

WEEKEND

D.C.'s Mass appeal: An ode to a road

Take a trek up Massachusetts Avenue, the most elegant – and fascinating – street in Washington, D.C. **10**



KATHERINE FREY/THE WASHINGTON POST

CASUAL DINING

The Petworth ramen shop Menya Hosaki will soothe your appetite and your soul. **6**

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A thoroughfare with a fount of enticements

Traverse Massachusetts Avenue and you'll be rewarded with an array of intriguing stops

BY MELANIE D.G. KAPLAN

Early one morning last month, I stood on a red curb outside the D.C. Jail and prepared to walk what my great uncle Aaron called the most elegant street in Washington: Massachusetts Avenue.

For years, Aaron walked to work along Mass, from just below the British Embassy, where he parked his car, to his office downtown. As his wife, Paula, tells it, he was often accompanied by a furrier named Zlotnik, whose store, at 12th and G streets NW, was guarded by a giant white bear. Paula remembers stopping by her husband's office one day and finding a collection of hubcaps, learning that he had picked them up on his walks. "You have no idea how many hubcaps are lost along Massachusetts," he told her.

Aaron, a businessman, philanthropist and writer who was born in the District, loved this street. When I learned, years after his death in 2000, that he'd dreamed of walking the entire length, I adopted his never-completed mission as my own. This summer, I biked the avenue from the Anacostia River to Goldsboro Road and back, 22 miles. I buried my nose in history books and learned about a time when livestock roamed freely north of Massachusetts and when the road was just 4 miles long. British author Anthony Trollope wrote of the avenue in 1862, "Go there, and you will find yourself not only out of town, away among the fields, but you will find yourself beyond the fields, in an uncultivated, undrained wilderness."

Part of Pierre L'Enfant's original plan, Massachusetts is among the widest and longest roads in the District. It passes through three of the city's quadrants, around more than a half-dozen traffic circles — one, Randle Circle, is in a disconnected 1.5-mile segment of roadway east of the Anacostia — and past some of the most notable addresses in the city. Deborah Shapley, founder of Restore Mass Ave, an organization created to improve the landscape along Embassy Row (home of several embassies along Mass), told me that the avenue once boasted a double row of majestic American linden trees on each side of the street. Planted in the late 1800s, the trees sheltered promenades, buffering pedestrians from the dusty roadway. Since 2006, RMA has planted hundreds of new trees and saved others from removal.

By late September, I was ready for my walk. Starting at 7 a.m., I strolled unhurriedly. I completed the walk in seven hours, stopping for lunch and detours; I've listed many of my discoveries below. Sidewalks line both sides of the avenue, except for the far end in Maryland, where you'll find footpaths on just one side of the road. Whether you walk or bike, be adventurous: Explore alleys and peruse pocket parks.

Halfway through my walk, I met up with Paula, a young-spirited octogenarian wearing a pink sweater set. I could hardly wait to tell her what I'd found near the Observatory.

"A hubcap," she said, laughing at the happenstance, "See? Aaron wasn't making this up!"

Visit some of these suggested stops — or improvise — to create your own memories along one of the city's grandest avenues.



PHOTOS BY KATHERINE FREY/THE WASHINGTON POST

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: People walk by the fountain in Dupont Circle; roses bloom in Bishop's Garden at Washington National Cathedral; a statue of Samuel Hahnemann at Scott Circle; dogs frolic in a fog-shrouded Congressional Cemetery.

Congressional Cemetery 1801 E St. SE

Our tour of Massachusetts Avenue starts about a block south of the Stadium-Armory Metro. But before we get started, detour to nearby Congressional Cemetery, a beautifully restored National Historic Landmark and the final home for many notable figures, including journalist Cokie Roberts, D.C. Mayor Marion Barry, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, composer John Philip Sousa and Push-Ma-Ta-Ha, the Choctaw Indian chief who served with Andrew Jackson during the War of 1812. Congressional is known not only for its impressive collection of historic funeral sculpture but for its beloved K9 Corps — a private dog-walking program composed of hundreds of dues-paying members and joyous off-leash dogs. During this phase of the pandemic, the cemetery is open most days to K9 Corps members as well as visitors who purchase a K9 day pass (\$10). The cemetery also offers guided weekend tours

through October. Continuing along a residential section of Massachusetts, you'll pass Lincoln Park, a popular neighborhood green space with two notable memorials: one commemorating Black educator Mary McLeod Bethune, and the controversial Emancipation Memorial, depicting Abraham Lincoln and a kneeling Black man.

