

THE WASHINGTON BREWERY AT NAVY YARD

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Overview

Brewing has been a fundamental part of the history and culture of Washington, D.C. Beer was a staple, and brewing made potentially dangerous water potable. Brewers were once the second-largest employer in the city after the federal government. Six major breweries in the Washington-area were closed by Prohibition; only one of them successfully reopened, Christian Heurich, and that too closed for good in 1956. That brewery was demolished to make room for the Kennedy Center. Today, there are almost no architectural remains from DC's brewing past.

Washington was long bereft of beer until it legalized brewpubs in 1991. 20 years later, the city finally opened its first production brewery (DC Brau) since 1956, which was then followed by a slew of microbreweries. People are proudly drinking local beer again.

No brewery was more storied than the Washington Brewery, the first brewery in the city's history. It was a name so popular that (so far) seven different companies have used it on six plots of land. Founded in 1796 by Dr Cornelius Coningham, an English physician, the brewery first operated along the Potomac near Foggy Bottom. Around 1805, Coningham leased the Sugar House near Navy Yard and moved the brewery to that site. The Washington Brewery remained at Navy Yard until it closed in 1836. It was one of Washington's first industrial sites.

What follows in this document is a short history of the Washington Brewery at Navy Yard and a description of its location. The brewery once stood near Yards Park, adjacent to a DC Water facility. It is our hope that the

District of Columbia will emplace a historic marker at Yards Park or in the proposed Forest City development at The Yards to mark the brewery's location and acknowledge its contribution to DC's history, as well as to support an archaeological dig at the site before construction begins on the proposed new development.

Washington Brewery history

Dr Cornelius Coningham opened his Washington Brewery in 1796, right along the Potomac River in Square 129 (near the village of Funkstown, where the Reflecting Pond now stands). He moved the brewery to its second location, the Sugar House near the bustling Navy Yard, around 1805 after his landlord and former business partner, James Greenleaf, ended up in debtor's prison. The Sugar House was a sugar refinery built around 1798 of imported English brick. It had failed as a business venture and stood vacant. Coningham leased the property from Thomas Law, one of the early investors in Washington real estate. The Navy Yard site was probably more auspicious as a brewery location, as it was closer to the workers who might buy Coningham's beer.

The oldest known image of a brewery in Washington is George Cooke's 1833 painting, 'City of Washington from Beyond the Navy Yard' (Fig. 1). The Sugar House is clearly shown west of Navy Yard and directly below the greatly enlarged White House. It's shown as a tall brick building right on the Eastern Branch (now the Anacostia River).

Just a year after the Washington Brewery moved into the Sugar House, Thomas Law listed the land for sale.



Figure 1. 'City of Washington from Beyond the Navy Yard', George Cooke, (1833),

Source. Courtesy Library of Congress.



Figure 2. Detail of 'City of Washington from Beyond the Navy Yard', George Cooke, (1833), showing the Washington Brewery (the multistorey building on the river bank in the centre of the image) in the Sugar House.

Source. Courtesy Library of Congress.

The *National Intelligencer* advertisement on 17 September 1806 provides valuable information about the location:

The dwelling house and brewery now in lease to Dr Coningham, two squares above the Navy Yard, on the Eastern branch, eminently calculated for a most extensive brewery and distillery; also, a valuable wharf on which the same stands, suited for a Lumber yard.

Coningham continued operating the Washington Brewery at the site until 1811, when he sold the brewery to John W. Collet. The new owner advertised the availability of his beer at the brewery in January 1812 in the *National Intelligencer*. The advert described its location as 'At the old Sugar House, foot of New Jersey avenue', along with the price of the beer per half barrel; \$3 for Table Ale, \$4 for Strong Ale and \$5 for X Ale. Besides purchasing beer at the brewery, people could

also buy it at Daniel Rapine's bookstore on Capitol Hill - the first known retail outlet for beer in the city.

John Collet purchased the adjacent property that abutted on the new Washington Canal, as he intended to build a new brewery. However, he discovered that beer wasn't as popular as whiskey, and so attempted (but failed) to sell the brewery in 1813.

