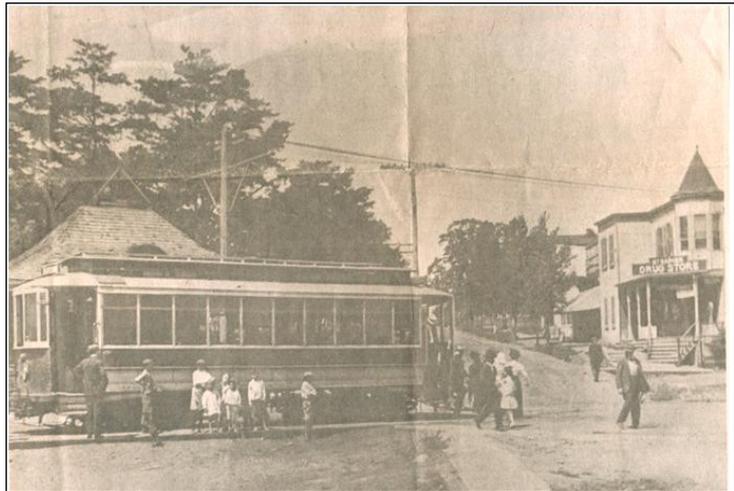


## INCORPORATION AND EARLY YEARS

The original incorporation proposal called for inclusion of subdivisions over a wide area from the D.C. line to Hyattsville. A committee in 1909 reviewed the proposal (the members of the group included men from the subdivisions of Mount Rainier, Holladay, Rhode Island Avenue, Wilen Heights, Brentwood, Cottage City, Edgemont, and the Colored Citizens' Association of Brentwood). The committee found that property owners in some of the subdivisions opposed inclusion in the new town; those refusing inclusion in the new Mount Rainier later became parts of Brentwood, Cottage City, North Brentwood, and Hyattsville. (*Wash. Herald* 2/10/1909)

The committee met at the 34<sup>th</sup> Street Chapel (now 4029 34<sup>th</sup> Street). Once agreement was reached on which subdivisions would be included, the state legislature enacted the charter on April 11, 1910. The citizens ratified the charter in a special vote on April 14, 1910. At the first election in May 1910, Robert E. Joyce became mayor by only a few votes and served just one year. Council members elected were C.O. Bohrer, J. Benson Moore, William H. Vanneman, and Thomas Elliott. According to news accounts, politics were volatile. Joyce's opponents referred to him as a "political boss." At a particularly contentious council meeting, attendees saw a pistol partially hidden under his coat. Joyce defended his right to carry a pistol since he also served as a justice of the peace. (WP April 1911)



**Plumer's Station, Rhode Island Avenue at 34th Street**

Joyce lost his re-election bid in 1911 to Joseph Plant who then had his own political crisis. Former mayor Joyce and supporters presented a petition to recall Councilman Elliott who—among other grievances—was accused of being responsible for initiating a 25 cent surcharge on residents for sanitary initiatives. The group threatened to recall Plant as well. The newspaper accounts noted that the process for recalls had been included in the charter, but it was more commonly used in the western U.S. and rarely adopted in the East. (WP 11/20/1911)

### POTTS HALL

Potts Hall, 3205 Rhode Island Avenue, was a social center even before the town was incorporated. The first town council meetings were held in the hall, as well as initial services of at least three local churches. At New Year's celebrations in 1910, the Mount Rainier Amusement and Physical Culture Club attempted to sponsor a boxing match on the second floor of Potts Hall. The first floor was a pool hall at that time. Deputy Sheriff Mohler prevented the bout from taking place on the grounds that the fight was illegal and the club was not properly chartered. (WP 1/2/1910)



**Earliest known photo of Potts Hall (1930s), provided by the Order of the Eastern Star which owned the building for many years until the City bought it in 2010.**

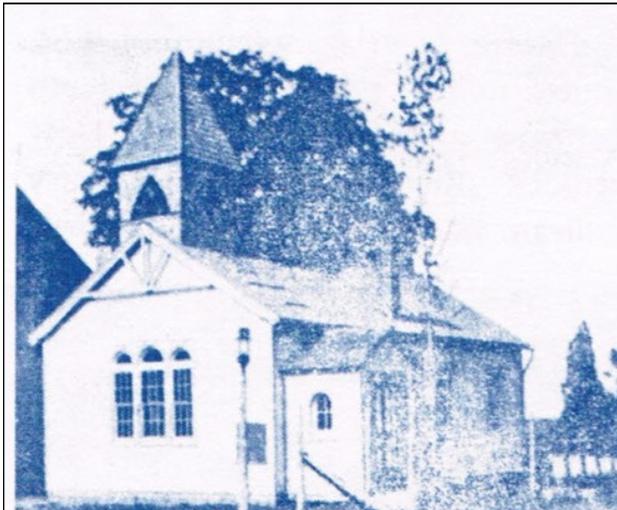


**ORIGINAL MEMBERS of the Mt. Rainier VFD: (L to R) Frank Coward, William Vanneman, Theodore Schultz, unknown, Frank Crown, Clarence Moore, unknown, Otto Gerhardt, David Lang, Ernest Bankman, unknown, Ralph Keyes, Herb Green, Norman Pruitt, Jim Dunnigan, and Charles Miller. Two kneeling, unidentified. 1911.**

## GRANDFATHER CLAUSE

Section 3 of the 1910 charter (see next page) prevented African Americans from voting since it prohibited registration of any man who did not have a relative entitled to vote prior to Jan. 1, 1868. Previously naturalized citizens had been provided a loophole so that they could register. Such “grandfather clauses” were not uncommon in the Southern states after Reconstruction. But in 1915, the U.S. Supreme Court found a similar grandfather clause in the Oklahoma Constitution to be invalid.

