

SPECIAL HISTORY STUDY

Park Building 37: The John T. Reiley Building

1865-1952

Harpers Ferry National Historical Park

Harpers Ferry, West Virginia

final version by:

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based on the report by:

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**National Park Service/University of Maryland
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HISTORICAL RESEARCH PROJECT

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Note on references . . .

The following terms apply throughout the report:

_____ Census	refers to Bureau of the Census, U. S. Census records for 1810, 1820, 1830, 1840, 1850, 1860, 1870, 1880, 1900, 1910, and 1920, as well as certain special Censuses (such as Slave and Manufacturing); most are available on microfilm at Harpers Ferry National Historical Park; some data is only accessible in hardcopy or through the History Database
HFD-____	Harpers Ferry National Historical Park, Document No. . . documents, manuscripts, maps, etc. in HAFE Library
HAFE	Harpers Ferry National Historical Park
HF-____	Harpers Ferry National Historical Park, Photograph Collection numbers
JCC	precedes references to records at the Jefferson County Courthouse, Charles Town, West Virginia
NA RG	National Archives & Records Administration, Washington, D.C., Record Group . . .
Reel ____	references microfilm reels in HAFE library
Reel __, Vol. __	refers to binders in HAFE library of National Archives material photocopied from microfilm
Building Numbers	<u>Park Building</u> indicates current HAFE identification
	<u>H</u> & <u>AD</u> are prefixes from the park's 1859 base map; <u>H</u> signifies "Dwelling House" <u>AD</u> signifies "Armory Dwelling"
WL	Wager Lot; refers to lot numbers in 1835 property division of Wager Reservation

Preface

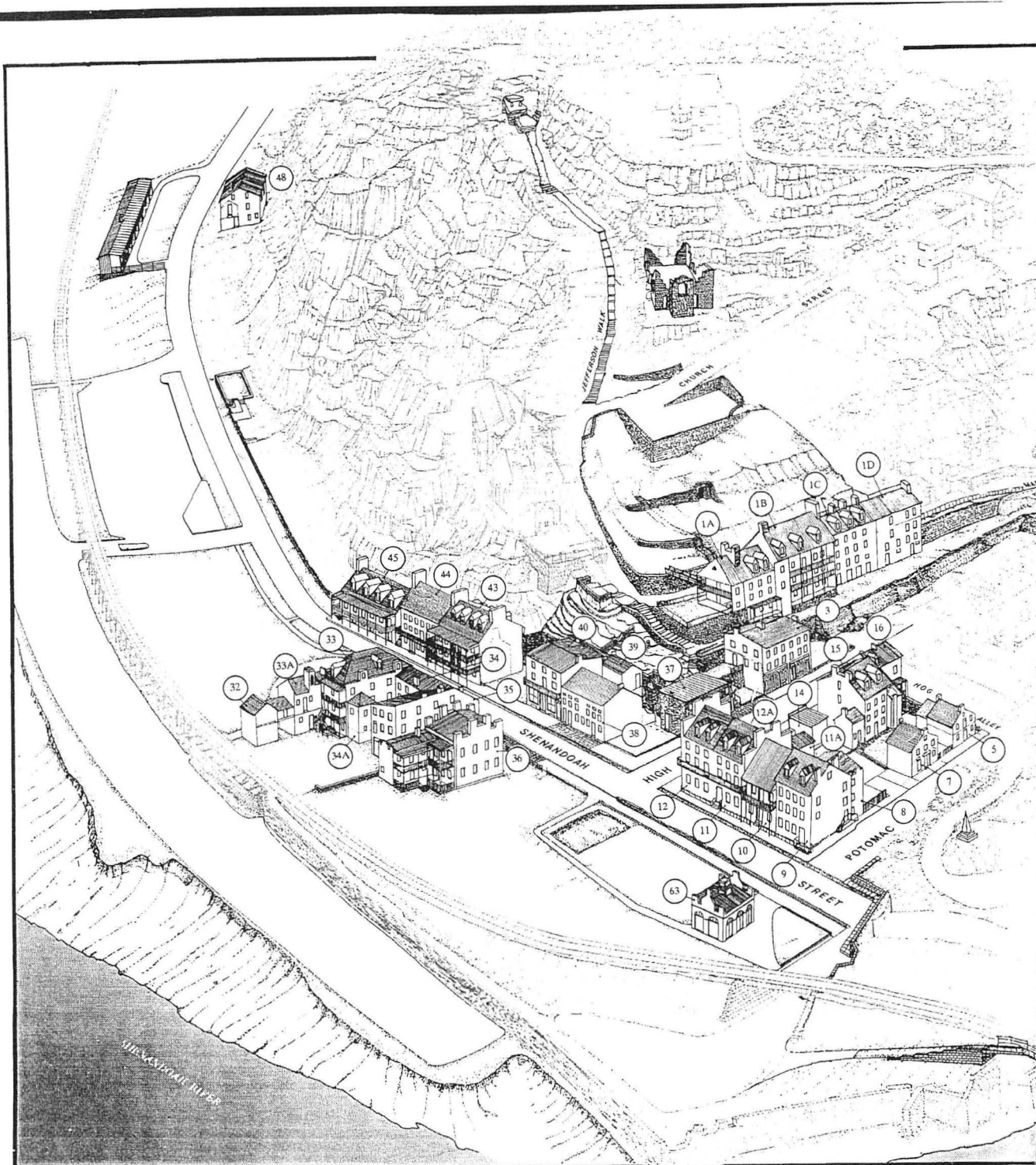
The first draft of this report was prepared in 1990 when planning for a new interpretive exhibit in Park Building 37 mandated an up-to-date history of the structure. The previous study, Charles W. Snell's 1958 report for Building No. 37, reflected the Park's early philosophy of interpreting Harpers Ferry in the context of the John Brown Raid/Civil War era. This report extends the building's history to Park acquisition in 1953.¹

Although Snell's 1958 work provided the foundation for the present report, current research has uncovered data unavailable to Snell. This report, therefore, elaborates on, corroborates, clarifies, and supplements Snell's, and, taken together, the two reports comprise the authoritative history of Park Building 37.

Of particular value to the present work has been the Park's History Database. Begun in February 1989 by a team of historians working at the Park under a Cooperative Agreement between the National Park Service and the University of Maryland, the history database is a computerized index of local newspapers, local censuses and other demographic data, and pertinent property records. The database assists, defines, and supports restoration and educational programs of the National Park Service at Harpers Ferry. It helps determine appropriate adaptive uses and restoration configurations of buildings in Park Service care.

¹Charles W. Snell, "Historic Building Report, Part I for Building No. 37, The John T. Reiley Building," Harpers's Ferry National Monument, June 30, 1958.

Lower Town Harpers Ferry Locator Map



I. OWNERSHIP OF THE LAND: 1865-1952

Harpers Ferry National Historical Park Building 37 on Wager Lot (hereafter WL) 52 fronts on High Street adjoining the historic stone steps on the downhill side. It was named by the Park Service after John T. Rieley, a boot and shoe maker who occupied it from 1853 to 1861.²

The building's site, WL 52, was part of the "Wager Six Acre Reservation," land the Wager family (heirs of eponymous founder of Harpers Ferry, Robert Harper) held back when they sold Harper's lands to the U. S. Government in 1796 for establishment of an armory and arsenal. Wager heirs retained title to WL 52 until December 20, 1889, when the property was sold to James Conway by special commissioners acting for Gerard B. and Ellen A. Wager, both deceased.³

Lot 52 and Park Building 37 figured in the financial affairs of James Conway long before he purchased them. An 1878 deed of *Lis Pendens* (a pending suit in which the court has control over the property involved) revealed Conway placed a lien to satisfy a \$293.83 debt dated March 23, 1873, against the property. The lien involved the one-fourth interest of Catharine and John Schilling (daughter and son-in-law of Gerard B. Wager).⁴

²Snell, "Building No. 37." Wager Lot numbers devolve from the 1835 plat of the Wager Reservation; the plat was drawn to permit the sale of land comprising the share of Wager property assigned to James B. Wager, who was in bankruptcy.

³JCC, Deed Book U, p.336, Deed of Bargain and Sale, Special Commissioners to James Conway, December 20, 1889.

⁴JCC Deed Book G, p.21, Deed of *Lis Pendens*, Catharine M. and John L. Schilling vs. James Conway, November 6, 1878.

Conway's name appeared again in a deed of trust dated July 14, 1885, in which Elizabeth M. Wager (daughter of Gerard B. Wager) put into trust to L. A. Montague, trustee for James Conway, "Lot no. 52 at the foot of the stone steps having on it a stone building or buildings." The release of trust was dated November 2, 1889.⁵

When Conway died intestate in 1911 the property passed to his grandsons, James R. Rau and Charles W. Rau. William O. Rau, their father, was appointed guardian for Charles W. Rau, who was a minor. James subsequently conveyed his interest to Charles. In 1916 Charles W. Rau sold the property to Leo O'Beirne as sole owner.⁶

The property was the subject of two Trust transactions during the 1920s. Leo O'Beirne granted it to Forrest A. Brown in November 1926, and then six months later, in April 1927, Leo O'Beirne and his sister, Katherine O'Beirne Keating granted it to Forrest A. Brown.⁷

Special Commissioners sold the property to the Bank of Harpers Ferry in 1930 to satisfy debts the estate of the late Leo O'Beirne owed to the Levering Coffee Company. The Bank of Harpers Ferry sold the property to C.W. Demory in 1938, who in turn sold it to

⁵JCC Deed Book O, p.120, Deed of Trust, Elizabeth M. Wager to L. A. Montague, trustee for James Conway, July 14, 1885; Release Book 3, p.9, Release, James Conway and L. A. Montague to Elizabeth M. Wager, November 2, 1889.

⁶JCC Deed Book 110, p.75, Deed of Bargain and Sale, James R. Rau to Charles W. Rau, November 11, 1913; Deed Book 118, p.253, Deed of Bargain and Sale, Charles W. Rau to Leo O'Beirne, October 24, 1916.

⁷JCC Deed Book 128, p.92, November 10, 1926, Trust, Leo O'Beirne to Forrest A. Brown; Deed Book 128, p.445, April 4, 1927, Trust, Leo O'Beirne and Katherine O'Beirne Keating to Forrest A. Brown. Between these two trust transactions O'Beirne sold his Wager Lot 54A property to William W. Kronk (Deed Book 128, p.306, February 10, 1927).

the State of West Virginia in November, 1952.⁸

II. PARK BUILDING 37 - CONFIGURATION

Historian Snell concluded Park Building 37 was erected some time between 1803 and 1813. Originally a two-story stone structure with a wooden-shake, gable roof, the present building remains two stories, but has a sloping tin roof and a seven foot addition to its High Street front. Snell hypothesized the latter change occurred after 1917, a conclusion likely based on the 1922 Sanborn map (see Appendix C), which shows Park Building 37 in its original, set-back configuration. However, Sanborns are not infallible. In addition, Snell had access to photograph HF-381 (see Appendix B) which was dated '1930'; recently a date of late 1913 or early 1914 for that photograph has been established.⁹

Newspaper evidence revealed the extension of Park Building 37's front out to the sidewalk dated from rebuilding after December 1913. According to the Spirit of Jefferson, on December 28, 1913, a fire broke out in the A. R. Miles & Sons store (on WL 51 at the corner of Shenandoah and High Streets), consuming that building and all its contents and "the one directly back of it" (Park Building

⁸JCC Deed Book 148, p.331, Deed of Bargain and Sale, Special Commissioners in chancery to E.A. Rinehart, Receiver for the Bank of Harpers Ferry, February 17, 1930; Deed Book 148, p.331, Deed of Bargain and Sale, Bank of Harpers Ferry to C. W. Demory, September 21, 1938; Deed Book 190, p.317, Deed of Bargain and Sale, C. W. Demory to the State of West Virginia, November 29, 1952.

⁹Snell, "Building 37," pp.6,16;

The revised date of photograph HF 381 is derived from numerous newspaper references to the 1913 fire on WLs 51 and 52, and from references to the filling station which occupied the corner of Shenandoah and High Streets from the late 1920s on through the 1930s.

