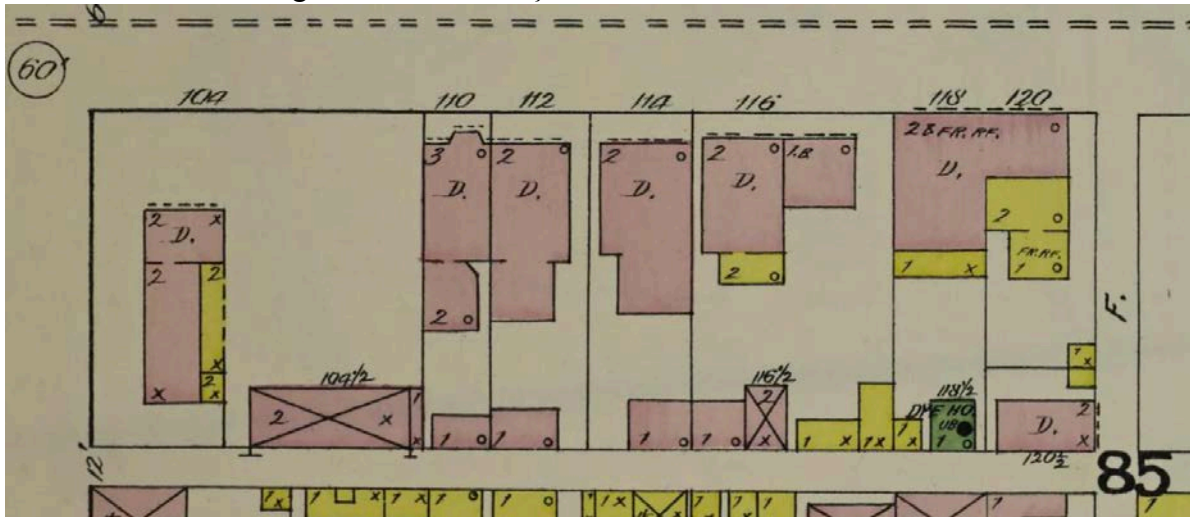


104-110 14th Street Alexander Laing Row

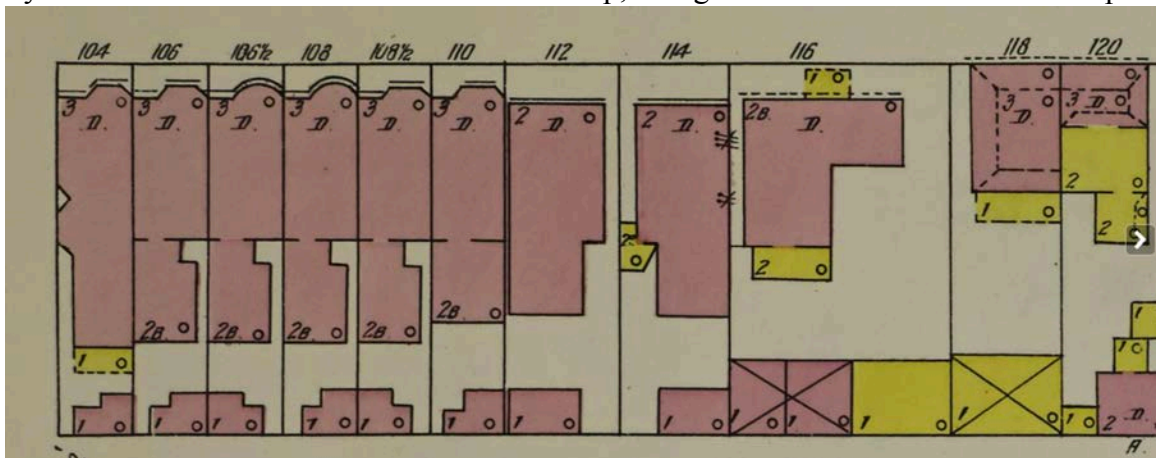
Scottish immigrant Alexander Laing arrived in the United States on board the *Roscius* in 1845, at age 21. Laing (1824-1907) appears in the 1850 Census as living in the United States Hotel, in Wheeling's Third Ward. By the time of the 1864 City Directory, Laing was a partner in Greer and Laing, described in the 1888 directory as dealing in "wholesale hardware and cutlery, agricultural implements, etc., agents for Fairbank's Scales, Page's Leather Belting, and Caldwell's Patent Steel Roofing, 1214 & 1216 Main." Partners at that time were Jacob R. Greer, Alexander Laing, and William Cruikshank.

