

the BULLDOZER

and the

Rose



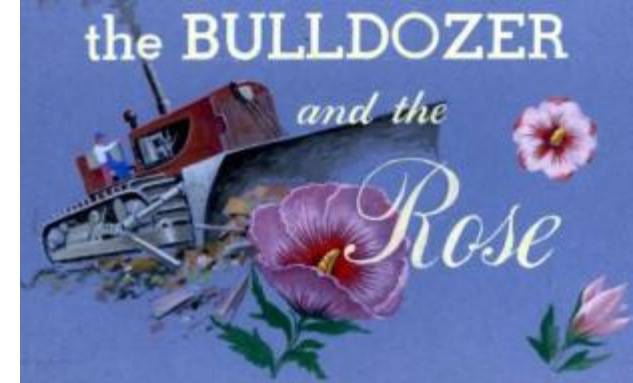
Recreated by the Historical Society of Washington, DC from Garnet W. Jex's Slide Presentation about Southwest Washington.

Introduction

It has always been interesting to come back to Southwest Washington and see the great changes that have taken place since I first knew it since the 1920's when I worked at the old Army Medical Museum, and then again, beginning in 1948, when our Public Health Service Graphics Section was moved to H E W's South Building.

My work has been in the graphic arts field all these years. I'm a weekend and vacation landscape painter, and have always carried along a camera.

For several years ,in putting on this Southwest show, I shared the time with my old P. H. S. friend, Dana Doten. His chief interest was in the sociological side, in city planning; and in his information job he's a master of the English language.



Before I retired in '62, our old Virginia car pool used to be greeted this way at the District end of the 14th street bridge. Then we'd cut across the Southwest to our parking space, and on foot dodge the traffic to our several buildings



For years I'd read about plans for "redeveloping" Southwest Washington, but nothing ever seemed to happen. Then it did

....

A fine old 1870 house, with its Mansard roof, near Virginia or Maryland Avenues, would be abandoned; then the wreckers got to it, and suddenly it was gone. "Gee, some of this stuff ought to be painted," I would say. But by the time a weekend rolled around, it would be too late,...

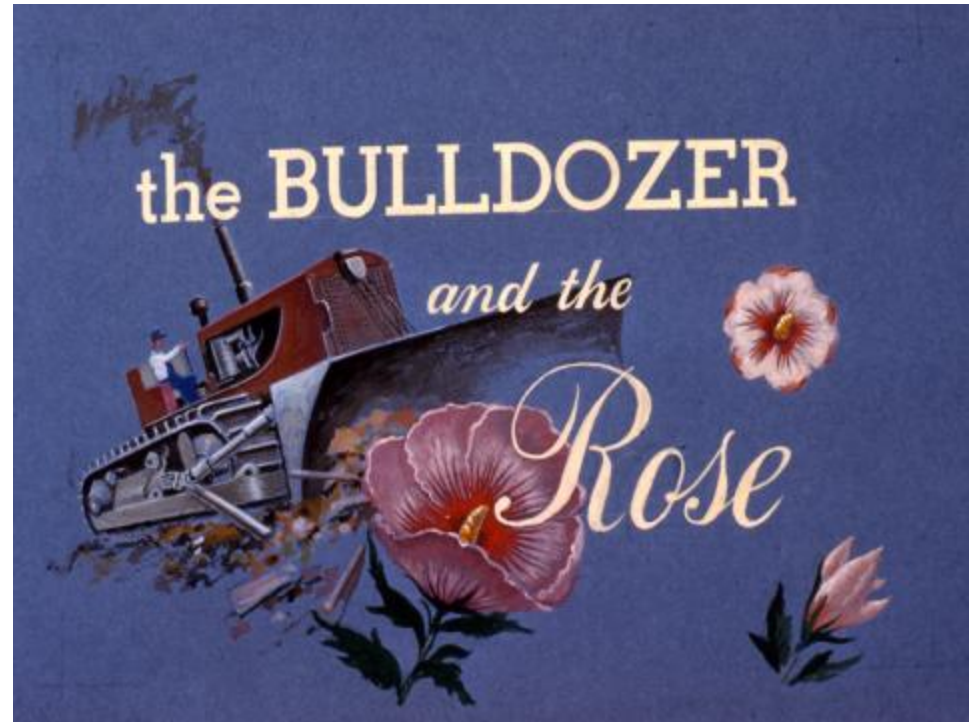


For only this was left—a pattern on an adjoining wall, and a scraggly little tree in front yard debris. These rectangles of color—our “playing card pattern” of wall-paper and paint— became a Southwest trademark.

