

P NORTHWEST PASSAGES

THE PEOPLE AND PLACES OF NORTHWEST WASHINGTON

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Franklin's present belies past glory

By **KATIE PEARCE**
Current Staff Writer

After its most recent stint as a homeless shelter, the Franklin School at 13th and K streets NW now sits vacant and deteriorating as city leaders debate its future. But a few blocks away, at the Historical Society of Washington, D.C., a small exhibit offers a reminder of grander times.

The exhibit, organized by the Coalition for Franklin School, is part history lesson, part political advocacy.

"It's an attempt to tell the story of Franklin and the story of D.C. Public Schools," said Joseph Browne, chair of the coalition's steering committee. "But it's also the story of how we came to have so many surplus schools and what we've done with them."

Through text and old photos — along with a couple of signature pieces, like an intricate model of the school building — the exhibit

showcases Franklin's role in the history of D.C.'s education system. It also makes a case for preserving the building as a public resource.

Designed by prominent Washington architect Adolf Cluss, Franklin was built in the late 1860s to promote a public school system on the upswing.

"With Franklin, [the city was]

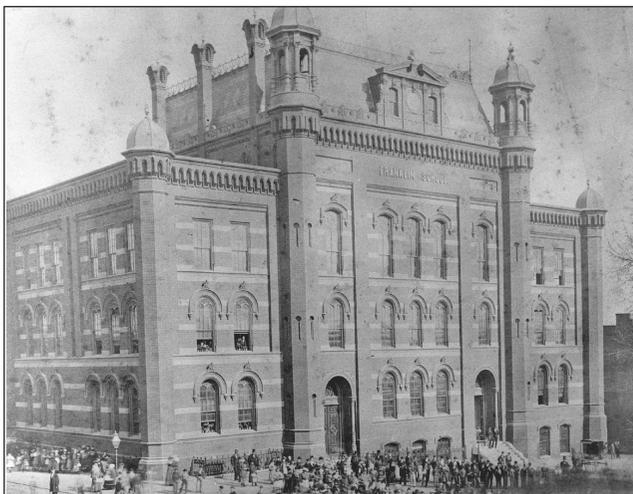
the public school system in Washington had featured one- or two-room buildings where students of all ages learned together. "The system failed to thrive," exhibit materials note. The free schools were viewed as charity or "pauper schools."

When Mayor Richard Wallach came in, he pumped funds toward school improvements, hoping to bring dignity to the system. In 1864, the Wallach School at Pennsylvania Avenue SE, between 7th and 8th streets, opened as the prototype for a new breed of public schools, combining several of the older, smaller schools under one roof.

The red-brick Franklin School, built downtown in 1869, took this model to the next level.

Franklin's distinctiveness was tied directly to its architecture. Cluss, who had also designed the Wallach School, mixed Renaissance style and modern technology in the new building.

"When it was built, there was



Courtesy of Sumner School Museum and Archives

Adolf Cluss' design for Franklin School in the District inspired many similar buildings across the country.

trying to make the statement that it was OK to go to public school," exhibit curator Lucinda Janke said in an interview.

For the first half of the 1800s,



Courtesy of Frances Benjamin Johnston collection, Library of Congress
The Franklin School was at the forefront of 19th-century educational innovations, including high school classes and coed school rooms.

nothing higher around it, and you could see it from many places in the city," Janke said. "It was meant to stand out and be attractive."

The three-and-a-half-story school, with 14 classrooms for 900 students, showcased groundbreaking features at the time like blackboards and a central auditorium. Students sat at individual desks rather than sharing long benches.

From its first day, Franklin succeeded in attracting notice.

Applications consistently exceeded capacity and the school drew students from the affluent neighbor-

hood around it, including the children of two presidents. Models of the award-winning building were sent to other states and countries.

Franklin's programs followed this trend of innovation. In 1873, the building made room for the Washington Normal School, the city's first professional training school for teachers. In 1876, Franklin offered the city's first high school classes. By 1890, the genders — previously separated — were joined in the classrooms.

The school building housed
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Volunteers give, get from animals

By **LINDA LOMBARDI**
Current Correspondent

When Bethany Meissner decided to try volunteering at the Washington Humane Society, it wasn't only because she felt sorry for poor homeless animals. "I had just moved to D.C., and I was bored and wasn't meeting enough people," she says.

