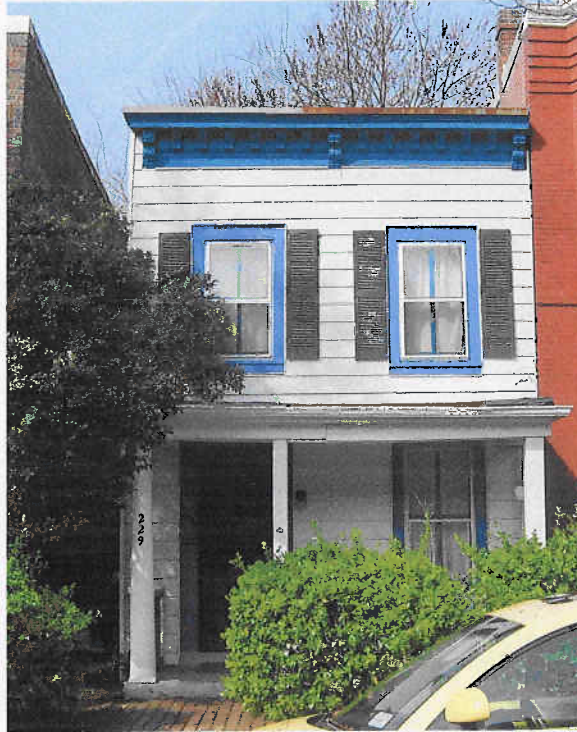


## 229 10<sup>th</sup> Street, SE



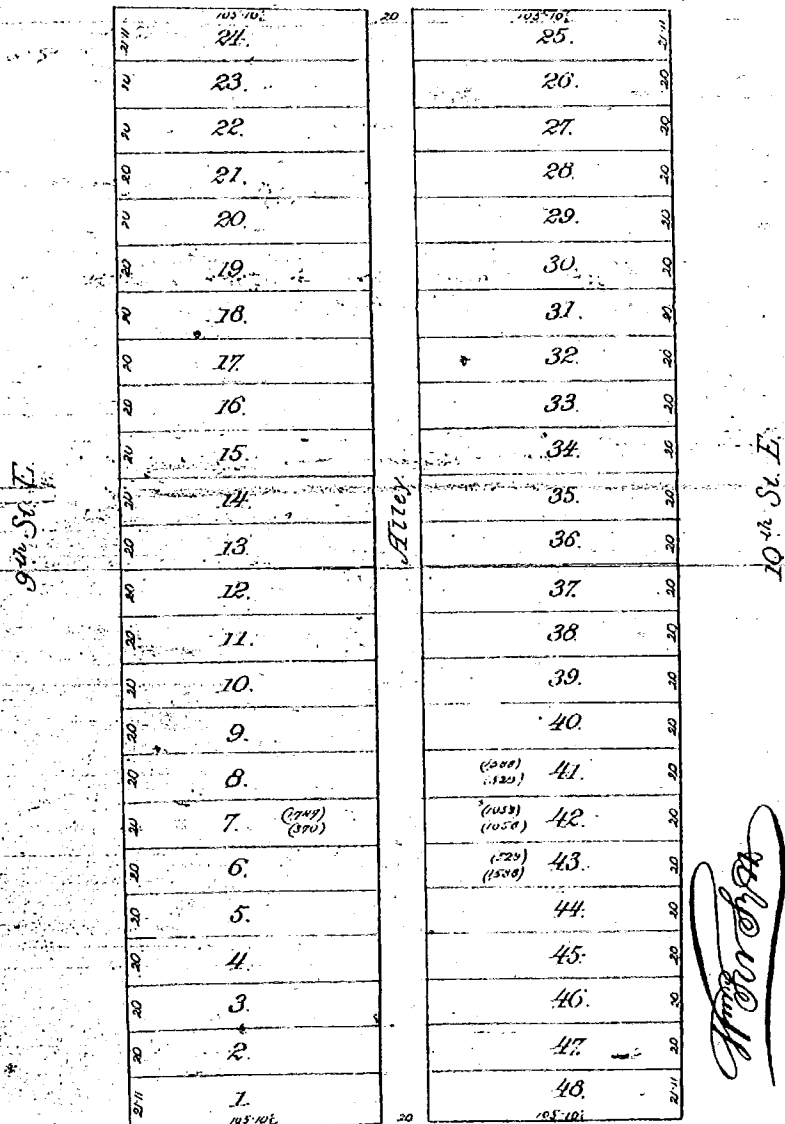
Land was cheap when the little house at 229 10<sup>th</sup> Street, SE, was built. Now, in 2016, the land is dear and more valuable than the house that sits on it. Prohibitions of the Capitol Hill Historic District usually prevent our modest residential buildings from being razed for more luxurious structures, but there are other ways to erase a little old house. Before that happens it would be worth remembering how it connects us to our history as a neighborhood.