In 1916, the Mount Rainier charter was amended to remove the “grandfather clause.” But the town continued to keep its own voter registration rolls and thereby control over who was added to the list. Names were added only on three days that fell not more than 40 days and not less than 30 days prior to the election that occurred only every two years. The time and place of the registration was determined by the town clerk. In addition, a voter had to have lived in the town for at least 365 days prior to the election.



**34th Street Chapel — 1910**



**4029 34th Street**

The 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was ratified in 1920, providing women the right to vote (nullifying the town’s charter language which continued to only provide men with the right to register).

## VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT

The first formal meeting of the Mount Rainier Volunteer Fire Department occurred in the kitchen of John Klein in 1911. In that same year, a lot was acquired and a frame building was constructed. In 1913, a Knox automobile was converted to a hose wagon and placed in service. This was the first piece of motorized fire equipment in the county. In 1915, a Model T Ford Chemical Truck was purchased and a Model T Ford Hose Wagon was added in 1917.

**Grandfather Clause— the denial of the vote to blacks is in Sec. 3 of the first Mount Rainier Charter (above) which limits voting to “all citizens who prior to January 1st, 1868, were entitled to vote in the State of Maryland or any other State of the United States at a State election, and the lawful male descendants of any person who prior to January 1st, 1868, was entitled to vote in this State or in any other State of the United States at a State election...”**

Each ward to be represented by a councilman resident of said ward who shall be voted for only by the voters residing in the ward he is to represent.

SEC. 3. *And be it enacted*, That all male citizens of the said town of twenty-one years of age or over, who have actually resided in said town for a space of 365 days next preceding the next Monday in May, 1910, and who have never been convicted of any infamous crime under the laws of the State of Maryland, and who shall come within any one of the three following classes of male citizens: (1) All duly authorized citizens (2) and male children of naturalized citizens who have reached the age of 21 years (3) all citizens who prior to January 1st, 1868, were entitled to vote in the State of Maryland or any other State of the United States at a State election, and the lawful male descendants of any person who prior to January 1st, 1868, was entitled to vote in this State or in any other State of the United States at a State election, and no person not coming within one of the three enumerated classes shall be registered as a legal voter and entitled to vote at any municipal election held in said town of Mount Rainier, Maryland, shall elect on the first Monday in May, 1910, at such place as shall be selected for the holding of elections, one person, a legal voter of said town, who has resided therein for two years at least next preceding the election to be Mayor of said town, and four persons who possess the same qualification one from each ward who shall be voted for only by the voters residing in the ward he is to represent, to be Common Councilmen of said town, and thereafter annually, on the first Monday in May, such citizens, with the above qualifications, shall elect one person having the qualifications above described to be Mayor, provided, that two of said Councilmen shall at the first election held under the provisions of this section, be elected to serve one year and two to serve two years, terms of office to be decided by casting of lots and thereafter two Councilmen to be elected each year who shall serve two years. If any vacancy occurs in the office of Councilman the Mayor, with the advice and consent of the remaining members of said Council, shall appoint a person to fill such vacancy during the balance of the unexpired term. In case of a vacancy in the office of Mayor a special election shall be ordered by the Common Council to be held within thirty days after publication of such order, for the purpose of electing a person to fill such vacancy. No person shall be eligible as Mayor or Councilman of said town unless he be the owner of real estate in said town, in his own name, to the amount of \$500, and shall so remain during his term of office, and his term of office shall terminate upon his removal of residence from the town limits. Neither the Mayor nor any of the Coun-

## 1910 CENSUS

(Excerpts from article by Daniel Preston in 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Book)

In 1910, the U.S. Census recorded a population of 1,242 for Mount Rainier. Although relatively new, it was as large as Takoma Park and larger than most other Maryland suburbs. Only Laurel and Rockville (both more like country towns than suburbs) and neighboring Hyattsville (population 1,917) were larger. By 1920, the population had reached nearly 2,400. Immigrants were few in the early years. In 1910, there were less than 100, and most of them had been in the U.S. for over 20 years. The low cost of houses meant that most residents owned homes. The census of 1910 indicates only 51 renters.

In 1910, there were 299 households. Most of the residents were adults. Most homes had at least three adults living in them. This would include close relatives, servants, and boarders. The small number of children explains why the town shared a school with neighboring Brentwood. Of the 299 heads of households, 239 were under 50 years of age, and 165 were under the age of 40. Of the 801 adults, 576 were married. Most of the couples had at least one child. Gas and electricity were available, but water and sewer lines were not built until 1917.

In 1910, the most common occupations were those in the building trades. Of the 460 employed persons in town, 120, or approximately one-fourth, were employed in this line of work. The housing boom created demand for carpenters, bricklayers, plasterers, painters, electricians, plumbers, and roofers. There is no indication where these many men worked, but from Mount Rainier they could have taken the streetcar to the growing suburbs to the north or into Washington. Many probably found work in the immediate area.

The next largest area of employment was the federal government, which provided work for 111 town residents. Several worked at the local post office, but most travelled into D.C. and worked as clerks. The two largest federal employers were the printing office and the Navy Yard. Thus, the city was a "blue-collar suburb" from the very start.

