

ROTHWELL'S WASHINGTON ROTHWELLS: A PROSPEROUS CAPITOL HILL FAMILY

By Timothy Hauser

Richard Rothwell was a marble cutter/stonemason by profession. He came to America from Manchester, England in early 1850 with his wife and five children, arriving by ship in the port of Baltimore. They settled initially in Baltimore, but Rothwell was unsuccessful. After two years, he moved his family to the smaller and less sophisticated city of Washington, D.C. where stonemasons were in great demand as construction on the new federal capital and major public buildings accelerated. The affairs of Richard Rothwell and his extended family prospered in the capital city.

The 1853 edition of the "Washington and Georgetown Directory" firsts lists Richard Rothwell, and what is most probably a brother Daniel, "stonecutters" both, living respectively at "north side Massachusetts Avenue between New Jersey Avenue and 2nd Street West" and "west side New Jersey Ave between D and E Streets" (near present- day Union Station).

Richard moved subsequently to lots he owned in the northeast corner of Square 1007, just off Maryland Ave. at the intersections of F and 13th Streets, N.E. , before moving to Ninth Street, N.E. in September 1858 sometime after his purchase of lots 10 and 11 in Square 919. By 1864 Rothwell had completed one of the few two-story brick residences east of Fourth Street, N.E., rivaling the stately Philadelphia Row townhouses along 11th Street, SE, which were built at the same time.

The Rothwell family – both men and women --proved very successful in business as stonecutters and stone and brick suppliers (Richard Rothwell operated a stone yard in Square 941 lots 7 and 8 and a brick yard at 12th and C Streets), plumbers/gas fitters, real estate speculators and builders, pool hall operators, grocers and retailers (Emma Rothwell ran a grocery from 24 Ninth Street in the early 1860's, and her oldest son William sold plumbing and building supplies such as slate fireplaces from his store on Pennsylvania Avenue), and were active in all aspects of their Capitol Hill community. Richard Rothwell also enlisted in the Union Army, Columbia Regiment, in 1861, qualifying for a Civil War veteran's pension.

The Rothwell men are documented to have worked on the construction of a number of the more prominent early public buildings in the nation's capital, including the enlargement of the Patent Building (known now as the National Portrait Gallery), the Pension Building (now known as the Building Museum), the Capitol Extension, the Treasury Building west wing, the Washington Monument completion, the Smithsonian's Arts and Sciences Building (known then as the National Museum), barracks and BOQ's at Fort Myers, and various cenotaphs and private memorials at Congressional Cemetery.

The Rothwell family could well have worked on other public buildings under construction at the end of the 19th Century for which documentation cannot be found,

such as the Library of Congress, or the Capitol terrace extensions completed in the 1880's. Large contracting firms had taken over the quarrying, cutting, and shipping of stone by that time, although the Rothwells could very well have worked as subcontractors. We do know, for example, that the son of his neighbor and fellow stonecutter George Thorpe applied for work on the Library of Congress construction in 1881.

More likely, the family's business interests shifted more exclusively to real estate and house contracting with Washington's population boom after the Civil War. The many city improvements initiated by Mayor "Boss" Sheppard in the early 1870's, such as the laying of sewers, paving and lighting of streets, and the beginning of public transportation, led to the residential building boom of the second half of the decade.

Rothwell and his sons were active participants in shaping their immediate neighborhood along Ninth Street and East Capitol and the greater Capitol Hill landscape. They built No. 22 and No. 28 Ninth Street NE and also a small apartment building where No. 26 Ninth Street NE now stands in 1876/7 and No. 800 East Capitol Street, originally a feed store, in 1879.

On the opposite side of Ninth Street NE in Squares 941 and 942, they built Nos. 23 and 25 Ninth Street in 1890 on land they had used for their stonecutting business. In 1892 after moving two frame houses in which Daniel Rothwell and his sister Emma had lived they built Nos. 10 and 11 9th St. SE (No. 10 Ninth Street is the current residence of Eleanore Holmes-Norton). Richard Rothwell built 115, 117 and 119 Tenth St. NE. The 115 Tenth St. NE house was once on the Capitol Hill Restoration Society tour.

Rothwell and his eldest son William owned and built on property throughout the city, some of which has not survived to this day. William was a plumber and gas fitter by profession as well as a builder and lived and operated his plumbing business on Pennsylvania Avenue SE in Square 731 where the Library of Congress Jefferson Building now stands, and built a large residence on Independence Avenue SE in Square 732 where the Library of Congress Madison Building now stands.

