

Kimberly Wenrich  
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Dr. Michael Barton

### **A Study of Carpenters, Builders, and Contractors in the City of Harrisburg's Old Eighth Ward, 1869-1900**

When I began my research at the Dauphin County Historical Society, I was not sure where to look. I was amazed by the volume of records that have been preserved from the past and wondered how much has been lost. When I first learned about this project, I talked to my family about any relatives we may have had who had lived in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. I found out that both sides of my family actually have ties to the city's past. I decided to start my research by looking up my family name. I found a possible family name in the city directories and plan to continue to seek information as to whether or not he is a relative. Even though I did not find a relative in the 8<sup>th</sup> Ward of Harrisburg, I did find a topic to pursue in my 8<sup>th</sup> Ward research. I chose to follow the occupation of my possible relative and trace carpenters in the 8<sup>th</sup> Ward from 1869-1900. The following charts and analysis comprise an attempt to synthesis the data collected on carpenters, builders, and contractors listed in the business and general directories of *Boyd's Harrisburg Directory* from the years 1869 through 1900, excluding books 1870 and 1897 as they were unavailable at the time of my research.

I initially started my search for the occupation of carpenter. When I began using the *Business Directory* section of the city directories, I discovered that carpenters were part of a larger listing for *Carpenters, Builders, and Contractors*. These are the listings which I consulted for my data collection. I was surprised at how few names were listed for this trade within the 8<sup>th</sup> Ward. I had expected to find an increased number of people in the 8<sup>th</sup> Ward with this occupation. I thought that this occupation would have been more common in a working-class neighborhood like the 8<sup>th</sup> Ward. One of the challenges that I encountered in my research, however, is that there could easily be more people in this neighborhood with an occupation like

this, but they may have escaped my research as they would not have been listed as “carpenters” if they did not own a business listed in the *Business Directory*. I was forced to focus my search on the business directory for carpenters, builders, and contractors in the 8<sup>th</sup> Ward and used the general address directories to trace the lives of the few business owners that I did find there. From this point forward, I will refer to carpenters, builders, and contractors simply as carpenters.

The first step in data collection was to determine the total number of carpenters in the city of Harrisburg and the total number of carpenters in the 8<sup>th</sup> Ward from the years 1869-1900. Figures 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, compare the total number of carpenters for the city of Harrisburg and the 8<sup>th</sup> Ward, according to year. I found it interesting that the total number of carpenters fluctuated, sometimes dramatically, over this time period. One frustrating aspect of research with city directories is that they do not give any evidence to show what may have been happening in the city during the times of increase and decrease of carpenters in the city and the ward.

**Figure 1.1: Total Number of Carpenters, Builders, and Contractors in the City of Harrisburg and in the 8<sup>th</sup> Ward, 1869-1879**

	1869	1870	1871	1872	1873	1874	1875	1876	1877	1878	1879
<b>Total Number of Carpenters in Harrisburg</b>	2	-	12	12	5	10	10	7	7	15	15
<b>Total Number of Carpenters in the 8<sup>th</sup> Ward</b>	0	-	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1*	1*
* = opposite side of North Street just outside the “Bloody Eighth”											

Figure 1.1 shows the total number of carpenters in the city of Harrisburg from the years 1869-1879. With the exception some small decreases and increases, the total numbers seem to be consistent over a two-year time period. Figure 1.1 also shows the total number of carpenters in the 8<sup>th</sup> Ward of the city of Harrisburg from 1869-1879. The first business owner appears in 1871 and this number remains consistent throughout these years. In 1878 and 1879, the business listed for the Ward appears to have moved to the opposite side of North Street just outside the “Bloody Eighth;” however, it seems reasonable that this business would have served the Ward from this location.

