

JOINT COMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS
OF THE NATIONAL CAPITAL

Application for Designation
of a Historic Landmark

Case No. 74-12

GENERAL INFORMATION

Name of property Old Engine #6; Formerly Metropolitan Hook & Ladder #3
Street Address 438 Massachusetts Avenue, N. W. Washington D.C. 20001
Square and Lot Numbers Lot 856, Square 517
Present Owner District of Columbia Government (Fire Department)
Address 614 H Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20001
Present Use Community Relations Division, D.C. Fire Department
Original Use Firehouse; Metropolitan Hook & Ladder
Construction Date 1854-5
Architect unknown
Architectural Style/Period Victorian
Alteration of Original Design doors widened in 1948

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

Lot Dimensions 29'x 108'
Building Dimensions 29'x 70'
Facade Materials
Wood: Clapboard Shingle Other
Masonry: Brick Stone Concrete
Number of Stories two Number of bays front facade two
Type of Roof slope, front to rear
Original Site yes
Photographs yes (CA 1879)

District of Columbia
Fire Department

Applicant
By [Signature]
Title Fire Chief

September 10, 1974
Date

RECEIVED

9/10/74
EHN

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

OLD ENGINE #6

Never used for any other purpose, this building spans 129 years as a firehouse. Erected in 1855 as the quarters of Metropolitan Hook & Ladder #1 and occupied by Engine #6 from 1879 until 1974, this structure stands as a monument to the fire service of the District of Columbia.

As Metropolitan Hook & Ladder, and later Hook & Ladder #1, this building housed the only ladder company in the District of Columbia, and so responded to every alarm in the city from 1855 until 1879. As Engine #6, uncountable alarms were answered from 1879 until 1974.

The building itself is a simple structure of the Mid-Victorian Period, red brick with ornamental stone fans and modest dentil work at the roof line. Random burnt or painted brick has been used as a decorative device and is still evident. High arched windows occupy nearly three-quarters of each bay at the second floor level to offset the large equipment doors at the ground. Even the widening of these doors from eight to ten feet in 1948, and the squaring of the door arches has not markedly changed the architectural integrity of the facade.

Most importantly, one element remains intact above the small access door. A carved granite trophy of helmet, speaking trumpets, national shield and firefighting tools is set in the masonry. Finely detailed with sharp undercuts, this trophy, although painted in recent years, is a fine example of the stonemason's art, and must be preserved.

The interior of the structure when entered at ground level is a simple two bay equipment room, low ceilinged, twelve feet, with the standard brass poles, rear stair, and a stable area and kitchen in a small addition behind the stairway. A later stable area is delineated by iron kick plates set in the side walls on the main floor.

The second floor is composed of a small office and bathroom off a short central hall which opens onto a bunkroom, or dormitory, of heroic proportions, considering the size of the structure. It is a simple unbroken room twenty feet high, forty-one feet long and twenty-nine feet across the front, the roof supported by two massive rod-enforced trusses. The windows previously described provide more than sufficient light for the whole area, there being no windows to the side of this room.