Richard Rothwell built St. John's Catholic Institute on Vermont Ave. opposite the Lutheran Church and statue of Martin Luther in 1879. This was perhaps his most ambitious private sector project based on the architectural plan that have survived to this day. Unfortunately, the Institute was torn down in the 1960's to make way for high rise apartments.

Richard Rothwell was once paid by Congress for creating 20 cenotaphs that in memory late Congressmen and Senators in Congressional Cemetery. He died in Washington in 1906, 20 years after his wife Emma. They are buried beneath a sighing angel in Congressional Cemetery. William died from bronchial asthma in 1914 and his wife Sarah passed away in 1933. Both died at their home on 24 Ninth Street NE.

By the end of World War I, several of the third generation Rothwells had abandoned their entrepreneurial legacy, shifting to clerical jobs in the private and public sectors.

Daniel Rothwell was the last of Richard Rothwell's sons to pass away in 1940 at the age of 89. Most of the first and second generation, and several of the third generation of Rothwells are buried in Congressional Cemetery.

HISTORIC HOUSE IN SQUARE 919 - FEDERAL STYLE TOWNHOUSE

Number 24, Ninth Street, NE is both typical and unique as one of the earlier, pre-Victorian brick residences on Capitol Hill. It was built sometime between 1858, when the land on which the house was eventually built was acquired, and 1864 when the District of Columbia Tax Records first assessed the value of a "double two story" brick residence for \$2000. It is not possible to give a precise date for the construction since no District of Columbia building permit records have survived prior to 1877. That said, it is likely from the tax and assessment records that the house was built in 1862-63, since the first valuation appears in the 1864 D.C. Tax Record.

When the house was built, there was only a scattering of houses nearby, mostly south and west closer to the Capitol and the Navy Yard. The house was in every sense on the fringe of residential development at the time. It remained the only brick structure in Square 919 until the mid-1870's (according to the 1874 Faetz and Pratt plat records and DC Tax Records), when a number of brick townhouses were completed along East Capitol, Eighth Street, Ninth Street and "A" Street.

Several early wood frame houses had also been built by the mid-1870's according to Faetz plat records, which show seven frame buildings and one brick building on Square 919 in 1874. The latter frame houses date from the late 1860's, if not earlier.

Richard Rothwell, purchased land in the northeast corner of Square 919 comprising the then designated eastern half of lot 10 and all of lot 11 from John Collins, a bricklayer from Ireland, for \$1350. The "Washington D.C. City Directory" shows Rothwell living at or very near No. 24 Ninth Street, NE by 1860. The specific address is listed as "Ninth east near A north", and by 1863 the address had become "A north corner Ninth east". We have to wait until the 1871 edition of the "D.C. City Directory" to find Rothwell mentioned at the specific street address No. 24 Ninth Street.

The \$1350 price, when compared to the price of \$105 paid for the western half of lot 10 or the \$650 paid for lot 12 at roughly the same time, suggests the possibility that a structure may have been included on the lots when Rothwell bought them. Examination of the earliest residential maps available – the Boschke maps of 1857-1861, show only two/possibly three structures in Square 919 at the time – all in the northeast quadrant of the square, most probably on lots 10 and 12, although the exact location is difficult to ascertain given the scale of the map. The houses are located side-by-side on the interior portions of each lot where they adjoin.

It seems likely that John Collins, a bricklayer/mason from England, who first purchased lots 10, 11 and 12 in 1854, built on the lots during the course of the ensuing four years. Collins sold all the lots in 1858: the eastern half of lot 10 – currently No. 813 A Street — to George T. Mangum, the western half of lot 10 – currently 815/817 A Street -- and all

of lot 11 – currently Nos. 24,26 and 28 Ninth Street --to Richard Rothwell, and lot 12 – currently Nos. 20 and 22 Ninth Street -- to Alexander Campbell, who quickly resold the lot to another British stonecutter, George Thorpe.

The “Washington D.C. City Directory “ for 1858 lists two residents in the block: George T. Mangum at “A north near Ninth east”, and John Collins at “Ninth east near East Capitol”. The “City Directory” for 1860 shows three residents of the block: George T. Mangum at the same address, Richard Rothwell, “stonecutter”, at “Ninth east near A north” and George Y. Thorpe, “stonecutter”, at “Ninth east near A north”. (Since there was no numbering of city residences on Capitol Hill before 1871, it is not clear whether Rothwell and Thorpe, both stonecutters who were to share a long working association, lived in the same residence for a time or in adjacent properties.) John Collins, “bricklayer” has a new address at “Tenth east near A north “ by 1860, even though he has repurchased one year later the lot he sold George Mangum for \$500 – five times the original price and an indicator that another structure had been built on lot 10 in 1859.

