

Benjamin Reiss

(- 25 Feb 1880)

The Evening Star, September 10, 1859

Musical Instruction.

The following is a list of musical instructors, in the city, now ready for the application of pupils--as will be seen more fully by reference to our advertising columns:

Benjamin Reiss. Professor of Music, proposed to receive a few more pupils on the piano and guitar, and vocal music in connection therewith. Residence, 287 G street, between Fourteenth and Fifteenth.

Washington Post, June 26, 1880, p. 3

City Talk and Chatter

The marriage of the late Benjamin Reiss with Elizabeth Slathwer, shortly before his death and the ante-nuptial settlement he made on her of the property 1406 G street, is to be made the subject of a suit in equity by the children by former marriages on the ground that both were procured by fraud while their father was suffering from a marrying mania in old age. No suit was filed up to the close of business yesterday.

Reiss. On Wednesday evening, February 25, 1880, Benjamin Reiss in the 71st year of his age. Friends of the family and members of the Oldest Inhabitants Society are respectfully invited to attend the funeral from his late residence, No. 1406 G street, n.w. on Saturday, 28th instant at 3 o'clock p.m.

The Evening Star, February 26, 1880

Mr. Benjamin Reiss, a well known teacher of piano and vocal music, and a resident here for over thirty years past, died quite suddenly last night at his residence, on G street, near 14th street northwest. Mr. Reiss came to this country when quite a young man, and after residing a short time in Baltimore came here and established himself as a music teacher. Here for over a quarter of a century he has quietly pursued his avocation making friends generally with all with whom he came in contact. He was always bright and cheerful and was highly esteemed by a large circle of acquaintances.

The Evening Star, February 23, 1910

Razing Old House

Old Reiss Mansion on G Steet Being Torn Down

Landmark of the Capital

Had Many Prominent Men as Its Guests Before the Civil War

The forward march of improvements is slowly but surely obliterating many of the landmarks of the Washington of past generations, and nowhere is this more true than in the downtown section of the capital. Modern buildings are replacing the older structures on nearly all of the streets of the business district, and it may safely be said that only a few more years will suffice to wipe out the few reminders of civil war times which are yet standing.

Only last week the wreckers began razing old St. Matthew's Church, 15th and H streets northwest, the doom of that building having been written when the Southern Building Corporation determined to construct a modern office building for the Southern Commercial Congress--and within the current week

the old Reiss mansion, 1406 G street northwest, which in recent years has been used as an office building, came under the hands of the destroyers. It will give way to the new District National Bank building.

In Family Sixty Years

The ground at 1406 G street has been in the Reiss family, of which Benjamin W. and William Reiss and a couple of the latter's grandchildren are the only living lineal descendants, for more than sixty years. Benjamin W. Reiss is secretary of the Association of Oldest Inhabitants of the District of Columbia. The property first came into the family in 1845, when it was purchased by Benjamin Reiss, father of the present generation of Reisses. It was a vacant lot when Benjamin Reiss took title, and he secured it for 3 1/2 cents a foot. The property was sold a short time ago to object W. Harper, president of the District National Bank, to be used as the site for the new home of that institution, and in that transaction the ground brought \$30 a foot, or a total of \$86,750, without consideration of the old brick house which stood upon it.

The first building constructed upon the premises by Benjamin Reiss was a frame dwelling. This was finished in 1855, and it stood only three years, for in 1858 it was removed to permit the construction of the big brick house which is just now being demolished.

In the fifties the dwelling was considered of unusually large size, and it was finished with all of the rare attention in detail characteristic of the period. All of the wood which entered into its construction was turned and trimmed by hand.

Built as Boarding House

The dwelling was built by Benjamin Reiss as a boarding house, and in those days there were very few houses or hotels which provided accommodations of the style desired by the congressmen and the dignitaries of church and state who were constantly passing through the capital. When this house was completed it at once leaped into popularity and the fame of the Reiss boarding house spread apace. Many of the rooms were the scenes of impromptu gatherings of the greatest brilliancy in the palmy days before the war--and when the clouds of civil strife obscured the land not a few councils of the most serious import were held behind closed doors within its walls. G street then was only a dirt road, dusty or muddy as the rules of the seasons ordered, and the sidewalks existed more in name than in fact.

The house numbered among its guests at various times some of the most famous men and women in the country. Gen. Don Carlos Bitrell was among the first to make it his home, and A. Dudley Mann, afterward commissioner at Rome, representing the Confederate government before the pope, also stopped there before the war; L.O.B. Branch, member of the House from North Carolina, was a lodger with Mr. and Mrs. Reiss while he was in Washington to attend the sessions of Congress. When his state seceded, Representative Branch became a general in the Confederate army, and was killed in battle in 1862. Another tenant for a time was Gen. A.P. Hill, who became one of Lee's most trusted commanders and who also was killed in action in April 1865.

Gen. Pickett Stopped There

Gen. Samuel Jones, afterward a leader in the Confederacy, lived at 1406 G street before the war, as did Gen. Pickett, whose division made the celebrated charge at Gettysburg, and Admiral John Rodgers. Representative Alfred Ely of Rochester, N.Y., left the G street house with several others on a sightseeing picnic to the battle of Bull Run, and did not see the Northland again for months, because he was among those captured and imprisoned at Richmond. Leutze, the artist who painted the picture "Westward Ho!" which hangs in the Capitol, performed that work of art while living in the house, and it is said he incorporated Mrs. Reiss and one of her daughters in the painting.

One of the most picturesque characters who ever called the house his home was Count Gurowsky, the irascible Pole, whose diary caused his expulsion from the country. It was Count Gurowsky that Abraham Lincoln is said to have characterized as the only man he personally feared. Other famous folks whom the old house sheltered included Charles O'Neill of Philadelphia, at one time nestor of the House of Representatives, and Mary Clemmer Ames, who there wrote her memoirs of the Carey sisters.

After it ceased to be a lodging house, the old dwelling was used as an annex to the Riggs House, and after that it was the home of the Wimodausis Club. Its usefulness as a residence ended about eighteen years ago, and it became an office building. The new District National Bank building, which will occupy the site, will be completed in about a year.