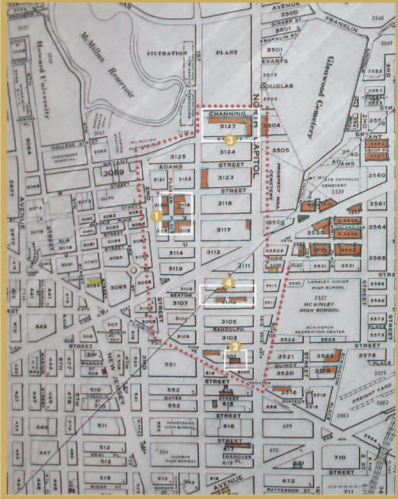


WARDMAN's WASHINGTON

Celebrating a Century of Wardman Row-House Neighborhoods

BLOOMINGDALE



Wardman Buildings in Bloomingdale, DC Building Permits Database, Brian Kraft, compiler (above)



128-138 Y Street, NW, 1905, Albert H. Beers, architect (above)
Baist Real Estate Map, 1894, Showing Minimal Development in Bloomingdale (left top)
Baist Real Estate Map, 1907, Showing Bloomingdale Substantially Developed (right bottom)
Courtesy: The Historical Society of Washington, DC



The Eckington & Soldiers' Home Railroad, c. 1891 (above)
Courtesy: Lefay O. King, Jr.

The Bloomingdale neighborhood derives its name from the nineteenth-century estate of George and Emily Beale that was located near the intersection of North Capitol Street and Florida Avenue, NW. In 1889, after the death of the Beales, the land, which ran from Florida Avenue to T Street, was platted for residential development. The streets were laid out in conformance with the L'Enfant grid which was not the usual practice for subdivisions prior to the Federal Highway Act of 1893. Sold by Moore & Barbour Realtors, prices for the lots ranged from \$75 for a mid-block site in the northern portion of the subdivision to \$200 for a corner site in the southern portion.

The Eckington & Soldiers Home Railroad, Washington's first electric line which opened in 1888, originating at Mt. Vernon Square and Seventh Street, NW, was extended north of Florida Avenue along North Capitol Street to the entrance of the Glenwood Cemetery and to Soldiers' Home in 1894. Bloomingdale became easily accessible to those employed downtown and, within a few short years, four more subdivisions were platted.

Between 1903 and 1908, Wardman built 180 row houses in Bloomingdale. Twenty-seven were row-house flats; eighty were single-family row houses, seventy-three

were front-porch row houses. During these years, Wardman bought and sold properties on a daily basis, and in some instances, profited as little as \$200 per house. His total profit for five years of work in Bloomingdale was probably about \$50,000, a tidy sum at that time. But that was only a portion of his business, for he was just as active in Columbia Heights and Mount Pleasant during this period. By 1906, at the age of only thirty-four, Wardman's reputation was such that his name warranted mention on advertisements.

The Baist maps show that in 1896, two years after the extension of the trolley line, development in Bloomingdale was minimal. By 1907, few vacant lots remained. A year later, Wardman built his last project in Bloomingdale.

Detail, Fifteenth International Christian Endeavor Convention Map, 1896 (right)
Courtesy: Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division



Bloomingdale is composed of five subdivisions: the original Bloomingdale plot of 1889, LeDroit Park, LeDroit Park Addition, Dobbins Addition, and the Moore & Barbour Addition. Portions of the Dobbins Addition once belonged to the Prospect Hill Cemetery, which moved from Seventh Street downtown to the rural location in 1838. In the late 1890s, Congress purchased land from the cemetery in order to extend North Capitol Street, creating a small swath of land west of North Capitol Street that was severed from the cemetery. In the 1920s, that parcel of land was developed with front porch row houses.

1 Single-Family Row Houses

131-141 Y Street, NW, 1905, Albert H. Beers, architect (right)
Rear of 131 Y Street, NW, Showing Sleeping Porch (left)
Front Elevation, 131-141 Y Street, NW, 1905, Albert H. Beers, architect (below right)
Plan for 131-141 Y Street, NW, 1905, Albert H. Beers, architect (below center)
Courtesy: National Archives, DC Building Permits
Drawing by Sally Berk



The majority of Wardman's buildings in Bloomingdale are single-family row houses. Typically, they have six rooms and a bath, a pressed-brick facade, Indiana limestone trim, and a sleeping porch located at the rear of the second floor. In design, they are a continuation of the late-nineteenth-century Washington vernacular row house — predominantly red brick with motifs borrowed from the Romanesque, Queen Anne, and Colonial Revival movements. Their most ubiquitous element is the bay window. In 1871, the municipal government declared that "... it shall be lawful to extend bay windows a distance of four feet beyond the building line," resulting in an animated streetscape that lessened the monotony of block-long rows of identical houses. For the occupant, the bay provided a much-desired oblique view down the street.