After missing out on a few fine old houses, in early 1958 I began to use my trusty little camera, sometimes also during the week, and put together ideas for the history and other sketches.



As I got deeper into the project and its significance, a title suggested itself: the BULLDOZER could symbolize the destruction of old Southwest; and the ROSE, really the perennial shrub, the Rose of Sharon, that grew profusely in fenced-in front yards - could represent the human values, persistent human values, now so violently uprooted.



Then what a pleasure it was one day to bump into my friend Dana, also poking around, watching what happened to people, as the old town came down and the new one went up . . . in this so-called REDEVELOPMENT in Southwest Washington.



The Southwest Section is roughly one square mile in size, almost a triangle in shape. It is practically in the center of the Washington Metropolitan area; therefore it has geographical importance. No longer could it remain an economic “wasteland.”

Across its top runs the Mall, Uncle Sam’s “Front Yard.”





From the Capitol steps we look westward down the vast green “lawn” of this showplace.

Past the Washington
Monument in the
middle...





Tom Jefferson is just off the left...



And Abraham Lincoln presides over the west end. We're all very proud of Uncle Sam's "Front yard".



Close-by the Capitol is this fountain in the Botanic Garden which edges over into the Southwest, a delightful spot of color, BUT...

About as far away, as from home plate on a baseball field to the left-fielder's position, ANOTHER Southwest began: alley dwellings, poverty, outdoor privies ---two-thirds of old Southwest had outdoor privies...



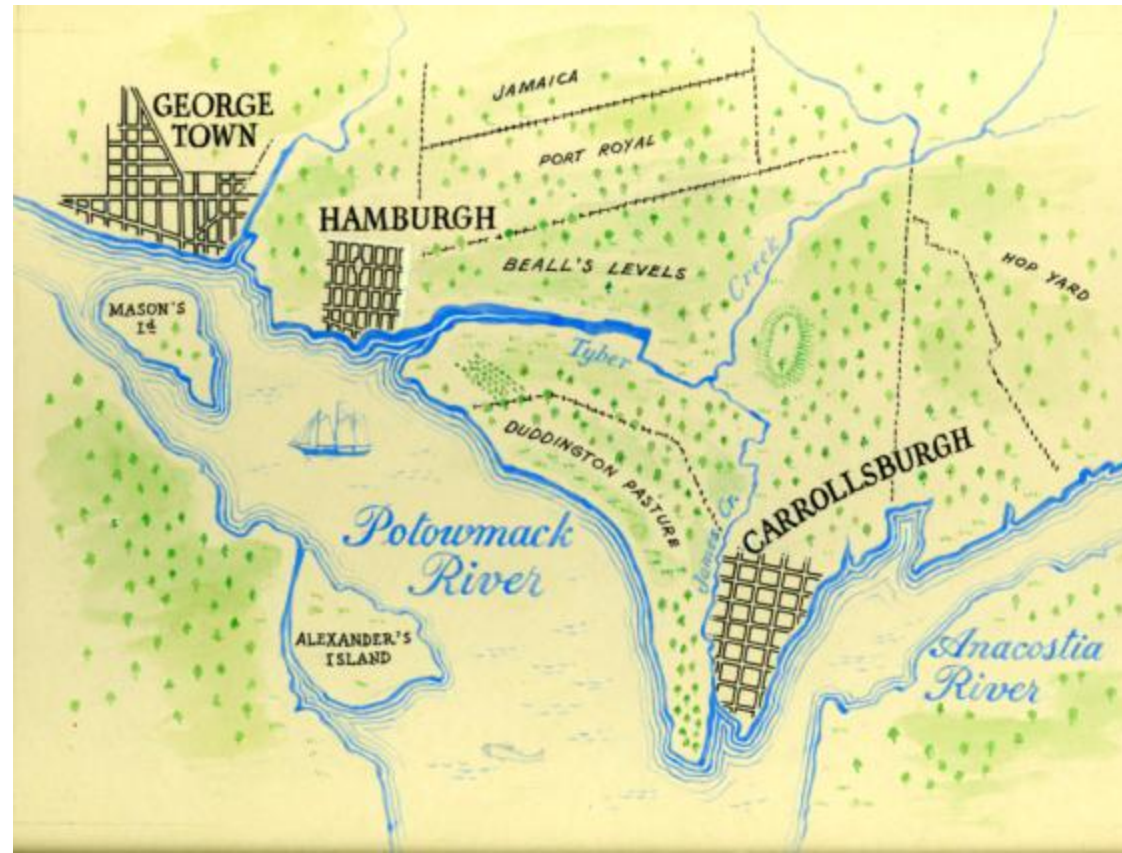


A wash hung out over a vacant lot; broken glass, weeds and stones...