Collet's advert placing the Washington Brewery for sale in the 9 July 1813 *National Intelligencer* gives us further important evidence about the brewery's location. It placed '...the BREWERY situate[d] on the west side of Jersey avenue, near the Eastern branch of the Potomac'. The brewery contained, along with 'Several hundred Casks of various capacities':

two Copper Boilers, one of which contains about eleven hundred gallons, the other five hundred; with a Mill, and all the necessary appurtenances for carrying on a Beer and Porter Brewery on an extensive scale.

On the adjoining lot, which Collet owned, there was a 'Brick MALT-HOUSE:

one hundred feet by thirty, with arched vaults under the whole, and GRANERY of the dimensions aforesaid. This is a corner Lot, having a front of 120 feet on the new canal [the Washington Canal, which had recently opened] and 100 feet on the street, on which may be erected a Brewery of large extent, having been purchased with that view.

Horses, carts, barley, malt, porter, ale, vinegar, and a 'prime' horse saddle were also up for sale.

Collet operated the Washington Brewery until his death in September 1814, a month after the British raid on Washington during the War of 1812. He is buried at Congressional Cemetery.

The brewery was purchased by another English immigrant, Thomas Coote, in 1817. When Coote got in financial distress, he brought in his brother, Clement, as an investor. Clement later assumed ownership of the Washington Brewery, as his brother could not pay off his debtors. Clement was a prominent citizen in the City of Washington, an owner of a dry goods store, a city alderman and a justice of the peace.



Figure 3. Clement T. Coote's signature on the 1836 deed of sale transferring his brewing equipment to William Hayman.

Source. Courtesy Historical Society of Washington, D.C.; photo by Garrett Peck.

Clement Coote leased the brewery in 1826 to Thomas and William Gunton, then resumed operating it in 1832. He closed the brewery for good in 1836 and sold off the equipment to William Hayman, who operated a brewery near Georgetown. The deed of sale with Coote's signature is in the Historical Society of Washington, D.C. The Sugar House was torn down piecemeal, its imported English brick a valuable commodity. It had disappeared entirely by 1847.

Locating the Washington Brewery

Can we pinpoint the location of the Washington Brewery? Yes. Thanks to George Cooke's 1833 painting 'City of Washington' and the brewery advertisements in the *National Intelligencer*, we know several crucial facts about its location from site descriptions:

1. The Washington Brewery was located at the foot of New Jersey Avenue, SE, on the west side of the street.
2. The brewery stood right along the Eastern Branch (now the Anacostia River) in the tall brick Sugar House, a former sugar refinery, which was built with a wharf that extended into the river.
3. The malt house stood on a corner lot adjacent lot to the brewery (probably to the east). It had a 120-foot

face along the Washington Canal and 100 feet along the street, probably N Street, SE, but it could have been N Place, SE, the half-street to the south.

Knowing these three facts, we can overlay this information onto historic maps. There is only one block that meets all three requirements: Square 744. At the time the Sugar House was built, about three-quarters of the square existed; the southeast corner and Square 745 (744SS) to the south were both later infill projects that extended the shoreline into the Anacostia River. Atop the mouth of the filled-in Washington Canal now stands a DC Water pumping station. Square 744 is now occupied by parking lot H/I and a DC Water maintenance facility to the south. The Washington Brewery once stood in this block between the DC Water building and Nationals Park.

Corroborating evidence is also found in a 1900 biography of Thomas Law by Allen Culling Clark. He wrote that the Sugar House

was the *first* manufacturing enterprise in the city of Washington and the *largest*. The sugar came from the West Indies. The Sugar House was at the southeast corner of Square 744, fronting river and canal; the main building was eight stories high and the wing five.

The DC Water building is a critical site for the Clean Rivers Project, which is installing two mammoth underground tunnels to prevent combined sewer overflows (C.S.O.) into the Anacostia River. Once completed, this will have an enormously positive impact on the cleanliness and health of the Anacostia.