Retailing provided the third largest field of employment. 76 persons worked as salesmen, salesladies, or in some other form of retail work. In addition to these, there were 47 others who were employed in a craft involved with retailing. This group included dressmakers, butchers, tailors, shoemakers, bakers, furniture makers, and so on. One craft that, perhaps, would not fall into this category was the carriage trade. Apparently there was a carriage shop in the area; the census lists five men employed as carriage painters, one as a carriage maker, two as wheel-wrights, and two as harness makers. There were stores and shops in town, and a number of the town's residents undoubtedly worked in the immediate vicinity. But, as there were not enough retail establishments to employ anywhere near 120 people, most of the retail employees worked in Washington.

An odd mixture of professionals tempered the working-class majority. Besides two doctors, two attorneys, and three school teachers, there were five nurses (all employed by private families), a dentist, a newspaperman, and a stockbroker. Although there were several religious congregations, only one minister lived in town.

Eight residents found employment in the arts and entertainment field—an artist, two music teachers, a musician, a singer, two actors, and a scenery changer at a theater. Semiskilled and unskilled trades such as farm labor, wagoning, and machinery operation also provided employment. Because Mount Rainier was a working-class neighborhood, there were few servants. Besides the five nurses, there were only eleven live-in servants, three of them with one family. While there could have been day servants who lived elsewhere, the employment make-up of Mount Rainier makes this seem unlikely.

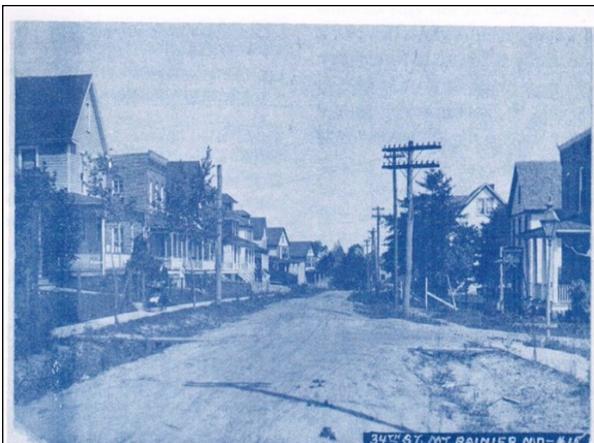
A final occupation class consisted of jobs that were not really professional, not necessarily skilled, and yet, not unskilled. Among these occupations were telephone and telegraph operators (10); office workers (10); motormen for the streetcars (4); and a fisherman, a steamboat captain, and a steamboat machinist.

The residents in the workforce were primarily male. Of the 396 women living in town in 1910, only 75 were employed outside the home; of these, only 18 were married. Those women who did work were usually young (18 to 25 years old), unmarried adult daughters. The census figures suggest that once a woman married, she did not seek employment, whether she had children or not. There is no pattern among the 18 married working women that would allow conclusions.

Although the community of Mount Rainier was only eight years old in 1910 and had been incorporated just that same year, the tone the town would maintain through the future was established. It was—and is—a suburban town of small frame houses occupied by middle-income people.

## WATER SYSTEM

The homes originally had individual wells and outhouses. Large homes clustered around Shepherd and 33<sup>rd</sup> Streets had a small water system supplied from the old spring (believed to have been the Clemson's source of water). In 1914, the town's health officer reported that the water supply was in a "frightful condition" and recommended that the council issue bonds to finance a water and sewer system. (WP 1/21/1914)



**34th and Taylor Streets—1911**



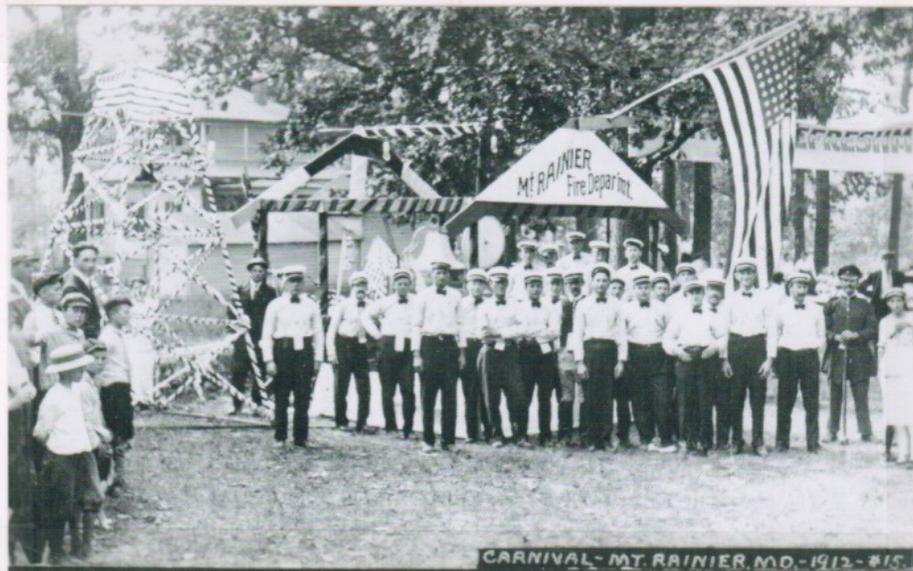
**34th and Taylor Streets—2010**



**A photo of the 1912 carnival parade as it moves westward down today's Perry Street. The brick building behind the automobile is the rear of Star-Potts Hall. The present City Hall replaced the home (3500 Perry Street) to the right of Star-Potts in the 1990s.**



**Carnivals in the early days raised money for civic projects. This 1912 carnival parade photo is the earliest known depiction of African Americans participating in town events.**



Linda Nails

*The fire department gathers for a pose, on Shepherd Street between 32nd and 33rd.*



Linda Nails

*Another group pose on Carnival Day, 1912.*

**The sign behind the men says “Get Post Cards of the Carnival and Parade Here.” Therefore explaining the source of the photos we have from the event.**

In 1917, construction began on the water and sewer system, but litigation slowed completion of the work. The town finally won a suit against the contractor, but no meters were supplied to connect houses that desired service.

