



THE RUTH ANN OVERBECK
CAPITOL HILL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with Mary Jerrell

Interview Date: March 28, 2003

Interviewer: Andrea Kerr

Transcribers: Barbara McDonough, James McMahon

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TAPE 1/SIDE 1

KERR: And the date is March 28th, I believe, yes. And we are going to talk about growing up on Capitol Hill and life as it was lived on Capitol Hill during Mary Jerrell's life. So we will begin by saying were you born on Capitol Hill and if so where?

JERRELL: No, I was not born on Capitol Hill, I was born in Virginia but I was five years old when we moved into the house at 808 East Capitol Street. My father bought the house from Helen Nicolay the daughter of John G. Nicolay who was Lincoln's secretary. They did not ever live in the house according to Ruth Overbeck but somehow I felt it was a brief brush with history even so.

KERR: Very nice. Your family moved to Virginia because?

JERRELL: Moved from Virginia

KERR: Your family moved from Virginia because your father got a job in the city or ...?

JERRELL: He had a furniture store downtown near Kann's [department store].

KERR: I see.

JERRELL: And I presume that is where he worked when I came here—I don't really know. I know that's he sold it in 1928 or 29. But we had lived on a farm, a little truck farm on the Chain Bridge Road.

KERR: Oh my!

JERRELL: But ah, I remember Capitol Hill way, way back, I remember the people who lived there, that's what I thought might be interesting.

KERR: Well yes, I think so. Now ...

JERRELL: In our block, let's see at 800 there was Mr. Murphy, and I know his daughter was with him, Mrs. Mim, and Mrs. Mim had two children, a girl named Margaret and I forgot the name of the boy, they were somewhat younger than I. Next to them at 804 was the Gibson family. Mrs. Gibson, who was a widow and her two single daughters, Florence and Miss Viola. They also had a daughter named Myrtle who lived down the street on Ninth Street, 18 Ninth Street, SE and she was married to a Mr. Thom, and they had a daughter named Myrtle and a son named Chester. And Myrtle was one of my good friends and I met her later on in other schools and other places but I remember her from childhood. Now my house was 808, the house next, there was no 810, they started figuring the numbers from both ends of the block and 810 got left out. But the next house was 812, it was the Weiss family. And Mr. Weiss, I'll call him

the grandfather, in fact I always called him the same as Barbara did, Barbara was the niece, whom they raised. Barbara and I grew up together. And Barbara's relatives were my relatives, and my parents were Mom and Daddy Jerrell. Barbara was raised by a blind aunt, very remarkable woman, Louise Weiss, who had been a nurse. And she was totally blind, I mean her eyeballs had even been replaced, there wasn't one bit of sight that she had. But the wonderful things that Aunt Louise could do, she could cook, she could keep house, there were other members of the family living there, Anna and Ed, then Anna's husband, Billy Beck. But Aunt Louise was the one that was raising Barbara because Barbara's mother died when she was an infant. And Barbara's father remarried and kept the other child, an older boy, but Aunt Louise kept Barbara. And she looked after Barbara.

I remember one incident where Aunt Louise called our house, she asked Mother to send me over, she had baked a peach pie. And in getting the peach pie from the oven to the kitchen cabinet, which she always referred to as McDougal, I presume the company's name but it always sounded to me like it was sort of a person, so she had not made the trip successfully. She had dropped the pie on the floor and she had finally run into something she couldn't do. She couldn't get it off the floor. So I was sent over to rescue the remains of the peach pie and throw it in the trash which I hated to do, because it was a pretty good looking peach pie and I had a great urge to taste it even off the floor but I didn't. [Laughter] But that was Aunt Louise. She was just so remarkable, and in later years she learned to type, and she learned the moon system, which was little bit more simple than Braille and she had her books, and childlike I decided that I could learn it too and I brought her books home and my father caught me with my eyes tight shut, practicing my moon system and it upset him so much he wouldn't let me do it anymore. I guess he thought maybe it was bringing on the future which maybe I'm going to have. But anyhow I remember she went to Baltimore one time to see a friend and I decided to write her a letter. Well I didn't have the punch that they used to write Braille but I did it with a pen. Aunt Louise was too impatient to try my moon system so she just got someone to read it—that was easier.

Now on the next door. Uncle Ed I know was a veteran, I remember his funeral was at ... I think it was in the Spanish American War and he had some sort of spells that he had every once in a while, the fallout that they thought came from some fever he had caught when he was in Cuba. Now they owned the next two houses 814 and 816. I think the Williams lived in the 814 and Mrs. Wheately used to live in 816 with two of her daughters, Mrs. Barr and Miss Mamie Wheatley. Mrs. Wheately had a son who I've learned in later years was very active in politics in Maryland, H. Winship Wheately. The people in the next one was the—I think the Thatcher was the name of them, I don't remember too well. Then there was a vacant lot, then there was a building for some commercial purposes, but I—some way I think it was probably it was a Chinese laundry but I am not sure about that. But the Chinese laundry building was torn down and a bank

put in and it was a Peoples Bank, I think they had two branches, that one and another one. I still have the little—Dad of course took me up to the bank. He started my bank account and I had a little bank that you put your coins in and I have it somewhere even yet. I'll always have money as long as I have that bank, because I can't get it out. [KERR, laughter] So I know I have a picture of myself roller-skating down the front of that bank. And in due time the bank was sold to another bank. I think that was City Bank and then American Security and Trust. Either one or the other decided they needed a parking lot by that time, see we were progressing. Capitol Hill was always progressing and changing.

