

Freda Murray was interviewed in 1974 to provide background for the application to create the Capitol Hill Historic District. Citation of this material should include this information and cite the Ruth Ann Overbeck Capitol Hill History Project website. The transcript was retyped by Paula Causey in 2012 with street names and house addresses edited to conform to the style used in Overbeck Project transcripts, and some additional information was added in brackets.

Capitol Hill Interviews

Interview with Freda Murray

By Hazel F. Kreinheder

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Conversation with Mrs. Freda Murray, 761 Tenth Street SE, 1 October 1974.

Mrs. Murray, the daughter of Annie Sabina Müller and August G. Herrmann, was born on the east side of the 700 block of Tenth Street SE about 81 years ago. The house in which she was born has since been demolished. She was baptized at First Trinity Lutheran Church where her parents had been married. She attended kindergarten at Christ Church as there was no public kindergarten at Tyler School at that time. She later attended Tyler, Cranch, and Buchanan schools. The old Tyler School faced 11th Street SE. Her children and her oldest grandchild attended that school. When her oldest grandchild was in about the fifth or sixth grade, the new school was constructed. Mrs. Murray graduated from the old Business High School at Ninth and Rhode Island Avenue NW. She served as her father's bookkeeper for about 25 years.

Freda and her husband operated the T. Frank Murray Funeral Home in an old home which had been owned by her mother on the west side of the 700 block of 11th Street SE. They had only been in business for a few years when her husband died. The building was then rented to the Walsh Funeral Home until its demolition.

Mr. Murray's family had originally come from Philadelphia and established a funeral business in Anacostia. That area was called Uniontown. Monroe was the main street. It was renamed Nichols Avenue. Recently, the name was changed to Martin Luther King Avenue.

Mrs. Murray's mother was born at 12th and E Streets NW where her family owned a corner grocery store. The family still owns three buildings on that block, one of which is part of O'Donnell's Restaurant, and the two Danker buildings. The rest of the 1200 block of E Street NW is owned primarily by the Heurich family.

Later her mother's family moved to 115 Third Street SE, now the site of the Library of Congress Annex. [Adams Building]. The alley behind the house on Third Street was cobblestone. Reformation Church was on the corner of the alley, facing B Street SE. [Church of the Reformation was at that location from 1881 until 1931, when it began the process of moving to its present location at 212 East Capitol.]

Her maternal grandmother later remarried a man named Witthafft. He owned the German Hall, site of the German-American Building Association at Third and Pennsylvania Avenue SE, now the location of

American Savings and Loan. Mrs. Murray's father started in business with his father, John F. Herrmann in a small store at Second and Virginia Avenue SE, about where the Evening Star building is now located. They made bottled root beer and opened their small store in about 1874. Around 1880, they moved to 1002 I Street SE and built their business in the block between Tenth and 11th, G and I Streets SE. They went into the business of bottling ginger ale which they made from natural extracts. They sold eight oz. bottles to the stores for two cents and the stores sold the bottles for three cents. Some of the bottles were packed in large casks in which sugar had been shipped and then taken by wagon to Union Station to be sent to the outlying areas. Her father retired from business around 1932. He died a few years later. She and her brother had kept the business going, but sold it not long after her father's death.

Mr. Herrmann was one of the founders of the German-American Building Association and was a director of the National Capitol Bank for many years. He organized the Capitol Hill Southeast Citizens Association in July, 1906.

The Gaddis family owned the house at 1002 I Street before Mr. Herrmann bought it. (Note: I found a reference to Edgar Gaddis at 1021 East Capitol in the 1895 City Directory.) Mrs. Murray was told by "Old Mr. Gaddis," who lived at Tenth and East Capitol, when she was a child that his family had modernized it, adding a flat front third story to the original two. The house at 1006 I Street had received the same treatment. Originally, the two houses had third stories similar to that of the Commandant's house and were built about the same time as it was. Photographs of the two I Street houses taken from HABS photos are reproduced in "Places and Persons on Capitol Hill" by the Capitol Hill Southeast Citizens Association, Washington, DC, 1960, pages 30 and 31. This document is hereafter referred to as "Persons and Places."

Laura Trexler's home at 732 Ninth Street SE now has the mantel which was taken from 1002 I Street SE at the time that it and the rest of the buildings on that square were demolished for an extension to the Tyler School Playground early in the 1960s. Laura says that she was told that the house was originally built between 1797 and 1802 for the purser of the Navy Yard. The annual rental was \$5,000.

Mrs. Murray showed me a picture of 1002 I Street SE that may have been taken after the blizzard of 1899. The snow reaches almost to the top of the five foot fence next to the house. That year the annual masquerade of the German Sangerbund, to which her parents belonged, had to be postponed for several days due to the snow.

I was also shown a photo of the north side of the 1000 block of I Street SE taken about 1925.