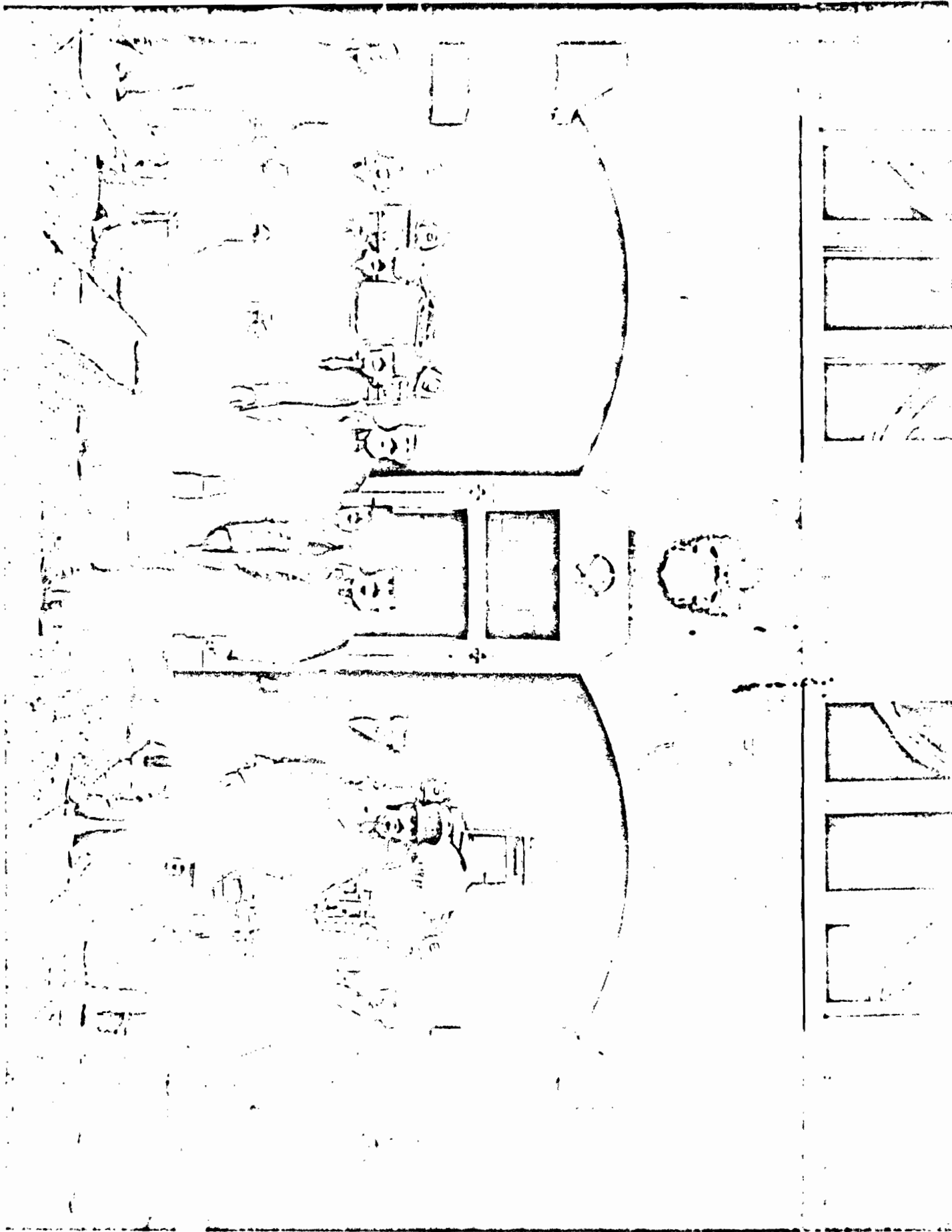
The building has been retained by the District of Columbia Fire Department as quarters for the Community Relations Division, to act as a point for the dissemination of fire safety information, and, because of its proximity to the proposed Visitors Center at Union Station, to be a place of rest and information for the many visitors to the Nation's Capital.