The town's water tank was located at the high point, 3<sup>1st</sup> and Shepherd Streets (probably at today's 4014 31st St. which still has an odd concrete pad in the backyard that may be a vestige of the tower). Norman Venning who spent his life in Mount Rainier remembered that the location was surrounded by large old oaks that had been around the Clemson mansion. Many ancient oaks still stand in the yards of the nearby homes.

In the end, the system, including the springs and pumping station on Columbia Avenue (now Hamilton St.), was sold to the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission in 1922.

## OTHER EVENTS AND FACTS

1912

- Mount Rainier's Boy Scouts of America Troop No. 3 recognized (later changed to Troop 203).

1916

- The first service of the Methodist Church was held in Star-Potts Hall.

1919

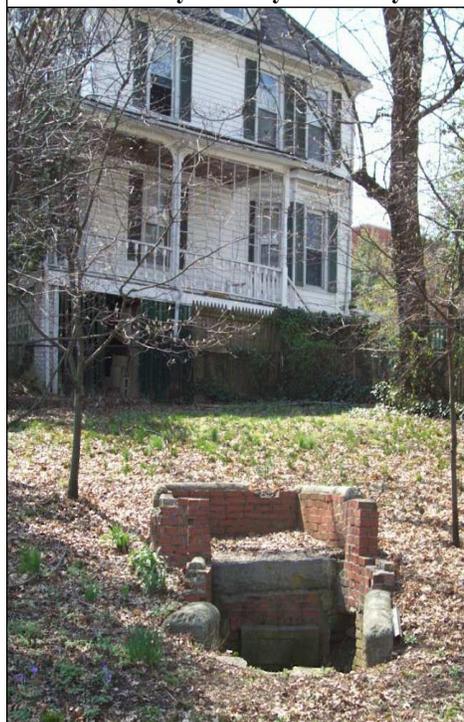
- First movie shown at Potts Hall.

## SOURCES

- "Incorporation Opposed." *Wash. Herald*. 2/10/1909.
- "Mayor 'Totes' a Gun." *Wash. Post*, Apr. 1911.
- Venning, Norman. Mt. Rainier's First Water System and Other Historical Highlights. Handwritten manuscript, 1988 (Venning was born at 4015 33<sup>rd</sup> and lived there until the late 1980s).
- "Fight is Stopped. Authorities Prevent Bout at Mount Rainier, Md." *Wash. Post*, 1/2/1910.
- "Recall Reaches East." *Wash. Post*, 11/20/1911.
- "Plant Balks 'Recall'" *Wash. Post*, 11/21/1911.
- "Mount Rainier, Md.: The Town That Has Annexed Washington D.C. As A Suburb." Historical Notes by D.M. Nesbit, *Mount Rainier Carnival News*, Sept. 1914 (Prince George's County Historical Society Library).

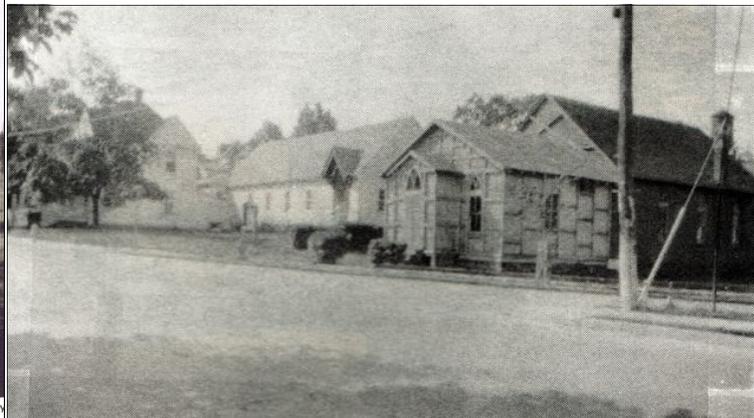
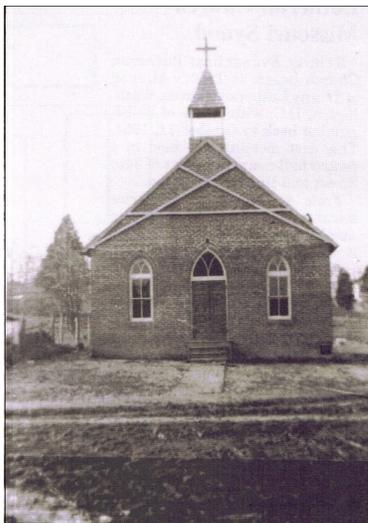


