

On several large homes in the Logan and Dupont Circle neighborhoods, weathered old backlight signs are seen attached to the lower entranceways, revealing a mysterious array of the names of doctors, lawyers, and dentists that once practiced in those English basements. One such name, Dr. W.O.I. Byrom, is featured on the lower entrance to the house at 1329 R Street, in the Greater 14th Street Historic District. Few pedestrians in the gentrified neighborhood might realize the significance, however, of Dr. Byrom, who was the first African-American woman dentist to obtain a license in the District of Columbia.

Most passersby first gaze at the unusual copper bay window on the home, which was built in 1892 and designed by architect Joseph Johnson. It was built for Thomas Whyte, an owner of a cornice manufacturing business, The National Cornice Works, located at 300-304 13th Street, NW. The bay window was designed and fabricated, along with the copper cornice, as a form of advertising and to serve as an example of the fine work that Whyte was able to create. He and his brother also held their own patent on a ventilating skylight. Whyte moved into 1329 R Street from a house at 1340 Rhode Island Avenue.

Architect Joseph Johnson was first listed in the *City Directory* in 1888 as a partner in the "Johnson and Gibbs" firm, located in the Corcoran Building. It was the only year that the firm was listed, the other partner being Charles E. Gibbs, who had first been listed in the *City Directory* in 1881 as a draftsman. Johnson became an architect in 1882, but following the economic depression of 1893, worked as a cashier at the Ebbitt House restaurant. From 1889 to 1890, Johnson had a listing of "Johnson and Company," continuing to be located in the Corcoran Building. Johnson himself resided at 407 T Street, NW.

The 1900 census indicates that Whyte was then 40 years old, was born in Indiana and had been married for 15 years to his wife Rose, originally from Michigan. Also living in the home were the Whyte's two sons, Clifford and Russell, Thomas Whyte's sister-in-law, Florence McMillan, and his brother-in-law, George McMillan. They continued to reside there until 1904.

Eventually, in 1945, 1329 R Street was sold to Dr. Westanna Byrom, who by then had established a dental office at 1451 U Street. Dr. Byrom was a trailblazer in the field of dentistry. Her father, Henry M.S. Byrom, was a physician, and she was born in East Tennessee where she attended elementary and high school. She later attended Tennessee State College in Nashville, and—on the urging of her stepfather, Dr. T.E. Stevens—pursued a career in dentistry by enrolling in Howard



photo—Paul K. Williams—The InTowner



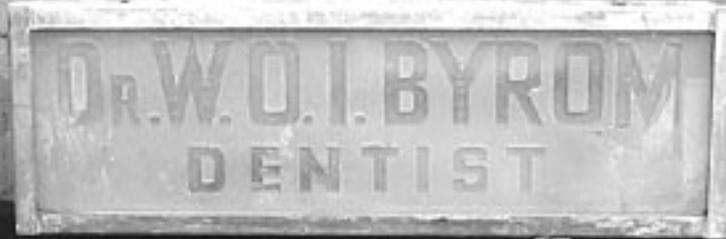
photo—courtesy, new owners of 1329 R Street.

Dr. Westanna Byrom, above.

The house shown above left, near Logan Circle, is well-known for its unusual copper façade and cornice.

The sign over the entryway to the one-time English basement office, at left, remains as a reminder of the distinguished African-American who treated her patients there.

The original owner, Thomas Whyte, advertised his skills as a copper and tin cornice manufacturer by means of print advertising, as shown below, in addition to the fine examples installed on his own house.



Scenes from the Past...



advertisement—1895 Washington City Directory, courtesy, MLK Library, Washingtoniana Division.

photo—courtesy, new owners of 1329 R Street. Dr. Byrom is seen here in a newspaper photograph attending to one of her patients, Patricia Stevenson, age 10, at the Sumner School, one of the many local schools Dr. Byrom visited to provide dental care for students.

she also worked with indigent children in the public school system, taking her own portable dentistry equipment along with her from school to school.

She received her District of Columbia dental license on July 2, 1940, and in 1942, Dr. Byrom became the first African-American woman to open a dental office in the city.

University's College of Dentistry in 1933. She received her degree of Doctor of Dental Surgery in 1933.

Dr. Byrom first opened her dental office in the town of Cleveland, Tennessee and later in Chattanooga, where

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RESERVATIONS RECOMMENDED

By Alexandra Greeley*

COPPI'S ORGANIC Coping with Organics

Striking a delicate balance between casual bistro and tony Italian, Coppi's on U Street has reinvented itself. No longer just Coppi's Restaurant, this pocket-sized eatery has become Coppi's Organic. Once famous as a pizza hangout, this new destination touts a regularly changing menu that is still basically pizza but with a smattering of antipasti and entrées.