Paint peeling from desolate little row houses, but our Rose of Sharon in full bloom. For years the press made much of this anomaly, but neither the City nor Congress seemed to care.



The story goes way back, before 1800. Georgetown is already thriving. Hamburg, in “Foggy Bottom”, is chiefly a real estate venture; Carrollsburg the same. “Jenkins Hill” rises where swampy Tyber Creek divided, the main stream going westward to the Potomac, while some of its water goes southward, back of “Duddington Pasture”, into James Creek and the confluence of the Potomac and the Anacostia. Thus the name “The Island”, for it was ringed by water.



And The Island it would be called by generations of Southwest people. From among them Alexander Shepherd became Governor of the District of Columbia, a different ruling set-up than now. The Noyes family founded the “Evening Star”. The late Charles Stanley White became a famous surgeon and a founder of D. C. Doctor’s Hospital; his brother also nicknamed “Doc”, a World Series pitching star for the old Chicago White Sox. The record goes on and on.



Some less adventurous people never left The Island, between cradle and grave. (Similarity, Cade’s Cove, Tenn., in the Great Smokies)

In the 1850's the bed of old Tiber Creek became an extension of the C & O. Canal. At the foot of Jenkins Hill, on which the new Capitol was under construction, one branch of the Canal followed James Creek to the Arsenal on the point; another to the Anacostia with its deeper water, where ships could dock.





Here's the view down the wide Potomac from Greenleaf Point, or Buzzards Point near-by; here Indian chiefs once powwowed, and L'Enfant's idea for a fort was carried out.

Fort McNair today.
“Generals’ Row”
across the green. Big
military names have
trained and lived here.
Tragedy recorded in
1814 (when the British
burned Washington);
again with a munitions
explosion during the
Civil War.



On April 18, 1861, five days after Fort Sumter fell, here is Colonel Robert E. Lee riding across Southwest's Long Bridge to his Arlington home, after declining command of the Union Army, offered to him by General Winfield Scott.



And in July 1865, within this building, once part of a penitentiary on the McNair campus, was held the trial of the conspirators in the Lincoln assassination plot. Four of them were hanged from a scaffold behind a fence about where the trees are now - - George Atzerodt, David Herold, Lewis Payne, and Mrs. Mary E. Surratt, all with hoods over their heads



This building, now demolished, on 7th Street just south of Independence Avenue, was on the site of Williams' slave pen, where slaves were bought and sold. On 8th Street a colored church was involved in helping slaves escape to the North by the Underground Railroad.



Right in the middle of the old Island, on the highest ground, is St. Dominic's, whose landmark spire used to dominate the skyline from far away, especially as you came across the River — and before being dwarfed now by cement and glass Government palaces.



Our city's history tied in with many old buildings. Multifamily "Wheat Row", on 4th Street near N, built in 1794 by a Supreme Court Justice, as a speculation, before the Government moved to Washington, planning to walk from his home here to Capitol Hill.



Now they've painted the lovely old red brick a shining cream to match the new stuff joined to it.

The 1796 Law-Lee house, near the waterfront: “Honeymoon House” for Martha Washington’s granddaughter, Elizabeth Parke Custis, and her English husband, Thomas Law. An uncle of Robert E. Lee lived here later.



All painted over now.

At the right, the Cranch-Duncanson House, which later became the Barney Settlement House; at the left, the Washington-Lewis House, where Ernie Pyle once lived.



In 1814 both were spared because British troops billeted in them. All four of these houses have been saved again by the strong appeal of local architects, especially the late L. Morris Leisenring whom many of us knew. RLA has worked them over, and joined them up with new construction beside them.



Like a Scottish castle — the old brownstone
Smithsonian, beside the Mall.



We guessed that maybe a Director once lived here, only a block away.



The wreckers got to it.



