.

[Register Here](#)

DC Historic Sites Tour: Gone, But Not Forgotten



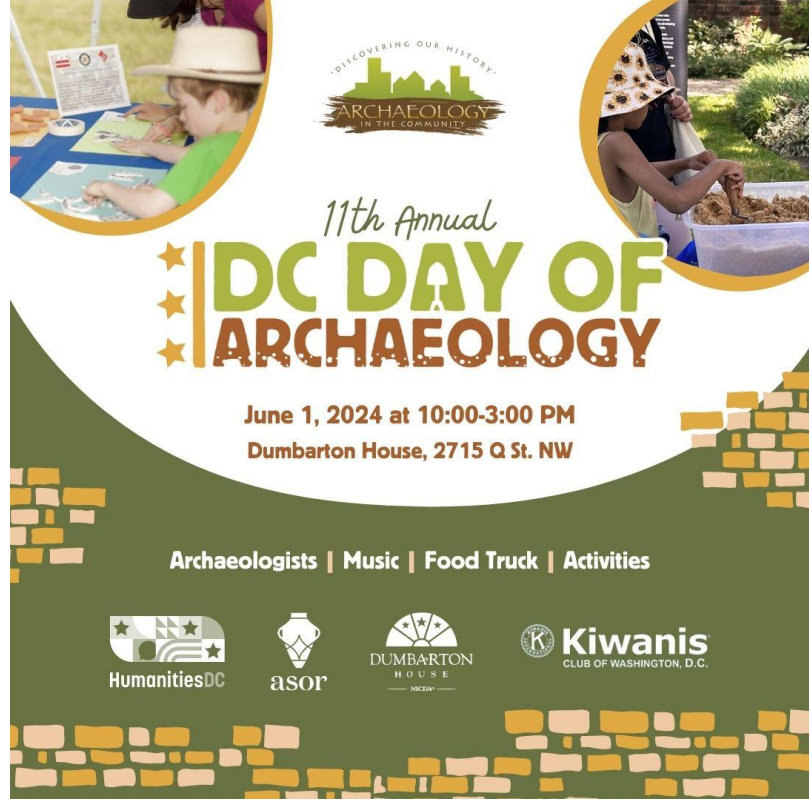
The McGill Building's cornice and intricate brick and stone masonry in 1973, the year that it was demolished.
Photo courtesy of the DC Preservation League.

DC is a city with many layers of history, as illustrated by the built environment's many architectural styles. As the city grew and changed, so did its buildings, many of which were altered or simply demolished. Before the 1960s, historic preservation laws were rare, with historic preservation ordinances in place in only a handful of cities around the country. Federal efforts had been focused on sites of national historical significance, as well as historic documentation through the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), established during the New Deal Era.

In 1966, Congress passed the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), which established the National Register of Historic Places and Section 106 process. Shortly thereafter, [in 1971, Don't Tear It Down \(DC Preservation League's original name\) was founded](#) to save the Old Post Office. By the end of the decade, in 1978, DC had passed a local preservation ordinance, the DC Historic Landmark and Historic District Protection Act, which established the DC Inventory of Historic Sites and a local process for preserving historic landmarks and districts. Despite these protections and processes, demolition may still occur, and some of the sites on this tour were demolished after the federal and local laws were established.

This tour includes historic sites in DC that were recognized for their historical and/or architectural significance, but were still demolished. Some of these lost places went down with a fight, but all of these losses reflect a constantly changing city. The list includes: Western Market, The Six Buildings, Church of the Covenant, McGill Building, the old Dunbar High School, and several more. Also, sometimes a loss occurs through fire, which is what happened to the Dry Barn at St. Elizabeths in 2022.

[DC Historic Sites Tour](#)



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