

Navy Yard Neighborhood Timeline

Mara Cherkasky, September 20, 2014

- 1790:** Congress authorizes a permanent “seat of government” somewhere on the Potomac River.
- 1791:** George Washington announces his choice for the site of the District of Columbia.
- 1792:** Peter C. L’Enfant completes a plan for the new nation’s capital. The plan includes a canal and an arsenal at Greenleaf’s Point (Fort McNair). Also: George Washington approves the Navy Yard site.
- 1797:** Thomas Law builds a sugar refinery at the foot of New Jersey Avenue, but it closes within a few years and then becomes a brewery. Wharves and other businesses crop up nearby.
- 1799:** The Navy Yard is established.
- 1800:** The Navy Yard employs 200 people: free and enslaved African Americans, as well as whites. Many workers settle nearby. Also: The federal government arrives from Philadelphia.
- 1801:** US Marine Corps Barracks established.
- 1802-1815:** Construction of the Washington Canal connecting the Potomac and Anacostia rivers.
- 1806:** Public tobacco inspection warehouse established on Third Street between M and N.
- Early years:** Well-off Washingtonians build houses near the Navy Yard. New Jersey Avenue, which connects the wharves with the Capitol, becomes an important residential corridor.
- 1806:** Eastern Branch (aka Navy Yard) Market opens at Seventh and K.
- 1814:** The Americans burn the Navy Yard on August 24, to prevent it from falling into the hands of the British as they overrun Washington and burn most public buildings. (It is soon rebuilt.)
- 1830:** Horse-drawn omnibuses start running between Georgetown and the Navy Yard, two population and employment centers in the District.
- Civil War (1861-1865):** Tens of thousands of the formerly enslaved flee to the District and many settle near the Navy Yard. The poorest live in shacks, often in low-lying areas subject to flooding (e.g. the Navy Yard neighborhood). Also: South Capitol Street becomes the center of the city’s industrial area.
- 1862:** Washington’s first streetcar line, using horse power, opens between Georgetown and Navy Yard.
- 1870:** McCormick School (for white children) opens on the site of the old tobacco warehouse.
- Early 1870s:** The city’s infrastructure is modernized. The canal is covered over. New sewers are laid, mostly emptying into the Anacostia. Improvements mostly benefit Northwest DC; property values soar.
- 1870s:** The area has declined and parts become known as Bloodfield.
- 1880s:** Pennsylvania Railroad opens a station on the Mall. Train tracks are laid on the Mall and along Virginia and Maryland Avenues south of the Mall.

1886: The Navy Yard becomes the Naval Gun Factory.

1891: Washington and Georgetown Railroad Company builds the castle-like Navy Yard Car Barn, across the street from the Navy Yard gate.

1907: The sewer pumping station opens at the mouth of the old canal.

1930: The Navy Yard neighborhood is majority African American. It is 79.2 percent black by 1940.

Late 1930s-1940: The government replaces blocks of old housing with Carrollsburg Dwellings and Ellen Wilson Dwellings.

Mid-1950s: Arthur Capper Dwellings replace blocks of old housing.

1962: The Navy Yard becomes an administration and supply center, occupying 127 acres. The first leg of the Southeast-Southwest Freeway opens, to Seventh Street, SE. Streetcar service ends in Washington in favor of an all-bus system.

1970s: Gay clubs begin opening around Half and N Streets SE.

1991: The Navy Yard Metro Station opens on the Green Line.

2002: The Southeast Federal Center is built on 55 acres of the Navy Yard.

Mid-2000s: Housing projects are cleared and razed. Gay clubs and other businesses are closed and razed for a new baseball stadium.

2006: Capper Senior Center opens at Fifth and I Streets SE.

2008: Nationals Ballpark opens.

2012: Canal Park opens on a former school bus parking lot – also the former canal site.

Resources:

John R. Wennersten, *Anacostia/The Death & Life of an American River* (Baltimore: The Chesapeake Book Co., 2008)

Tour of Duty: Barracks Row Heritage Trail (Cultural Tourism DC, 2004)

<http://arthurcapper.omeka.net/>

<http://www.jdland.com/dc/index.cfm>

Contact Mara at mara@PrologueDC.com

More at PrologueDC.com, ThisPlaceHasaVoice.info