



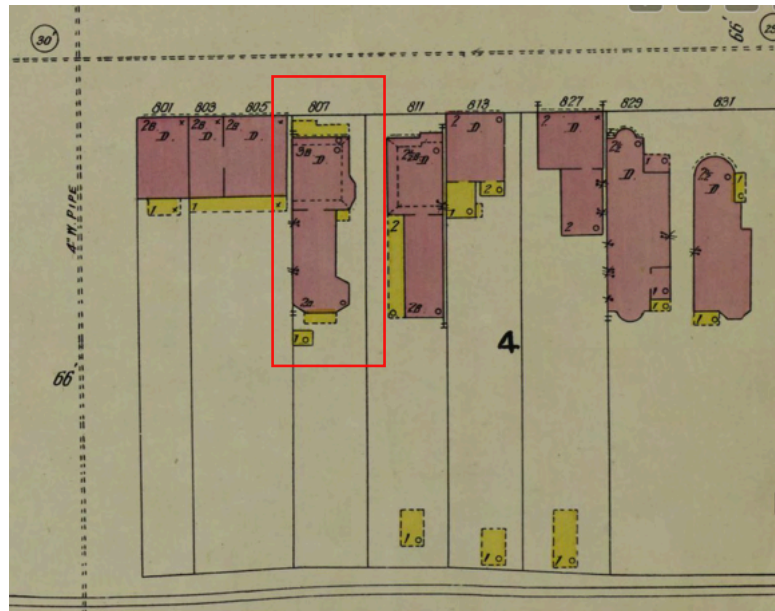
**807 Main Street
Stifel-Kossuth House, c. 1884**

According to the National Register nomination for the North Wheeling Historic District, this house, “built in the 1880s, is important for both its historic and architectural character. George Stifel was the owner of Wheeling’s largest dry goods business in the last decade of the 19th century... And world famous portrait photographer George J. Kossuth lived in the house and had his studio there from 1941 until his death in 1960. Some of the famous people who were subjects of his work were Carl Sandburg, Eleanor Steber, Jerome Hines, and Presidents Richard Nixon and Lyndon B. Johnson.

“The house is brick with stone window and door hoods, a deep bracketed cornice and handsome Mansard roof. Decorative gable dormers pierce the roof, and the roof is capped with a dentiled metal cornice. The front porch is not original.”¹

Deed records indicate that the land on which this house stands was a portion of what had been claimed by Jonathan Zane, a brother of Wheeling’s founder, Ebenezer Zane, and one of the first residents of what is now Wheeling. In 1826, Zane’s heirs sold the property to John Dulty. It passed from the Dulty family to the McVay family in 1842, then to John McFerran in 1846, and to the Thomas Sweeney family in 1869.

George E. Stifel purchased the property in 1882 and was undoubtedly the owner when the house was built. His name appears at this address in city directories as early as 1884. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, the Sanborn Insurance Company prepared maps of Wheeling that were used to determine fire insurance rates. The 1902² version of those maps shows the house as a three-story brick structure (as indicated by the red color) with wooden porches on the front, side, and rear (as indicated by the yellow color). Since that time, the front porch was changed to brick, but the rest of the footprint seems to be the same as it was at that time.



¹ National Register Nomination, 1988

² The 1884 Sanborn map doesn’t include this block of Main Street.

George Elias Stifel (1849-1931) was a son of Stifel Calico Works founder Johann Ludwig Stifel. While other sons followed in their father's footsteps in the calico printing business, George became a dry goods merchant. According to information when he was inducted into the Wheeling Hall of Fame, "A young George began a long and successful career in merchandising at the age of 14 when he entered the employ of Stone & Thomas, where he remained for five years. He clerked for 10 years in another dry goods store before he and Fred C. H. Schwertfeger formed a partnership to launch what became the George E. Stifel Co., a dry goods store which grew to be one of Wheeling's outstanding department stores."³



A biography of Stifel in 1902, the same year that the Sanborn map was made, states, "Over 100 people are employed by George E. Stifel & Company. An immense stock is carried, the first floor being devoted to the sale of silks, dress goods, notions, wash goods, linens and flannels; the second floor to cloaks, suits and ladies' and gentlemen's underwear; the third floor to curtains,

draperies, upholstery, rugs, etc.; and the fourth and fifth floors are devoted to the reserve and duplicate stock; while the basement is used for toilet and boiler rooms and storage for domestic goods. The building is 135 feet in depth, and is heated with steam and lighted with electric lights, including the mammoth show windows. These windows are always artistically decorated, and present at night a most beautiful and attractive appearance, illuminating the street for some distance. This store is very largely patronized, having the exclusive trade of Wheeling. It is the largest dry goods store in Wheeling, and thus has established a wide reputation. Mr. Stifel married Emma Beck, a daughter of Peter Paul Beck, a pioneer of Wheeling, and formerly in the brewery business. Mr. and Mrs. Stifel have two daughters, - Nellie and Alberta. They have lived at No. 807 Main street for the past fifteen years. Mr. Stifel is independent in politics. He is a member of the Lutheran church."⁴

An advertisement for the store in a city directory from about that same period is shown. It was located at 1154, 1156, 1158, and 1160 Main Street. In 1959 – long after

³ <https://www.ohiocountylibrary.org/wheeling-history/-wheeling-hall-of-fame-george-e.-stifel-/4140>

⁴ "History of Wheeling City and Ohio County, West Virginia and Representative Citizens," by Hon. Gibson Lamb Cranmer, 1902, pp 418 and 421..

