

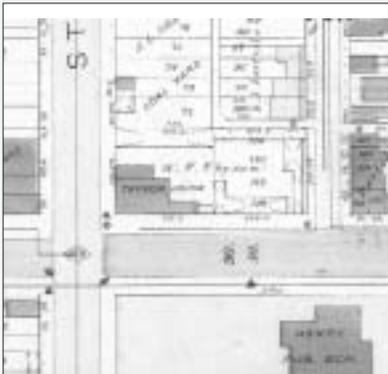
# Scenes from the Past...



photo—courtesy, Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division

Early 1930s view of the Thyson House, by which time it had long been in use by the Salvation Army.

The impressive house that once stood on northeast corner of 7th and P Streets was built prior to 1874 for William F. Thyson. He owned the majority of Square 445 at the time, and he and his extended family began to subdivide it and sell off portions of it in April and May of 1878.



map—courtesy, Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division  
The 1887 Hopkins map shows that by that time Thyson had an extensive array of stables in his rear yard, which then extended to Marion Street side of the block on the east.

By the time a Hopkins map was published in 1887, the house had been expanded considerably, with the addition of a rear kitchen in 1879 and various outbuildings in 1880. In fact, the Thyson house extended eastward to the corner of Marion Street, with a multitude of stables and sheds appearing in the rear and side yard. To the north along 7th Street that year was a vast open coal yard.

The several small stores seen at the left in the photograph, at 1509 to 1513 7th Street, were built in 1909, replacing the coal yard. In 1914,

the house itself served as the “Thyson Hotel,” with John Walsh serving as manager, but shortly after World War I it was converted and utilized as the Salvation Army’s “colored men’s club.” By 1925, about the time the photograph shown here was taken, the rear stables had been converted into a lumber business. Earlier, in 1921, J.S. Leatherman had obtained a permit to construct the Broadway Theater at 1515 7th Street, at a cost of \$40,000.



photo—courtesy, T. Luke Young, author’s collection.

More than 30 years after the building was destroyed by fire during the riots, the corner of 7th and P Streets remains vacant to this day.



photo—courtesy, Washingtoniana Division, MLK Jr., Library

The ruins of the Thyson House can be seen in the background of this image from April of 1968, with a National Guardsman seen patrolling the area devastated by the riots.

The Salvation Army’s history in Washington included, in 1925, nine stores selling conditioned clothing and numerous residences for needy people; over 200 girls resided at the old Dewey Hotel at 1330 L Street, with out-of-work men housed at 102 B Street, NW. The former Thyson home at 1501 7th Street served as the only facility for African-American men in need of shelter and job training. In the summertime, the Army maintained a camp in Patuxent, Maryland, enjoyed by more than “500 poor children and their mothers” each year. In 1922, the Army provided 3,000 Christmas dinners to the needy, and delivered gifts to 900 needy children. Overall, they provided 33,240 meals that year, and distributed 26,241 articles of clothing.

In November of 1950, however, the abrupt closing of the facility at 1501 7th Street prompted the *Washington Afro-American* newspaper to launch an investigation of racial discrimination, as the Army had no plans to replace the services to black men who were then not allowed to utilize the Army’s other buildings or services.



By the time this photograph was taken after World War I, the stately Thyson House was being utilized by the Salvation Army.

photo—courtesy, Washingtoniana Division, MLK Jr., Library

## RESERVATIONS RECOMMENDED

By Alexandra Greeley\*  
**MIDI CAFÉ AND BISTRO**  
Left Bank

If lamb shanks can be called “cute,” then Midi Café & Bistro has found the right butcher for this dinnertime special of slow-braised lamb. Neatly trimmed and as shapely as a drumstick, the shanks come as tidy packages with a side of vegetables, and for a few extra dollars, as a set meal with wine and a soup or salad.

Dupont Circle’s uniquely French bistro, this café has grown up in the last few years, emerging from its casual cafeteria-style ambiance into a sit-down eatery with wait-staff and plenty of French bistro cooking. Management has obviously struck a responsive neighborhood chord, since business seems brisk. Just try finding a seat on Sunday mornings when the brunch bunch gets going.

