

# The Newsletter of the Cleveland Park Historical Society

My Cleveland Park: Q & A with Clare Tighe, Master Gardener

Page 1

Historic Architecture of the National Zoo

Page 2

Students See Cleveland Park in a New Light

Page 3

**Bringing Wikipedia to Our Neighborhood** 

Page 3

The Sears Houses of Macomb Street

Page 3

**Architectural History Lectures** 

Page 3

**Humanities Truck Exhibit on the Park & Shop** 

Page 4

CPHS Leadership News, Annual Meeting, Board Nominees, and ARC Members

Page 5

Neighborhood Preservation News: Main Street Program, Historic District Signs, & Reporting Illegal Construction

Page 6

Oral History: George Idelson

Page 7

Membership Form

Page 9

# My Cleveland Park: Q & A with Clare Tighe, Master Gardener



Voices editor **Polly Ghazi** sat down for a brief Q & A with **Clare Tighe**, lifelong Ordway Street resident, gardener to the neighborhood, and owner of the famous orange pickup truck. This is just a teaser: Fran Maclean has conducted a full oral history interview with Clare, which we will post on our website soon.

PG: Rain or shine, you spend your days out and about in Cleveland Park. What are your favorite neighborhood spots?

CT: "My favorite place is Rosedale, going back to when I grew up here in the 1960s. All the neighborhood kids would play hide and seek among the huge box elder trees. There was one big house (across from Rosedale) and my sister, friends and I would would pester the lady who lived there to ride the Icelandic pony she kept in her backyard. She had three daughters but they weren't interested in the pony. We would ride bareback and get dumped over and over.

I still love it today, although it's much more manicured and dogs have replaced the pony. My other favorite place is the Cathedral grounds, next to Wisconsin. I like to sit on a particular bench there, even in the rain, and just contemplate."

(Continued on next page.)

(Q & A with Clare Tighe, continued from previous page)

### PG: You've lived most of your life on Ordway Street, and been gardening professionally for almost 30 years. How have Cleveland Park's streetscape and flora changed?

CT: "People used to let their yards grow naturally. Nothing was manicured and nobody used leaf blowers or mulch. That's all changed in the past 15 years. The changing climate has also allowed my clients to try different things. Plants like crepe myrtle and butterfly bushes used to be lucky to survive the winter but now they're everywhere. Tropicals also do well in the summer now. On the other hand, daffodils and tulips that need a long hard freeze don't bloom for long anymore. The worst change is having to deal with mosquitoes in the daytime. I wear long sleeves, a hat and a scarf even in the height of summer—and they still get me."

#### PG: Your orange truck is a local landmark. Can you tell us about it?

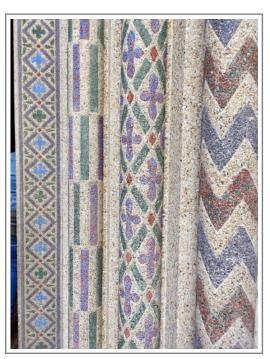
CT: "I got the truck in 1990 when I started gardening professionally, but it's a 1980 model. I don't have a special secret to keeping it going, but I drive less than 600 miles a year. And I do change the oil frequently! The truck's become like a beacon for Metro riders climbing the steep Ordway hill from Connecticut Avenue. People I've never met before come up and tell me that when they see it they know they're almost home!"

### **CPHS Events: A Review of 2018-2019**

We are just winding up a programming year that was unusually rich in architectural history events and collaboration with local students. Read on for a recap. To get news of upcoming events for the 2019-2020 season, visit clevelandparkhistoricalsociety.org; follow our Facebook page at facebook.com/clevelandparkhistory; and become a member or renew your membership on our website or using the form on page 9 of this issue.

#### Historic Architecture of the National Zoo

In October, CPHS members were treated to a special tour of the National Zoo's historic buildings, organized by FONZ (the Friends of the National Zoo) just for CPHS and led by architect John Thomann and National Zoo landscape architect Matt Sellers. The tour began inside the Reptile House with an introduction to the history of the Zoo's buildings and landscapes and continued outside with a walk to look at architectural details of several early buildings, including the Reptile House (Albert L. Harris, 1931, with polychrome concrete decoration by John Joseph Early); the current Small Mammal House (Edwin Hill Clark, 1937); and the original Small Mammal House, now the Think Tank (Hornblower & Marshall, 1906); as well as the Great Ape House (designed by Cleveland Park's own Winthrop Faulkner, 1980). Next time you're at the Zoo, take a close look at the amazing polychrome concrete decoration on the Reptile House's entrance. Spot the statues of small mammals on the roof of the Think Tank, indicating the building's original function as the first Small Mammal House, and



Left: John Thomann, an architect at Gensler who volunteers with the Zoo, introducing its historic architecture inside the Reptile House. The building's original doors have been saved and rehung at the entrance to an interior room.

