
Looking Back on Capitol Hill

By Nancy Metzger

On Sunday, April 10, the Capitol Hill Presbyterian Church at 4th and Independence Avenue, SE, will begin the run-up to its 2014 Sesquicentennial celebration with a special worship service at 11:00 am. Everyone is, of course, invited (see <http://capitolhillpreschurch150.org> for more details). This seems like an appropriate time to look back at the beginning years of the church for a glimpse at Capitol Hill and its residents during the Civil War years.

At the dedication in February 1865 of a small frame chapel, the Daily National Intelligencer reported that the new chapel was "the only Presbyterian church organization in the section of the city including the Capitol and the navy yard, comprising more than a third of the territory of the city and with a population amounting to at least 15,000 people." The chapel was built on land purchased by the congregation during their first year, under the leadership of the pastor, Rev. John Chester. The article notes: "The chapel is located on Fourth street east near Pennsylvania Avenue, is within two squares of the new and elegant public school edifice [Wallach School at the Hine site], which is so creditable to the public spirit of the city, about the same distance from the Capitol, and in the immediate neighborhood of the land purchased by a Philadelphia company, and upon which a large number of dwelling-houses are to be erected [likely referring to Philadelphia Row in the 100 block of 11th Street, SE]. These statements show the good sense which guided in selecting a location...." The church lot measured 90' x 96' and was purchased for \$2,200; the frame chapel cost about \$4,000.

There is much more to the story of the Capitol Hill Presbyterian Church, which will be covered in another "Looking Back" but this is a good time to introduce Mrs. Anna Hitz, a member of the congregation, and her life during the Civil War, which was recounted by Rev. Chester at her funeral service in 1883.

"Mrs. Hitz constitutes a historic figure in the annals of our nation. Her services to the sick in the hospitals, during the late war, have attracted such attention that her life is placed, among other women of national reputation, in the book entitled, *The Women of the War*." Rev. Chester went on to recount how Anna and her husband John came from Switzerland attempting to reestablish family fortunes, but first had to endure the deaths of three of their children soon after arriving in the US. At first they lived for a while in Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania County, where John was engaged in mining ventures. In 1853 John was appointed Consul General of Switzerland. The 1865 City Directory shows Anna Hitz, widow of John, living near Third and A Streets SE with other family members nearby. Son John Jr. also served as the Swiss Consul General.

Rev. Chester continues: "Civil war had in the meantime set in, and among the first women found busy in visiting the sick and wounded in the hospitals in this city was Mrs. Hitz. ... She did not, however, depend on the organized charities, but drew largely from her own funds. Among the troops which arrived in Washington just before the battle of Bull Run, were the 12th and 25th New York regiments. They were quartered on Capitol Hill near Mrs. Hitz's home. They arrived wet and weary, their commissary department

in an inadequate condition to supply their immediate wants. Mrs. Hitz at once went to work to supply them; stripping her house of all the eatables it contained, calling in help from her neighbors, fitting up large boilers to give them a warm drink of coffee, and adding to it what 'The Boys in Blue' well appreciated, kind words of greeting and encouragement from her motherly lips...I myself, remember in 1865 seeing a regiment halt in front of her house, as they passed through the city, and she at once emptied every eatable she could lay hold of into their hands, taking even the preserves from her pantry and the dinner from her table."★

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