

# Scenes from the Past...

Washington, DC residents are fortunate to have original building permits for most of the structures in this city built after 1877, when they were first required, but sadly, the vast majority of the accompanying drawings to these records were destroyed by the city government in the 1960s. It is always a rare occasion to obtain a detailed artist's or architect's rendering of a planned residential development, such as that here of the row of houses located on R Street between 20th and 21st Streets, NW. They were built following issuance of a building permit on June 17, 1886, and remain to this day.

The permit listed Brainard H. Warner as owner of the lots and builder of the eleven houses that were to be constructed between 2006 and 2028 R Street at a cost of \$77,000 or approximately \$7,000 each; a substantial sum for the time. He listed architect W.F. Weber from Baltimore as responsible for the design of the houses, which were to be constructed of brick, marble, and brownstone atop a concrete foundation.

At the time of his application to build the houses, Warner listed his address as 2100 Massachusetts Avenue. It was a house that he had built himself just two years earlier, in 1884. He would remain at that address throughout his building and finance career in the city, overseeing the construction of more than 1,000 houses through his business, the B.H. Warner & Co.



This image of Brainard Warner, at left, was reproduced in John Proctor's *Washington Past & Present* (1930). image from book—courtesy, Kelsey & Assoc. private collection.

Warner had been born in Great Bend (now Halstead), Pennsylvania, in 1847, and had served in the Army until accepting an appointment at the U.S. Treasury in 1866. Upon his 1872 graduation from the Columbian School of Law (which later became part of The George Washington University), he joined the real estate firm of Joshua Whitney & Co. He later succeeded the owner following his death,

This rare pen and ink drawing, above, of the row of houses in the 2000 block of R Street, showing the 21st Street corner at the right, appeared on the cover of the October 1887 *Real Estate Review*.

At right, Copy of the June, 1886 building permit for the Warner row houses.

and constructed the Warner building in 1876, signaling the beginning of a rather substantial, yet undocumented, construction career.

Warner was eventually involved in a large variety of business-related enterprises, including the founding of the Columbian National Bank in 1887, president of the Washington Board of Trade, and member of the Committee of 100. John Proctor wrote in his five-volume *Washington Past and Present* (1930), "Many of our finest statues, buildings and parks stand as monuments of his unceasing energy and devotion to the national capitol."

Warner, himself, published the *Real Estate Review* in Washington for an unknown number of years. The illustration of the homes along R Street seen here was included on the cover of Volume IX, Number 8, dated October 1887. The caption under the detailed drawing of the elegant houses read, "Block of stone front buildings, just being completed, on the corner of 21st and R Street, N.W." The eight-page publication, recently purchased on an on-line auction site, featured condensed real estate stories from around the country, a variety of advertisements from local contractors and suppliers, and an enormous classified listing section with hundreds of lots for sale, houses for rent, and houses for sale in all quadrants of the city, apparently all owned by the B.H. Warner company itself.

In fact, it seems Warner retained and rented at least some of the houses in his 2100 block of R Street development. The 1900 census reveals that the house at 2011 was rented to Marcellus Bailey and his wife, daughter, and niece who were tended to by three servants. Private secretary Charles Moore rented the house at 2013 R that year, with the house at 2015 R Street owned by John Head. Russian-born William Ferson rented the house at 2010 R Street in 1900, and had come to this country just a year earlier, in 1899, along with his wife and four children.

Brainard Warner continued in the real estate business until 1902, when several of his eight children and former business partners took over the operation. Warner himself died in 1916. The *Washington Star* reported upon his death that Warner "was one of the most forceful factors for the



drawing—courtesy, Kelsey & Assoc. private collection.



document—courtesy, National Archives



photo—Paul K. Williams—The InTowner

The 1891 *City Directory* advertisement for the B.H. Brainard Company.

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## RESERVATIONS RECOMMENDED

By Alexandra Greeley\*

### INDIQUE Indicating India

By now, you are probably familiar with such food words as samosa, kulfi, rogan josh and chutney. And you can quickly pinpoint India as their culinary source. But don't think that Indian food has become something of a cliché around town. Under the guidance of such masters as Heritage India, Bombay Palace and Bombay Club restaurants, we've come to expect something exemplary and food fit for the Maharajah from local tandoori ovens.

Joining these ranks—or at least, almost there—is the new Indique (“Unique Indian Flavors”), a dressy stepchild of the suburbs’ Bombay Bistro restaurants (Rockville and Fairfax). Sleek and contemporary and with walls almost bare of the usual Indian trappings, this two-story Cleveland Park newcomer sets the scene with minimal décor that nonetheless echoes India, and it places its glassed-in tandoori ovens in the main entranceway—a subtle reminder to people as they walk in that whatever else they’ve come for, they really have come to feast.

With measured courtesy, the maitre d’ leads you upstairs to the dining room—and you’ll quickly appreciate how much work the waiters take on, for they must

scurry up and downstairs loaded with full or empty trays, depending on which direction they’re headed. Surprisingly, the upstairs really holds relatively few tables, for the designer has carved out a central “well” in the floor space opening onto the area below. This design, plus the multiple windows, give the room a sense of airiness, but it also cuts down on seating.

It’s now Sunday early afternoon, and surprisingly, considering the hour, the dining room is a busy place. Word gets around quickly in town, and when the word is “good,” foodies can expect a crowd. But besides the stair-climbing, it’s hard to figure out why service lags slightly. Considering that the lunch menu is very abbreviated, it seems the kitchen staff might have extra time on its hands.

Starting with the “First Taste” section, a tapas-like assortment, presumably meant for sharing, this contains at least one familiar dish: the chaat papi, a snack offering of potatoes, chick peas, and bread crisps and, usually, a drizzle of sweet tamarind sauce and yogurt. But the Gujarati specialty of steamed lentil cakes, or dhokla, beckoned. Unremarkable—actually, I thought these were made of rice—they don’t rank as a

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## SCENES

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advancement of Washington . . . gifted with a remarkable faculty for organizing public movements . . . at the same time an unusual capacity for leadership.”

In 1924, the Warner mansion at 2100

Massachusetts Avenue was razed and replaced by an apartment building that later became the Fairfax Hotel, located on the corner today, although now under a different name.

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

## CORRECTION

In this space last month we featured a short history of the William H. Thyson house at the corner of 7th and P Streets, NW, later to become the Salvation Army’s “colored men’s club.” One of the photographs used was misidentified. The caption accompanying that photograph, a view of a building on the southwest corner of 7th and P Streets reduced to total rubble, was mis-identified as the “ruins of the Thyson House. . . .”



Washingtoniana Division, MLK, Jr., Library.

The Thyson House ruins were, in fact, at the corner diagonally opposite, as seen in the photograph reproduced here, taken only hours following its destruction. In the picture which we did run (and which can be seen by accessing the pdf file archive of back issues at [www.intowner.com](http://www.intowner.com) and scrolling to page 12 of the January 2003 issue), the National Guardsman shown standing by the Kennedy Playground fence (which is still there) is looking directly north across P Street at the remains of Thyson House, by then no longer still smoldering.

—Editor

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