Right: Polychrome concrete by John Joseph Earley on the portico of the Zoo's Reptile House.

the areas of blue glass tile, which were designed to let light into the interior.



(CPHS events, continued from previous page)

#### Students See Cleveland Park in a New Light

By Eileen B. Langholtz, Enrichment Coordinator, Eaton Elementary

Last fall, Eaton Elementary students learned to see the streets around their school with new eyes. First, third graders gained an understanding of the neighborhood's development from the video "Cleveland Park: No Two Houses the Same," produced by students from American University's Public History Program, under the direction AU professor and CPHS member Malgorzata Rymsza-Pawlowska. (See the videos at clevelandparkhistoricalsociety.org/videos.) Next, the three classes each got an afternoon tour from CPHS Executive Director Carin Ruff, who pointed out early Cleveland Park house styles along Macomb Street, including one property



created from a Sears Kit. Dr. Ruff focused in particular on window, door, and porch design, and students were then charged to turn detective and point out similarities and differences between a variety of the street's homes. The activity got them examining the streetscape many of them regularly use, but rarely "see."

The program was part of Eaton third graders' study of Washington, DC history, which also included researching and visiting federal memorials and monuments.

#### **Bringing Wikipedia to Our Neighborhood**

#### By Nick Netchvolodoff

In November 2018, CPHS hosted a Cleveland Park Wikipedia Edit-A-Thon. During the three-hour session, Ariel Cetrone of Wikimedia DC, the regional outreach organization for Wikipedia and the other projects of the Wikimedia Foundation, taught approximately 15 local residents how to create and update Wikipedia pages. The group updated entries for several locations of neighborhood interest including Tregaron (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tregaron\_Estate) and the I. M. Pei-designed William L. Slayton House (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William L. Slayton House).

Wikimedia DC created a page summarizing the event, along with resources for editors, which you can view at <a href="https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Meetup/DC/Cleveland\_Park\_Wikipedia\_Edit-a-thon">https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Meetup/DC/Cleveland\_Park\_Wikipedia\_Edit-a-thon</a>. That page contains how-to information, a list of Cleveland Park-related entries than need work, and bibliographical resources gathered for the event by CPHS.

We hope to schedule another edit-a-thon in the fall. Any aspiring editors interested in working on Cleveland Park-related pages should contact CPHS board member Nick Netchvolodoff at nnetchvolodoff@gmail.com.

#### The Sears Houses of Macomb Street

Local kit house expert Catarina Bannier reprised her popular tour of Cleveland Park's kit houses, this time focusing on the Sears houses on Macomb Street near Connecticut Avenue. The tour began with refreshments and an illustrated talk at the "gingerbread house" (a Sears "Barrington" model from 1928), the home of CPHS board member Julia Rogers. We then moved down the street to the four earliest Sears houses in DC, built in 1911 by developer Harry Kite using models he had seen at the Illinois State Fair, and saw the beautifully-preserved interior of one of them, the home of CPHS members Pete and Allen MacDonald.

In the DC area, it was typical for Sears and other kit houses to be put up in pairs or small groups by developers looking for economical ways to build on infill lots—though there are also a few examples of kit houses purchased directly from the catalogs by homeowners. To read more about DC-area kit houses, visit **dchousesmarts.com** and click on KIt Houses in the menu.

Above right: Catarina Bannier leading tourgoers across Macomb Street to look at DC's earliest Sears kit houses, 2937-2943 Macomb.

#### **Architectural History Lectures**

Two very popular lectures we offered this spring focused on architects important in the history of Cleveland Park who also had distinguished careers in the wider world of Washington architecture. Emily Eig of EHT Traceries talked about the career of Waddy Wood, who was one of the architects hired in the 1890s by the Cleveland Park Company to design unique houses for their new development. He went on to a distinguished career that included the Woodrow Wilson House and the Department of the Interior.



