

Ethnic Divides in an 1880 DC Neighborhood

by M. Marie Maxwell

This is the first part of a study of the 1880-1930¹ US Census for the Truxton Circle area to study the demographic trends in the neighborhood. When the project began two years ago, the Shaw and surrounding neighborhoods of Eckington and LeDroit Park were experiencing rapid changes. The District of Columbia's real estate boom created a housing crisis in neighborhoods that were predominately black and middle to working class. The older housing stock in these neighborhoods, some with late 19th to early 20th century features, close to major transportation routes and close to the heart of downtown attracted homebuyers who were noticeably not Black or working class like their neighbors. As more people and investors were attracted to the areas east of 16th Street, NW housing prices rose at a dizzying rate, beyond the reach of many working class residents who may have wanted to buy.

Gentrification was a term to describe what was happening to the neighborhood. Gentrification is defined as, "the restoration and upgrading of deteriorated urban property by middle-class or affluent people, often resulting in displacement of lower-income people." In the case of many DC neighborhoods there is the added element of race and it has been viewed as the replacement of blue-collar blacks for white collar or professional whites. Some opponents of gentrification, when addressing the changes assert that the neighborhood has always been one way and the settlement of whites and white-collar

¹ The 1890 Census for this area does not exist.

workers in Shaw is a new thing. This study asks the question, was Shaw always black and working class?

The method used for approaching this question was to gather data from the census about individual residents living in the study area. Besides being a treasure trove of information for genealogists, who use it to find family relations, the census contains a wealth of information. It captures an individual's race, occupation, parent's place of birth, and other details that when combined with their neighbors' particulars, provide an image of what kind of neighborhood a place is when looking at class and race. The census is the best source as it attempts to capture all residents regardless of race, gender, occupation, or lack thereof.



Map 1. Outline of Shaw.
Source: *City of Washington, statistical maps*. Map.
Washington, D.C.: The Commissioners, 1880.

Shaw is a very large neighborhood. Even though the history of the neighborhood is as old as the capitol city itself, the borders of Shaw are a 1960s construct. The National Capital Planning Commission defined Shaw as the area serviced by the Shaw

Junior High School and those borders stretched to North Capitol. In 1967 the

Washington Post published a map showing the borders of Shaw as 14th, Florida, North Capitol and M Streets, NW (Downie and Kaiser, A4). Within these borders are several subsections such as, Logan Circle, U Street, Blagden Alley, Mt. Vernon Square, and

Truxton Circle. Due to the neighborhood's sheer size, and number of residents in any census year, a manageable subsection of Shaw was used for this study.

Truxton Circle, as the modern District of Columbia city administration defines it, sits on the edge of North West and parts of NE DC. The majority of this neighborhood sits within the northeastern boundaries of Shaw. It is situated in between three major roads, with part of one major road, Rhode Island Avenue, briefly crossing through. On the north is Boundary Street, currently called Florida Avenue. Boundary Street separates, Old City, where Truxton Circle lies, from the various "suburban" District neighborhoods such as Eckington and LeDroit Park, which began to appear around the late 19th century. As this study is for the Shaw portion of Truxton Circle, North Capitol will be the eastern border, which separates North West Washington from North East. At the intersection of Boundary and Florida was where the Truxton Circle traffic circle sat. New York Avenue creates the southern border and New Jersey Avenue borders the western part of the study area. According to period maps both New York and New Jersey Avenues appear very wide and would logically separate residents on either side of these well-traveled thoroughfares.

The Truxton Circle area proved to be a suitable section to investigate for two reasons. First, there is an absence of literature regarding this portion of Shaw. Second, in 1880 there were over 100 households in Truxton Circle that blossomed to approximately one thousand households in 1930, creating a statistically solid but manageable number of residences.

How data was collected

The project draws heavily from the United States Census. The 1880, or 10th census, will be the base upon which data from following census years will be judged. The

area of Truxton Circle falls within the 21st and 29th enumeration districts. Those districts as well as surrounding districts were searched for Truxton Circle addresses. Of those addresses falling within the search area, every bit of data was collected from the census rolls for each address. Every man, woman, and child's name, age, race, occupation, marital status, relationship to household head, everything, was culled. Although informative, it was very time consuming so future collections will focus on household heads and spouses. Each address was arranged by city square and data regarding the household head and spouse's race was mapped.

