



THE RUTH ANN OVERBECK  
CAPITOL HILL HISTORY PROJECT

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**Interview with Helene A. Au**

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*Before the Overbeck Project was created in 2001, Nancy Metzger interviewed long-time residents of Capitol Hill while she was chair of the Historic Preservation Committee of the Capitol Hill Restoration Society. She graciously offered to allow these interviews to be incorporated into the Overbeck Project collection. Any use of this material should credit the Ruth Ann Overbeck Capitol Hill History Project website for making it available.*

*[Addresses in this transcript are in Southeast Washington, DC, unless otherwise noted.]*

TAPE 1/SIDE 1

**METZGER:** When did your family first come to Capitol Hill?

**AU:** My grandparents came from Germany in 1873 because my grandfather had a position with the Marine Band. He was in the Marine Band for 32 years. They came right to the Hill where all the bandsmen lived at that time. I'm the last of the family that stayed here.

**METZGER:** So it's over 100 years your family has been here.

**AU:** Yes and I was born on Fifth Street—116 Fifth Street SE. During the First War we lived at 411 B Street, which is Independence Avenue. In 1921 we moved to 1019 Independence.

**METZGER:** Now these were your mother's parents?

**AU:** My father's. My father took his mother to Germany in 1910 so she could visit her relatives and he met my mother and fell in love. They became engaged and the next year he went back and they were married. In 1911 she came here. So my mother and my father's mother were born in Germany. My father was born here, of course.

**METZGER:** What were your grandparent's names?

**AU:** My grandfather's name was Wilhelm Au and my grandmother's name was Augusta. In Germany it's pronounced "ow" and here it's pronounced "ou." My father's name was William and his brother's name was Karl, who lived at 1009 Independence.

**METZGER:** So that was the family ...

**AU:** Yes, my grandparents had two sons. My uncle had one son, Holton, and Holton had two sons, Karl and Paul. In our family it was my brother and me, the two of us. His name was Fred, and he was a year and a half older.

**METZGER:** Your grandfather was in the Marine Band. Did you go down and listen to things?

**AU:** No. My grandmother did but my grandfather died in 1909. In those days the bandsmen were allowed to moonlight so my grandfather played in the orchestra at the National Theatre for 22 years, while he was

in the Marine Band for 32 years. He apparently had an interesting life and traveling while my poor grandmother stayed home.

**METZGER:** Was your father a musician?

**AU:** No, he wasn't. His brother was very musically inclined. His father insisted that he play piano but that never amounted to anything. My father wanted to learn something mechanical, but his father wanted him to be a bookbinder. His father had two friends: one was a bookbinder and the other was a pharmacist. They both seemed prosperous to my grandfather, so my uncle was to be a pharmacist and my father a bookbinder. So he apprenticed him to a publishing house here on the Hill somewhere, but Pop didn't like it so finally he did get a chance to go down to the Navy Yard and he apprenticed there and became a very good machinist. His brother Karl went to GW University to learn pharmacy. One day his teacher, Professor Holton, was weighing something. My uncle said, "I can make a much more accurate scale than that." He was very young—in his teens. He came home and he made a scale that was so accurate you could weigh a piece of tissue paper, my grandmother said. This so impressed Professor Holton that he said, "You have to go to Polytechnic Institute in Massachusetts." He convinced my grandfather. My uncle was not prepared to go there—his education had not prepared him. So all summer long, Professor Holton's wife and her partner, Miss Arms (of the Holton-Arms School), tutored my uncle so he could get into the Worcester Polytechnic Institute. Then my father went up there, and he was instructor in machine shop practice. After that my father never worked; he looked after his properties. He would have loved to work with engines and motors but he was allergic to petroleum products. He would break out in boils so he couldn't do that.

**METZGER:** I remember someone telling me that your uncle, maybe your father, did some instruments ...

**AU:** Yes, this house was bought because it was connected to a carriage house—not the one behind the house but on the other side—which was across from my uncle. So the estate bought this. My grandfather was dead; my grandmother bought this, and my uncle took the carriage house. He had his shop there. He was an instrument maker and had some very important inventions. One was the outwater stage recorder that was used on the Potomac to measure the flow—how many gallons per minute. There were gauges on the Potomac here at the Leiter estate. He and Major Bagley developed a panorama camera. Major Bagley had an idea and he had some lines on a piece of paper but he couldn't work it out, so my uncle got together with him. That camera is in the Smithsonian. It was used in Alaska where it was hard for them to get [unclear]. This was background for the First World War. Those things were built in the carriage house.

