

Wagner Roof Lines

A Quarterly
Newsletter

Wagner Roofing...between Washington and the weather since 1914

Spring 1994

Contractors restore the District's historic Franklin School

The future of a landmark hung in the balance. Demolition or renovation? The first would permanently remove the Benjamin Franklin School, one of the city's most historic education buildings; the other would prove costly and time consuming.

But thanks to support and lobbying from hundreds of concerned citizens, the imposing building located at 13th and K streets Northwest was saved from the wrecking ball. The narrow escape was made in 1977, but it wasn't until three years ago that restoration of the school began.

Built in 1869 and neglected for decades, the school's exterior was recently restored to its former glory. Wagner Roofing and other contractors worked for nearly a year to rebuild the dilapidated structure. For many of these contractors and craftsmen, it was the project of a lifetime--a chance to incorporate old and new, bringing to life a piece of Washington's architectural history (see box).

For Wagner Roofing the project also meant an opportunity to learn from the traditions of the original

artisans. Under the leadership of veteran metal man, Israel Shimberg, Wagner workers rebuilt the building's cupolas and replaced the slate and metal roofs.

When crews arrived at the Franklin School, it was in bad shape. Cupolas, bell towers and dormers had been removed. The slate roof was badly stained; metal corroded; wood trim rotted; and doors and windows deteriorated. Benjamin Franklin's heavy cast iron bust had been taken down and stored in the building after its supporting dormer deteriorated.

Using historical photographs and written descriptions, a team of researchers set out to determine the original construction materials and appearance of the building.

What stands today at 13th and K streets looks as close as possible to the structure completed in 1869. Quite an amazing feat considering the years of neglect and poor maintenance the building suffered.

"There was a lot of discovery that went on, realizing how much was rotted and in bad shape," said company President Chuck Wagner. "But we just tried to stay with Mary Oehrlein's design [the preservation architect]."

"This is the kind of job we love. When working with this kind of detail, your craftsmanship can really



The Franklin School restoration, shown completed above, lasted almost a year.

be seen and appreciated. It's not every building that has hand-cut slate, chimney caps and 24 ounce lead-coated copper gutters -- not to mention gold-leaf finials."

continued on page 2

WAGNER ROOFING

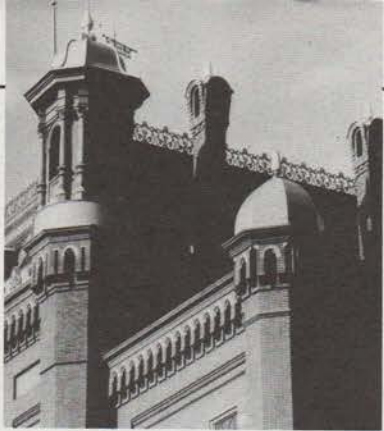
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Inside this issue

In Our Words.....2
Camp Friendship.....3
Recovering from winter.....4



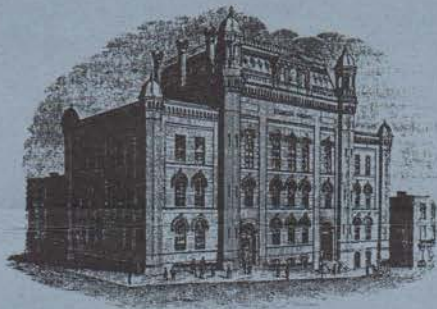
The cupola and bell tower, left, were rebuilt and covered in lead-coated copper. Notice the detail work involved in the gold-leaf finials and dated weather vane. This quality of craftsmanship recently garnered the Franklin project an excellence in construction award from the Associated Builders and Contractors.

from page 1

Wagner Roofing's largest contribution to the project was restoration of the slate roof. Using premium grade Vermont slate, Wagner duplicated exactly the colors and patterns of the original roof, which was so stained and weathered it could not be restored to its

original 1869 colors.

The restoration project was made possible by a public service grant from the Sigal/Zuckerman Company. Currently, the District's Board of Education is searching for funds to complete the interior renovation.



A school where history was made

The Benjamin Franklin School is not only a monument to the bright beginnings of public education in the District, but also a place where history has been made. When preservationists fought to save the structure from demolition, here's what they discovered about its past:

- ◆ Alexander Graham Bell sent the first wireless message over a beam of light from the third floor window of the school in 1880.
- ◆ The school was the center of the city's progressive and practical educational policies during the late 19th and early 20th centuries--policies that were emulated around the country.
- ◆ Children of presidents attended the school because of its proximity to the White House.
- ◆ James A. Garfield attended a concert in the Great Hall of the building and even monitored student exams there. Several days before his assassination, Garfield gave out diplomas at the school's graduation ceremony. President Arthur, whose children attended Franklin, also participated in graduation ceremonies.
- ◆ A model of the school won architect Adolph Cluss the "Medal of Progress in Education and Architecture" at an 1873 international exhibition in Vienna and another similar honor in Paris in 1878.
- ◆ A model of the school was chosen by the city government to represent the District at the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia.

Wagner salutes 80 years of work

It's been 80 years since my grandfather started Wagner Roofing with little more than his tools and a truck. The company has grown considerably in that time, but our message and motto haven't: excellence in work and service.

In Our Words

Our aim has always been to maximize the life of your roof through quality installation, maintenance and repair. And through this newsletter we hope to further that mission by sharing with you our knowledge of roofing as well as some of our history and goals.

Otto Wagner, my grandfather and a German immigrant, began the company in 1914, developing a following of loyal customers and weathering the Great Depression.

In 1937 Otto died of cancer and my father, Jack Saunders Wagner, made the decision to take over the business and provide for his mother. He was just 17, and it meant giving up a job at the Government Printing Office and a track scholarship to American University. The company consisted of a 1936 Ford panel truck and a basement shop.

