

Scenes from the Past...



photos—courtesy, Washingtonians Division, Martin Luther King Jr., Library.
The original statue of Admiral du Pont was relocated to Delaware in 1922, when a marble fountain was installed that year that had been designed by noted sculptor Daniel Chester French.

Most Washington residents correctly assume that Dupont Circle is named after the famous chemical and industrial du Pont family, but few may know that its central white marble fountain was not the first statuary object to commemorate a member of that prestigious family, Admiral Samuel Francis du Pont.

Before 1882, Dupont Circle was referred to as Pacific Circle, a name designation instituted by city planner Charles L'Enfant. On February 25 of that year, the U.S. Congress officially designated it as Dupont Circle, and within the following two decades, large and lavish homes began to appear around its perimeter. The Circle itself was landscaped with lush plantings,



Dupont Circle featured the statue of Admiral Samuel du Pont, above, for 40 years, from 1882 until 1922, when it was removed and replaced with the current marble fountain.

The familiar fountain in the center of Dupont Circle has remained in place since its installation in 1922, with one exception; in 1948, it was temporarily relocated for the construction of the underground trolley passage. Seen at left is Captain H. C. Whitehurst with a model of the automobile and trolley underpass plan, taken that year for a Washington Star newspaper article.



Dupont Circle was previously known as Pacific Circle until 1884, when it was named after Admiral Samuel du Pont, pictured here.

including 850 ornamental trees and exotic flowering species, and in 1884, a bronze statue of Admiral du Pont was placed atop a granite base at its center. It was sculpted by Launt Thompson.

Samuel du Pont was born in 1803, and had become involved in military affairs at the young age of 12, when he was appointed to the U.S. Navy by President Madison. Following an impressive military career that took place all over the world, he was appointed Rear Admiral on July 16, 1862. Toward the close of the year several armored vessels were added to his command, mostly of the Monitor type. Being the first officer to whom the Monitors had been assigned, he carefully tested their offensive powers, hampered by their small number of guns and the slowness of their fire. On April 7, 1863, du Pont led a charge to take Charleston, South Carolina.

His gallant effort had failed miserably, however, what with limited maneuverability in the channels, with one ship sinking and five others being disabled. Du Pont had, beforehand, given an opinion that a ground force was necessary, but had been rebuffed by the Navy; this, his last military action, seemed to tarnish his lifelong career. Charleston only fell on the approach of Sherman's army. Du Pont died in Philadelphia, on June 23, 1865.

To honor him and help set the record straight, the du Pont family erected a statue of Samuel in 1884, but today, the statue is nowhere to be found in Washington. That is because, in 1922, the du Pont family had the statue relocated to Wilmington, Delaware where it can be found in Rockford Park.

Following its relocation, the du Pont family commissioned Daniel Chester French to design the fountain that now stands where the statue of Samuel once stood. Known for his masterpiece of Lincoln inside the Lincoln Memorial, French was commissioned to carry out the designs of architect Henry Bacon. Incidentally, French's daughter then resided close by, in

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RESERVATIONS RECOMMENDED

By Alexandra Greeley*

SETTE OSTERIA Selecting Sette

If you wonder why DC has room for yet another Italian restaurant, you haven't eaten at Sette Osteria yet. Joining the charmed life in Dupont Circle, this newcomer sets about stripping away all our preconceived, Chef Boyardee notions of Italian cooking and presents us with Neapolitan food that's the real deal—which I can confirm after attending a Slow Food conference in Naples recently.

No lackluster imitation, Sette Osteria—"sette" means seven, a lucky Italian number apparently, or so their website says—dishes out no over-sauced pasta, no tricky cheese-crusted and gooey pizzas, and by all appearances, no greasy calamari. In a word, the food is glorious.

That said, Sette has been discovered, and at noontime and into the afternoon, you can count on finding crowds and a bit of bedlam, and possibly not immediate seating, though you can opt to cozy up to the bar that curves along the back wall opposite the open kitchen. Dinners must find quadruple the numbers of the hungry, urgently and desperately seeking pizza.

