CENTENNIAL 1911 – 2011
Our House at 647 South Carolina Avenue, SE
Washington, DC

Prologue

In 1903 the 600 block of South Carolina Avenue was paved with asphalt blocks. "The Maples," home to descendants of Emily Edson Briggs, who acquired the property in 1871, was the only structure on the trapezoid-shaped block north of the Avenue. The south side was lined with a row of residences, both brick and frame – similar to what we see today. There were two lots, each occupied by a modest frame house, where 647 stands today. The two properties changed hands several times between 1905 and 1909.

Henry C. Emrich, 1911 - 1920

In March 1911, Henry Emrich, a real estate dealer according to the city directory, bought both properties and joined them into a single lot. The frame houses were demolished. On June 8, 1911 Mr. Emrich took out a building permit to construct a house, valued at $5,000 and a garage, valued at $300, on the newly constituted lot. He hired the architect A.H. Beers to design the house and contracted with R.C. Hess to construct it. Beers designed many other houses on Capitol Hill. Hess had built houses across the street from 647 in 1907 and 1909, and on D Street in 1908 for the owner of The Maples.

Henry Emrich lived on K Street NE, and moved to South Carolina Avenue when his house was completed in 1912. In 1915 he took out a permit to build a brick house next door at 649, which had been occupied by a frame house. The permit lists C.C. Dunkel as the architect and Emrich himself as the builder. After selling his home at 647 in 1920, Henry moved to NW DC. He died in 1931 and was interred, temporarily, at Congressional Cemetery.

The McCormick Family, 1920 - 1960

The McCormicks lived nearby at 656 B Street SE (now Independence Ave.). Thomas, the head of the family, came to the United States from Ireland when he was a child. In 1872 he married Mary Ann (Mary), who was born in Pennsylvania. The U.S. Census listed Thomas as a blacksmith in 1900 and as a blacksmith and wheelwright in 1910. According to city directories in the 1920s he is a wagon-maker. He had a shop at 1006 C Street, NW. The 1900 census shows Thomas and Mary in the house on B Street with 5 children ranging in age from 25 down to 11: Thomas, Jr., Mary (Mamie), Michael, Francis (Frank), and Jennie (Jane). By April 1920 the household, still on B Street, consisted of Thomas (about 72 or 75 years old), Mary (67), Mamie, her

husband Andrew Weschler, their 2-year-old son, and Jennie (30). At that time Michael (34) was serving as a chief gunner's mate at the U.S. Naval Station in Groton, Connecticut. Another family member, Mabel McCormick (probably a daughter-in-law) was living in a boarding house at 705 5th Street (SE?) with her 4-year-old son Allan.

Two months later, in June 1920, Thomas and Mary McCormick bought the house at 647 South Carolina Avenue from Henry Emrich. The deed was made out only to Mary, probably to protect the house from liability from Thomas's wagon making business (which must not have looked like a winner in 1920).

Thomas McCormick died early in 1930. The census that year lists Mary, Jennie and Mary's grandson, Allan, then 14, living at 647. Later, in the early 1930's according to the city directory, Michael was assigned to the Washington Navy Yard as an "ordinance man" and moved in with his family on South Carolina Avenue.

Mary passed away in 1943. Michael and Jennie – Mr. Mike and Miss Jennie to the neighbors – stayed for the rest of their lives. We were told that Michael raised the Stars and Stripes every day on the big flagpole mounted on the side of the garage. He had peach, apple and pear trees in the back yard. Jennie raised roses and enjoyed sitting on the back sleeping porch where she could observe the goings-on in neighboring yards.

Jennie died in 1957. Michael died in 1960 at the Bethesda Naval Hospital. His funeral was celebrated at St. Peter's Church. Thomas, Thomas, Jr., Frank, Michael J., Jane F. (Jennie) and Mary are buried at Mt. Olivet Cemetery. Mary's stone is missing.

Charles and Besse Mauss, 1960 - 1969

In September 1960 Michael McCormick's estate sold the house at 647 to Charles E. Mauss and Besse Day Mauss. According to his obituary, Charles was a contractor who moved from Pennsylvania to Washington in the early 1930s. He restored old homes on Capitol Hill. Besse, in her younger years, was an accomplished statistician and mathematician according to a reference in an oral history. Charles was about 60 years old when the couple bought the house. He and Besse lived there until 1969 when they sold it and retired to Charles's hometown of New Oxford, Pennsylvania.

Hopkins and Judith Holmberg, 1969 - 1972

Next in line were R. Hopkins Holmberg and Judith V. Holmberg who purchased the house in November 1969 and stayed for just a little over two years. The city directory lists Hopkins as a consultant employed by Harold F. Wise & Associates. Judith worked for the DC public schools.

Tony Podesta, 1972 - 1980

Anthony T. Podesta purchased the house in January 1972. During that year 647 South Carolina was filled with McGovern presidential campaigners. A neighbor says they unwound with volleyball games in Marion Park. Tony lived in the house for the rest of the decade, often with several housemates including his brother, John Podesta. The next-door neighbor at 649 reported that "Tony and them" hosted many lively parties.

Margaret and Ed Missiaen, 1980 - 2011 and . . . .

We (Margaret Branham Missiaen and Edmond Missiaen) purchased the house in February 1980. Unfortunately, the magnificent brass lady holding a lamp on the newel post did not convey. The porch and house trim were painted dark brown and the porch ceiling was sky blue – traditional colors for the early Twentieth Century. The sleeping porch on the back of the house was decayed. One of the columns on the front porch was missing a plinth and dangling from the porch roof beam. The back part of the driveway, adjacent to the rotting garage door, was submerged beneath wisteria vines. But we loved it and have made it our home for 31 plus years and, hopefully, several more.