**Spring Park, 33rd and Shepherd Streets—yesterday and today**

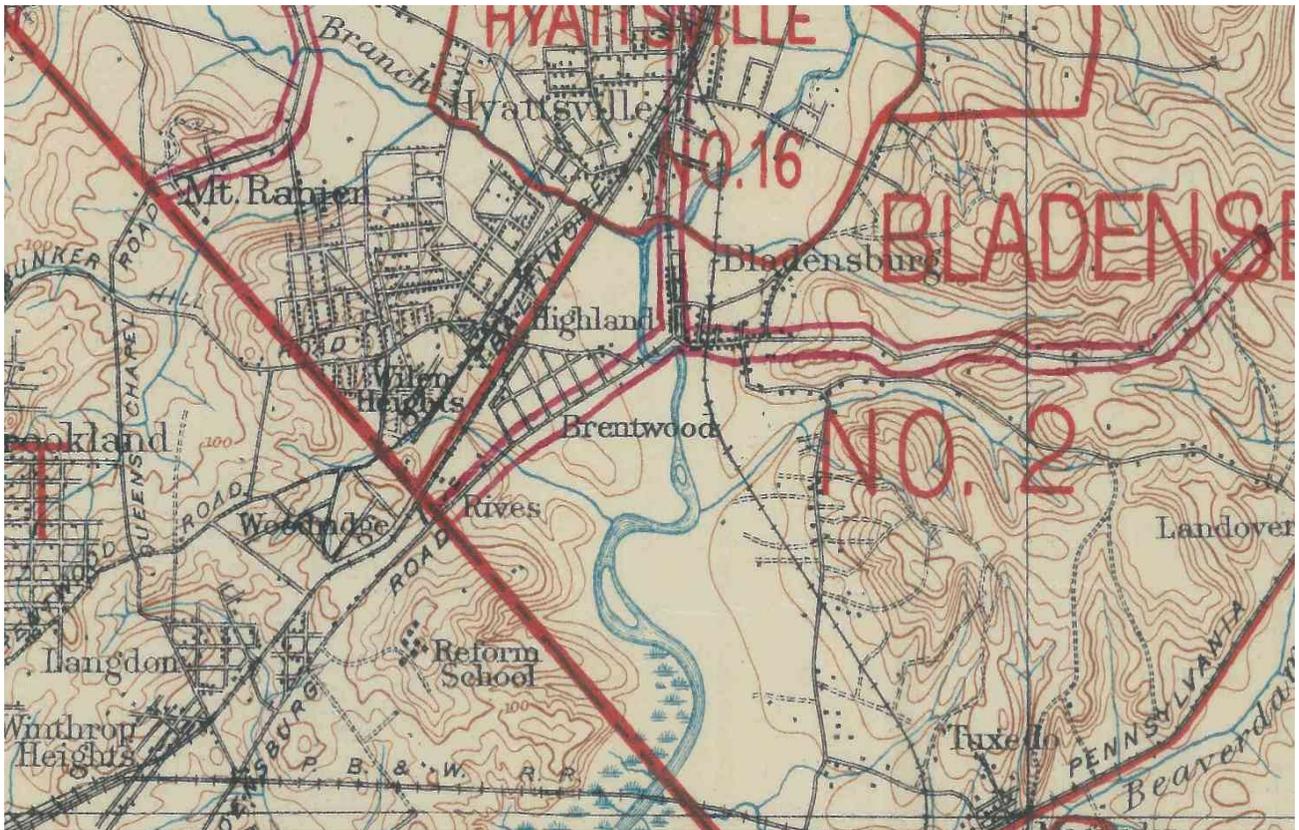




**Mount Rainier's water tower is visible behind the houses in this 1930s photo of the cornerstone laying ceremony at St. John's Episcopal Church at Rainier and 34th Streets. Only known photo of the water tower which would have stood near intersection of Shepherd and 31st Streets (probably at 4014 31st Street).**



**St. John's Church evolves after 1913 (above) with an addition on the front (right), and in the 1930s (top of page), the cornerstone was laid for a new building.**



1914 Electoral Topographical Map (above) “Reform School” is Fort Lincoln today.



Wooden pipes wrapped in coiled wire supplied water in the early days. This section was dug up in 2010 during street reconstruction. See also, “Wooden Water Pipes Replaced in Mt. Rainier.” By Harold Willard. *PG Post*, 12/5/1959.

TO THE  
**Citizens and Taxpayers**  
 OF MT. RAINIER

In announcing my candidacy for Mayor in the coming election to be held on May 5, 1919, I respectfully submit the following statement for your most earnest and careful consideration, believing as I do that the fair-minded citizens, who have the interest of the town at heart, will readily see the truth and justice of the facts as set forth herein, viz:

It has been rumored, if not openly and publicly stated, that I, during my former administration as Mayor of the town, purchased the Czarra springs, seven in number, together with acres of land, at a price in excess of their real face value, whereas the same springs were offered to another community at a smaller figure. The real and true facts in the matter are as follows, viz:

Before ever looking at the Czarra springs or really knowing of their possibilities, the feasibility of damming the Northwestern Branch and building a suitable filtration plant was openly discussed for months by the members of the Council and also by the interested citizens of the town, and the matter was thoroughly investigated from every conceivable viewpoint.

Some of the principal objections to this proposition were the excessively high cost of procuring a water supply in this manner; the probability of a limited and unsatisfactory supply, and, not to say the least, the fact that for miles just around and above the point of the proposed damming, hundreds of cattle

(cows, horses, dogs, etc.) were seen almost continually using this body of water and polluting the same in various ways.