Pizza sizzled and browned in the wood-burning ovens is the name of the Sette game—which I didn't figure out until long after my recent lunch. Talk about regrets—with a choice of nine pies with such toppings as fresh mozzarella, broccoli rabe, pork sausage and Calabrese chili peppers; or, tomato, escarole, gaeta olive, capers, anchovies and fresh mozzarella, plus dozens of topping choices (some free, other with a small charge), why would anyone select a pasta? Or even a portion of the house specials, the lasagna di carnevale, a Neapolitan baked meat lasagna, or melanzane alla Parmigiana (eggplant Parmesan with basil and tomato).

Look at it this way: These just give me 27 reasons to return to Sette as soon as possible. Yet, how could I trade away the homemade cecatelli con cime di rape, or homemade cecatelli pasta topped with nicely trimmed and fresh broccoli rabe, another reason to adore Sette. A much-ignored vegetable in the US, tart broccoli rabe (or rape or rapini) is a wonder of nature, the prince amongst greens, especially when lightly sautéed and tossed with pasta. On this particular dish, look for a shaving of pecorino

cheese, which melts decorously into the hot pasta, smoothing out and enriching each bite. Fabulous, I thought, scooping up every last snippet of vegetable.

Other pastas include gnocchi baked with tomato and mozzarella, ziti with pancetta, curly fettuccini with onion and zucchini, rigatoni with Neapolitan meat sauce, plus a few others.

Of course, Sette sets out a handful of appetizers, at least one of which could be called indecently good: the mozzarella en carrozza, a glorified Neapolitan grilled cheese sandwich which often gets short shrift elsewhere, usually ending up as a thick and oily wedge of bread and cheese. But at Sette, the kitchen gets it right with a version that calls for dunking cheese-topped bread into an egg batter and frying the layers. The result? French toast crossed with grilled cheese, but crustier than either. Other starters include calamari decorated with a wrapped lemon half for squeezing; fire-roasted bell peppers and eggplant; a potato cake with grana, dry salami and smoked mozzarella; and marinated olives. Then there are the salads—but why turn to dressed green with so much else to intrigue and delight?

Desserts corner such Neapolitan favorites as the cannoli, a tiramisu with limoncello (Naples' heavenly lemon liqueur), and zeppole. Plus a cheese plate. How can any of these fail to please?

How much does all this luxury food cost? Far less than a trip to Naples, with pizzas priced in the \$8 to \$12 range and pastas all at \$12. The idea, says the website blurb, is to offer a casual setting, authentic food, and great wine. And it's all affordable. Well, they met their goals! □

Sette Osteria, 1666 Conn. Ave.; tel., 483-3070. Hours., Mon.-Thu. 11:30am-2am; Fri. & Sat. to 3am; Sun., 11:30am-12mid. Major credit cards. Web, www.setteosteria.com.

*Alexandra Greeley is a food writer, editor and restaurant reviewer. She has authored books published by Simon & Schuster, Doubleday, and Macmillan. Other credits include food editor of *Vegetarian Times*, restaurant reviews and food articles for *The Washington Post* and *The Washington Times*, as well as former food editor/writer for the *South China Morning Post* in Hong Kong.

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the 2000 block of R Street.

Interestingly, water pipes had been laid for a potential fountain in 1877, but had never been utilized. The installation of the fountain itself in 1922 also met the direction of Pierre L'Enfant's notion in 1791 that "the center of each square will admit of Statues, Columns, Obelisks, or any other ornament such as the different States shall may choose to erect: to perpetuate not only the memory of such individuals whose counsels or Military achievements were conspicuous in giving liberty and Independence to this country."

A popular misconception about the fountain is that the three figures depicted on it represent the Three Fates from Greek mythology. But, the two women and one male figure actually represent the three arts of ocean navigation: the sea, the stars and the wind. One woman is depicted holding a boat in one hand, stroking a gull with the other, which symbolizes the sea; stars are

represented by a second female figure holding a globe. The wind is depicted by a strong male figure draped in the wind-filled sail of a ship, holding a conch shell horn.

One can see several other examples of French's works in Washington, including the Lincoln Memorial, the Butt-Millet Memorial (E. Street near 17th), and the First Infantry Division Memorial (State Place near 17th). Also in Washington is the Thomas Gallaudet Memorial (Gallaudet University), which is the only sculptured work of French's to incorporate American sign language.

The only time the Dupont Circle fountain has been disturbed since it was installed was in 1948, when plans commenced to temporarily remove it for the construction of the Connecticut Avenue trolley underpass. It was replaced shortly before its opening in November of 1949, and has remained as a gathering spot for neighborhood residents ever since.

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