

326 North Huron Street Charles Christian Kraft House

This house was probably built around 1878 by Charles Christian “Chris” Kraft (1827–1905), a German immigrant who was a partner in the firm Klieves & Kraft Company. Kraft was a son of George F. Kraft, who came from Hanover, Germany, to the United States with his family in 1834, when Chris was about eight years old. Shortly after arriving, the family moved to western Ohio and settled on a farm.

Meanwhile, Chris’ older brother, John Kraft¹ (1808 – 1864) immigrated to Wheeling with his wife, Caroline Klieves (1807–1889). It is likely that Caroline was related to and perhaps a sister of brothers Theodore, Bernhard, and William Klieves, also German immigrants.

In 1840, at about age 13, Chris Kraft came to Wheeling, reportedly walking the 200 mile distance from western Ohio, carrying his possessions on his back, and began an apprenticeship in cabinet-making with Jeremiah Clemens. He married Caroline Schmidt in 1849, and the couple had at least eight children², with four daughters and one son surviving to adulthood. During the Civil War, he reportedly served with militia groups that “helped to chase Morgan³ about Ohio.” In 1864, Chris Kraft formed a partnership with Bernhard Klieves, the two opening a shop of their own. In 1868 a partnership was formed in which William Klieves and Theodore Klieves were additional members. This firm engaged in the planing-mill business, under the name Klieves & Kraft Company. In 1877 William Klieves retired, and three years later architect Edgar W. Wells⁴ joined the firm as lead architect and designer.



¹ John Kraft served as an Orderly Sergeant in Captain Hamilton’s Company, a militia group during the Civil War that guarded the new state capital of Wheeling. He died, reportedly of pneumonia, on April 11, 1864, while still a member of the militia company. His widow applied for pension benefits in 1875, and C.C. Kraft and William Klieves were the two witnesses who signed her application. Census records in later years suggest that she then ran a boarding house in Centre Wheeling.

² Daughters Gertrude (1855 – 1905), Ellen (1861 – 1936), Julia (1865 – 1951), and May (c. 1869 – 1953) and son Frank H. (born 1872) never married.

³ Confederate Brigadier General John Hunt Morgan led a raid into northern states in the summer of 1863, intending to draw Union troops away from eastern battlefields. Part of their route covered territory to the west of the Ohio River and reached north of Steubenville. Although the raid failed in its primary goal, it was feared that Morgan would attack Wheeling.

⁴ Edgar W. Wells (1850 – 1890) is also credited with designing Shaw Hall at West Liberty University and the Roger Hotel in downtown Wheeling and was working on the Eoff Street (Jewish) Temple in 1890 when he drowned in an Ohio River ferry accident, age 39.

The March 5, 1878 issue of the *Wheeling Intelligencer* reported that Klieves & Kraft would be building a structure at a cost of \$8500⁵ “on Market Street between 12th and Register Alley” which would house Thomas Hughes and Company, tailors.

An 1890 description of the company states, “The firm stands at the head of the contracting and building business of Wheeling; and Washington hall, the Reilly block, among many other business buildings, and such residences, as those of A. W. Kelly, G. E. Stifel, Dr. Hazlett, A. W. Paull and other elegant structures, testify to the efficiency of the firm in that particular.” The home of A. Wilson Kelly (now known as the Kelly-Welty House) is located at 96 12th Street; George E. Stifel’s home⁶ (now known as the Stifel-Kossuth House), still stands at 807 Main Street; “Dr. Hazlett’s House” is certainly the Dr. Robert W. Hazlett House at 921 Main Street (built in 1887 and the current home of Friends of Wheeling); and the A. W. Paull House with its lovely key-hole window still stands at 729 Main Street as the home of Jividen Law Offices.

The twin homes of Theodore and Bernhard Klieves (2313 and 2315 Chapline Street, built c. 1885 – 3rd and 2nd houses from the left in the sketch⁷) and Edgar Wells (2301-2303 Chapline Street, built c. 1889 – far right in the sketch) – prominent homes on “Chapline Street Row,” were built by the company.



And, given the style of the Wheeler House at 3526 Jacob Street, it was probably their work, as well. The company is also credited with building St. Alphonsus Church in Centre Wheeling (built in 1887) and the iconic Second-Empire-style Woodburn Hall (built 1874-1876) on the campus of West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV.

By 1890, Kraft was a stockholder in various enterprises, among which were the German bank, the Dollar Savings bank, the Wheeling & Belmont Bridge company, and the Elson Glass works, of Martin's Ferry. A 1902 description of the Klieves & Kraft Company states that, “Their present

⁵ Using an inflation calculator, \$8500 in 1878 is about the same as \$247,000 today.

⁶ The March 29 issue of the *Wheeling Intelligencer* included a notice that L.C. Stifel had contracted with Klieves, Kraft and Company for “the erection of four elegant residences on Main, just above 9th.” The Stifel-Kossuth House is located in that block.

⁷ This sketch was done as part of a survey done by the Historic American Building Survey (HABS) done by the National Park Service in 1977. The associated documentation states that the buildings shown “possess a strong cohesiveness which is the result of the similarity of their architectural design. Their scale, relative proportions, relation of materials, and the general homogeneity of workmanship have produced a neighborhood of individual units which collectively create a strong sense of nineteenth century Wheeling.”

location is on Eoff Street, between Twenty-second and Twenty-third streets. At first they employed eight men, and now 33 men, although the number would be four times as great were it not for the introduction of labor-saving machines and general improvements. The dimensions of the plant are 100 by 100 feet, and it is equipped with all modern improvements and facilities for carrying on the work.”

Caroline and Charles Christopher Kraft and their daughter Gertrude died in 1905. The four surviving children, Frank H., Julie, Ellen, and May, sold the property to McKimmie and Anna Powell in 1919. McKimmie Powell (1870–1949) was a mill worker at the Aetna Mill. Anna Davis Powell (1871–1942) had preceded her husband in death, and the widower sold the property in 1944 to Alta May Laney.

George Stefanow purchased the property in 1951, followed by Stephen and Jean Wojcik in 1952, John and Emily Goudy in 1954, and Emmett and Mary Lucas in 1956. Beginning in late 1980, Susan Bailey and later Susan Bailey Mituzas and Thomas E. Mituzas, Jr. owned the property. Martin and Rosalie Kimball became the owners in 1992, followed by John and Percy McGhee in 1994. Jason Bradcovich and Larry Brothers, obtained the property in 2013 when it was in serious disrepair. As of this writing, they are renovating this building that is remarkable, both because of its architectural style and also for its history.

Prepared by Jeanne Finstein, Friends of Wheeling
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Sources:

- Ancestry.com
- Brant & Fuller, "History of the Upper Ohio Valley," Vol. I, 1890, pages 351-352.
- Cranmer, Hon. Gibson Lamb, "History of Wheeling City and Ohio County, West Virginia and Representative Citizens," 1902. pp. 414-415
- Findagrave.com
- Historic American Building Survey, 1977
- National Trust of Historic Places Nominations
- Ohio County Census Records
- Ohio County Deed Records
- *Wheeling Intelligencer*
- WV Vital Records

Photo by Joanne Sullivan
House sketches – Historic American Building Survey