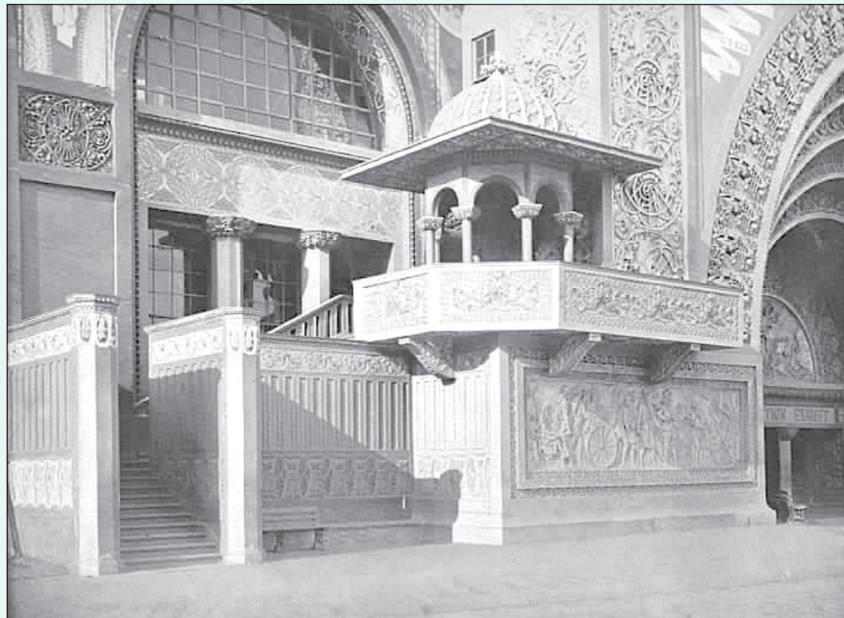


Scenes from the Past . . .

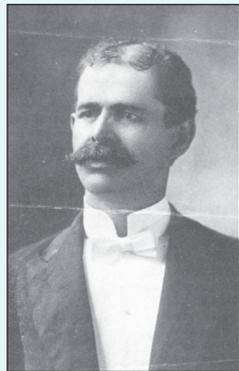


photo—courtesy, www.Wikipedia.org.

The architectural details found on the Cairo were inspired by architect Louis H. Sullivan's Transportation Building that was prominently featured at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair and which had been admired by the Cairo's architect-builder, Thomas Franklin Schneider, when he attended the fair.

Most Washington residents are familiar with the well-known Cairo Apartment building at 1615 Q Street, NW, visible for blocks as one of the tallest structures in the city. Fewer, however, may know that it was built in 1894 as a combination apartment house and hotel, with lavish public reception and dining rooms and with the inspiration of its design and namesake taken from the 1893 Chicago World's Fair.

The Cairo Flats, as it was first known, was designed and built by Washington's first large-scale architect-developer, Thomas Franklin "TF" Schneider, who was responsible for the construction of thousands of row houses in the city. The son of German immigrants, Schneider gleaned his architectural skills in



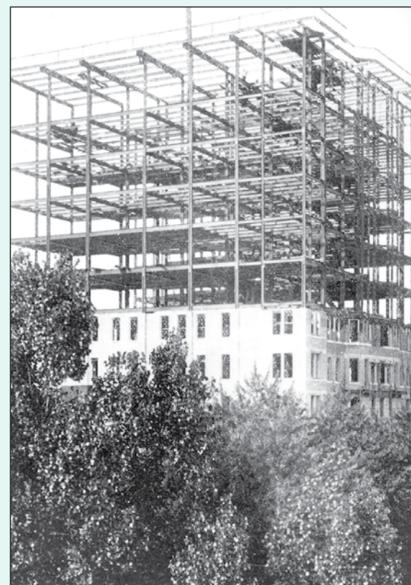
photo—courtesy, Kelsey & Associates private collection.
Architect Thomas Franklin Schneider (1858-1938).

the office of German-born architect Adolph Cluss. He attended the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, where he took inspiration for the Cairo from Louis Sullivan's Transportation Building, lifting several design elements such as the square cornice and stone carvings. The fair had an Egyptian and Moorish revival theme, with its buildings and venues lining Cairo Avenue, apparently the namesake for the Cairo Flats Schneider began designing just a few months later.

The interior featured walls and floors of marble, with an ornate reception desk located to the left of the front entrance. The lobby extended to the rear courtyard, lighted by an arched skylight. A wrought iron elevator cage was also one of its more unusual features of the time. A public parlor was



photo—courtesy, Kelsey & Associates, Inc. private collection.



photo—courtesy, Historical Society of Washington.

The Cairo was built in 1893 at a cost of \$425,000 using a steel frame that towered 12 stories above the ground, prompting both scathing architectural reviews and public outcry, leading to the passage of Washington's height restrictions.



Main entrance.



Reception desk.



Lobby.



Main floor lounge.



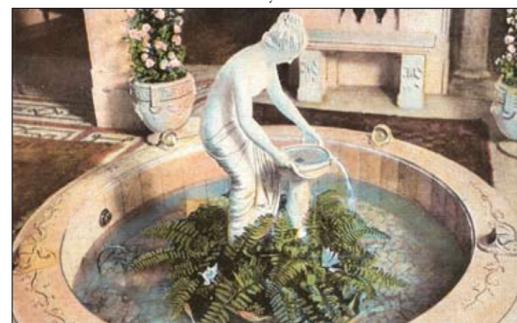
Another main floor lounge view.



The Moorish-styled Red Room.



12th floor dining room.



Lobby fountain.

images—courtesy, Kelsey & Associates, Inc. private collection.

Color-enhanced images of the Cairo's lavish and extravagant interior were included in a booklet promoting the hotel's room rates about 1900, which ranged from \$1.50 per night for a single room without a bath to \$4 for a double room with bath.

adjacent to the lobby, coined at various times the Red Room or Oriental Room, as well as a reading room, ballroom, and drugstore. The English basement level housed a bowling alley, billiard room, and several service rooms.

The dining room took up half of the 12th floor and featured access to the popular roof terrace and garden. Washingtonians, unaccustomed to such heights, experimented by throwing pebbles and coins off the roof, causing several runaway carriage mishaps along Q Street. As a result, in 1904 Schneider purchased and razed the townhouses to the east of the Cairo to accommodate a large addition to house the relocated dining room.

The Cairo opened with 110 apartments on the upper floors, most of which did not contain

a kitchen as residents and temporary hotel guests took meals in the public dining room. Apartments and rooms could be expanded easily by opening adjoining doors to create individual suites and large apartments. One of the more notable residents who moved there in 1897 was Hawaii's deposed Queen Liliuokalani.

Following his death in 1938, Schneider's daughters Florence and Ethel, inherited the Cairo and eight other large apartment houses, and would continue to manage them until 1955. The Cairo deteriorated significantly, however, until it was vacated in 1972. The following year it was reconfigured by architect Arthur Cotton Moore into 192 small apartments for the new owner, Inland Steel Development Corporation. The design included a series of eight new

duplex apartments and eight new garden apartments built in the former rear courtyard and a few opening into the area once occupied by the 1904 restaurant addition on the east side of the building. It reopened as a rental building in 1976, and was converted into a condominium in 1979.

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

Copyright (c) 2007 InTowner Publishing Corp. & Paul Kelsey Williams. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without permission is prohibited, except as provided by 17 U.S.C. §107 ("fair use").