



Southwest Corner, 14th Street and Park Road (1949).

The D.C. Historic Preservation Office recently sponsored a project to complete a 1989 architectural survey of Columbia Heights and to research the commercial history of 14th Street. Here is material from the study.

Early commercial enterprises on, or in the vicinity of, 14th Street in what is today Columbia Heights, date to as far back as the early 1800s. At that time, the Washington Jockey Club race track (near the intersection of 14th and Columbia), drew spectators to the area from all walks of life. Thereafter, 14th Street was one of the few pre-Civil War roads running north from the city, and by around the 1870s, it attracted enough traffic to support a general store at the corner of 14th and Park. With increased development, by the 1890s streetcars first made the trek up the hill from Florida Avenue. Grand houses, like the former Hines Funeral Home, still located at 2901-2907 14th Street, lined the street. Gradually, as the 20th century unfolded, residences along 14th Street began to have first-floor commercial uses and later, luxury apartment buildings and commercial structures came to replace the elegant rowhouses.

Commercial Heyday

In the 1910s and 1920s, 14th Street was a vibrant commercial strip with dozens of small grocery stores, cigar stores, milliners, candy shops, florists, furriers, bakeries, nut shops, bowling alleys, clothing shops, hardware stores, music stores, nickelodeons, bicycle stores, restaurants, and gift shops. Fourteenth Street also featured all kinds of services, from dry cleaners to chiropractors.

One of the most famous stores was the local A&W root beer stand. A few years after opening in 1927, it added tamales and chili to its menu, changed its name, and became the nation's first Hot Shoppe and the beginning of the vast Marriott Corporation. Other Washington chains, such as Hahn's shoe store, had early branches in Columbia Heights.

In addition to this wide assortment of individual stores, 14th Street was also home to a Washington landmark, the Arcade Market. Located on the west side of the street, just south of Park, the former street car barn housed more than 100 stalls which drew customers from all over Washington.

The Arcade was also a part of a major entertainment center at this intersection. The Arcadia Amusement Company, also in the Arcade building, featured a bowling alley, billiards parlor, and ballroom as well as rooms for dancing lessons and card parties. Its 4,000-seat auditorium was dubbed the "Madison Square Garden of Washington." In 1926, when the auditorium opened, it was home to the Washington Palace Five, Washington's first

full-fledged professional basketball team, playing as part of the American Basketball League. Although the Arcade is gone, one of the other wonderful amusements near 14th and Park, the grand 2,500-seat Tivoli Theater, still stands today.

All told, 14th Street was one of the largest and busiest shopping areas in Washington outside of the downtown/7th Street area.

The People of 14th Street

In the late 19th and early 20th century, 14th Street and Columbia Heights had a generally affluent feel. Although it was largely the domain of upper-middle-class whites, there were exceptions. One was P.B.S. Pinchback of New Orleans, a prominent African American who constructed the 3-story rowhouse which still stands at 1422 Harvard. Pinchback, who served both as lieutenant governor and (for a month) governor of Louisiana, was part of the "creme de la creme" of black Washington society. His grandson, Jean Toomer, an important Harlem renaissance author, lived with him.

By 1930, 14th Street had an interesting ethnic mix. The apartments along 14th Street were generally occupied by U.S.-born European Americans. However, above the stores, and in the smaller apartments and houses there was a vibrant mix of immigrants of many nationalities, many of whom ran small businesses on 14th Street. There were also many Jewish residents and shopkeepers in the area who formed the core of the Tifereth Israel Congregation, at 14th and Euclid. Although there were virtually no African Americans living on 14th Street in 1930, by this time black households were



North side, 14th Street and Park Road (1948).

predominant on many of the side streets just off of 14th Street, including Park, 11th, Columbia, Sherman, and Florida.

The 1940s saw greater congestion in Washington with the large influx of war workers. In 1948, the Supreme Court ruled that real estate covenants that restricted ownership by race were illegal and in the general movement toward integration, 14th Street apartments were opened to African Americans.

Black Washington's Downtown

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, 14th Street was a different place again. It remained a strong commercial corridor; now, however, it had a predominantly African American clientele. With stores spread from south of Columbia Heights on up to Newton Street and beyond, 14th Street became known as black Washington's downtown—Washington's equivalent of 125th Street in Harlem or 103rd Street in Watts. Given the variety of stores, residents said there was no need to go shopping anywhere else in the city.

Fourteenth Street in Columbia Heights by this time was also a destination for night life. Many of the clubs and restaurants, like Joe's Burdland (3201 14th) and the Bob Inn Club (3316 14th) were known throughout the city. Folks said that after sunset, 14th Street between Columbia Road and Irving Street was one of the busiest blocks in town. The Waffle Shop, still located today at the corner of Park and 14th, was popular as one of the few restaurants that was open 24 hours a day.

The April 4-8, 1968, riots which followed the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. changed the character of 14th Street once again. Fourteenth Street in Columbia Heights was one of the worst hit areas in Washington—hundreds of businesses were either damaged or

otherwise closed their doors. After the riots more than 70 acres of land in Columbia Heights were bulldozed. As a result, most of the smaller commercial buildings that had been the backbone of the commercial strip south of Park Street were lost.

Change came again in the years following the riots, particularly in the 1980s, as 14th Street became home to immigrants from Central and South America. Columbia Heights, for them, was a bridge between their new and old countries. The arrival of the Metro in 2001 also altered the character of the neighborhood by increasing the area's accessibility and visibility to the rest of the city.

Over the years, 14th Street in Columbia Heights has changed many times: from upscale residential address, to bustling entertainment and shopping area, to hip club area, to international cultural mixing bowl. Despite its many changes, take some time to look around at its buildings, and you can still find important clues to 14th Street's past lives.



PHOTO CREDITS: The Arcade photo and the original Hot Shoppe (cover), both courtesy of Washingtoniana Division, DC Public Library. Other historic photos courtesy of the Historical Society of Washington, DC.

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Columbia Heights **Fourteenth Street Commercial Corridor** A Short History