Near-by were solid brick row houses. Employees, no doubt, who could come home for lunch, and walk over to the city sometimes.

The wreckers got to them: — in the way of the proposed 10th Street Mall. Even the old Smithsonian castle was threatened. Sacrilege. Another new plan was to “beautify” it with a moat of water all around.



Comfortable 3-storey houses near the Agriculture Department. Owners had worked them over—Georgetown style; but they were evicted after appeals to court had failed.



How lovely these five pairs of row houses must have been when new, about 1870.

The two houses in each pair were linked together in design, and the pairs alternated - brick then frame. Note the pattern in the slate of the sloping roof, and the intricately modeled ornamentation about the windows.



Down they came, and I doubt if a single architect gave a damn, except a few sentimental old-timers.



What could present-day Georgetowners have done with these, so individual in design?

But all houses weren't architectural gems. In some areas, "little" people had modest places — a raft of kids, dogs and cats, and a few flowers behind fences.





Poverty and our Rose in the shadow of Federal “palaces”. That’s the G S A Building beyond; the H U D Building now fills the foreground.



Bubble gum and hollyhocks. Most any kid would pose for a dime

Living down under the gashouse; cobblestone streets, and the dog-pound not far away.





This kind of housing had to go!!... whether on designated city streets or in alleys that sometimes bore odd, “picturesque” names.



Too many people trying to live like this....

Here's the Congo in the foreground, a crude outdoor privy, and in the background---our own Department, dedicated to Health, Education and Welfare !!



Yet people try. Our “Madonna”
shot.(Emily’s)

A Philippino mother and her child
by an American soldier, making
the best of it in a house where
the D. C. Health Department put
on a demonstration in rat control.
Smart, fat rats didn’t wait for
demolition; they evacuated to
richer hunting grounds.



Cops were having a merry time. This touching episode would be dated about the time of World War I. Wars always brought in droves of people, mainly from the South, and over the Southwest's old Long Bridge.



By the 1950's the cops traveled in 2's and 3's, and in squad cars.

Yet a small beginning had already been made in “public housing” --like this modest on-the-spot type Jefferson Gardens-- under the far-sighted John Ihlder, during the Tugwell-Eleanor Roosevelt days in the 1930’s.

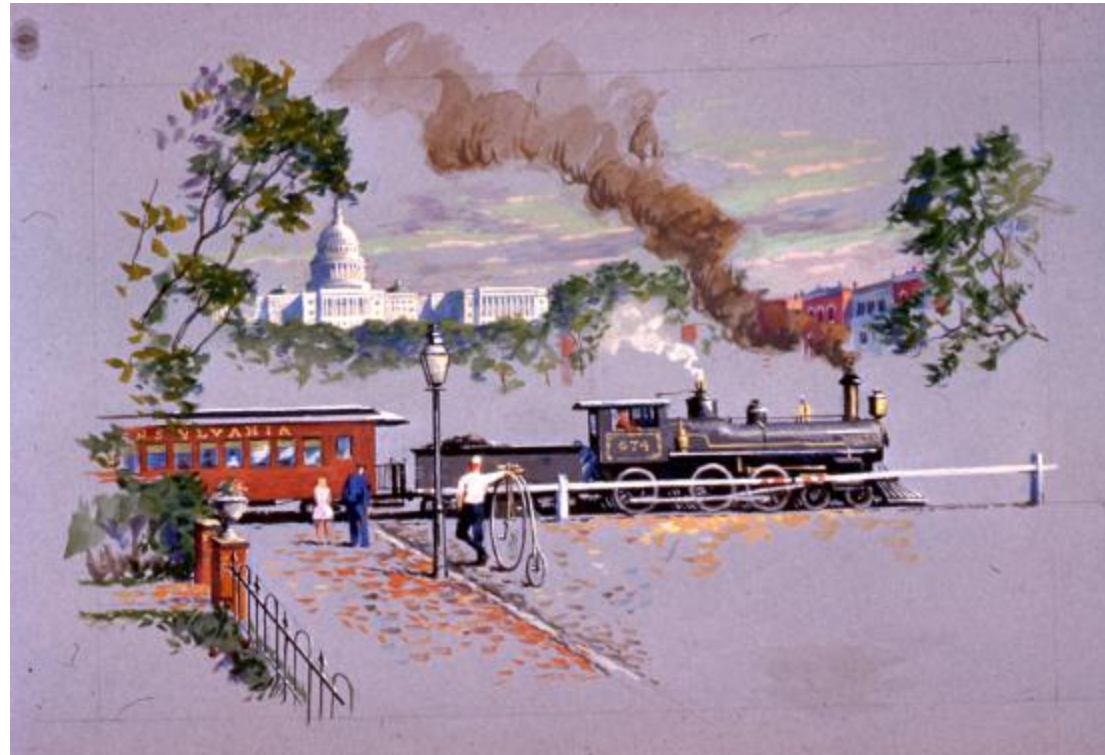
But it was in the way of the *Grand New Plan* of redeveloper William Zeckendorff and the Redevelopment Land Agency, who replaced it with a larger tract farther east.





