

Snows Court and Hughes Mews: Quiet remnants of Foggy Bottom's raucous back alley past



By **Sonny Goldreich**
Special to the Examiner

When the District's Foggy Bottom Historic District was added to the National Register of Historic Places, it was hailed for the preservation of 19th century dwellings that were formerly home to working class Irish and German immigrants who labored nearby in breweries or the glass works and gas plant.

Rarely mentioned was the fact that the once low-rent sections of the northwest neighborhood were long infamous for saloons, squalor and segregation, especially the back-street areas of Snow's Court (between 24th and 25th Streets and K and I Streets) and Hughes Mews (between 25th and 26th Streets and K and I Streets). More recently, they served as student rental housing, with only the most Spartan updates.

These small homes stand today, saved by the 1987 creation of the historic district from the march of development that has wiped out most of old Foggy Bottom. They have one or two bedrooms each and offer a rare affordable single-family home option for buyers who are looking for something within a few blocks of the Metro.

"These places are selling for about the same as a one-or-two-bedroom condo," said Anslie Stokes, a realtor with McEneaney Associates, who has sold three homes on Snows Court recently, including one she owned. "For a condo, you might get 1970s renovations with dated kitchens and parquet floors. But here you get your

own home with outdoor space without any of the high condo fees."

The 40 or so historic homes in the two alleys, most of which date to the late 1800s, rarely come on the market. The most recent sale was an 800-square-foot home on Snows Court that fetched \$450,000 last year.

Houses selling in that range typically have had extensive renovations, including central air conditioning. They range in size from about 500 square feet to 800 square feet spread out over two levels. Some come with storage space in the basement, just room enough room to crouch over a washer and dryer.

Stokes, who bought her 528-square-foot house for \$207,000 right after graduating from next-door George Washington University in 2002, created a chic space by making numerous updates. She added a pedestal sink and black wall tiling in the bathroom and a custom kitchen with all new appliances and a dining island. The home had double pane windows throughout, wide-plank pine floors, and recessed lighting. But best of all, Stokes said, was the 10-foot-by11-foot private brick patio out back. She sold her home in 2006 for \$368,503.

Today, the descendants of emancipated slaves who made up as much as 90 percent of the neighborhood 100 years ago would no longer recognize the impoverished, crime-plagued alleys that Congress wanted to level to make room for parks.

"It's a little oasis," Stokes said. "It's such a private place in a great location, you would think somebody would have bought it up long ago and put up big high-rises."



At a glance

May 2008

- Average sold price for homes sold in zip code 20037: **\$533,818**
- Average list price for homes sold in zip code 20037: **\$554,771**
- Average days on market for homes sold: **73**

May 2007

- Average sold price for homes sold in zip code 20037: **\$583,148**
- Average list price for homes sold in zip code 20037: **\$613,752**
- Average days on market for homes sold: **81**

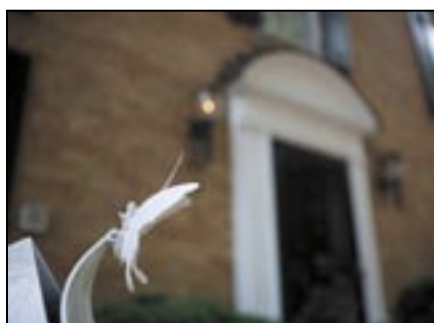




Top Reasons

to live in

Snows Court and Hughes Mews



LOCATION

Snows Court is only two blocks from the Blue and Orange Line Metro stop on the GW campus and Georgetown is a brisk 10-minute walk down K Street. You can also make your way by foot to the Kennedy Center, GW Hospital and shops and restaurants in the West End and along Pennsylvania Avenue.

PRIVACY

It is possible to hang out in this enclosed community and forget that there is a noisy car-choked city just beyond the brick paved walkways that

lead to surrounding streets. With its narrow alleys, nobody comes through this little pocket neighborhood to try to shorten their commute. "There is no traffic in these alleys," Stokes said. "Anyone who comes on Snows Court you know is a neighbor."

COFFEE CAPITAL

With caffeine-buzzed students and medical workers streaming out of the hospital and college buildings next door, the neighborhood is within reach of at least a dozen coffee shops. At one point, Starbucks had eight locations in or next to Foggy Bottom, with two directly across the street from each

other at GW's Marvin Center and Gelman Library Starbucks. The Marvin Center Starbucks closed last year but you can always fill your mug at the new campus all-you-can-eat cafe that displaced it.

GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY, THE FOGGY BOTTOM ASSOCIATION

The school's main campus has been a driving force in helping Foggy Bottom transform from an industrial slum to an upscale neighborhood. But its expansion and high-density urban real estate plays puts GW in constant conflict with the neighborhood

civic group, which formed in the 1950s as Foggy Bottom's preservation society. The FBA is vigilant against any moves that would encroach on neighbors' quality of life and it has been very effective in bending developers' plans (Trammell Crow paid the association \$2.4 million in 2004 to drop opposition to up-zoning to allow a mixed-use development that now includes condos and a Trader Joe's where the Columbia Hospital for Women once stood.) GW officials, in turn, usually have strong backing from city officials for real estate partnerships that bring housing and amenities to Foggy Bottom.