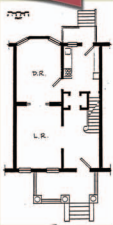
Sleeping porches, a signature of Wardman's attached houses, served dual purposes. Outdoor sleeping was considered a cure for tuberculosis, a disease that was rampant in dense urban areas of late-nineteenth-century America. In addition, the outdoors was the most comfortable place to sleep in summer before the advent of air conditioning and the noise and pollution that accompanied the automobile.

The average single-family Wardman house in Bloomingdale sold for \$4,000. They were occupied by carpenters, clerks, managers, waitresses, salesmen, bookkeepers, and employees at the Bureau of Printing.



3 Front-Porch Row Houses

Plan of Front-Porch Row House (right)
Drawing by Sally Berk
14-44 Channing Street, NW, 1908, Albert H. Beers, architect (far right)
Detail of 2428 North Capitol Street, NW, at Channing Street, 1907, Albert H. Beers, architect (left)



In 1907, Wardman began construction of a new row-house type in the recently-platted areas north of Florida Avenue. Contemporary accounts referred to it as "semi-suburban." Four changes to the traditional row house gave it a suburban texture. The houses were set further back from the street, thereby creating a small lawn; they were wider and shallower in plan; they emphasized horizontality; and, most significantly, they had front porches with roofs that were large enough to serve as outdoor living rooms. Although the roof of the front porch reduced the amount of light that entered the front room, the wider and shallower plan allowed the light to penetrate deeper into the room. These changes had a significant impact on the relationship of the house to the street, and the lifestyle of the resident. They animated the street and engendered community.

As the foremost developer of front-porch row houses, Wardman — or possibly his architect, Albert H. Beers — probably deserves credit for instituting what was to become the predominant single-family dwelling type in Washington for the next three decades. By the mid-1920s, however, the front porch was beginning to lose popularity. Most middle-income families in Washington could afford a car, extending the distance they could travel for socializing. As the front porch row house became associated with the working class, the garage gained popularity as a more desirable amenity and as a symbol of social standing.

The early residents of Channing Street included a draftsman at the Navy Yard, a chief statistician at the Bureau of Labor Statistics, a teacher at the McKinley Manual Training School, a structural engineer for the Treasury Department, an electrician, a dentist, a route agent for the Evening Star, a clerk at the Department of Agriculture, a druggist whose store was at the corner of North Capitol Street and Rhode Island Avenue, an assistant superintendent at Papers, and many low-type operators at the Government Printing Office.

Preservation



1612-1620 North Capitol Street, NW, 1901, B. Stanley Simmons, architect; Middough & Shannon, developers (above left)
Photograph ca. 1949-1950. Courtesy: The Historical Society of Washington, Wymer Collection

Front Porch Photograph of B Street, NE, 1913 (right top)
Courtesy: Jerry A. McCoy Collection, Willard R. Ross Real Photo Postcards

Front Porch Photograph of Truxton Circle, 1912 (right bottom)
Courtesy: Jerry A. McCoy Collection, Willard R. Ross Real Photo Postcards

Bloomingdale today appears much as it did a century ago. Composed almost entirely of solidly built row houses — a dwelling type still popular today — most of the buildings in the neighborhood are intact. The demolition that has occurred has been due largely to the construction of commercial buildings, primarily at the intersection of North Capitol Street and Florida Avenue or for the widening of North Capitol Street to accommodate commuter traffic.

One of the rows that was compromised by the construction of commercial buildings is in the 1600 block of North Capitol Street, NW. Designed by prominent turn-of-the-century architect B. Stanley Simmons and built in 1901, the row of five houses now consists of only two.

Truxton Circle is also gone, a victim of traffic accommodation. Named for Emily Beale's brother, Revolutionary War commodore Thomas Truxton, the circle was laid out as part of the original Bloomingdale subdivision. In the tradition of Tidewater, it was intended to mark the intersection of two major thoroughfares — North Capitol Street and Florida Avenue — but also to provide a park for the residents of the neighborhood and, thereby, increase the value of the lots. Built in 1900, the circle was razed in 1946 for the widening of North Capitol Street.