It should also be noted that all of the local Washington area breweries today get their water from DC Water, which sources the water from the Potomac River. This is the water that goes into our beer.

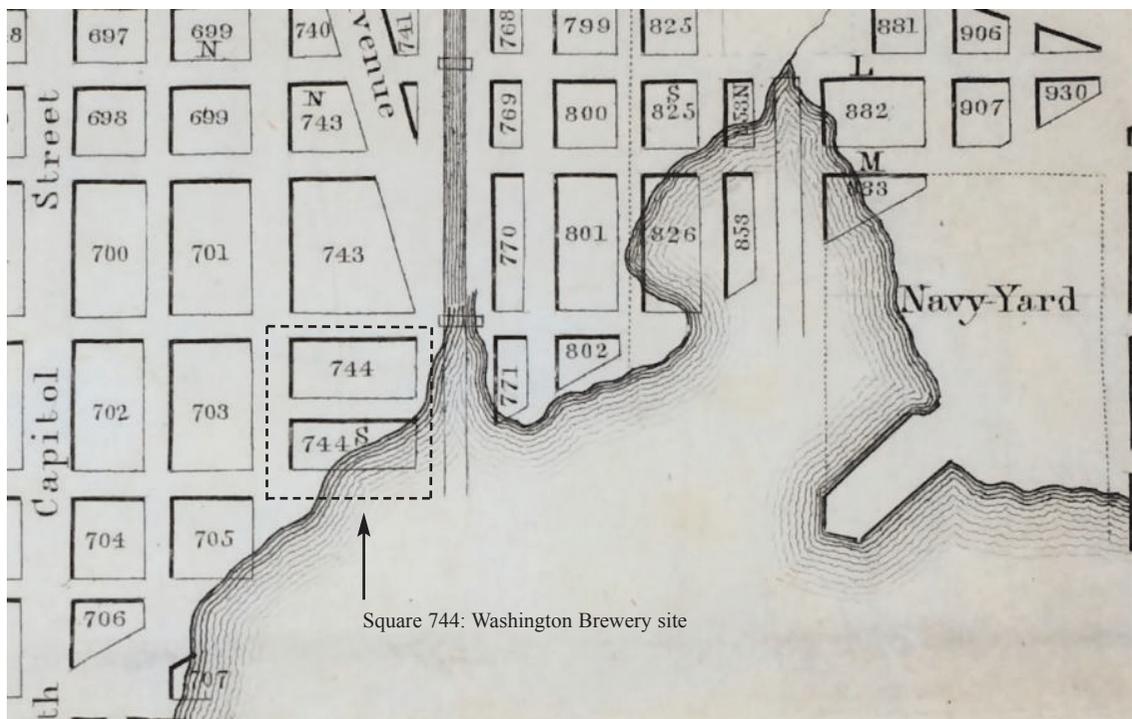


Figure 4. A close up of John Brannan's 1828 Map of the City of Washington.

Source. Courtesy the George Washington University - Gelman Library - Special Collections Research Center.

The Navy Yard site

In the following series of historic maps (pages 36-) - largely sourced from the Gelman Library's Special Collections Research Center at The George Washington University and DC Public Library's Washingtoniana division - we see how the Eastern Branch shoreline near Navy Yard expanded southward over the decades through infill. The planned street grid is even noted in the water. Today's Water Street, SE (once Georgia Avenue, and later Potomac Avenue) is appropriately named, as it once marked the river shoreline. Everything to the south of it - including Yards Park - is landfill.

Unfortunately, none of the historic maps shows the historic Washington Brewery location.

The 1820 map by Peter Force (Fig. 5) shows the grid and numbered squares around Navy Yard. The Washington Canal is clearly visible, which had been open for about a decade when this map was printed. The Washington Brewery predated the canal, which was built adjacent to the property.

The 1828 map by John Brannan (Fig. 6) breaks out Square 744 into its two halves: the northern half that bordered on the Eastern Branch, and the southern half that was largely in the water. It shows the planned extension of the shoreline southward.