37). Park Building 38 which adjoined the Miles store on Shenandoah Street was also damaged. A Farmers' Advocate news article identified the properties as belonging respectively to the Misses Riddle of Charles Town [WL 51], the Conway heirs [Park Building 37], and the Tearney heirs [Park Building 38]. The Advocate noted the Conway property was uninsured; it had been occupied by William Jackson as a restaurant on the lower floor, and Eugene Shugart Esq. used the upper floor as an office.¹⁰

Note of the fire also appeared in the Virginia Free Press, but that account stated the fire "originated in the small building at the foot of the stone steps leading up to the Catholic church. It belonged to the Conney (sic) heirs and was not insured."¹¹

A week later the Farmers Advocate reported that the "Rau property burnt in the recent conflagration" was being rebuilt, and would be "much larger" (emphasis ours) and more modern when finished. The Rauses were the aforementioned heirs of James Conway. The following week the same source stated that Leo O'Beirne would lease the new building under construction by Mr. Rau "on the burnt corner" and would move his store into it as soon as completed.¹²

On January 31 the Farmers Advocate paper noted:

O'Beirne's grocery under the superintendency of Mr. William Rau is growing into its full size . . . joists of the second story have been placed and the walls are rising to receive the rafters. Much of the old walls however had been left to

¹⁰Spirit of Jefferson, January 6, 1914, p2c3;
Farmers Advocate, January 3, 1914, p4c6.

¹¹Virginia Free Press, January 8, 1914, p3c4.

¹²Farmers Advocate, January 17, 1914, p2c4.

stand. A large cellar was blasted out of solid rock which took many of the days of the open [sic] month.¹³

By mid-March work had progressed so that O'Beirne was expected to begin occupying the building in April, and on April 25 the Farmers Advocate reported:

Mr. Leo O'Beirne, known by young and old as Leo, has moved into his new quarters on High St . . . at the foot of the stone steps. The building has been recently rebuilt by the Conway heirs into an up-to-date storeroom with a wareroom on the second floor and is brilliantly lighted with electricity, which shines through the large glass front and with the additional electric lights on the outside imparts an especial attraction to the spot. Mr. O'Beirne has been in the grocery and confectionery business for eleven years succeeding Mr. William Rau for whom he clerked as a boy . . . ¹⁴

In a deed of bargain and sale dated October 24, 1916, Charles W. Rau conveyed the "two story metal roof store property" to Leo O'Beirne. This description appears to affirm that the 1914 rebuilding brought Park Building 37 to its present configuration. The deed conveying the property to O'Beirne was recorded in 1920.¹⁵

III. USES OF PARK BUILDING 37

A. Pre-Civil War

In his Historic Structure Report for Park Building 37, Historian Snell accounted for the use of the building until 1861, when he contended Rieley closed his boot and shoe manufactory.

¹³Ibid, January 31, 1914, p2c2.

¹⁴Ibid, March 21, 1914, p2c2; April 25, 1914, p2c1.

¹⁵Deed Book 118, Page 253, Deed of Bargain and Sale. Charles W. Rau to Leo O'Beirne, October 24, 1916.

Snell acquired his information mainly from newspaper advertisements in the Virginia Free Press, and from deeds and census records.¹⁶

The following summary of the building's history prior to the Civil War is derived from information in Snell's report supplemented by the History Database at Harpers Ferry National Historical Park.

October, 1782	Sarah Harper, wife of John Wager, Sr., inherited the part of her uncle Robert Harper's estate which contained future WL 52.
February, 1803	N. King and L. Harbaugh made a survey map of Harpers Ferry which shows no building on WL 52.
September 21, 1803	John Wager, Sr. died and John Wager, Jr. inherited land containing WL 52.
1803-1813	John Wager, Jr. built a two-story stone building, Park Building 37, on Wager Lot 52.
October 22, 1813	John Wager, Jr. died and his wife, Catherine Wager, and four minor children inherited Wager acreage containing WL 52 with Park Building 37.
1813-1824	Park Building 37 was leased to Roger Humphreys, probably for use as a general store. Humphreys was Postmaster in 1814, so building could have served as post office.
1828-1831	Building leased by Dr. John R. Hayden as drug and apothecary shop
October 10, 1835	The Wager family real estate was divided among the three surviving children of John and Catherine Wager during the bankruptcy of heir James B. Wager; Gerard B. Wager was awarded WL 52 with Park Building 37.

¹⁶Snell, p.13.

April 1831-
December 1838

Park Building 37 was leased by Adam Young for use as a drug store and apothecary shop

1835

Adam Young, Jr., [probably same person as "Adam Young"] opened a confectionery and fancy store above the drugstore in rooms formerly occupied by him as a dwelling. Adam Whip leased Park Building 37 for use as a saddle shop.

December 1838-
December 1839

February 8, 1839

Gerard B. Wager and wife Ellen A. Wager exchanged land with Noah H. and Sarah A. Swayne reducing the High Street frontage of WL 52 from 43 feet to the width of Park Building 37: 29 feet, four inches. The land taken from WL 52 was added to WL 51, immediately adjacent.

January 1840-
August, 1842

Alfred and H. V. Andrews operated a shoemaker's shop in Park Building 37.

1842- December, 1845

Alfred Andrews opened a shoemaker's shop in Park Building 37.

By 1844:

Deed records reveal that a 1-1/2 story frame building had been erected at the rear of WL 52 for use as a kitchen by Alfred Andrews. In 1854 the frame structure as well as Park Building 37 were offered for sale by the estate of Gerard B. Wager but remained unsold until after the Civil War.

April 1842-
April 1848

The first floor of the building may have been used by Philip P. W. Stephenson as a drugstore.

December 1845-
December 1846

James A. Fitzsimmons operated a bookstore and confectionery in Park Building 37 (possibly in the space adjacent to the Stephenson drugstore).

May 1848-
January 1851

Park Building 37 may have been used by Dr. Joseph G. Hays as a drugstore.

1848 until After
the Civil War

WL 52 was owned by the estate of Gerard B. Wager.

February 1851-
December 1852

Use of Building unknown

January 1853-
February 1861

John T. Rieley operated a boot and shoe shop on the first floor of Park Building 37 and may have resided with his family on the floor above

B. Post-Civil War

There were few newspapers published locally during the Civil War, and documentation of the building in both newspapers and public records after the war is minimal.

The earliest reference to a post-Civil War business in Park Building 37 appeared in a February 26, 1867, Spirit of Jefferson advertisement headed: "Saddle and Harness Making at Harper's Ferry," In this ad Wm. A. Bantz announced he was "prepared at his SHOP IN HARPER'S FERRY on High Street just above the store of S.V. Yantis, to execute all kinds of work in the SADDLE AND HARNESS LINE," and also conduct boot and shoe making business, and will have at all times "a competent hand to attend to this branch of the business." It is noteworthy that Wm. A. Bantz' ad appeared immediately below a similar notice, headed "A New Enterprise" placed by "Bantz & Wachter" of No. 61, West Patrick Street, Frederick (Md.). No connection between the two businesses has been established.¹⁷

Another advertisement signed W. A. Bantz appeared 2 days later in the Virginia Free Press. The wording was more specific: "The

¹⁷Spirit of Jefferson, February 26, 1867, p4c1;

JCC Deed Book 4, p.65, Deed of Bargain and Sale, Noah H. and Sarah A. Swayne to Solomon V. Yantis, August 1, 1865. Solomon V. Yantis' storeroom was located on WL 51 at the corner of Shenandoah and High streets.

undersigned having removed to Harper's Ferry, and taken the house on High Street, one door above Mr. Yantis Store, lately occupied by H. R. Hershbunger." In an adjoining column was a news note:

W. A. Bantz.

Mr. Bantz has removed from "No. 10," Halltown, and has located at Harper's Ferry, where he designs manufacturing, largely, Harness, Saddles, Boots and Shoes of every description. Mr. Bantz has the energy coupled with the means to drive a big business in his department."¹⁸

The reference to "Hershbunger" in the Virginia Free Press advertisement was the only mention of him in the available historical record, so there is no other data on the business he conducted, or the length of his occupation of Park Building 37. W. A. Bantz continued advertising in the Virginia Free Press through April 4, 1867. Thereafter his name never recurred in any local source. Neither Bantz nor Hershbunger appeared on a Harpers Ferry census, and neither name was on recorded Wager leases.

In August 1867 the Spirit of Jefferson carried an article on Harpers Ferry which alluded to "Tom Earnshaw's saloon" located "at the first flight" of the stone steps. This reference is hardly detailed enough to be interpreted as Park Building 37, but the possibility must be considered. The Earnshaw family had resided in Harpers Ferry since 1820 (although they were missing from the 1840 census) and continued in local listings until 1880. Therefore, Park Building 37 could have served as a saloon for a while.¹⁹

¹⁸Virginia Free Press, February 28, 1867, p2c5&6.

¹⁹Spirit of Jefferson, August 13, 1867, p2c7;
Reel 245, Fourth Census (1820), p.535 of Harpers Ferry;
Reel 246, Fifth Census (1830), p.166 of Harpers Ferry;
Reel 248, Seventh Census (1850), p.419 of Harpers Ferry;

The commissioner's sale of the Gerard Wager estate, scheduled for October 30, 1869, was advertised in the September 30, 1869, issue of the Virginia Free Press, although the sale advertisement did not identify specific properties. WL 52 appeared on an S. Howell Brown plat (see Appendix A) of the property disputed in a chancery case.²⁰

It remains unclear, however, how much of Gerard Wager's property, if any, was sold in 1869. A search of deeds in the Jefferson County Courthouse disclosed no evidence of sale of the property between 1869 and 1889, during which time the property was tied up in chancery litigation.

The sale of WL 52 was recorded on December 20, 1889, when special commissioners deeded the property to James Conway. As indicated earlier, Conway possibly used the property before this date, but he certainly had a collateral interest in it (see this report, page 1).²¹

James Conway emigrated to the United States during the Civil War from Limerick, Ireland, and arrived at Harpers Ferry at the end of the War. His 1911 obituary stated he was a clerk for Major Quinn, a wholesale and retail liquor dealer on the corner of

Reel 250, Eighth Census (1860), p.199 of Harpers Ferry;
Reel 137, Ninth Census (1870), p.38 of Harpers Ferry P. O./Bolivar Township;
Reel 138, Tenth Census (1880), p.13 of Harpers Ferry Town.

²⁰Virginia Free Press, September 30, 1869, p2c6. The sale was in accordance with a judgment in the chancery case of Walter Taylor and Lucy Wager vs. the administrators of Gerard B. Wager, deceased.

²¹JCC Deed Book U, p.336, Deed of Bargain and Sale, Special commissioners to James Conway, December 20, 1889.

Potomac and Shenandoah streets (in 1911 the site of Erwin's Drugstore), and that he eventually succeeded to proprietorship of the Quinn store, later moving his store into a dwelling he built.²²

Conway appeared in the 1870 and 1880 censuses as a retail liquor dealer. The 1870 census listed him as owning real estate valued at \$5000.²³

In November 1879 James Conway purchased Lot A7 on Shenandoah Street from the United States and soon erected a substantial building there. Late in the nineteenth century Harpers Ferry chronicler James Barry noted James Conway's presence in the town: "Daniel Ames, who died recently, and James Conway erected . . . fine houses after the war--the last named after the government sale."²⁴

The first time Conway's name appeared in the Spirit of Jefferson for receipt of a retail liquor license was in May, 1870.

²²Farmers Advocate, February 18, 1911, p2c1. Erwin's Drugstore was on former WL 14, present site of Park Building 9.

During the 1870s there was note of both a "Major T. Quinn" and "Matthew Quinn" in the news record. The "Major Quinn" referred to in the obituary almost certainly occupied WL 14, and the "Matthew Quinn" had a business on Government Lot C6. Available information suggests these were two individuals. Matthew Quinn appeared in the 1870 census as a 38 year-old native of Ireland, keeper of livery stable. A liquor license issued to Matthew Quinn in 1871 was transferred to Edward Murphy after Quinn died following a fall.

²³Reel 137, Ninth Census (1870), p.19 of Harpers Ferry;
Reel 138, Tenth Census (1880), p.5 of Harpers Ferry.