2 Row-House Flats



35-43 Quincy Street, NW, 1903, Nicholas R. Grimm, architect (above)
37 Quincy Street, NW (showing double front door) (above right)
Plan of Row-House Flats (right)
Drawing by Sally Berk



REAL ESTATE OPERATIONS.
A Hundred More Two-Flat Houses—Sisters of Providence Building.
Mr. Harry Wardman, who has built a large number of two-flat houses in Georgetown, Mount Pleasant and other parts of the city in the past year, has decided to begin operations on another hundred of such houses in the near future. Mr. Wardman says that he does not consider the business situation generally, or the building situation in particular, to be inimical to the success of more houses of the same plan.
"A Hundred More Two-Flat Houses..." The Washington Post, December 1, 1903 (above)

The row-house flat was a dwelling type new to Washington in the early years of the twentieth century. It had been introduced in 1897 by the Washington Sanitary Improvement Company, which was founded that year. A year earlier, the Washington Central Relief Committee had concluded that no class of really paid as well as alley dwellings and that, during such a severe housing shortage, developers could profit from the construction of sanitary and comfortable houses for the blue-collar worker. The row-house flat was the solution. From the exterior, the two-unit building appeared to be a single-family residence, avoiding the stigma associated, at that time, with living in a multi-family dwelling. Once inside the foyer, the occupants were provided private entrances to the individual units.

As early as 1900, Wardman was constructing row-house flats in older areas of the city, building them for other developers as well as acting as developer in his own right. In 1903, he began building them in Bloomingdale, first in partnership with Harry Willson at 35-43 Quincy Street, NW, then as both builder and developer at 20-34 Setaon Street and 14-20 T Street, NE, and partnering in 1904 with David Moore at 2026-2034 North Capitol Street, NW. By 1905, Wardman had abandoned the row-house flat. It was a short-lived phenomenon in Washington, replaced after only a few years by the larger, more profitable apartment building.

4 Architecture



75 Setaon Street, NW, 1904, Nicholas R. Grimm, architect (above)
2834-2836 Flagler Place, NW, 1905, Albert H. Beers, architect (detail) (above right)
"The Houses That Wardman Builds," The Washington Post, July 1, 1904 (above far right)



Bloomingdale is one of the most homogeneous neighborhoods in Washington in terms of housing type, size, and design, yet it was built by approximately a dozen developers. Homogeneity resulted from several factors. The neighborhood was constructed in little more than a decade; it was intended for a single socio-economic class; and, until 1908, when Wardman introduced the front-porch row house in Bloomingdale, the architecture was based on the late-nineteenth-century vernacular Washington row house found in all quadrants of the city.

While the two houses in the left photo appear to be similar, they were, in fact, built by different developers. 75 Setaon Street (right) was built by Wardman in 1904 with Nicholas R. Grimm as architect. 77 Setaon Street was built by Thomas Healy in 1902, and he is listed as architect. There are fifteen houses at the western end of Setaon Street that were built by three different developers, yet they form a cohesive block.

Wardman employed two architects to design the houses that he built in Bloomingdale. The first, Nicholas R. Grimm, an experienced row-house architect, was responsible in 1903 and 1904, for the design of seventy houses, a third of which were row-house flats. In 1905, Wardman replaced Grimm with Albert H. Beers, also an experienced designer who was to become one of Washington's most prolific architects. Although the architect changed, the houses remained similar, with differences largely in the details. For example, Beers substituted Grimm's flat window lintels of rough-cut stone with voussure lintels of smooth concrete (right photo), a change that gave the design a more domestic look.

Beers continued Wardman's practice of using only one design for a row of houses that was intended for middle-income residents, providing variety only by alternating round wooden lintels with metal ones. Wardman was willing, however, to vary one row from another by constructing some with square bays others with polygonal ones. Having found a successful formula, Wardman remained with it, benefiting from the fact that the row house not only creates desirable neighborhoods but remains a viable dwelling type.

Bloomingdale Community



Unit Block of K Street, NW, Showing "Historic K Street" Banner (above)
Bloomingdale Residents, June 20, 2005 (left)

Residents of Bloomingdale take pride in their century-old neighborhood and appreciate the diversity of architecture that has been achieved within the row-house form. They describe it as a friendly community that is conveniently located near the center of Washington, yet is surprisingly quiet. The houses have curb appeal, are situated on big lots, and are well built. All is testament to the fact that the row house not only creates desirable neighborhoods but remains a viable dwelling type.