When the Czarra Springs were first brought to my attention, and also to the members of the Council, it being impossible for me, under the provisions of the Town Charter, to act alone in this matter, the proposition to procure these springs was investigated thoroughly and promptly by the members of the Council, myself, and the Town Engineer, and, when it was demonstrated that they would amply meet the needs of the town, steps were taken to procure them, seven in number, and located on three acres of land, at the lowest figure possible, viz, \$5,000 for the springs, and \$350 per acre for the land, making a total of \$6,050.

The lowest estimate furnished for damming the Northwestern Branch and installing a filtration plant was about \$25,000.

In refutation of the false statements being circulated that Dr. Czarra offered to sell the springs to any one for a much smaller sum than this, I invite your attention to the following affidavit by him on the subject:

HYATTSVILLE, MD., April 29, 1919.

I, Dr. Sigmund A. Czarra, do solemnly swear that the statements made by Fred E. Weber, former Mayor of Mt. Rainier, Md., relative to the efforts made by him to procure the Czarra Springs at the lowest possible figure are absolutely true and correct in every particular, and I consider the sum paid by the town of Mt. Rainier a fair and equitable one, the town receiving a supply of water conceded by several experts, including State officials, to be of the highest purity and its supply ample to meet the demands of the town for years to come, and that I would not have sold them to any one at the time they were

**Controversy over the purchase of the town's water supply (springs located on the Northwest Branch below today's Hamilton Street) erupted in the 1919 mayoral campaign.**

**Weber lost the election.**

purchased for a less sum than the one paid by the town of Mt. Rainier.

SIGMUND A. CZARRA, M. D.

April 29, 1919.

STATE OF MARYLAND, }  
 County of Prince George, }

On this 29th day of April, 1919, personally appeared Sigmund A. Czarra and made oath in due form of law that the above statement is correct and true.

[Seal.]

G. HODGES CARR,  
 Notary Public.

From a careful perusal of the foregoing, and the fact that the present administration has spoken very highly of the abundant supply of water these springs give forth, and also that their extreme purity has been attested by the State Board of Health, I feel that it can be readily seen I have acted for the health and best interests of every man, woman and child in the community.

If elected to the office of Mayor, I shall endeavor to serve the people and the interests of the town to the best of my ability, and will heartily cooperate to the fullest extent possible with each and every public-spirited citizen or citizen's association in everything tending to the betterment and welfare of the entire community.

Respectfully,

FRED E. WEBER.



# Dog Ordinance

PASSED AT COUNCIL MEETING  
MONDAY NIGHT, JUNE 17, 1918.

Be, and it is hereby ordained by the Mayor and Common Council of Mt. Rainier,

SECTION 1. That on and after July 1st, 1918, it shall be unlawful for any person to have, own, harbor, or bring into the corporation limits of the Town of Mt. Rainier, Maryland, any dog, male or female, unless each and every dog is provided with a metal tag, showing that such dog has been duly licensed by the public authorities of Maryland, as provided by the Act of the Assembly of 1918.

SECTION 2. That on and after the said 1st day of July, 1918, it shall also be unlawful for any person to have, own, harbor, or bring any dog, male or female within the corporation limits of the Town of Mount Rainier unless said dog is muzzled with an approved dog muzzle.

SECTION 2 A. That during the months of July, August and September it shall be unlawful for any dog to run at large in the streets, by-ways or alleys of the said town of Mt. Rainier. For such an offense the owner of such dog shall be fined not less than \$1.00 nor more than \$5.00 on conviction thereof.

SECTION 3. That any person violating any provision of this ordinance, shall on conviction thereof, as now provided for the trial of other Town offenses, be fined not less than one dollar nor more than five dollars, or imprisoned in the County jail not exceeding thirty days.

SECTION 4. That any dog found within the corporation limits of the Town of Mount Rainier, on and after the said First day of July, 1918, not licensed and muzzled as provided by the provisions of this ordinance shall, when found upon the public streets and ways of the Town be killed by the Town bailiffs or by such special officers as the Town shall appoint for that purpose.

PROVIDED, the officers enforcing the law shall have one-half the fine, this in addition to the fines and penalties now provided by the present Maryland State law.

By order of the MAYOR and COUNCIL.

OFFICE OF THE TOWN TREASURER.

THIS BILL IS DUE AND RECEIVABLE.

TREASURER'S OFFICE,

MT. RAINIER, MD. *Sept 23<sup>rd</sup> 1910.*

*Mrs. May J. Parsons*

To the **Town of Mount Rainier, Md., Dr.**

For Real and Personal Property Tax Levied *1910*  
Tax, 20 Cents per \$100 Assessed Valuation.

WARD NO.	SUBDIVISION	Block NO.	BLOCK NO.	VALUE OF LOT.	VALUE OF IMPROVEMENTS.	VALUE OF PERSONAL PROPERTY.	TOTAL ASSESSED VALUATION.
<i>3</i>	<i>Mt Rainier</i>	<i>4-5</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>500</i>	<i>1400</i>		<i>1900</i>

Pay to MAURICE E. STALLINGS,

Total Amount of Tax - \$.....

*Town Treasurer*

To Penalty of ... per cent, \$.....

Total - - - - - \$ *3.80*

*Paid Sept 23<sup>rd</sup> 1910. Maurice E. Stallings*  
*Town Treasurer.*

Attention is called to Sections Nos. 10 and 12, Town Charter. The taxes for each year shall be due and payable on the first day of July next succeeding the date of the levy thereof. The said taxes will be in arrears from and after July 1, and legal interest may be charged from that date. And if the same be not paid by the first day of January, succeeding the date of the levy, collect the same with all costs by distress and sale of the real property of the delinquent at public auction.

