



115 14th Street

This lovely brick home was probably built for Thomas B. McLain around 1892. McLain (1842-1924) was born in Warren, Ohio and came to Wheeling with his parents, John G. and Eliza Ellen Baird McLain, when he was two years old. His father was a printer and publisher of the *Wheeling Argus*, one of the first newspapers in the city, from 1844 until his death in 1849. (Thomas would have been about seven years old at the time of his father's death.)

Thomas's brother Robert began the family's first drug store in 1856 in a building owned by Dr. Robert W. Hazlett at the corner of 38th and Jacob Streets in Ritchietown (South Wheeling). Thomas worked there as a clerk and errand boy.

Around 1860 the McLain brothers established a penny post office in their store. This "proved to be quite remunerative to them and a great accommodation to the townspeople who took advantage of it. People who wanted their mail brought down from the city signed an order to the postmaster to have their mail put into the penny post box, and every morning it was carried down to the drug store, distributed into the proper boxes, and delivered when called for at a charge of a penny for each letter or paper. During this time, the younger brother [Thomas] boarded and lodged at the family residence on North Main Street, between 8th and 9th Streets, and walked to and from the little drug store stopping on the way at the post office for the penny post mail." (Cranmer)

Thomas and his three brothers, Henry B., Robert B., and John G. McLain, later opened the McLain Brothers Drug Store in Washington Hall, at the northeast corner of Market and 12th Streets. It was described as one of the most up to date in the city. When Washington Hall was torn down, the McLain Drug Store moved across the street.

By 1890, the three older McLain brothers had retired from the drug business, and in 1893 Thomas, under his physician's advice, disposed of the drug business. That was around the same time that the house at 115 14th Street was built. Then Thomas and his son James formed the McLain Dental and Surgical Supply Company, located on the 2nd floor of the 'McLain block,' corner of Market and 12th Streets. The company kept a "large and varied stock" of artificial teeth and instruments used in dentistry; surgical instruments; and sick room and hospital supplies such as hot water bottles, ice bags, air pillows, bed pans, syringes, sterilizers, and food warmers. "They also made a specialty of renting rolling chairs, invalid beds, air mattresses, chair commodes, and surgical operating tables. A specialty of the firm was truss fitting... They also supplied appliances for deformities of the body, artificial eyes, limbs, arms, and hands... along with instruments to aid the hearing, such as mohair conversation tubes, London hearing horns, hard rubber audiphones fans, black metal ear trumpets, and invisible ear drums." (Cranmer)

Thomas McLain lived at 115 14th Street for about ten years. By 1903-4, Wheeling City Directories show his residence as Echo Point. He later lived at 80 North Front Street (1905-6), then 303 South Penn Street beginning around 1907, followed by 416 Richland Avenue (Warwood) beginning around 1919. When he died in 1924 at age 81, his residence was listed as 127 Edgwood Street. His obituary called him “one of the city’s pioneer businessmen and most highly respected citizens.” He was survived by his wife and three children – Mrs. J. Ralph Boyd, Mrs. D.A. Burt, and James L. McLain. He was buried in Greenwood Cemetery.

Bernard Horkheimer and his wife Estella are listed at 115 14th Street in the 1903-4 City Directory. Horkheimer (c. 1853-1906) was a German immigrant who was in the wool-buying and grocery business with his own brothers and the Baer brothers. The Horkheimer family was very prominent in the Wheeling Jewish community at the time, and two of his nieces (daughters of Morris Horkheimer) married local rabbis who went on to some renown in their later lives. Bernard’s death certificate states that he was “accidentally killed by being crushed between [railroad] cars at Baer Sons Wholesale Building [corner of 16th & Main Streets, now known as the Boury Lofts].” He was buried in the Jewish section of Mt. Wood Cemetery. Horkheimer’s widow remained in the house until around 1910.

The next resident found was Frank C. Swift, whose occupation was shown as broker and then as traveling salesman in the 1917 and 1920 City Directories. Swift was followed by Rev. Pliny Brokan Ferris and his wife Alice. Ferris was the pastor of 2nd Presbyterian Church. Deed records indicate that church trustees owned the property during this period.

Subsequent residents/owners included veterinarian Leon Reefer (and his wife Josephine), who apparently used the house as both an office and residence from around 1928 until his death from pulmonary tuberculosis on January 1, 1935. Daniel H. and Edna Manners were the next residents, from 1936 to 1946. Manners worked as office manager for Hygrade Food Products and later as a purchasing agent for the John Wenzel Company, meat packing.

The Antonucci family then lived at this address and 115 ½ (or 115a and 115b) from 1946 until the late 1980s. Carl Antonucci (wife Mary) was a millworker at Wheeling Steel. No occupation or family relationship was found for later resident Philip Antonucci.

It appears that the house (and the house at the adjacent address, 115b) were vacant beginning in the early 1990s. Brian and Stephanie Wilson purchased the home in 2013 and made much-needed structural repairs. Betsy Sweeny became the owner in May 2020.

Prepared by Jeanne Finstein, Friends of Wheeling
June 8, 2013 and June 27, 2020

Sources:

- Cranmer, Gibson L. *History of Wheeling City and Ohio County, West Virginia and Representative Citizens*, 1902, pp 815-819
- Wheeling City Directories
- *Wheeling Intelligencer* obituary, June 21, 1924
- WV Vital Records