Figure 1.2 shows the total number of carpenters in the city of Harrisburg and the 8<sup>th</sup> Ward from 1880-1889. The total number for the city of Harrisburg remained consistent for the opening stages of this decade but began to rise in 1883, 1884, and 1889, reaching its highest point of twenty-five in 1889. The numbers for the 8<sup>th</sup> Ward reflect the previous decade from 1880-1883, but two listings appear in 1884-1885. However, they drop back to one in 1886 and 1887, but close the decade with two listings. A reasonable assumption here could be that a neighborhood like the 8<sup>th</sup> Ward could easily sustain one business like this for an extended period of time. It also leads to speculation over what was going on in the neighborhood and city that allowed two businesses to occupy space in a relatively small blue-collar section of the city.

<i>Figure 1.2: Total Number of Carpenters, Builders, and Contractors in the City of Harrisburg and in the 8<sup>th</sup> Ward, 1880-1889</i>										
	1880	1881	1882	1883	1884	1885	1886	1887	1888	1889
<b>Total Number of Carpenters in Harrisburg</b>	10	10	10	14	21	21	21	20	20	25
<b>Total Number of Carpenters in the 8<sup>th</sup> Ward</b>	1*	1*	1*	1	2	2	1	1	2	2
* = opposite side of North Street just outside the “Bloody Eighth”										

Figure 1.3 shows the total number of carpenters in the city of Harrisburg and the 8<sup>th</sup> Ward from 1890-1900. The total numbers for Harrisburg remain fairly consistent from 1890–1895. Eighteen new listings appear in 1896 and 1898 but then that number falls slightly in 1899 and 1900. The introduction of the “City Beautiful” movement in the late 1800s and early 1900s could account for the increased number of carpenters in the city of Harrisburg at the close of the 1890s. Again, the city directories do not provide concrete proof. The number of listings for the 8<sup>th</sup> Ward remains at two from 1890 until 1898 then falls to one at the close of the decade. These figures show that while the city of Harrisburg was not a city on the same scale as Philadelphia, it was a thriving city that saw its most dramatic growth in the number of businesses that could have potentially eradicated the 8<sup>th</sup> Ward from the years of 1895-1898 on the eve of the “City Beautiful” movement.

**Figure 1.3: Total Number of Carpenters, Builders, and Contractors in the City of Harrisburg and in the 8<sup>th</sup> Ward, 1890-1900**

	1890	1891	1892	1893	1894	1895	1896	1897	1898	1899	1900
<b>Total Number of Carpenters in Harrisburg</b>	26	31	27	27	25	25	43	-	43	38	37
<b>Total Number of Carpenters in the 8<sup>th</sup> Ward</b>	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	-	2	1	1

From the figures above the number of carpenters in the 8<sup>th</sup> Ward fluctuates only occasionally from one to two through the time period from 1869-1900. I decided to trace the business addresses and the years of occupancy in the 8<sup>th</sup> Ward for each name listed in the business directory. Figure 2 shows the names, years of occupancy in the 8<sup>th</sup> Ward, and the business addresses for each listing. This figure shows that the population of carpenters in the 8<sup>th</sup> Ward was consistent from 1872-1877 when Jacob Cramp occupied 516 State Street. From 1878-1882 Cramp is no longer listed in the business directory, and S. C. Weistling appears at 602 North Street on the edge of the “Bloody Eighth.” Another question could be raised here as to why Jacob Cramp decided to leave his business.

**Figure 2: Business Addresses for all Carpenters, Builders, and Contractors in the 8<sup>th</sup> Ward, 1869-1900**

Name	Years of Occupancy	Business Address
Cramp, Jacob	1872-1877	516 State Street
Weistling, S. C.	1878-1882	602 North Street*
Moeslein, E. and Reiber, M.	1883-1886	428 Cranberry Avenue
West, Ansel	1884-1885	526 North Street*
Moeslein, Edward	1887-1898	428 Cranberry Avenue
Ryan, J. P.	1888-1900**	504 South Street
* = opposite side of North Street just outside the “Bloody Eighth”.		
** = search cut off at 1900		