The 1835 map by Thomas Gamaliel Bradford (Fig. 7) shows the city's numbered blocks around Navy Yard. It has one notable error: block 743 is mislabeled as 745. Again, note the planned street extensions that would later be built using landfill into the Anacostia River.

The 1836 Henry Tanner map (Fig. 8) of the City of Washington at Gelman Library is in unbelievably pristine, like-new condition. This map was produced the year that the Washington Brewery closed near Navy Yard. While it doesn't show the Washington Brewery site, it does, however, show the location for Hayman's Brewery near Georgetown (27th & K Streets, NW). This the earliest map uncovered so far that shows a brewery location in Washington. Ironically, that site would adopt the Washington Brewery name in 1850. It later became the Arlington Bottling Company in 1885 and operated until torn down for the Whitehurst Freeway soon after World War II.

The 1874 Gray's Atlas Map (Fig. 9) shows the Washington Canal in its final years before it was filled in to form 2nd Street, SE. You'll note that the southern half of Square 744 has largely been filled in. The former Washington Brewery site would no longer be on the shoreline, but a half-block inland. A wider mouth of the Washington Canal is shown.

An 1884 map by Adolph Sachse (Fig. 10) shows the Navy Yard neighborhood, which was then composed of small industrial sites. The Washington Canal was filled in by then and was now 2nd Street, SE. The site of the Washington Brewery was now occupied by several wooden structures for a brickyard (and later a lumberyard). The large inlet next to the huge white structure at Navy Yard is where the Trapeze School now stands.

The 1892 Hopkins map (Fig. 11) shows that the Washington Canal was filled in as 2nd Street, SE, but the block-long mouth of the canal was still in use. Square 744 was now completely inland and had a series of row houses along its northern edge, while the rest of the property was a brickyard. The area south of Water Street (the diagonal) with the coal shed and Columbia Pottery is now Yards Park. Square 771 (just east of the canal) is a parking lot today.

The 1909 Baist map (Fig. 12) shows the mouth of the Washington Canal completely filled in, save for a small inlet that still exists today. Atop the former canal is the "Sewage Disposal Plant," shown in pink; today that is the DC Water pumping station. The Washington Brewery site in Square 744 now had a lumberyard on it, and below that Square 745 had extended the shoreline southward through infill.

The 1928 Baist map (Fig. 13) shows the Anacostia shoreline largely as it is today. The brick rowhouses on Square 744 north would be demolished for the parking lot that stands there today. The diagonal Water Street was then called Potomac Avenue. N Street was later reconfigured to form Tingey Street, SE, which moved the street slightly northward east of New Jersey Avenue, where the Boilermaker Building (and Bluejacket brewery) stand today.

The opening of Nationals Park in 2008 marked the beginning of modern revitalization in the Navy Yard neighborhood. The city has completed the Anacostia



Figure 5. *A Correct Map of the City of Washington: Capital of the United States of America*, Peter Force, 1820.

Source. Courtesy the George Washington University - Gelman Library - Special Collections Research Center.



Figure 6. *Map of the City of Washington*, John Brannan, 1828.

Source. Courtesy the George Washington University - Gelman Library - Special Collections Research Center.



Figure 7. District of Columbia, Thomas Gamaliel Bradford, 1835.

Source. Courtesy the George Washington University - Gelman Library - Special Collections Research Center.