(CPHS events, continued from previous page)

Then in May, Caroline Mesrobian Hickman gave a talk about her grandfather, Mihran Mesrobian, architect of Sedgwick Gardens and

### **CPHS** Leadership News

#### From the Executive Director

Dear CPHS Members,

I will be stepping down as executive director effective June 30, 2019. It's eight years since I started with CPHS as staff person and four since I became executive director, a tenure that has overlapped with five board presidents. It's time for me to pursue other projects and for someone with new energy to help lead CPHS.

Working for CPHS has been everything I hoped it would be when Dick Jorgensen and Lois Orr hired me back in 2011. I have had a chance to learn how historic preservation works in DC at the city and neighborhood level; I've learned an enormous amount about the history of the neighborhood I grew up in and its experience with preservation since the 1980s; and I've loved serving as historical reference person for Cleveland Park. I'm happy to have been able to build and expand relationships between CPHS and DC's preservation, local history, and educational communities. Collaboration with the Tregaron Conservancy, the Rosedale Conservancy, the Art Deco Society of Washington, the Historical Society of Washington, DC, John Eaton School, and the American University Public History Program, as well as local and national experts in architectural and landscape history, have enriched our programming in recent years. CPHS's board and ARC members and neighborhood partners who support our year-round work, especially web designer Danna McCormick and administrator Meg House of the Cleveland Park Congregational Church, have made running the organization as easy as it could possibly be.

I hope you will continue to support CPHS by keeping up your membership and by volunteering to get involved in programs that interest you. If you have an idea for something CPHS could be doing, let the board know and then offer to get it started yourself. And tell new neighbors about their local historical society!

Carin Ruff

#### Annual Meeting 2019

The annual meeting of the CPHS membership will be Wednesday, June 19th at 7:30 pm at the Cleveland Park Congregational Church. All members are invited. The speaker will be David Maloney, State Historic Preservation Officer for the District of Columbia, who will speak on "New Initiatives in DC Preservation Planning."

#### Nominees for the 2019-2020 Board of Directors

New board members are proposed each spring by a nominating committee of the board. The slate of nominees is elected by the membership at the annual meeting. Board members serve a three-year term, after which they may be reelected for one additional consecutive three-year term.

Former board members are eligible be reelected to the board after an absence of three years.

#### The current board members are:

Leila Afzal, Secretary Shaun Jones
Hadley Debevoise Allen Roberta Mathews
Myra Best Rick Nash, President

John Chelen Nick Netchvolodoff, Vice-President Polly Ghazi Shannon Penberthy, Treasurer

Mike Goldstein Raina Regan Christine Hobbs Julia Rogers Stefan Hurray Frank Swain

Stefan Hurray and Nick Netchvolodoff are ending their second terms this month and retiring from the board.

#### The nominees for the 2019-2020 board are:

For a new three-year term:

**Karen Davis**, Connecticut Avenue **Saveria Emblad**, 30th Street **Vicky Marchand**, Rodman Street

Ron Ngiam, 34th Street

**Lois Orr,** 34th Street (for a new term after three years off since her last service on the board)

For a second three-year term:

Christine Hobbs, Norton Place Shaun Jones, Newark Street Shannon Penberthy, Porter Street Frank Swain, Newark Street

Read biographies of the nominees on our website, **clevelandparkhistoricalsociety.org**.

#### The Architectural Review Committee

Win Brown David Kay
Ana Evans Tina Mead
Phil Eagleburger, Co-Chair Ron Ngiam
Christine Hobbs, Co-Chair Lois Orr
Stefan Hurray Anne Weir

Danny Ince

Contact: For ARC-related business in summer 2019, email Christine Hobbs, chobbswashington@gmail.com.

The ARC consists of eleven CPHS members, including several current and former board members, who have interests and professional expertise in architecture, preservation, and allied fields. New ARC members are proposed by the ARC chairs and confirmed by the Board. The ARC meets on the second Monday of every month except August to review Cleveland Park projects that are slated to come before the Historic Preservation Review Board. If you would be interested in serving on the ARC next time an opening occurs, contact ARC Co-Chair Christine Hobbs or any of the ARC members.

VOICES - SPRING 2019 5

### **Neighborhood Preservation News**

#### In the Works: A Main Street for Cleveland Park?

By Susie Taylor

The volunteer team striving to revitalize the commercial area of Connecticut Avenue in Cleveland Park intends to apply for a grant through the DC Main Streets Program (dslbd.dc.gov/service/DCMS). They hope to join the other 16 Main Street organizations throughout DC.

