

Owners and residents

1889-1900 Mr. Benjamin H. Warder, the owner, rented the premises to tenants who worked in white-collar jobs-- stenographers, clerks, government employees and the like. This was entirely consistent with the type of neighborhood, especially the 200 block of A St., N.E. To date we can identify during the home's first decade only one resident. The resident was Daniel W. Ridgely, a government clerk.

The U.S. Census for 1900 enumerates Mr. Ridgely as "renter". The household included his wife, Ella, their son and daughter, Charles and Eugenia, the mother of Mr. Ridgely, Mrs. Mary A. Ridgely, and two live-in servants, Carrie Loper and George B. Williams. The Ridgely family was native to Delaware, as was one of the servants, Carrie Loper. George Williams, the other servant and the only black member in the household, was born in Maryland. Mr. and Mrs. Ridgely had been married twenty-four years and they were at the time of the Census both in their mid-forties. Charles, the son, was twenty-one and worked in "real estate". His fifteen year old sister, Eugenia, was still in school. The grandmother was seventy-four and a widow. Carrie Loper was twenty-one and George Williams nineteen.

Nowadays we tend to associate live-in domestic help with wealthy households; but a century ago many people

with middle-class incomes could afford live-in servants. The educational level of most common folk, and particularly those of the "servant class", did not extend beyond the elementary grades. Job opportunities for the unmarried female and for minorities were much restricted. People back then were also just far more home oriented. Although it is not widely known the "voluntary" indentured servant system existed in the city of Washington well into the mid-1890s; there are numerous examples in the archives documenting the courts indenturing a young person over to a household where he or she would work for a specified period of time and then be released. Upon their release, however, their employer was often responsible for seeing that these individuals had gained some marketable skill, a small sum of money and a new suit beforehand. Individuals coming into the city from the rural areas and who had few jo skills and little formal education at the turn-of-the-century often saw advantages in the live-in job. Beyond a little pocket money now and then, it didn't pay well, but it did provide room and board not to mention a secure, respectable place to live.

Returning to the Ridgely family, they demonstrate how renters in the market on Capitol Hill back in those times were mobile. The Ridgelys rented, at different times, at least three different addresses in the 200 block of A St.