²⁴JCC Deed Book 86, p.302, Deed of Bargain and Sale, The United States to James Conway, November 6, 1879. For a full discussion of Conway's Lot A& property, see: Mary Johnson, "Lots 1 to 7, Block A, to Lot 1, Block B, Shenandoah Street (Part of the Old Arsenal Yard), Harpers Ferry National Historical Park (1869 to 1953)," Special History Study, Final Report, National Park Service/University of Maryland, Cooperative Agreement, July 24, 1995.

Joseph Barry, The Strange Story of Harpers Ferry . . . 1st printing by Thompson Brothers, Martinsburg, West Virginia, 1903, 7th printing published by The Woman's Club of Harpers Ferry District (Printed by the Shepherdstown Register, Inc., Shepherdstown, W.Va.), 1974, p.149.

He was issued licenses regularly thereafter. In 1873 the Virginia Free Press announced a meeting of the Shenandoah Bridge Company at James Conway's Saloon.²⁵

Randall's Business Directory for Harpers Ferry for 1892-93 listed Conway's saloon on Shenandoah Street. It is likely this saloon was located on Lot A7, the only property Conway then owned on Shenandoah Street.²⁶

Historic photographs provide some clues to Park Building 37's use. Photograph HF-787, dated 1886, shows a corner of the front porch of Park Building 37 and part of a sign hanging in front of the store reading " . . . IONERY." The sign could have read "confectionery" or "stationery." It likely read "confectionery," as a January 1887 supplement to the Virginia Free Press listed "Decker & Co." under the heading "Baker and Confectioner" on "High Street at the foot of the stone steps," Harpers Ferry. The listing noted a "restaurant upstairs."²⁷

Photographs HF-94 and HF-359, included in Snell's report, were identified as circa 1865. Closer inspection and recent data reveal the photos dated to significantly later in the century.

HF-94 showed the right (northeast) side of the building and the porch and steps leading to the second floor. On the porch

²⁵Spirit of Jefferson, May 3, 1870, p3c2;
Virginia Free Press, July 26, 1873, p3c2.

²⁶Randall's Business Directory of Winchester, Berryville and Front Royal, VA., Charlestown and Harpers Ferry, W.VA. 1892-'93, John C. Randall, Martinsburg, W.Va, 1892, p.53.

²⁷Virginia Free Press, January 20, 1887, Supplement.

outside the second-floor door was a small sign: "Dr. D. M. SCHAEFFER." In 1890 Dr. Schaeffer was a B & O railroad physician, assisting Dr. B. B. Ranson, a prominent Harpers Ferry doctor.²⁸

According to the 1880 and 1900 censuses, D. M. Schaeffer was born in 1867, the son of Emanuel Schaeffer. No other "Schaeffer" family appears in the Harpers Ferry area in this time period (on the 1870 census the family name was spelled "Shaffer"). Schaeffer appeared on an 1892 voter role as a 26 year-old doctor who was a native of the state, county and district.²⁹

The April 19, 1892, issue of the Spirit of Jefferson announced Dr. Schaeffer had just been married "and will live on High Street." In September, 1895, Dr. Schaeffer located at Halltown to practice medicine with Dr. Hurst of Fauquier County, Virginia. He may have retained his Harpers Ferry office, however. Since St. Peter's Catholic Church had not yet been remodelled (1895/96) in photograph HF-94 (showing the Dr. Schaeffer sign), the picture likely was taken between April, 1892, and 1895/96.³⁰

The street lamp beside the Stone Steps in front of the church helps date photo HF-359. According to issues of the Spirit of Jefferson eight years apart, Harpers Ferry first "has public street lamps . . . one step ahead of Charlestown" in 1879; Shenandoah and

²⁸Spirit of Jefferson, December 16, 1890, p3c2.

²⁹Reel 137, Ninth Census (1870), p.19 of Harpers Ferry;
Reel 138, Tenth Census (1880), p.28 of Bolivar District;
Reel 139, Twelfth Census (1900), p.82A of Bolivar Town;
"Oak Grove, Harpers Ferry Dist., Precinct No. 4, 1892" Voter Registration Roll, Entry 722, T. T. Perry Collection, Box 58, Virginia Historical Society. Copy in HAFE library.

³⁰Spirit of Jefferson, April 19, 1892, p3c3; September 10, 1895, p3c2.

High Streets received street lamps in September and November, 1887. Thus photo HF-359 is likely dated between 1879 and 1887.³¹

HF-989 shows the new St. Peter's, and a "GROCERIES" sign on the front of Park Building 37. This same "GROCERIES" sign appears in photographs HF-94 and HF-359, indicating grocery occupation from as early as 1879 until some time after 1896, though possibly not continuously, as the 1894 Sanborn Fire insurance map shows Park Building 37 a dwelling.

The proprietor (or proprietors) of the grocery in this period remains unknown, although it is possible Conway's son-in-law, William O. Rau, had a store in the building. Rau was a Harpers Ferry grocer, and is listed in Randall's Business Directory as operating a grocery at the corner of Shenandoah and High Streets in 1892. Park Building 37 may fit this description, as "the corner of Shenandoah and High" was a nebulous designation. Newspapers reveal, at various times, at least six different merchants in six different locations who claimed to occupy the corner of Shenandoah and High Streets. A more likely location of Rau's store was on WL 51 (on the northwest corner of Shenandoah and High streets), which, according to the 1894 Sanborn map, was a grocery.³²

The Sanborn maps for the years 1902 and 1907 both show Park Building 37 as vacant (and in 1902, "vacant and old"). By 1913, however, and possibly earlier, William Jackson ran a restaurant in

³¹Ibid, May 13, 1879, p3c1; September 20, 1887, p3c1; November 15, 1887, p3c3.

³²Randall's Business Directory. Pages 48-49.

the building, and there was an office on the second floor. References to and an advertisement for William H. Jackson, restaurateur and caterer, appeared in the Farmers Advocate in 1909, 1910, and 1912. Although there were several men named "William Jackson" in and around Harpers Ferry, the one in question may be the William H. Jackson enumerated on the 1910 census as a 35 year-old white male, born in Virginia, whose occupation was listed as "cook/restaurant." William H. Jackson was probably not in Park Building 37 in 1909, as the advertisement that year places him on "South Shenandoah Street."³³

Another William Jackson cannot be discounted, particularly as the Farmers Advocate account of the December, 1913, fire omitted the middle initial "H." William R. Jackson, a 21 year-old black male in the 1880 census, was listed as "waiter in hotel." He did not appear in the 1900 or 1910 censuses. The Harpers Ferry Times reported in February 1906 that a "negro tough" had been arrested while trying to dispose of meat at the restaurant of Wm. Jackson on Potomac Street; later that same year the Jefferson County Court issued "eating house" licenses to both W. H. Jackson and Wm. Jackson. Wm. H. Jackson advertised the "Gem Cafe" opposite the Old Stone Steps leading to Jefferson Rock in August, 1906. And there is the previously cited ad for William H. Jackson offering "fresh first class oysters by the gallon or smaller measure" at South

³³Ibid, December 11, 1909, p4c5; June 11, 1910, p2c3; April 20, 1912, p2c4; Farmers Advocate, January 3, 1914, p4c6; Reel 252, Thirteenth Census (1910), p.181 of Bolivar-Town.

Shenandoah Street in December 1909.³⁴

Accounts of social events in both 1910 and 1912 named "William Jackson" (no middle initial) as "caterer." Those accounts were contemporary with William H. Jackson's documented restaurant operation and closely approached the 1913 identification of Jackson in Park Building 37.³⁵

The second floor office of Park Building 37 was occupied in March, 1911, by F. P. Edgell, D.D.S. Dr. Edgell was described in the Farmers Advocate with his office in the "Conway Building," second floor "as you go up the stone steps."³⁶

Edgell came to Harpers Ferry from Keyser, WV, where he had six years' experience, and lived with his small family on Fillmore "Avenue." Dr. Edgell moved his office from "down in the Ferry" to his Camp Hill residence for the winter of 1911. In February, 1913, he opened an office in Charles Town, while continuing to maintain his practice in Harpers Ferry. In June, 1913, he advertised that he would be in his Charles Town office every day. By late 1913, Dr. Edgell apparently no longer occupied the second floor office of Park Building 37, as the account of the 1913 fire stated the office

³⁴Reel 138, Tenth Census (1880), p.20, p.13 of Bolivar Town;
Harpers Ferry Times, February 2, 1906, p4c1;
Farmers Advocate, April 7, 1906, p2c2;
Harpers Ferry Times, August 3, 1906, p5c2;
Farmers Advocate, December 11, 1909, p4c5.

³⁵Farmers Advocate, June 11, 1910, p2c3; April 20, 1912, p2c4.

³⁶Ibid, March 11, 1911, p2c2; p3c2.

was occupied by Eugene Shugart, Esq.³⁷

When Charles W. Rau (grandson of James Conway) deeded the property to Leo O'Beirne in October, 1916, O'Beirne had operated his grocery business there for some time. In addition to accounts of the rebuilding of Park Building 37 following the 1913 fire (which state O'Beirne would occupy the building as a grocery), the November 7, 1916, issue of the Spirit of Jefferson announced: "Mr. Leo O'Beirne has purchased the building which he now occupies from C.W. Rau for \$1000.00." One reference to O'Beirne's grocery appeared in July, 1916, three months prior to his purchase, when the Spirit reported: "Mr. Garney Conrad has accepted a job with Leo O'Beirne the grocer."³⁸

According to the Farmers Advocate, in 1920 Leo O'Beirne was a successful merchant who, in addition to his "prosperous grocery," owned a restaurant and a pool and billiards hall in Harpers Ferry. O'Beirne was a well-known local citizen during the first 3 decades of the 20th century, and recent interviews have provided a few details on him. In the first Mary Cavalier Dalgarn stated in August 1990 that Leo O'Beirne "always kept animals in cages out in front of his store. He was in the stone building to the left of the steps up to Jefferson Rock." Mrs. Isabel Kern Flanagan in August 1992 also alluded to animals, saying O'Beirne had a cage

³⁷Spirit of Jefferson, September 23, 1911, p2c4; February 18, 1913, p2c7; June 3, 1913, p2c7;
Farmers Advocate, January 3, 1914, p4c6.

³⁸JCC Deed Book 118, p. 253, Deed of Bargain and Sale, Charles W. Rau to Leo O'Beirne, September 20, 1916;
Spirit of Jefferson, November 7, 1916, p3c2; July 18, 1916, p2c1.

with albino squirrels and kept an alligator in a tank of water! Additionally, among papers loaned by Mrs. John Newcomer in September 1992 was a letter signed by Leo O'Beirne attesting to the character of Daniel Newcomer, son of a prominent Camp Hill family and grandson of Storer College founding president Nathan C. Brackett. For more information on Leo O'Beirne, and a photocopy of the character letter, see Appendix D.³⁹

Leo O'Beirne was only forty-five when he drowned in the C&O Canal in August, 1928 (see account in Appendix D). In 1930 the Park Building 37 property was sold to the Bank of Harpers Ferry to settle the late O'Beirne's business debts. While this might indicate O'Beirne was still in the grocery business when he died, the news account of his death states "[he] until recently [emphasis ours] operated a general store near the corner of High and Shenandoah streets."⁴⁰

Another sale occurred, however, before the 1930 settlement. In October, 1928, local papers indicate the property had been sold to Chester L. Sexton for \$2,310. Sexton had operated a meat market across High Street in the "Burton" building (Park Building 14) and planned to move into the newly-purchased O'Beirne building in the

³⁹Farmers Advocate, April 24, 1920, plc6.

Interview conducted by Patricia Craig with Mary Cavalier Dalgarn, August 8, 1990; interviews conducted by historical research staff in August and September 1992 with Mrs. Isabel Kern Flanagan, a Harpers Ferry native & resident until 1947.

Newcomer Family Papers, Mrs. John Newcomer, Harpers Ferry, WV; Daniel Newcomer was Mrs. Newcomer's brother-in-law.

⁴⁰Spirit of Jefferson, August 9, 1928, plc1;
JCC Deed Book 133, p.297, Deed of Bargain and Sale, Special Commissioners to E. A. Rinehart, Receiver for the Bank of Harpers Ferry, February 17, 1930;
Farmers Advocate, August 11, 1928, plc1.

near future. Since no other documentation of this transaction has surfaced, it may have foundered during litigation involving O'Beirne's estate.⁴¹

The Bank of Harpers Ferry held the property for eight years before selling it to C. W. Demory in 1938. Little information has been found on the use of the building in years following O'Beirne's death. The only evidence is contained in the 1933 Sanborn map, which shows the building as a store, and an undocumented photograph believed taken circa 1955 with a sign outside reading "STONE STEPS INN." This was possibly the last business in Park Building 37 before C. W. Demory sold it to the State of West Virginia in 1952.⁴²

⁴¹Spirit of Jefferson, October 4, 1928, plcl;
Farmers Advocate, October 6, 1928, plcl.