KERR: And this is on East Capitol Street?

JERRELL: Yes, the 800 block. So, they tore down—well meanwhile I think another house was built by the Parks family, next to the bank on the vacant lot. So when the bank decided to put up a parking lot they tore down Mrs. Parks's house and 818, 816, and 814. They tore them all down. And not too many years before I left the area somebody came along, the Bank having discontinued use of that building, and they built three houses and made them try and look as much as they could like the house next door at 812. But they had to make them smaller because there was a size limit and you had to be just a certain length or width or whatever so they could not get four houses in, so they only got three in. And I think it was a doctor from somewhere bought the Bank building and made a home of it.

KERR: OK—we were talking about the family that bought the bank building.

JERRELL: Yes, we've finished that block. I was going to talk—are we ready?

KERR: We'll yes, but I have a few questions in here. What years are we talking about here?

JERRELL: Well, it was 1920 when the Weisses and all lived next door to me. I grew up with Barbara. And Barbara eventually married, raised a family, moved away. The aunts stayed there for a while and Uncle Ed and Uncle Bill died and Barbara took the other two out in Maryland and eventually they died. But this was the way it was in 1920 to 1925, somewhere like that.

KERR: And the bank came somewhere in those years and ...?

JERRELL: The bank came, see we moved in in 1920, and it was shortly after we moved in that they put the bank in there, tore down that building. I barely remember the building but I have a picture of myself, maybe about eight, on roller skates, skating down from the front of the bank so ... and then the one bank after another bought it and then they added the parking lot, then they sold the bank and built on the parking lot to build some more houses. The area is constantly changing.

KERR: And then the parking lot turned back into houses and they put three in where they were four before?

JERRELL: That's right and the bank building there's a man occupying that now.

KERR: And I think it's still a residence isn't it?

JERRELL: The bank—yes it's a residence—it's a private residence still. It was residential to the extent, to a certain extent, but there were some non-conforming places probably before they made the regulations. And as long as it's used ... occupied by commercial one after another it is all right but if it ever goes residential they can't put it back on commercial again. That's one regulation.

KERR: Do you remember the Chinese laundry? Did you use a laundry in the neighborhood?

JERRELL: Not that one but one in the neighborhood, yes. There was one in the next block. We called him Charlie Lee, in fact there were two of them. There was one around the corner on Eighth Street, they were the Yows and I went to high school with Helen Yow, one of my friends. And her dad was old fashioned Chinese, and knowing we had bloomers in high school, and we got new outfits and he wouldn't let her wear the pants, so we solved that because I had a new set and I gave her my old set and of course Daddy didn't—but Mama knew—but Daddy didn't.

KERR: Did you wear those for gym in school? The bloomers?

JERRELL: Eastern High School. Yes, we had—I graduated from Eastern High School in 1933. Let me show you something. I was just going to show you the picture of the graduation class of Hine Junior High School in 1930. [Both Jerrell and Kerr talking together]

KERR: Oh my! And then you went on to Eastern High School?

JERRELL: See Eastern was in the Hine building.

KERR: Oh it was, and where was Hine?

JERRELL: There wasn't one, so they put the junior high in there. They were three schools when I went there—that block.

KERR: Oh, when did they build the Eastern High School that is there—do you know?

JERRELL: I don't remember exactly but ...

KERR: But you attended high school there? [ed: meaning the current Eastern High School location on East Capitol Street between 17th and 19th Streets. That building was built in 1923.]

JERRELL: But it was there before 1930 ... because it was there when I graduated from Hine, I went from Hine to Eastern and that would be 1930.

KERR: And did the neighbors visit often with one another, you seem to know them all very well? Did you have ...?

JERRELL: Well I was very close to the Weisses—some of them I knew fairly well—Mrs. Parks the last house they built, I knew her quite well.

KERR: And did the adults socialize, your parents, socialize with the other people on the street or ...?

JERRELL: With some of them, with the Weisses more and some of the people around the corner they knew. That house at 800, you know, they're modernizing it or, I don't know what you call it, it's like when they say these houses are restored. They have been restored in a style to which they never were and I don't see how you can restore something to something they never were.

KERR: No, no this is true.

JERRELL: But that is an expression that they use. The house has been restored.

KERR: They should more properly say refurbished. Or something.

JERRELL: Something. But I have been told lately that the house at 800 where Mr. Murphy and Mrs. Mims lived—you know it went downhill. It was made into little apartments. And it was a very poor job from what I have been told.

KERR: Now when was that done, do you know?

JERRELL: The years are not something I can tell you exactly.

KERR: But somewhere before or after World War II?

JERRELL: I'm trying to think—it was before World War II.

KERR: Describe the street. You came home from school and tell about what was going on on East Capitol Street when you were a girl, say, in grammar school. You would come home and the milkman came, the bread man came, I'm just ...

JERRELL: I'm not following you.

KERR: Well, the sort of neighborhood life that went on. Nowadays people get in their cars and drive to the supermarket but I imagine that the daily life of people was quite different then.

JERRELL: Well, I had old-fashioned parents and Dad always went to the market, not only Eastern Market but the farmers market.

KERR: Which was where?

JERRELL: I guess you call it Eckington now, that area.

KERR: Oh, ok.

JERRELL: I think it's still there isn't it?

KERR: Yes it is. The food market. The suppliers... yeah.

JERRELL: Yeah, well he used to go there as some of the farmers came in.

KERR: And did he do the food shopping for the family?

JERRELL: My father did, yes.

KERR: He did.