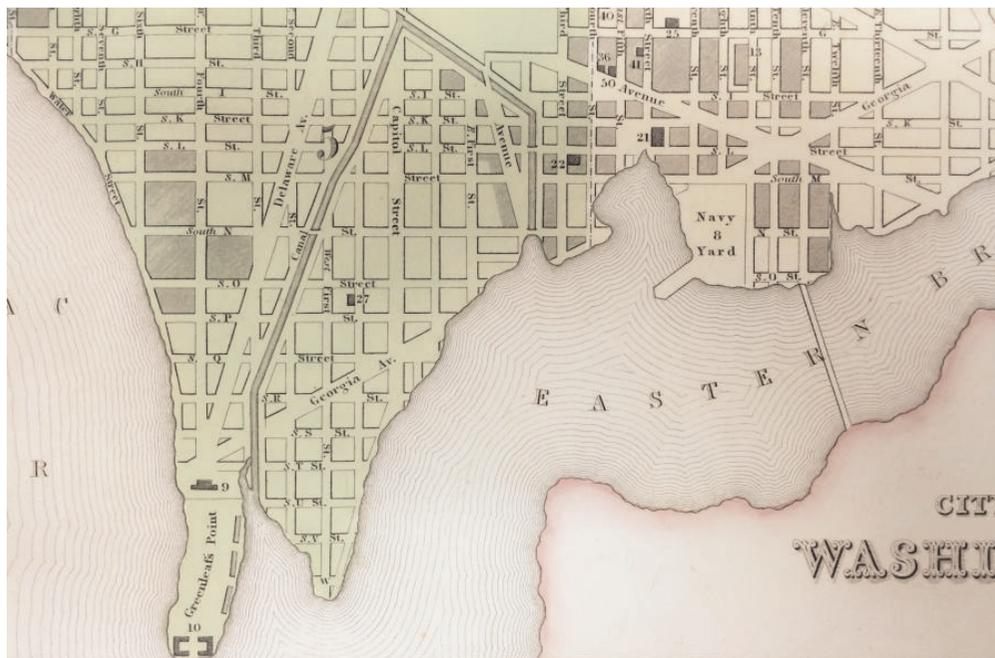


Figure 8. City of Washington, Henry Schench Tanner; 1836.

Source. Courtesy the George Washington University - Gelman Library - Special Collections Research Center.



Figure 9. Gray's Atlas Map of Washington, Ormando Willis Gray, 1874.

Source. Courtesy the George Washington University - Gelman Library - Special Collections Research Center.



Figure 10. The National Capital, Washington, D.C., Adolf Sachse, 1884. This map shows Navy Yard as a port with small industries. An original map hangs in the University Club.

Courtesy Library of Congress and the University Club.

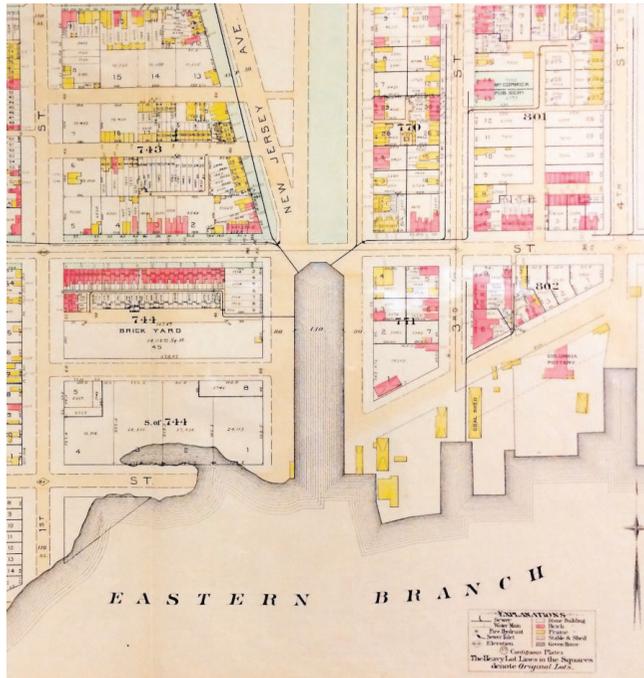


Figure 11. 1892 Hopkins map showing the Navy Yard area. Courtesy DCPL - Washingtoniana.