⁴²JCC Deed Book 148, p.331, Deed of Bargain and Sale, E. A. Rinehart, Receiver for the Bank of Harpers Ferry to C. W. Demory, September 21, 1938; Deed Book 190, p.317, Deed of Bargain and Sale, C. W. Demory to the State of West Virginia, November 29, 1952.

MAPS

1803 King & Harbaugh Map of Harpers Ferry*

S. Howell Brown plat of estate of Gerard B. Wager, c. 1866**

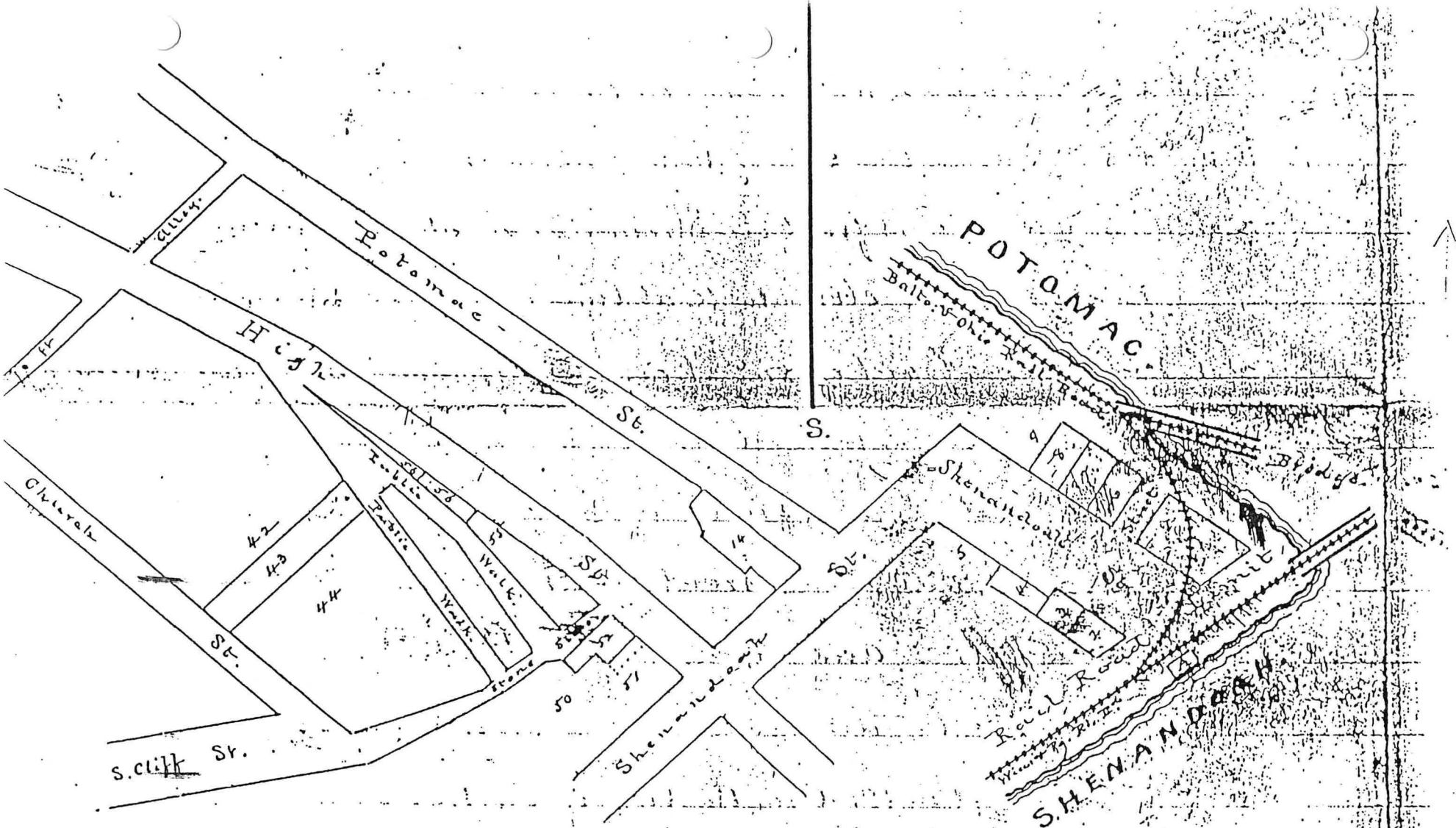
Sanborn-Perris Fire Insurance Maps:	1894
	1902
	1907
	1912
	1922
	1933

* "Plan of the proposed junction of the CANAL at the lower Falls of Shenandoah with the Public Canal at HARPERS FERRY and the necessary Locks for descending into the Potomak River. Surveyed & Level'd by N. King & L. Harbaugh Feby 1803 for the Public & the Potomak Company." [detail from map, National Archives, Records of the National Park Service, RG 79]

** C. J. Faulkner sub-collection, T. T. Perry Collection, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia



1803 KING & HARBAUGH MAP

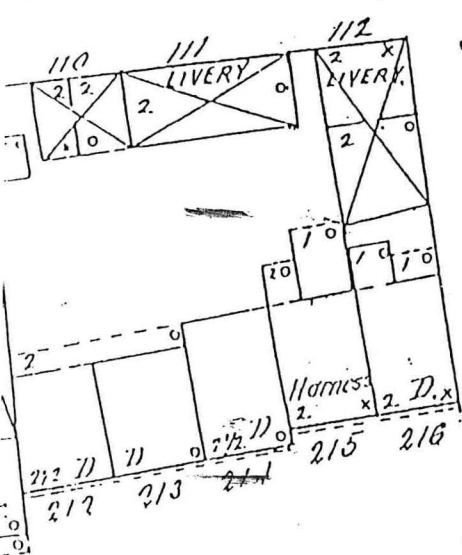


Scale 10 poles for inch.

S. HOWELL BROWN PLAT OF ESTATE OF GERARD B. WAGER c.1866 FROM C.J. FAULKNER PAPERS,
VIRGINIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY, RICHMOND, VA.

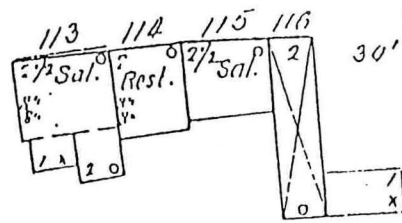
FIVE LINE

AC



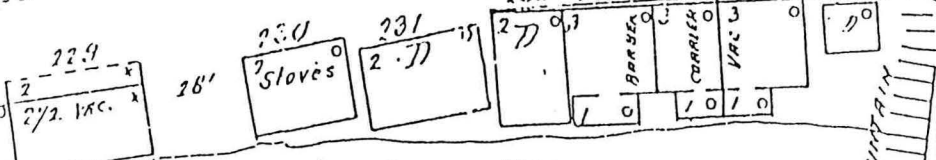
38'

2

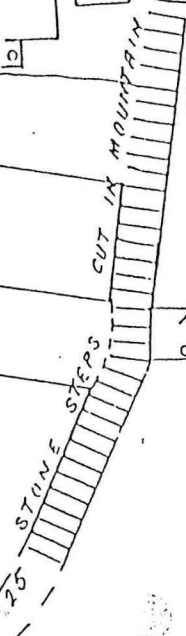


30'

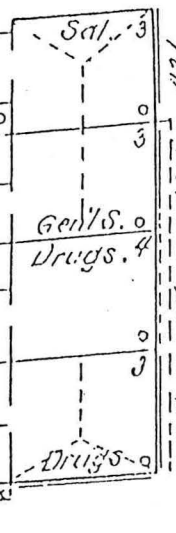
HIGH



ALLEY.

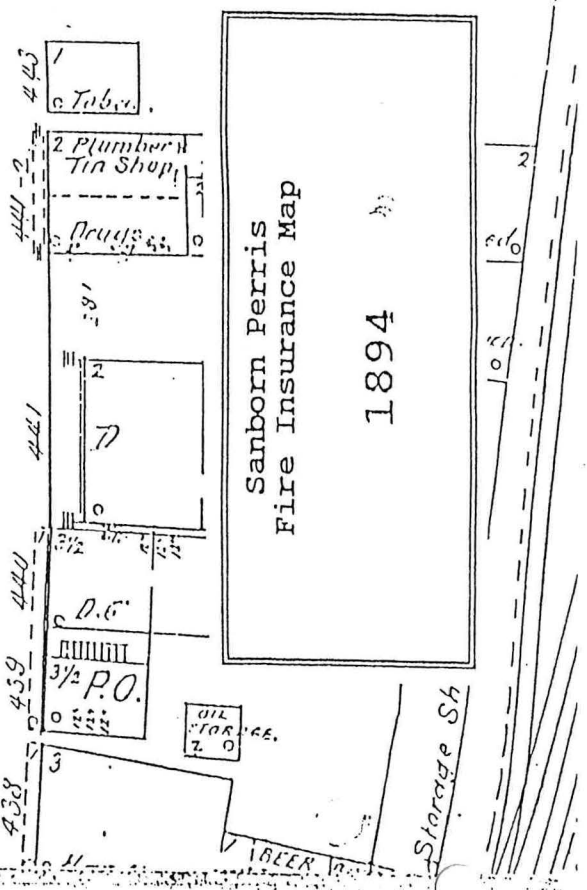
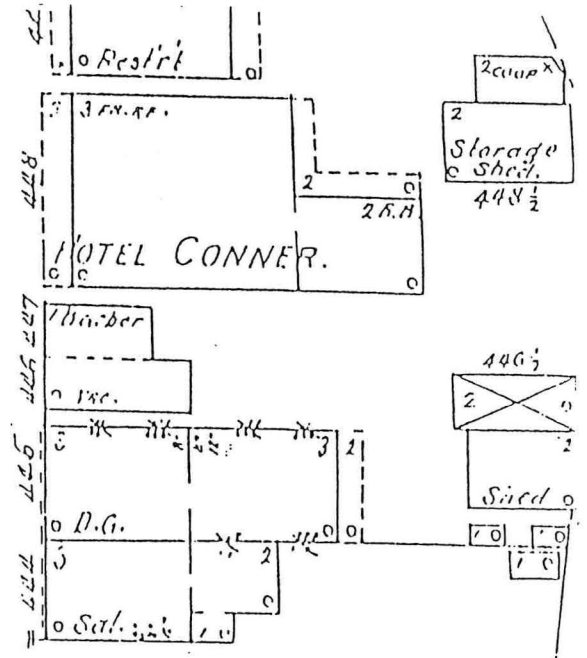


ALLEY HO.