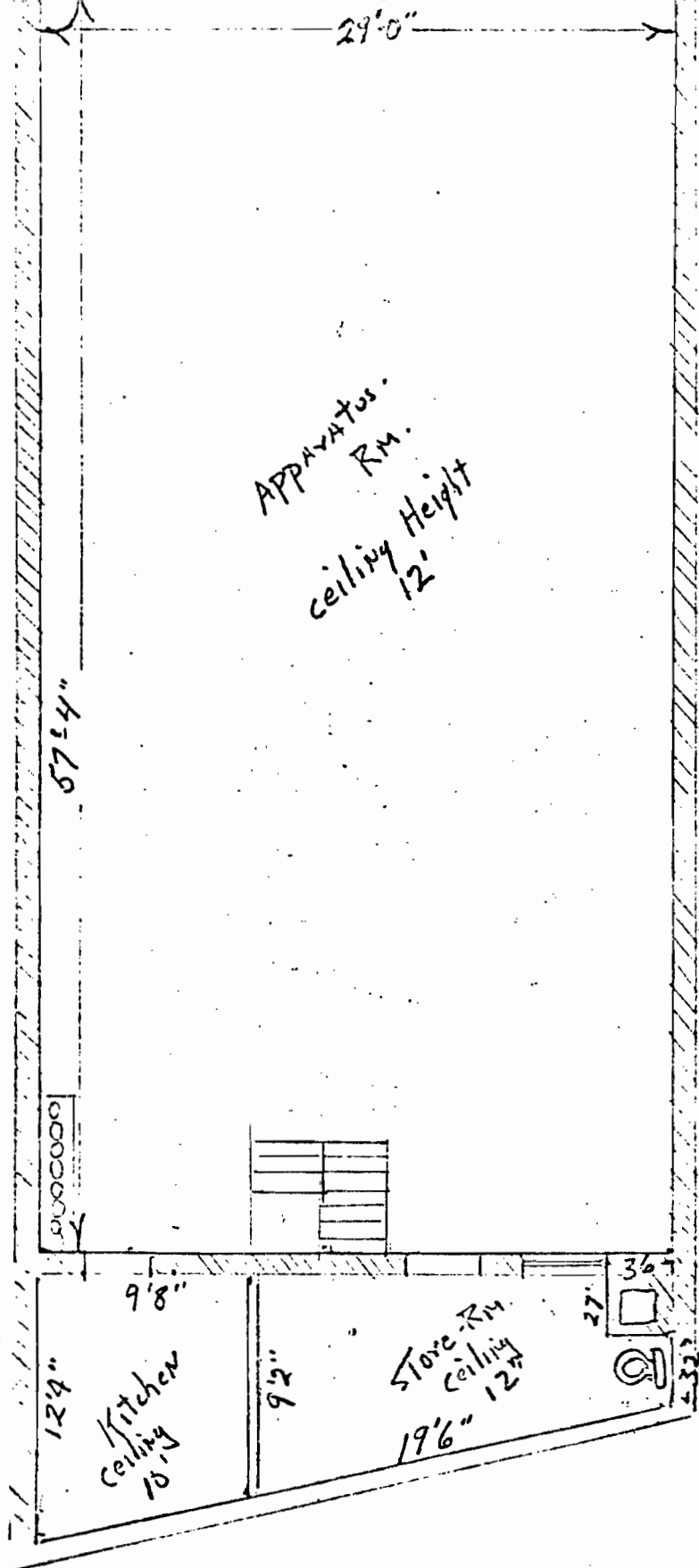
Sources

Nicholson, Philip W. History of the Volunteer and Paid Fire Department of the District of Columbia. Washington, D. C. 1936, Sponsored by the City Fire Fighters Association.