He also had some gadget that measured whether salt water was leaking into wells. They were used around the world. He would hear from all these countries, people interested in getting one ...

**METZGER:** Did he manufacture things?

**AU:** He was an instrument maker. My father worked there off and on.

**METZGER:** You said your father had properties. So by this time the family had prospered ...

**AU:** My grandfather had bought some houses here on the Hill; my father and his brother had inherited them from my grandmother.

**METZGER:** Things had changed for the family from when they first came over ...

**AU:** Yes, they were middle class. I think my grandmother said when they first came over [my grandfather] got \$17 a month from the band. Seventeen dollars was probably a good bit then ... When my grandfather had to go on trips he had to get a substitute at the National Theatre. Being frugal this was something that was a little hard for him. So as soon as my uncle was old enough—he was about 13 or maybe 14—my grandmother made him a pair of long pants and he substituted for his father. He was a very talented clarinetist. Uncle Karl was quite a talented man.

**METZGER:** When did your uncle die?

**AU:** Ask Paul, but I think about 1970.

**METZGER:** And your parents about the same time?

**AU:** My father died in 1953; my mother died in 1965. She was 77. He was born in 1887; she was born in 1888.

**METZGER:** Did she talk about how it was coming from Germany?

**AU:** She was happy to be here ... After my father died, I told her I would take her back to Germany for a visit. No, she was happy here.

**METZGER:** But she had gone back ...

**AU:** Oh, yes, we went back in 1921-22 for about a year and again, five years later. My father had promised her stepfather that he would bring her back every five years. But then World War I broke out. As soon as he could go, he wanted to go and see how the family was getting along. He was so fond of her family. They really were fine people. My mother said if you go, I'm going and take the children. My

grandmother was living here at the time but they took us along. Then we didn't go after another five years; we heard about Hitler and never went again.

**METZGER:** So you went in 1921-22; 1926-27. If you went for a whole year, how did that work with school?

**AU:** They took us out of school. We had a tutor the first time we went over. The second time my mother said if you promise to study (we're taking the books) you won't have to have a tutor. I was almost 19 when I graduated from high school.

**METZGER:** Because of making this up?

**AU:** Making it up or just continuing. They had had fractions in my class and I missed that. They got one of the kids to teach me fractions but I was never good in fractions.

**METZGER:** But did you enjoy the time?

**AU:** Oh yes, wonderful memories. Nice family and friends. No one became a Nazi; my uncle got in trouble for helping a Jewish family.

**METZGER:** What was your mother's maiden name?

**AU:** Benthien. It sounds a wee bit French, perhaps Huguenots. A lot of Protestant Huguenots left France ... They did disperse to wherever people would take them in. Gosh, those were times. The decisions you had to make for your religion ... your life.

**METZGER:** We've often talked about the market, little shops here on the Hill. Which ones do you remember that your family patronized the most?

**AU:** We dealt at the Sanitary Grocery Store on the northeast corner of Tenth and Independence. We bought our meat from Diegelman's Butcher shop on the north side of the 1100 block of C Street SE. You can still tell that it was a store, even though it is a private home now. The building at Eighth and Pennsylvania Avenue, Millers Furniture Store until recently, was originally Haines Department. The name is still there, in brick, on the corner.

**METZGER:** Yes, it says the date too—1892.

**AU:** A Mrs. Haines ran it, in my father's childhood. The children liked to go there after school. She would say, "Children put your hands behind your back and you won't be tempted to take anything." On the southwest corner of Ninth and East Capitol was a pharmacy run by two Norwegian brothers named

Helmsen. They had a soda fountain. At Eastern Market, Mr. Frasier had a dairy stand. He lived in the large yellow brick house in the middle of the 200 block of A Street SE on the west side. He had a huge house with a front porch.

**METZGER:** When you say a dairy stand, was it just milk?

**AU:** Cheese, horseradish, butter, sauerkraut. Mr. Ray Krailly had a bakery and pastry stand where Glasgow's was before the renovation. Their store was in the 200 block of 11<sup>th</sup> Street, east side. They were very famous for their ice cream; people came from all over to get it. Mr. Zambrini had a poultry stand near the restaurant, where the poultry stand now is.

