

DC Builders & Developers Directory

Henry Kersey Boss		 Source: Washington Post, August 28, 1927			
Biographical Data					
Birth: 3/28/1882	Place: Washington, D.C.				
Death: 6/15/1958	Place: Washington, D.C.				
Family: wife, Antoinette; daughters, Barbara & Margaret; son, Grant					
Education					
High School: unknown					
College: n/a					
Graduate School: n/a					
Career					
Permit Database (through 1958)					
As Builder		Earliest Permit: 1914	Latest Permit: 1942	Total Permits: 131	Total Buildings: 643
As Owner		Earliest Permit: 1914	Latest Permit: 1942	Total Permits: 139	Total Buildings: 666
*Note: In many instances, the subject is both the builder and owner. The permit counts also include permits issued to the individual and any company with which he was affiliated.					
*As a part of nineteenth century building regulations, building permits were required for the first time in 1872 and were often not archived until 1877.					
Practice		Position		Date	
Stone & Fairfax		Rent Department		1898–1901	
Moore & Hill, Inc.		Sales; Secretary		1902–1907	
Boss & Phelps, Inc.		Partner/President		1907–1958	
Madison Building Co.		President		1933–1940	
Professional Associations					
Societies or Memberships: Director of American Security & Trust Co.; Episcopal Eye Ear and Throat Hospital; Episcopal Home for the Aged; Director of the American Security and Trust Co.; President of the Washington Real Estate Board; Chairman of the Convention Committee of National Real Estate Boards; Washington Board of Trade; Columbia Historical Society; Chevy Chase Club; Episcopal Church; National Conference on City Planning Joint Committee on the National Capital; Committee of 100 on the Federal City; Church Pension Fund of the Diocese of Washington; American Planning and Civic Association					
Awards or Commissions: Silver Pitcher in recognition of fundraising efforts for the Washington National Cathedral (1924)					
Buildings					
Building Types: Row-houses, Apartments, Condominiums, Duplexes, Attached and Semi-detached Dwellings					
Styles and Forms: Tudor Revival, Colonial Revival, Vernacular					
DC Work Locations: Northwest quadrant: Foxhall Village, Cleveland Park, Colony Hill, Georgetown, Mt. Pleasant, Washington Heights; Northeast; Maryland: Chevy Chase					
Notable Buildings		Location		Date	Status
Gloucestershire Group		West side of 44 th Street between Q and Greenwich Parkway		1928–1930	Foxhall Village Historic District

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Condominium	1715 Swann Street NW	1922	Dupont Circle Historic District
Detached Dwellings	3525–3533 Quebec Street NW	1921	Cleveland Park Historic District
Duplex	3921 & 3923 Morrison Street NW	1916	

Significance and Contributions

Henry K. Boss was the founder and president of Boss & Phelps, Inc. a prominent realty development firm specializing in both residential and commercial real estate for the greater Washington, D.C. area. Boss gained his experience in the building industry from work as a real estate agent. He was involved in the design, development and sales of dwellings within the District of Columbia and its immediate vicinity.

Henry Kersey Boss, son of Charles and Helen Kersey Boss, was born in Washington, D.C. in 1882. Known as Harry, Boss apprenticed in the rent department of Stone & Fairfax real estate corporation starting at the age of 17. By the time he was 21, he worked as a clerk for Moore & Hill, Inc. and within five years held the position of Secretary. During this time Boss met and married Antoinette Eberly of Washington, D.C. and moved into 1928 15th Street NW in 1905.

While working for Moore & Hill, Boss also met Herbert Glenn Phelps who was employed as a settlement clerk. The two left Moore & Hill in August of 1907 to form their own firm, Boss & Phelps, with offices located at 1910 14th Street, NW. An article in the *Washington Post* from September 1, 1907 announcing the partnership predicted a “prosperous career” for the experienced businessmen.

The earliest years of the firm specialized in general real estate, but by 1914 Boss began purchasing lots for the firm to develop. Examples of these early endeavors for which Boss served as the project builder are 2324 & 2326 California Street NW (1914) and 1784 & 1786 Lanier Place NW (1915). Both of these early projects were designs by A. H. Sonnemann, an architect Boss & Phelps repeatedly employed along with Harvey Baxter, James E. Cooper, Albert E. Landvoight, Horace W. Peaslee and George T. Santmyers. Outgrowing their initial office with expansions to include mortgage, financing and fire insurance services, the firm moved multiple times and finally relocated to 1417 K Street NW in 1923.