The house is sited on lot 39 of the Van Horn and Metcalf subdivision, square 944. Squares are parcels of land surrounded by the streets of L'Enfant's grid of the old city, numbered to facilitate sales to speculators in 1791. Real estate investors John Van Hook and William W. Metcalf acquired the still-vacant square in 1863 after its investor-owner had been sent to prison for his support for the Confederacy.<sup>1</sup> They anticipated demand for housing in this area with the end of the Civil War. Earlier the city had developed to the west, but there were features here that would be attractive to a growing number of working and middle class buyers. Two of the city's biggest employers were nearby—the Navy Yard and the Government Printing Office, as well as the Capitol. Another attraction was the route of the city's new street railways. Passengers could board a horse-drawn car at the corner of 8<sup>th</sup> Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, SE, to ride to the Navy Yard or, in the other direction, past the Capitol to Georgetown with the agencies, offices and shops in between. By 1864 another line ran west along East Capitol Street. Also on Pennsylvania Avenue, between 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>, there was the new state-of-the-art Wallach School for white children.

Van Hook and Metcalf proceeded to subdivide the square into 48 lots arranged on either side of a 20' wide north-south running alley. All except the slightly wider corner lots were also 20' wide.

# 944.

South B. St.



South C. St.

J. Van Hook Subd. Square into lots 1-48, June 13, 84.

Plat for Square 944, Van Hook and Metcalf Subdivision. Real Estate Directory of the City of Washington, D. C., Vol. 3, E. F. M. Faehz and F. W. Pratt, 1874.

When he became "financially embarrassed," Van Hook sold out to Metcalf, who continued to market the lots with another partner.<sup>2</sup>

**LOTS FOR SALE ON LIBERAL TERMS—**  
**L** BEAUTIFULLY LOCATED; one square from  
 street cars on Capitol Hill; only \$40 down and  
 small monthly payments required; 4 years time  
 given. Lots 20 by 100 feet deep to a 20 foot alley.  
 Call at once if you would secure one.  
**STARR & METCALF,**  
 (Plant's Building,)  
 New York ave. and 15th st.  
 je 5-tf