Mapping proved difficult as maps did not always have house addresses. The 1887 Hopkins maps serve as the main maps in the 1880 portion of the study. The maps outline houses, illustrating what was brick, wood, or a shed as well as major institutions such as schools, churches and hospitals, and their footprint on the property and their relationship to surrounding structures. As regular

maps they show street names, street widths, major sewer lines, relative widths of alleys, square numbers, lot numbers, and sometimes house numbers.

In addition to using maps, there was the occasional walk through. Several of the buildings existed at the time of the 1880 census it helped to walk over and see if the building was a



small two story federal or a sizeable three story Victorian. However, there is no guarantee that the building standing at an address is the same one from 1880. Regardless, a visual inspection reveals if the property had a basement apartment, which may or may not have existed during the time of the 1880 census.

Truxton in Black and White

Of the fifteen occupied blocks in Truxton Circle, three did not have any African Americans households or recorded occupants. They were Squares 507, 519 and 520. Of those three, two were sparsely populated. The only household listed and shown on the 1887 Hopkins map on Square 519 is the Florist and Prussian immigrant George Glorius, where he lived with his wife and five children. Glorius's house, greenhouse, and sheds are the only structures on the square (Hopkins, plat 15). Given the nature of his work, it would explain why he had the whole block. The other sparse block of 520 had two households; the first was James Reeves, a Maryland born white man living alone at 305 Q Street. The only structure facing the odd numbered side of Q Street, where 305 should have sat, is shown as a shed on the Hopkins map. What sits on that spot today is a bricked up tow story garage. The top floor possibly could have housed a bachelor. John Miller, a French retired gardener, living with his Prussian wife and their three American born children, headed the other household. On the 1887 map a John Miller is shown to have owned almost all of Square 520, and several properties on neighboring square E. 509. On Square 507, the households for that block lived on New Jersey Avenue and Boundary Avenue. A great many of the heads of those households worked as clerks, and among those it seems they worked for the Federal government.

Alternately, Square 617 was the only block where African Americans were the only residents. Curiously, of the 41 people who lived on this square 16 people,

representing five households, resided at 78 O Street. If the unit block of O Street structures seen in the 1887 map is any guide to the size of the house, 78 O Street appears to have been very small structure. Later fire maps from the early 20th century do now show any structures where 78 O sits, therefore the current residence does not give any inkling to the size of the 1887 building.

Even though Truxton Circle was sparsely populated in parts, compared to block west of New Jersey Ave in the rest of Shaw, there was typically someone of a different race living across the street, or down the street or on the next block. The unit block to the 200 block of O, 100 block of P, 200 block of R, and the 1400 blocks of 3rd and 1st streets had instances of blacks and whites living across the street from each other. Of those, only the 100 block of P, squares 552 & 553, had whites on both sides of the street.

When there are only a few occupied residences on a street it is hard to see a pattern at the street level. So looking at blocks with streets with five or more addresses on one side there are some patterns. The even numbered unit block of O, where the crowded 78 O Street sat, is the one of the African American sided streets, in addition to the 1400 block of First Street. The odd numbered 1700 block of NJ, even numbered 1400 block of North Capitol, odd numbered 1400 block and 1600 block of 3rd street were all white portions of the street where a number of occupied residences sat. The other occupied blocks or streets were a mix of black and white households where the races clumped. Various patterns of clumping range from one race on one street or one end of the street, a cluster of houses or in other instances a mix of one race living in between or near a larger cluster of another race. From 1408 to 1418 Third Street, a row of houses, six held African Americans, at the end of the row lived a white family in 1420. Crossing the alley

there were two more white occupied houses. Passing two vacant lots, at the end of O Street, was a black family at 1430 and Beulah Baptist Church, which was a black church. Within the pattern of clumping among whites, broken down to the level of nationalities, there were concentrations of Germans and German Americans, and a cluster of Irish and Irish Americans.

Ethnic Divides

1880 Truxton Circle was ethnically diverse. Besides having a population of black and white residents, among white residents there were a number of immigrant and first generation Americans. For the purposes of this study, the head of the household and their spouse's nativity and parentage are the focus. Their, and their parent's place of birth is

Table 1. 1400 Block of North Capitol Residents			
Address	Surname	Head/ Spouse's background	Head's occupation
1400 North Capitol	Leimbach	German/ German	Retail Grocer
1402 North Capitol	Louhardt	German-Amer/ Swiss-Amer.	Butcher
1402 North Capitol	Gleason	Irish/ Irish-Amer.	Stone cutter
1406 North Capitol	Degan	German/ German	Wheelwright
1412 North Capitol	Tensing	Swiss/ German-Amer.	Carpenter
1414 North Capitol	Radenganger	Austrian/Austrian	Retail Grocer
1416 North Capitol	Sullivan	Irish/Irish	Laborer (unemployed)
1422 North Capitol	Keller	German/ German	Blacksmith
1424 North Capitol	Geyer	German/ Native White	Tailor
1426 North Capitol	Monder	German/ German	Baker
1428 North Capitol	Mohler	Native White/ German	Retail Grocer
Compiled from the United States Census, <i>Tenth Census 1880</i> .			

important and equal as both parties play a part in the family's ethnic background.

