

# Wellington Hall and Sigma Nu A History of the North High Streetscape between 14<sup>th</sup> & 17<sup>th</sup> Avenues

By Doreen Uhas Sauer

## WELLINGTON HALL



### A Residence for Men

One or two room apartments with the latest modern equipment including private bath with shower — twin beds — special room service. Excellent ventilation and abundance of light.

J. W. BURGESS, Mgr.  
WA-2000

North High St. at 16th Ave.

## Wellington Hall, 1892-1900 N. High St.

Wellington Hall opened to great fanfare in March, 1928. The completion of the building was a long held dream of J. W. Burgess and Ralph S. Fallon. Burgess was a twenty-year resident of the University District who had long planned for comfortable “bachelor apartments” with “modern and attractive storerooms” in the neighborhood across from the university. He was well known as the owner of a grocery business near Fifteenth and High for more than 16 years.

Fallon was the general contractor whose work was in residential construction but agreed to build a business block. Fallon had previously built residences in Columbus and Bexley for a number of wealthy clients. In the construction of the Wellington, Fallon, in turn, hired many of the workmen, masons, and outfitters who had worked on his residential

projects. Over 20 local firms were employed in the construction, including American Art Glass Company for the leaded glass, F. M. Pearl for the brick work, and Davis Cut Stone Company.

The architects were Benham & Richards, 167 East State Street. Bentham & Richards operated from 1919 to 1947, becoming Bentham, Richards, & Armstrong from 1947 until 1969.

Originally the building contained nine “storerooms”—three in the basement and six on the street level—and 32 apartments of one and two rooms all furnished as bachelor quarters. “Storerooms” was another term for what would today be seen as commercial spaces.

“Bachelor quarters” were a popular concept in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century as young professional (or would-be professional) men were entering the commercial, business, or university realm and had no intention or means of starting their own household or family until they were firmly established. Other buildings downtown, like the Virginia and Seneca Hotels catered to the young professional men of the day, as did the YMCA for more working class men. To that end, Wellington’s bachelor quarters provided hotel service in the apartments. Hotel service was complemented by other amenities—shoe stores, cigar shops, barber shop, novelty (notions) shop, confectionary, and a restaurant (The Fallone) which was under the direction of Mrs. Ralph Fallon, formerly with the Lazarus tea room. The Fallone opened as a trendy modern restaurant open to the public, seven days of the week until 8 each evening.

The Lazarus Company was “proud of our part in the completion of these unique and handsome apartments”—as outfitters of Wellington Hall, they supplied the furniture, floor coverings, and draperies (all made to order in Lazarus workrooms) and oversaw the decoration of the rooms. Lee’s Scarlet and Gray Barber Shop was on the Sixteenth Avenue side.

In the Depression, future Ohio governor, James Rhodes started a restaurant, Jim's Place, in the hotel to help with college expenses. Born in southern coal mining Ohio and far from being wealthy, Rhodes would not have been part of the trendy raccoon coat college men who could afford to take up residence at the Wellington; however, he had a sense of humor. He created a pseudo fraternity that was joined by other like-minded students, spoofing "the swells." Their fraternity pin was a crushed beer bottle cap.

The Wellington has had a number of businesses over the years—banks, laundry, independent book and record stores, shoe stores, and, in the basement, the longest running business, Bernie's Bagels, which closed in December 2015.



### **Sigma Nu, 22 E. 16<sup>th</sup> St.**

The Beta Nu Chapter of Sigma Nu fraternity was established at Ohio State in 1891; its original founding in 1869 was at the Virginia Military Institute. By November, 1928, plans were announced for Sigma Nu's new home—immediately behind—and attached to—the prestigious Wellington Hall (later called Wellington Hotel) on the northeast corner of North High Street and East Sixteenth Avenue (officially listed as 22 East Sixteenth Avenue).