The building scope of Boss & Phelps included row-houses, duplexes, condominiums and both detached and semi-detached dwellings. Typically working in the Northwest quadrant, the firm did develop brick row houses at 1109–1175 3rd Place, NE and a number of single-family dwellings like 26 West Irving Street (1920) and 4004 Thornapple Street (1926) in Chevy Chase, Maryland. Most famously, the firm’s name is associated with the development of Foxhall Village, the 29-acre community bounded by Reservoir road to the north, Glover-Archbold Park on the east, P Street to the south, and Foxhall Road to the west. Boss & Phelps’ efforts with Foxhall Village were a result of Boss’s visit to England in the early 1920’s, where he was inspired by English Tudor-style architecture.



Image of Boss in England. Photograph from “Scrapbook of the construction of Foxhall and Colony Hill” 1920s–1930s.

AMERICAN SMARTEST COLONY OF ENGLISH GROUP HOMES

FOXHALL VILLAGE

Seven Minutes from Dupont Circle.

A VILLAGE IN THE CITY

A PREDETERMINED AND COMPLETED DEVELOPMENT.

3 Bedrooms and Bath to 6 Bedrooms and 3 Baths.

The view from Foxhall Village is one of its many charming features. The spires of old Georgetown College, the Lincoln Memorial, the long bridge spanning the silvery thread of the Potomac, and the distant foothills of Virginia. It was here that Presidents Jefferson, Madison and Monroe were wont to spend many pleasant evenings with Henry Foxhall, owner of Spring Hill Farm, upon which the Village is built. And yet the Village is only seven minutes ride from Dupont Circle.

FROM ACTUAL PHOTO.

A NEW HOME

4420 QUE ST.

(Northwest.)

Price, \$15,500

OPEN FOR INSPECTION.

BOSS & PHELPS

CREATORS AND DEVELOPERS OF FOXHALL VILLAGE.

1417 K St. Main 9300.

Drive West on Que St. to Wisconsin Ave. North One Square to Reservoir Rd. West to Village. Make Left-Hand Turn at 44th St.

City Ad for Foxhall Village, *Washington Post* 1929.

The middle-class row-house neighborhood of Foxhall Village offered clusters of charming “old-world” houses of stone, brick, half-timber, and stucco finishes on high tracts of land, away from the bustling noise of the City Proper. After selling their first group of Foxhall Village houses, designed by James E. Cooper in 1925— Foxhall Village, in continuous construction phases, became one of the largest development undertakings in Washington, D.C. with several hundred row-houses. Boss & Phelps’ success with Foxhall Village attracted other developers to encroach on the area, inspiring the firm to construct Colony Hill of Foxhall Village, designed by Horace W. Peaslee in 1931. Most significantly, Foxhall and Colony Hill marked the transition from independent speculative row-houses to planned residential neighborhoods.

In order to expand their clientele, while maintaining their current reputation among middle class and upper middle class clients, the firm created a side company named Madison Building, Co. in 1933 to handle simpler and less detailed projects. Boss served as the president and Phelps the vice-president. Under the Madison Building, Co. name, Boss & Phelps erected apartments, row-houses, and attached and semi-detached

dwelling. Harvey P. Baxter served as the architect for most Madison Building Co.’s projects, majority of which consisted of two-story apartment houses. Such examples include 921 Aspen Street NW, 4020–4034 Calvert Street NW and 3918–3932 W Street NW.

In addition, the real estate firm was in the business of restoring older dwellings. *The Washington Post* reported in 1941 that Boss & Phelps restored and then resold twenty-two houses in Georgetown for that year alone. With the addition of this enterprise, Boss & Phelps successfully partook in all entities of the building industry. In 1942, with their 35th anniversary, the *Washington Post* reported the firm’s involvement amounted to over a quarter of a billion dollars in sales.

It is hard to separate Boss’s individual accomplishments from that of the firm’s, since the two were deeply entwined. However, it can be said of Boss that, unlike Phelps, he was an extrovert and arguably the reason behind the companies’ early risks and growing success as major developers.

Boss’s activities outside the firm were invested in the overall wellbeing and development of the Nation’s Capital. During World War I, Boss aided the U.S. Government in the appraisal of properties. Later he served as director of the American Security & Trust Co., chairman of the convention committee of the National Association of Real Estate Boards, president of the Washington Real Estate Board, and member of the Washington Board of Trade— earning an excellent reputation in Washington’s real estate community.

Boss died at the age of 76 at his home of 808 Forty-fifth Street NW, he is buried in Rock Creek Cemetery. With his death, Phelps took over the firm as President, and Boss’s son Grant became a vice-president. Tragically, one year later, Grant was killed in an automobile accident on Massachusetts Avenue NW.

