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## Gateway to Historic Capitol Hill

The gateway to the historic Capitol Hill neighborhood is distinguished by three of the most magnificent buildings in America: the Library of Congress, the Supreme Court, and Union Station.

### **Library of Congress—Thomas Jefferson Building**

*First Street and Independence Avenue, SE*

The stunning Thomas Jefferson Building, the first of the three Library of Congress structures on Capitol Hill, was completed in 1897. It is a brilliant fusion of literature and art, and a dramatic reminder of the nation's debt to past Western civilizations.

The exuberant Beaux-Arts architecture on the exterior is a prelude to a riot of mural decoration and sculptural figures on the interior extolling the progress of human knowledge. A mountain of gray New Hampshire granite was transformed by more than forty artists and craftsmen into a sacred depository of knowledge and creativity for future generations, and a symbol of late nineteenth-century American optimism. The Italian Renaissance-style building based on the Paris Opera House was designed by Washington architects John L. Smithmeyer and Paul J. Pelz.

With more than 126 million items, the Library of Congress ranks as the largest library in the world and the nation's oldest federal cultural institution.



## Supreme Court

*First and East Capitol Streets, NE*

Since its completion in 1935, the U.S. Supreme Court building—with its imposing entrance stairs, soaring columns, and sculptural pediment—has epitomized the American courthouse. Following a dictum laid down by Thomas Jefferson that federal architecture should be in the classical style of Greece and Rome, architect Cass Gilbert looked back to ancient Rome to create an iconic building reflecting democratic ideals.

The building is composed of three parts: a dominant temple of Roman derivation flanked by two wide horizontal wings. The entire composition is a carefully constructed procession beginning at the sidewalk where a visitor climbs a few low-rise stairs to a one hundred-foot-wide oval plaza, ascends a full-story staircase onto a portico with sixteen massive columns—an American variant of the Corinthian order—passing through imposing bronze doors into a colonnaded main hall that culminates at the far end in the dignified court chamber.

Throughout the route to the entrance, a visitor is surrounded by white Vermont marble with unusually high mica content, causing blinding reflections on sunny days. White glazed roof tiles add to the luminous appearance of the building.



## Union Station

*Columbus Circle at First Street and Massachusetts Avenue, NE*

“Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men’s blood . . .” said Daniel Burnham, the architect of Union Station and one of America’s most eminent Beaux-Arts architects.

To fulfill and expand Peter L’Enfant’s grand vision for the national Mall, Burnham was instrumental in persuading railroads to abandon their unsightly stations at the foot of Capitol Hill and build one station—Union Station—just north of the Capitol.

Begun in 1903, the grand Beaux-Arts building opened in 1907 as the largest railroad station in the world. Burnham combined two ancient architectural typologies to create the building: the triumphal arch and the public bath. The design is based on Rome’s Arch of Constantine and the Baths of Diocletian, with allegorical figures sculpted by Louis Saint-Gaudens that represent Fire, Electricity, Freedom, Imagination, Agriculture, and Mechanics. With the decline of railroad passenger service, the building was nearly lost, but in 1988 the station was restored to its former glory and reopened as a transportation hub and bustling retail center that serves not only as a destination for the millions of visitors who come to Washington each year but also as an exciting neighborhood watering hole for Hill residents.



**Sewall-Belmont House**  
*144 Constitution Avenue, NE*

One of the oldest houses on Capitol Hill, this Federal-style mansion was built by Maryland plantation owner Robert Sewall in 1800. Sewall rented the house to Albert Gallatin, secretary of the treasury under Jefferson and Madison, who lived there with his family from 1801 to 1813. On August 24, 1814, American flotillamen occupying the house fired on British troops invading Washington, and so the British set fire to the house, destroying the front two rooms before a thunderstorm doused the flames. Sewall rebuilt the house, and it remained in the family until 1922 when Senator Porter Dale of Vermont purchased and restored it.

In 1929, Dale sold the property to the National Woman's Party, and it has remained the organization's headquarters ever since. The party renamed the structure the Sewall-Belmont House to honor Alva Belmont, whose financial contribution enabled its purchase. The house also served as the residence of the party's legendary founder, Alice Paul, until her death in 1972.

The balanced three-bay facade retains its Federal-style detail and original Flemish bond walls. The mansard roof with three dormer windows was added in the late nineteenth century, and the exterior staircase dates from the early twentieth century.





*A peacock stained-glass fanlight was added to the entrance in the late nineteenth century.*



*Busts and portraits of the leaders of the American Woman's Suffrage Movement are the centerpieces of the entrance hall.*





*This was the desk of Susan B. Anthony, who drafted the nineteenth amendment to the Constitution.*



*A bust of suffragist Susan B. Anthony, done by longtime Hill resident and sculptor Adelaide Johnson, who also created the Portrait Monument statue of suffrage pioneers in the Capitol rotunda.*



*The main drawing room is the California Room in honor of Phoebe Hearst, whose son William Randolph Hearst donated the Victorian-era furniture. On the pedestal is a bust of suffragist Lucretia Mott by Adelaide Johnson.*

**Sparatt House**  
*421½ Sixth Street, SE*

Through the windows of this classic Federal-style house, two centuries of inhabitants have witnessed the transformation of pastoral Jenkins Hill into urban Capitol Hill. The house was completed in 1802 by Hugh Densley, a master plasterer who was one of the city's earliest craftsmen. In addition to working as a plasterer on the White House and the Capitol, he engaged in residential real estate development. Densley sold this finished house to Joseph Sparatt, the owner of a grocery store.

Despite more than two hundred years of shifts in architectural fashion, the house has steadfastly remained true to its origins. The simple doorway with arched fanlight above, Flemish bond brick, stone lintels with keystones, and gable roof with a dormer make it a fine example of a Federal-style townhouse. The original cast-iron hitching post remains at the front curb.

Densley also built the adjoining Carbery House, which was owned by Washington Mayor Thomas Carbery. The Carbery House, however, was dramatically changed from its original Federal style into the popular picturesque Victorian villa style in 1881 with the addition of a central tower and porch.





*An arched porch topped with a soaring tower virtually disguises the Federal-style origins of the Carbery House, also built by Hugh Densley, that adjoins the Sparatt House.*



*The interior remains largely intact except for this kitchen, which was moved from the basement to this former dining room. The dumbwaiter was in the far right corner.*



*A simple fanlight and wide-plank pine floors in the entrance hall help attest to the two hundred-year-old origins of the house.*



*Simple furnishings complement the chaste architecture and modest proportions of the rooms.*