Sure, neighborhood deterioration demanded renewal. But even more of a factor was the automobile, around which we seem to build this enlightened civilization of ours.

Railways had put the slow canals out of business. The name only, short “Canal” Street, near the Rayburn Building, is the last vestige. The B & O arrived before the Civil War; the Pennsy soon after, seen here crossing Maryland Avenue here at 6th Street, Southwest, after leaving its station where the National Gallery is now. A “nut” shot President Garfield there in 1881, his first year in office.



Among famous people who lived here on Maryland Avenue were “Gentleman Jimmie” LaFontaine, the gambling boss; and L. C. Handy, Matthew Brady’s son-in-law, who inherited much of the famous collection of historic photographs.

For once in the Railroad Era there was cooperation with Government. Senator McMillan, whose turn-of-the-Century Master plan, (actually reviving L’Enfant’s) made Washington a true Capital City, worked out a man-to-man-agreement with the president of the Pennsy to get the railroad off the Mall. Congress kept faith, sponsoring the Union Station.

The present track area lacks anything aesthetic, but maybe we can save the handsome Union Station.

Urban “rapid transit” followed -- the kind that did not pollute the air with carbon monoxide, and it made the sparrows happy.



Maybe we ought to bring the horse-cars back



Then came this little red monster; the dawn of our fast new world, with another brand of “cowboy” to disconcert “Old Dobbin”, and bewilder the stately dowager.

A lot of transportation history in this shot: former stables In an alley where — behind a fine house, on the street - lived the hired help and the horse, along with carriage, oats and hay. The horseshoer had his day, then the little alley garage.

Both are gone, replaced by the Super Service Station and the Auto Agency - where white coats stride about like Members of the House of Lords, or Roman Senators in togas



Little gas stations were all around. They survived early destruction, reminding me of the letter an old lady once wrote to a patent medicine company whose ad asked for testimonials:

“Dear Dr. So-and-So, after using 9 bottles of your famous “Cure” for the wart on my nose, my face is all gone, but the wart is still there.”

The old familiar features on the face of the Southwest did go, bit by bit, as demolition picked up speed, but the little gas station warts stayed on.



Southwest had two main business streets: Seventh street, its “Broadway”, where the car line ran from Uptown Washington to the Wharves...



And Fourth Street, its “Fifth Avenue”, with the same familiar little establishments -- the grocery, the hash house (serving more fish than hash), the pool room, the barber shop, the liquor store, the pawnbroker, and the undertaker -- caring for all human needs in life and in death.

