

Scenes from the Past...

photo—courtesy, Library of Congress Prints & Photographs Division



These eight, charming wood frame houses may appear to be located in a small town in America, but they actually once graced the 1100 block of Harvard Street in Columbia Heights. A total of 11 houses were built simultaneously along the block from 1107 to 1127 Harvard Street, between 1874 and 1877, when the area was still rather rural in nature. They were captured in the photograph above about 1925.



map—courtesy, Washingtoniana Division, M.K. Library

A Hopkins map from 1892 shows the eleven houses on Square 23 (later designated Square 2853), still completely surrounded by large vacant parcels of land nearly 20 years after their construction. In fact, upon further inspection of the map, city planners had drawn a proposed extension of New Jersey Avenue that would have called for the demolition of seven of the homes located at 1107-1119 Harvard. The avenue was never completed.

Instead, apparently Harvard Street itself was graded to take out a shallow gully toward the middle of the block around the turn of the century. Thomas Sharpless, the owner of the homes at No. 1113, No. 1115, and No. 1117, applied for a permit on June 7, 1901 to "raise the present buildings to a grade of eight inches above grade of Street" and place them on new brick foundations. The cost of the improvement to each house was estimated at a mere \$100. Sharpless rented the houses, and lived close by in the 1200 block of what was then known as Princeton Street. The owners of 1123 Harvard, J.M. and C.F. Crossman, did the same to their house in September of that year so that it too, would "correspond to the improved grade of Harvard Street."

The census from 1900 reveals that all but one of the houses were rental properties. The sole owner-occupied one stood at 1107 Harvard, and the census-taker recorded its owner as architect George H. Lloyd. He was then age 35, and resided there along with his wife Florence, and both his mother and brother-in-law. The other



document—courtesy, National Archives



photo—Paul K. Williams—The InTowner

College, occupying lots 76 to 104. It was built following issuance of a construction permit on January 4, 1912. Its central pediment and end chimney's can be clearly seen in the shadow.

The school was named for James Ormond Wilson, a long-time Superintendent of Schools in Washington in the 1860s and 1870s. Ormond had his hands full during his tenure at the job: In 1871, the city had a total of 29,000 illiterate citizens, and the average salary of the 209 teachers in the white schools was \$400 per year. Ormond himself earned \$2,500 per year for his position, overseeing 17,403 pupils in the white schools, and "about 10,000" in the black school system.

Unfortunately, the Ormond School remains vacant (although a sign does announce that the building is to be taken over for use by the Carlos Rosario Charter School) and is in a deteriorated state today, while the fine wood homes along the street were replaced in the early 1970s with the homes shown above.



photo—Paul K. Williams—The InTowner

houses along the block were occupied by families of three to five people, who worked in a variety of jobs: government clerk, department store clerk, teacher, plasterer, proof-reader, grocer, cook, and a night watchman. All occupants were Caucasian, with the exception of the lone servant on the block, an African-American maid named Nellie Morris who lived with the family at 1123 Harvard.

The shadow seen in the vintage photograph on Harvard Street itself is that of the James Ormond Wilson Teacher's College, occupying lots 76 to 104. It was built following issuance of a construction permit on January 4, 1912. Its central pediment and end chimney's can be clearly seen in the shadow.

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