The organizing team behind this effort is a group of volunteers operating under the auspices of the Cleveland Park Business Association (CPBA, a 501c3 organization). There is broad-based community support for a Main Street application including from the Cleveland Park Historical Society (CPHS), the Cleveland Park Citizens Association (CPCA), our three ANC commissioners whose SMDs include Connecticut Avenue, and Council Member Mary Cheh, who has included funding for the project in next year's budget.

Concerns about the Connecticut Avenue corridor peaked in Spring 2017 following in rapid succession the closing of several businesses and two beloved restaurants. These concerns led to the formation of four committees to support the commercial corridor: Economic Vitality, Streetscape, Resources, and Promotions and Marketing. These committees have engaged community residents in projects for the last year and a half and have made significant strides including:

- Created a new website (cpbiz.org).
- Produced the "Uptown Shuffle", a community-wide dance party that was extremely well attended.
- Organized the seasonal community farmers' market and holiday artisans' market.
- Conducted survey affording a detailed understanding of demographic, market, and infrastructure influences on the economic condition of our local businesses.
- Arranged for family-friendly movies on Saturday and Sunday mornings at the Uptown theater.
- Held marketing workshops for our merchants, and coordinated with other organizations to produce events in the community, including the new speaker series and the re-opening of the Cleveland Park Library.
- Worked closely with DDOT to successfully complete plans for a transformative streetscape project.

It is clear, however, that the volunteers need reliable leadership structure to move forward. After substantial research and discussions, the team believes the best way to achieve this is through the DC Main Street program. CPHS has been an active participant and strongly supports the effort. Next steps are to meet with the Interim Deputy Mayor for Greater Economic Opportunity, obtain letters of support from Council Member Cheh, and hold discussions with the Executive Directors of the Woodley Park and Van Ness Main Street organizations.

#### **Cleveland Park's Historic District Boundary Signs**

By Leila Afzal

Historic districts in DC, including Dupont Circle and Woodley Park, are typically graced with city-designed signs that announce their boundaries. After investigating why this was not the case for our own Cleveland Park, CPHS Board member Leila Afzal learned that the District's Department of Transportation had 12 signs ready in a drawer, with no timing for installation. Following much cajoling on her part, DDOT agreed to install seven signs on Connecticut Avenue, and put up the remainder once the community reached consensus on their placement. In fall 2018, the CPHS Board unanimously agreed on the best locations for the signs around the neighborhood. Both the ANC and the DC Office of Planning's Historic Preservation Office have now approved our recommendations, and DDOT confirmed to Ms. Afzal that the signs will go up this year as part of the Connecticut Avenue beautification project.

#### **Reporting Illegal Construction or Demolition**

There have been several instances recently of contractors exceeding the scope of their permits or doing unpermitted work on Cleveland Park Historic District properties, and one egregious incident this year of substantial illegal demolition of a house on Porter Street. The Porter Street house is to be rebuilt as it was before demolition, as required by the historic preservation law.

If you see suspected illegal construction during business hours, call 202-442-STOP (7867) to make a report to a DCRA (Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs) inspector, and also call the DC Historic Preservation Office (HPO) enforcement officer, Toni Cherry, at 202-442-8844. Outside business hours, call 311 to be connected to an on-call inspector. Please also let us and your ANC Commissioner know.

You can check the status of permits for any address by visiting **eservices.dcra.dc.gov/obpat/default.aspx** (or Google "DCRA permit status").

In the historic district, any work that requires a permit requires clearance from HPO staff before the permit is issued in order to ensure that character-defining features of historic properties are preserved. The review process for relatively minor work like fences and hardscaping or replacing windows, doors, siding, and roofs is straightforward and does not require coming to ARC, ANC, or HPRB meetings. Painting is not covered by the historic preservation law unless the property is an individual landmark in masonry that has never been painted before. Contact HPO staff for guidance on what can be approved and the application procedures. The general number for the office is (202) 442-7600 and Steve Callcott, HPO staff reviewer for Cleveland Park projects, can be reached at (202) 741-5247 or steve.callcott@dc.gov. For a complete guide to the design review process, visit clevelandparkhistoricalsociety.org/preservation-design-review.

### **Oral History: George Idelson**



George Idelson, now in his 90s, has lived in Washington since 1950 and in Cleveland Park since 1967. He has a long history of leadership in community organizations, particularly on preservation issues. In this oral history conducted in November 2017 by CPHS oral history committee chair **Abigail Porter**, George reflects on what's

Photo of George Idelson from the Committee of 100 on the Federal City 2017 Vision Awards

changed and what hasn't over fifty years in Cleveland Park. Here are some excerpts. Read the whole interview at **clevelandparkhistoricalsociety.org/oral-histories** and look for new interviews in the series coming soon to that page.