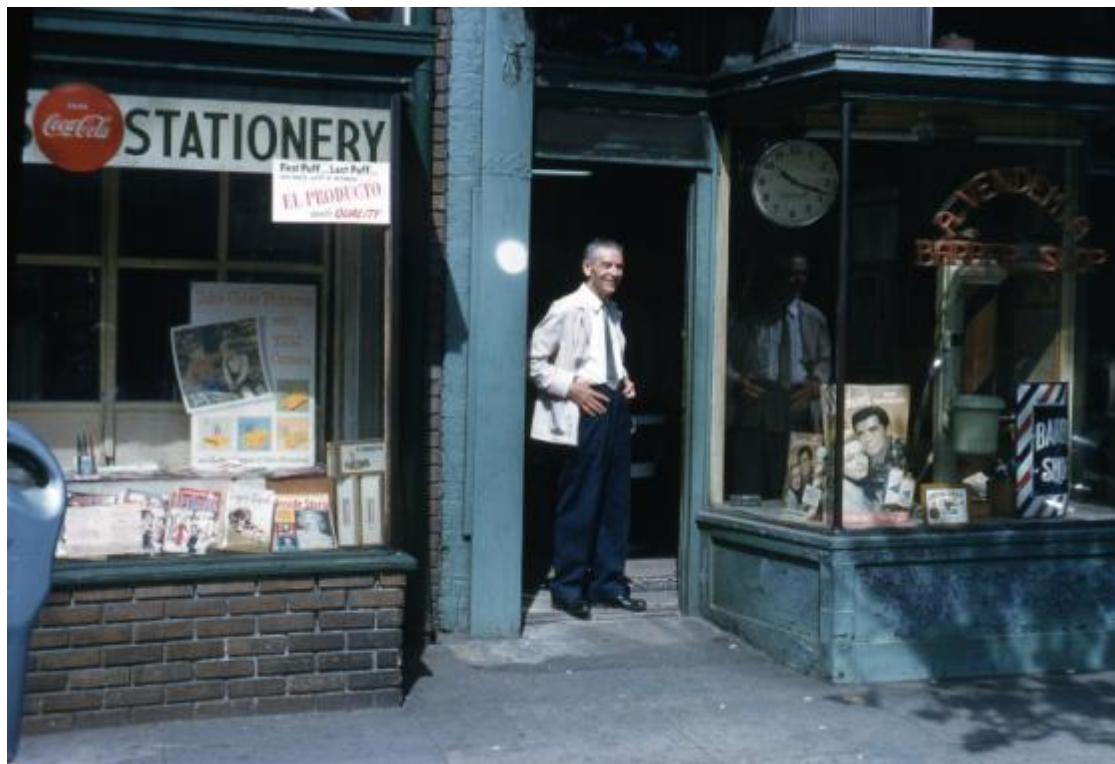




Here's the last corner grocery store to go; the owner's family lived upstairs; had credit "problems" with customers, but got along with them very well. Later on, the April 1968 riots burned out many little stores like this — in other parts or Washington.

Here's "Tony" the barber, who cut my hair in the mid-1920's, then again from 1948 until they tore his place down, the last in his block to go, EXCEPT the liquor store.

Then "Tony" cut hair in the Raleigh Hotel barber shop on "The Avenue". That's torn down now. He retired.





There were a number of well-built neighborhood schools.
Young kids in a mixed population seem to get along together, like kids most anywhere ---if parents keep away.

Churches of all denominations and sizes. Tabernacle Talmud Torah, on E Street near Fourth. Gone! Of a Southwest family, his father the cantor, Al Jolson as a boy sang here and at Hall's Restaurant, and became famous.





Church architecture in the Greek Revival manner. The congregation dispersed; a building supply company moved in for a while.



A store-front church facing the Maine Avenue waterfront. Little people are just as serious about their religion as cathedral goers, and probably sing better and louder.

Always had the waterfront been the economic base of the Southwest. Dredging deepened the Channel, and made East Potomac Park out of the mud. As a kid I had many a ride on the old excursion boat, “The Charles MacAllister”, to Mount Vernon, Marshall Hall, and River View.



Chesapeake Bay skipjacks and “bug-eyes” sailed in with fish in all seasons, and oysters, crabs and watermelons in their turn.

Generations of River people earned their living this way. Housewives from all Washington came —on foot, by trolley, and by car— to buy from the boatmen or from close-by markets. Many an artist and photographer found pictures here.



RLA has responded to the cries of anguish, and will let the boatmen stay.

The Waterfront Carillon Tower, over a motorboat section. A landmark built by the Norment family that operated the Norfolk and Washington Steamboat Line, now gone; but happy memories of those trips remain. The clock and the bells kept time, and gave a pleasant earful to the workers in “commission” markets, as they loaded trucks with fresh vegetables and meat.





The “Farmers’ Market” near-by. Baskets were carried home filled with fresh things from orchard, garden and chicken-house; and neighborhood kids always seemed to have fresh watermelon in season, acquired by whatever method. You name it!

Then, of course, the seafood restaurants. Two of the big ones, “Hogates” and the “Flagship”, -are still there. This is the bar at Hogates the oldest (1864), and most famous. General Grant came here; legislators argued, caucused and drank upstairs.



It had to move, down near old Buzzards’ Point, in a modern structure without “atmosphere”, but they did install the wonderful old bar intact, and the big life-size painting of the mysterious nude. Now a big new Government building stands on even this site, and they quit.