Union Station

50 Massachusetts Ave. NE

Next up is one of the city's most elegant Beaux-Arts buildings: a beautifully renovated transportation hub for train, bus and subway travelers that opened in 1907, consolidating the tangle of unsightly and dangerous railroad tracks that once crisscrossed the city. As you approach the main entrance and look up, you'll see "The Progress of Railroading," six massive granite statues created by Louis Saint-Gaudens (brother of the more famous sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens). Pause just before you enter and take in a

view of another architectural gem: the Capitol building, reflected in the station's glass doors. (Yes, the station's public bathrooms are open.) Just the other side of North Capitol Street, you'll find two lesser-known memorials in a city packed with them: the Holodomor Memorial to the victims of the Ukrainian famine-genocide carried out by Joseph Stalin; and the Victims of Communism Memorial. If you're in the mood for a side excursion, the Metropolitan Branch Trail, a paved bike path that follows the line of the old B&O Railroad, runs 4.5 miles from Union Station to Franklin Street NE.

Carnegie Library

801 K St. NW

Just past Chinatown, we arrive at Mt. Vernon Square and the Carnegie Library, a gift to the public from industrialist Andrew Carnegie, and the District's first public library. (It opened in 1903 as a desegregated building — the



Neighboring the houses of worship we find some unexpected flair. From the top of the circle, you'll just catch a glimpse of the Washington Plaza Hotel, designed by the modernist maestro Morris Lapidus, best known for several Miami Beach hotels (Lapidus also designed the fun Capitol Skyline Hotel in Southwest).

Scott Circle and Dupont Circle

Think you know this short stretch of roadway? Think again. Curiosities are hiding in plain sight here, including memorials to Samuel Hahnemann, the German physician who developed homeopathy, on the east end of Scott Circle, and orator/politician Daniel Webster to the west (check out the intricate bronze panels below Webster's statue). Pop into the courtyard of Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies, where you'll find a segment of the Berlin Wall. It's also a nice place to picnic. So is Dupont Circle, named after Union Naval officer Samuel Francis du Pont — whose statue has long since been replaced with the circle's now iconic fountain and three marble figures representing sea, wind and stars. Squint your eyes at the PNC Bank branch on the northwest side of the circle, occupying two limestone buildings built in 1923 — one with massive windows — and you can see into the past, when the building was an automobile showroom. It's a vestige of the days when Connecticut Avenue was lined with car dealerships, and a reminder of our ever-changing city. Open year-round on Sundays, the Dupont Circle farmers market is wildly popular, as is DC Bike Party, a monthly evening ride around Washington that sets out from the fountain. It's truly one of the most enchanting public events in the city. (Find updates on Facebook.)

Embassy Row

There is, perhaps, no better embodiment of the District's cosmopolitan character than the stretch of Mass between Dupont and Observatory circles, where the flags of numerous embassies might be identified — at least by eagle-eyed viewers — from afar.

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The Indonesian Embassy is among the more impressive of the grand mansions along this strip — once considered remote and rural — when it was built in 1903 as a 60-room home for philanthropist Thomas Francis Walsh. In the next block you'll find the lavish Anderson House, built in 1902 and now headquarters of the patriotic organization Society of the Cincinnati. Detour down the alley behind the house to see some of the original stables — now home to Gold Leaf Studios, a framing, art-conservation and gilding business — and you can imagine guests arriving by carriage for an extravagant soiree. Cross the street and spend a few moments in a lovely park dedicated to Mahatma Gandhi, memorialized in bronze at 21st and Q streets. Behind 2201 Mass, along 22nd, you'll find a curious structure with a green pitched roof — almost resembling a tiny chateau — that, in 1900, was the District's first permitted garage. If you're on foot, look out for the beautifully painted historic police and fire callboxes along the sidewalk. One of the most distinctive examples of architecture in this neighborhood is the Islamic Center, evoking the buildings of 15th-century Egypt, and among the first such institutions in the Western Hemisphere.

Lover's Lane and Normanstone Trail

Massachusetts Avenue might be the last place you'd head to for a walk in the woods, but there are enough trails that intersect with it to offer an unexpected hiking sampler. North of Glover Bridge, which crosses over Rock Creek, look for the dirt path to Lover's Lane on the south side of the street. Follow the shady trail downhill about a third of a mile to reach Dumbarton Oaks Park, Montrose Park and the paved portion of the trail, which continues uphill to R Street. Slightly farther up Mass, just past the British Embassy, Normanstone Trail is a half-mile hike down to Rock Creek. In the stretch between the two trails, stop at 3000 Massachusetts to look at the McCormick House, designed by John Russell Pope in the manner of an Italian palazzo, and now home to the Brazilian ambassador. Also between the two trails, the South African Embassy's statue of Nelson Mandela seems to look across the street toward the British Embassy's Winston Churchill memorial. The latter — with his fingers raised in a V for victory — stands with one foot on British soil and one on American.

Kahlil Gibran Memorial Garden

3100 Massachusetts Ave. NW



People enjoy a late-day stroll along Little Falls Stream Valley Trail, a 3.5-mile paved path that runs perpendicular to Massachusetts Avenue in Maryland's Montgomery County.