JERRELL: My mother didn't go out very much. She was still a country girl. But Dad, Dad did the marketing and I thought Dad—Dad sometimes got live chickens from a farmer friend and he would keep them on the premises until he got ready to eat them one by one. I wrote an article for the paper here at the home. I've written several, a number of articles. But, then I remember telling about Dad and, you know, the chickens. And Dad fell from a ladder when he was taking down storm sash. And here we had this rooster and these three hens and now that's not typical Capitol Hill. But it's a funny story. But we had to get somebody else [chuckle] to kill the chickens because as I put in the article, we had lost our hatchet man.

KERR: [Chuckle]. Well did he live after he fell from the—I mean he lived after that. It didn't kill him, did it?

JERRELL: Did it what? My dad?

KERR: When he fell from the ladder?

JERRELL: Oh, no.

KERR: Oh, no.

JERRELL: No, but he didn't kill any chickens. He broke both legs.

KERR: Oh my! Well, I'm sorry I didn't know about these. I would like to read them, if they're copies of them because they would have given me some good things to ask.

JERRELL: Oh, well.

KERR: So he kept a couple of hens and a rooster?

JERRELL: Three hens, and a rooster... yeah.

KERR: And were they layers, or were they just for eating?

JERRELL: Well, a little bit of each. But I mean that's not typical Capitol Hill. I mean [chuckle] nobody else had chickens. It was just because we were country folks. Now let's see, I remember the rooster going over the fence all of a sudden after Dad was incapacitated, and the hens followed him.

KERR: [Chuckle.]

JERRELL: And I caught them two houses over. Almost at the house where they had a dog, and I was afraid the dog was coming out. And I was sort of afraid of the chickens: I mean they looked like they could peck you pretty good. So, finally I got them headed back home. Flew back over [chuckle] the fence, and I had to take more ordinary manners to get there. I'm not too good at flying. And I know Dad, I asked one of the neighbors to kill that hen [rooster], when he fell down the ladder. He says it crowed yesterday. It is against the law [chuckle] to have a crowing rooster.

KERR: That's funny.

JERRELL: But the neighbor didn't know how to do it. How to kill the hen—the rooster. But we had a relative who came over and killed some, and I think my mother killed some. You know those country people, they think nothing of whacking the head off a chicken. I couldn't do it—I'm all city girl. But eventually we got down to one—Miss Squawky.

KERR: Did you say Miss Squawky?

JERRELL: Well, she said "SQUAWK, SQUAWK, that's squawky." So Miss Squawky got to be quite a pet. In fact the first hen—some of them developed a little further than others—and when she got ready to lay her first egg she got on the kitchen window and beat on the glass until we thought she was coming through. And we couldn't figure out exactly what ailed her. Then she went into the garage and I followed

Miss Squawky in there—I mean I think, there was Laysnake, [?] Blackie and Miss Squawky. So anyhow we discovered that she merely announcing the big things that were happening she was going to lay her first egg so we were lucky that she didn't do that every time because I don't know how long the windows would have held up. But it was the funniest thing was that each one when she reached that stage of maturity and the first egg they all beat on the kitchen window. [Laughter] That window really had it, so anyhow they tamed down a little bit after the first one. This was big news and they wanted us in on it, I guess.

KERR: Were you an only child?

JERRELL: Yes, so the animals and things played a bigger part in my life than children.

KERR: Sounds like the neighborhood had quite a few children.

JERRELL: Well, there were children but they weren't children that I mixed with.

KERR: I see.

JERRELL: They were down the street or around the corner or somewhere.

KERR: And you went to elementary school where?

JERRELL: Wallach, Towers and Hine. You know where Hine is?

KERR: Well, I know where Hine is now.

JERRELL: Well, it's the same place. That whole block there were three schools on it, it was Towers, and Wallach and Hine.

KERR: Oh, Towers.

JERRELL: Yes, you went to Towers first, there was the first three grades. Then the next grade you went to Wallach. And then when you got through at Wallach you went to Hine. And I don't know where Hine had been before because ... when I went there it was Hine but I know that Eastern High School—the pupils marched from that Hine building to the new Eastern High School. Saw them march. Used to know some people who marched but I don't know anymore. But it's great to remember, I remember making the speech when I graduated from Hine. Having to get up and scared to death. And I went back—I remember one delightful teacher that was Mrs. Frankinfield.

KERR: Mrs. Frankinfield?

JERRELL: [Spells the name] Mrs. Frankinfield loved to talk and she had a sister who was married to a missionary. We were little smart alecks, you know, we discovered that if we could get her onto the subject of her sister, why we missed a lot of education. So, Mrs. Frankinfield used to talk about that sister quite a lot, but the thing I remember about her was that you wanted everyone to be quiet she'd go out of the room and she would come back and catch them talking you know. And she would look us all over and she'd say "Empty vessels make the most noise." And they do. [Laughter]

KERR: This is true.

JERRELL: I never forgot that, "Empty vessels make the most noise."

KERR: What grade was that?

JERRELL: Junior High. It would be seventh, eighth or ninth. I don't remember which one I was in at the time, and years later when I went to college, he told us to go back and see what went on at the school we went to and Mrs. Frankinfield was still there and she still remembered me after all those years. But that building had gotten so old that when you went up the steps they scooped.

KERR: Of course.

JERRELL: All those little footsteps going up and down so they tore it down in more recent years and built Hine that is there now but it was right on the same grounds.

KERR: And obviously you walked to school. Did the streetcar come near your house?