DOAH

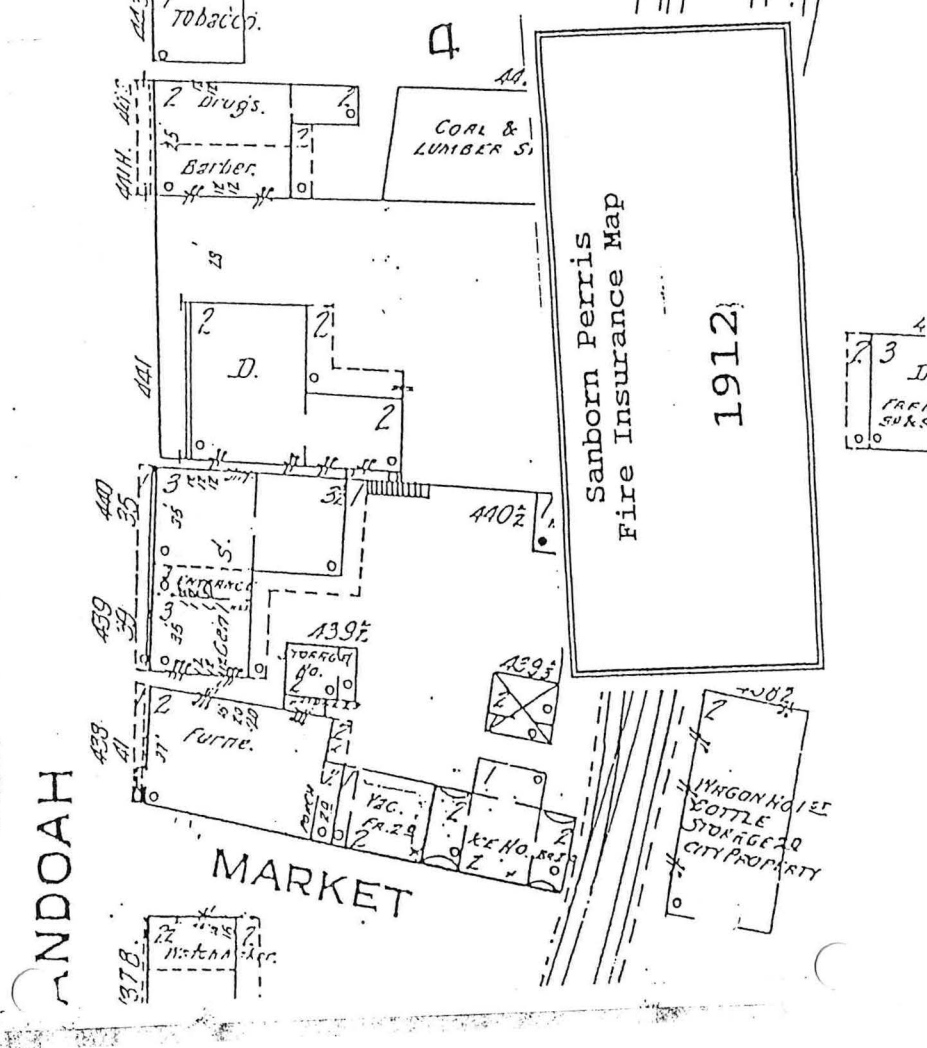
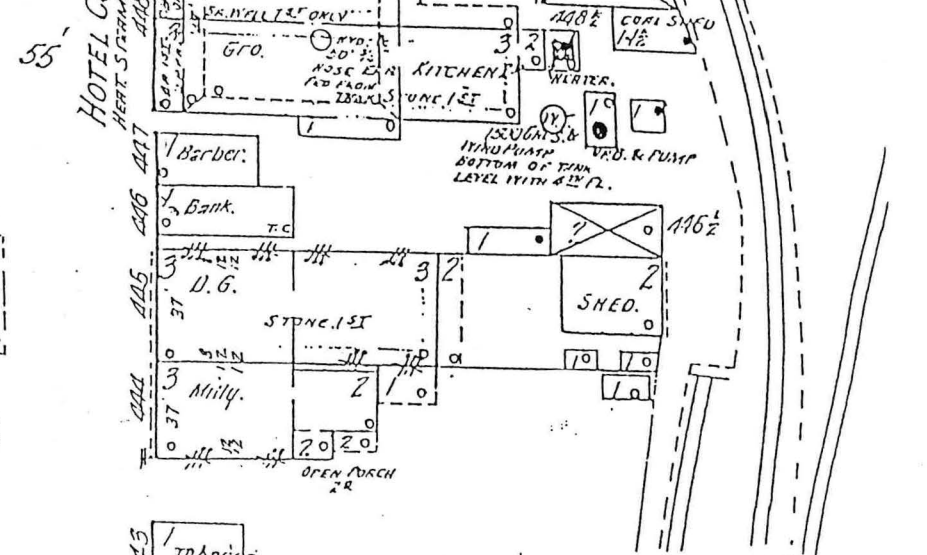
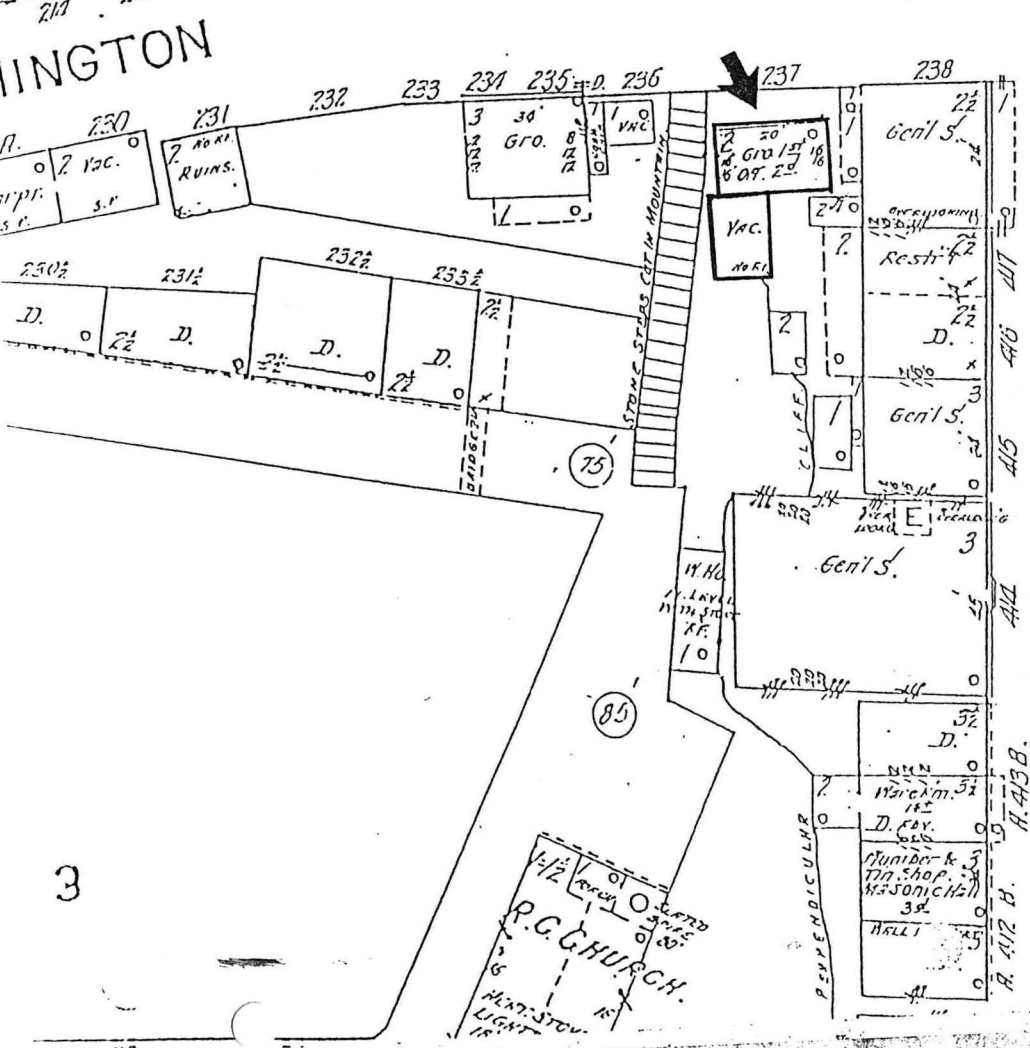
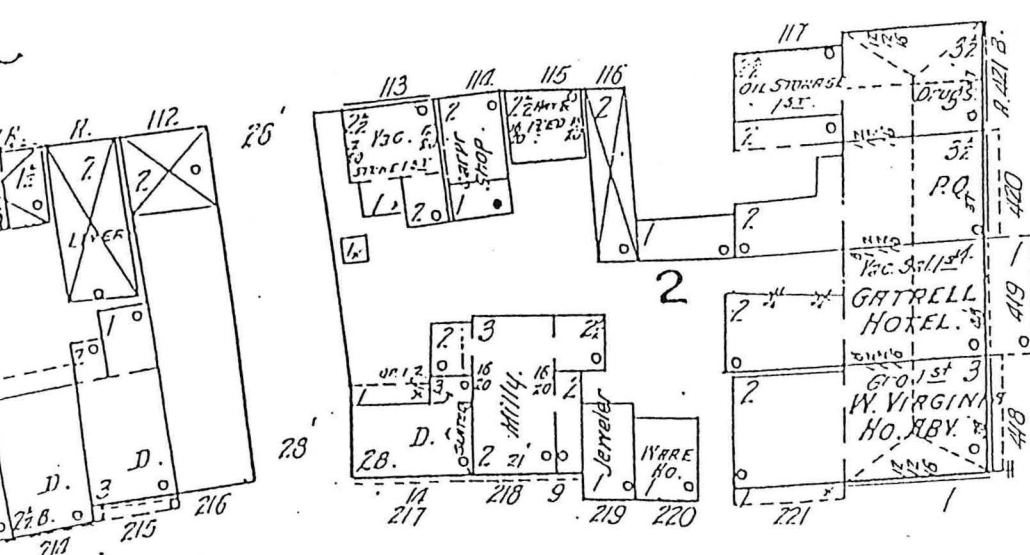
55'