Meissner got her start walking dogs and socializing cats, but in the past two years it's grown to much more. She's not only found a community of like-minded people and "discovered a real passion for animals," she says, but she's also found that it's not just the animals that feel the benefit of volunteering.

"If you have a bad day at work, when you walk into the shelter to take a dog for a walk, that dog is happy to see you," Meissner says. "It doesn't care about a mistake that you made or a typo that you missed."

Although a certain minimum time commitment is generally required, shelter volunteers come from all walks of life and all ages, including many busy people with high-profile careers, says Mary Jarvis, chief operations officer of the Washington Animal



Bill Petros/The Current

Washington Humane Society volunteer Breen Byrnes nestles Freeman in her arms during a pet adoption event at Open City.

Rescue League. "But they'll always take an hour or two a week — that's their pleasure time being with the animals," she says. "There's a lot of stressful jobs in the Washington area, and this is a good place to come and feel good about yourself."

But feeling good and helping animals isn't all there is to it — there are many opportunities to learn new skills and make use of your
See **Volunteers**/Page 35

Gleaning crews aim to feed hungry

By **TEKE WIGGIN**
Current Correspondent

"Go deep!" yells a girl in a white tank top as she chucks three ears of corn in rapid succession toward a man stooped over a crate behind a row of stalks.

The man springs upright, deftly grabbing each ear as it hurtles through the air. Laughing to himself, he snaps off the stalk butts and peels the thick outer husks. He begins to drop the ears into a crate lying at his feet but pauses and turns his head toward the girl.

"You're not checking these, Ashley!" he shouts.

Ashley shakes her head and prepares to launch another salvo, scooping up ears from the tilled soil and snapping off others from trimmed stalks.

On a sweltering Saturday, the two volunteers, along with about 30 others, are scouring Parker Farm's cornfields in Oak Grove, Va., to harvest leftover crops for the food-sal-

vaging program known as "Glean for the City."

Now in its second year, the program gleans crops from local farms in order to add large quantities of produce to the 5,000 food bags its Northwest-based parent organization, Bread for the City, provides to D.C.'s poor and needy each month.

Though Bread for the City collects canned goods and other non-perishable food items year-round, from July to November it focuses on the gleaning program, gathering different crops — ranging from broccoli to apples — at area farms.

The program organizes gleaning sessions on farm acreage that has just undergone harvest — furnishing vans and coordinators to

guide participants through crop fields. Last year, the program salvaged more than 50,000 pounds of fresh produce, according to Bread for the City spokesperson Greg Bloom, who said that figure should increase this year by at least 50 percent.

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Teke Wiggin/The Current

Volunteers at Parker Farm collected 3,000 pounds of corn on Saturday.

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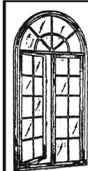
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BUSINESS

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practice has been able to address have included menopause-related issues, skin conditions, body pain, arthritis and digestive issues. "I never realized how many people were constipated," she said.

She works on these issues with a team of about 10 practitioners trained in areas ranging from herbology to colon hydrotherapy. The services available include massage, reflexology, bodywork, chakra balancing and magnetic therapy. Some patients come in for a particu-

lar service, while others simply present their concern and seek advice on how to treat it.

The institute does not deal directly with insurance companies, and costs vary depending on the service and the practitioner seen, but some of the staff members offer certain insurance-related discounts.

The Washington Institute for Natural Medicine, which moved in May from Connecticut Avenue, is now located at 5101 Wisconsin Ave. NW in Suite 100. Office hours are 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday and 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday, though many practitioners see patients outside those hours. For details, visit washingtonginstituteofnaturalmedicine.com.

VOLUNTEERS

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talents. Training is provided for working directly with the animals, but shelters are complex businesses where there's a lot to do in addition to walking dogs.

Kelly Manion, adoption events coordinator at the Washington Humane Society, says her organization needs people to do everything from making nice signs for animal cages to helping at special events, where there are sometimes a hundred volunteers performing tasks that can include setting up tables, tending bar and "poop patrol."

"It's kind of whatever you're interested in doing, we'll find a task that you'll be useful to us and you'll be entertained," Manion says.

Meissner has done a wide range of jobs at the shelter, from running off-site adoption events to updating adoptable animal listings on the web, some of which have benefited her outside the shelter as well. "I've been moving into social media in my job," she says. "Kelly welcomed the plan that I drew up, so I've gotten to practice things for my real job."