The architect was Ray Sims who had previously designed the Tudor-style Tau Kappa Epsilon fraternity in 1927, often considered to be the most beautiful fraternity on campus. Sims was active from 1918 to 1964, associated with Sims, Cornelius & Schooley (1946-1964). In 1964, the firm became Schooley Cornelius

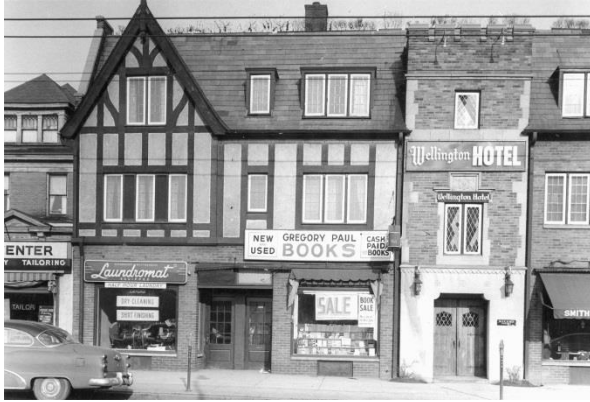
Associates until 1969. Today the firm is known as Schooley Caldwell Associates.

The building was designed in a "northern Italian style" with wrought iron grill work on windows and balcony, brick trimmed with stone, and completely fireproof. Off the entrance hall on the first floor were a dining room and kitchens and an entrance to an enclosed porch. Upper floors had eight study rooms; baths and dormitories were on the third and fourth floors.

Sigma Nu officially opened early April, 1929.

The area between Seventeenth and Fifteenth Avenues, by the 1920s, became a trendy and lively place to hang out and be seen. Close to campus and across from the university president's home on North High Street, there were two elegant tailoring shops, tobacco shops, and restaurants. The wide sidewalks between Seventeenth and Sixteenth Avenues were once the front lawns of the older residential homes. Across Sixteenth Avenue just south of the Wellington, a large grape arbor graced the area on High Street for more than seventy years. It extended a full lot from a small florist shop and was a favorite student and community shady respite in the summer. Long gone, the arbor supposedly did not die with the construction of the newer building on the corner, and local legend has maintained that it came up under the nearby building, traveling even across (or under) High Street to the Wexner Center's prairie plantings.

## Background of North High Streetscape



Like many of the early fraternities at Ohio State in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Sigma Nu was originally not at its present location on East Sixteenth Avenue. A number of fraternities moved yearly since they leased their buildings, and landlords were reluctant to enter into long term agreements. A few fraternities owned their house on East Fifteenth or East Sixteenth, but many more were located on West Tenth, Indianola, and East Thirteenth Avenues. Sigma Nu was (in 1913) located at 80 East Thirteenth Avenue. The original entrance to Ohio State was on

the site of South Campus Gateway; hence much of the life of the university centered on the residential streets on the west side of North High or south of East Fifteenth Avenue.

The face of North High in the 1920s was changing rapidly and dramatically as the university grew northward and the entrance to Ohio State became more centered at Fifteenth and North High. Large and opulent residences built across from the President's house (present site of Mershon Auditorium) were demolished for new construction.

In the 1920s, zoning codes were enacted in Columbus and, almost overnight, buildings across the city which faced major arterials along streetcar stops were designated as "commercial" zoning. Many existing houses simply stopped being residential, grew buildout additions with storefronts, and became, in effect, two levels of commercial or retail space. In many cases in the early days, families took up residence in the existing space in the back or upstairs of the building and operated the family business in the front. This was the case with the Marzetti family who moved their restaurant from near Eleventh Avenue and North High Streets to East Woodruff and North High (now the site of Panda Express), operating a restaurant in front from their family space just a few step away.



The Herb Hennick family lived at Waldeck and East Seventeenth Avenues (house still there) but opened their soda, smoke, and snack shop at 1904 North High in a former residential row house that faced East Fifteenth Avenue. The building remains and is occupied by Brennan's coffee with a number of other businesses on the upper floors. Before World War I, they moved their business to their second and best known site—just south of Long's Book Store.

