

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.

and their did this all within a period of less than nine years! They first rented 212, then came over to 219, and later moved into 216 A St., N.E. When they finally left the 200 block of A altogether, they did not go far. They only relocated a block over and three up, arriving in the 300 block of D!

Home ownership was not as common then as today and people changed addresses often in the city. Nevertheless, with their belongings moving so often down the steps and into the street, then across to the other side and into yet another home, no doubt the neighbors came to recognize the Ridgely family furniture nearly as well as did the Ridgelys themselves!

After the Ridgelys it is not known who immediately followed on the premises. Unfortunately the 1910 U.S. Census lists no one in residence at the home, so we assume it sat vacant. The city directories during this decade provide no cross references by address and surname to assist our research. Scan reading the directories without computers to do it for us was not a time efficient method.

1912-1921 When Mrs. Susan E. Spaid first came to reside in the home in 1912, she was employed as a clerk with the Patent Office. Although married some thirty-three years earlier, she was by now either a widow or separated from her husband, Mr. Chauncy D. Spaid. The husband, it seems, worked as a contractor and, for

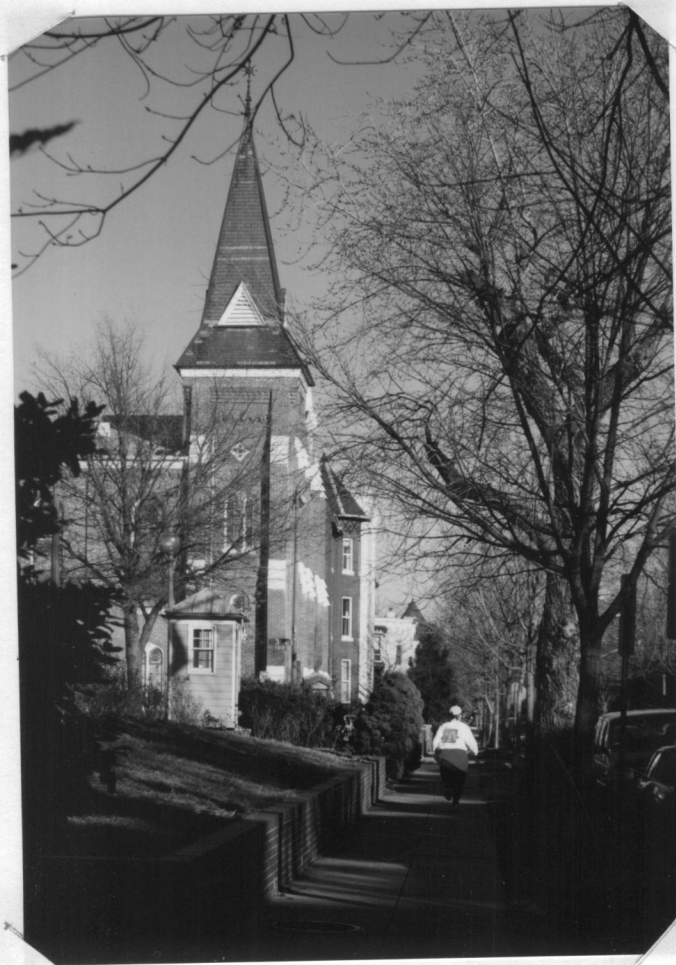
about a year only, was the proprietor of a modest hotel located at 1413 Pa Ave., N.W., called the "Owen House". In any case by 1882 we find Mrs. Spaid living alone in a boarding house and working as a government clerk. Mr. Spaid has either died or relocated.

The last good glimpse we have of Mrs. Spaid comes on January 9, 1920, when the Census taker came to her door at 219 A St. There she is still employed with the Patent Office despite the fact that she is eighty-six years old. Living with her is Mrs. Lana Fitzgerald, also a widow and her younger sister of seventy-two years. Together they've started a little boarding house with four lodgers: Miss Catherine Carroll, Miss Rosalie Slaughter, Miss Marie Rumbill and Miss Marie Hughes. These young ladies are all in their twenties and work at Federal agencies, such as the War Department and the I.R.S. They come from different backgrounds-- their native places of birth being Mississippi, Missouri, Georgia and Ireland respectively. This kind of boarding house situation was very common on Capitol Hill from the turn-of-the-century until the 1950s. Of course even today we still have a lot of "shared housing" on the Hill but I suppose the boarding house arrangement in the precise meaning of the word would be a little less present due to the area being within a historical district.

1922-1923 The Freeman family resided in the home as tenants only two years. William N. Freeman and his wife, Maude A. Freeman, operated a commercial office service specializing in duplicating and typewriting. This being an era before xeroxing, the work load must have been heavy. Their shop was located downtown in the 600 block of F St., N.W., near Judiciary Square.

At this point in the narrative we should digress a little by mentioning the Waugh Church because it is truly a neighborhood landmark. The Church at 3rd and A dates from 1854 when the congregation members met there in a building that could hardly be called more than a "shanty". By 1858 the first stage of the building was completed and it was dedicated. They named it after Rev. Beverly Waugh, a very important pastor. By 1875 the tower was erected and then the north side of the building enlarged. Between 1892 and 1903 a organ loft was installed. During the summer of 1922 one big occasion was the "radio lawn party..." held at Waugh Church, featuring the broadcasts of the Naval and U.S. Marine band concerts! That was one social hour that must have been audible up and down A St.! But how different the Church had become by this time. Fifty years before, that is, in the 1870s, Waugh M.E. Church was admired for the well kept grounds surrounding it...an "enclosed low fence around... luxuriate tangles of running roses and honey suckle in yard and garden." Twenty thousand dollars damage was caused in a fire in the

steeple during 1926. By early 1950s the membership had leveled off at about 500 and by the late 1950s the pastor of Waugh Church was urging his congregation to integrate. Today the Church has become a black penecostal holiness congregation known as the Faith Tabernacle United Holy Church of America, Inc.



But returning now to our discussion of the home at 219 A St....On March 16, 1923, the home finally left the estate of Benjamin H. Warder and the trust that handled it after his

death some nineteen years earlier in 1894. The deed now passed into the hands of Mrs. Bessie Cryer.

1923-1948 The Cryers were a blue-collar, working class family. Walter J. Cryer, an auto mechanic, kept the deed in his wife's name, Bessie Cryer. Unfortunately the deed records are not entirely clear as to when the home passed on to the Cryer's son, James Walter Cryer-- although it seems that date might be about 1930, the same time when no further listing for the father, Walter, can be found.

In any case, the son James W. shared the home with his parents early on. The son was also an auto mechanic, only he continued the trade as an employee of the the Post Office. Together Bessie Cryer, the mother, and her son, James W., built a galvanized metal auto garage toward rear of the lot in June, 1923. The building permit for the garage is included here as is a 1928 Sanborn Fire Insurance map illustrating the garage. Apparently the metal sat on a wooden frame. The garage is the only area for auto parking that I can document with a direct connection to the home; it sat entirely within lot 19 and this lot has not changed in size, by square footage, since the subdivision of Benjamin Warder back in 1889. If there was any other area for parking vehicles and for the sole use by residents of 219 A St., I am not aware of it or, at least, no documentation can be found.

As for James W. Cryer the information about him is very sketchy. We know that before relocating to A St.,

