

### *My Father, John James Stevens*

My father, John James Stevens was born on March 12, 1889 in Lovingston County, Virginia. The family moved to Lynchburg, Virginia when he was a youth. His parents had purchased a home at 319 Florida Avenue. Daddy attended schools in Lynchburg and as it was with most Negroes at that time, the children had to stop school to help support the family. My father finished the eighth grade before going to work. He worked at Bennie's Hotel in Lynchburg, near Twelfth and Main Streets. His boss was named Thomas Ryan.

When he was in his late teens, Daddy came to Washington, D.C., perhaps encouraged by some Lynchburg friends, like a man named Hubbard, who had come to Washington and obtained fairly decent jobs. My father began to work as a Red Cap at Union Station as a parcel porter, which was considered a pretty good steady job for Negroes at that time. Red Caps wore uniforms with red caps. They helped travelers with their luggage and helped them obtain transportation to their destinations.

When he first came to Washington about 1909, John Stevens lived at 1207 Ninth Street, N. W. A postal card from his future wife, my mother, was mailed to him at that address in August of 1909. Later he stayed with a family at 935 Fourth Street, N. W.. This is the address where he and my mother lived when they were first married. This house is located near Mount Carmel Baptist Church, 901 Third Street, N.W., where I have been a member since 1937.

In a letter from Boston, Massachusetts, dated April 3, 1912 from Florence Garland, John Stevens was living at 935 Fourth Street, N.W. She wrote in the letter that she heard he had a new car. This, no doubt, was unusual because most people did not own automobiles at that time and the first Ford car was not made until 1903.

My father and mother had kept in touch with each other after he had left Lynchburg. Her parents had sent her to Boston to live with her maternal grandparents. My mother came to Washington from Boston in 1912. She and my father were married on August 14, 1912 at 503 D Street, N.W. Washington, D.C. by the Reverend W. Westray who lived at 1102 Delaware Avenue, S.W.. At the time of their marriage, my father was twenty-three years old and my mother was twenty years old. The ceremony was witnessed by Alice Martin and Edward Hughes whose names I am not familiar with.

An undated postal card mailed to Florence Garland Stevens from her father in Lynchburg, mentioned her recent marriage. The card was addressed to 935 Fourth Street, N. W. The couple apparently did not live at this address very long because they purchased a house at 2024 Fourth Street, N.W. in 1913. The house was bought from H.A. Kite. It was listed as being located on Lot 56, Square 2080. It is now listed as Lot 0100, square 3232, in an area that had been called Effington Square. At that time it was considered the "garden spot of Washington" for Negroes. The area is now called LeDroit Park section of Washington.

The former mayor of Washington, D.C., Walter Washington, has lived for many years at 408 T Street, N. W., two blocks down the street from 2024. Fourth Street.

Historical records relate that at one time around the year 1900, Negroes were not allowed to live north of Florida Avenue, N.W. But things were changing. I remember reading of a riot between whites and blacks in that area about 1919. Many thanks to those brave folks who had the nerve to fight for the rights of all the Negro people.

My father was a hard and steady worker outside of the home. Even during the Great Depression that began in 1929 when many people were unemployed, fortunately, he was never without a job. In addition to his day job as a Red Cap, he worked at night at the Wardman Park Hotel, 2600 Woodley Road, N.W. (Now the Sheraton-Washington).

The United States entered World War I on April 6, 1917. My father was required to register for military service, as were all the men about his age. He was about twenty-nine years old at that time. He was not classified at the top of the eligible list to serve in the war because he and my mother had a new baby girl. The war ended formally on November 11, 1918, when Germany signed the armistice.

About 1922, Daddy began to work as a photostat operator in the Photo-duplicating Laboratory at the Library of Congress. The Library of Congress is located at First and Independence Avenue, S. E., close to the U. S. Capitol. This was considered a good position for a Negro back then because most Negroes were hired only as laborers. His work involved making copies and preparing material requested by U. S. Congressmen. It required a good bit of skill on the machines that were used at that time. He worked Monday to Friday and one-half day on Saturday. Then, on Sunday he went back to the Library of Congress (sometime called the Congressional Library) where he worked from 2:00 to 10:00 P. M. as an admissions agent at the door of the Library Reading Room. I remember my mother taking my sister and me to visit the Library. We would get all dressed up in our Sunday best clothes, little gloves and hats. I thought the Library was just so beautiful and spacious. We would go up to the balcony and look down over the Reading Room area where my father would be working and checking in the visitors, directing them to the proper places in the Reading Room, and clicking a hand-held instrument that counted each visitor that entered the Room. I had no idea that several years later I would spend hours at the Library of Congress, sometime not willingly, working on research papers for my classes at Howard University.

About 1924 Daddy became ill with double pneumonia. He evidently was quite sick, and doctors did not have very good methods then to treat the disease. But he recovered nicely. The doctor told him that to stay healthy, he should swallow two whole raw eggs for breakfast every day. From that time on for the rest of his life, every single day, that was part of his breakfast, along with a glass of fruit juice and a cup of coffee. He never, as far as I know, ate cereal or cooked eggs, or sausage, or bacon. He tried to follow the doctor's orders, at least to that extent. Now, doctors say too many eggs can cause high cholesterol levels. Little or nothing was known about cholesterol in 1924.