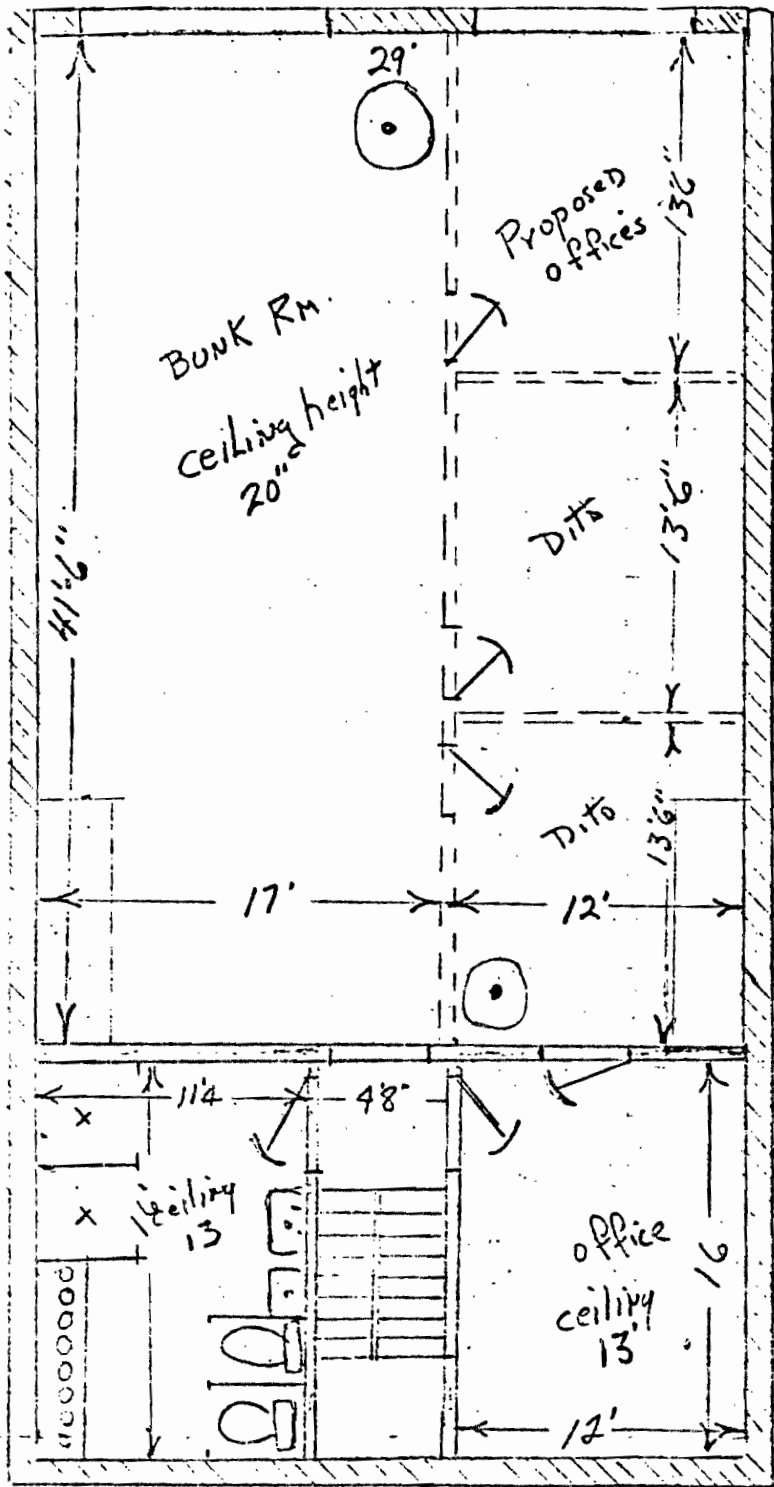
C. O. Glory, (pseudonym, Local 36, IAFF, Albert O. Raeder et al) 100 Years of Glory, Washington, D. C., Mount Vernon Publishing Co., Inc. 1972

Breen, John P. Notes on the History of No. 6 Engine House Washington, D. C. Unpublished monograph, 1957

