

Scenes from the Past...

While many homeowners are aware of the past owners of their old house, most have not researched individuals who once rented their houses and who were often intriguing individuals with stories that might be far more interesting and significant than suggested by a simple chain of title list. Renting property in Washington was a common occurrence in the beginning of the 20th century, when homeowners took extended vacations that could last a year or more.

Widow Sarah R. Thorn applied for and was granted an "Application for Permit to Build numbered 1238" on April 27, 1897 for the single-family townhouse located at 1832 16th Street, NW. The exterior green stone utilized in the construction was known as serpentine stone, which was paired with an Indiana limestone trim.

The interior of the \$12,000 home was to be heated by a hot water system and would be lit by gas fixtures. The architect was listed as Isaac B. Bursey, who indicated in the City Directory that he was a carpenter in a partnership with John C. Louthan and Luther W. Gibson. They maintained offices at 408 8th Street, NW, and called their firm "John C. Louthan & Company."

Sarah Thorn was the widow of Columbus W. Thorn, who had died nearly 10 years earlier, in 1888. He had been the proprietor of the "CW Thorn & Company," established in 1867, a wholesale millinery and notions goods business located at 313 9th Street, NW. They had married in 1866, when Sarah was only 16 years old.

Columbus' will quite oddly bequeathed their house at 218 I Street, NW and all of its contents to his best friend, Eldred G. Davis. Sarah Thorn was provided use of the house during her lifetime, but she obviously decided to build her own by 1897. A bachelor, Davis was listed as a collector of taxes for the city, and later lived alone at 2211 R Street, NW.

Beginning on November 1, 1904, owner Sarah Thorn leased 1832 16th Street to a lawyer named Daniel Thew Wright. He came to Washington from Cincinnati, Ohio as a newly appointed associate justice on the District of Columbia Supreme Court, having been nominated by President Theodore Roosevelt. He had previously practiced law and served as the mayor of Riverside, Ohio from 1890 to 1893. He would rent the house until sometime in 1908, when he moved



photo—Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division. DC Supreme Court Justice Daniel Thew Wright rented the house from 1904 through 1908.



photo—Paul K. Williams, Kelsey & Associates.

The recently restored house at 1832 16th Street, NW.

into the Wardman Park Hotel. His judicial appointment terminated on November 15, 1914, due to his resignation pending impeachment proceedings, accusing him of acting as an attorney while serving as a judge, misappropriation of court monies, and other charges.

Following Judge Wright's move out of the house, owner Sarah Thorn moved back in herself. She was listed there alone in the 1910 census, without any domestic help or live-in servants. Her daughter Helen and her husband John McLaughlin, a "government clerk," had earlier lived in the house (1900) but then moved to 1707 Kilborne Place, NW. There is no record of where Helen's mother, Sarah, was living between 1911 and 1914 while the house was rented, but it is known that in 1914 she moved in with the couple on Kilbourne Place.

Beginning in 1911, according to the City Directory, the house had been rented to lawyer William Morgan Shuster and his wife Caroline. They and their married son, William Morgan Shuster III, also a lawyer, resided there with them through the end of 1916.

William Shuster II had his own law firm, while his son was a partner in the Shuster & Bouve law firm, which maintained offices in the Union Trust Building. He had been born in Washington, DC on June 19, 1846; his wife, the former Caroline von Tagen, had been born about 1860 in Pennsylvania; her father had been born in Germany.

William Morgan Shuster III, or "W.

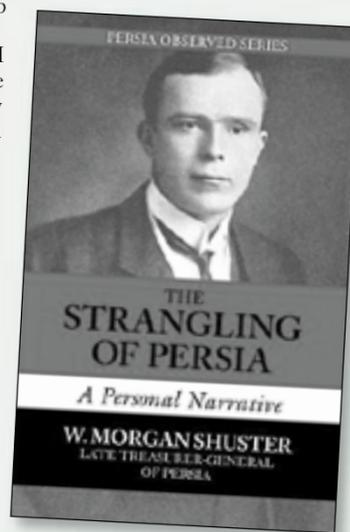
the position from May to December of 1911.

William Shuster III had graduated from the Columbian University and its law school and became a customs collector for the federal government, serving in Cuba in 1899 following the Spanish American War and in the Philippines, which was at that time an American colony.