JERRELL: Yes, there were streetcars on Eighth Street and also on East Capitol. You see ... there were two lines—I've been trying to think of things that might be interesting to people—I think the one on East Capitol was Washington Railway and Electric, the one on Eighth Street was Capitol Traction [Transit?] and if you want to transfer from one to the other you had to pay a penny for your transfer, because of the different ownership.

KERR: And were these open cars or were they closed, the streetcars?

JERRELL: You are thinking about Virginia, they had what we called summer cars, they were open on the sides, and then there was like a running board and that's where that conductor went up and down you know, the seats went this way and he would come along this way and get your fare.

KERR: During that summer?

JERRELL: And they ran out to Glen Echo which was an amusement park in Maryland. That was fun, I enjoyed that. I liked the summer cars, but I mean the other cars they had sides and all. When I was in college I got on an old one one time where the seats went long ways, every once in the while we would see that one, but most of the time the seats went cross ways like they usually do. I was trying to think what else was interesting in those days.

KERR: Did your family have a car?

JERRELL: Oh yes, we had a touring car, they didn't have glass sides, glass windows, they had some kind of windows you snapped on when it rained, isinglass I think is was. Yeah, we went driving, up in the country, Sunday evenings, afternoon drive. It was the routine. When I went to Easter—I know we went out to Soldiers Home with my cousins and rolled eggs and all—course if it would rain why the eggs had to be rolled at home. But we had a folding ironing board so we just folded, you know, like it was on a slant, it worked pretty well. I remember some of the stories about Hine ... Let's see. It was all these years, it's getting a little confusing to me. I remember one teacher, Miss Newlove, she was always threatening. I think she was in the fourth grade at Wallach. And she said that if people didn't stop talking she was going to make them stand in the corner with adhesive tape over their mouth. Nobody believed that she would do it but when I went to fifth grade my teacher sent me back to see Miss Newlove about something on an errand and there in the corner was a kid standing with adhesive tape.

KERR: Nowadays his parents would be in there filing some kind of lawsuit I suppose.

JERRELL: I'm telling you, can you imagine the uproar.

KERR: Oh, indeed. Did you play outdoors after school, were you allowed to ...

JERRELL: Well, I roller-skated.

KERR: Did you have a bicycle?

JERRELL: No, I wasn't that much of an athletic kid. I didn't have a bicycle. I did have some kind of a tricycle, it had a seat like this and then one part right here and you pedaled it some kind of way one wheel here, two here, but not a regular bicycle. No. I never was crazy about ball and things like that. Virginia was the one that did those things.

KERR: Well, I also heard there was a girls club and a boys club somewhere in the neighborhood, did you ever go to that?

JERRELL: No, they weren't right in the neighborhood, they were somewhere ... the ones I'm thinking of were down about beyond Eastern High School, there was one.

KERR: Ah ha.

JERRELL: I didn't go into anything like that. I loved to read. That was my happy moments, I knew the libraries pretty well.

KERR: Now, where was the library?

JERRELL: There is one I guess—it's just off Seventh and Pennsylvania Avenue SE—

KERR: Oh—same one—

JERRELL: And there is one on, near the old Casualty Hospital, there was one at one time. [ed: reference to the Northeast Library]

KERR: The library that's there now was the one that you went to? The one that's on Seventh, just below Pennsylvania?

JERRELL: I guess it is, it's on—by the steps going up it. I don't think they ever tore that one down, I don't know. See I haven't been over there for six years I don't know what's there now.

KERR: No, the library is still there. [ed: reference to the Southeast Library]

JERRELL: Oh, I loved the library.

KERR: Did they have events in the library?

JERRELL: I don't remember any, no.

KERR: I mean story hour, or reading contests, or things like that.

JERRELL: No, we didn't have anything like that.

KERR: So you actually were growing up during the Great Depression?

JERRELL: Yes, I guess I was. I don't remember seeing anybody selling apples though.

KERR: Maybe because Washington had more jobs than most places. Your father sold his furniture store before the depression, didn't he?

JERRELL: I know that I was in junior high and I graduated in 1930, when he sold the store. Because it had an elevator in it. It was an elevator that was a platform and a rope, and you stood on the solid area and pulled the rope to get the platform up and down to move furniture from one floor to another. In fact that particular furniture store lately has been sold and there was an article in the paper about it. The newspaper. But Dad was operating that and he stepped on some grease and he fell down the elevator shaft and he was just there to help the man get started, you know. But I know that was when I was in junior high.

KERR: That is a man with some hard luck there, off the ladder, down into the elevator shaft. That was the furniture store—oh.

JERRELL: You may have read about it, sure, I don't remember the name of it but yes.

KERR: Yes, just recently, his family had had it for good many years and he was hoping to find a new owner. It was down at H, where was it, F?

JERRELL: No, it was on Indiana Avenue, near Kann's.

KERR: Okay.

JERRELL: That was the one that just recently has been in paper. But I can't think of its name at the moment.

KERR: So now did you have to come in from playing when the streetlights came on?

JERRELL: Oh yes, I wasn't allowed the freedom that children have now. I was going to tell you about the store. The Shriner's parade was one of the big events, it went on for several days. And I know that Dad would get the family together at the store. He would get some lemonade and sandwiches and the relatives would come and we would all get on the roof and we would watch the parades. I always was scared because Daddy kept walking around the edge of the roof, looking down. I was sure sometime or other he was going to fall but he didn't. [Laughter]

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 1

TAPE 1/SIDE 2

JERRELL: Dad took us out when he got this table, and we really had it good we were standing on the table until the policeman came by and got nosy and made him take the table back.

