

Scenes from the Past



photo—Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.

Pre-World War II view of the Rochambeau Apartments, flanked to the right by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce headquarters building at H Street and to the left at the corner of I Street by the Army and Navy Club's original building.

The fabled Rochambeau Apartment building was built overlooking Farragut Square at 815 Connecticut Avenue by Francis Henry Duehay beginning in June of 1903. Its luxury apartments housed many Washington elite, Congressmen, and a Supreme Court justice for the following 30 years, until it was converted to an office building.

Duehay received his building permit on June 19, 1903, and estimated that the cost of construction would be \$500,000. It was designed by noted local architect Thomas Franklin Schneider.

During the winter of 1905, owner Duehay was arrested for allegedly violating the new anti-smoke law in Washington, which was

enacted to reduce the amount of thick black smoke emitted from factories and businesses. It exempted private residences, of course, and Duehay argued in an eventual lawsuit that the apartment house was indeed a private residence and not a commercial building.

Duehay had been born in Washington in 1863, and had graduated from the National Law School. Almost immediately after leaving school, he established the F H

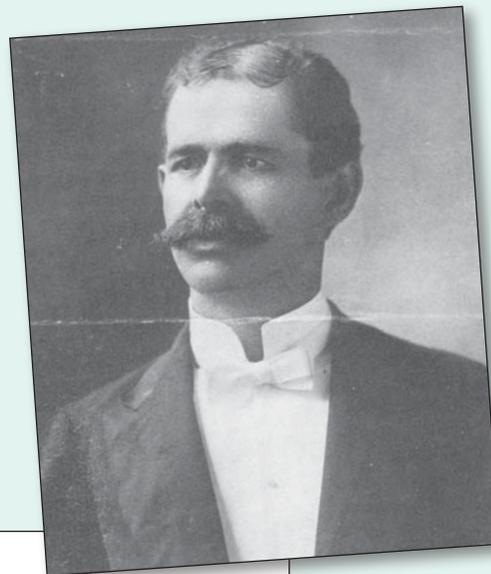
Duehay Real Estate Company that specialized in apartment buildings. He and his wife Edith resided for most of their lives at 1623 28th Street, NW. Duehay served as the superintendent of federal prisons during World War I.

The building was sold to the Acacia Mutual Life Insurance Company for \$650,000 in early 1935. On November 1, 1935, the federal government took over the apartment house and notified its 100 residents, mostly doctors and dentists, to vacate their apartments by December 1st of that year, so the building could be converted in offices for the Federal Trade Commission. At the time, Supreme Court Justice James Clark McReynolds was among its more prominent occupants. President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal prompted the influx of thousands of new federal workers, and office space in Washington quickly became scarce.

The building sat directly south of the famed Army and Navy Club building, built in 1891 to the designs of Harvey L. Page. It featured a distinctive rounded turret that covered an outside meeting and social space.

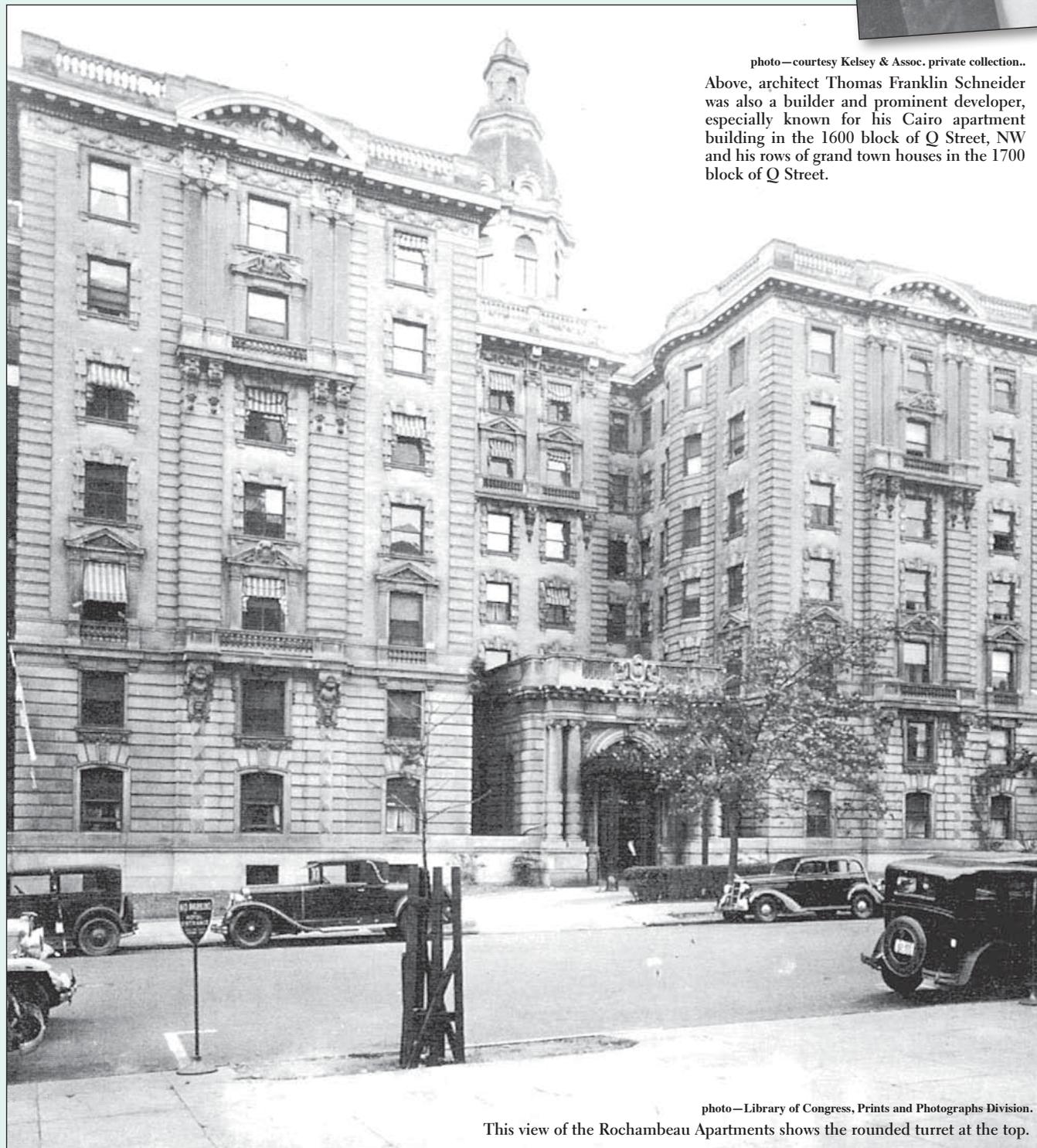
Duehay died of a heart attack in 1934 at the age of 70 and was interred in Oak Hill cemetery in Georgetown. His Rochambeau apartment building was torn down in 1962 and replaced by the office building that now occupies that site.

—Paul Kelsey Williams
Historic Preservation Specialist
Kelsey & Associates,
Washington, DC



photo—courtesy Kelsey & Assoc. private collection..

Above, architect Thomas Franklin Schneider was also a builder and prominent developer, especially known for his Cairo apartment building in the 1600 block of Q Street, NW and his rows of grand town houses in the 1700 block of Q Street.



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This view of the Rochambeau Apartments shows the rounded turret at the top.

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