

A Story of a Devoted Family and the History and Development of the Waldkirch Subdivision

The Waldkirchs emigrate to the U.S. in the mid-1800s, settle in Tennessee

To know the full history of 906 Bradford Avenue and the Waldkirch Subdivision requires a look back through almost 200 years of history. Caroline Woehle (Born January 17, 1824) emigrated from Baden, Germany to the United States in 1847, and Bernhard Waldkirch (Born August 1828) emigrated from Switzerland to the United States in 1851. After Caroline and Bernhard found each other in the U.S., they married in Cleveland, Ohio on January 18, 1855, and they immediately started a family. They lived in Ohio and then Indiana, but after the Civil War ended in 1865, within two years Bernhard and Caroline and their four children (August, Emma, Sophie, and Oscar) moved to Nashville, Tennessee. In Nashville, they continued to expand their family, having two more children: Fannie, and then the youngest, William Frederick Waldkirch, I in 1871.

Bernhard worked as a watchmaker and jeweler and the family lived at 48 Lewis Street in Nashville for a few years until purchasing a home on Lawrence Avenue in Nashville, in what was then known as "Waverly Place". Caroline and Bernhard's new home on Lawrence Avenue sat on 18 acres of land, which today is the location of the following addresses in 12South: all of the houses on the south side of Lawrence Avenue between 9th and 10th Avenues, addresses on the north and south sides of Bradford Avenue between 9th and 10th Avenues, and the addresses on the north side of Waldkirch Avenue. Initially, Caroline and Bernhard's address was simply "Waverly Place", but by 1890, according to the Federal Census, Caroline and Bernhard's address was recorded as 11 Lawrence Avenue.

Caroline and Bernhard probably had no idea just how special their youngest child, little William F. Waldkirch I, would be to so many people and to the future development of much of what is known today as 12South. William I's son, William II, tells the following story, which became a significant pivotal moment in his father's life: One afternoon in 1883 when young 12-year-old William I was home with his mother, there was a knock on the front door of their home. The visitor was a gentleman from the bank that held the mortgage on their home. The man informed his mother, Caroline, that if she and husband Bernhard did not get caught up on their mortgage payments, they would lose their home.

The visit from the banker that day was a defining moment for young William I, as he and his older brother, Oscar, made a pact that neither of them would marry and start a family of their own until Mom and Dad's mortgage was paid off free and clear. With this commitment to the security of his family, at the age of 12, William who was in the 6th grade, quit school and went to work for Werthan Bag Company, a local Nashville producer of cotton and burlap bags. William's job was to drive a horse and buggy around Nashville to make bag deliveries. This marked the beginning of what would end up being a four-decade career at Werthan for William, who worked his way up to Sales Manager for the company. Today the bag company is still in existence in the Nashville area and is known as Werthan Packaging, Inc.

The two Waldkirch brothers kept their promise made and along with their siblings continued to work, accumulate financial security, and to take care of their tight-knit family through the 1890s. Bernhard Waldkirch who is described by his grandson as the "philosophical type", at some point during these years left his profession as a jeweler and became a farmer of the 18 acres in Waverly Place, known as "Waldkirch Farms". August had followed in his father's footsteps working as a Jeweler, Oscar as a Bookkeeper, and Sophie as a School Teacher. Emma and Fannie had no occupation that was reported. According to the 1900 Federal Census, the parents Caroline and Bernhard, and William and his five adult siblings all still resided at 11 Lawrence Avenue. None of the siblings had yet married, and the home and its 18 acres were owned free and clear with no mortgage.

The first decade of the new century would prove to be a difficult one for this close, loving family. Both Bernhard (1901) and Caroline (1908) passed away, as well as their son August and daughter Fannie. The 1910 Federal Census reported that the four remaining siblings (Oscar, Emma, Sophie, and William) were all still living in the original family home, with joint ownership of the 18 acres of land, which was recorded known by that point as 911 Lawrence Avenue.

After the parents passed away, Oscar married and moved to a home on Belmont Boulevard a few blocks away. William, however, was traveling substantially as a Sales Manager with Werthan and did not deem it appropriate to marry if he would be absent much of the time. So with his strong work ethic, William continued to work and reside at 911 Lawrence Avenue and to provide for his two sisters, Emma and Sophie.

Early 20th Century Development of the Waldkirch Subdivision

During the 1910s, it is believed that William was the motivated business driver behind the efforts to subdivide the Waldkirch Family's 18 acres of land to develop "Waldkirch Subdivision". The subdivision created a total of 61 original lots located on three streets. The first street included the homes on the south side of Lawrence Avenue, one lot the existing home purchased by Caroline and Bernhard. The second street created was Caroline Avenue, named after their beloved mother (now called Bradford Avenue). Finally, lots were also created on the entire north side of Waldkirch Avenue.

According to William Waldkirch II, the first lot to sell and build in the new Waldkirch Subdivision is 905 Bradford Avenue. Since Caroline and Bernhard's original home on Lawrence was for safety reasons later torn down by William I sometime in the late 1930s, this makes 905 Bradford Avenue the oldest house standing in Waldkirch Subdivision today. The last lot to be sold was 904 Bradford Avenue, making that home the newest home among the original homes constructed in the early 1900s.

Caroline and Bernhard's original home located at 911 Lawrence Avenue is where William Waldkirch I, sister Emma, and sister Sophie all still resided in 1920, none of which had yet married and they were all in their 50s. This was recorded in the 1920 Federal Census, which also reported that William Waldkirch I was still a Sales Manager at Werthan Bag Factory.