**METZGER:** Now, you had told me about ... No, Dorothy Taylor told us about that because her sister married a Zambrini. What about that area between the North and South Hall?

**AU:** A German lady by the name of Mrs. Amann—she sold peasant type bread. It was a tiny little place and she was a friend of my grandmother. I remember once she came around to my grandmother; she was so upset. She had brought her money home from the market in a basket to hide it. She put it in the oven. Without thinking she lit the oven and it was burned. My grandmother kept saying, "Don't worry; don't worry." I guess she took her to the bank or somewhere and got it exchanged. They were able to tell what it was and replaced it for her. She lived in the middle of the 200 block of Tenth Street, on the west side. My grandmother used to go around and visit her.

Almost every intersection had a Mom-and-Pop store. Krailey's Pastry Shop was on the east side of 11<sup>th</sup> Street in the middle of the block. We got our oysters from Swains on E Street, north side, at Third Street as I recall. There was also a seafood shop on C Street, on the northeast corner, which was run by black people who delivered on a bicycle. My brother remembers that. I don't. It's the store right next to the corner. On the southeast corner of East Capitol Street at Fifth Street was Werner's Drug Store, now Jimmy T's. Mrs. Werner was a teacher at Bryan school. On Kentucky Avenue, around the corner from Independence, there was a candy store and also a candy store at Ninth and C Street, on the northwest corner. In the former seafood store at the corner of Seventh and South Carolina Avenue was Williams Drug Store, now Antiques on the Hill.

**METZGER:** So did you all go down to Eastern Market every couple of days?

**AU:** Yes. And they just had the farmers out on the line on Saturdays. The Market, when I first started going there in 1914—when I was four, really wasn't very old.

**METZGER:** Yes, it has occurred to me in doing these interviews, that what we think of as historic—old houses and all—was to the people who were young in 1920 all very exciting and new.

**AU:** Mr. Clements and I were mentioning while he was working that this house was built in 1885 and we bought it in 1921. In those few years, really that wasn't a very long time, there was a lot of damage to the woodwork.

**METZGER:** Had it been used as a boardinghouse?

**AU:** No. The last people had a teenage boy and he is supposed to have done a lot; they had a dog who scratched on the doors. Up in the bathroom there was a place where the mice had scratched on the corner of the door. I covered it with some aluminum.

**METZGER:** You mentioned your grandmother going around to visit. Did she keep the German custom of the afternoon coffee?

**AU:** Yes. A friend of my father's, a lady who grew up on Ninth Street when my father and his family were on Ninth Street, once told me that she and her girlfriends in the afternoon liked to visit my grandmother and have coffee and cake. The girls liked to do that. My grandmother only had boys.

**METZGER:** I remember you telling me when you were coming home from school sometimes your mother was having a coffee.

**AU:** My mother belonged to a group of ladies who met once a month in different homes. They were all German, spoke German when they got together. They called themselves the Kretchen, which is a little weed. One of the ladies was the wife of the Ambassador, so when I came home from school and saw the car with the chauffeur out front, I'd come on out to the kitchen because I knew there were all kinds of goodies. My mother had been sent to a finishing school (not in the sense that we had finishing school), a place where the girls learned to keep house. Even though they weren't going to have to do it themselves, they had to know the proper way. My mother was mainly interested in the painting, sewing, cooking. She learned to make the fancy things, and she enjoyed that, but she married a man who was a meat and potatoes person and vegetables. My mother used to make some very fancy things but she said she married a man who liked pie; she had never made pie, but she learned to make pies.

**METZGER:** Did your mother have someone to help her with the housework?

**AU:** Yes, my mother had a colored girl who came in once a week. We had a washer woman when I was very small who came and picked up wash. But as soon as Bergmann's started up (I think in the early 20s), we switched and stayed with them until after my mother died. But it was confining; I had to be here when

they delivered. I have a washing machine now and a clothes line. I love hanging up clothes because we never did it. I can remember my grandmother, when she washed out smalls, hanging them up.

**METZGER:** Did you have your big meal in the middle of the day?

**AU:** No, we had supper. We had to appear at dinner; there was no excuse, except if you were sick in bed. That was the family dinner, usually about 6 o'clock.

