



ABOUT BLOOMINGDALE'S 'VICTORIAN SECRETS AND MODERN TRUTHS'

In the early-1800's, Bloomingdale – then located in Washington County -- was bucolic and rural, defined primarily by its estates and farm land. But in 1888, Congress passed legislation requiring the extension of the City's street grid to its growing County suburbs in order to simplify the extension of utilities to these areas. This, along with the extension of streetcar lines to the County, opened it to subdivision and development. In 1889, the Bloomingdale subdivision was established and its major residential development was initiated soon thereafter

Twenty years later, nearly all Bloomingdale lots had been built upon, resulting in the neighborhood's unique architectural and social legacies. Architecturally, Bloomingdale is known for its Victorian, Colonial Revival and Queen Anne row homes that form a distinct rhythmic streetscape. These homes were brick, substantial (sometimes with servant quarters and coach houses or garages), and known for their up-to-date amenities. Socially, Bloomingdale was a highly desired, solid middle-class suburban neighborhood. But some of its speculative developers, seeking to secure sales in the then, as now, highly competitive Bloomingdale real estate market (and probably also in consideration of the neighborhood's proximity to Howard University) placed racial covenants on deeds and peddled the myth that the covenants would protect property values and the neighborhood's reputation. One of Bloomingdale's covenanted homes, whose new Black owners were sued (*Hurd v. Hodge*) and forced to vacate by white neighbors (as was the case for Black owners of at least 33 other Bloomingdale homes), became one of the cases reviewed by the U.S. Supreme Court, resulting in its 1948 decision (*Shelley v. Kraemer*) rendering all of the nation's restrictive housing covenants as illegal and unenforceable. In Bloomingdale and elsewhere, this ruling was followed by discriminatory federal and private mortgage lending, realtor and property appraisal practices. It should be noted that typically, these practices did not target individuals – but racial/religious minority neighborhoods and communities (i.e., 'redlining').

Consequently, Bloomingdale was increasingly populated by middle-class African Americans with a legacy of accomplishment. But in the late 1950s through the 1970s, Bloomingdale was characterized by White Flight, increased rentals, disinvestment, and riot. In addition, the displacement of virtually the entire population of the Southwest quadrant of DC (most of whom received little or no federal relocation assistance) due to massive urban renewal, and the re-settlement of some of these persons in Bloomingdale, served to further erode the neighborhood's social fabric. Since 1921, the Bloomingdale Civic Association was a leading neighborhood advocate for such neighborhood concerns.

It was not until the late 1980s and early 1990s, when Federal agencies engaged in major crackdowns on discriminatory mortgage lenders and appraisal and real estate practices, did Bloomingdale residents and prospective buyers gain ready access to funding for home purchase and/or renovation. This ushered in 'gentrification' and Bloomingdale's renewal.

Today, Bloomingdale's century-old homes still stand occupied; their exterior architectural dignity largely intact; the secrets witnessed by its Victorians slowly oozing out as modern truths. The hundreds of millions of dollars that collectively have been invested by Bloomingdale homeowners and developers have proven that the interiors of these homes are highly adaptable to changing modern lifestyles and needs. Behind the sobriety of Bloomingdale's facades are unexpected, surprising and varied renovated interiors reflecting the various tastes of their diverse occupants. With an influx of new residents, commercial activity has increased, as has the visibility of the neighborhood's Arts & Letters community. In addition, voluntary neighborhood history, heritage, preservation, beautification, urban planning and advocacy

efforts actively pursue a modern truth: Bloomingdale is re-inventing itself as a stable, diverse, welcoming, and inclusive neighborhood. **THIS IS WHO WE ARE.**

(For more related info, go to [Bloomingdale History](#))

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'Bloomingdale: Victorian Secrets & Modern Truths'