There were 62 households with German or German-American heads or spouses in Truxton Circle. Several Germanic households clustered around the corners of O, North Capitol and P Streets, NW on Square 616. North on Square 615 on North Capitol there were three other German households but not a large or concentrated cluster as they were equaled out by one Irish spouse and two native white households. On the eastern side of 615 were twenty German or German-American households with a strong presence on the 1400 block of North Capitol (see Table 1).

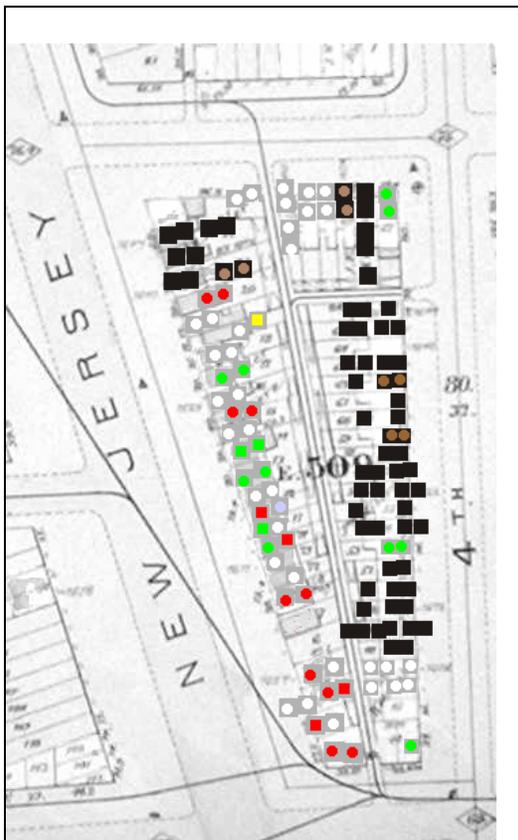
Besides the number of German immigrant and German-American households, there were Swiss and Austrians sharing the 1400 block of North Capitol. Austria is a German speaking country and Switzerland's major languages are French and German. The two persons of Swiss heritage may have held language in common with their spouses and possibly their neighbors.

Clustering near the corner on the unit block of P Street were the Stroups, the Plowmans, the Peters, the Haufmans, the Stefels, and the Steidets. Among their ranks were a laborer, journeyman baker, a huckster, retail grocer, a tailor and a journeyman painter. 12 to 22 P Street was a solid block of German immigrants where both spouses were German. At 24 P Street lived a native white family that provided a pause in this line of Germans, which continued on to 26 and 28 P Street.

The western end of Square 616 where O and P Streets met First Street had an African American cluster. 66 P Street began the cluster with Harry Tilghman's family and continued on to 5 more addresses ending at 78 P Street. These families came from the surrounding states of Virginia and Maryland. If there are any District natives among

them, they are the children. In matching addresses to properties, it appears a large swath of space on the corner of First and P broke up the cluster. 1425 First Street, the northern most house on this part of First, sat isolated from the other black families on the street. The next six black households on O Street are separated from each other several properties and one Irish immigrant family.

The pattern on Square 616 racially shows whites on the eastern end of the block and blacks on the western section. White households on this block had a predominately Germanic background. The lines where the races met was near the middle of the block, but it is not a hard line as two white households on O Street are intermixed with the 7 black households.



Map 3. E 509 (key- Black square- Black household; Grey square- White household; Brown-Mulatto; White- Native White; Green-Irish; Red- German; Baby Blue- Canadian; Yellow- Other European)
 Compiled from United States Census, [10th Census](#) and the Washington, DC Hopkins map 1887.

Square 509E was another densely populated block in 1880. The New Jersey Avenue side was predominately white and Fourth Street primarily black. Unlike 616 there aren't any large clusters of Germans. There was a small cluster on the southern end of the square from 1601 to 1613 New Jersey, but four native whites and one Irishman balance it out.