**METZGER:** What would be a typical dinner?

**AU:** Chops or steak, potatoes, vegetables and a desert. Mother made nice deserts.

**METZGER:** A couple of people have mentioned door-to-door food sellers ...

**AU:** Yes, they came on wagons, and also the ice man. Ice was delivered every day and it was fun for the little children to ask for pieces of ice to suck in the summer time. I think ice was only delivered in the summer time. Also the horses were very interesting to us. When the driver of a horse and wagon would stop, he would put out an iron disk attached to a rope and the horse did not move. There were very many nice drinking troughs scattered around the city to water the horses. The large alleys were very clean; the city saw to that. That was where the children played mostly.

**METZGER:** You were saying they would put a sign in the window that would say how much ...

**AU:** There was a sign that had a number—10, 20, 30. I think that applied to cents—a 10 cent piece, 20-cent piece of ice. You turned the card so the number was visible. That was how the ice man knew how much ice to bring in.

**METZGER:** So someone had to be home to let the ice man in.

**AU:** Yes, but someone was always home. Then we got a refrigerator. This one [the refrigerator in her kitchen] goes to 1946. Can you imagine? It's 54 years old.

**METZGER:** So you've pretty much left everything in the house as it was in the 1920s.

**AU:** I wanted to tell you about cars. Cars in those days didn't have gas gauges. If one wanted to know how much gas was left in the tank, the driver and his passenger had to stand up, lift the front seat because the tank was under it, unscrew the cap, and put a dipstick down to measure the gas. My father had one of the first cars on the hill—1908, 1909. My father bought gas from a Mr. Pap Hayden, who had a store or shop in one of the group of small buildings on the south side of Pennsylvania Avenue where the Hawk and Dove now stands. Mr. Hayden, a short elderly man, would bring the gas out to the curb in large heavy

metal cans, like milk cans. A Mr. Leonard Redmond had a tobacco shop there; Mr. Mamakos, a Greek gentleman, had a candy factory. His two daughters, referred to by my father as “Louis Mamakos’s girls,” are the ladies who own Sherrill’s restaurant [233 Pennsylvania Avenue SE].

**METZGER:** You also had a little thing about the lights—you had to leave a light on when they parked at the curb.

**AU:** Yes, if you didn’t put your car in the garage and most people did, at night you had to have a small light on the rear and probably on the front. So every evening you would have to go out, and there was a little switch on the dashboard, and you turned the light on. Back when people used coal they would get the coal dumped at the curb and they were supposed to bring it in before dark. If something happened and they couldn’t get anyone to bring it in, they were supposed to put a lantern on it. This was when the streetlights—gas lights—were very, very dim.

My father was coming home on a bicycle and they didn’t have a lantern, he hit and went right over. His kneecap was badly hurt.

Sunday afternoons we would go for a drive to Hains Point. Ohio Drive was then called the Speedway. Very often in warm weather my friends and I, in this block, would go for a walk to the Capitol grounds, stopping on the way at Sherrill’s Bakery for a Charlotte Russe—a real treat. Do they still do it in paper cups—white with a scalloped top?

As teenagers we would often take our lunch to eat on the mall and then visit the museums. But mostly Saturday was spent at the movies. We went to the Carolina, on 11<sup>th</sup> Street. We also went to the Avenue Grand. I understand there was one on Eighth Street called the Academy. The other branch of our family used to go, but I was never there.

**METZGER:** So everybody had their favorite movie theatres. Did you go down to H Street?

**AU:** No. On C Street NE was the Home Theatre. It’s now a church—C Street on the north side, about 13<sup>th</sup> Street [1230 C Street NE].

**METZGER:** What games did the children play?

**AU:** Mr. Sladen, who was born in 1900, remembered how little girls would fashion lanterns out of cardboard boxes by cutting windows on the side, covering them with colored paper and putting a candle inside. Then they pulled them along by string.

**METZGER:** But you never did that?

**AU:** No. That was summer and I usually wasn't here during the summer.

**METZGER:** That's right, your family had the place down on the water.

**AU:** We played hop scotch, hide and seek, tag, jump rope, One-Two-Three-O'Leary, card games, board games, mumbledy-peg. Boys played marbles. We played Run, Sheep, Run; Red Rover; May I?; Statues; Blind Man's Bluff; Go In and Out the Window; London Bridge; Mulberry Bush; musical chairs; Ring Around the Rosie. Girls sewed clothes for their dolls; we cut pictures of sofas and furniture from Sears catalog and made rooms out of shoe boxes. My brother had an Irish Mail and a scooter.