KERR: Really. Why do you suppose that was?

JERRELL: I don't know but I know that did not make him very popular with us, because you know we were little folks. We really had it made there for a while.

KERR: Of course. Well I think having a store right there on the parade route must have been a treat anyhow. So were the streetlights much like they are now? Out on the street when you first came there?

JERRELL: No they have changed quite a bit. And then the alley, I was going to tell you about the alley. There was no alley back of the house at that time just the tiny little trash alley a little bit way up from Eighth Street but not very far, one or two houses. But they decided to put in a real alley. And as soon as they put the alley in, now that must have been—we built a garage and they happened to put the date inside the garage and I know it was 1922. I remember that. Otherwise I wouldn't know. And of course everybody started building garages that had space for it. We had more garages than cars around that alley. And then after a while, Mr. Seton, I remember he was the one who had the most garages, and he decided to sell his house, they wanted to build an apartment building, the Davmar. That apartment building is still there, on the land that Mr. Seton used to have, with all of his garages. [ed: the Davmar is at 18 Ninth Street NE.] And we had rented part of our house, it's a three story house, I have a picture of it over there, to a family named Brimer, who left us when the Davmar was built because they were offering one month's rent free, probably the second month, so we lost our tenants to it. But the Brimers, if you know the Good Humor ice cream on the stick,

KERR: Sure.

JERRELL: Well, they were the ones that started that business. The Brimers were. And I could remember Mr. Brimer bringing this gadget with all these little sticks, some way he could pull it out and dip it in about six of them at a time into the chocolate and showed how they made it, and that was I think the beginning of the Good Humor business.

KERR: So they were a young couple when they lived in your house?

JERRELL: With one little boy, Bobby Brimer.

KERR: And do you know what became of them?

JERRELL: No, I think Bobby was involved with the Good Humor business when he grew up [Robert Brimer became the President of Good Humor after the retirement of Thomas J. Brimer.] but beyond that I don't know. But in this alley I remember one of my great amusements was the ... we had gaslight in the alley, electric lights on the street, but a gaslight in the alley. Every evening, about dusk, this little man would come along and he had this stick with some kind of gadget on it that he would light the light and I

assume that at daybreak he must have come back again. I never was up at that time so I don't know, but that was a big treat watching him do that.

KERR: And before they put the alley in, who owned the land back there?

JERRELL: Well, each one of us, they bought part of our land.

KERR: Ah, the city did. Just eminent domain or something?

JERRELL: Yes, they took part of our land too. Everybody's. Course the alley is still there and the Davmar is still there.

KERR: And the garages are still there?

JERRELL: Yes, well they tore—the McDonoughs moved into 808. They bought it from me and they tore down one garage, a metal garage, which was getting rather rusty. And they wanted to add, big as the house was, they wanted to add a sort of a sunroom on the back of the house. You have to not build on a certain portion of your land you know, you only allow so much of it so you want to add something you've got to tear down something. So, yeah, they added a sunroom, and the house was two stories in the back, three in the front and they added one more floor on that two-story part. I can tell you one interesting part about that roof. It leaked every once in a while, in snow, not with rain but with snow somehow it would leak, it was a rather flat roof. And I think it was the year of the Knickerbocker disaster, you probably heard of that

KERR: Of course, right, right. Yes, when the whole roof—

JERRELL: The theater ... when the whole roof fell. I remember that those were the days that my dad went up on the third floor roof from the second, with a little short ladder and at one time at night he told us he was going up to do the roof. "Don't you all get up from bed, I'll be fine." So he went up on the roof, of course I didn't pay any attention to that. I was watching through the window and all at once I heard Daddy yelling. The ladder had blown down and he was on the third floor roof and couldn't get down. And we had rented the apartment out to a couple. I roused them and the man went out and put Daddy's ladder back and got him down off the roof. So we had a little excitement even in those days.

KERR: The tenants lived on the top floor?

JERRELL: Yeah ... When we first bought the house we couldn't get full possession, we lived in one of the apartments. Of course they eventually got them all out of there, I think there was a policeman in there.

KERR: And they had laws that let them live on in there, is that ...? Well, you said you didn't get full possession of the house when you bought it

JERRELL: No, until the tenants, we couldn't just throw the tenants out. See it was rented out in apartments but there was one apartment vacant and we lived in it until we got possession of the whole house.

KERR: When the tenants' leases finally expired?

JERRELL: I don't think they had a lease, probably just monthly tenants. But you see those tenants were the ones with John G. Nicolay's daughter.

KERR: Who were they?

JERRELL: John G. Nicolay, he was Lincoln's secretary, John G. Nicolay and John Hay. Well that's history.

KERR: That is history, that's a really interesting house. Our friends bought a house on Fourth Street NE, just off East Capitol that was visited quite often by Sousa.

JERRELL: Yeah, I think he lived there, didn't he?

KERR: Maybe he did.

JERRELL: Yeah, I think he did. He is buried in Congressional Cemetery.

KERR: Right.

JERRELL: He and J. Edgar [Hoover].

KERR: So one of the other interviewees told me that block by block there were ethnic enclaves and he said "mine was the Irish block", he was talking about I think C Street NE. He said the next block was the Italian block. Did you remember any of that from your youth, or ...?

JERRELL: No, I don't.

KERR: No ... It is funny when you're young, your world is your neighborhood.

JERRELL: I was pretty much limited to my own neighborhood when I was small, because my parents were old fashioned, they weren't turning me loose.

KERR: And what did you do for fun?

