

722-724 Main Street: Update #1, January 2022

This is the first in a series of background and construction updates on the project to rehabilitate 722-724 Main Street.

The houses at 722 and 724 Main Street are two of three on “Lot 61, east side of Main Street” that was purchased for \$600 in 1846 by Thomas Hughes (Sr.). We believe the houses were built shortly after that. Thomas Hughes (1789-1849) was a gunsmith and was also involved in steam boating and lumbering. He was the first Treasurer of the City of Wheeling, served on City Council for 32 years, and was involved in several other companies and organizations, including



the Wheeling & Belmont Bridge Company (which completed the Wheeling Suspension Bridge shortly after Hughes’ death). His son, John Hughes (1818-1870), whose portrait¹ is shown, was also a long-time member of Wheeling City Council. He and his family lived in 724 Main. John Hughes was involved in a “planing” business as early as 1851. By 1864, he had the John Hughes & Company business that dealt in “lumber, moulding, doors, sash, etc.” located at Market and Washington Streets (now known as Market and 7th Streets). He was later listed in city directories as a “collector” for his brother Thomas’s tailoring business. He died of typhoid fever, age 52, on March 22, 1870, just over two months after the death of his daughter, 4 ½ year-old Bessie, who died of scarlet fever on January 6, 1870. John’s widow, Eliza Sterritt McLain, 1829-1914, married in 1847)

remained in the home until her death.

It is unclear who originally lived in 722 Main. However, when Thomas Hughes’ widow died in 1872, 722 Main was sold to “whitewasher” Anton Baiker.

Thomas Hughes, Sr.’s sons Alfred and Thomas (Jr.) and their sister Eliza Hughes were staunch supporters of the Confederacy during the Civil War. Eliza was the first female in what is now West Virginia to become a licensed physician. More on them will be reported in future updates.

Over the years, both 722 and 724 Main fell into disrepair, and the City of Wheeling proposed demolition. However, the City, Wheeling Heritage, Friends of Wheeling, and the Victorian Old Town Association saved both structures from demolition, replaced lost bricks between 722 and 724, installed a new roof, and did some other exterior repairs. Both buildings were then sold to a private developer. That developer removed so much of the interior structure that exterior bracing had to be installed to prevent collapse. He then gave up on renovation plans and donated both buildings to Friends of Wheeling in January 2022.

These buildings are important as contributing structures in the North Wheeling National Historic District and because of their histories. Their loss would probably lead to the loss of the connected building to the north (720 Main), leaving a huge hole in the east side of this important block. And their loss would mean the loss of an interesting piece of Wheeling’s history.

¹ Portrait copy courtesy of Thomas Hughes, great, great, great grandson of Thomas Hughes, Sr.