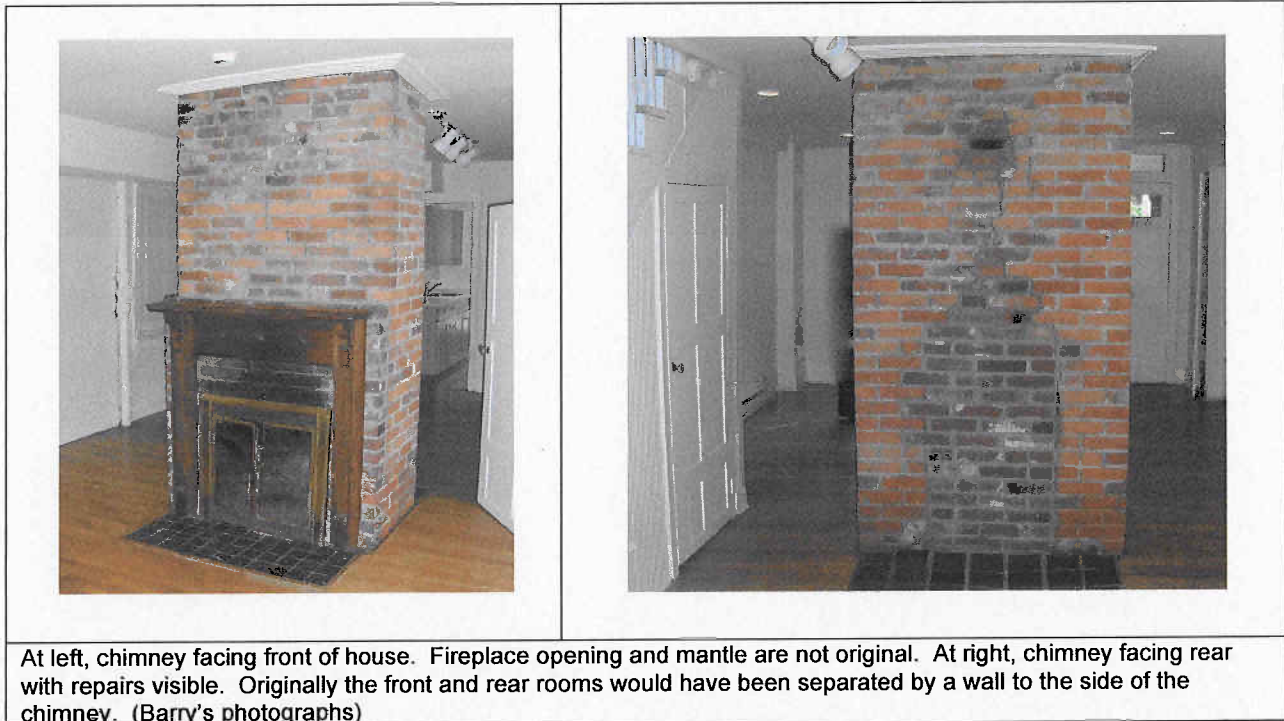
*Evening Star*, June 10, 1867, and other dates during that month. (In fact the lots are 105' deep.) Metcalf did not exaggerate proximity to street cars. It was customary at the time to express distance by squares. Standing at the southwest corner of square 944 and then walking diagonally across the next square, one arrives approximately at the intersection of Pennsylvania Avenue and 8<sup>th</sup> Streets. The advertised liberal terms weren't a very good deal and best avoided if possible. Monthly payments were for interest, with a balloon payment due for the sales price at the end of the four years.

Although a few of the houses on square 944 are documented to have been built by Metcalf, he was primarily interested in selling the vacant lots, which he priced at \$250 each, a bit more for corners. Early buyers on the 10<sup>th</sup> Street side of the square included Thomas Somerville, founder of today's eponymous regional distributor of plumbing, heating and air conditioning supplies. He built his mansion, as it was known, at 243 and moved his family in by late 1865.<sup>3</sup> Most of Metcalf's buyers were of more modest means, though—iron molders, workers in the building trades, or clerks—and their wood frame one or two-story houses reflected their circumstances.

On October 8, 1868, William Metcalf sold lot 39 to Francis E. Boyle as trustee "to hold the property for the sole use and benefit of Hannah Brierton."<sup>4</sup> Francis E. Boyle was the priest at St. Peter's Catholic Church on 2<sup>nd</sup> Street, SE, and Hannah Bryerton (as the spelling was eventually standardized) was a parishioner. It's not known why the trust arrangement was made. It may have had to do with doubts about Hannah's husband; in a few years he would disappear from the picture.

Hannah Bryerton was an Irish immigrant, as was her husband. When she bought the lot through Father Boyle she was about 42 years old. The earliest city record of her life in Washington located by this research is the marriage between Patrick Brardon and Johanna Craven on May 18, 1857. This would have been her second marriage. Her eldest child, Daniel F. Craven, was born in Connecticut, but nothing is known of his father and Hannah's first husband, Thomas Craven.