Boss & Phelps’ long-term real estate firm with included property management, insurance and loans continued for 74



*Image of 1628 44th Street, NW, in Foxhall Village,
Photo by EHT Tracerics 2006*

We're proud of our role as
the **ORIGINAL DEVELOPER**
of
Foxhall Village
...and we're still serving!

**RESIDENTIAL & COMMERCIAL SALES
PROPERTY MANAGEMENT**

**3830 Veazey Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20016
Phone: 362-9300**

**Property Management Department
4211 39th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20016
Phone: 966-4271**

Boss & Phelps, Inc., advertisement from 1979 Foxhall Community's Half Century celebration.

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years, until the real estate market's decline in the early 1980's and an uncovered bank fraud scheme caused the company to close operations. Although the firm's reputation may have been damaged in the end, the legacy of Boss & Phelps, Inc. holds as one of the longest running and leading firms paramount in the early to mid-twentieth-century development of the District of Columbia.

Sources			
Vertical Files	☐ HSWDC	☐ MLK Library	
Other Repositories: DC Building Permits Database, Ancestry.com			
Obituary:	Publication: <i>Washington Post</i>	Date: 6/16/1958	Page: B2
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☐ Who's Who in the Nation's Capital			
☐ History of the City of Washington: It's Men and Institutions	1903		
☐ Washington Past and Present	1932		
☐ Prominent Personages of the Nation's Capital	c. 1924		
Other Sources: "Boss & Phelps List Recent Realty Sales: Property Worth \$344,000 Total Changes Hands," <i>Washington Post</i>, November 26, 1939, Proquest Historical Newspapers. "Boss & Phelps Report Sales Aggregating \$300,000," <i>Washington Post</i>, March 24, 1940, Proquest Historical Newspapers. "Boss & Phelps Report Sales of \$2,761,000: Realty Firm Officials Expect 1941 Business Will Set New Record," <i>Washington Post</i>, January 12, 1941, Proquest Historical Newspapers. Harry K. Boss, "Scrapbook of the construction of Foxhall Village and Colony Hill" 1920s-1930s. Original scrapbook in the possession of Malcolm and Daphne Ross; pdf version of album compiled by Cheryl Tlam Foster and the Foxhall Community Citizens Association, April 2006. "Buying Stock of Firm" Harry K. Boss, H. Glenn Phelps and B. T. Webstor in Partnership," <i>Washington Post</i>, February 29, 1920, Proquest Historical Newspapers. "Colony Hill Area Attracts Interest: Community's Charm is Enhanced by Gateway Formed of Two Houses," <i>Washington Post</i>, December 6, 1931, Proquest Historical Newspapers. "Colony Hill Plans to Build 75 Houses, New Development Is Given Commendation by Board of Architects," <i>Washington Post</i>, April 12, 1931, Proquest Historical Newspapers. "Foxhall Village Celebration Sunday," <i>Washington Post</i>, September 20, 1979, Proquest Historical Newspapers. "Gateway Draws Host of Visitors To Colony Hill: Home Project at Reservoir Road Charming Today in Summer Beauty," <i>Washington Post</i>, August 13, 1933, Proquest Historical Newspapers. "Harry K. Boss, 76, Dies; Top Real Estate Man," <i>Evening Star</i>, June 16, 1958. "H.G. Phelps, 84, District Realtor," <i>Washington Post</i>, May 30, 1964, Proquest Historical Newspapers. "Homes Attract Attention: Spanish Architecture Feature Houses on Washington Heights," <i>Washington Post</i>, September 4, 1910, Proquest Historical Newspapers. National Register of Historic Places, Foxhall Village Historic District, Washington, District of Columbia, National Register #357166 "New Boss-Phelps Head," <i>Washington Post</i>, June 26, 1958, Proquest Historical Newspaper. "New Realty First Starts: Boss & Phelps, Formerly of Moore & Hill, Announce Their Entry," <i>Washington Post</i>, September 1, 1907, Proquest Historical Newspapers. Joe Pichirallo, "Realty Firm Owners Draw 6-Month Prison Terms," <i>Washington Post</i>, October 20, 1981, Proquest Historical Newspapers. "Washington Couple Killed on Rte. 1; Grant Boss Dies in Crash Here," <i>Washington Post</i>, October 24, 1959, Proquest Historical Newspapers.			
Notes:			
Prepared by: EHT Traceries		Last Updated: August 2012	