JERRELL: Our house now, they had all outside toilets. Most of the neighbors, which are not legal anymore but very handy. Now they didn't have flush pumps but they turned a little handle. They weren't like country toilets, but the water you just turned the handle and the water went but not a flush, to clean it out.

KERR: And that was what you had in your house, when you bought it?

JERRELL: That was outside the house.

KERR: Oh, that was outside the house.

JERRELL: Yeah, a lot of people had them, it was convenient. And that is one of the things that fascinated my cousin, he didn't want me to take it out, that would help me sell the house to somebody who wanted everything old fashioned. So we sold it to the McDonoughs who wanted to turn everything all new fashioned.

KERR: How long ago was that? When did you sell the house?

JERRELL: Sold the house in '97, the papers were signed January of '97.

KERR: And had you kept everything pretty much as it was in the house?

JERRELL: As much as I could, yeah, because I appreciated old things.

KERR: Nice woodwork, nice but what did you like?

JERRELL: I think it must have been intended to be rental property. I don't think the woodwork was as nice but I do remember a gray marble mantle, that I always said that when I moved I was going to take it with me but of course I didn't bring it to the Methodist Home. And I had Latrobe heat, not a fireplace, have you seen Latrobe, have you seen Latrobes?

KERR: Yes.

JERRELL: Well, that's the kind of heat.

KERR: Describe the Latrobe heat for me.

JERRELL: Well it wasn't exactly a stove. But it's sort of shaped (can't put that on tape) like half of a stove, I guess, fitting into the fireplace and on the floor. You used coal, I think, for it. And on the floors above there was little place, something like this thing in the wall [motions], so that the heat went up the chimney and heated the bedrooms above. We didn't have electricity when we moved in.

KERR: Did you have gas lamps?

JERRELL: We had gas, yeah. In fact my father didn't have too much confidence in electricity. We had one lamp that was a ceiling light that was gas and electric both. I left that in the house, I don't know if the McDonoughs took it out.

KERR: Oh my.

JERRELL: To me that was attractive. But of course if you are not affected by history why, you don't like it. It always hurt my feelings a little that they modernized it. I expected it to be modernized but not everything torn out.

KERR: I think I can be very sympathetic to that. Most of these houses have been through a number of renovations and changes through the years and that there was something that was so historically right. I can see why.

JERRELL: That house was built in 1870. Now the civil war ended in 1965 [1865]. So you see that when he was serving, John G. Nicolay, was serving Lincoln in the White House.

KERR: And then he must have done something in Washington afterwards when he moved into the house?

JERRELL: See, he never lived in the house. That's what Ruth Overbeck told me.

KERR: Oh.

JERRELL: I wish he had but that's what the deed said, that he had owned the property. And left it to his only daughter and heir. And my father bought it from Helen G. Nicolay. Helen Nicolay was a writer, and she wrote a biography of her father and of John Hay and I think children's books too. She lived in New York. When she died it was in the paper. Or else I wouldn't know all that, I tie it in. I mean I have an ear for history.

KERR: Yes, I was going to say, you are a good historian. She didn't live in the house either, she kept it for rental.

JERRELL: I don't think so, at least not when we bought it, because it was rented out in apartments.

KERR: And it seemed as if it was always that way?

JERRELL: I don't know whether she—I mean Ruth Overbeck said they didn't, I don't know how far she researched it. I didn't ask her to research it but she knew what I had said about the deed. It would

have been fun if they had lived there. Oh yes, there was a little girl who lived there, had a pony. And one of the ladies who lived across the street grew up in the neighborhood. She told me that the little girl who used to live in our house had a pony.

KERR: Which she kept out behind the house? Do you suppose?

JERRELL: Somewhere behind the house. I don't know, she was the only one who told me that.

KERR: Well it must have been a pretty good-sized back garden before they built the alley?

JERRELL: Well we still had double and a single garage after the alley was built.

KERR: You did! Oh my!

JERRELL: You know, a lot of houses in that area have stables back of them, I know we owned a piece of property at 632 A NE and it had a stable and it even had a second story. So to speak, I don't know, I'm not a country girl enough to know exactly what you call that, but they kept the hay stuff for the animals.

KERR: And now it would be a chi chi loft apartment, no doubt. So you had a double garage and a single garage out behind your house?

JERRELL: Yes, uh-huh.

KERR: It's a wide lot, or you owned another piece adjoining property?

JERRELL: No, it was a long lot. It was ... It wasn't a wide lot. Neither one of us can go get it but I have a picture, but ... A lot of those houses are narrow but long.

KERR: And so the, yes ... the garages were staggered on the back of the lot or they stretched right across the back of it?

JERRELL: Well the alley cut a little piece out of the yard, so that the double garage fitted into the long end of the yard, the other one fitted into the part that was cut back. So they hit each other at right angles.

KERR: So now how long did they have gaslights back there in the alley?

JERRELL: That is something I don't remember.

KERR: At some point though they came and ... did they re—

JERRELL: Yes we had electric, yes eventually. But I always enjoyed watching that man, I remember that. And something else before I forget. It's about the streetcars, they also had the sweepers, to sweep the

snow off the tracks, they had great big brushes underneath them and went down and they swept the snow. And at one time we had a little loading platform out there, like they used to have downtown. And when it got to the loading platform this piece would shoot out from under the machine and cut it right across the snow packed platform and swish it right off as it went by. I often wondered what would happen to anyone who was standing on that platform when that thing got there. [Laughter]

KERR: Yeah.

JERRELL: You probably have to move in a hurry.

KERR: So now did you go off and do errands, or did you father do them all? Did you do shopping in the neighborhood?