#### AP: When did you buy your house?

GI: We bought our house in 1967. The owner had worked for a Congressman who had been defeated. We were at that time living in the Foxhall-Reservoir area, very close to the river and very much in the flight path of National Airport. My wife is particularly sensitive to noise and it became a matter of some concern to do something about it. Well, we did try to do something about it, to help organize an activist group called the Committee Against National. And we had some successes. But you don't readily change the flight path of the airplanes, not with Congressmen flying home on weekends. We finally decided that we had to move.

#### AP: Had you seen a house that you liked?

GI: No, but I would have liked to have built one. My idea was to find a house with an empty lot, move in temporarily, get away from the airplanes, and build a modern, no-maintenance house. Cleveland Park was particularly appealing because it really wasn't on the flight path, and close to our jobs downtown. And we loved the feeling of living in a village in the city. We never did find such a lot. Houses were very hard to come by in Cleveland Park at the time. You didn't see signs out front that said "For Sale." If you moved into Cleveland Park, it was usually because somebody told you about it. And indeed we were wandering around in the neighborhood and struck up a conversation with somebody across the street who was out tending his garden. We told him we were looking and he said, "Well that house across the street is going to go up for sale. But they haven't given it to the agent yet. And you know if you buy it now you might get it a little bit cheaper." So we did. We walked up the stairs. To me it seemed very Victorian looking, and certainly not the modern no-maintenance house I had in mind. Big, probably bigger than I imagined we would want. But we bought it.

#### AP: Do you remember what you paid for it?

GI: Yeah, sixty-six thousand, and later thought maybe we'd offered too high a price. I don't feel that way today (laughs) but... and we've come to love it. I don't really think of it as Victorian any more. Queen Anne is probably a better description. Many people see it as one of the prettiest houses in Cleveland Park. That's helped by my wife's ideas about how it should be painted and cared for, and her garden that she tends so arduously. It does have a lot of steps, but we decided that if we age in place in Cleveland Park those steps would either make or break us. I'm not sure which it'll turn out to be but we're certainly aging in place at the moment.

#### AP: And can you think back and describe what your neighborhood was like when you moved here? Has it changed much?

GI: Well, I've always thought of Cleveland Park as sort of an intellectual neighborhood, certainly a liberal neighborhood. And in those days people took care of their own gardens and they cut their own grass — things like that. Now they hire people to do that. Evelyn

is still the gardener, but we are older now and we need help. So that's that's a big difference. People who move in today are moving into a much more expensive neighborhood. You know a lot of us old timers say we couldn't afford to move into this neighborhood now.

But Cleveland Park hasn't changed all that much. Many of the things that made it attractive and appealing still make it attractive and appealing. And part of that is because in 1986 we became an historic district, which was a way to protect its historicity and to give us a voice in the kind of development that could take place here. Even so, we've had our share of development controversies. It helps to have lawyers.

#### AP: How did you get into advocacy?

(Continues next page)

#### (George Idelson oral history excerpts, continued from previous page)

GI: It actually started at a CPCA meeting. Pete MacDonald got up and said there would be a protest on Capitol Hill against the design of the proposed World War II Memorial. This was around the year 2000. I am a World War II veteran – fought in the Battle of the Bulge – and thought that the design and location were wrong. When I got there, the media picked up on my remarks and I had my fifteen minutes of fame on national and local media. The woman who organized the protest was Judy Scott Feldman, an art historian with a special interest in the National Mall. Judy started up an advocacy group called the National Coalition to Save Our Mall (now the National Mall Coalition) and invited me to join. I have been an active board member ever since.

#### AP: What wasn't right about it?

GI: Well it was in the wrong place and the wrong design. It was to be on the on pool in front of the Lincoln Memorial and looked like it belonged in Arlington Cemetery. Compared to the Vietnam Memorial it totally lacked emotional impact. Incidentally, my work on the Memorial drew the attention of Isabel Furlong, retiring president of the Cleveland Park Citizens Association. I was asked to run for the office and the rest is history.