Early D.C. Tax Books corroborate that indeed there were three early frame residences in Square 919 – one each on the eastern and western halves of lot 10, valued separately at \$300 each by the time the lot was subdivided and sold in 1858 (The first improvements on lot 10 are mentioned in the 1857 D.C. tax ledgers.), and a third built slightly later in 1859 on lot 12 and also valued at \$300 (According to tax records, George Thorpe purchased lot 12 undeveloped in 1858, and Richard Rothwell purchased lot 11 undeveloped in 1858.). These would probably have been modest, one-story houses initially, although Richard Rothwell must have added substantially to the structure occupying the eastern half of lot 10 because its assessed value had almost tripled to \$800 in the 1859 tax assessment. The assessment on this property remained unchanged until the 1869 assessment, when two things happened: the assessment on the eastern half of lot 10 reverted to “no improvement” and the assessment on the adjacent lot 11, which was still un-subdivided at this time, rose from \$2000 to \$3000.

One can only conclude that this structure on lot 10 was torn down or more probably moved to the adjacent lot (The eastern half of lot 10 would remain essentially undeveloped except for stables and sheds serving the residences on lot 11, Ninth Street, until 1914 when an apartment building was constructed.). The assessment on the western half of lot 10 remained unchanged at \$300 through 1868, while the 1870 tax assessment on lot 12 tripled, suggesting further improvements on that property. By the 1872 tax year, the property on lot 12 was assessed \$1000 and thus appears to have been expanded into a larger, two-story frame residence.

Compared to today’s row of four ornate townhouses sandwiched along Ninth Street, not to mention the imposing Davmar Apartment Building just to the south, No. 24 Ninth Street NE must have been an imposing residence when it was first built amidst the open pastures occupying virtually all of Capitol Hill west of Fourth Street and north of Pennsylvania Avenue. It is a federal style townhouse with Victorian flourishes that above all reflects Richard Rothwell’s profession as a marble cutter, his middle class aspirations and tastes, his English origins and the early Civil War period in which he

was building. The Rothwell house resembles more the late 18th/early 19th century federal period townhouses of Alexandria and Georgetown than the largely Victorian housing stock on Capitol Hill. The wide, flat front and graceful curving stoop and cast iron railing contrast sharply with narrower bay front townhouses. The marble over stone foundations and pressed brick façade are equally distinguishing. Nevertheless, the geometrically carved marble framing of the doorway with its carved Green man which stands for verdancy and new beginnings, the marble lintels over the main floor windows, and the eaves, denticulated cornices and brackets at the roof line are compromises with the later architectural styles (Italian and Gothic) of the Victorian era.

DISTINGUISHING FEATURES

The Rothwell house has weathered well the last 160 years and remains essentially intact in its original condition. It has a number of unique features, both inside and out, that corroborate its “old house” status.

Front: The house is unusual for its 22-foot width, since the standard width of most of the later Victorian houses was 18 feet. The decorative stone detailing on the front façade and the curved marble stoop and supporting pillar have already been mentioned. It seems likely that Rothwell used local Maryland marble to build his house, although one old resident of Ninth Street (Margaret Johnson at No. 19 Ninth Street) , who knew Sarah Rothwell before she died in 1933, said that the carved Green man keystone on the arch of the front door came from England. The marble probably came from the same source as that used for the Capitol Extension – a project on which Rothwell was working while he was building his new house.

The checkerboard marble and red and grey slate pavers and garden edging connecting the sidewalk and the stoop are also original to the house and further testimony to Rothwell’s stonecutting profession. The front door frame with paneling is original to the house.

The front door is a Victorian reproduction, while the semicircular arched transom in sunburst style is a reproduction built by the present owner’s father using German antique glass.

Finally, one of Capitol Hill’s few remaining coal cellars lies under the northern half of the front garden/easement. Coal stoves were the chief source of heating at this time, positioned in front of traditional fireplaces and using the fireplace flues and grates in each room to circulate heat (One such grate in the front, upstairs bedroom was uncovered in 1982 when the room was stripped of old wallpaper for plastering). The coal cellar has a grate at the sidewalk/street end and a doorway opposite facing the house. The separate fence gate was opened, the coal grate lifted, and anthracite coal shoveled into the coal bin for storage. Residents would exit the north door of the English basement to fetch coal supplies. Hot water heating with radiators became the preferred technology starting in the mid-1870’s, eventually obviating the need for such underground coal bins.