Laing purchased the property where the 104-110 14th Street properties stand on October 23, 1865. The purchase included Lot 43 and the adjoining Lot 46 "and buildings;" the purchase price was \$6,800 (the equivalent of more than \$108,000 today).

The 1890 Sanborn Insurance Map shows several disconnected buildings in this block, with number 110 14th having a similar front façade outline as later.



By the time of the 1902 Sanborn Insurance Map, Laing's row of townhouses was complete.



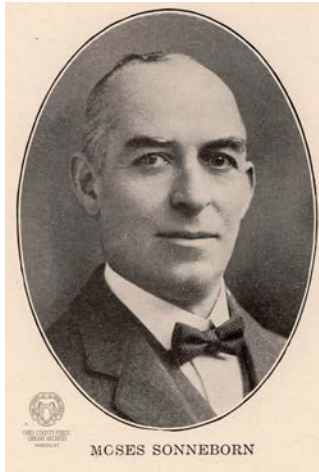
Although Laing is listed as living at 104 14th Street from at least as early as the 1867 City Directory, he probably lived in the older structure, and the current house numbered 104 (built on part of Lot 43) was probably built in the late 1890s, along with the rest of the row. Laing was a bachelor and apparently a very successful businessman. The Executor's Bond for his will was valued at \$525,000, the equivalent of more than \$14.2 million today. His estate included shares in LaBelle Iron Works and Wheeling Iron & Steel, along with the properties at 104, 106, 106 ½, 108, 108 ½, and 110 14th Street.

The first Wheeling City Directory that lists residents in the new Italianate townhouses was the one dated 1898-1899, when Alexander Laing is still shown at 104 14th Street. Moses Sonneborn (President of The Hub clothing store) is at 106 14th, Rev. J. H. Little (co-pastor of the United Presbyterian Church) is at 106 ½, T.M. Garvin (attorney-at-law) is at 108, and W.F. Seanor (men's and women's fine shoes) is at 108 ½ 14th Street. No listing was found for 110 14th Street.



The 1900 Census provides a picture of the residents of the row at that time. In addition to 71-year-old hardware merchant Alexander Laing, several other relatives also lived at 104 14th Street – Isabella Robb (48 year-old niece, 1855 immigrant from Scotland), iron moulder William Robb (52 year-old nephew, 1855 immigrant from Scotland), druggist Henry Robb (nephew, born in WV, no age listed), clerk Harry Robb (21-year-old grandnephew, born in Ohio), and companion Anna B. Robb (18-year-old grandniece, born in Ohio).

In addition to Moses Sonneborn (45-year-old Jewish clothier, son of German immigrants) listed at 106 14th Street, others also at that address were his wife, 40-year-old Lottie, two sons (16-year-old Charles and 14-year-old Herbert, 21-year-old niece Daisy Anathan, and a cook and another servant. No one is listed in that census record at 106 ½ 14th Street, so perhaps the Sonneborn family occupied both halves.



According to a 1923 biography in *Progressive West Virginians*, “There is no more prominent merchant or better esteemed man, with all classes, in the City of Wheeling than Moses Sonneborn, president of the Hub department store, which institution he started in May, 1891, and which has grown from a small institution to one of the largest department stores in the State... After the City of Wheeling purchased Wheeling Park in 1924, prominent citizens were asked to purchase facilities for the park. Moses Sonneborn funded the entrance gate to Wheeling Park, which was constructed in 1928. Today it is known as the Sonneborn Gate.”

