

# Scenes from the Past...

Many Washingtonians know that the Hay-Adams Hotel at the corner of 16th and H Streets, facing Lafayette Square, was built in 1927 on the site of two elaborate homes designed by H.H. Richardson and built beginning in 1884 for two notable residents: John Hay and Henry Adams. At the time, the adjoining pair was considered to be the most important residential housing design in the city outside of the White House itself, located just across the park.

What few people know, however, is that when they were razed in 1927, the quality of workmanship and high regard for the architect's design prompted the careful disassembling of major architectural elements, which ended up on two different homes in Washington; one on 31st Street and one on Woodland Drive, both located near each other in the south end of Woodley Park. Incredibly, Richardson's trademark use of dramatic arches and front door surrounds were saved and reused after only being located on the Hay and Adams houses for 43 years. The two homes' initial design and construction, as well as life in the grand houses of two of America's important political and scholarly families, are well documented in Patricia O'Toole's book, *The Five of Hearts* (Ballantine Books, 1990).

On May 1, 1925, John Hay's daughter, Alice Hay Wadsworth, leased the land on which both the Hay and the Adams houses stood to developer Harry Wardman. The lease stipulated that he would raze the two houses according to a procedure approved by Mrs. Wadsworth, and erect a building valued at not less than \$500,000 within four years.

Wardman applied for an "Application for Permit to Raze Building," numbered 5612, on December 22, 1926. He was granted permission to raze both the Hay and Adams houses, along with three smaller brick structures on the site, on January 3, 1927. A building inspector's note dated March 2, 1927, reveals that the razing process was officially declared "100% complete."

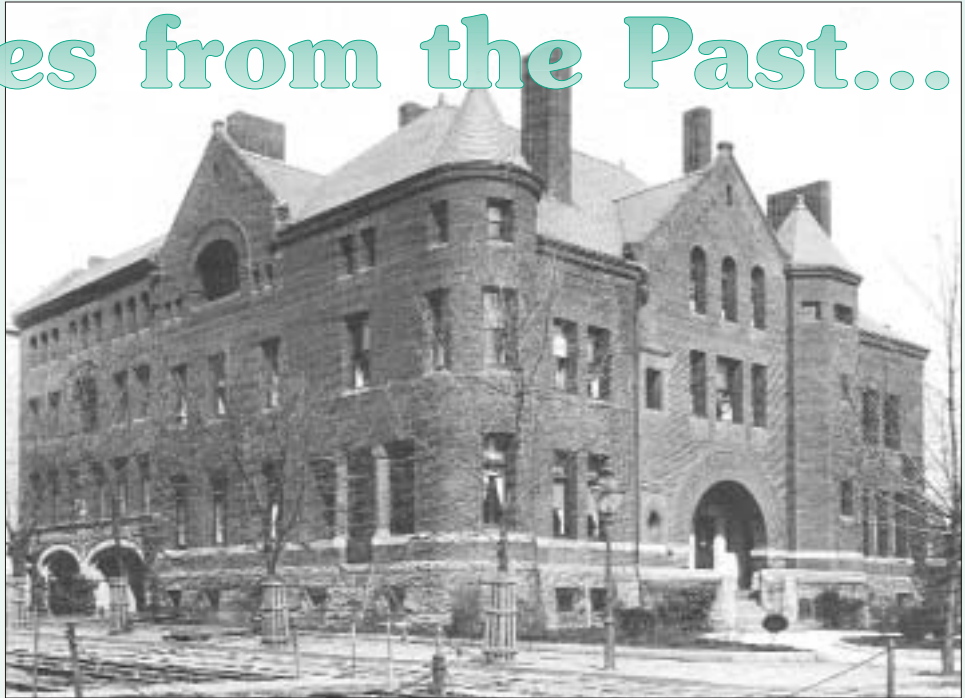
The building permit for the new Hay-Adams Hotel on the site was issued in February of 1927, and by May of that year, construction on the new building had begun. It was designed by Mihran Mesrobian, Harry Wardman's chief architect.

While the structures of the Hay and Adams houses were destroyed, bits and pieces of the houses were saved, many dispersed to other locations near and far. Elements of the interior of the Hay house were incorporated into the new Hotel, and the James Wadsworth family has confirmed that paneling from the Hay entrance hall was installed in Hartford House, their family home in Geneseo, New York; it is of white mahogany.

Local Washington architect Horace Peaslee recognized the importance and value of the Richardson-designed exterior elements of the houses, and incorporated two such elements on houses he designed in 1927. Located today in Woodley Park just north of Massachusetts Avenue and Observatory Circle, the front door with its carved door surround of the Hay house was placed on the home at 3014 Woodland Drive then being construction. It is easily recognized today as the doorway, without the dramatic curved arch, illustrated here. The Woodland house was owned at one point by Pennsylvania Senator Hugh Doggett Scott, Jr.

The other exterior element from the Richardson design that survives in Washington today is the dramatic low entrance arches from the Adams house. Horace Peaslee incorporated them into a design in 1927 for a house being built at 2618 31st Street, NW, just around the corner from the re-used Hay doorway. One arch was used as the home's garage entrance, and the other one, while significantly shortened, became the surround of the main entranceway, seen here. The fact that local architects considered Richardson details to be significant enough, just 43 years after they had been designed and executed, to re-use them in other projects, stands as testament to the Richardson's impact on the local architectural scene.

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photo—courtesy, Washingtonia Division, MLK Library

This vintage photograph of the southwest corner of 16th and H Streets, as taken from the north side of Lafayette Park, shows the John Hay house's entrance with its single large arch facing 16th Street, to the right, and the Henry Adams house with its two, smaller arches facing H Street, at the far left.



photo—courtesy, Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Div.

This 1884 photograph shows the construction of the dual arches of the Henry Adams house on H Street.



photo—T. Luke Young (2001).

Shown above are the reconstructed arches, noticeably altered, as removed from the Henry Adams House and incorporated into the 31st Street residence.



photo—T. Luke Young (2001).

This Woodland Drive residence, at left, features the original front door and door surround removed from within the arched entry of the John Hay house.