JERRELL: Well, see Dad died in '46, but before that he did most of the errands. I was in school and then I went to work. See I was working during WW II. Down at the old Navy Yard. And I could tell you a lot of stories about that, but that's not quite Capitol Hill.

KERR: Well it is part of Capitol Hill. Where did you do your clothes shopping?

JERRELL: Oh, downtown.

KERR: You would go downtown.

JERRELL: Oh yes, down to Hecht's and Kann's. Get on the streetcar and go downtown. Eventually we got on the bus instead. No we shopped there. We didn't go to the suburbs, it's just recently that I've been doing that because friends had cars and they would take me out there.

KERR: Well and just about everything disappeared from downtown.

JERRELL: Yeah, that is a pity, I liked downtown.

KERR: So after you graduated from Eastern High School you went to college?

JERRELL: I went to Teachers College, Wilson Teachers College, that was at 11th and Harvard NW.

KERR: What was the name of it?

JERRELL: Wilson Teachers College.

KERR: Wilson Teachers College?

JERRELL: You see schools were segregated in those days, it was also the Minor Teachers College, for the black students.

KERR: Yes, I remember that, yeah.

JERRELL: I guess it's become DC College, the whole business.

KERR: Right. Yes, then it became Federal City College, and now it's the University, maybe.

JERRELL: Yes, that's right.

KERR: You went to work after college, not teaching but at the Navy Yard?

JERRELL: No, I discovered I didn't want to be a teacher ... a little late, but nevertheless. No, I got my first real job in 1941. It was in September I think, and I decided, my birthday was the ninth of December, that I was not going to work on my birthday. I would have just enough annual leave by the ninth of December that I wouldn't have to work. December the seventh the Japs tricked me. They attacked Pearl Harbor, and there was no more leave to get.

KERR: No, I don't guess.

JERRELL: I started working on my birthday, and then on ...

KERR: What did you do?

JERRELL: Clerical work. I worked for a publications section. They put out circular letters and booklets about how to operate different kinds of ammunition gauges. Different kinds of ammunition and guns, equipment of all kinds. And I remember how thrilled we got when we got a letter from Franklin D. Roosevelt Jr. asking for some publication. We gave that special notice.

KERR: And how long did you work for them?

JERRELL: I worked over ten years. I worked through World War II and was getting into the Korean situation. My father had died and my mother was not very well. But the salaries that we were getting, why ... to pay somebody to take care of her would cost me more than I was making. So, I just gave up my work. Fortunately, I left my money in the accounts so that I do have a small pension. But, I loved the Navy Yard. It was like a little village. And, when dignitaries came, why, they would get out the sailors and they would line up, you know, and the band would play, and they would shoot off the cannon. Everything!

KERR: So, it's undergoing a whole lot of change now. So.

JERRELL: Yes.

KERR: It would be a very interesting future. You are right. Capitol Hill is always changing.

JERRELL: Always changing ... I remember my dad taking Myrtle and myself on a sled around the neighborhood when it snowed. That was one of my childhood pleasures. And Dad being a country man, he brought all of his country equipment to the city equipment with him. And he had these bells you put around the horse's neck. Well, Dad put those around his neck. He would pull the sled around. The bells would jingle and it was fun.

KERR: Oh, I would think that sounds like lots of fun. So ... And where did she go to afterward?

JERRELL: Myrtle? Myrtle became a teacher and I lost track of her a long time ago.

KERR: And have you stayed in touch with anyone from the neighborhood?

JERRELL: Well most of them died. They were like my family and my friends, most of them have died now. There weren't people there—I would say the closest to anybody that knows—do you know Gary Abrecht?

KERR: Yes. Oh, his wife.

JERRELL: M'El [Mary Ellen Abrecht].

KERR: I know her. She's in my yoga class.

JERRELL: Yeah. Well, M'El, of course, is a descendant of the families. I think ... some way back her great grandfather built that little house they live in [ed: 9 Eighth Street NE] and the house on the corner [800 East Capitol]. I have heard different stories, that he was assistant treasurer, if I recollect, during Garfield's [ed: Grover Cleveland's] time. But I wouldn't swear to that.

KERR: Now this is?

JERRELL: M'El's ... some ancestor of hers.

KERR: OK. Well she just retired.

JERRELL: Oh, is she retired now?

KERR: Just.

JERRELL: Just, because I talked to her at Christmas, a mutual friend had died [ed: Grace Griffith].

KERR: Yes, she's um ...

JERRELL: Gary had already retired, I know.

KERR: Right. Now she is busy taking art classes and enjoying her retirement. So She's pretty young to be retired.

JERRELL: I would think so, yeah.

KERR: So what did her parents do? Do you know? Are they your neighbors?

JERRELL: No, her parents weren't neighbors. But that was an older generation. I didn't know her parents. But Mrs. Schmidt, the Whelpleys, I think their father must have been named Whelpley [ed: James Winne Whelpley b.1834, d.1918]. The one that was assistant treasurer or whatever. They had built this little house, where M'El lives now. And these two aunts, single for a long time, but one of them did eventually marry. They lived in that little house. And I knew them very well. [ed: Louise Richardson Whelpley d.1936 and Margaret Van de Zee Whelpley Smith b. 1883, d.1970. Margaret married widower Walter F. Smith in 1929 after he retired from the Marine Band. He had been second leader under Sousa and lived in the 700 block of East Capitol before moving to 9 Eighth Street NE.]

KERR: So, was it good neighborhood to grow up in?

JERRELL: I thought so.