Listed at 108 14th Street in 1900 were Jacob Emsheimer (age 62, Jewish clothing merchant born in Germany), his wife Fannie (53), daughter Sadie (25), two sons – Irvin (16) and Herbert (14), son-in-law Morris Jacobson (37), daughter Minnie Jacobson (31), grandson Joseph Jacobson (9) and one servant.

108 ½ 14th Street was home to Charles F. Brandass (48-year-old, German immigrant tobacco merchant), his wife Mary (48), seven daughters – Lottie (24, stenographer), Sophia (21), Carrie (19), Minnie (16), Alma (14), Adelia (12), and Marie (9), and one son – Carl (5).

By the time of the 1900 Census, Mrs. Rebecca Kraus (age 53) lived at 110 14th Street. She was the widow of merchant Samuel Kraus (1832-1894), a Jewish immigrant from Bavaria who served in both the Mexican War and the Civil War, during which he rose to the rank of Captain. He was severely wounded at the Battle of Antietam but later returned to duty and survived the war. Afterwards, he returned to Wheeling and joined with his brother in a men’s clothing business under the name Kraus Brothers and later had a successful wholesale liquor business. Also listed in the household were daughters Nettie (24), Rose (22), Stella (18), and Blanch (16), granddaughter Fanny Hirsch (12), and one servant.

When builder Alexander Laing died in 1907, the row of houses were left to various relatives - 104 14th Street was left to his niece, Isabella W. Robb; 106 14th was left to his grandniece Anna Bell Robb; 106 ½ went to grandniece Isabella Robb; 108 14th was left to grandnephew Harry M. Robb; 108 ½ went to grandnephew Charles C. Robb; and 110 14th Street was left to grandnephew Allen Robb.

Isabella Robb (1851-1938) never married and continued to live in 104 14th Street, along with other relatives, until her death at age 87. It was then sold to Lena Zanke (aka Zanche), wife of Frank Zanke, owner of the East End Café, 1701 Wood Street. Frank Zanke (born 1891) was an Italian immigrant, arriving in the U.S. in 1910 at age 19. He worked selling produce before starting the East End Café. Lena (born c. 1897) was the daughter of Italian immigrants. Frank Zanke’s WWI draft record lists him as “stout.” By the time of the 1940 Census, Frank was listed as “unable to work,” and the WWII draft records describes him as 5’7” tall and weighing only 138 pounds. He was deceased by the time the 1944 City Directory was published. Around that time, Frank and Lena’s sons (Dominic, born c. 1916, and Vincent, born c. 1918) ran Zanke’s Café and no longer lived with their widowed mother at 104 14th Street. Tenants Fred W. Beisner,



an employee of the Riley Law Building, and his wife Mary were tenants in 1960. Robert and Marcia A. Padgett purchased the property in 1978. Robert was a teacher at West Liberty State College. His wife Eileen worked for a time at the Northern Panhandle Medical Health Center. Robert and Marcia Padgett (perhaps siblings, Marcia is identified as 'single') prepared a Right of Survivorship deed in 1987. Robert and Eileen Padgett sold the property in 1996 to Paul C. Peter for \$38,000. Peter died in Monroe County, Ohio, on November 5, 1997. City Directories show that the house was vacant in 1997 and 1998. In 1998, Stuart Levy acquired the property for \$23,000. Charles Kleine and Glynis Board, purchased it in 2015.

Other than niece Isabella Robb, it doesn't appear that any of the heirs of Alexander Laing ever lived in the other row houses. Over the intervening years, many owners and tenants have occupied them, with at least some of the properties being acquired by the state and sold for unpaid taxes. In several years, multiple, apparently unrelated occupants are listed at a single address in city directories, suggesting that the buildings were divided into apartments. As of this writing, the four middle properties, 106, 106 ½, 108, and 108 ½ are vacant but have been purchased by new owners with plans to rehabilitate them to their former glory.

Prepared by Jeanne Finstein, Friends of Wheeling
March 15, 2023

Sources:

- Ancestry.com
- FindaGrave.com
- Ohio County Census Records
- Ohio County Death Records
- Ohio County Deed Records
- Ohio County Public Library
- Wheeling City Directories

House Photos by Joanne Sullivan