From the southern tip of 509E at 1601 New Jersey to nearly the northern end at 1639 lived a long string of white families. Among the twenty-two white households, there were eight native white families or heads, and five

German, and two Irish headed households where both the head and spouse (if present) were immigrants. The households with German and Irish backgrounds were fairly intermixed with each other and native white families. Unlike their neighbors to the north on the 1700 block of New Jersey, there wasn't a single clerk among the heads of these households. They were a mix of tradesmen, policemen, and laborer. David Donigan, an Irish American, at 1623 New Jersey and August Schultz, a German-American, at 1617 were listed as police officers. There were six carpenters, most of them native whites.

The northern end of the street lived six African American families residing at three addresses from 1641 to 1647 New Jersey. George Williams, a 50-year-old laborer from Alabama lived at 1641 New Jersey with his 40-year-old wife, Catherine, from Virginia. Next door, to their south was August Plitt, a baker from Germany, his wife and their seven children. The Williams appear to have shared the house with laborer Henry Johnson's wife and their three-year-old son, all from Virginia. Also doubling up at 1645, lived laborer Buckman Powell's wife and two children and another family listed as his boarders. At 1647 New Jersey, were two other black families sharing one house. All the men over 18 years of age in this group were listed as laborers. The only other occupation was that of servant, held by 1647 New Jersey resident William Weddington's, teenage son. Servant and laborer are two very common jobs for African Americans in this study.

Around the corner on R Street, was a small block of blacks and whites. 418 R Street, is a problematic address, because where it should be on the map there isn't a house, just a shed for a corner property on New Jersey. It is one of those properties in the 1880 study that cannot be matched to the map as the 400 block of R continues west past New Jersey and out of the boundaries of Truxton Circle. If it did exist where it is

supposed to be, then the three person household of DC native white and retail grocer William Wood lived on the western end of a group of houses on R at 418 R Street. At 410, lived nine people, two households, both headed by native white carpenters. The next two houses, 408 and 406 resided native white families, followed by two African American households. Mulatto laborer Archibald Monlton lived at 404 with his wife and three female boarders. 402 R listed three households but it appears that Henry Hughs, a black laborer, and his wife took in John Bulter and his wife and his stepdaughter as well as Eliza Downey, a laundress, as tenants. On the corner of Fourth and R at 400 R Street, grocer Charles Pearson, an Irish immigrant lived with his wife, also from Ireland, and their four children.

Towards the rear of the Pearson house, and across the alley, was Truxton Circle's largest African American cluster, on the even numbered side of the 1600 block of Fourth Street. Like their counterparts on the northern end of New Jersey Avenue, there were plenty of families doubling up. Of the seventeen black addresses on Fourth Street, eleven of them had two or more households living under one roof. 1610 and 1632 4th St. listed three households. Both of these addresses housed nine people each, and if the current structures at these addresses have remained unchanged for the last 125 years, the people at 1610 may have lived more comfortably as that house has a basement apartment. Along this side of Fourth Street, houses were small two story federals, with two bedrooms on the top floor with about 1000 square feet of living space if no basement was present. Thirteen houses whose modern equivalents do not have basements, nine of those houses house eight or more people, with the highest number, 13 residing at 1640 Fourth St.

Also like the New Jersey African Americans many of the male heads of households were listed as laborers. There were a few exceptions. Jarrett Wallace at 1614 4th Street, Charles Davis of 1626 and Farley Thornton of 1636 were shoemakers. William Wheeler at 1624 was a carpenter, and Robert Beans of 1638 was a huckster. There also a few female headed households, some single tenants. A common occupation of working women on Fourth Street was that of laundress and servant, which reflects the rest of the neighborhoods on the issue of female jobs. Most women, black and white in the 1880 census were listed as “keeping house”, sometimes daughters and rarely wives would hold jobs. At 1614 laundress Rachel Tontee lived as a tenant with two sisters, who were listed as servants. At 1622 55-year-old widow Elise Carrol was keeping house, while her eldest daughter, also a widow, and Carrol’s younger single daughters worked as servants. In that same house lived laundress Mary Hull, another widow, and her adult son, a laborer and her school aged daughter. Next door, laborer William Todd’s wife worked as a laundress. Widow Francis Washington, Mr. Thornton’s tenant at 1636 was a laundress. If Elizabeth Clark-Lewis’s book *Living In, Living Out* on African American domestic life during the great migration holds true for 1880 domestics, laundress was a far better position than that of servant. Laundresses were far more independent with greater control over which jobs they took. Laundress was also a step above “washerwoman” who did the laundry in her home and taking pick up work to supplement her income, whereas the laundress provided her services “on site” and had the respect of her employers and other domestics.(Clark-Lewis, 140-141)