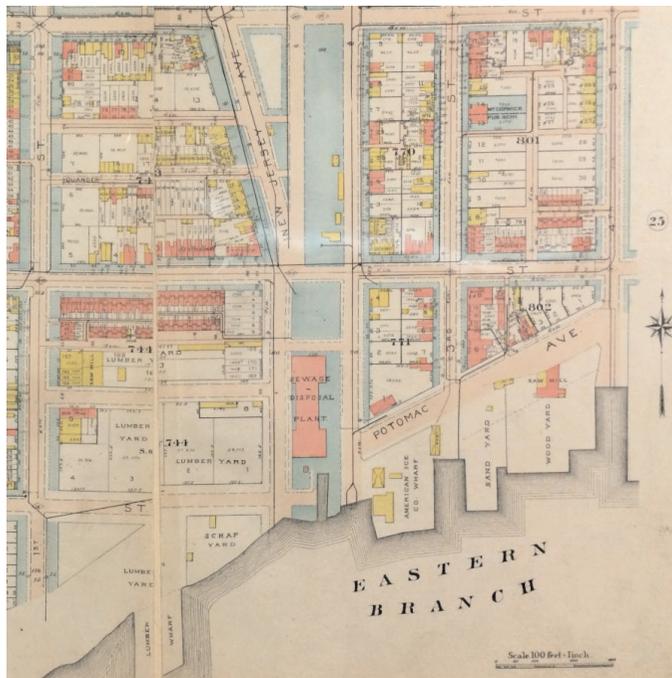


Figure 12. 1909 Baist map. Courtesy DCPL - Washingtoniana.

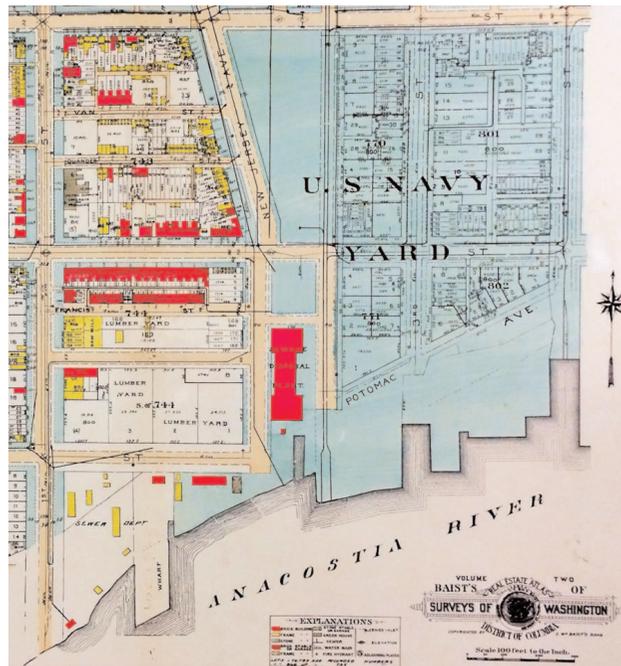


Figure 13. 1928 Baist map. Courtesy DCPL - Washingtoniana.

Riverwalk Trail so cyclists and pedestrians can explore both sides of the Anacostia river. Water taxis pull up at Diamond Teague Park at the foot of the ballpark. In 2011, it opened Yards Park, an urban park along the river that was part of the reclaimed shoreline. A year later, the city opened Canal Park, a three-block long park along the former Washington Canal that was filled in during the 1870s. These have become popular urban destinations for both locals and tourists. Apartments, homes, restaurants and retails have all opened in recent years in the neighborhood, which was an original part of the Pierre L'Enfant-designed city.

Signage and archaeological proposal

Having pinpointed the historic site for the Washington Brewery near Navy Yard, it is suggested that the District of Columbia should consider placing a historic marker to commemorate this long-standing brewery. The best location for such a sign is the northwest corner of Yards Park. The Washington Brewery site was literally one block due west. This is the nearest that the public can get to the historic site, given that the DC Water building

is closed to the public, and part of the brewery site is currently a DC Water maintenance facility.

The developer Forest City Washington has submitted a proposal (13-05) for the redevelopment of the DC Water maintenance facility on Squares 744S and 744SS (noted historically as 745). This includes the creation of 1-1/2 Street, SE that will bisect the Washington Brewery site. It will take several years to build this project, but when it is finished, it may be appropriate to place an additional historic marker on the actual brewery location.