Even then, despite its small size, the company developed a reputation for quality work and fair dealing with customers, contractors and employees--a reputation we always strive to uphold.

During World War II, Dad enlisted leaving Mom to run the company. He could have received a deferment because of the business, but he wouldn't hear of it. The company continued to prosper under Mom, despite the shortage of men for labor.

"You couldn't buy trucks or cars, it being wartime," she remembers. "I had a four-door '36 Ford. They put ladder racks on it and sometimes remembered to take them off at night. Many a night, my girlfriends

continued on page 3

from page 2

and I went out with 40-foot ladders on the car.

"We did very well, even though the customers were heard to say later: 'Thank God you're home, Jack. We couldn't have stood another month of her prices!'"

Today, my wife, Sheila, and I run the company from our Hyattsville office. I started working in the business as a teenager and continued full time after college some 30 years ago. My father died in 1977, a great loss to us all. He was a strong believer in fairness and the Golden Rule, and we are proud to be part of his legacy.

We feel a great responsibility to past and future generations of Wagners to maintain excellence in the industry and continue to put you, our customer, first. It isn't just our business, it's our own good name. All of us at Wagner Roofing thank you for your support.

Charles E. Wagner

Mark Your Calendar

S M T W TH F S

The National Building Museum celebrates the history of roofs with a free seminar "The Development of Roofing" on April 9. Wagner Roofing President Chuck Wagner and Steve Peiffer, the first American apprenticed under English master thatchers, will lead the workshop. Peiffer will present thatching techniques, and Wagner Roofing mechanics will demonstrate the use of slate, tin, copper, and fiberglass shingles and shakes. This drop-in program begins at 10 a.m. and ends at 4 p.m. at the museum, located at 401 F Street NW. For information call the museum at (202) 272-2448 or Wagner Roofing at (301) 927-9030.

Slate roofs date back more than 1,000 years

Did you know...

- ◆ slate is one of the longest lasting roofing materials ever used. In some countries it has been used for more than 1,000 years
- ◆ slate is a naturally occurring rock formed by the downward pressure of the earth's crust
- ◆ slate can be found in many regions of the world but much of it occurs in Scotland, Wales, France, Spain, Southern Germany and the United States
- ◆ some slate veins are a few hundred feet long while others encompass entire mountain ranges
- ◆ because of its durability, many companies guarantee their slate for as long as 100 years
- ◆ slate operations can be as large as stadium-size chambers 2,000 feet below the ground

Area contractors build center for kids with cancer

It took almost 40 contracting companies and hundreds of volunteers, but they did it in just two days. These Washington-area businesses built a large activity center at Camp Friendship, a program for children with cancer.

The weekend project had the old-time feeling of a barn raising, according to Ty Gable, executive vice president for Associated Builders and Contractors of Washington.

"It was a challenge for these guys," Gable said. "Once someone said that we could make it like a barn raising and build it in a weekend, there was no stopping them. They worked Saturday from dawn to midnight and again on Sunday

from dawn until about seven."

The Laytonsville, Md., camp offers children with cancer a chance to enjoy summer activities while still under volunteer medical care.

But Camp Friendship had no place to assemble the children. If it rained, they had to disperse quickly, covering up arts and crafts projects and ending games.

So camp administrators decided to construct an activities building in October. The Carol Jean Cancer Foundation that operates the program purchased a prefabricated kit to build the center. But they still needed builders and many more supplies for the septic lines, plumbing, roof, foundation and landscape.

ABC volunteered its services and

almost one-tenth of its 500 members responded. From foundation to roof, the association coordinated the job.

Wagner Roofing, one of the dozens of companies involved, donated the roofing labor. Wagner employees used lights to work late into Sunday evening. It was a frenzied pace, but well organized by ABC members.

The 2,500-square-foot building will house the camp's library and computer center. Administrators also hope to use the center for year-round activities, such as seminars for parents and siblings, and weekend events for children.

For more information about Carol Jean Cancer Foundation programs, call (301) 587-6300.

TALES OF DISASTER

If you've ever doubted that it pays to choose your contractor carefully, consider the true story of a recent debacle in Georgetown. The elegant house's new roof required continuous soldering of huge copper sections--about 400 feet of soldering

or the same distance as 10 row houses in Georgetown. An expensive job, even under the best direction.

Unfortunately, such competent direction wasn't there. Due to contractor error, the first solder attempt failed. Then the second. Then even the peel and stick adhesive applied over the second solder job didn't work. Finally--just two weeks ago--the entire roof was torn off and begun again by a third contractor. Now we're talking expensive. Not to mention wasted time and a thoroughly disgusted homeowner.

The moral? Hire the right people from the start--contractors with established reputations and solid references. You only get as good as you demand.

Cutting corners has its place, but there is one woman in Georgetown who'll tell you that the "roof over your head" is not where to start.

Be prepared for next year's winter weather

We've all seen enough of snow, ice and rain this winter, and many roofs are worse for the weather. The unusually cold temperatures and excessive precipitation have caused all kinds of roofing troubles. Here are some tips to cope with the winter's aftermath and avoid problems next year:

- ◆ Install an ice and water shield. This is an efficient and cost-effective way to avoid snow and ice related leaks. The waterproofing membrane is applied around vulnerable flashing points to protect against wind-driven rain and ice dams.
- ◆ Install snow guards. These protect people, landscaping, lower roofs and gutters from heavy slides of melting snow and ice. The snow guards hold snow and ice in place allowing a gradual melting.
- ◆ Do not attempt to have broken gutters reattached until the snow is cleared.
- ◆ Have your roof inspected once the cold weather is gone. For the most effective results, a professional should do the work.

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