During 1906 in Iran, what was being called the "Constitutional Revolution," reformers sought to establish constitutional monarchy based on a Western-oriented, democratic civil society. The movement forced the Shah to agree to the election of the first Majlis, the opening up of a relatively free press, and a number of other reforms. After being recommended by the U.S. government to the Iranian minister in Washington, Shuster was appointed by the Majlis to help manage the country's financial position. Iran was on a shaky financial footing at the time due to heavy debts accumulated by the Qajars, the royal family, to the two colonial powers of Great Britain and Russia in Iran. Great Britain and Russia had previously carved up the country into two spheres of influence pursuant to the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907.

Shuster became active in supporting the Constitutional Revolution. When Iran's government ordered Shu'a al-Saltaneh, the Shah's brother, who was aligned with the goals of Imperial Russia, to surrender his assets to the government, Shuster was assigned this task, which he promptly moved to execute. Imperial Russia immediately landed troops in Bandar Anzali demanding that the government stop the process and issue an apology.

The hiring of Shuster and his American associates as financial advisors concerned the imperial powers, which sought to keep Iran from independent influences and dampen national feeling. Under Russian and British pressure, the Vice-Regent, acting against the will of the Majlis, ordered the expulsion of



photo—courtesy, Buy.com.

William Shuster authored his book, *The Strangling of Persia*, which was a reminiscence of his time in Iran serving as its Treasurer-General.

Shuster from office in December 1911. When the Majlis refused to comply, Russia occupied parts of northern Iran, the Majlis was suspended, and no budget law was prepared for a number of years. Shortly thereafter, due to the chaotic political climate created by Shuster's ouster, the deposed Shah, Mohammad Ali Shah Qajar, attempted to regain his throne.

Following Shuster's return to Washington, while living on 16th Street, he authored *The Strangling of Persia*. Subtitled, "The Story of the European Diplomacy and Oriental Intrigue that Resulted in the Denationalization of Twelve Million Mohammedans," the book is a recounting of the details of these events, and

ple who trace their roots to the Bisayan-speaking region in central Philippines.

Sarah Thorn, owner and builder of 1832 16th Street, died on August 21, 1933. She left the house to her children, Helen McLaughlin and Charles E. Thorn. They apparently had a sibling dispute over the ownership, resulting in a court-ordered consent decree stemming from a civil action whereby Charles Thorn was awarded sole ownership on April 3, 1945. Charles Thorn died in 1956, and left the house to a niece, Katherine Seeley Thorn, who obtained title on September 27, 1956. She sold it the same day to a real estate lawyer named George Basiliko; 59 years of Thorn family ownership then came to an end. □

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photo—Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.

Shown here are Mr. and Mrs. W. Morgan Shuster, III while on board a steamship returning from Iran in 1911 following a Middle East financial scandal that was extensively covered by the press at the time.

which included harsh criticisms of Britain and Imperial Russia.

In 1917, the Shusters moved to a house at 1722 Q Street, NW. William Shuster II died in 1921, and William Shuster III died in 1960.

From late 1916 to 1919, 1832 16th Street was rented to Congressman Ben Johnson from Kentucky. He had been born near Bardstown, Nelson County, Kentucky on May 20, 1858. His father, William Johnson, was a state senator and a lieutenant governor of Kentucky. His mother, Nancy (Nannie), was a member of the committee that selected the design of the Confederate flag, which was first revealed to the public in 1861 at the Johnson's Greek Revival-style home in Kentucky; they chose Stars and Bars design submitted by Nicola Marschall.

Johnson graduated from St. Mary's College in Kentucky in June of 1878 and from the Louisville Law University in 1882; he was admitted to the bar in 1882 and commenced practice in Bardstown, Kentucky.

The 1930 City Directory indicates that 1832 16th Street was home to an organization coined the "Visayan Circle" without identifying the purpose or naming a director of the oddly-named organization. Visayans (also spelled Bisayans) generally refer to peo-



photo—courtesy, current homeowner.

Shown in this 1911 photo is the family of William Morgan Shuster, III, who lived in the house after Justice Wright.



photo—Library of Congress, prints and Photographs Division. Between late 1916 to through 1919, the house was rented to Kentucky Congressman Ben Johnson.