Then the kitchen plays to a packed house, and if you wait patiently for your table—upstairs or down—you’ll be rewarded with mugs of steaming robust coffee, delicate French pastries, and an array of substantial entrées, from the Provence breakfast with scrambled eggs and bacon on rösti potatoes to warm and cold sandwiches and the thin-crust tarts with savory toppings. An obvious choice, the L’Alsacienne tart comes with apple-wood-smoked bacon caramelized onions and a melt of muenster cheese. Resembling a flour tortilla rather than a pizza shell, the crust barely holds its topping of cubed bacon and cheese, giving the illusion of delicately crusted pastry that is yet sturdy enough to stand in as a foundation for hot food.

Despite the crowds, the staff handles the flow of orders with seeming ease, though delays are inevitable. Dinnertime seems less frenetic, but that may depend on the day of the week. On a recent Saturday evening before the crush, service moved briskly—a boon to someone craving the lamb shanks. With its side of potatoes gratin and steamed green beans, the cute shank rests prominently in its swirl of sauce, slightly sweetened from prune but not cloyingly so, and provides a winsome meal—one without the labored frills of fancier restaurants. This is French bistro cooking in all its simple glory, just waiting for a crackling fireplace, a ceiling covered

with shiny copper pots, and several glasses of red wine.

But dinner choices can get complicated. Why not, instead, the seared duck breast with lentils and mint in a lavender sauce, or braised beef, a stew cooked as the owner’s grandmother did, the menu points out? Less appealing, but probably because salmon prepared in any way has become such a culinary cliché, is the grilled salmon, never mind that it comes with braised fennel. The chicken breast with grilled veggies is another too-common offering, easy to overlook in favor of the vegetarian cocotte with a vegan sauce.

The thin-crust tarts have their place on the dinner menu, but it is unclear whether the evening versions are larger than those at other meals—but the selection is larger: toppings include smoked turkey; chorizo and scallions with mushrooms; smoked salmon and sour cream; and chicken sausage with braised cabbage and caramelized onions. Even children merit their version, something called “La Kids” with their choice of cheese.

A restaurant for all seasons—and all times of day and night—Midi throws open its doors for breakfast daily, offering the continental casual pastries and sturdy European coffees. Want something heartier? You can tuck into omelets or scrambled eggs with your choice of embellishments. Lunches continue on with the omelet theme, but look for salads, soups, and assorted warm and cold sandwiches as well. Word has it that the bistro’s desserts warrant sweet applause, so consider a serving of bread pudding, wild strawberry cake, or possibly the ginger peach mousse. □

**Midi Café & Bistro, 1635 Conn. Ave.; tel., 234-3090. Hours: Sun.-Thu., 8am (serving Breakfast)-10pm; Fri. & Sat., to 11pm; Sat. & Sun. Brunch, 8am-2pm. Dinner entrée prices: \$7.95-\$14.95.**

Alexandra Greeley is a food writer whose books have been published by Simon & Schuster, Doubleday, and Macmillan. She formerly was a food editor/writer with the South China Morning Post in Hong Kong. These days she is food editor of Vegetarian Times and contributes reviews and articles for a variety of publications, including The Washingtonian, The Washington Post and e-zines.

Alexandra Greeley’s reviews  
archived at [www.intowner.com](http://www.intowner.com)

## SCENES

From p. 12

In April of 1952, the Salvation Army opened a neighborhood center for African-American youth at 1318 9th Street, which could accommodate 100 youngsters during the daytime for indoor games, Bible lessons, music, art, and craft classes. It was under the leadership of Salvation Army Major Victor Wilson.

However, on the day after the spark of protest and looting at 14th and U Streets on the evening of April 4, 1968, following the announcement of the murder of Martin Luther King, Jr. in Memphis that day, the Tyson house was, on the next day, an unfortunate witness to a police altercation that took place at its intersec-

tion of 7th and P Streets. Policemen on Friday afternoon, April 5, wearing gas masks, used tear gas to break up crowds of looters who had been pushed up 7th Street, away from the prosperous men’s clothing stores near Mt. Vernon Square. Despite their inexperience with controlling crowds with gas, police arrested 250 people between noon and 8 pm. The Salvation Army building burned that afternoon, along with 200 simultaneous fires burning throughout the city, including the entire block of stores along the 1500 block of 7th Street, opposite the Tyson house. Sadly, the site of the Salvation Army building remains vacant to this day.

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

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