**METZGER:** An Irish Mail—that's one of the pump things like on a railroad tracks. A scooter—did he do that thing where you use old roller skates?

**AU:** Yes, he probably made his own scooter. Maybe not, he would know.

**METZGER:** Who did you play with?

**AU:** There were a lot of girls. I only played with the kids on my block. Very few cars were parked on the street. Most people had garages. In the fall, when leaves began to fall, my friends and I used to sweep the leaves into what looked like an architect's space with doors, windows, and so forth. We tried to be creative.

**METZGER:** That's a great story. To be able to sweep leaves into the middle of Independence Avenue ...

**AU:** You would think cars going by ... but there was very little traffic. The men would be working.

**METZGER:** And there was not a whole lot down there—very few destinations. What about school? Favorite teachers?

**AU:** There were many fine teachers at Eastern. Miss Dant for English; Mr. Short for Latin; Mr. Hart was principal; Mr. Holls was vice principal; and his aunt, Miss Holls, was biology teacher, and so many others.

Wallach was an Italianate red brick building with large shade trees around it—very handsome. They had a picture down at CVS of it without a shade tree in sight. Poor Wallach—that's not how it looked. It had beautiful shade trees and I don't think that any of the kids ever went near the front. We always played in the little playground.

Miss Baker was my favorite teacher in elementary school. She lived in the 200 block of Eighth Street. Miss Stineberg had been my father's teacher. Miss Cannelli was also a favorite. Her father owned a

leather finding's shop on the Avenue near the Avenue Grand. Miss Downey was also a teacher at Hine Junior. At Hine Junior High I had Miss Penny who had taught [famous aviator Charles] Lindbergh. At Eastern I had Miss Buckrum who had taught General McAuliffe, who said "Nuts." [Ed: McAuliffe became famous for replying "Nuts!" to a German demand for surrender in the Battle of the Bulge during World War II.]

**METZGER:** You said "leather findings shop"? What is that?

**AU:** Shoemakers would buy leather—leather shoestrings. It was retail so others would buy leather too.

Hine was also an attractive building, as was Towers. All three were on the block now used by Hine alone. Wallach faced the Avenue; Hine faced Seventh Street; Tower faced C Street. I also attended Bryan for a year or so. The girls' entrance and the boys' entrance were on opposite sides of the building

The lower half of our block, bordering C Street, (the 10 hundred block of C Street), was an empty lot until about the late 1920's, when houses were built on it. It had been the location of a stable for the horses that pulled the Heredics, which were the horse-drawn streetcars years before. It was an unkempt lot, very uneven and we children liked to play on it.

On warm summer evenings and on summer afternoons, people liked to stroll on the tree-shaded streets of Capitol Hill. East Capitol Street was a popular one and sometimes they stopped at Steinle's Ice Cream Parlor at Fifth and East Capitol Street for a treat. I think it was later Mary's [Blue Room] restaurant.

My memories of World War I were of family friends in uniform and of a garden party given for wounded service men from Walter Reed in the yard of the first house on Fourth Street, whose side yard is on B Street [200 Fourth Street SE], across from the ...

**METZGER:** Presbyterian church.

**AU:** They had a strawberry party for them. I remember because we lived two doors from there. I remember that as seeing these soldiers all in their uniforms. Now when I walk by, I realize there is only a strip of yard this wide; there are all these window wells.

I well remember the summer afternoon when lightening felled the spire of the church. I was 5 or 6 and we lived at 411 B Street. We were in the dining room and the dining room windows looked up at the spire. When the lightning struck it was so loud. The tumbling of the spire must have added to the noise. I remember so well when the lightening hit, my father jumped. You think your parents are so strong and brave. I thought nothing would faze my father.

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 1

TAPE 1/SIDE 2

**METZGER:** On the Hill here, very large houses are sometimes next to very small houses. As children, was there a sense of economic disparity?