Somehow, little “Harrigan’s”, a couple of blocks inland, survived longer - putting on art shows inside, and in the little backyard. Best to have a couple of drinks before looking at the pictures

After the exodus empty row houses. Where did these people go? RLA had a big wall map; with pride, officials told where every family was relocated. Perhaps some questions could be asked: about readjustment heartbreaks, higher rent and purchase price, what effect on other neighborhoods, etc. A study, later on, had a very critical note.





Marked for destruction; no litigation pending; utilities disconnected.



Down comes a wall. Lucky to be along at this moment. A movie crew had set up for the shot.



It must have been fun to pitch stuff down from a second floor.



Some of the ruins were beautiful in color and form.....



Some had a gaunt stateliness.....



Our “playing-card” pattern — repeated and repeated.....



Especially beautiful with snow.....



A stairway was always the last part to go.



In the upper right is the Star Spangled banner, proudly waving over the wrecked house and a stairway banister down which a little boy slid happily many years ago.



You wondered why families had to hang on so long in all this wreckage ...'till legal technicalities were resolved - resolved by officials sitting at comfortable desks - before these poor people could be moved somewhere else.



The Waterfront Carillon and the storage warehouse came down one wintry day. The big crane, swinging the giant “pear”, banging away

The solid masonry of old
Jefferson Junior High
School was hard to
crumble.





The once handsome Baptist Church. Looks like Rotterdam after the Luftwaffe bombed it in 1939.

One of Washington's first apartment houses, near where the 7th Street railroad station used to be, where Virginians left commuter trains to walk or take trolley cars to their jobs.





The tedious scraping of old brick, which sold for much more than it cost. Maybe Government officials smuggled some home in heavy brief cases for their backyard garden walks.

I hope some appreciative soul bought this handsome old iron stairway and railing ... the lonesome last house in its Maryland Avenue block, where now stands a glass and cement office building.





A poor, brave, mutilated little Rose of Sharon, sticking up through wreckage



Scavengers came, with little hand-pulled, or horse-drawn, carts. Several old iron horse-troughs lingered to the end; gifts to the community long ago from a Ladies' Aid Society.



Fires came in their turn, to consume debris, and keep workers and onlookers warm.



Fire in a Springtime setting: a tree in bloom, a nice old iron picket fence, patterns of color on wrecked houses, and a trim young gal headed for the Agriculture Department.



Then that touch of finality: after the fire -the bulldozer, our other Southwest symbol, to clear away the debris and level the ground.

Lonely St. Dominic's had few local parishioners now; most were living over town. But the New Southwest brought people back.





It deserves a better fate: breathing space, a little park, or a “Place” in the European way. But hail to the car ,our King!



We like to call this our “Salisbury Cathedral View”, reminiscent of the painting by the Englishman, John Constable. June 1959, and weeds growing where little houses stood.

The following winter. Over Fourth Street the bridge for the Freeway has been completed





The next Spring. Still no new construction.



.... Except the Freeway.



Its piers going up over the Channel in cold and snow.



Stone piers and structural steel. In this picture business, we must learn to compose new forms and materials. How different from an old Currier and Ives print of a New England covered bridge!



At last, the open freeway. Limited access, fast time across the City, statistically safer, happy motorists; but it's like a saber scar across the face of Southwest Washington. Yet no doubt we need it.

Meanwhile the NEW
Southwest got under way.





Capitol Park Apartments over the rubble. Residents again can walk to work in near-by Federal Agencies -- if status, pride, and soft paunchiness permit such physical exertion.



So-called “Town Houses”. If it weren’t for their high price, we’d disrespectfully call them very plain-looking row houses. Maybe some little lady occupant will grow a geranium in a pot.



More and more apartments sprung up... more Town Houses. Some architect must have gotten an idea from an old airplane hangar -- or did he once see a Latin American hut made of scrap tin? How would you hang a picture on an upstairs curving wall?



The new Town Center: post office, bank, big Safeway and Peoples Drug, well-stocked liquor store, but yet no barber shop. “Tony” couldn’t have afforded the rent. And now we also have elegant L’Enfant Plaza, that monument to Progress.



The Arena Stage under construction – CULTURE! Good luck to it! And more apartments.



A limited area of “public housing”, for only a fraction of the displaced people. Neat, clean, and the kids seem happy. Also the rent is only a fraction of what it would be in a “Town House”.



Big Greenleaf Gardens, another public housing project.