The two-story wood frame house that Hannah built was typical for the block and for neighborhood working and middle class families of the time.<sup>5</sup> The interior arrangement was two rooms upstairs over two rooms downstairs (the main block) with a narrower one-story kitchen ell at the rear (the "back building," as old city building permits termed the ell)<sup>6</sup>. Steep narrow stairs against the north wall ran from the back of the rear room of the main block up to the second floor. One feature of the house was less typical for new construction in the post-war period: a large central brick chimney that could have vented wood or coal burning stoves in both of the first floor main rooms of the uninsulated house. There was no basement, attic or porch.<sup>7</sup>



At left, chimney facing front of house. Fireplace opening and mantle are not original. At right, chimney facing rear with repairs visible. Originally the front and rear rooms would have been separated by a wall to the side of the chimney. (Barry's photographs)

The pre-1873 houses on the west side of the block were sited to allow side passages from the street to the back yard. No. 229 is the only one remaining that has not been expanded to close the passage (as of May 2016)<sup>8</sup>. A water main wasn't laid until 1872 and a sewer sometime later. Residents relied on public pumps or hydrants and used box privies. The alley at the time probably existed mainly on paper, thus the side passages were useful for removing contents of the privy boxes, refuse and ashes from the back yards. Even when "Potomac water" and sewerage became available, residents didn't rush to install indoor plumbing. Many types of fixtures were still suspect and trouble-prone, and water pressure on Capitol Hill remained very poor until after the turn of the century. An 1894 map shows five houses on this square still having box privies.<sup>9</sup>

In 1868 the 200 block of 10<sup>th</sup> Street, SE, was the edge of town. There were ten or eleven wood frame houses on the west side, some of them only a single story high. Across the dirt road there was an antebellum tenement. Otherwise the view to the east was mainly of a vacant scrub-covered "commons," as the empty land was called, with two significant exceptions – the substantial brick houses of Philadelphia Row on 11<sup>th</sup> Street, SE, and the buildings of the vast former Lincoln Hospital (east of today's Lincoln Park), which would not be demolished until the following year.

The first city directory to list Patrick Bryerton living on the block was compiled late in 1869, but the family wasn't new to the neighborhood. The 1860 census had enumerated them in the 6<sup>th</sup> Ward under "Brearton." (You can hear the Irish brogue in the spelling variations.) The directory for that year places them at "486 L south" and later directories on 6<sup>th</sup> Street, SE.

The family was enumerated here in 1870. Patrick was listed as a laborer, a vague label that encompassed both skilled and unskilled workers. Hannah was keeping house for the family. Patrick and Hannah are both listed as having personal estates of \$100, which included such valuables as "bonds, stocks, mortgages, notes, live stock, plate, jewels or furniture."<sup>10</sup> Only one

other woman on the block, a widow, and only half the male heads of the other (by then) fourteen households claimed to have a personal estate worth \$100 or more. Hannah and Patrick had three daughters: Ann, 12; Maria, 9; and Margaret, 7, all in school. Hannah's restive son Daniel Craven was enumerated here also, but in fact he was far away at sea.

Daniel had an uneasy childhood in Washington. He was a newsboy in 1863 when he ran away from home and was taken in by a kindly woman from whom he subsequently stole money. Arrested and released, he promised to make restitution. The next year, barely 12, he was enlisted as "a boy bound to learn music" at the Marine Barracks on 8<sup>th</sup> Street. The Marine Band apprentice program indentured boys to the Corps until they were 21. During that time they agreed to serve their master, officially the Drum Major of the Corps, foregoing vices and matrimony. They were trained in music and military discipline and attended a school on the barracks grounds. Some boys were known to have lived at home, and Daniel probably did, too. If so, Hannah likely received an allowance for his board.<sup>11</sup>

Many of the boys were the sons of band members and went on to become accomplished professional musicians later. One of Daniel's young fellow apprentices was John Philip Sousa. Daniel, however, had no particular aptitude for music. In 1869 he shipped out aboard the flagship of the South Atlantic squadron as a drummer. Honorably discharged from the Marine Corps two years later, he returned to Washington to live at 229.<sup>12</sup>

Hannah and Patrick Bryerton separated and began listing themselves at different addresses in the 1872 city directory. Daniel gave his occupation as plumber, but it's doubtful that he had acquired any skill in the trade. To support her young daughters, Hannah opened a grocery store in the house. Turning the front room of one's home into a little store was a step sometimes taken by women facing hard times. Hannah was in business here for about five years.