**AU:** On our block everything is pretty much the same. To me this was a big house when I was little. I realize now that it really isn't. We lived at 411. That's the red brick house that projects out a ways. The man who lives there now goes to my dentist. My dentist got me in touch with him. He invited me to come and he showed me the various apartments that he made out of it. There is a little house next to it that sits back [407 Independence Avenue SE]. An elderly black brother and sister lived in it. They were very fond of my brother and me and we were very fond of them. On the other side of 411 is a house that sits way back, a rather unusual house [413 Independence Avenue SE], a group of brothers and sisters lived there. They were from up in Maryland—Savage, somewhere. It was two sisters, two brothers, and a younger brother, 17. My mother was very fond of the young teenager. He developed tuberculosis. The doctor said he had to go out to Arizona so one of the sisters took him and moved out there. But he didn't make it. I don't think she came back. We had kept in touch with one of the brothers—Kenny Weakly—and one of the sisters, Bella. Nice people from the country, a very nice family.

**METZGER:** You had mentioned that you weren't here in the summertime because you were down at the cottage. How did your family find this cottage so far away?

**AU:** There was a Mr. Leibling who had a plastering business. He lived down on E Street, I think. His father-in-law also had a plastering firm—Mr. Cooksey. Mr. Cooksey bought a piece of land on Neal Sound, which is behind Kent Island and subdivided it. He asked people he knew if they would like to buy a lot and build. My father knew his son-in-law, Harold Leibling. One day they met on the street and he asked my father, "How would you and Miss Elizabeth like to buy a lot down there? It's very nice down there. We'd like to have you as neighbors if you'd buy the lot right next door to us." So we drove down. This was 1919, 1920. Anyway, I used to get car sick. That's what I remember. It was really very, very rural. It took about two and a half hours to get down there. Now it takes about an hour and 15 minutes. In 1921 we went to Germany and came back in 1922. A lot of people had built their houses. So my father got Mr. Yost—a contractor here on the Hill—with his crew to go down and build our cottage in March of 1923.

**METZGER:** So is it a wooden cottage?

**AU:** No, ours is real nice; it has a [unclear] top on it. In fact, it wasn't necessary but all the wood trim is like here—fancy. The walls are all plastered. It has a porch on the front, a screen porch on the side, a screened eating porch on the back, three bedrooms, living room, dining room, kitchen.

**METZGER:** So your mother, brother, and you would be down for the whole summer?

**AU:** We'd all be down there. My grandmother lived until 1935. My father would be waiting down by the school on the last day and we would come out and get in the car. We wouldn't be back until school started.

**METZGER:** Did you miss your friends up here?

**AU:** Not particularly. I had a whole other set of friends. There were at least a dozen kids and I'm the last one. My brother is still living and another brother and sister, who were special friends but all the rest are gone. I'm selling in the spring.

**METZGER:** Are you going to miss it or just be glad not to worry?

**AU:** Oh, that drive. I *hate* being on the road. Look at that accident with that truck.

**METZGER:** It's no longer fun for you to go down.

**AU:** That's right. Frequently when I tell my brother I'm going down tomorrow, I'll get up and change my mind because I don't have to unless I'm meeting somebody down there, workmen. But once I get on the road I don't mind it so much; I stay to the right side of the road and I just stay there. I do not go out on the streets at night.

**METZGER:** A lot of the Capitol Hill houses have a very small back room. Does this one and how was it used?

**AU:** This house has a large front bedroom, clear across. Then the hall runs back, a pretty large bedroom, small bath, a small bedroom, and then a rear bedroom clear across.

**METZGER:** Was that small room anything special?

**AU:** My brother's bedroom. It's big enough we have a library table in there. My grandmother had the back bedroom; my brother, the little room; I had the next bedroom; and Mom and Pop in the front room.

**METZGER:** Did your house have dark woodwork?

**AU:** No it was painted white when we came so I don't know what it was like when it was new. It has all the plates on the door—brass with stamped designs. This had five coats of paint and Mr. McClennis could tell there was a design there. He took all the paint off; I hoped it would be brass but it was iron. Throughout the house they all have stamped metal; even in the basement there is an extra little room with a lock and it is stamped too. We always say the house must have looked nice when it was new.

**METZGER:** I noticed when I came in that the doorbell cover and mail slot were stamped.

**AU:** Yes, that's original.

**METZGER:** Was there glass in your front door?

**AU:** No. We had a break-in one Fourth of July. We didn't lock the front door so they were in the vestibule where they could work on the inner door. This was in about 1950—a couple of drug addicts whom they caught. That's when my father had glass put in the panels.