And is the restaurant really all organic?, we asked two different staff members, wondering if Coppi's might challenge the Numero Uno of organics, Nora, the premiere DC restaurant on Florida Avenue that, to date, has been the singular national restaurant certified totally "all organic"—that includes the wines, Nora Pouillon once commented. Everything.

The staff responses differed slightly, in that one person said yes, and the other one equivocated. But whatever its status, Coppi's Organic is headed in the right direction by embracing fit-to-eat food.

Organics aside, chef/owner Elizabeth Bright and husband Pierre Mattias once owned a related restaurant (Coppi's Vigorelli, later renamed simply The Vigorelli) on Connecticut Avenue in Cleveland Park that had much the same look as Coppi's Organic—all those photos of Italian bike racing and biking champ, Coppi—and a similar Italian outlook: Ligurian food.

If you can't get a handle on Ligurian cuisine, don't start thinking spaghetti bathed in tomato sauce or even lush, cream-laden dishes topped with copious amounts of cheese. Think, instead, of simple, herbed vegetable and meat dishes broiled or grilled and amply napped with green-gold olive oil—and of cooks using every edible piece of landscape, including flowers.

Specializing in Ligurian cooking, Bright picks up on this use-it-all approach with her don't-miss Fiori di Zucca alla Ligure appetizer, a Ligurian dish of squash blossoms filled with cheese and herbs then gently sautéed. Flower power here? Almost. While not a flavor knockout, the blossoms are unique in that few cooks in town dabble in edible flowers, and the filling has the bland and smooth consistency of mashed potatoes.

As for entrées, your best bet may still be one of Bright's pizza selections. With a wood-burning oven in the open-to-view kitchen, you are guaranteed to have a

traditional pie, and her topping selections are still among the best in town: tapenade, organic mushrooms, spicy cured meats, pork sausage, lamb sausage with smoked mozzarella, smoked salmon, pancetta, or part of her pantry that go to make a distinctive selection of 14 different pies. We zeroed in on the Genovese, a crust delicately brushed with basil pesto and topped with butterflied prawns and fresh mozzarella.

But the non-pizza offerings, of which there are only five, provide less of a thrill. Who wouldn't look forward to a New York strip steak, which when offered as a half portion at \$12.95 becomes relatively affordable. (A full portion totals \$23.95.) So our second entrée had to be the tender steak, but it comes bathed in a strange fusion sauce of tomatoes with ginger. Is that Italian?, we wondered. Other choices: three pastas, one of which, ravioli filled with nettles and crab meat, sounds intriguing. And a seared North Carolina black grouper with summer vegetables would come in last.

As for desserts, one must guess that Ligurians are definitely not sweet eaters. Instead of a parade of rich pastries, such as you might find in Naples, Bright selects such minimalist fare as biscotti, a chocolate-filled calzone, the Italian custard classic zabaglione, and assorted gelati and sorbetti. We ended up with a parfait glass of Belgian chocolate ice cream (gelato), perhaps, at \$5.95, the most expensive scoop of ice cream in town.

You may not find the menu arresting, but you should always applaud any restaurant person who strives for organic fare. So for that, we say three cheers to this Coppi's reincarnation. □

Coppi's Organic, 1414 U St., NW; tel., 319-7773. Open for dinner: Mon.-Thu., 6-11pm; Fri. & Sat., 5-12mid; Sun., 5-10pm. Entrée pizza prices: \$11.95 small, \$18.95 large; other selections, \$11.95-\$23.95. Major credit cards accepted.

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SCENES

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Following her purchase of the house in 1945, she opened a dental office in its lower level, and had a fashionable backlight sign installed above the door which remains to this day.

In 1944, toward the end of the Second World War, Dr. Byrom became associated with the city's public health department. She also contributed greatly to the war effort by collecting funds and selling bonds on behalf of the Robert T. Freeman Dental Society.

On April 7, 1963, Dr. Byrom was one of three women to receive a citation from the Gamma Chapter of Iota Phi Lambda Sorority, when she received the

"Outstanding Woman of the Year Award." For her years of service as the only African-American woman dentist in Washington, and for her work to help improve the health of the city's children.

By 1954, the home was also occupied by Dr. Byrom's new husband, Harold G. Covington, an employee of the State Department. The couple had one child, Bettye. Byrom and Covington would reside at 1329 R Street for many years until January 17, 1982, when Byrom passed away, leaving the home to Bettye B. Allen, her sole heir. The house was later restored in the early 1990s and is today an integral architectural resource in the Greater 14th Street Historic District.

—Paul Kelsey Williams
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