

## 104 14<sup>th</sup> Street Alexander Laing House

Scottish immigrant Alexander Laing arrived in the United States on board the *Roscius* in 1845, at age 21. Laing (1824-1907) appears in the 1850 Census as living in the United States Hotel, in Wheeling's Third Ward. By the time of the 1864 City Directory, Laing was a partner in Greer and Laing, described in the 1888 City Directory as dealing in "wholesale hardware and cutlery, agricultural implements, etc., agents for Fairbank's Scales, Page's Leather Belting, and Caldwell's Patent Steel Roofing, 1214 & 1216 Main." Partners at that time were Jacob R. Greer, Alexander Laing, and William Cruikshank.



Laing purchased the property where 104 14<sup>th</sup> Street stands on October 23, 1865. The property included Lot 43 and the adjoining Lot 46 "and buildings," the purchase price was \$6,800 (the equivalent of over \$108,000 today). Records found don't indicate what buildings were there at the time. Although Laing is listed as living at that address from at least as early as the 1867 City Directory, the current house numbered 104 (built on part of Lot 43) was probably built around 1880, perhaps around the same time as the rest of the row.

The National Register Nomination for the East Wheeling Historic District describes the house as "three-story, two bay, brick Italianate with stone foundation and a flat roof; first structure in a series of row houses." It is a "contributing structure" in the district, with construction date estimated to be 1880.

Laing was apparently a bachelor and a very successful businessman. The Executor's Bond for his will was valued at \$525,000, the equivalent of over \$14.2 million today. His estate included shares in LaBelle Iron Works and Wheeling Iron & Steel, along with the properties at 106, 106 ½, 108, 108 ½, and 110 14<sup>th</sup> Street, in addition to his house at 104 14<sup>th</sup> Street. When he died in 1907, 104 14<sup>th</sup> Street was deeded to his niece, Isabella W. Robb, and grandnephews Harry and Charles Robb. Isabella Watt Robb (1851 – 1938) was also born in Scotland, the daughter of William Robb and Annie Laing. The 1900 Census shows her living with her uncle, occupation 'housekeeper.' Also in the home at that time were William L. Robb (nephew, age 52, iron moulder), Henry C. Robb (grandnephew, no age listed, druggist), Harry M. Robb (grandnephew, age 21, clerk), and Anna Robb (grandniece, age 18, companion). In later City Directories, Henry C. Robb appears as a partner in Reed, Robb & Breiding, wholesale druggists (1911-1912) and later as vice president of Goodwin Drug Company (1923-1924). He and Isabella apparently continued to live at 104 14<sup>th</sup> Street until the property was next sold. In 1923, Laing's grandniece Annie Robb married Jesse Ebeling, vice president and manager of the savings department of Dollar Savings & Trust Company; they are also listed as living at 104 14<sup>th</sup> Street after their marriage.

In 1938, the year that Isabella Robb died, the house was sold to Lena Zanke (aka Zanche), wife of Frank Zanke, owner of the East End Café, 1701 Wood Street. Frank Zanke (born 1891) was an Italian immigrant, arriving in the U.S. in 1910 at age 19. He worked selling produce before

starting the East End Café. Lena (born c. 1897) was the daughter of Italian immigrants. Frank Zanke's WWI draft record lists him as "stout." By the time of the 1940 Census, Frank was listed as "unable to work," and the WWII draft records describes him as 5'7" tall and weighing only 138 pounds. He was deceased by the time the 1944 City Directory was published. Around that time, Frank and Lena's sons (Dominic, born c. 1916, and Vincent, born c. 1918) ran Zanke's Café and no longer lived with their widowed mother at 104 14<sup>th</sup> Street. Tenants Fred W. Beisner, an employee of the Riley Law Building, and his wife Mary were tenants in 1960.

Robert and Marcia A. Padgett purchased the property in 1978. Robert was a teacher at West Liberty State College. His wife Eileen worked for a time at the Northern Panhandle Medical Health Center. Robert and Marcia Padgett (perhaps siblings, Marcia is identified as 'single') prepared a Right of Survivorship deed in 1987.

Robert and Eileen Padgett sold the property in 1996 to Paul C. Peter for \$38,000. Peter died in Monroe County, Ohio, on November 5, 1997. City Directories show that the house was vacant in 1997 and 1998. In 1998, Stuart Levy acquired the property for \$23,000. Charles Kleine and Glynis Board, purchased it in 2015.

Prepared by Jeanne Finstein, Friends of Wheeling  
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Sources:

- Ohio County Census Records
- Ohio County Death Records
- Ohio County Deed Records
- Wheeling City Directories

Photo by Joanne Sullivan