KERR: Did you always feel very safe, and ... were there ever times when you were ... when you felt that it went up or down?

JERRELL: Well, I can tell you that one time ... those were the days of milk bottles and the milkman coming in the wee hours. We had a front vestibule, and we would leave the outer door unlocked. So he could get in to deliver the milk. And my dad heard some clinking of the milk bottles in the front vestibule and it was not the right time for the milkman yet. So Dad went downstairs and Mother and I woke up. We heard a lot of yelling and cursing and going on. And Dad had found a black man trying to pick the lock. So it wasn't completely safe, even in those days. So Dad startled the man. And I remember he had an overcoat that he had laid down to better manipulate the lock, I guess. And he was working away when Dad suddenly jerked the door open. And Dad grabbed him by collar, fired him out the front door, the other door. The man didn't have a chance to pick up his coat, and Dad didn't give it to him, either. And then we woke up. We heard a strange voice, saying, "Don't you say things like that about my mother."

KERR: [Laughter]

JERRELL: You could figure the rest of it. [Laughter]

KERR: [Laughter]

JERRELL: Dad had a good vocabulary.

KERR: Obviously, a good country man.

JERRELL: Yeah, he was all right. During World War I he had worked at the powder plants with DuPont at Conner's Point, I think it was. And Mother and I lived around with relatives. See, I was just a little thing. And I guess maybe he picked up his vocabulary, or maybe he already had it. I don't know.
[Laughter]

KERR: The milkman came when you were very small, was it horse drawn or was it ...?

JERRELL: Horse drawn.

KERR: Horse drawn.

JERRELL: There was Holmes's Bakery, that was horse drawn too.

KERR: And did they deliver bread?

JERRELL: Yes, uh-huh. And there were hucksters. Aunt Louise, the blind lady, I know she had a huckster, we didn't patronize him, but she did.

KERR: And what did the huckster do?

JERRELL: He had an open truck. He brought vegetables, and things like that. I don't think—probably no meats. And I know he had a large family. And they were like stair steps, you watched the stair steps go along and presently a new one would show up, you hadn't seen before. The older one had grown too big and the little was coming along now to help Daddy with the truck.

KERR: My goodness.

JERRELL: And, if there were ... Of course there were people you know, seasonal things like watermelons and stuff. Why they would drive the horses down the street. And they would be yelling: WATERMELONS! WATERMELONS! Anybody that was watermelon hungry would pop out the door. We really got things fresh.

KERR: I think so. What about um ... the ragman. Did he come?

JERRELL: No, I don't remember the ragman. But I remember the man that sharpened knives. Maybe we kept the rags [laughter]. I'm not sure about that. I don't remember a ragman. But I do remember the others.

KERR: When I was a girl there was someone who came with a horse drawn wagon and he collected rags and bottles. Rags, old clothes, and bottles is what he called out.

JERRELL: Yeah, I think I have heard stories about that but I don't remember ever actually ... really experiencing it.

KERR: Yeah, but you had someone who came and sharpened knives?

JERRELL: Yeah, he sharpened knives for you.

KERR: Now where was the dairy? Do you know the stables were for the dairy and the ...?

JERRELL: No, I guess they were outside of town. There was an ice man too, don't forget him.

KERR: Oh. No.

JERRELL: Oh, Mr. Ferris, the iceman. I think they sold coal too, it seems a strange combination. And their place was on Seventh Street, about A Street NE, at one time. I remember that. And he'd come with his truck you know and he would put up a little card in your window for what you need in the way of ice. He'd bring it in. The kids would get in the back of the truck while he was gone. With the little chips, you know, that was great fun.

KERR: Yep.

JERRELL: And there was a snowball man, who came to Lincoln Park. And the snowballs, you know, you would scrape the ice, and put some kind of syrup on them.

KERR: Oh!

JERRELL: Yeah, I think he had chestnuts maybe in the winter. But ah, Aunt Louise, the blind lady, she could make good ones. She had her scraper and she would get a chunk of ice and she, and Barbara and I enjoyed snowballs for free.

KERR: She sounds like quite an amazing woman?

JERRELL: Oh, she was, Aunt Louise was great.

KERR: She could do all that without vision.

JERRELL: No vision whatsoever. And I know that she sometimes got annoyed with her brother-in-law and the rest of the family. And she would come over and tell her troubles to my mother. And she would say, I can bear it. My shoulders are broad. I've gotten so meek that when I get heaven St. Peter won't recognize me.

KERR: [Laughter]

JERRELL: And years later, I mean, after she died, her body was brought back to Lee's Funeral Home. And I got away from—but long enough to go over there. There was no one there but Aunt Louise and myself. And I stood and I looked down at her. And all at once it dawned on me. I wonder if St. Peter recognized her?

KERR: Ah ... I imagined she looked quite meek at the moment.

JERRELL: Yes. She put her hair straight up. You know they were German. The father and mother had come over from Germany. I know they told me stories about World War I. The Steinleys [?] they had, a bakery I think. They were German. And a lot of people wouldn't buy from them after the war. After the war with Germany. That's World War I. They wouldn't patronize them, that little restaurant, and that nice little bakery and all. You know how hard it was for people who were German descent. And there is a lady here that I wrote that up in one of my articles for the newsletter here. And she made the comment that it was very bad. She had come back over here after World War II. And I guess she had gotten a bit of that too. You know, shunned because she was German.

KERR: That's very hard.

JERRELL: Yes. We are not always kind.

KERR: No. I think we will stop now.

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 2

END OF INTERVIEW