

Scenes from the Past

The imposing house at 16th and Corcoran Streets known for many years as the Green Door Club House has captured the imagination of many passersby, with much of the interior features visible through the expansive glass conservatory windows. It was built in 1885 for a former mayor of Leavenworth, Kansas.

Hampton B. Denman was born in 1829, the son of Samuel and Suzanna (Boyle) Denman. In his late 20s, he was elected and served as the mayor of Leavenworth, Kansas in 1858, 1859, and 1862 before moving to Washington, DC with his family by 1876 for unknown reasons. They were living at 1608 19th Street in 1885 when he purchased the vacant lot on 16th Street between Q and R Streets for \$14,416 in 1886 where he intended to build his mansion.

Denman estimated the cost of building the Romanesque and Queen Anne Revival-styled house as \$22,000. The architectural firm of Fuller & Wheeler of Albany, New York was chosen to provide the plans for the brick and Hummelstown brownstone residence; its partners were Albert W. Fuller and Charles E. Wheeler. Fuller published examples of his popular work in five manuals of architecture, and the proposed design of the Denman residence was included as a page in the June 19, 1886 issue of *American Architect and Building News*, illustrated here.

The Denmans entertained and opened their house for social events during the first decade of their occupancy, until Hampton Denman died on October 11, 1895. His wife, Mary (Young) Denman and their son, lawyer Hampton Y. Denman (1872-1902), resided at the house until her death in 1898.

The house and its contents were left to various local charities upon the death of Hampton Y. Denman in 1902, but remaining family members soon contested the will, and a settlement was entered into in 1905. The estate sold the house to Eleanora O'Donnell Hinckley that year for \$32,000.

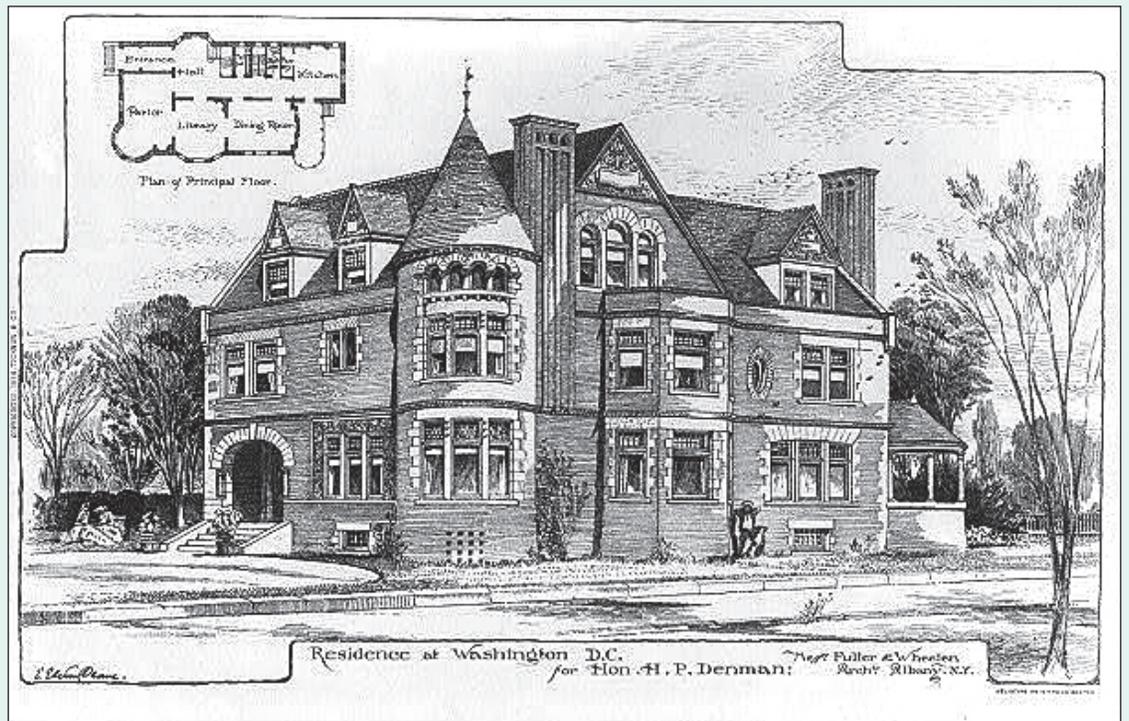
At the time of her purchase, Hinckley was the estranged wife of portrait painter Robert Hinckley, who studied under the famous Hudson River School landscape painter Asher Durand and became the first American pupil of the École des Beaux Arts after the Civil War, under Cabanel and Yvon. He had been born in Boston, Massachusetts on April 3, 1853. In Washington, he worked at

the Corcoran Art Gallery and completed at least 350 portraits of notable Washingtonians. By 1910, however, he gave up painting and moved to Rehoboth Beach where he spent much of the rest of his life until his death in 1941.

Mrs. Hinckley, a son, and daughter Gladys remained at 1623 16th Street where she became active in the Women's Sixteenth Street Improvement Association, which eventually succeeded in legally changing the name of 16th Street to be the Avenue of the Presidents in 1907. She also undertook a series of renovations to the house, adding a conservatory and new dining room to the rear of the property that were reportedly designed by daughter Gladys at age 14, with the assistance of architect



Recent view of the house while still occupied by the Green Door. photo—courtesy Wikipedia.