I've been told there will probably be 8 or 10 churches in the new Southwest. This is the Lutheran at 3rd and M. Pointing upward, the spire and windows symbolize Man still aspiring to enter Heaven above.

Maybe space exploration has revised our old concepts of Heaven, and the Methodist congregation at 4th and I streets, judging by their V-shaped roof line, aspires to a warmer region in another direction.





And of course, the new Federal “palaces” End-to-end they flank the Mall, a giant, gleaming, white mass hemming in Uncle Sam’s green “Lawn”.

One day in '61, I saw these old Capital Transit street cars being hauled away on trailer trucks - sold to Czechoslovakia.



Mr. Chalk had stored dozens of them in a sort of graveyard across from his once fine old brick terminal near Ft. McNair, as smelly buses took over. He put up apartments, "Chalk Houses", on that site.

Then I saw this watermelon cart behind “public housing” where old Farmers’ Market customers now live. Note especially this white horse. District Building friends told me he’s Washington’s last working horse.



With him and the street cars — an era ends.

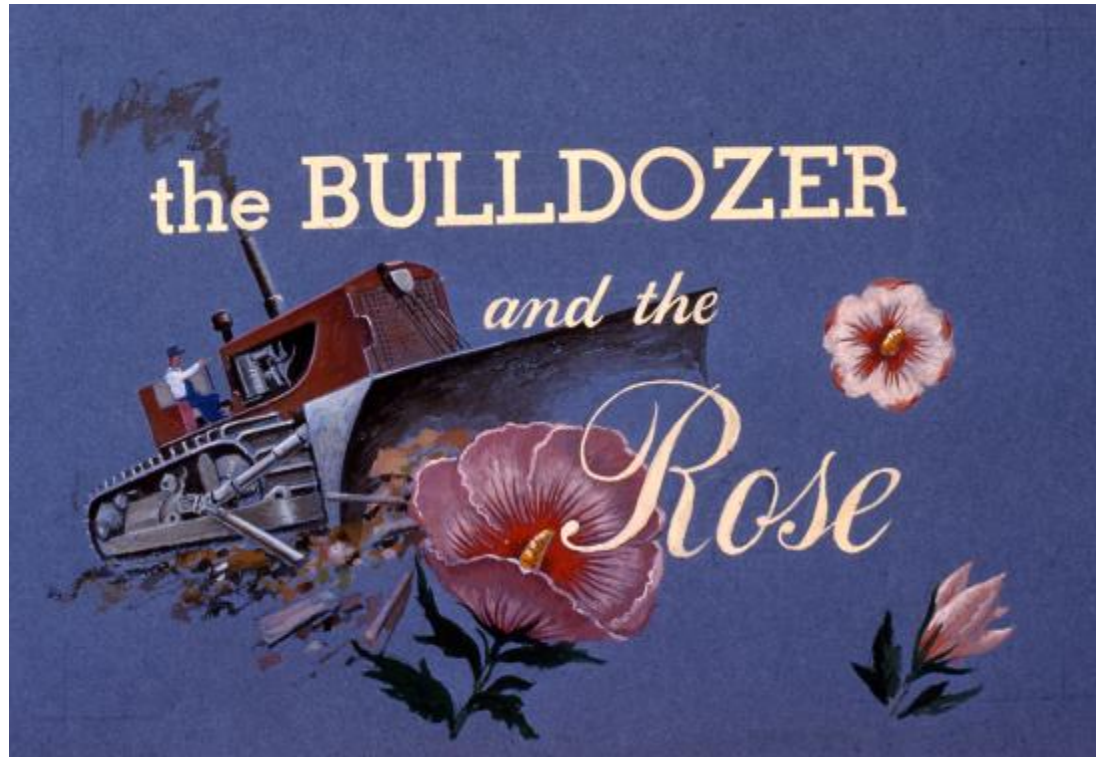


No longer can there be an old Southwest Irish lady tenderly caring for her flowers, bright flowers more important than a new coat of paint on her little frame house here beside an alley. She dug them up, and took them with her, when they made her leave.



And gone forever, I do believe, is our Rose of Sharon before a broken slum window in Southwest Washington.

But people are people, and it could sprout again where simple folks, in better housing, still have their little front yards, and like to see things grow --- unless the Planners and the Beautifiers, in the name of “Progress”, find a way to eliminate front yards.



Thank you.