**METZGER:** When it got very hot, what did you do?

**AU:** Stayed down in the country.

**METZGER:** Did you have electricity? Fans?

**AU:** No, we had gas when we moved here in 1921. We got electricity sometime in the 1920s. Fred will know. We had gas fixtures. My grandmother always changed the mantles [in the lamps]. Once they have been used, they are so fragile. My grandmother was very delicate; she knew how to handle them. She was such a sweet little thing. On Thursday, she would have been 150 years old. She was born in 1850.

**METZGER:** What kind of chores did you have as a child?

**AU:** When we were asked to do something, we did it, but nothing on a regular basis.

**METZGER:** Did you have a wood stove in the kitchen?

**AU:** In here, there was a big stove—coal—over in the corner. Out on the porch was a water closet with a toilet. Because the water would freeze in the winter—there was no trap apparently—but the box with the water was up there but you pulled a string outside.

**METZGER:** I've heard about those. Dorothy Hawkins showed me a picture of her father standing outside one.

**AU:** There was a house on the House Tour some years ago on Seward Square, a few doors from Sixth Street, they had a working one.

**METZGER:** Your family had a car from the early years but you did walk a lot?

**AU:** Oh yes, and used the streetcars. I had a problem riding the streetcars because putting the brakes on caused that awful odor of the grinding metal so I never got to Glen Echo.

You had to have license plates for each state you went. My father had Maryland plates and District plates. I still don't know much about Virginia. You should ask Fred about Hoover airport. The cars had to wait if there was a plane taking off or coming in. There was a place called Arlington Beach over there. My girlfriend tells me that her father and his young friends—they were young fellows—would go over there, sort of an amusement place and a beach. Kate Smith grew up in Foggy Bottom and she had a wonderful voice. She would go over there, sneak away from home, and go over there and sing. When her mother would come looking for her, the fellows would kind of cover for her.

I do remember the beach at Tidal Basin. I remember the drive that was there. There is a picture that appears every once in a while. I cut it out of the Martha's Vineyard Gazette once that showed an elderly policeman kneeling down and measuring the girls' bathing suits. I had a friend, who died a few years ago, who used to go there. She was sent home once. She had bought a nice Jantzen bathing suit but the policeman said it was too short and sent her home.

**METZGER:** You said about the games you played as a child. What did you do as teenagers? Movies, of course. What did you do for dates?

**AU:** When we were in high school you didn't date. One or two maybe went out with a boy. When we were in our late teens we enjoyed going down town to eat out, go to the shows. I went to classes down at the Y during the war. I enjoyed trying to learn languages. At one time or another, I dabbled in seven I think.

**METZGER:** You didn't go out to work?

**AU:** The women in our family didn't go out to work. Paul's mother took a job and Uncle Karl was very, very strict; he really ruled the roost. We were all very surprised when his daughter-in-law, Paul's mother, took a job at Woodward and Lothrop office.

**METZGER:** Did you miss it or were you happy?

**AU:** No, I was happy. My particular case was different. Just about the time I was getting out of high school, my mother suffered a seizure. She was healthy until she died, but you never knew when she would have a seizure. That was the problem. I had to make up my mind. I knew I would have the care of Mom. Was it fair to a husband? She was always trying to kick me out of the nest, but circumstances were that way. When my father was living I was free to go out in the evening and have a nice social life.

**METZGER:** How were holidays celebrated? Christmas?

**AU:** It was a German Christmas. The gifts were exchanged on Christmas Eve. That was when the children first saw the tree.

**METZGER:** You were going to the Lutheran Church. Did they have a pageant?

**AU:** I don't remember. Later they did, I know. The little children dressed as angels were so cute. But it was very much for family. On Christmas Day we sometimes visited close friends. My parents had close friends on Massachusetts Avenue and it got to be a tradition that every Christmas Eve after we had our celebration they would go there for the rest of the evening.

**METZGER:** Were your parents, or grandparents, active in that German association?

**AU:** Nothing. Just the German church at 20<sup>th</sup> and G ...

**METZGER:** ... NW ...

**AU:** ... a Lutheran church that had services in German and English (and they still do). That was the family's church; my brother and I went to Reformation. We never went to those summer festivals or Octoberfests.

**METZGER:** What about beer gardens? Did your family go there?

**AU:** There were beer gardens. My grandfather would sometimes play at a beer garden. They were nice places. It wasn't just a place to drink—it was family oriented. You were in that house down here on C Street that was on the house tour—that fantastic house with the chandelier. It had been a store, a saloon, and a restaurant. I remember it as a restaurant; I don't remember it as a saloon. The 1921 law changed that. I was so pleased to be in that one.

