

## Eileen McGuckian - A Life in History

by Lew Hages

Zandel Smith probably never imagined that the love of history he instilled in his daughter, Eileen, during family vacations would become a lifelong passion that would benefit the entire Rockville community. Her mother, Bertha Smith, was a teacher who inspired Eileen to learn about her surroundings and pass that knowledge on to others.

A native of Brooklyn, Eileen moved to Washington, D.C., with her family when she was a toddler. She is a graduate of University of Maryland and earned a Masters degree from Western Maryland College, with additional graduate studies at George Washington University. Eileen moved to Rockville in 1966 and raised her family here - first in Roxboro and then on Wall Street, where her love of Rockville grew from living in one of the City's most historic areas. Proposals for widening West Montgomery Avenue in the early 1970s sparked her interest in protecting older houses from demolition - a grass-roots movement that resulted in the creation of Rockville's first historic district and Eileen's subsequent appointment to the Historic District Commission.

The demolition of the Masonic Lodge, which Eileen and Carlie Kingdon tearfully documented, marked a turning point in Rockville's preservation history. Driven by that loss, Eileen and a group of dedicated Rockvillians met in Arthur and Lynn Wagman's living room in 1974 to create a citizens' organization that would advocate for and support protection of important local historic resources. They named the new organization "Peerless Rockville" after an 1890 brochure that advertised real estate in Rockville, then a remote outpost of Washington. With very little money and a storehouse of energetic dedication, they



*The demolition of the Masonic Lodge in 1974 made clear that there was a need for a citizens' advocacy group to help protect local historic resources.*



*Key to the success of Peerless Rockville has been Eileen's ability to inspire community support, enlist allies and supporters with needed skills, and to organize an untold number of volunteers.*

held fundraisers to pursue their goals - preserving buildings and educating the public about the value of community history. Under Eileen's watchful eye and guidance, Peerless Rockville became a model of public-private partnership whose successes include rescue of the 1873 B&O Railroad Station, preservation of the Montrose School and Baptist Cemetery, restoration of the Dawson farmhouse, Wire Hardware, and the Grand Courtroom

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### Thank You!

Peerless Rockville gratefully acknowledges the support of the Cohen Companies and their new Rockville boutique hotel The Legacy Hotel and Meeting Centre, with their generous donation to the Eileen McGuckian Preservation Fund and the Tribute Party for Eileen.



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Continued from previous page



Since 1975, members and friends have welcomed each year at Peerless' annual New Year's Day Brunch.

of the Red Brick Courthouse, among many others. Preservation is matched by Eileen's strong commitment to public outreach and education. Walking tours, history programs, publications, and signature events, such as the Peerless Rockville Progressive Dinner, fostered a sense of community heritage and formed the basis of an impressive body of information on Rockville history - today known as the Peerless Rockville Collection. Maps, documents, architects' drawings, and historic photographs of people, places, and streetscapes provide an invaluable resource for local residents, students, and scholars, including Eileen, whose award-winning book, *Rockville: Portrait of a City* (2001) made full use of the Collection she has carefully supervised and maintained during her tenure as a Peerless founder, past President, and Executive Director.

Most recently, Eileen has led the effort to restore Frieda's Cottage, a 1936 Colonial Revival house on the grounds of the former Chestnut Lodge, and is actively involved in Peerless' survey study of Rockville's recent past. Since 1974, Eileen has been a guiding spirit and ardent champion of preserving the history, architecture, and information so essential to Rockville's heritage and civic identity. Indeed, it's hard to imagine the Rockville of today without her. As she begins a new chapter of her professional life, we congratulate her on her many outstanding achievements and extend our best wishes for things to come.



Eileen talking to a reporter about the historic significance of Wire Hardware.

# From the President

Dear Peerless Rockville members, friends, and supporters,

I hope that you will join the Board of Directors and me in welcoming Mary van Balgooy as our new executive director. She will start on Monday, March 10. Mary brings vast experience in all areas of historic preservation, including collections, development, and history, and she has an overall understanding of the importance of the historic places and spaces that surround and ground us. The Board chose Mary unanimously after an extensive search, and we know that you will find her engaging and enthusiastic as you meet her and work with her.



Peerless Rockville's new executive director, Mary van Balgooy.

I also want to invite you to join Peerless Rockville in honoring our retiring executive director, Eileen McGuckian, on Sunday, March 16 from 5-8 PM, with a special program at 7 PM. We will celebrate the many ways in which Eileen's leadership and steadfast commitment to historic preservation have shaped our hometown of Rockville and set an example for other similar organizations.

I look forward to seeing you on March 16 and at upcoming Peerless Rockville functions.

Sincerely,  
Joan Zenzen



Wondering about the logo that Ellen Errico of E.SQUAREDESIGNS created for the Tribute to Eileen? Many long-time friends and members of Peerless will remember that Peerless Rockville's first logo was a high bike. As for the pink flamingo—it's a favorite of Eileen's.

# Peerless Places

## Major Achievements (1974-2008)



Rockville's B&O Railroad Station on the move, 1981. Faced with the possible demolition of this 1873 treasure, Peerless and the City of Rockville successfully advocated for relocating it out of the way of the Metro line. Photograph by John Spano.



Above: In 1979, Peerless Rockville bought Montrose School for \$1 and restored the dilapidated building to active use through intensive work and fundraising. Below: Peerless Rockville was instrumental in restoring this beloved community landmark, once again an operating courthouse.



Frieda's Cottage, just the latest in a long line of Peerless Rockville projects, is currently being restored and will be returned to residential use later this year.



The Old Baptist Cemetery as it appeared in 1983 when Peerless Rockville took title to it. Since then Peerless has conducted extensive research and restoration of this 19th-century cemetery. Photograph by David Kelsey.



In the 1990s, Peerless stepped in to save Wire Hardware, one of the few examples of 19th-century commercial architecture in Rockville.





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### Mission:

Peerless Rockville safeguards and promotes Rockville's past by preserving buildings, spaces, objects, and information important to our city's heritage. Peerless Rockville advances its goals through education, example, advocacy, and community involvement.

*Tribute to Eileen McGuckian  
Sunday, March 16, 5-8 p.m.  
at Glenview Mansion*

### Contact Us:

T: 301.762.0096  
F: 301.762.0961  
E: [info@peerlessrockville.org](mailto:info@peerlessrockville.org)  
Surf, Point, Click,  
and Discover at  
[www.peerlessrockville.org](http://www.peerlessrockville.org)

### Hours:

Resource Center, Library  
and Peerless Store:  
**Tuesday-Saturday,**  
**10 a.m.-1 p.m.**  
**and by appointment**

Office:  
**Monday-Friday,**  
**9 a.m.-5 p.m.**

### 2007-2008

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**Please consider supporting the  
Eileen McGuckian Preservation Fund.**

In honor of Eileen's advocacy and educational achievements for the past 34 years, the Board of Directors has created the Eileen McGuckian Preservation Fund to ensure the continued success and strength of Peerless Rockville's core mission. The Board invites you to make a contribution.

Yes, I want to make a donation to honor Eileen's many important contributions to historic preservation and Rockville. Enclosed is my tax-deductible contribution:

- \$5,000       \$2,500       \$1,000       \$500  
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