The building is still marked Hennick's though it lost its very 1940s vitreous enamel tile doorway and sign. Here Hennick's was the true campus hangout with booths for students and a jukebox. Upstairs was a ballroom which could be rented for dances and parties. Hennick's was a favorite student hangout from 1922 to 1949 and became even more legendary for its association with humorist James Thurber and his

fraternity brother, Elliot Nugent. They co-authored the spoof on Ohio State life and its football craze, *The Male Animal*, which became a Hollywood movie, later debuting in Columbus at the Palace Theater.

Hennick's location was so well known—like Long's Bookstore—that it did not advertise its address, listing itself simply as “at the gateway of the university.”

Frank C. Long (otherwise known as “the Colonel”), founder of Long's Bookstore, had his house on East Fifteenth Avenue at Pearl Street, eventually building out the entire front footage on High Street as a commercial space that became Long's as most would remember it.

Long enrolled at Ohio State in 1899, majoring in agriculture, but pursued other money making ideas. He purchased a “student book exchange” from another student in the basement of University Hall, but, as he later claimed, he was “kicked off campus.” His father helped him open a bookstore in the former Kiler's Drug Store at Eleventh and High. The original Long's Books (1902) was approximately in the same location as present Barnes and Noble Books at South Campus Gateway.

The store moved to East Fifteenth and North High in 1909. Here Long built the two-story building which grew from his family's house. Long's was the oldest family-owned bookstore in the United States. Long's Bookstore, closed for more than a decade, is actually 1960s stucco front on a handsome brick and stone building that grew over time.

Originally, the bookstore was quite small and also contained a grocery. In the 1920s, that space became a Lazarus Department Store for a short time. The Cottage Cove in the basement sold bean soup for five cents. In addition to co-authoring *The Male Animal*, Eliot Nugent also wrote *The Poor Nut*, which was set in Long's and was made into a Broadway play in 1925. In 1928, a neighborhood zoning battle erupted between Long and his neighbors on Fifteenth Avenue. Led by Mrs. Hagerty (Hagerty Hall on campus is named for her husband), neighbors protested when Long installed a dining car on the premises (present parking lot). Though zoning laws were new in Columbus and the frontage on North High was zoned for commercial use, it appears Long lost his case.

In the 1940s, Long's was the world's largest bookstore, doing \$1,000 a week in retailers' orders from around the world. However, much of the wealth of Long's came from its own publishing company—from religious tracts to French texts. Frank Long's son, Robert, built a rare and first-edition book collection (later acquired by Ohio State University). The original wallpaper, book shelves, and door to the rare book room still exist though altered by time and neglect. The iconic Long's sign (now at Gateway) was fabricated in 1948 by the Columbus Sign Company. With Robert's death in 1956, Dr. Frank Long, Jr., left his medical practice to run the business, expanding the store to 50,000 square feet, adding clothing, memorabilia, and an extensive art department. A third generation operated the business until it was sold to Campus Partners in 2000.

By the late 1920s, North High Street from Twelfth through Woodruff Avenues was undergoing an extreme makeover with regard to its tenant base. Commercial buildings remained—including the College Inn bowling alley and apartments, the Big Bear commercial bakery, the original Trade Winds in a former home and medical office of one of Columbus's early female doctors, the Romanesque style commercial building that housed Yee's Hand Laundry, a Greek Revival style bank (whose pillars were moved to the Short North), and more than 30 bars. These lasted until the development of Gateway.

However, by the 1920s, the university had grown to the north. As streetcars carried more and more students to campus from around the city, housing needs for students and staff necessitated the building of large brick apartment buildings and courtyard row house development (both of which still exist in a few places). Houses continued to exist though frequently with a commercial buildout addition in front. Elsie Janis, well known and nationally celebrated vaudevillian, lived in a house with an expansive front lawn where Wendy's newest restaurant is today near Woodruff. Arthur Schlesinger Jr., famous historian and part of President Kennedy's inner circle, was born in one of the apartment buildings on the site of SBX at Fourteenth Avenue. His father was a professor at Ohio State. One of the apartment buildings remains behind SBX.