OFFICE OF THE TOWN TREASURER.

THIS BILL IS DUE AND RECEIVABLE.

TREASURER'S OFFICE,

MT. RAINIER, MD., *June 26 1912*

*J. E. Stansbury*

To the **Town of Mt. Rainier, Md. Dr.**

For Real and Personal Property Tax Levied *1912*  
Tax, 20 Cents per \$100 Assessed Valuation.

WARD NO.	SUBDIVISION	LOT NO.	BLOCK NO.	VALUE OF LOT	VALUE OF IMPROVEMENTS.	VALUE OF PERSONAL PROPERTY.	TOTAL ASSESSED VALUATION.
	<i>Mt. Rainier</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>350</i>	<i>1400</i>	<i>200</i>	<i>1950</i>

Pay to *Joe Stansbury* Total amount of Tax - \$ *3.90*

To Penalty of ... per cent, \$.....

*Town Treasurer.*

Total - - - - - \$.....

*Town Treasurer.*

Attention is called to Sections Nos. 10 and 12, Town Charter. The taxes for each year shall be due and payable on the first day of July next succeeding the date of the levy thereof. The said taxes will be in arrears from and after July 1, and legal interest may be charged from that date. And if the same be not paid by the first day of January, succeeding the date of the levy, collect the same with all costs by distress and sale of the real property of the delinquent at public auction.

Treasurer's Stub.

MOUNT RAINIER, MD.

*J. E. Stansbury*

Real Estate and Personal Property Tax

Levied *1912*

Ward No. ....

SUB.	Block.	Lot.	Personal Property.	Total.

DO NOT DETACH THIS STUB.

Total Amount of Tax - \$ *3.90*

To Penalty - - - - - \$.....

Total - - - - - \$.....

*The following pages are reprinted from the 75th Anniversary history booklet.*

## **A Profile of a Washington Suburb: Mount Rainier, Maryland, 1910** **By Daniel Preston**

The second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth was a period of great urban expansion in the United States. Washington, D.C., although different in many respects from other American cities, shared in this growth. Increased government employment, general economic prosperity, and Washington's image as a desirable place to live all contributed to a population boom that created a great demand for housing. Like the residents of other cities, Washingtonians wanted the amenities of urban living but yearned for the pleasantness of a rural home. Improved local transportation, particularly the railroad and the streetcar, allowed urban dwellers to have both: people

“The area of Thirty-fourth and Varnum Streets was a pine forest, in 1906.”

(Vernie Vanneman)

could live outside the city and commute to work. As a result, suburbs proliferated. Although there was some suburban development in Virginia and on the southeast side of the Anacostia River, most of Washington's suburban growth occurred to the north of the city. This included neighborhoods immediately outside the city and along three arteries: Connecticut Avenue to Chevy Chase; the Baltimore and Ohio railroad line through Brookland, Takoma Park, and Silver Spring; and the B. & O. spur to Baltimore.

One suburb on this last-named corridor was Mount Rainier, just across the district line in Maryland. Settlements along the B. & O. spur appeared as early as 1850, but the area did not begin to prosper until the Rhode Island Avenue streetcar line of the City and Suburban Railroad Company reached Hyattsville in 1899.

Three years later a group of local real estate developers purchased a hilly, one-hundred-acre tract in the angle formed by the district line and the B. & O. Railroad. This tract had been surveyed and platted previous to the purchase by a group of Army engineers from Seattle who named the area after Mount Rainier, which dominates the skyline of that city. The area included part of an earlier, unsuccessful suburb, Wilen Heights. There were about fifteen houses on the tract and an estimated fifty people; by 1910 the inhabitants numbered over 1200. In April of that year, the



*sometime between 1901-1909*

(Mauphin)

town incorporated. The plan of the town created fifty-two irregularly shaped blocks, thirty of which were at least partially occupied in 1910. The main roads through town were Bunker Hill Road, which was the old road from Bladensburg to Georgetown, and Rhode Island Avenue, a muddy track alongside the streetcar line. The north-south streets, with the exception of Shasta Avenue, continued the numbering system from the District and consisted of 28th to 38th Streets. The east-west streets did not follow the plan of Washington City, but those north of Bunker Hill Road and west of 34th Street did have alphabetical sequence—Ash, Beech, Cedar, Date, Elm, Fir, and Grape. The streets were not paved; there were, however, concrete sidewalks in some areas. Gas and electricity were available, but water and sewer lines were not built until 1917. Although the railroad passed along the southern edge of town, there was not a station in Mount Rainier.

The town had a decided rural flavor, a feature that was apparently quite an attraction. Houses were mostly of one

This house still stands at 3200 Upshur Street.



*Cleaves should be correct spelling.*

Teresa Wilcox

or two story frame construction and situated on large lots. Real estate advertisements stressed the country atmosphere—homes in Mount Rainier were “charmingly located” on “very large (rich) grounds” that were “high and healthy.” An ad for one house listed “[a] good barn and outbuildings; fences, shade, fruit and shrubs” among the property’s assets. Also advertised was a house with “wide porches” located on a parcel of “three lots, each 50 by 150 ft.” and featuring “high ground” and “fine old shade trees.”