Architect's 1886 rendering of the house at the time of its construction.

illus--courtesy Kelsey & Associates private collection.

Frank H. Jackson.

In March of 1911, Gladys "still one of Washington's most popular society belles," became the first woman in the capital to fly in an "aeroplane" when she went up 50 feet in a Rex Smith biplane over Potomac Park. She was quoted in the March 26, 1911 issue of the *Washington Post* as having enthused, "It is simply bully to soar out over the ground. You feel as though you were riding on a cloud."

And, in 1918, the *Post* reported that Eleanora Hinckley obtained her driver's license for a 1915 Hudson automobile. She lived at the house until her death in 1934.

Her daughter Gladys, who had married McCeney Werlich in 1923, a

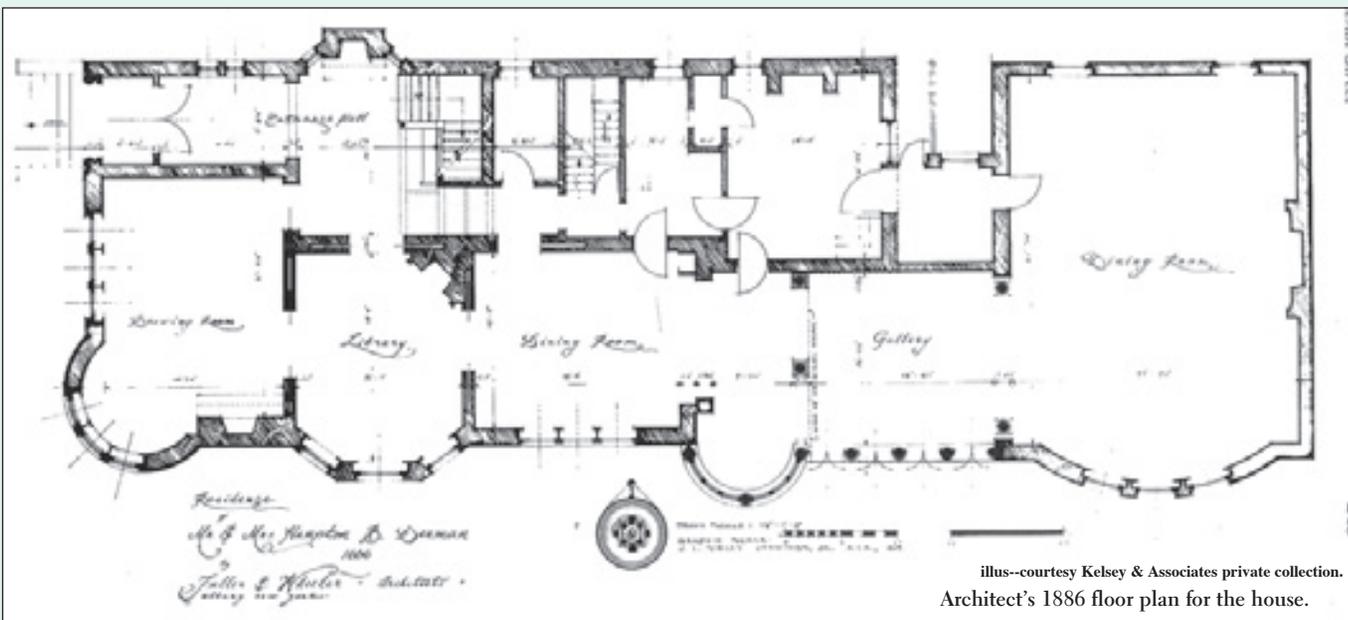
foreign service officer with whom she lived all over the world, including Latvia, Poland, Costa Rica, Liberia, and France, returned to Washington in 1936 when her husband died suddenly in Paris. She would remain at the house for the ensuing 40 years.

The *Washington Post* of January 21, 1976 wrote, "She had an overpowering, marvelous house, full of people, with all sorts of parties going on. . . . She had a lovely aquiline face and a wonderfully flutely voice, like a marvelous English dowager."

In January of 1976, at the age of 87, Gladys was walking home after shopping at the 17th Street Safeway store. A gang of kids as young as age 12 were stalking potential mugging victims, soon targeted her. As reported by the *Post* on January 24th, "[a]ccording to police accounts, Mrs. Werlich was walking near the McDonald's [on the corner of 17th and Corcoran Streets] on her way home from a supermarket . . . when the youths followed her. Mrs. Werlich was struck on the head with a soft-drink bottle during the attack across the street from her home of the past 70 years at 1623 16th St., NW, police said. She died of a fractured skull and other head injuries. . . ." (*Washington Post*, January 24, 1976).

Her son Robert sold the home within the year. The estate sale revealed to the public a house filled with 150 years of his family's history. The mansion was purchased by the Green Door organization, which prepares women and men with schizophrenia, bi-polar disorder and other mental illnesses to work and live independently in the city. The 11,400 square-foot structure has been listed for sale at \$5.4 million since December of 2010.

—Paul Kelsey Williams
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illus--courtesy Kelsey & Associates private collection.
Architect's 1886 floor plan for the house.

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