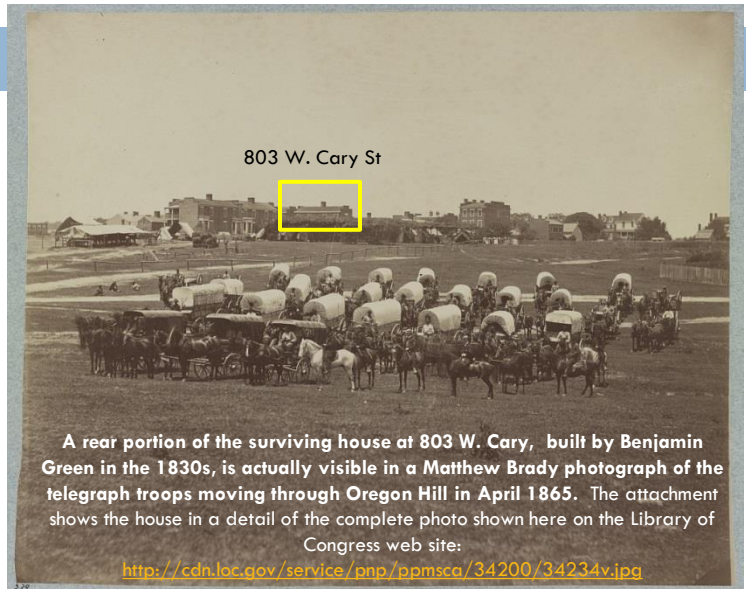


800 Block W. Cary Street

A Brief History, by Charles Pool

The buildings on the 800 block of W. Cary Street back up to Green Alley, and we have discovered the reason: Benjamin W. Green built the several double brick houses on the 800 block of West Cary that appear in the Beers Atlas of 1876. Two of the buildings built by Green have survived at 803 and 807 W. Cary and date to the 1830s, making them the oldest buildings in the Oregon Hill Historic District after the 1817 John Jacob House and the 1819 Samuel Parsons House. Benjamin Green played an important role in the early development of Oregon Hill, and it was long thought that all of his Oregon Hill buildings had been demolished. It is a major discovery to find that two gabled roofed buildings built by Green in the 1830s have survived at 803 and 807 W. Cary. Benjamin Green lived for some years in the historic Samuel Parsons House, and he is known for his important development in the old part of Oregon Hill east of Belvidere. There is a very good write-up on him in Mary Wingfield Scott's, "Old Richmond Neighborhoods," where she refers to Green as a "remarkable adventurer." According to Scott, "Ben Green may be considered the first to determine the character of the buildings on Oregon Hill as modest three or four room dwellings." He built a row of houses on Maiden Lane in 1838 D bear a strong resemblance to the surviving building that he constructed at 803 W. Cary that he constructed in the 1830s. Green sold the houses on Cary Street in several transactions in 1840 when he experienced financial difficulties, probably the result of the financial depression of 1837. Since he was selling the lots with improvements in 1840 in the aftermath of the financial depression, we can assume that he built the houses in the 1830s. [Deed Book 40 pages 285 and 387, and Deed Book 46 p. 192.] Green moved to his home named Huntley (also known as Green's Farm) at 6510 Three Chopt Road in the mid-1840s; Huntley is also listed on the National Register.

William Rankin is shown on the 1876 Beers atlas as the owner of many of the properties on the 800 block of W. Cary. He was born in Ireland in May 1827 and immigrated to the U.S. in 1864 (during the Civil War) according to census data. Rankin's wife, Bridget, was born in Virginia, but her parents were both born in Ireland. Rankin owned a grocery store just east of Belvidere Street on Cary Street that he acquired in 1870. He acquired in 1869 and 1872 the houses on the 800 block of W. Cary Street that are shown in the Beers Atlas. [Deed Book 90A, p. 115; D.B. 98B p. 355; and D.B. 99A, p. 37.] The attached 1869 deed [Deed Book 90A p. 115] is for property on the south side of "Dover Street" [the old name for Cary Street] "between Laurel and Cherry Streets ... the same Real Estate conveyed to James H. Wilson by Alexander Grant Jr. surviving trustee of B.W Green and wife ..."



Irishman William Rankin played a pivotal role in the development of the block. The 1889 Baist Atlas shows a frame building at 815 W. Cary. Around 1892 William Rankin built the fine brick building at 815 W. Cary. (Perhaps the frame building was destroyed by fire.) According to city directory listings, Rankin and his sons William Jr. and James lived at 815 W. Cary from 1893 until his death. Earlier, from 1889 through 1892 William Rankin lived at 811 W. Cary Street. William Rankin, who was a successful merchant, died in 1913 and is buried in Mt. Calvary Cemetery.

In the 1928 city directory, the listing for the first time indicates a commercial function for 815 W. Cary Street. The 1928 city directory lists J. S. Kent & Son, grocery, as the occupant of 815 W. Cary. Old-timers recall the Harvey Hardware business as an occupant of 815 W. Cary for many decades. The building has been renovated for the current commercial function of the Sweet Frogs ice cream store.

What is now known as the Paragon Pharmacy building at the corner of Laurel and the 800 block of W. Cary is shown in the 1876 Beers atlas as being owned by Edward P. Vial. Vial purchased the property in 1871 [Deed Book 93A p. 400] and probably built the surviving structure at 801 W. Cary around that year. The building was on the site of half of one of the double houses built by Benjamin Green. Edward P. Vial in 1878 lived in the neighborhood's oldest home, the Jacob House, and in 1878 built the Vial House at 608 W. Cary that was attached to the 610 W. Cary Street Jacob House. Vial also built the surviving beautiful brick homes at 315, 317 and 319 South Pine, also listed on the National Register as contributing to the Oregon Hill Historic District. Vial was a foundry owner, who specialized in the "Stonewall Plow." Edward P. Vial died in 1883 and is buried in Hollywood Cemetery. After his death his estate was embroiled in an acrimonious dispute; as a result of this dispute his complete family tree is available in court documents. In the 1904 city directory, the listing for 801 W. Cary for the first time indicates a commercial function of the building. The 1904 city directory for the first time lists Paragon Pharmacy as the occupant of 801 W. Cary Street. The Paragon Pharmacy remained in business at that location for many decades.

The five solid brick structures on the 800 block of West Cary (that are now threatened with demolition) date from the 1830s and form an almost complete streetscape. All of the buildings are listed on the State and National Registers of Historic Places as contributing structures to the Oregon Hill Historic District. The buildings comprise one the most important gateways into the historic district. These structures connect with the vital history of the contributions made by Irish immigrants to the city and to the legacy of Benjamin Green in constructing modest working class dwellings in the neighborhood. *The highest priority should be placed on preserving these important landmarks.*