Edward Moeslein, one of the most consistent listings, appeared for the first time with what looked to be a partner, Milton Reiber, in the Moeslein & Reiber, Co. from 1883-1886 at 428 Cranberry Avenue. Moeslein later appeared to have taken over the business from 1887-1898 at the 428 Cranberry Avenue location. Later in 1889, Edward Moeslein, Jr. and Ferdinand Moeslein appear to have joined Edward Moeslein in business at the Cranberry Avenue location. In 1898, Moeslein, Jr. seemed to take over the business, and Moeslein, Sr. took on several different management level jobs away from the family business. Also, Moeslein, Jr. and

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Ferdinand Moeslein left the Moeslein, Sr. home address in 1890 and resided at 424 Cranberry Avenue in the 8<sup>th</sup> Ward until 1899. After that, both Edward, Jr. and Ferdinand no longer appear to have worked or lived in the Ward. By 1899, the Moeslein family business disappeared from the 8<sup>th</sup> Ward, and the Moeslein family moved their home addresses out of the Ward as well.

From 1884-1885 Ansel West is located on 526 North Street, just outside of the “Bloody Eighth.” West appeared only briefly in this location on the edge of the neighborhood before disappearing from the block. Finally, J.P. Ryan moved his business into the Ward in 1888 at 504 South Street. Ryan seemed to be the most consistent business and home resident of this group. The data here stopped at 1900, but I randomly selected the 1917 volume of the city directories, and J.P. Ryan was still listed at the same business address in the 8<sup>th</sup> Ward. I wonder if Ryan profited from the “City Beautiful” movement before he would have had to move on?

Due to the low number of businesses located in the 8<sup>th</sup> Ward, I decided to consult the general address directories for each of these one-time residents of the Ward and compare the location of their business addresses with the location of their home addresses. In this type of locality it is common for residents to live and work in the same neighborhood. Figure 3.1 shows the results for each of the name listings according to the years that they spent at each business and home address from 1869-1900.

Cramp, Weistling, West, and Ryan both lived and worked in the 8<sup>th</sup> Ward throughout their entire residency there. Reiber and Moeslein appeared to have spent a great deal of time moving their home residences into, outside of, and around the 8<sup>th</sup> Ward. Reiber appeared at three different addresses, only one of which was in the 8<sup>th</sup> Ward, throughout his time as Moeslein’s partner. The longest period of time he spent at one home residence was two years and then he appeared to leave the business with Moeslein and no longer seemed to be a resident of the city of Harrisburg. Moeslein also showed up at several different addresses throughout his tenure as a business owner in the Ward. Moeslein had six different home addresses from 1883-1900 while

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his business remained consistent at 428 Cranberry Avenue. Moeslein poses a bit of a puzzle. He seemed to have been a steady business owner at the Cranberry Avenue location for about fifteen years, but his home address continually changed over that same time period. Moeslein’s situation raised the question, if he could establish his business with a partner in 1883 and then afford to continue on his own in the same location from 1887-1898, what caused him to repeatedly move his family around the city of Harrisburg and around the 8<sup>th</sup> Ward?

**Figure 3.1: Business and Home Addresses for Carpenters, Builders, and Contractors in the The 8<sup>th</sup> Ward of Harrisburg, 1869-1900**