Having known the name Kahlil Gibran from my childhood — my mom kept a copy of the Lebanese American poet's "The Prophet," on her nightstand — stumbling on the hidden Kahlil Gibran Memorial Garden was like running into an old friend. Located at the end of a small bridge just north of 30th Street, and largely unnoticed by motorists, the garden features a striking bronze bust of the writer, a star-shaped fountain, benches and such quotes, carved in stone, as: "We live to discover beauty. All else is a form of waiting." If you need to plug back into the real world after this serene pit stop, sync your watch against the U.S. Naval Observatory's Master Clock, just up the

road. While the Naval Observatory, which has been home to every vice president since Walter Mondale, is not currently open to the public, it offers a fascinating public tour that should resume after the pandemic. Continuing on Mass, you'll pass the nunciature — the Vatican's embassy — where the Pope stays when he visits D.C. Don't miss the mum-and-pumpkin market at Saint Sophia Greek Orthodox Cathedral, at 36th Street.

Washington National Cathedral

3101 Wisconsin Ave. NW

Completed in 1990, after 83 years of construction, the neo-Gothic structure at the corner of



PHOTOS BY KATHERINE FREY/THE WASHINGTON POST

A statue of John Wesley sits on the grounds of Wesley Theological Seminary, whose campus has a shady courtyard and a bell tower.

dawn redwood. During World War I, the government used the campus for chemical warfare laboratories and proving grounds; the McKinley building became the birthplace of the Army Chemical Corps. A more peaceable spot: the Ilene Zatkan-Butler Garden. Across Mass Avenue is the school's Katzen Arts Center and American University Museum (currently closed), with a cascading, terraced fountain, benches, gardens and several outdoor sculptures, including three from Jules Olitski's "Cyclops" series.

Wesley Theological Seminary

4500 Massachusetts Ave. NW

Massachusetts Avenue is dotted with more than a dozen churches and religious institutions: Look for Washington Hebrew Congregation's 24-foot-tall steel stainless steel menorah, midway between Washington National Cathedral and American University. A little past AU in the Spring Valley neighborhood, you'll find Wesley Theological Seminary's particularly inviting campus, boasting a shady courtyard, bell tower, large grassy lawn, picnic tables and a bronze statue of John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Church and the religious school's namesake. If you have kids in tow, seek out the popular nearby playground at Friendship Park at 45th and Van Ness (better known to locals as Turtle Park). If you need to fuel up, stop at Millie's, which has a popular kid- and dog-friendly patio and ice cream/takeout window.

Little Falls Stream Valley Trail and Capital Crescent Trail

Westmoreland Circle, the rare roundabout without a statue, straddles the D.C.-Maryland border. As you continue into Montgomery County, you'll pass residential neighborhoods and come to Little Falls Stream Valley Trail, a 3.5-mile paved path that runs perpendicular to Mass between Little Falls Stream Valley Park, to the south, and Norwood Local Park to the north. It's more scenic on the south side of Mass — the trail is clearly marked with a sign — where you might see foxes, owls and ducks. The pathway runs parallel to the Capital Crescent Trail, which runs between Georgetown and Bethesda on the former rail bed of the B&O Railroad. (It's easy to miss if you don't see the trail going over Mass on a bridge, just a couple hundred feet north of the Little Falls trail.) Shortly after the trails, find Norman's, a beloved produce stand that's been in this spot for 25 years. The stand is open daily until the end of October, with squashes, apples, beets, pumpkins and fresh cider.

goingoutguide@washpost.com

Mass and Wisconsin — one of the city's highest points — is an architectural treasure. (Stone carvings include a Darth Vader grotesque; bring your binoculars). It's also home to some of the most beautiful public grounds in the District, originally developed by Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. Stunning and fragrant in any season, the Bishop's Garden features cedars and fig trees, roses that bloom until November, an 18th-century English bronze sundial and a finial that fell from the cathedral in the 2011 earthquake. Follow a stone footpath through the oak, beech and maple trees of Olmsted Woods, one of the few remaining old-growth forests in the city. You'll find a quiet and secluded amphitheater with curved stone walls and grassy tiers, a perfect spot for reading or contemplating. Just across Massachusetts from the cathedral, discover Bryce Park, a multilevel green space that's easy to miss from the window of a whizzing car. Named for British Ambassador James Bryce, the park hosts DC Tai Chi classes and private instruction with swords or spears. Drop-ins are welcome for beginner classes.

American University

4400 Massachusetts Ave. NW

Beautifully landscaped, the AU campus is an arboretum — with more than 3,000 trees, including a scarlet oak from the university's founding as a Methodist school in the 1890s, and such unusual varieties as the Korean cherry, maidenhair and