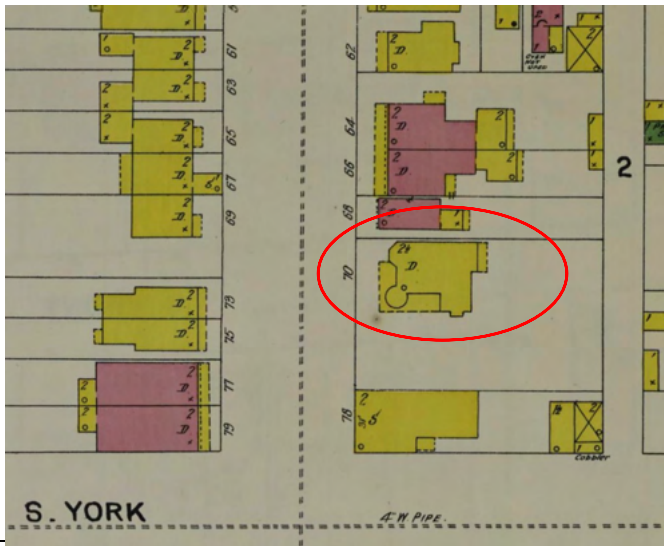


## 70 Virginia Street Susan Russell Wells House

Based on deed records and early maps, it appears that this house, located on Wheeling Island on the south side of Virginia Street between Broadway and York Streets, was built for the widow, Susan Thistle Wells Russell around 1898. It is located on a lot – plus an extra strip of land to the west – that had been laid out by Ebenezer Zane’s descendant Orloff Zane and owned by WV Supreme Court Judge James Paull. Susan T. Wells purchased both parcels for \$2950 in 1897 from Paull’s widow Eliza and their children. The 1902 Sanborn Insurance Map is the earliest map found with a building identified at this address. The footprint on the map is consistent with the current structure, and the yellow color indicates that it was a frame building, as it is now.



Susan Thistle Russell Wells (1829-1909) was born in Tyler County, (West) Virginia, the daughter of Irish immigrant Joshua Russell and his second wife, Evalina Phillips Thistle. Joshua Russell and his first wife, Catherine Wells<sup>1</sup>, were the parents of noted Wheeling attorney Charles Wells Russell,<sup>2</sup> making him Susan’s half-brother.

<sup>1</sup> Catherine Wells was one of 22 children of Charles Wells (1745-1815), who settled in Tyler County in 1802, settling at ‘Wells Landing.’ Two other daughters, Sarah Wells McCoy (1794-1887) and Delilah Wells Grier) are credited with laying out the town of Sistersville, named for them.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Wells Russell (1818-1867) argued, among other important cases, a suit involving the Wheeling Suspension Bridge. That case, brought on by the State of Pennsylvania, attempted to stop construction of the bridge and later to have it torn down. The case went to the U.S. Supreme Court, and Russell’s arguments lost. However, the bridge was saved as a U.S. Mail route through an act of Congress. Russell was also at the forefront of ensuring that the B&O railroad made Wheeling its Ohio River destination. At the beginning of the Civil War, Russell declared loyalty to Virginia and left Wheeling in 1861. His home at 75 12<sup>th</sup> Street was taken under the Confiscation Act by U.S. Marshal Edward M. Norton and was used as Union army headquarters for Generals William Rosecrans and John C. Fremont. Russell was elected to the Confederate Congress and was called “a pillar of the administration” of Jefferson Davis.” After the war, he moved to Baltimore where he lived until his death.



In 1851, Susan married Charles V. Wells<sup>3</sup> (1819-1880), a grandson of Charles Wells (the founder of what is now Sistersville) and nephew of Susan's father's first wife. According to online records, "Charles was an active river man who owned several steamboats and often made trips to New Orleans. At the start of the Civil War he and his wife's two brothers<sup>4</sup> joined the Southern Army. The war ruined his river business, and after the Civil War he moved to Miller County, Missouri, in 1866. He had lost his stocks in the steamboats during the Civil War and his Missouri farm was the best prospect for regaining his fortune." His obituary states, Wells died "on his farm on the banks of the Osage River, Missouri. He will be remembered by all old boatmen as the builder and commander of the famous Wheeling and Louisville packet *Virginia*. He afterward built and commanded two steamers called *The Planter*. The last one he built and took south in 1861. Capt. Wells cast his fortune with the

Lost Cause, his steamer being used during the war principally in the vicinity of Mobile." He died in 1880, leaving behind his widow and four grown children, daughters Cleona and Evaline and sons Joshua and William. He was buried in Missouri.

Susan (age 50) and the three youngest children appear in the 1880 Tyler County Census, along with her mother, Evaline Russell (age 70), with son William listed as a farmer. By the time of the 1898 Wheeling City Directory (when Susan was age 69), William is shown as living with his mother at 70 Virginia Street, Wheeling. Following Susan's death from pneumonia in 1909 (age 80), the property was apparently left to her children, with the other siblings selling it to William for \$6500.

In 1916, Harry L. and Rhonda White purchased the property for \$7000. The Whites sold it three years later to Barbara and Joseph Hufschmitt (1882-1957), a meat merchant who was an immigrant from Alsace-Lorraine. Five years later, in mid 1924, grocer Edward A. Starner (1868-1932) and his wife Alice purchased the property.

James E. Willey, Sr., and his wife Mildred purchased the property from the National Bank of Wheeling in mid 1940. Following their deaths in 1970 and 1972, the property went to their children, James E. Willey, Jr. and Patricia Louise Lewis, who sold it in 1976 to John J. and Bonnie J. Treiber.

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<sup>3</sup> Charles V. Wells was born in Sistersville, (West) Virginia, the son of Peregrine (Perry) Wells (1789-1878) and Charlotte Miller (1795-1821). His home in Sistersville was reportedly "a very large colonial style house, being seventy feet across the front, with a fire place in each room for heating. The slave quarters were situated at the back of the lot."

<sup>4</sup> Susan's brother William Russell (1831-1862) was killed in Montgomery, AL, during the Civil War – age 30. Another brother, Sampson Thistle Russell, may have fought for the Confederacy in the Washington Battalion of the Louisiana Artillery

William and Carol Cornforth bought the property in 1981 from the Treibers and sold it in 1991 to the current owner, David H. Nelson.

Prepared by Jeanne Finstein, Friends of Wheeling  
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Sources:

- Ancestry.com
- Findagrave.com
- Fold 3.com
- Library of Congress
- Ohio County Deed Records
- The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 14 February 1880
- Tyler County Census Records, 1880
- Wheeling City Directories

House photo by Jeanne Finstein, December 29, 2022  
Photo of Susan Russell Wells from FindaGrave.com  
Sanborn map from the Library of Congress