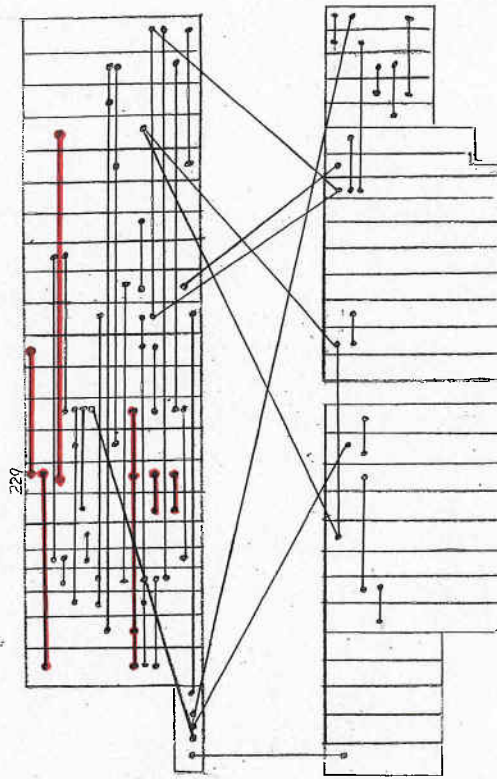
Possibly discouraged by his prospects as a civilian Daniel Craven enlisted in the Navy. When he came home again the family's situation was starting to improve. By the 1880 census everyone except Hannah, who had been able to give up the grocery, was working and contributing income to the household. Daniel, 28, had secured a position with the District's fire department, "a gallant fire laddie as well as an excellent gentleman."<sup>13</sup> Daughter Ann, 22, was a dressmaker. Minnie (Maria), 20, always an outstanding student, had completed normal school and was teaching at the Adolf Cluss designed Cranch School, 12<sup>th</sup> and G Streets, SE. Margaret, 17, was a clerk in a confectionary store.

After Father Boyle, Hannah's trustee, died in March 1882, his sister deeded the house to Daniel as the new trustee for his mother. That May the family suffered a harsh blow when bright and popular Minnie died of meningitis. The funeral began at 229 and proceeded to St. Peter's for a requiem mass where the church was filled with flowers and crowded with her friends. Cranch School closed for the day in her honor.

The Bryertons left 229 later that year, moving to 6<sup>th</sup> Street, SE. They did not sell the house, however. It remained in the family until the last Bryerton, Margaret, sold it 60 years later. Meanwhile, the house became a rental property, and in that capacity it supported the social fabric prized by Capitol Hill old timers and newcomers through the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Washington has always had a low rate of homeownership, and in Capitol Hill many residents moved frequently among rented quarters. Transience was not an indication of community instability, however. Renters usually moved within the neighborhood or even within the same