William, I Marries at Age 50, Starts a Family of His Own

So now that William Waldkirch I establish a method for securing future income through the development of Waldkirch Subdivision, he decided it was time to finally settle down and start a family of his own. At Werthan he met a young woman, Marion Cox, a native of Hopkinsville, KY and in her early 20s. So that they could marry and have a home of their own, according to the Warranty Deed registered April 8, 1921, William F. Waldkirch, I purchased from his Waldkirch siblings their ownership in lots 16, 17, and 18 in the Waldkirch subdivision for a total cost of \$2,400. He then divided those three lots in half to create two larger lots, and he built two identical homes now known as 906 and 908 Bradford Avenue. According to Mr. Waldkirch II, both homes were built simultaneously in 1921 by Nashville's "most reputable contractor". 908 was intended to be William Waldkirch I's personal home with his wife Marion Cox Waldkirch. He built 906 Bradford Avenue for Marion's mother, Will B. Cox, and Marion's brothers, Minos and Frank. The building of 906 Bradford Avenue for his in-laws is just another example of the many incidences throughout William I's life where he demonstrated generosity in taking care of all in his entire large extended family.

In addition to taking care of his wife's family, William I continued to support his two sisters whom never married. Emma and Sophie continued living in Bernhard and Caroline's original home on Lawrence, and although Sophie was a School Teacher, she suffered from a stroke and became wheelchair-bound and unable to speak. Emma assisted in her sister's care and William provided financial support. The original house, however, had been paid off by him and his brother decades prior.

William and Marion were married in 1921, and in 1923 their oldest son, William F. Waldkirch, II, was born at 908 Bradford Avenue. In the years that followed, William Waldkirch I continued to sell lots of land and develop the Waldkirch Subdivision. William and Marion also continued expanding their family, having three more children—Oscar, Marion, and Richard. And while William experienced the rapid growth of his new young growing family, his siblings in his extended family all started to expire, with his brother Oscar passing in 1927, Sophie in 1929, and Emma in 1932. This then left William Waldkirch I as the sole owner of the remaining unsold lots in Waldkirch subdivision. Much of the building that occurred is as it appears today, with some homes having been demolished and replaced in recent years and some being in the process of restoration.

The Loss of Caroline Avenue, The Gain of the Caroline House

Although many of the houses built in the early 20th Century are still as they were, one street name is not. When the Waldkirch brothers established the neighborhood development, they named what is now known today as Bradford Avenue "Caroline Avenue", after their dear mother and German immigrant, Caroline. In approximately 1941, the City of Nashville renamed Caroline Avenue to Bradford Avenue to be consistent with the existing Bradford Avenue stretch of street that extended beyond 8th Avenue. This act by the city of changing the name of the street where he resided was very disheartening to William I, as Bernhard and Caroline's original home on Lawrence was demolished in the 1930s, so "Caroline Avenue" was the last remembrance of her in the neighborhood.

The Heart of This Story

In learning about the Waldkirch family and the history of the development of the Waldkirch Subdivision, the one element of this story that is quite striking is the unwavering love and commitment the Waldkirch family had for each other, but especially the devotion and sacrifice displayed by William F. Waldkirch I. William I spent his entire life from the age of 12 until his passing at the age of 80 in 1952, providing financial support and care for all in his extended family. The degree of loyalty and devotion displayed by his actions is rare indeed.

Due to this devotion, and to commemorate the memory of William I's beloved mother Caroline as he intended, the homeowner of 906 Bradford Ave, Ashley S. Rose, and William Waldkirch II have decided that as of the date of the home's first inaugural Historic 12South Home Tour on April 18, 2015, the home at 906 Bradford Avenue was officially named the "Caroline House".

Caroline House Nashville Today

The home at 906 Bradford Avenue in Nashville was originally built in 1921, although public records indicate 1930. Many homes in the 12South Neighborhood & District have inaccurate dates reflected in the public records. The reason for this is due to a fire at the Metro Nashville Administrative Offices destroying many property records. The many homes from the early 1900's report a "default" guesstimate construction date of 1930. It was in 2014 that the property owner, Ashley Rose, discovered the original 1921 deed for the home through the State of Tennessee Archives & Library.

906 Bradford Avenue was originally constructed as a 4 bedroom 1.5 bath home with an unfinished basement, the basement of which included a coal room and furnace for heating the home. Back in the 1920's, the coal was delivered on the west side of the home and was loaded into the basement window.

In the Spring of 2014, the Rose-Backhoff family purchased the home following a complete and total renovation and expansion of the property which included the following improvements: All plumbing and electrical work completely updated, complete renovation of the kitchen, complete renovation of the existing 1.5 bathrooms and three additional bathrooms added--one on each level, the basement was finished, covered patio with fireplace added in the back along with a two car garage guest house. The original walls surrounding the dining room were removed to create a more open floorplan on the main level and other minor framing changes made, such as the location of the entry door into the baths. Many of the original fixtures in the home which were refurbished and remain include all of the doors, most of the windows, the stone fireplace in the family room, the stairwells and banisters, cabinetry on either side of the fireplace, hutch near the kitchen, the hardwood floors, and the upstairs clawfoot tub are all original. With these improvements, many will continue to enjoy the charm of this home for the next 96 years.