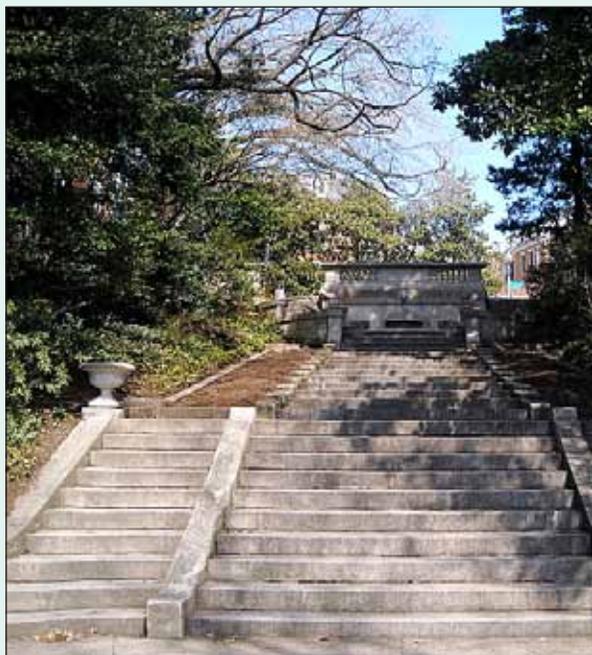


# Scenes from the Past

The large and unusual red brick mansion that is situated at the northeast corner of Decatur Place and 22nd Street was built beginning in May of 1906 for a single woman named Miss Martha C. Codman. It was designed by her nephew, noted architect Ogden Codman, Jr., and built at a cost of an astonishing \$80,000 when a typical townhouse at the time could be constructed for \$4,500. The mansion, adjoining the celebrated Spanish Steps, today serves as the residence His Excellency Mr. Kittiphong na Ranong, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Kingdom of Thailand to the United States of America.

Marta Codman was about age 48 when she had 2145 Decatur Place built; never having revealed her true age, she had been born about 1858 in Boston to a wealthy shipping family. Her Great-Great Grandfather was merchant Elias Haskett Derby of Salem, Massachusetts, generally considered America's first millionaire. Like many of her social standing and wealth, she also owned homes in Boston, and two homes in Newport, Rhode Island coined Atlantic House and Ocean House.

Architect Ogden Codman studied architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and practiced in Boston, Newport and New York City. Unlike other architects of the time, he considered interior architecture and interior design a branch of architecture. He co-wrote the very influential book with client Edith Wharton titled



photo—courtesy Wikipedia Commons (Wikipedia.com).

View of the Spanish Steps, at the top of which is S Street, as seen from where 22nd Street dead-ends at Decatur Place; the Codman mansion is to the right (not shown).

## The Decoration of Houses.

The Codman mansion in Washington took a year-and-a-half to build, and was noted for its unusual walled Italian garden and conservatory (later pool) located on the second story. A large reception room is located downstairs, originally adjacent to wine closets, a silver vault, an office and a dairy room. The first floor, or piano noble, features a music room, drawing, library, dining room and kitchen.

Martha's bedroom and morning room were located on the 3rd floor. All of the interior decorations, carvings, hardware and furnishings were imported from France. The *Washington Post* noted that the house was nearing completion in late October of 1907. At the time, Codman also had a large stable and coach room built close by at 1415 22nd Street that still exists, most recently



Photo—courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Singer Maxim Karolik from 1941.



photo—Paul K. Williams—The InTowner.

Present day view of the Codman mansion at 2145 Decatur Place, NW; the Spanish Steps are to the left (not shown).

operated as the Apex nightclub.

Martha Codman met Russian-born singer Maxim Karolik at one of his performances in Newport. He had been born in Akerman, Russia in 1893, and had migrated to the United States in 1922, shortly after the First World War. Rumors after a recital at her Bellevue Avenue mansion in Newport in the summer of 1927 of an impending engagement between the two were labeled by Karolik as "preposterous" and "ridiculous." Nevertheless, on February 2, 1928, they were married in France. She was somewhere around 70, he was 35. This caused somewhat of a scandal in the conservative society circles, especially



photo—courtesy Educators Online, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Martha Codman, the mansion's owner, as pictured about 1906 in a watercolor on ivory by painter Georgine Campbell.

in Boston. He was labeled a "Russian adventurer" or the "musical bridegroom."

Their marriage lasted, however, and in 1939 they presented the Boston Museum of Fine Arts with an 18th century collection of American paintings, furniture,



photo—courtesy Wikipedia Commons (Wikipedia.com). Architect Ogden Codman, Jr.

silver and other examples of art worth \$400,000. Martha died in Newport on April 21, 1948, and Maxim died in New York City on December 20, 1963.

In 1938, the mansion was sold to Philippines Governor General Dwight Filley Davis (of the Davis cup fame). In 1947, it served as the location of the Louise Home, founded

by W.W. Corcoran (of gallery fame), a home for ladies "who had known brighter days and fairer prospects . . . compelled to contend with adverse circumstances."

The mansion was purchased in 1976 by neighbor Stellita Renchard for \$500,000. She had hoped to restore and preserve the house for her Spanish-American art collection. Tragically, she and husband were killed in a car crash in 1982 and the house became vacant for several years.

The property was listed for \$3.5 million in 1987, and was once considered by the Spanish government as a potential ambassador's residence. Before becoming the Kingdom of Thailand's ambassador's residence, it was purchased and owned for a short time by Hungarian rags-to-riches immigrant Nicolas Salgo, the financier who built the Watergate complex. □

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