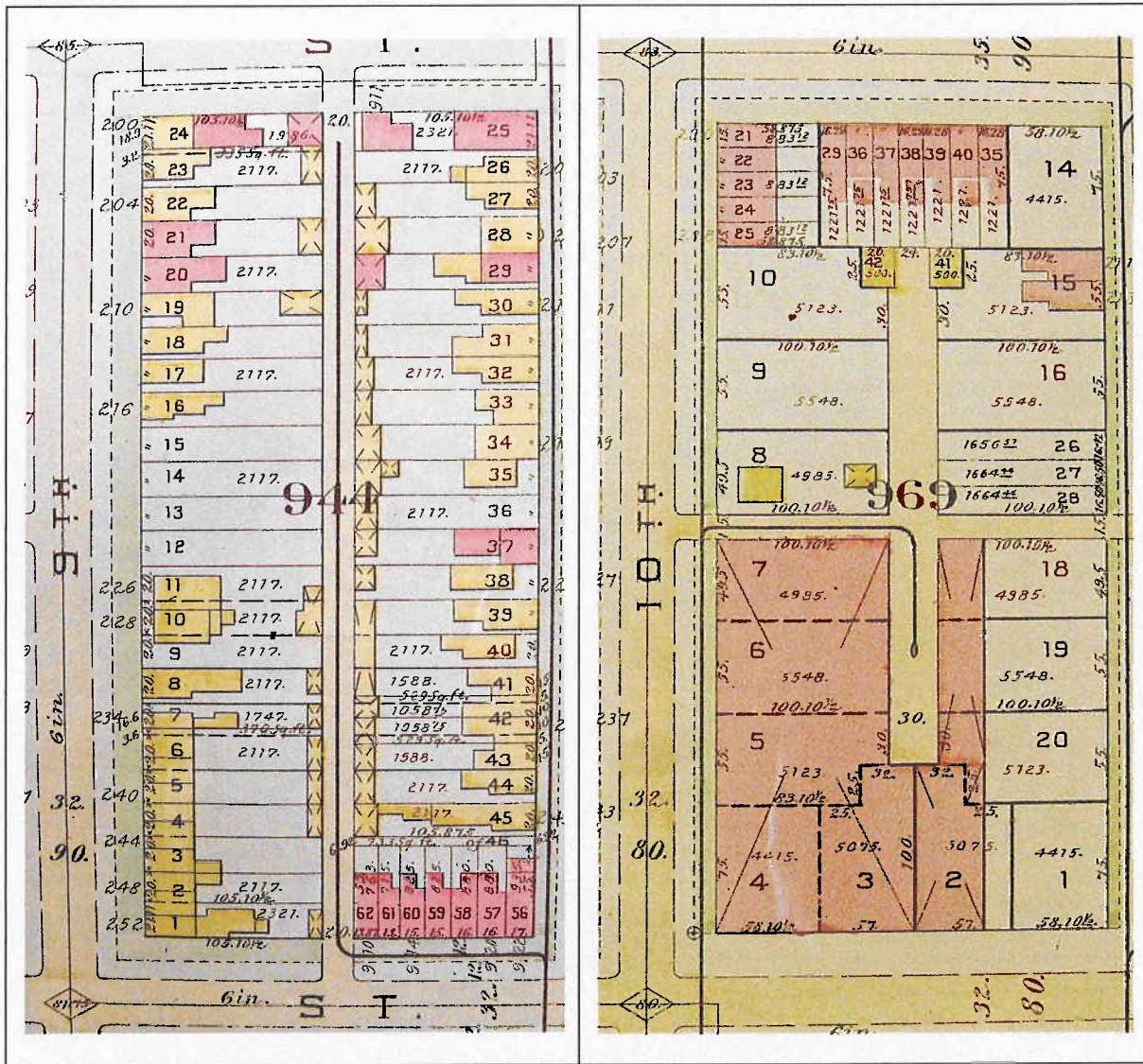
block, and they were as fully engaged with the community as property owners. In fact, tenants were likely to be friends or relatives of the landlords. Children grew up here and married neighbors, then raised their own families near their parents, siblings and familiar institutions, renting when they couldn't or didn't want to buy. The Capitol Hill community was also racially mixed and economically diverse. White and black residents often lived next door to or across the street from each other. Financially secure families lived near others scraping by. White collars mixed with blue. Rental properties accommodated residents in a variety of circumstances. However, as houses aged, if they weren't maintained or modernized to keep pace with advancing domestic technology and the amenities available in competitive new construction, their rental value declined. Such old houses were more and more likely to become shelter for poorer residents who were often African American. This would be 229's story for many years, as well as the story of the block.



**Houses of the 200 Block of 10<sup>th</sup> Street, SE.** Lines and dots represent historical family connections of ownership or tenancy among the houses. The red lines show connections for 229 and its place within the block community.

For many years the Bryertons kept 229 tenanted with the families of white skilled workers, salesmen, or store clerks who were their friends and Capitol Hill neighbors. The apparent absence of newspaper advertising suggests that the house was passed around through word of mouth. The first tenants, for example, were fellow parishioners of St. Peter's. They were followed by a young, newly married daughter of the Daughton family at 241, who, like the Bryertons, were original residents of the block. Other Daughton relatives lived here later.