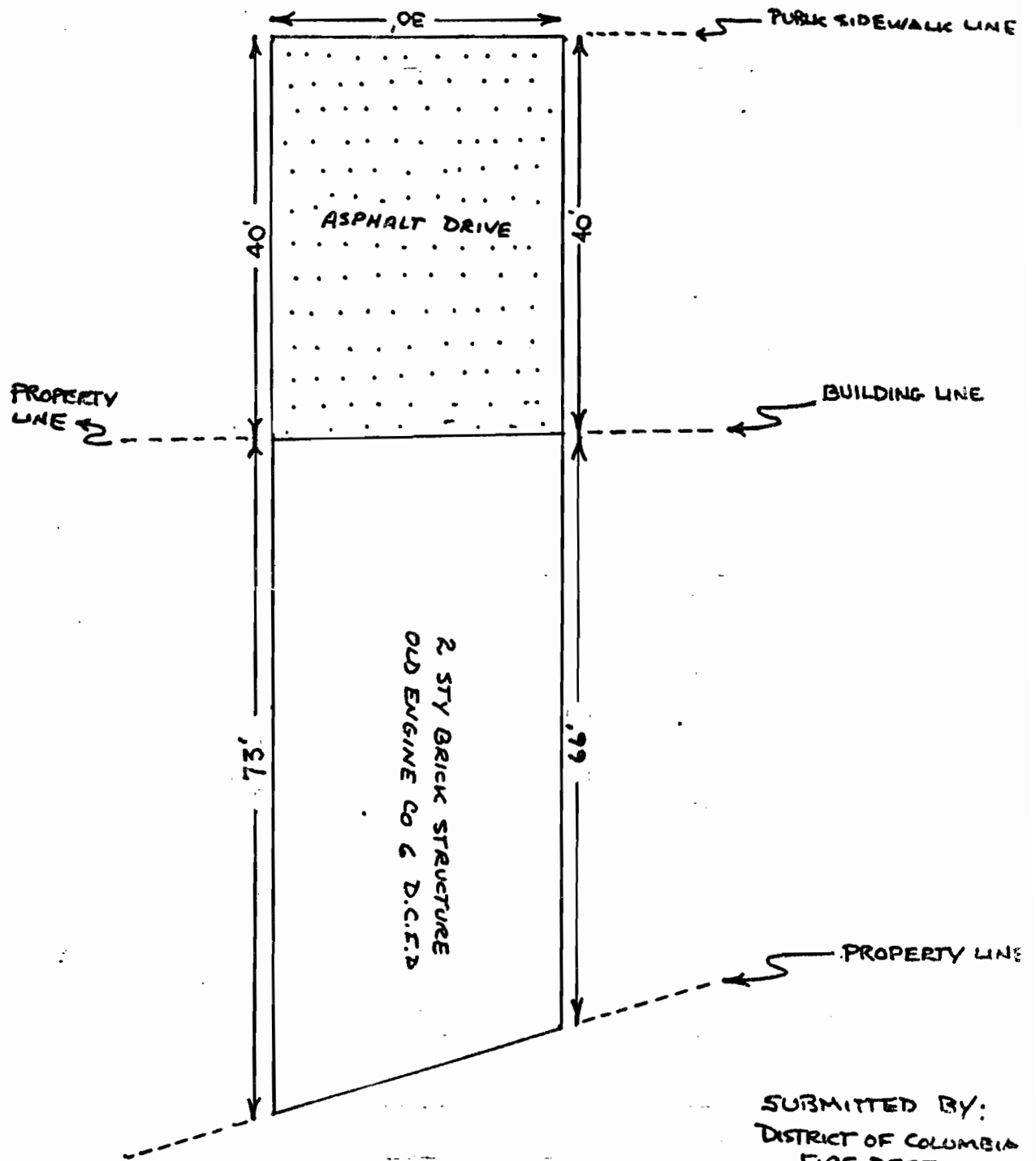




2.



OLD ENGINE CO # 6 D.C. FIRE DEPARTMENT - LOT 856 SP 5



SUBMITTED BY:
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
FIRE DEPT
Peter T. McGallie
Lt. D.C.F.D.