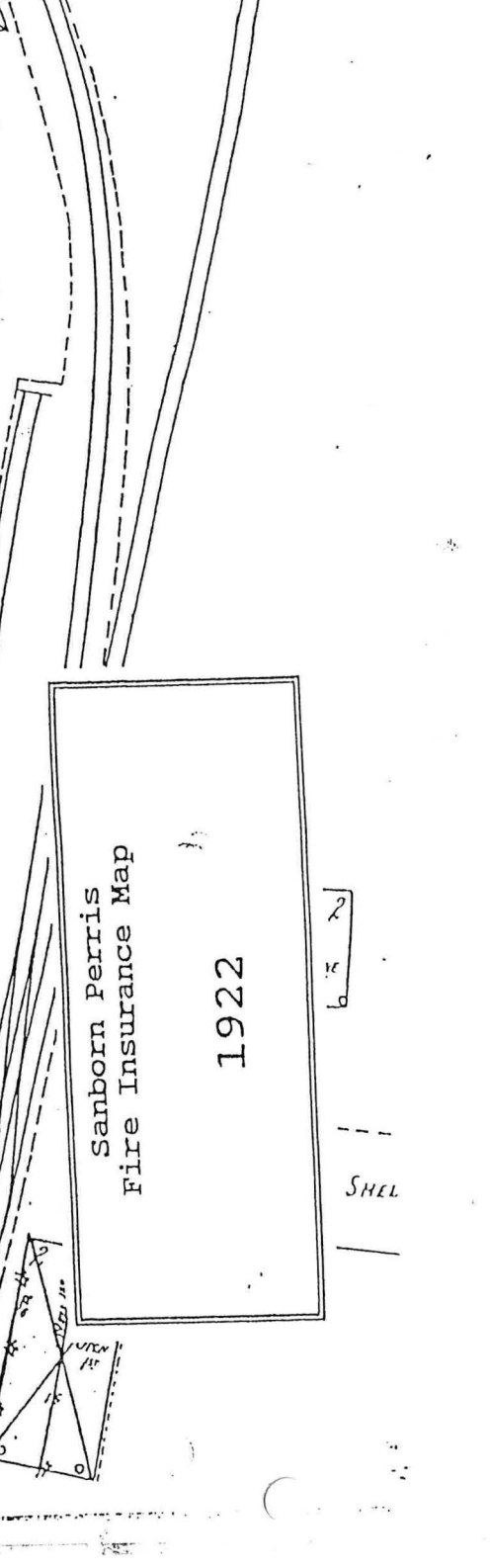
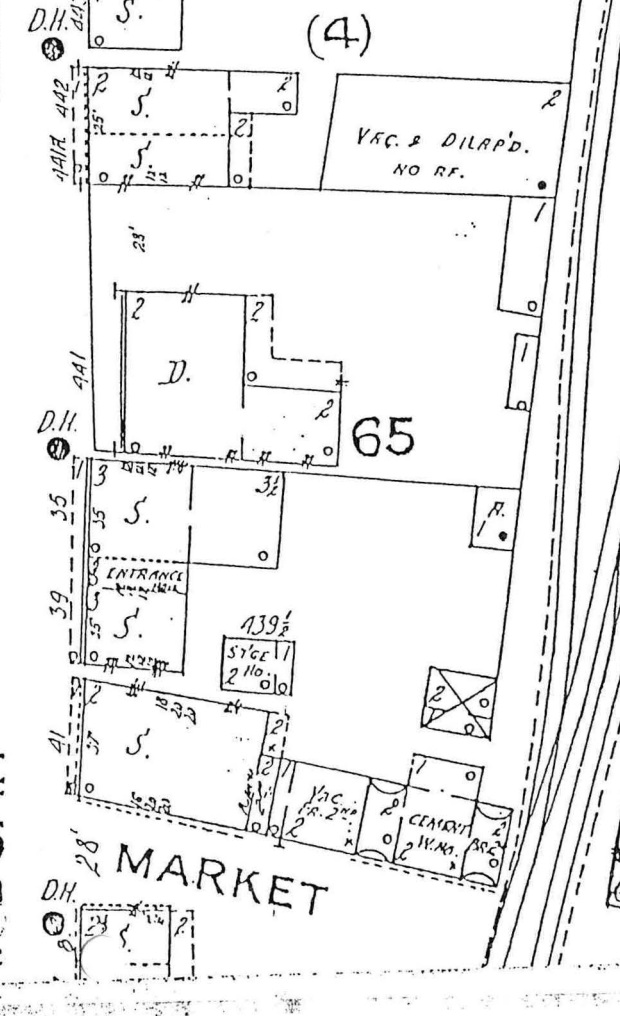
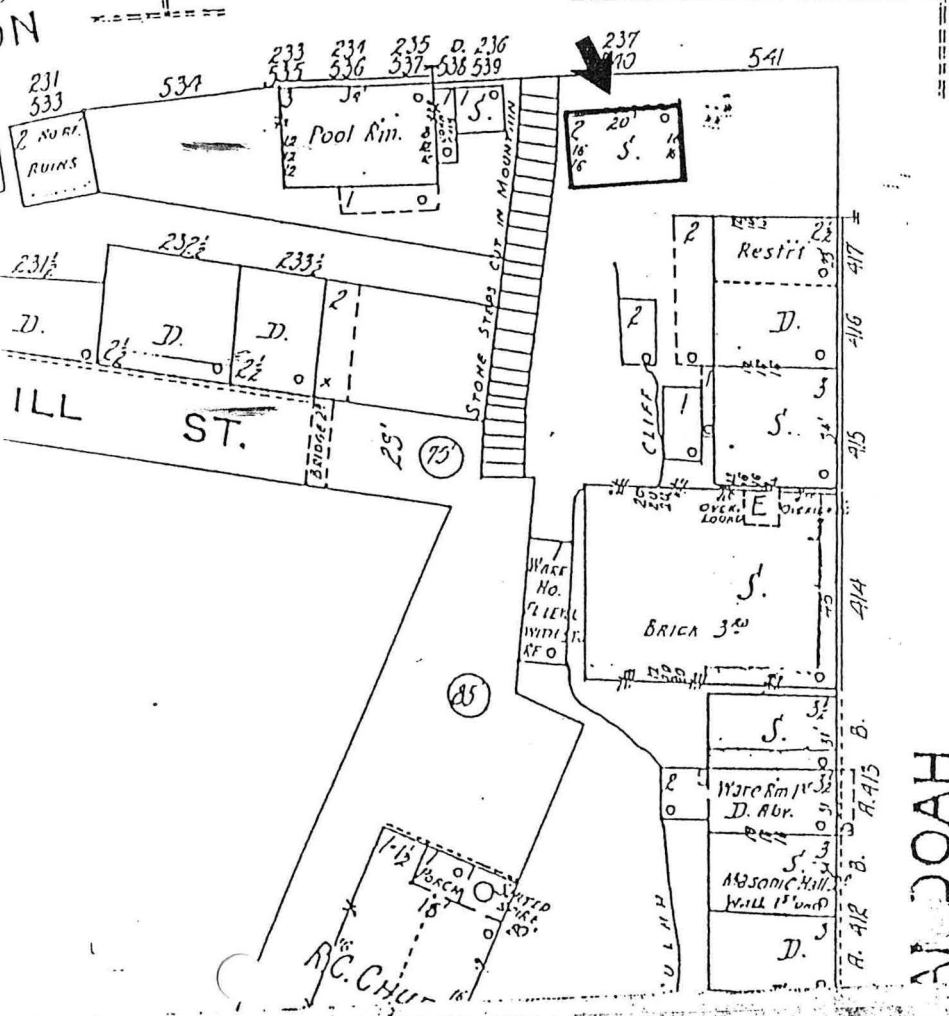
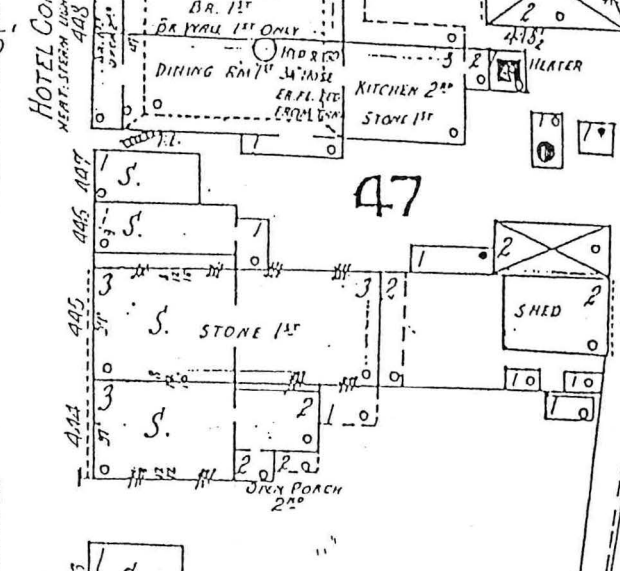
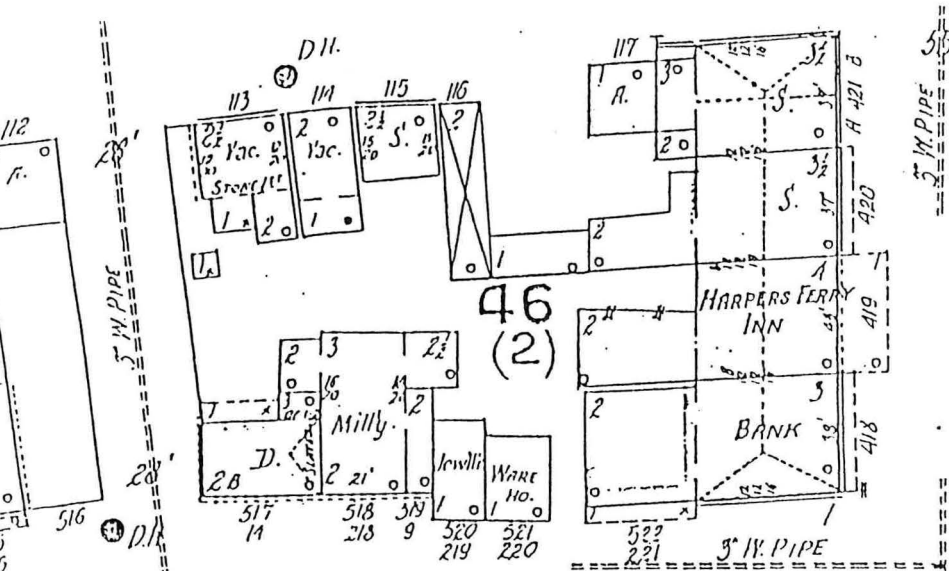