#### AP: So that's when you took over as President?

GI: Yeah, and that's when the Giant development issue was bubbling up. There was also another interesting development issue that was brewing at that time. A 13-acre property on Macomb Street west of Connecticut Avenue was owned by an Israeli developer who wanted to erect a hillside "village" of 100 to 200 homes. Macomb Street is barely passable now, and the thought of a huge new development really roused the community. The property, a woodland estate with trails and streams, had been owned by families going back to Alexander Graham Bell. The property was kind of a neighborhood treasure and a group called the "Friends of Tregaron" had been fighting to stop development there for years. Eventually their efforts succeeded, Tregaron was landmarked and the developer could no longer build on it. As part of a final deal, he donated some of the land for what is now a 13-acre Conservancy. I wasn't particularly involved in this fight, but as President of the Citizens Association I was added to the Conservancy board. I am still on the board and now actively involved.

#### AP: What time period was that? 80s, 90s?

GI: I was president between 2002 and 2009. The Conservancy was formed in 2006. To restore the property, it has to raise money, and they are doing a great job. People need to be reminded that this beautiful property, with trails and gardens open to the public, could have been a hundred or more houses.

#### AP: Were you involved at all in the Rosedale issue?

GI: The Association supported the efforts to protect Rosedale, but I was not personally involved. But that's another example of how neighbors fight to preserve a beautiful, historic property from overdevelopment. So, if you wondered what this would be like a hundred years from now, you might say, "Well, maybe not all that different."

### AP: So can you articulate—I think you have, but maybe more precisely—what it is you love about the neighborhood? Even going back to what brought you here?

GI: I just love the people. I love the quiet countrified look. It's just different. I love the fact that it's so close to downtown. That you can indeed walk to stores, the library and the post office. We live on a steep hill here on the top of Newark Street and it's not so easy for me to do it, but my cardiologist says I should walk. So I use errands on Connecticut Avenue as an occasion to do that.

And we now have a farmers market on Saturdays, which is another reason to go down. We love our little shopping center, but it's important that we patronize it if we want it to thrive.

#### 2019 MEMBERSHIP

Join or renew online at **ClevelandParkHistoricalSociety.org/Membership** or complete the following form and send it with a check payable to C.P.H.S. to:

CLEVELAND PARK HISTORICAL SOCIETY, P.O. BOX 4862, WASHINGTON, D.C. 20008

Name(s):				
Address:				
Phone:				
Email:				
	<b>Note!</b> Please be sure we have your current email address so that you do not miss important announcements. We will not spam you with too many emails, but we are now conducting most of our routine communication electronically, which saves us money and allows your membership dollars to go further.			
Membership I	level:			
	○ \$35 Apartment Re	sident 🔾 \$	50 Single-family Household	
	○ \$100 Sponsor	○ \$250 Patro	on \$500 Angel	
				Total enclosed: \$

All levels give membership benefits to everyone in the household. CPHS is a member-supported, 501c3 not-for-profit organization. Membership dues are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law. Members receive discounts and priority registration for public events,

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Want to keep track of preservation news in Cleveland Park and all around DC? We post news of preservation and DC history events on Facebook.com/ClevelandParkHistory.

## Planning work on your home in the Cleveland Park Historic District?

Owners of homes and other buildings in the Cleveland Park Historic District share responsibility for helping preserve the historic fabric of the neighborhood, the properties themselves and their relationship to the whole streetscape and natural environment.

Visit our website, ClevelandParkHistoricalSociety.org, for guidance on the design review in Cleveland Park and the permitting process in DC.

invitations to member-only tours, and discounts on event fees, house markers, and CPHS publications. Thank you for your

# Upcoming Architectural Review Committee Meetings

June 10th July 8th September 9th

All ARC meetings are held the second Monday of the month at 7:30 pm at the Cleveland Park Congregational Church, 3400 Lowell Street, NW. The ARC reviews projects in an advisory capacity before the projects are heard at the DC Historic Preservation Review Board monthly meeting. Note that the ARC does not meet in August (and neither does the HPRB). If you are planning major work on your home next fall, you may wish to start the preservation review process in time for the July ARC meeting.

To request a place on the agenda for the July or September ARC meetings, email ARC co-chair Christine Hobbs at <a href="mailto:chobbswashington@gmail.com">chobbswashington@gmail.com</a>.

CLEVELAND PARK HISTORICAL SOCIETY P.O. BOX 4862 WASHINGTON, D.C. 20008

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VOICES SPRING 2019

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Interview with Clare Tighe, Master Gardener
Historic Architecture of the National Zoo
Wikipedia Edit-a-thon • Sears Houses of Macomb Street
Architecture Lectures • Humanities Truck Exhibit
CPHS Board Nominees & Executive Director News
Main Street Update • Historic District Signage
George Idelson Oral History