You can even volunteer for a shelter by staying at home: The Washington Animal Rescue League is particularly looking for volunteers to expand its foster program.

There are many reasons that even the best shelter may be a difficult place for certain animals — if they're very shy, need a lot of exercise, or are healing from injuries, for example. That's where foster homes come in. The rescue league provides vet care, food and equipment to fosters, says Jarvis. Foster volunteers "just have to open their home and be willing to take [the animal] to at least one adoption event a month."

Mary Ann Behme, who fosters dogs for the rescue league, calls it "an amazing process to be involved in." And in some ways it's not really much work if you already have pets, she says. "What's one more bowl of food to put down? What's one more head to pat?"

Behme's first foster was a puppy-mill rescue unaccustomed to living in a normal home. "She had learn to be a dog and not be afraid of people," she says. "It's amazing to see the transformation, and it's wonderful when they do find their forever home."

When people ask if it's sad to see a foster go, Behme tells them it's bittersweet, but "it's not a final goodbye by any means. All the families keep in touch and send pictures. And when you place a dog, you're going to be able to help another dog."

Meissner emphasizes the same. "People ask how I can volunteer knowing how I have to say good-

bye, but it's so [much] more rewarding than it is sad," she says.

Shelter volunteers can actively participate in the process of helping animals find homes at both shelters. At the rescue league, volunteers help conduct personality assessments in the "Meet Your Match" program, which helps adopters choose a pet that fits their family. And the Washington Humane Society is particularly looking for volunteers at the New York Avenue shelter to get to know the dogs and help show them to potential adopters.

The humane society is also especially looking for a few good men who'd have an easier time walking the larger, more energetic dogs. Events coordinator Manion notes a particular benefit that might attract the guys to step up.

"My volunteers are all gorgeous, attractive, caring women in their 20s and early 30s, and we have just one guy," she says. "Here is a great singles opportunity!"

To see volunteer opportunities at the Washington Humane Society and fill out an application, go to support.washhumane.org/.

To inquire about becoming a foster home for the Washington Animal Rescue League, go to warl.org/about-us/programs/volunteering/. Other volunteer programs at the rescue league will reopen to new applications on Oct. 1; watch its website for information.

FRANKLIN

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some administrative offices from the start, but in 1925 — by which time both the schoolchildren and the teachers-in-training had moved out — Franklin became the administrative headquarters of the D.C. school system for the next four decades.

When those offices eventually moved out, too, Franklin fell into near-vacancy. According to Janke, an adult education center operated in part of its space until a men's homeless shelter opened there in 2004. After almost five years of operation, the city shut the shelter down in 2008.

Over the years, the Franklin School has survived many threats of demolition.

Only about 10 percent of the architecture of Cluss — who is now best known as the designer of Eastern Market — has survived to this day, according to Janke. Most of his work, including several Washington school buildings, "suffered in the 20th century when Victorian architecture went out of style for a while," she said.

One other Cluss school does survive, though: the Charles Sumner School at 17th and M streets NW. Built in 1872 as a flagship for the city's African-American schools, Sumner's history closely followed Franklin's in a racially segregated school system. Today the building houses a small museum and the

archives of the D.C. Public Schools.

Meanwhile, the city is now discussing how to proceed with the Franklin School. Some past ideas — a 2005 plan for a boutique hotel, and more recently, three charter schools' attempts to take over the building — have failed. But the city requested new development ideas last fall.

The Coalition for Franklin School is one group that submitted a proposal. The group is advocating for the building to be retained for public, ideally educational, use.

The new exhibition, which remains at the Historical Society until Sept. 26, "was a thought the coalition came up with to draw attention to the Franklin School," said group chair Browne.

Browne said last week that "one of the most promising suggestions" for the property now seems to be as a new home for the University of the District of Columbia's law school. He noted that D.C. Council Chairman and mayoral candidate Vincent Gray agreed with that suggestion at a recent community meeting, although Browne predicted that the city will stall on a decision until after elections.

In the meantime, the coalition hopes to present the exhibition — which was funded by a number of local and federal sources — at other venues, such as the Wilson Building, when it leaves the Historical Society.

More information about the exhibit is available at the coalition's website at franklinschooldc.org.