A friend of mine just bought the house down there on Tenth Street—on that side near the corner of C Street. It's pale gray with white trim and [unclear]. It's a darling house.

**METZGER:** National Washington—do you remember any senators or representatives that lived nearby?

**AU:** No.

**METZGER:** Was there much talk when women got the vote or another national event that impacted on your life?

**AU:** Not about that but, as a child, the talk at the dinner table or at lunch, mainly between my grandmother and father was about Teapot Dome and Muscle Shoals. I could figure out what a teapot dome would be. but a Muscle Shoals was a puzzle. I could never figure that out. That was the big scandal.

My mother, my friends and I didn't have a vote so we didn't have an interest in politics.

**METZGER:** But your grandmother was very interested in politics?

**AU:** Yes, she would read the paper and talk with my father about it.

**METZGER:** She must have been quite wonderful.

**AU:** Yes, she was. She lived to be 85. She was quite small. She would have been college material in any other time. She sort of raised us. My grandparents spoke no English when they came over. They took a room in a house here on Ninth Street between C and D. They were among German people; didn't have to speak English. The storekeepers were German around here, so she learned to speak English when her boys went to school. She was with us at night; we played games and Parcheesi. She read us fairy tales and I would cry. Fred used to say how embarrassed he was when we would go to the movies and when it was over and we would come out, his little sister would be crying. She was up in the mornings because my parents didn't get up until 9 or 10 o'clock if they had been out late. My grandmother would get up, have breakfast and get us off to school. Of course, we could come home for lunch. My mother would be there then.

**METZGER:** You had said on the phone about the lady next door who had a sign in the window about taking in table boarders ...

**AU:** That was done by ladies who were good cooks. It wasn't drop in; it was always pre-arranged. It was regular people who came every morning for breakfast; she'd pack them a lunch and then they came for their evening meal. It was almost all men, rarely was there a woman. They lived in rooms that had no cooking facilities. It was either that or eating in restaurants. This was eating in a home and she was a good cook.

**METZGER:** You said about the Navy Yard people ...

**AU:** Yes, they were fellows who were studying to be ensigns. They were stationed there for a while. Their commander came up one time and spoke to her and said he was grateful they had a nice place to eat. That was a little sign—like a For Rent sign—that said Table Board, up in a window.

**METZGER:** There were a lot of both boarding houses and rooming houses, particularly during the War?

**AU:** Yes, it was the patriotic thing to do, if you had a room to spare. I imagine there were a lot of boarding houses on Philadelphia Row. Those houses had 13 rooms, but there were none in our block except Mrs. [unclear]. She had to; her husband died. He had worked for the Post Office but I don't imagine there was much pension.

**METZGER:** You were telling me about Mr. Carry and the National Capital Brewery and the National Capital Bank.

**AU:** Mr. Carry was the owner of the brewery where the Safeway is now at 13<sup>th</sup> and E Streets. When prohibition came in, he was out of business. But he had condensers for chilling beer, so he decided to make ice cream. He made Carry's Ice Cream, which was probably the biggest seller of commercial ice cream in Washington. It was very good ice cream and popular for many years. Mr. Carry built a mansion at the corner of 12<sup>th</sup> and Independence Avenue. It was a gorgeous brownstone mansion on the style of those on Fifth Avenue in New York. Lots of the brownstone had carving on it. It was torn down, probably in the fifties. I said to Jimmy [James M. Didden], "Why did you tear the mansion down?" He said, "It was before my time." Now, they wouldn't be allowed to do it. It fell into disrepair to the nth degree. Women would bring men in, get them drunk, and roll them for their money. When you went up to the mailbox on the corner, there were all these drunks lying all over this gorgeous front entrance. It was a beautiful place.

**METZGER:** There are those new houses there now.

**AU:** But the Didden House was built by Mr. Carry for his daughter when she married Mr. Didden. [Ed: The Didden House was built at 139 12<sup>th</sup> Street SE, beside the Carry Mansion. Mr. Didden was probably Jimmy's grandfather, George, as Mr. Carry was his great-grandfather, Albert.] That was the parish house of St. Mark's. It is a lovely home, an Edwardian house.

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 2

END OF INTERVIEW