Name	Year(s) at each address	Business Address	Home Address
Cramp, Jacob	1872-1877	516 State Street	516 State Street
Wiestling, S.C.	1878-1882	602 North Street*	602 North Street*
Moeslein, Edward	1883-1886	428 Cranberry Ave.	514 Spruce**
Reiber, Milton	1883	428 Cranberry Ave.	517 Cowden
Reiber, Milton	1884-1885	428 Cranberry Ave	1125 Bartine Ave. **
West, Ansel	1884-1885	526 North Street*	526 North Street*
Reiber, Milton	1885-1886	428 Cranberry Ave.	1139 Derry Street**
Moeslein, Edward	1887	428 Cranberry Ave.	418 Briggs Street**
Moeslein, Edward	1888-1890	428 Cranberry Ave.	806 N. 6 <sup>th</sup> Street**
Ryan, J.P.	1888-1900	504 South Street	515 N. 4 <sup>th</sup> Street
Moeslein, Edward	1891	428 Cranberry Ave.	600 North Street
Moeslein, Edward	1892-1894	428 Cranberry Ave.	422 North Street
Moeslein, Edward	1895	428 Cranberry Ave. 18 N. 3d.	422 North Street
Moeslein, Edward	1896,1898	428 Cranberry Ave.	422 North Street
Moeslein, Edward	1899	No listing	701 N. 6 <sup>th</sup> Street**
Moeslein, Edward	1900	No listing	422 North Street
* = opposite side of North Street just outside the “Bloody Eighth”. ** = home residence outside of 8 <sup>th</sup> Ward			

Figures 3.2 and 3.3 show the consistency of J.P. Ryan throughout the beginning of his stay covered in this time period in the 8<sup>th</sup> Ward. Ryan was the most consistent business and homeowner in this group, both addresses remained constant for this time period in the Ward. Again, I wonder if Ryan found the best location for his business and benefited from changes to the 8<sup>th</sup> Ward and the city at the end of the 1800s and the beginning of the 1900s.

**Figure 3.2: Years of Occupation at Business Address(es) for J.P. Ryan, 1869-1900**

Year(s)	Business Address	Approximate # of Years at Each Address	Location of Address Inside the 8 <sup>th</sup> Ward
1888-1900	504 South Street	12*	YES

* = search cut off at 1900			
<i>Figure 3.3: Years of Occupation at Home Address(es) for J.P. Ryan, 1869-1900</i>			
Year(s)	Home Address	Approximate # of Years at Each Address	Location of Address Inside the 8 <sup>th</sup> Ward
1888-1900	515 N. 4 <sup>th</sup> Street	12*	YES
* = search cut off at 1900			

Figures 3.4 and 3.5 show the consistency of Moeslein's business address at the Cranberry Avenue location and the inconsistency of his home address in and out of the 8<sup>th</sup> Ward. Again, these figures raise the question about what could have caused Moeslein to continually move his family around the city. Why was he reluctant early on to live in the Ward when by 1892, his longest stay at one address, he located his family in the 8<sup>th</sup> Ward ?

Finally, I looked at the listings for carpenters, builders, and contractors who owned a

<i>Figure 3.5: Years of Occupation at Home Address(es) for Edward Moeslein, 1869-1900</i>			
Year(s)	Home Address	Approximate # of Years at Each Address	Location of Address Inside the 8 <sup>th</sup> Ward
1883-1886	514 Spruce	3	NO
1887	418 Briggs Street	1	NO
1888-1890	806 N. 6 <sup>th</sup> Street	2	NO
1891	600 North Street	1	YES
1892-1896, 1898, 1900	422 North Street	6	YES
1899	701 N. 6 <sup>th</sup> Street	1	NO
<i>Figure 3.4: Years of Occupation at Business Address(es) for Edward Moeslein, 1869-1900</i>			
Year(s)	Business Address	Approximate # of Years at Each Address	Location of Address Inside the 8 <sup>th</sup> Ward
1883-1898	428 Cranberry Avenue	15	YES

business inside but lived outside the 8<sup>th</sup> Ward. Figure 4 shows the names of business owners by years of occupancy at business addresses and home addresses. Wiestling occupied the same space just on the edge of the "Bloody Eighth" from 1878 until 1882. Again, it seems reasonable that this location would have served the 8<sup>th</sup> Ward. Weistling only stayed in business and lived on the edge of the Ward for around four years.