Stifel's death – the store became Stifel and Taylor's Value City. It continued to operate until the mid 1970s, when the company closed and the building was demolished. A parking lot is located at the site now. Photos of the interior of the store can be seen at:

<https://www.ohiocountylibrary.org/wheeling-history/5124>.

In 1909, George and Emma Stifel sold the Main Street property and moved “out the pike” to 1341 National Road.⁵ He died in 1931, and Emma passed in 1937. Both are buried in the Stifel family plot in Greenwood Cemetery.

Following Stifel's wishes, his daughter Nellie established a scholarship fund in his memory in 1951. Annually, the fund presents awards to outstanding students in Ohio County Public Schools in grades 5 through 12. In 2019 alone, these awards totaled \$113,739. In 1980, George E. Stifel was inducted into the Wheeling Hall of Fame in the Philanthropy category.



William C. Handlan and his wife Eliza were the next owners of 807 Main Street, purchasing it from the Stifels in 1909, then deeding it to J. Bernard Handlan (apparently William's brother) in 1918. William Handlan was the general manager of the Inter-state Telephone and Telegraph Company at the time they purchased the property and was an investment broker with Handlan, Hearne, & Company by the time he moved to Highland Park. J. Bernard Handlan was an attorney.

In 1918, J. Bernard Handlan sold the property to Jessie A. DeVinney (unmarried). City directories list DeVinney as living at 2202 Chapline Street, with no occupation listed. Nothing more was found.

In 1922, Jessie DeVinney sold the property to E[dwin] B. Potts, Sr. and his wife Sarah. The 1924 city directory indicates that, in addition to Edwin and Sarah, their sons Edwin, Jr. (1894-1950) and Forrest (1896-1934), along with Edwin, Jr.'s wife, Marie, lived at 807 Main. During the time that they lived there, the younger Potts were listed as proprietors of the Hotel Wheeling,⁶ located at the corner of 10th and Main Streets.

⁵ This home still stands and is now the offices of Costanzo Accounting.]

⁶ That building still stands and is known as the Bridge Tavern. The upper floors housed the hotel.

In 1941, George Kossuth (1885-1960) and his second wife⁷, Leah, purchased the property. Kossuth was the son of Swiss immigrant Peter Casper Kossuth (1850-1928) and Mary Abbott (1852-1910), both of whom are buried in Wheeling's Mt. Calvary Cemetery – suggesting that they were Catholic. According to a biography of Kossuth when he was inducted into the Wheeling Hall of Fame in 1979, “A gift of a box camera when George was 12 ignited a spark. After the eighth grade, he entered a 10-year apprenticeship to learn the craft of photography. In 1909, he opened his own studio. His portrait photography became internationally renowned.



“The master photographer also loved music. As a board member of the Frazier Concert Society, he met every famous musical artist

that came to Wheeling and photographed them all at this studio at 1219 Chapline Street. Kossuth was instrumental in the organization of the Little Theatre of Wheeling. Along with his friend George Stroble, he established the first broadcasting studio of WWVA.



GEORGE J. KOSSUTH
Portrait Photographer
Wheeling, W. Va.

“A man who loved to work with his hands, in 1941 he purchased the Stifel Mansion at 807 N. Main St. and restored it to its original state. It became his residence and studio, a place for many civic and social gatherings, and a meeting place for the Blue Pencil Club.⁸ It remained his home and studio until he passed away in 1960.”⁹

A more detailed biography of Kossuth appeared in the 1983 edition of the Upper Ohio Valley Historical Review - https://wheelingheritage.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/1983_VXIIN2.pdf. And a

more recent article about the house was written by Wheeling historian Margaret Brennan in 2015. It can be seen at <http://www.archivingwheeling.org/blog/love-old-buildings-wheeling-history> A partial collection of Kossuth's photographs can be seen at: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/tags/georgekossuth/>. An exhibit of his photographs of famous musicians, “Listening Through the Lens,” was held during the Wheeling 250 Celebration in 2019.

⁷ Kossuth and his first wife, Teresa Schmidt, were married in 1912. They were the parents of three children: Dr. Louis Casper Kossuth (1913-1989), a colonel in the U.S. Air Force; Mary Kossuth (c. 1916-?); and Georgia Jane Kossuth (1818-1996).

⁸ The Blue Pencil Club still exists as a men's social group. Their meetings include the reading of papers – most of a historical nature – written by members.

⁹ <https://www.ohiocountylibrary.org/research/biography-george-kossuth/5055>

Kossuth was buried in Homewood Cemetery in Pittsburgh. A memorial stone – in recognition of his many years of service on the Wheeling Landscape Commission – stands in “Kossuth Park,” a small plot of land on the west side of Main Street, just south of the exit onto Main from east-bound Interstate 70.

George Kossuth’s widow, Leah, remained in their home until 1975, when Frank and Dolores Fedorke purchased it. It was probably the Fedorkes who divided the house into multiple apartments. In 1993, they sold the property for \$125,000 to the Victorian Wheeling Landmarks Foundation, which, two weeks later, transferred it to the Vandalia Heritage Foundation. For several years, the first floor river room operated as a Tea Room. The building has been vacant for several years.

Prepared by Jeanne Finstein, Friends of Wheeling, January 26, 2021

Sources:

- Ancestry.com
- Findagrave.com
- Ohio County Census Records
- Ohio County Deed Records
- Ohio County Public Library Archives
- West Virginia Vital Records
- Wheeling City Directories

House photo by Joanne Sullivan