

# Scenes from the Past

Many of the buildings housing businesses and educational institutions along Connecticut Avenue were built as private homes, and the structures at 1832 and 1834 Connecticut — just south of Leroy Place and across from the Universal North building — were no exception.

Real estate investor and builder John H. Nolan applied for a building permit for 1832 and 1834 on March 13, 1906. Nolan would become the first owner-occupant of number 1834 along with his family. The two homes were designed by the architectural firm of Wood, Donn & Deming and built at a combined cost estimated at \$35,000.

The houses were declared 50 percent complete on May 22, 85 percent on June 16, and 97 percent on August 13, 1906. Following the time-consuming interior trimming and plaster work, the houses were officially declared 100 percent complete at 2:40 in the afternoon of December 4, 1906.

Despite constructing a total of 93 impressive dwellings and 258 medium to large-sized buildings in Washington, DC, Nolan led a quiet life that kept him out of most of the social columns in the newspapers, while avoiding submitting biographical entries for the various “Who’s Who in Washington”-type publications. He would reside at 1834 Connecticut from 1906 until 1913.

Nolan had been born in Washington in May of 1861, the son of James F. and Mary (Donahue) Nolan. He and his family were enumerated at 1413 8th Street, NW in the 1880 census, which indicated that both of his parents had been born in Ireland and that his father worked as a carpenter and roofer. Nolan also indicated that he was employed as a carpenter that year, when he was age 18.

He received his education at St. John’s College in Georgetown, and thereafter became an apprentice to prominent builder Robert I. Fleming. *The City of Washington* (1903) describes his employment as follows: “There he remained until he had mastered every detail of the building business, and was fully equipped to start for himself. His beginning was of course on a small scale, but gradually he extended his operations until he did not confine himself to contract work, but branched out and erected buildings as an investment, and in every instance found a ready purchaser.” In 1892, he became a Master



2010 view of 1832 (left) and 1834 (right) Connecticut Avenue, NW.

photo—Paul K. Williams, Kelsey & Assoc. private collection.



photo—courtesy <http://washingtoncenter.asu.edu>.

2011 view of 1834 Connecticut Avenue, NW, now Arizona State University’s Washington Center.

## Builder.

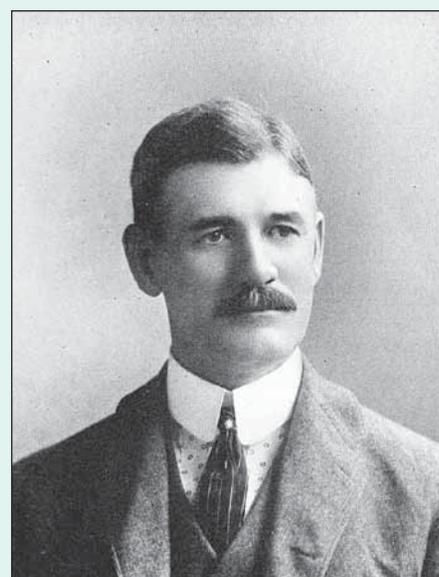
The book went on to describe his voice and reputation for aesthetically built buildings in the city: “Few men’s talents lie in more than one direction, and fewer still cultivate those talents to such an extent that each has reached a degree of excellence, whereby either could be used toward bringing in handsome revenue. Nature has been good to John H. Nolan, one of Washington’s best known constructors of modern buildings, and at the same time the possessor of a beautiful, rich, well placed bass voice that has brought it possessor prominently before the public of this and other cities.”

In 1885 Nolan had married a Miss Williams of Washington; in late 1901, several years following her death, he married Miss Lida Anderson. With his first wife, he had four children: James H. (b. June 1890); Helen R. (b. October 1892); Bessie (b. January 1895); and Charles M. (b. December 1896). They were enumerated at 1829 8th Street in the 1900 census, but had moved to a house at 1423 U Street by early 1901; Nolan had built the entire row of houses from 1415 to 1429 U Street beginning in March of 1898.

Nolan’s four children and second wife moved from the U Street house and were all enumerated at 1834 Connecticut Avenue in the 1910 census, a house substantially larger than their prior residence.

Nolan’s business success can be somewhat measured in that the couple then employed two black, live-in servants at the house in 1910. They included Patty I.

Kemp, age 39 and a native of Virginia, and Laura Martin, age 37 and a native of North Carolina. Martin indicated that she was a widow and had two children, but neither of which were alive in 1910.



photo—*The Book of Washington*, 1903.

Builder John H. Nolan, a resident of his own construction project at 1834 Connecticut Avenue, NW.

Among Nolan’s many building commissions he is known to have constructed several impressive apartment buildings that included the Westover at 16th and M Streets, NW; the twin apartment buildings in the 1400 block of R Street known as the Gladstone and Hawarden. He was also known for his downtown Davidson Building at 1413 G Street, NW, where his company had its office in which he kept offices; the Bond Building at 1400 New York Avenue, NW; and the Bancroft Hotel at 18th and H Streets, NW. The building permit index reveals his construction activities began in 1891 and lasted until 1913.

The 1920 census lists Nolan living at his daughter Ruth’s house at 245 41st Street in Norfolk, Virginia, along with his son-in-law, John E. Ballenger, a civil engineer at the naval base. Nolan indicated that he was a “builder of houses in DC” and it is unknown why he would suddenly stop building at age 52. In any event, the house at 1834 Connecticut Avenue was sold that year to Albert P. Maderia.

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