Back: The rear of the house is special for the white granite foundations at the English basement level. According to the 1887 Hopkins City Plats, No. 24 Ninth Street did not have the 10 feet X 9 feet two-story extension off the back of the house; however, the 1892 Hopkins Plats show an extension had been built sometime during the intervening five years, using the same white granite and marble as the original foundation. This addition no doubt reflects the arrival of modern plumbing to include indoor toilet/bathing facilities on the first floor and a more modern kitchen in the English basement.

The kitchen door opened onto a narrow, sunken patio with retaining wall and steps leading up to the rear garden, privy (located where the trellis is now) and rear storage shed and stable (built on the eastern half of lot 10 running behind the house). Once the surrounding townhouses on Ninth Street had been built in the late 1870's, the Rothwells continued to use the adjacent lot 10 for horse and buggy access until No. 815 A Street was built in 1914. The need for a stabling area had disappeared by that time and the need for garages and potential parking problems were not yet apparent.

First Floor: The entrance hallway is exceptionally wide and long with the staircases to the rear of the house. Double parlors with pocket doors separating them are also well proportioned. The doors off the hallway suggest that the parlors were used at least part of the time as bedrooms.

Richard Rothwell raised seven children in this house, and while we know that the oldest son William had already moved to his Pennsylvania Avenue address (site of present-day Library of Congress Jefferson Building) with his wife Sarah and youngest sister Annie by 1870, and third son Daniel and his oldest sister Emma had moved to Nos. 10 and 12 Ninth Street SE, respectively, by 1874, we also know that Richard's brother James lived with the family. Consequently, this was a crowded house, and there was certainly a need for bedrooms on the main floor. According to neighbor Margaret Johnson, Sarah Rothwell used the rear parlor for her bedroom in her waning years to minimize climbing stairs. Today the parlors have been restored as formal living rooms.

The single pane sashes in the front parlor windows and upstairs front bedroom windows may not be original to the house but are certainly late 19th century, sash- operated windows, while the six pane sashes in the rear parlor windows and those in the rear upstairs bedroom are original with the original glass (One pane in the upper sash of the right rear parlor window has the etched initials "W.R." for "William Rothwell", the last Rothwell to live in the house). The window frames in the front of the house are unusual in that they are all angled out to provide maximum light. The floors in the parlors and throughout the first and second floors are original, variegated width, heart- of-pine plank floors.

The front parlor marble mantel-piece is original to the house and probably imported from England. The ceiling rosettes and mouldings were added in 1983. The gaslight chandeliers and sconces in the hallways, stairwells and parlors are period from Boston and true to the house based on the gas pipe mains remaining in the attic and buried in plaster throughout the house. The front parlor chandelier from 1865 contains rare etched glass shades.

The doorway to the rear bathroom was probably a window before the rear section of the house was added in the late 1880's and in fact is the same width as the rear parlor windows. The bathroom contains an 1870 marble top chest, adapted as a vanity, and mirror, plus period wall sconces.

Second Floor: The staircase leading to the second floor bedrooms is an interesting configuration that doubles back on itself from a mid point landing. The original house had no plumbing upstairs; a large window similar to the other upstairs rear windows graced the landing where the door to the upstairs bathroom is now located. The upstairs bathroom was added in 1985 and contains another 1870 marble top chest, adapted as a vanity, and mirror flanked by period wall sconces.

The stained glass skylight in the bathroom was designed by the present owner and built by his father. With the addition of the upstairs bathroom and attending loss of a rear window, a skylight was opened over the staircase. The skylight was also designed by the present owner and built by his father using antique German glass.

The age of the house is immediately apparent from the sag in the second story floor and the accompanying droop in the door frame to the small front bedroom. This bedroom was undoubtedly used for infants and very young children since another doorway (also slightly drooping!) connects the room to the main front bedroom. It can be pointed out here that all the bedroom and parlor doors are original four panel doors on old "European" hinges. The door connecting the two front bedrooms contains the original, restored lock hardware.

The main front and rear bedrooms have their original chimney closets, which would have been an extravagance when the house was built since closets were taxed as separate rooms. All the other closets that exist in the house today have been added in recent times.

English Basement: The English basement was the main social or family area of the house, since this is where the kitchen and dining area was located. It is also the most extensively altered section of the house. When the present owner purchased the house in 1982, the basement level was divided into a front apartment with bath and fireplace and a rear kitchen and dining area with a furnace positioned where the rear fireplace is now located. A wall and doorway separated the two halves of the basement. In addition, the stairwell was enclosed with heart-of-pine planking and a plank door with latch, thus sealing off the basement area from the rest of the house. The stairwell was original to the house.

