

722-724 Main Street: Update 9, March 2023
Another Bit of History: Dr. Alfred Hughes



As we wait for the weather to cooperate for further renovation work, this update will relate some of the background of the Hughes family. As noted in Update #1, Thomas Hughes, Sr. (1789-1849), a gunsmith and local politician, was the original owner of the property now listed at 722-724 Main Street. His oldest son John was the original occupant.

A younger son, Alfred is the focus of this Update. Alfred was born on September 16, 1824 to Thomas Hughes, Sr. and his wife Mary (nee Odenbaugh). According to family records, the Hugheses at that time lived diagonally across the street from 722-724 Main “in the house at the corner of Main and Adams (now 8th) Streets.” That house no longer exists but was replaced around 1874 by Alfred Caldwell. Carlitos Restaurant is now at that location.

Alfred graduated from the Homeopathic Medical College of Philadelphia and married Mary Kirby Adrian on November 1, 1849 – just a couple of weeks before the Wheeling Suspension Bridge was opened to traffic. He successfully treated many patients during a cholera epidemic of 1854, which led to a large and lucrative medical practice. Later, his sister Eliza joined him in his practice – more on her in a future Update.

When the Civil War broke out, there was a statewide vote to determine whether or not Virginia should secede from the Union and join the Confederacy. Alfred and his brother Thomas, a noted tailor, signed the Ordinance of Secession and were considered “traitors.” As the war progressed, professional men in the city were expected to sign an Oath of Allegiance to the Union and to the Restored Government of Virginia – the breakaway effort that eventually led to the official formation of the state of West Virginia. Alfred refused to sign and was arrested and sent to the Union prison camp, Camp Chase, in Columbus, Ohio. During the seven months or so that he was there, his family kept up a written correspondence with him, and several letters from his wife Mary to Alfred survive, providing a vivid picture of life in the “North” as experienced by Southern supporters.

Dr. Alfred Hughes was eventually exchanged for a Union prisoner, returned briefly to Wheeling to settle his affairs, and made his way to Baltimore and eventually to Richmond, Virginia. Their journey was harrowing and would make a good movie. Teenage son Thomas, daughter Delia, and young son Alfred went with their parents on this journey, while two older daughters, Mary and Lizzie, remained in school at Wheeling’s Mt. de Chantal.

While in Richmond, Alfred served in the Virginia Legislature, representing Ohio County, and was a doctor to Mrs. Robert E. Lee. Following the war, the family was reunited and moved permanently to Baltimore. There, Alfred again set up a lucrative medical practice and added more children to his family. He died in Baltimore in 1880 and is buried there.

As the Friends of Wheeling renovation project has continued, we have discovered direct descendants and are compiling numerous letters written by or to Dr. Alfred, Thomas, the tailor, and Alfred’s son, Thomas, who became a successful attorney. Other family-related letters seem to keep popping up. One descendant of Alfred’s brother Thomas provided the image of Dr. Alfred Hughes that is included in this Update.