The block in which Mrs. Murray now lives (square 950) had many old frame houses which were demolished to build new townhouses. There are now 16 new houses on the square. Among the old frames still standing are those owned by the Free family at 723 and 727. Lilian McClain lives in the same house that she has lived in since she was about three years old. She has been there longer than Mrs. Murray. Her home is one of the three frames located on the west side of Tenth, just below the alley. The house at 761 Tenth Street was built by Mrs. Murray about 60 years ago and the addition immediately to the north about 30 years ago. There is a magnificent sycamore tree in front of these buildings. It must be very old as it was just as large when Mrs. Murray was a child. The two small brick houses immediately to the south of her house were there before her family moved to the neighborhood. The five red brick bay front houses at the corner of Tenth and I Street SE were built when she was about ten or eleven years old. Laura Trexler's grandfather lived in a little frame house, just south of the alley in the 700 block of Ninth Street SE, across from the Marine Barracks. That house was demolished in order to build a townhouse which is presently under construction. Mrs. John Miller lives around the corner at 903 G Street SE. She originally lived in the 1200 block of G Street SE, but her house was demolished to build the projects. (According to Mrs. Miller, the house in the 1200 block of G Street SE belonged to her husband's family. See John and Elsie Miller interview.) Abners Court was in the alley in this square. There were four houses behind the Murray houses and four or six houses behind the Frees. They were immaculately kept brick buildings lived in by colored families. Mrs. Roosevelt was responsible for having the alley dwellings demolished. The Abner Court buildings were similar to those on page 50 of "Persons and Places" and were a great loss to the neighborhood.

Navy Place was in the alley between Seventh and Eighth, G and I Streets SE. It was a terrible place and your life wouldn't be worth anything if you went in there. (Note: The following appears in "Neglected Neighbors" by Charles Frederick Well, Philadelphia, The John C. Winston Co., 1909 "In 'Navy Place', the most notorious alley in Southeast Washington, overcrowding has increased; the eight white people and 336 colored tenants of 1897 have become 23 white and 362 negroes, 385 in 1908." p. 39)

There were about eight saloons in the 700 block of Eighth Street SE.

One of the biggest breweries was owned by Albert Carry. He lived at 12th and B Streets SE. His brewery was where the Safeway is at 14th and D Streets SE.

There was a train tunnel which came out just east of 11th Street. It originally ran from Seventh to 11th, but was later extended to Second Street SE. Most of the trains that came through were freight trains. The old gas house was located in this area. 11th Street was cobblestone and there was a rickety old bridge at the

end that went over the Anacostia. It was always very exciting to see the horse drawn fire engines come flying over the cobblestones.

There were firehouses near the Virginia Avenue playground (Note: William Tindall writing in his "Standard History of the City of Washington", Knoxville, Tenn., pub. by H.W. Crew and Co., 1914, says among the fire companies in 1850 was "the Anacostia at Ninth and K SE."), at Seventh and North Carolina Avenue SE, behind the Eastern Market (Note: This building was demolished in the late 1960s and the Capitol East Natatorium built on the site.), and on Eighth Street SE.

The area south of Potomac Avenue, previously called Georgia Avenue, was known as Poplar Hill.

The Virginia Avenue Playground between Ninth and 11th SE was a wonderful place and all the children played there. There were many games and competitions.

One of the oldest houses in the neighborhood is the "pebblestone" house on the southeast corner of 11th and G Street SE.

There was a country store on the southeast corner of Tenth and I Streets SE. It was demolished to make way for the freeway. It had the only water pump in the neighborhood and supplied all the water for the area, including that used by the bottling factory. This building also had the first bathtub in the neighborhood and all the local boys would go there to take a bath.

The Meinbergs had a large bakery on the east side of the 700 block of 11th Street SE. It connected with the buildings immediately behind, which are currently used as Millers warehouses. All of these buildings are still standing, including the connecting passage. The warehouse buildings open onto the 700 block of 12th Street SE. Three of the Meinbergs adult children died in the flu epidemic of 1918. The family closed the bakery shortly thereafter. The Meinbergs built the two yellow brick flat front houses at 808 and 810 D Street SE.

A family named Mueller had a grocery store on the southwest corner of 13th and E Streets SE. This building is still standing. They built the bay front houses at about 906 and 908 South Carolina Avenue SE. Their daughter also died in the flu epidemic of 1918.

A family named Thompson lived in the houses at 1103-1105 Ninth Street SE. A HABS photo of them is reproduced on page 25 of "Persons and Places." The Thompsons were in the plumbing business.

Mr. and Mrs. Davis lived in her family home on the southeast corner of 11th and I Street SE. Her family name was Walker. A HABS photo of it is reproduced on page 73 of "Persons and Places." There is currently an EXXON Station on the site. Mr. Davis was principal of Business High School.

The first speaker for the 1974-75 season of the Capitol Hill Southeast Citizens Association will be Mr. Philip Martin, son of the famous actor. He is the brother of Mrs. Clements who lived at 110 13th Street SE.

END OF TRANSCRIPT