Besides the benefits of country living, the town offered small, inexpensive houses and easy access to downtown Washington. The advertisements for houses in Mount Rainier stressed that it was only one carfare (five cents) into

“In 1908, there were no sewers, electric, or indoor plumbing. Yes, we had outhouses. I later dug sewers for Stenrod Contractors for 10¢ an hour.”

(John Weser)

Washington and that the houses were within a few blocks of the streetcar line. This advantage was coupled with low-cost housing. Although there were homes priced at \$4500 and \$5000, most were closer to \$2000. Down payments were under \$200 and monthly payments ranged from fifteen to twenty-five dollars. These houses were easily affordable to most working people in Washington and compared favorably with new housing closer to the city which usually cost over \$5000. The low cost of housing meant that most heads of households could own their homes; according to the census, only fifty-one rented their homes in 1910.

A small business district formed at the intersection of Rhode Island Avenue and 34th Street. The streetcar station was there, as was the post office and a meeting hall. Stores and businesses included grocery stores, a bakery, dry goods stores, a laundry, a cobbler shop, hardware store, and a barber. There were no banks, hotels, or restaurants. Two churches stood just outside the business district, as did the school, which the town shared with neighboring Brentwood.

Like other Washington suburbs, Mount Rainier grew rapidly during this period. The town’s population grew from an estimated fifty in 1902 to 1,242 in 1910; by 1920 this number had almost doubled. This made Mount Rainier a rather substantial suburban community, particularly along the Rhode Island Avenue corridor. Although relatively new, it was as large as Takoma Park (the population of the two towns in 1910 was exactly the same) and larger than most of the other Maryland suburbs. Only Laurel and Rockville (which were more country towns than suburbs) and neighboring Hyattsville (with a population of 1,917) were larger. Brookland, which lay along the Rhode Island Avenue corridor within the district, was also larger. And like other Washington communities, Mount Rainier was racially segregated. While there were no legal restrictions barring black residents, there was a grandfather clause in the town’s charter that kept blacks from voting in city elections. This suggests that segregation was *de facto* rather than legislated. The town’s population was mostly native born, with most of residents coming from Maryland, Virginia, and the District. The Washington area attracted very few immigrants. There were less than one hundred living in Mount Rainier, and most of these had been in the United States for over twenty years.

According to the 1910 census, there were 299 households in Mount Rainier. This comes very close to the standard average of four persons per household. Most of these people, however, were adults. A majority of the households had

The first Council Meetings were held in the old Potts Hall, now known as Star Hall, on Rhode Island Avenue. From there they moved into the stucco building on Perry Street which used to be the real estate office of Mr. Rogers. A third move carried them into the building which was known as Tony's Barber Shop and was located on 34th Street.

This was the Tovey property and the Mayor and Council had it torn down as it was unsafe and a fire trap.

It wasn't until 1920 that the town fathers moved into the building which we now know as City Hall, after it had been purchased from Perry Boswell with proceeds realized from the old carnivals held annually in Mt. Rainier.

These carnivals were always such a success that even today, people mention them and recall some of the good times had back then. Mr. Boswell had operated a food market for a number of years on the premises before selling to the town the building which we still use as our City Hall.

The struggle to incorporate must have been interesting because the original plan included all or at least part of what is now Brentwood. This resulted in a split between the pros and cons of the plan and finally ended with just Mt. Rainier as the area to be incorporated. This also accounts for the zig zag boundary line on the east and northeast of our community even as we know it today. The Volunteer Fire Department was formed in February, 1911. See Special Section.

The real era of progress for Mt. Rainier began in 1916. Rapid growth and a progressive spirit caused the passage of two very important Legislative Acts for the benefit of Mt. Rainier.

By act approved April 18, 1916, all of the town's charter except section one was repealed and re-enacted with amendments so as to form practically a new charter.

The same session of Legislature also enacted a bill, approved at a public referendum on April 17, 1916,

which granted the Mayor and Council the power to issue bonds in the amount of \$100,000 for the construction of a municipal water and sewer system. It seems the referendum was challenged but the Court of Appeals upheld its legality in a decision handed down in February, 1917; the case being handled for the proponents by the law firm of J. Enos Ray and Ogle Marbury.

The contract was let and construction began but before everything was finished, another battle had to be fought and won. On April 1, 1919, it was reported that the water and sewer system had been completed and everything was in readiness for the town to take over its operation.

The old "Prince Georgian" reported under the date of April 17, 1919, that the Mayor and Council had taken over the system but only after they had condemned the contractor and that they were holding the United States Fidelity and Guarantee Company accountable for finishing this work. The Mayor and Council at that time consisted of the following: Perry Boswell, Mayor; and Councilmen Norman A. Pruitt, W. W. James, J. H. Hanback and Theodore Shultz.

The contractor filed a counter suit of equity in the court and the judge issued a temporary injunction against the system by the town. The case was won by the town finally, but still another problem confronted the citizens of the town for there were no meters provided for in the system to connect the houses that desired the service.

Here records become obscure, for there is no mention of how the problem was solved except to say the system soon proved to be inadequate and was turned over to the Suburban Sanitary Commission. Despite all the fights connected with that controversial project taken on by the town, it still stands high as the greatest forward step taken by the community in its growth and subsequent becoming of age.

The amendatory act of March 22, 1918, conferred certain additional police powers upon the Mayor and Common Council.



Boy Scout Troop 3, formed in 1912, poses in Spring Park. Later became Troop 203.