Before Forest City breaks ground on its expansion project in Square 744, the city and developer are encouraged to support an archaeological dig on the site to find remnants of the brewery and the malt house. The brewery was an eight-story tall building, so there may be remnants of its foundations, brewing paraphernalia, a well, outhouse trash, and remains of the brickyard and lumberyard that occupied the site after the brewery closed. A dig can document the details of the site for posterity, and answer crucial questions about the history of Washington's first brewery, one of the city's first industrial sites.



Figure 14. DC Water facility next to Yards Park. This is less than a block east of the of the Washington Brewery site. Photo by Garrett Peck.

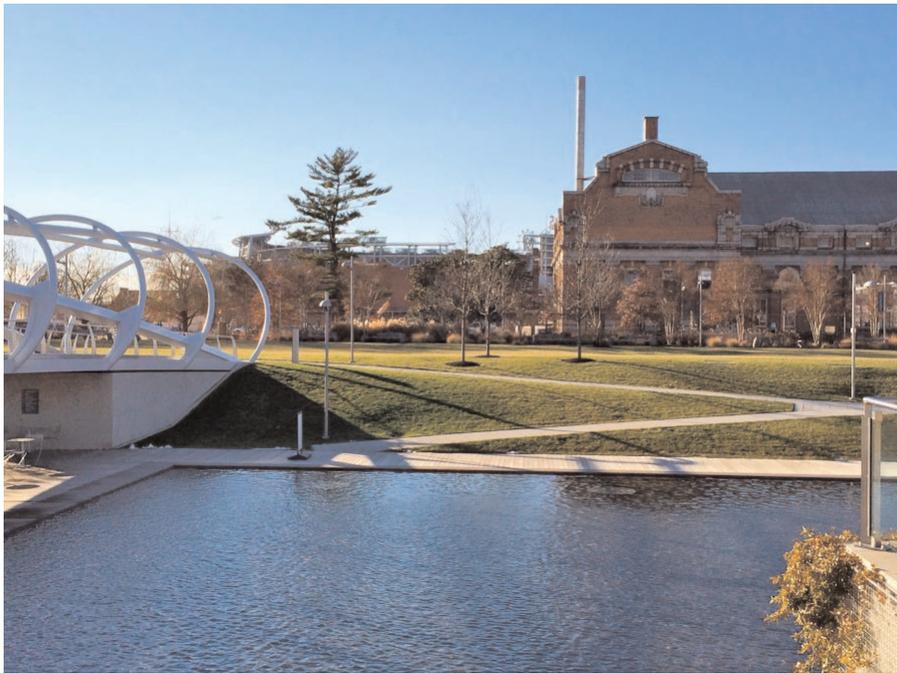


Figure 15. Yards Park. Photo by Garrett Peck.

What information could go on the historic marker?

Explanation that the Washington Brewery site was one block due west of the marker, on the opposite side of the DC Water building.

History of the Washington Brewery, including quotes from the *National Intelligencer* articles, and the brewery's contribution to DC's history.

Historic contribution of brewing in DC, once the largest employer in the city after the federal government.

A historic map showing the Navy Yard area (such from one of the maps at Gelman Library)

Clement Coote's signature from 1836 (HSW)

City of Washington painting from 1833 showing the brewery (Library of Congress)

In 2013, two brewpubs opened near Navy Yard - the first to open in the neighborhood since the Washington Brewery site closed in 1836. These are Gordon Biersch (100 M Street, SE) and Bluejacket (300 Tingey Street, SE). Bluejacket operates out of the Boilermaker Building and is two blocks from the historic Washington Brewery site. Brewing has returned to Navy Yard.

Garrett Peck is a local historian and author of five books, including Capital Beer: A Heady History of Brewing in Washington, D.C. and Prohibition in Washington, D.C.: How Dry We Weren't. www.garrettpeck.com

Acknowledgements

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Special Collections Research Center, Gelman Library, The George Washington University.

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