The house was also attractive as a dwelling for drivers of the Herdic Phaeton Company, which had built an enormous 200-horse stable across the street. The company was in business at this location until 1897 and employed scores of men. Some of the coach drivers were glad to find convenient housing here that was affordable on their salaries of about \$1.80 per very long day.



**Hopkins Real Estate Atlas, 1893.** Yellow signifies frame construction. Red signifies brick. There are a few errors, some corrected in later editions. In square 944 the house at 229 occupies lot 39, with a frame fuel shed on the alley. The Herdic stable is on the south end of square 969. Two-horse coaches left the C Street entrance, ran up 11<sup>th</sup> Street and turned left onto East Capitol Street to begin the route west. The stable also housed workshops for coach building and varnishing. It was torn down in 1900.

In June 1900 the census enumerator found 229 being used as a boarding house. City directories that bracket the census date indicate the business was very short lived, however, less than a year. Neither the widowed boarding house keeper, her five boarders nor her African

American servant can be traced reliably through other city records before or after their residence here. Two of the three adult male boarders had been unemployed for several months. (The other two were a wife and 3-year old child.)

Luther W. Reiley moved his large family into 229 on the heels of the departing boarding house keeper. Typically, they were Capitol Hill residents who moved among rentals. Luther Reiley listed himself as a contractor in directories, and all of the adult males of the extended family were employed in building trades or blue collar government jobs. Given children, stepchildren and another relative or three, there may have been ten to twelve people living here at one time. Requirements for personal space were different from today's, but the house was crowded even by old standards.

A tailor, George P. Braugh, and his family followed the Reileys. The Braughs were another Capitol Hill family; they moved here from the 200 block of 9<sup>th</sup> Street, SE. When they were enumerated here in 1910, George Braugh, 45, was described as a "tailor-merchant." His parents were from Germany, but he himself had been born in Maryland. His wife Mary was 49. They had two daughters, Ruth, 17, and Freda, 13. A son, Frederick, was 10. All were DC natives. Their social activities, usually involving church programs, were sometimes reported in newspapers.

By the time the Braugh family moved on in 1913, 229 had become less desirable housing. As any owner of an aging wood frame house will attest, upkeep is endless. However, city records show no permits issued for repairs to the house, not even for the inevitable and commonly permitted work of repairing or replacing siding, framing, or roof. Work might have been done without permits, of course, or records misplaced and lost. But the absence of repair records on file for so long a period is unusual.

Also, the house still did not have an indoor toilet or a bathtub. After the Braughs left, the house was advertised for rent among a list of offerings by John F. Donohoe & Sons, a Capitol Hill real estate company, as five rooms for \$13.00 a month, the next cheapest house among the listings. Significantly, the description omits any mention of a bath, a feature always cited in rental offerings if it existed.<sup>14</sup> The box privy would have already been replaced by an outside toilet connected to the sewer, though not necessarily to the city water supply. However, bringing a toilet, a bathtub, and a sink—the minimum equipment that met urban middle-class expectations—inside the small house was problematic. There was the matter of piping, drainage and a source for hot water (though at this time many were still resigned to hauling hot water from the kitchen or heating a kettle on a tiny stove in the bathroom itself). Most owners of the old houses on the block's west side faced a choice of building additions to accommodate the bathroom or retrofitting it into scarce existing space. Of four other houses with some documentation of bathroom installations, three owners built additions by expanding to fill in the side passageway and/or by making a second-story extension over the rear kitchen ell (in 1899, 1928 and 1931)<sup>15</sup>. One family chose to partition off a corner of one of the two bedrooms to make a windowless and unventilated space for a toilet and tub and attached the sink to the wall on the landing of the stair hallway.<sup>16</sup> The Bryertons wouldn't or, more likely, couldn't shoulder the expense. By then only Daniel Craven and Margaret Bryerton were left. Daniel had joined the Navy again and Margaret was a printer's assistant at the Bureau of Printing and Engraving. She was boarding at a house on A Street, SE.

As down-scale as 229 was, though, its continued availability as shelter for people who needed cheap rent worked to ensure the diversity of the neighborhood. Across the street and in the surrounding blocks new brick houses were being built with all the modern conveniences and