Sanborn Parris
Fire Insurance Map

1894

Storage Sh



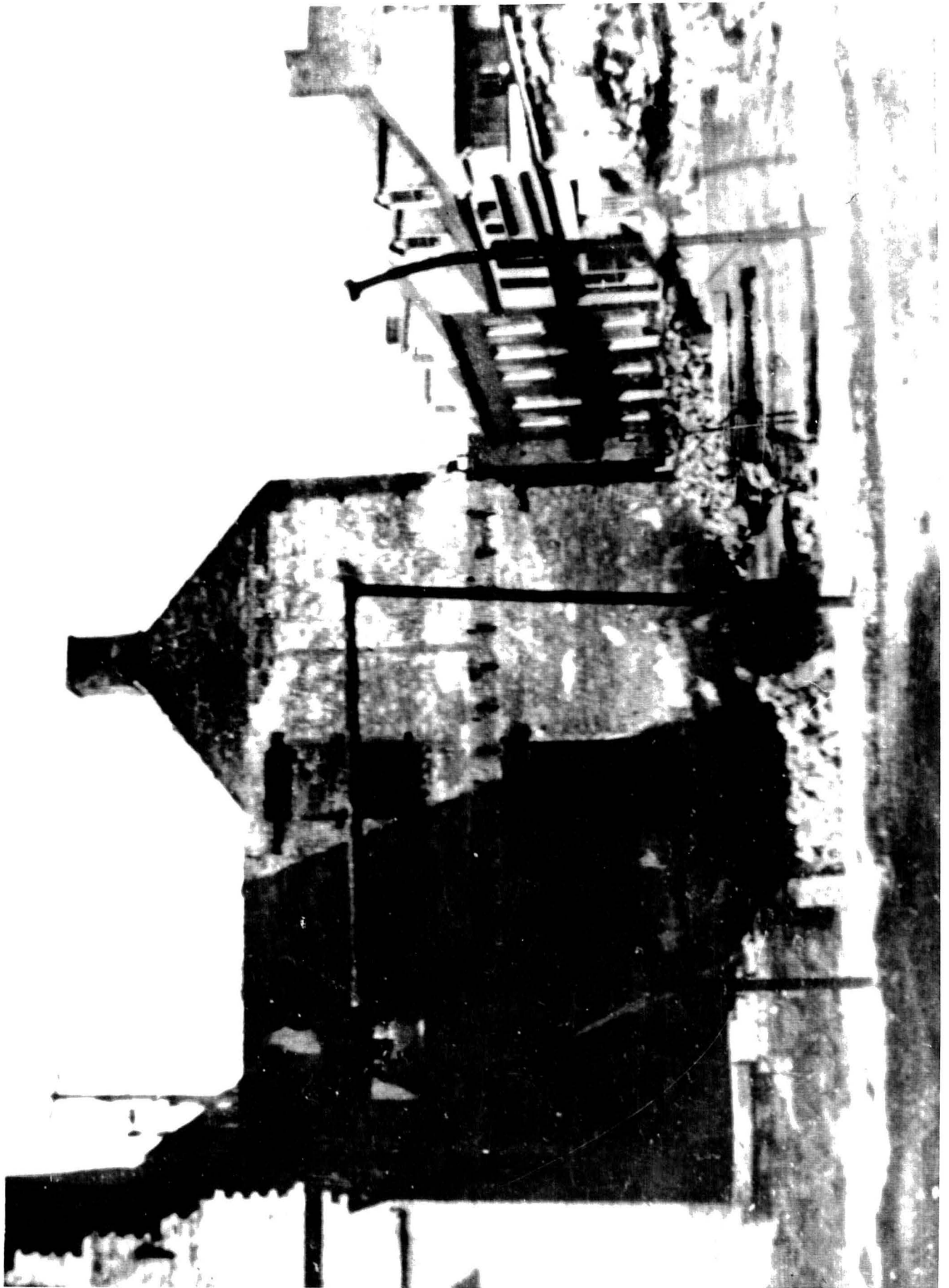


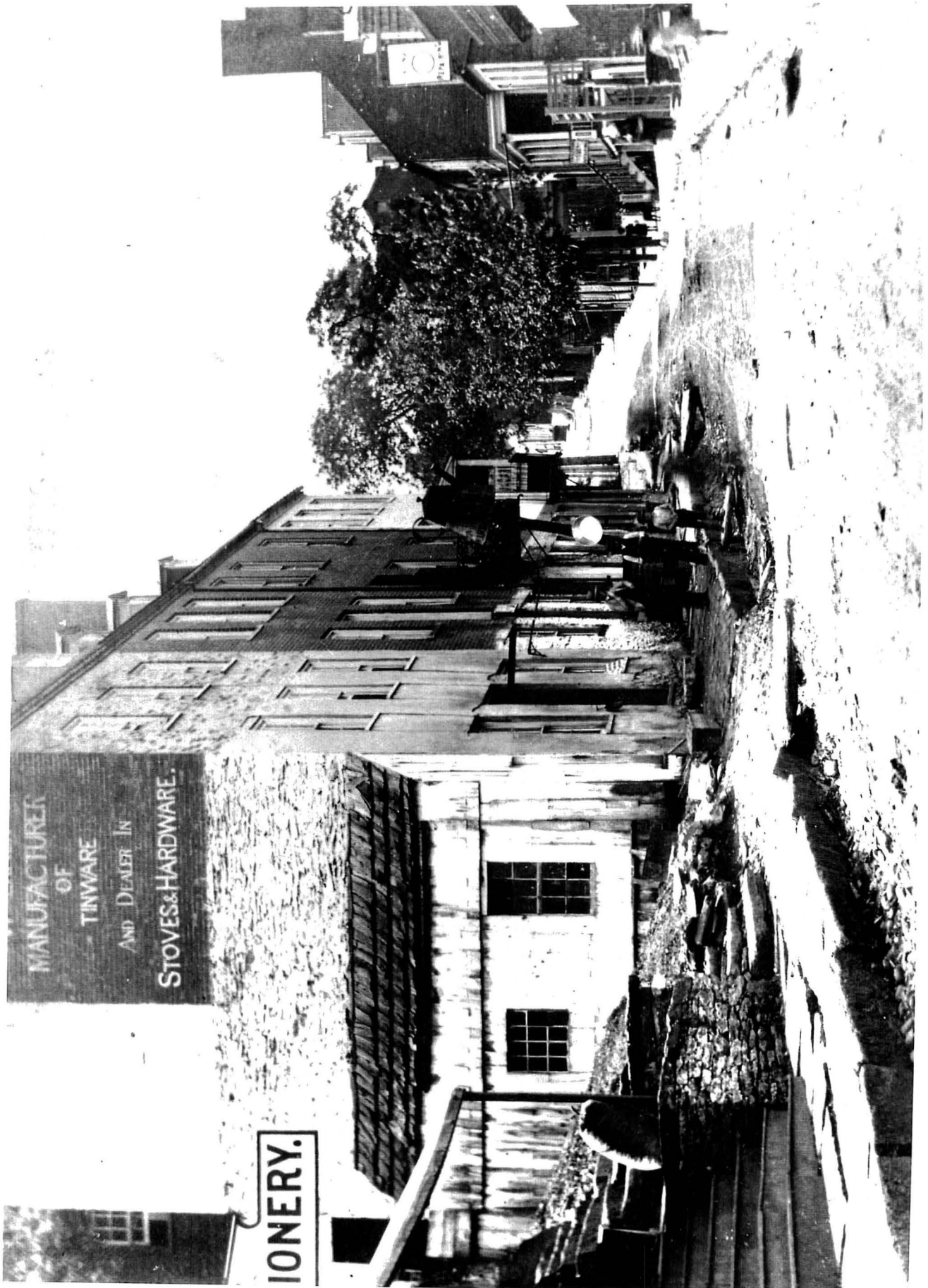


PHOTOGRAPHS:

HF-381: WL 51 following 1913 fire
HF-787: High Street Harpers Ferry c. 1886
HF-94: Stone Steps, c. 1892
HF-359: Stone Steps and Park Building 37,
c. 1879-95/6
HF-989: Stone Steps and Park Building 37,
postdates 1896
HF-1861: O'Beirne's grocery store; c. 1914-1928

* Photographs in Park Library

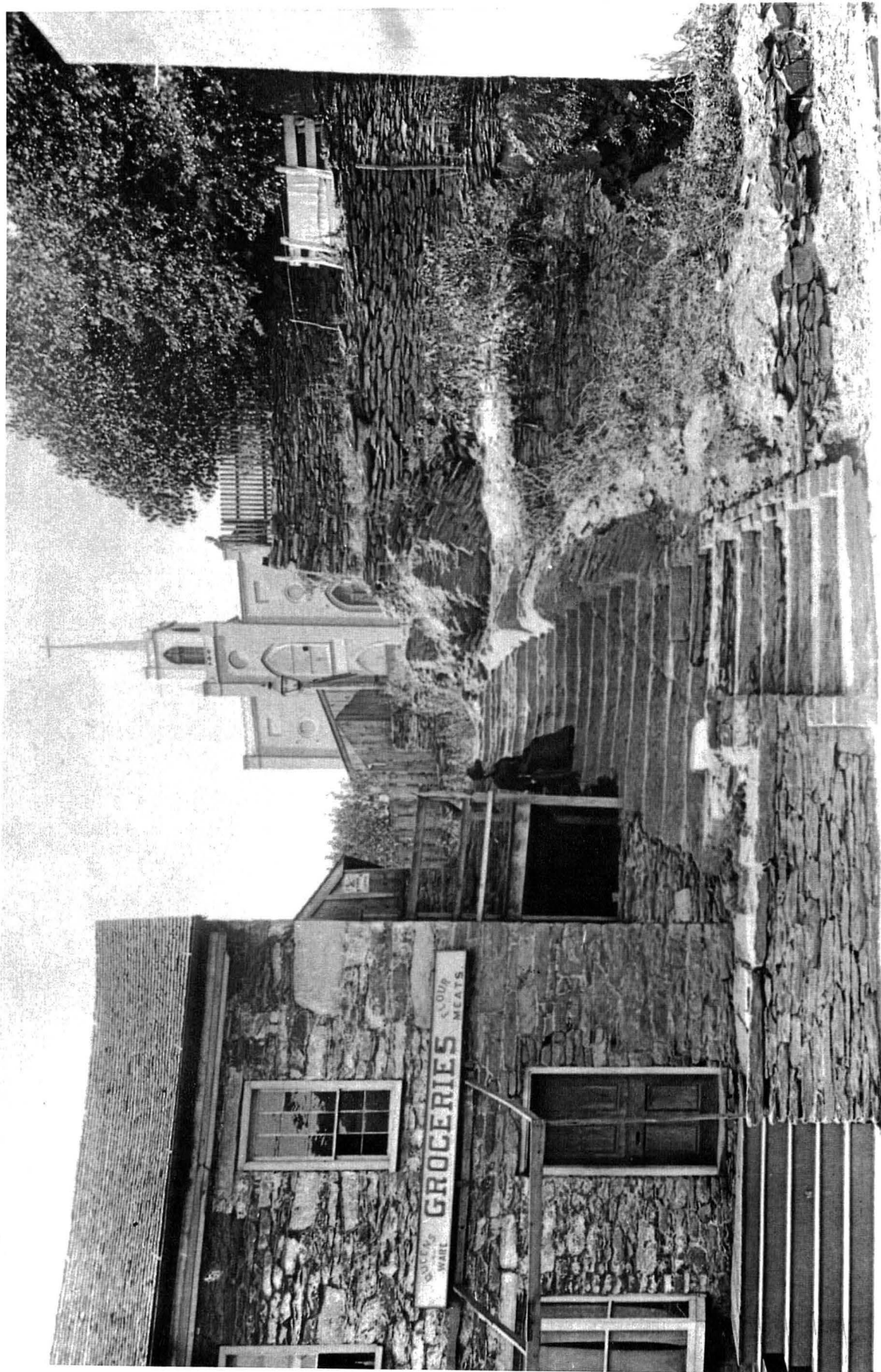




HF-94

CA. 1892





HF-989

1896-1903



HF-1861

1914-1919



LEO O'BEIRNE CHRONOLOGY

Throughout the census, newspaper and deed records, the family surname is variously spelled:

Byrn, Byrne, Obeirn, Obeirne, Obiern, Obierne, O'beirn, O'beirne, O'biern, O'bierne, Oburn, O'burn, Obyrn, Obyrne, O'Byrne, O'byrn, etc., sometimes with the 'B' in upper and sometimes in lower case

Unfortunately the family monument in St. Peters Catholic Cemetery has fallen over and is unreadable. For consistency in this report the name was spelled "O'Beirne," apparently the spelling of choice.

FAMILY BACKGROUND

The O'Beirne family first appeared in the Harpers Ferry Census in 1870. At the turn of the century Leo O'Beirne was apparently the youngest surviving child of Patrick and Ellen O'Beirne.

The patriarch of the O'Beirne clan, Patrick O'Beirne, was listed in the 1870 census under "Byrne;" but there is no doubt that the listing is for Patrick O'Beirne. He was a 35 year-old retail liquor dealer; his wife Ellen (20) and daughters Mary (4) and Kate (1) were also listed. In the 1880 census the family appeared as "O'Beirne." Patrick (45) was a stone mason, followed by Ellen (35) and a string of children including the girls listed above, and sons Frank and William, but not including Leo.

The 1890 census is not available. Patrick O'Beirne was listed, however, in an 1892 Voters Registration Roll as a 46 (based on the 1870 and 1880 census data he would more accurately have been 57) year-old stone mason, native of Ireland, resident of state, county and district for 32 years, naturalized at Baltimore.

In 1900 the family, without Patrick, was recorded as "O'Burn", and included Ellen (60), and the daughters, as well as sons Frank and Leo. Leo's occupation was listed as grocery salesman. Patrick had died on January 13, 1900; his age was reported as 75 (65 would fit with census data).

Leo's age in the 1900 census was 16, dating his birth to 1884. The report of his drowning on August 7, 1928, stated he was 45, affirming his birth in 1883 or 1884. It is somewhat remarkable that in 1905 he was elected to the Harpers Ferry Town Council as he would have been only 21 or 22 at that time.

The 1910 census recorded Leo, age 25, as a grocer living in the household of Ellen O'Beirne. Ellen died in 1920.

Ellen O'Beirne's maiden name was Fitzpatrick. She was the niece of Harpers Ferry merchants Richard and Michael Doran. Ellen, therefore, was a cousin to William and Mary Ellen Doran, who succeeded their parents, Michael and Sarah Doran, in the mercantile business. William and Mary Ellen were succeeded in the business by Mary Cecilia Doran, William's daughter. Thus Mary Cecilia Doran and Leo O'Beirne were also cousins. The Doran name remained active in business in Harpers Ferry through the early 1940s.

CHRONOLOGY

1900 Census; first mention of Leo O'Beirne; 16 year old grocery salesman living in home of mother, Ellen O'Beirne (census spelling was O'Burn)

1903.1120 (HF
TIMES) * Thomas J. Bond was working in Leo O'Beirne grocery store

.1127 " Leo O'Beirne bought goods in Baltimore

1905.0110 (SOJ) * Leo O'Beirne elected councilman at HF on Citizen's Ticket

.0519 (HF
TIMES) samples of handsome pictures & 25 labels of Martinsburg bread given away at stores of M. A. Cavalier & Leo O'Beirne

.1125 (FA) * Leo O'Beirne was on committee for annual Thanksgiving Ball to be given at Hilltop House by "young men"

1906.0109 (SOJ) Leo O'Beirne again elected to HF Council

1906.0209 (HF
TIMES) Leo O'Beirne on HF Town Finance Committee

1907.0104 (HF
TIMES) Leo O'Beirne among local attendees at masquerade ball in Brunswick

* local newspapers are abbreviated as follows:

HF TIMES: Harpers Ferry Times
SOJ: Spirit of Jefferson
FA: Farmers Advocate
VFP: Virginia Free Press