Handwritten notes:
1864
1870

SIGNIFICANCE

The Joint Committee on Landmarks has designated the Old Engine Company No. 6 building a Category II Landmark of importance which contributes significantly to the cultural-historic heritage and visual beauty of the District of Columbia. Erected in the early 1860's, it is the oldest surviving firehouse in the District of Columbia still in its original use as a firehouse. Its history span and uniquely reflects the development of the Fire Department of the District of Columbia from a volunteer force to the present modern professional force and the development of firefighting here from the mid-nineteenth century to the present. It was constructed as the house of Metropolitan Hook and Ladder, the first, and between ~~1864~~ ¹⁸⁶⁴ and 1870, the only hook and ladder company in the District of Columbia, and, consequently, its force responded to every alarm in the city during this period--including such historic conflagrations as that of the Smithsonian Institution in 1865 and of the U. S. Patent Office in 1877. It was constructed at the beginning of that period of intensive municipal improvement which ~~culminated~~ culminated in Alexander R. Shepherd's remarkable transformation of the city in the early 1870's. It is an architecturally distinctive mid-nineteenth century fire house related in design to such major municipal construction of the 1860's as the Mallach and Franklin Schools.

The Metropolitan Hook and Ladder Company was organized in April of 1855, the first hook and ladder company of the then ~~entirely~~ completely volunteer fire department of the District of Columbia. On November 12, 1855, ~~the~~ ^{when} the newly formed company's first hook and ladder truck arrived, ~~representatives~~ ^{rep} representatives of the Pioneer Hook and Ladder Company of

Baltimore and the Sun Fire Company of Alexandria joined District of Columbia firemen in a colorful parade celebrating the occasion, ~~which~~ ~~typical of the Elizabethan volunteer fire department.~~ A second hook and ladder company, the American Hook and Ladder, was also formed in 1855. In addition to these hook and ladder companies there were at this time six engine companies in the city--Union, Franklin, Northern Liberties, Perseverance, Anacostia and Columbia.

Metropolitan Hook and Ladder was first housed at 505 Massachusetts Avenue, N. W. ~~xxxxxxx~~ On November 20, 1862, the volunteer fire department was reorganized by the Common Council and the Board of Aldermen. It was at about this time that the firehouse at 428 Massachusetts Avenue, N. W. was ~~built~~ constructed for the use of Metropolitan Hook and Ladder. Architectural detail such as acroteria, corbelled brick cornice, chimneys, polychromatic offsets, window and door design is related to ~~that~~ ^{that} of such buildings as Franklin and Wallach Schools and the U. S. Department of Agriculture designed by the Washington architectural firm of Cass and Kammerhuber in the ~~late~~ 1860's.

The Act to Organize a Paid Fire Department was enacted July 1, 1864, ~~which~~ ~~the~~ The part-paid, part volunteer force ^{thus} established ~~by this~~ consisted of three engine companies--Union, Franklin and Columbia--in addition to Metropolitan Hook and Ladder. The latter was now known as the Metropolitan Truck Company, ~~while the former were known as Engine Companies 1, 2 and 3.~~ ^{Na No. 11.} While Philip W. Nicholson, in his History of the Volunteer and Paid Fire Department of the District of Columbia, 1800-1836, notes "The engine companies had three paid men who

(not underlined)
←

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Breen, John P. "Notes on the History of No. 6 Engine House, Washington, D. C." Unpublished Monograph, 1967.

Cassidy, J. Albert. The Firemen's Record. Baltimore, 1893.

Glory, C. O. (pseudonym, Local 36, IAFF, Albert O. Zieder et al) 100 Years of Glory, Washington, D. C.; Mount Vernon Publishing Co., Inc., 1972.

Government of the District of Columbia. Archives and Plan File of the Department of General Services. Plan of 1970 remodeling of Old Engine No. 6 building.

Martin Luther King Memorial Library. Atlases, directories, ~~photography~~ newspaper clipping files, photographic collection.

Nicholson, Philip W. History of the Volunteer and Paid Fire Department of the District of Columbia. Washington, D. C.; 1936, Sponsored by the City Fire Fighters Association.

~~Photography, Cassidy~~

Old Engine Company No. 6 Building. Desk Journal of Engine Company No. 6, 1897-1898.

"Report of the Fire Commissioners of the District of Columbia"
Report of the Commissioners of the District of Columbia. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1874-1903.