<i>Figure 4: Carpenters, Builders, and Contractors with Business Addresses in the 8<sup>th</sup> Ward and Home Addresses Outside of the 8<sup>th</sup> Ward, 1869-1900</i>			
<b>Name</b>	<b>Year(s) at each Address</b>	<b>Business Address</b>	<b>Home Address</b>
Wiestling, S.C.	1878-1882	602 North Street*	602 North Street*
Moeslein, Edward	1883-1886	Moeslein & Reiber Co. 428 Cranberry Ave.	514 Spruce
Reiber, Milton	1884-1885	Moeslein & Reiber Co. 428 Cranberry Ave.	1125 Bartine Ave.
West, Ansel	1884-1885	526 North Street*	526 North Street*
Reiber, Millton	1885-1886	Moeslein & Reiber Co. 428 Cranberry Ave.	1139 Derry Street
Moeslein, Edward	1887	428 Cranberry Ave.	418 Briggs Street
Moeslein, Edward	1888-1890	428 Cranberry Ave.	806 N. 6 <sup>th</sup> Street
* = opposite side of North Street just outside the "Bloody Eighth"			

Reiber appeared to be partners with Moeslein at the Cranberry Avenue location from 1884 until 1886, but his home address appeared transient throughout his stay in the city. He was also the only person to never have resided in the 8<sup>th</sup> Ward. A reasonable assumption could be that the business opportunity with Moeslein drew Reiber into the Ward. But, again, there is speculation as to his relatively brief association with Moeslein and the inconsistency of his home address. This figure also shows further evidence to support previous figures in showing the inconsistency displayed by Moeslein in his home address as compared to his business address from 1883 until 1890.

This type of research is frustrating at times because of the amount of information that is left out. City directories provide valuable records of those people who occupied the city of Harrisburg long before we came into existence. However, they do not tell anything about what was going on in the city that could have led someone to move their home from place to place or why a business excelled in one location but only lasted for a few years in another. Also, people collected these records and human error needs to be taken into account. One name misspelled or one number transposed could change the results for those being researched. I ran into this problem with the Moeslein family.

Despite the frustrations of research of this nature, several conclusions can be drawn about those former residents of the city of Harrisburg with the occupation of carpenters, builders, and contractors from 1869-1900. First, there were very few independent carpenters inside or outside of the 8<sup>th</sup> Ward in Harrisburg during this time period. I was surprised to find so few people with this occupation in a city the size of Harrisburg and in the 8<sup>th</sup> Ward in particular. I thought that this occupation would have drawn more men from working class neighborhoods like the 8<sup>th</sup>. However, another problem with this research appeared because there easily could be more people in the 8<sup>th</sup> with this occupation who never owned a business. The only way to trace them would be to catalogue the general address directories for each year and note the occupation of all of the residents of the city--a daunting and time consuming task.

Second, I was surprised by the consistency of the business addresses of some of these businessmen and the inconsistency of their home addresses. Edward Moeslein and Milton Reiber are two examples of men with consistent business locations and very inconsistent home locations. Why did they choose to move around the city seemingly constantly and why did Moeslein flirt with living inside and outside the 8<sup>th</sup> Ward? On the other hand, J.P. Ryan shows that not all businessmen of this type were transient homeowners throughout these years. Ryan appears to have had a successful business and home life inside the 8<sup>th</sup> Ward for many years. What changes in the city could have affected each man and influenced the decisions that they made regarding their homes and businesses?

And finally, I wondered at the brief appearance and disappearance of businesses throughout these years. Why did Weistling and West have such short tenures in the city? What caused them to move on when they did and did they leave the city or change occupations? To continue this search and try and answer some of these questions I would have to expand beyond the city directories to census data and more complete historical data on the history of the city of Harrisburg and the 8<sup>th</sup> Ward beyond simply the names of its residents.

**Sources**

Barton, Michael and Jessica Dorman. *Harrisburg's Old Eighth Ward*. Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2002.

*Boyd's Harrisburg Directory*. Years 1869 –1900 (excluding 1870 and 1897).