In the 1989/90 renovation of the English basement, the present owner preserved the kitchen (while updating the appliances), but essentially gutted the rest of the downstairs. The owner made a conscious choice **not** to move the dining room to the main floor as has been done in most Capitol Hill renovations.

The English basement was the perfect place in the 19th century for cooking, eating and socializing, since it was cooler in the summer and warmer in the winter than the rest of

the house. It also provided direct and quick access to the rear privy! The front half of the downstairs was thus turned into a formal **dining room** with additional closet space. The raised pedestal brick fireplace in the dining room was replaced with a late 19th century French mantel. The white wooden pillars were another addition. The center window was opened downward to create a floor to ceiling opening to match the flanking all glass doors on either side. In order to do this, the front well leading to the coal bin was expanded slightly on the south side by the stoop. Old French doors were installed between the dining room and the rear kitchen area, and there is also a concealed door to the basement bathroom.

A rear fireplace was reopened in the **kitchen area** and an 1880's walnut mantel installed. The furnace was updated and moved to the side with the hot water heater and washer/dryer, forming a small utility and tool area adjacent to a new bathroom. The rear window frames were opened downward an additional 12 inches to increase light and new double-pane Pella windows installed. The refrigerator was moved under the stairwell and surrounded by new kitchen cabinets (When removing the stairwell planking, the owner discovered nothing but packed dirt under the staircase, suggesting that the basement may well have originally been nothing more than packed earth or paving stones similar to those covering the coal cellar floor. The owner also found some old chicken bones and a whiskey flask.). New hardwood plank flooring and ceramic tile were installed over the concrete floor. All electrical wiring and lighting was updated and additional electric and hot water heating units installed.

Rear Garden: The rear garden has been renovated to create a two-tiered patio with an upper garden. The original layout, however, contained a much smaller well area about 6 feet X 10 feet outside the kitchen door with stone stairs immediately to the left of the door leading up to the main garden level. The well area was expanded in 1985 and further in 1999 with the construction of new retaining walls and shift in the stair location to a more central position in the garden. All the original capstone and stone steps were reutilized. During this renovation, several interesting artifacts came to light, including an 1865 Indian head penny and numerous pieces of anthracite coal. In digging post holes for the trellis, the owner uncovered pieces of white stoneware which archeologists at the Torpedo Factory in Alexandria date to the Civil War period and said belied an old privy.

The only original plantings from the 1982 purchase include the large American holly tree in the rear garden and the wisteria bush on the trellis. Other plantings include azaleas, rhododendron, crape myrtle, dogwood, various evergreen shrubs, boxwood, and roses.

Roof: A new tin roof was installed in 1983. A two-zone (Spacepak) air conditioning system was installed in 1996 and replaced in 2018.

OWNERSHIP

24 Ninth Street remained in the hands of the Rothwell family from 1862/63 until the estate of Sarah Rothwell, wife of William Rothwell was settled in 1938. During that 75-year period, the following family members occupied the house:

- Richard and Emma Rothwell and family: 1862/63 to 1876*
- Various renters: 1877 to 1893*
- Richard Rothwell Jr. and Hannah Rothwell: 1894 to 1896 (Richard Jr. died in 1896.)
- William and Sarah Rothwell and family: 1896 to 1914 (William died in 1914.)
- George J. Rothwell, William's oldest son, and Bessie Rothwell (together with Sarah Rothwell): 1914 to 1933 (Sarah Rothwell died in 1933.)

In **March 1938** ownership passed from the heirs of Sarah Rothwell to Laura and Lydia Bowman. In **November 1956** Laura Bowman sold the house to Adeline Gier Smith. In **November 1982** Smith sold the house to Timothy P. Hauser, the present owner.

None of Richard Rothwell's immediate family members can be documented living in 24 Ninth Street between 1877 and 1894. It is likely the house was rented along with the next door house 22 Ninth Street and the three flats in the Avia Apartment Building at 26 Ninth Street which they built. The latter was sold in 1903 to E.G. Egloff and torn down to make way for a larger apartment building constructed in 1906, while No. 22 Ninth Street was sold in 1910.

Richard Rothwell moved into No. 28 Ninth Street following its completion in 1877. The new house was grander, occupying the northeast corner lot in Square 919 with two bays, was larger by one story, and had modern amenities like indoor plumbing which No. 24 did not. Richard lived at this address until he died in 1906. His daughter Lillie lived with him and continued to live in the house after his death until 1920. His youngest son Daniel then lived there until 1927. The house finally passed from the Rothwell heirs in 1938.