- .1123 (FA) Leo O'Beirne, Harry Stoutzenburger & Bud Evans went coon hunting
- .1207 (FA) Leo O'Beirne among members of Order of Knights of Columbus assisting in initiation of new members into order in Martinsburg
- 1908.0118 (FA) Leo O'Beirne elected to HF Council
- .0502 (FA) Leo O'Beirne elected delegate to Congressional Convention in primary
- .0704 (FA) Leo O'Beirne & friends went with HF team to baseball game in Shepherdstown
- .0815 (FA) Leo O'Beirne listed as participant in charity "home talent" entertainment event
- .1121 (FA) Merchants Leo O'Beirne & Walter Dittmeyer were in city purchasing Christmas goods
- 1909.0109 (FA) Leo O'Beirne lost bid for mayoralty of HF to incumbent C. B. Wentzell; Wentzell slate was said to be pledged to higher license for local saloons
- .0508 (FA) "popular young merchant and politician" Leo O'Beirne was confined to home with illness
- .0612 (FA) pseudonyms for players in 2nd annual baseball game between married & single men of HF; on "Miles' Teddy Bears" team: "Ex-Mayor O'Beirne" (also officially tally clerk)
- .1023 (FA) among pallbearers in funeral for Dr. Irvin McConnell "young men from among his acquaintances here" including Leo O'Beirne
- 1910 Census Leo O'Beirne, Age 25, occupation "Grocer/Store," listed in household of Ellen O'Beirne
- 1910.0115 (FA) T. J. Burleigh & Leo O'Beirne attended boxing match in Baltimore
- .0129 (FA) Leo O'Beirne & Bernard Miles attended a public Ball in Frederick
- 1910.0212 (FA) Leo O'Beirne & Bernard Miles & Misses Anna & Rena Wentzell attended a dance in Palmbaum hall (Charles Town) given by Smart Set Club
- .0917 (FA) account of meeting held by business men of HF & steps taken to oppose substitution of tungsten

lights by legal proceedings; Leo O'Beirne was among those present

- .1119 (FA) L. O'Beirne was to take part in "Robinson Crusoe" to be given in New Opera House by "Home Talent" (also B.J. Miles); note that children's high school parade was in charge of Messrs. B. J. Miles, Leo O'Beirne & Eugene Shugart
- 1911.0311 (FA) "Sarg." Burleigh, Leo O'Beirne, Bernard Miles & others went coon hunting in Loudoun & nearly froze to death; got one coon & had him roasted at O'Beirne's cafe opposite the depot
- .0513 (FA) Messrs. Bernard Miles, Leo & Frank O'Beirne & William Rau will jointly purchase an automobile
- .0527 (FA) Mr. Shep Gatrell & Leo O'Beirne built large cages for their pet grey squirrels in the open outside their business places
- .1021 (FA) Comedy was given in "town hall" to large audience; among players: Leo O'Beirne
- .1028 (FA) Leo O'Beirne "our young townsman with marked sporting proclivities" & Messrs. Reese Cummings, Will Rau & Gus Daily went to the mountain & brought home 2 big coons
- .1111 (FA) Messrs. Louis Becker, Bernard Miles & Leo O'Beirne of Raccoon Club No. 9 of HF attended oyster roast in Baltimore
- .1125 (FA) account of coon roast at "O'Beirn Cafe" opposite the depot
- 1912.0302 (FA) Mr. Will Harrell won a large portable gas lamp chanced off by Mr. Leo O'Beirne & was using it to light his shop window
- .0305 (SOJ) account of ground breaking & parade for new high school; officers at "the hall" included Leo O'Beirne
- .0420 (FA) Mr. Leo O'Beirne "chief of staff" of local hunting fraternity returned with nice fat coon weighing 26 pounds a few nights ago
- .0620 (VFP) Among delegates to Democratic Congressional Convention at Grafton: Leo O'Beirne
- .1109 (FA) Chippy White & Leo O'Beirne brought home 50 odd

rabbits in 2 day hunt

- .1130 (FA) Bernard J. Miles & Leo O'Beirne visited friends in Frederick on return from trip through valley with other friends in their car
- 1914.0117 (FA) report that Leo O'Beirne would lease "new building" under construction by Mr. Rau "on the burnt corner" (rebuilt Bldg. 37)
- .0131 (FA) report that O'Beirne's grocery "is growing into its full size" (reconstruction of Park Building 37 progressing)
- .0425 (FA) "Mr. Leo O'Beirne . . . moved into new quarters on High St. at foot of stone steps. . . has been in grocery and confectionery business for eleven years succeeding Mr. William Rau for whom he clerked as a boy."
- 1914.0728 (SOJ) public sale of real estate in Marmion chancery suit to be held at Leo O'Beirne's store in HF
- 1915.0817 (SOJ) Among members of Boosters Club for Chatauqua to be held August 21-24: Leo O'Beirne
- .1116 (SOJ) Among pallbearers in funeral for Ms. Genevieve Walsh sister of merchant W. A. Walsh: Leo O'Beirne
- 1916.0718 (SOJ) Mr. Garney Conrad accepted job with Leo O'Beirne the grocer
- .1107 (SOJ) Mr. Leo O'Beirne bought building which he occupies from C. W. Rau for \$1,000
- 1917.0109 (SOJ) HF Municipal elections: Leo O'Beirne elected councilman
- 1918.0716 (SOJ) Among election officers appointed by County Court: HF District Precinct #4, Democrat: Leo O'Beirne
- 1919.0107 (SOJ) HF election: Leo O'Beirne elected a councilman
- .0204 (SOJ) Quaker Oats cooker offer; mentioned among HF grocers: Leo O'Beirne
- .0520 (SOJ) "Mr. G. F. Glass bought corner lot in Brant District." Adjacent was "George O'Biern's store" which stands on site of cabin of Peter Stevens, half breed indian who owned ferry; site is at foot of stone steps

- 1920.0106 (SOJ) Elected councilman at HF: Leo O'Beirne
- .0413 (SOJ) Among election officers appointed by County Court:
HF District Precinct #4: Leo O'Beirne
- .0608 (SOJ) Among applicants to County Court for Sunday
licenses: Leo O'Beirne for eating house/restaurant
- 1921.0111 (SOJ) Elected councilman at HF: Leo O'Beirne
- .0612 (SPECIAL ARTICLE FROM WASHINGTON SUNDAY STAR)
full page story on HF with 6 photos; includes note
on "frame lunch room of Leo O'Beirne seen "as you
come down the station platform steps" which has as
cook famous old dining car cook called "Pidgey"
- 1922.0107 (FA) Loudoun Valley cornet band played concert "before
Leo O'Beirne's store where there was a bright
light." Leo took them to his restaurant for a
treat.
- .0429 (FA) Loudoun County band performed for HF people in front
of Leo O'Beirne's store
- .0603 (FA) comment on council bringing water into lower town
along Shenandoah Street & up to O'Beirne's where it
meets pipe laid to that point from source on Camp
Hill
- 1923.0106 (FA) "Extremely tasteful decoration" of windows in Leo
O'Beirne's store was done by young school boy Tommy
Kern;
note on calendars given out by local businesses
states Leo O'Beirne gave customers choice of 3
subjects;
old Wentzell cigar shop was purchased by Leo
O'Beirne & would be pulled up to a vacant lot on
High St.
- .0410 (FA) Mr. Leo O'Beirne completed excavation of lot on High
St. to which he would move "one of the old
landmarks of HF," the building occupied by the late
Mr. Wentzell, tobacconist
- 1926.0707 (SOJ) Obituary of James Lovett, 75, "widely known" cook
in hotels & restaurants of HF for many years; last
employed in restaurant of Leo O'Beirne
- .0804 (SOJ) attorneys for town of HF admitted imprisonment
without just cause in 2-week detention of "Lee"
O'Beirne on drunken charge; action was on
instigation of Mayor Shirley Rockenbaugh of HF;

- \$100 fine paid by O'Beirne was returned to him on his release
- .1110 Deed Book 128, Page 92: Trust transaction. Leo O'Beirn granted Wager Lot 52 to Forrest A. Brown.
 - .1215 (SOJ) A. Kaplon of HF to hold public sale of miscellaneous articles opposite O'Beirne's store at HF. (note: Kaplon had recently gone out of business downtown)
 - 1927.0210 Deed Book 128, Page 306: Deed of Bargain and Sale. Leo O'Beirn sold Wager Lot 54A to William W. Kronk.
 - .0404 Deed Book 128, Page 445: Trust transaction. Leo O'Beirne and Katherine O'Beirne Keating granted Wager Lot 52 to Forrest A. Brown.
 - 1928.0308 (SOJ) among recent donors to Charles Town hospital from HF: Leo O'Beirne
 - .0807 (FA) report on drowning in Canal of Leo O'Beirne (see attached transcript)
 - .0927 (SOJ) appraisers of estate of late Leo O'Beirne fixed valuation of \$2,613.35 of which \$2,000 was store building in HF & remainder was stock, fixtures & personal articles
 - .1004 (SOJ) Mr. K. K. Cavalier will sell personal property in estate of late Leo O'Beirne;
Mr. C. L. Sexton of Loudoun County purchased High St. HF Building owned by late Leo O'Beirne who operated a grocery store there; Mr. Sexton with Mr. Roy Butts operated a meat market in the Burton bldg. opposite the O'Beirne bldg.; they would move into newly-purchased building in near future
 - 1929.0620 (SOJ) notice of chancery suite of Levering Coffee Co. & other creditors of Leo O'Beirne deceased Vs. K. K. Cavalier administrator of Leo O'Beirne; named Frank O'Beirne, Kate O'Beirne Keating, Bank of HF, Forrest A. Brown, Trustee
 - .1107 (SOJ) notice of public sale of HF real estate in chancery suit of Levering Coffee Co. etc. Vs. K. K. Cavalier administrator of Lee O'Beirne & others etc. in front of Bank of HF; real estate in HF of which Leo O'Beirne died seized & possessed included lot with building & improvements conveyed to Leo O'Beirne by C. W Rau by deed of 1916.1024 (Bldg. 37)

1931.0218 (SOJ) report of K. K. Cavalier administrator of Leo O'Beirne showing distribution of all funds was confirmed & case of Levering Coffee Co. Vs. K. K. Cavalier ordered retired from docket

TRANSCRIPTION OF REPORT FROM FARMERS ADVOCATE OF DROWNING OF LEO
O'BEIRNE, AUGUST 7, 1928 *

HARPERS FERRY--BOLIVAR

LEO O'BEIRNE, MERCHANT, DROWNED IN CANAL--
PERSONAL NEWS OF THE TOWNS.

This section of the county was shocked early Tuesday morning when it became known that the dead body of Leo O'Beirne had been found in the waters of the C. & O. Canal at Goodhart's lock, a half mile up the Potomac river from the highway bridge. Mystery surrounds the case. It was first reported that he had been drowned. Lacerations found on chest, arms and head, gave rise to a suspicion that he had met with foul play. Authorities in Washington county, Md., where the casualty occurred, summoned a coroner's jury early Tuesday morning. After hearing the testimony of some witnesses, the coroner's court adjourned, returning a verdict that the unfortunate man came to his death by drowning. Mr. O'Beirne, who until recently operated a general store near the corner of High and Shenandoah streets, was at one time one of the most popular merchants of the town. In addition to his store business, he conducted a lunch room successfully near the entrance to the bridges. He was a life-long resident of the town, his father, the late Patrick O'Beirne having been town sergeant here years ago. Deceased, who was about 45 years of age and unmarried, leaves one brother, Frank O'Beirne, and one sister, Mrs. Kate Keating, both residents of Harpers Ferry. Funeral services were held at 10:30 o'clock Thursday morning in St. Peters Catholic Church. Interment was in the Catholic Cemetery.

Witnesses before the coroner's jury said that Mr. O'Beirne fell into 16 feet of water in the canal and was unable to save himself. His sister Mrs. Kate Keating, was with him at the time and jumped into the water in an effort to save her brother. She had become almost exhausted in the unsuccessful effort when Gordon Goodheart heard her screams and went to her rescue.

* Farmers Advocate, August 11, 1928, p1c1.

Note: portions of the account are difficult to read due to poor microfilming, but the above is an accurate transcription.

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PRIMARY SOURCES:

Censuses of the United States, Harpers Ferry region. Microfilm at Harpers Ferry National Historical Park.

Historic Photographs from the collection of Harpers Ferry National Historical Park.

History Database at Harpers Ferry National Historical Park (an index to demographic, newspaper, and property records relevant to the Harpers Ferry Park area)

Newcomer Family Papers, collection of Mrs. John Newcomer, Harpers Ferry, WV; some items in document file, Harpers Ferry National Historical Park.

Personal Interviews:

Mrs. Mary Cavalier Dalgarn. Conducted by Patricia Craig, August 8, 1990.

Mrs. Isabel Kern Flanagan. Conducted in several sessions during August and September, 1992, by Patricia Chickering, Michael A. Jenkins, and Carol Petravage, with contributions from John Barker and Mary Johnson. Transcript in library, Harpers Ferry National Historical Park.

Public Records (Deeds, Wills, etc.): Jefferson County Courthouse,

Charles Town, WV

S. Howell Brown plat of estate of Gerard B. Wager, c. 1866. C. J. Faulkner sub-collection. T. T. Perry Collection. Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, VA.

Sanborn Perris Fire Insurance maps; Reel 255; original documents at Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

T. T. Perry Collection. Virginia Historical Society. Richmond, Virginia.