The 1600 block of Fourth would be complete stretches of black households were it not for three white households on the southern tip and one Irish household near the

middle. Sandwiched between twelve African American addresses to the north, and five black addresses to the south was 1618 Fourth Street, where police officer Thomas Lawlor, his wife, both from Ireland, lived with their two DC born children. Farther down the street at 1606 were the Tarltons and the Adams, at 1604 the Sampsons and nurse French, all native white families. At the very end, breaking the mold of holding typical female jobs was the Irish immigrant, widow Mary Barry, a retail grocer, and head of her household. She lived on the corner of 4th and R with her six DC born children ages ranging from 4 to 16, and her Virginia born sister Ellen Nelligan who stayed at home.

A small group of black households were book ended by several white families on the northern end of Square 509E and one large group on 4th St. Whites had the southern tip of the square and most of New Jersey Avenue and small groups of blacks on the northern end. On New Jersey the dividing line between black and white met at 1606 and 1608. On Fourth it is almost all black from 1608 To 1644 with the exception of 1618.

Square 553 was a block with two patterns of how races were segregated. The 1400 block of 3rd Street had no black families among its twelve households. Of those, eight were solely white natives. At 1417 3rd Street a German couple, and their seven children shared a house with Thos. Bryons, an Irish painter, who was listed as separate household. The only other immigrants on the street were 1401's Mrs. Catherine Ginter from Ireland, and 1407's Mrs. Anna Stein of Germany, both married to native whites. Around on P Street, in the middle of the block was a collection of seven households of whites. They were a mix of German-Americans, Irish immigrants, and native whites. They and the other 3rd Street male breadwinners, were skilled laborers and tradesmen with one government clerk among them. The 1400 block of First and the 100 to 200 unit

block of O were primarily black. Clusters of African American households sandwiched an Irish/ Irish-American household on the corner of First and O. The male household heads in this African American cluster were laborers with a few skilled tradesmen among them.

Noticeably, the Irish are everywhere in Truxton Circle. Irish immigrants appear on predominately black streets, white streets, and among German clusters. There is a small Irish cluster on Square 554 on the 200 block of O Street. They were five immigrant households with a native white and a British household between them. Along O street there were four black households on one end. The Peters in 216 O, a black family, lived next door to the widow Johanna Stack, in 218, and Irish immigrant and her family. Mrs. Stack supported her three children as a washerwoman. Irishman John Sullivan, at 220, like several of his African American neighbors worked as a laborer. Breaking the row of Irish in 222 was a young waiter from a white Virginia family, his English wife and their two children. From 224 to 228 were other Irish born residents, a widow, a laborer, his wife and their seven American children, and another laborer, his wife, their two kids and his mother.

Conclusion

This snapshot of Truxton Circle in 1880 shows an area as a whole that is racially mixed, despite the micro-segregation. In regards to class, Truxton Circle had a working class characteristic. There were more domestic servants, laborers and tradesmen than clerks or other professionals. In total the Truxton Circle neighborhood was 57% white and 43% black. Comparatively, the District of Columbia was about 33% black and 67% white.(Green, 200) When each block and each street is examined there is a little mixing

with whites and blacks as neighbors. More often, there is clustering, where the races live in large groups of people like themselves.

As mentioned earlier, this is just the first part of a larger project to study how the neighborhood's racial character changes over time. Samples from other census years were taken and they do reveal changes over the next fifty years. In 1920 the 1700 block of New Jersey Avenue was still all white, but with fewer government clerks and more tradesmen. In the space of ten years, African American government workers, independent contractors and dining car employees replace those white households. Not a single family on the 1700 block from the 1920 census appears on New Jersey Avenue in 1930, leaving the question of what happened to them? With the census data from the decades following 1880 there will be other questions the data may bring forth instead of answering. In 1900 many of the squares that in 1880 were sparse became dense. When the data is mapped out for 1900-1930 it will be curious to see how the area fills out, whether or not ethnic groups continue to cluster and when and if houses change over from one race to another. It will be interesting to see how Truxton became the African American neighborhood that gentrification is slowly undoing.

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