

Scenes from the Past...



Shown in this 1916 photo (above) is the U.S. Weather Bureau's central office at the southwest corner of 24th and M Streets, construction of which was started in 1886.

Many older Washingtonians may remember this 1942 building of the U.S. Weather Bureau at 24th and M Streets, shown at right, which was built in the front yard of the original 1886 building.

On the site now occupied by a nondescript office building on the southwest corner of 24th and M Streets stood for many decades the U.S. Weather Bureau, where the city's meteorological recordings were taken from 1889 to 1942.

Physicist Joseph Henry, who served as the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution from 1846 to 1878, inaugurated the system of public, daily meteorological observations in 1856, which eventually led to the establishment of the United States Weather Bureau. It was a direct result of the invention of the telegraph, which could transmit weather data instantaneously from various parts of the country to Henry, who then recorded them on a public map. It was first learned that weather traveled west to east during this time, and weather conditions could then be traced.

Many persons had made observation before him, including Thomas Jefferson, who recorded the temperature in Independence Hall two times on July 4, 1776, but these were made for prosterity, not for public consumption or forecasting. It was not until 1870 that Wisconsin Congressman General Halbert E. Paine introduced a bill to establish a weather forecasting system in the United States; it would eventually grow into the largest such institution in the world.

The Weather Bureau in Washington began issuing a "daily forecast card" on June 18, 1881, a civilian service that continued until January 25, 1925. The central office of the Weather Bureau was established in 1886 at the southwest corner of 24th and M Streets, and completed in 1889. Observations of temperature, precipitation, wind, humidity, and sky cover were made here from March 22, 1889 to March 2, 1942 from atop the castle-like building. Up until 1891, the beginnings of the Bureau were part of the Signal Corps of the U.S. Army.

Despite the successes, the centralized system locat-



photo—courtesy, Washingtoniana Division, Martin Luther King, Jr. Library

Records and measurements for Washington weather conditions began to be taken in 1942 at the newly completed Washington National Airport, which has been a subject of controversy ever since. Seen here is Miss Margaret Duffy preparing to launch a weather balloon on April 23, 1942.



photo—courtesy, Washingtoniana Division, Martin Luther King, Jr. Library

From the top of the castle-like building, observations of temperature, precipitation, wind, humidity, and sky cover were made from March 22, 1889 to March 2, 1942, when a new building was completed adjacent to the original structure.

ed in the District of Columbia, proved to be problematic and not as responsive as many had hoped. In 1935, the system was reorganized and local offices were set up in Jacksonville, New Orleans, Boston and San Juan, Puerto Rico. Airplane flights and more extensive communication systems provided additional and improved data for the Weather Bureau, and forecasts improved.

In March 1942 an annex building that was built directly in front of the original Weather Bureau "castle"—a much larger, Moderne-styled structure—opened for business. But, with World War II on the horizon, it proved too small for the Bureau's ever expanding needs, and many duties were moved to the Pentagon and National Airport. The Bureau was faced with the problem of enciphering and deciphering on the average of 150,000 words daily, consisting mainly of weather reports. Such reports formed the basis for rendering weather service to the Army, Navy, and also domestic industries engaged in war production.

Miss Margaret Duffy was one of the first women employees of the U.S. Weather Bureau, hired because of shortages of male employees during the war. C. O. Schick, then the meteorologist in charge, stated in the April 23, 1942 Washington Star that "he had always been opposed to women as weather workers, but he has been surprised—they will learn every phase of observation, but will not be allowed to make formal forecasts, which is a ticklish feat."

Duffy can be seen here launching a weather balloon from Washington National Airport. Not shown is the radiosonde, which is attached to the helium balloon when released; it soars toward the stratosphere and broadcasts temperature, humidity, and pressure readings. When the balloon finally pops, the instrument descends by parachute, with a note attached asking for its return. It was noted in the Star article "that if the radiosonde should fall on an axis submarine near the coast it would do its captors no good, for it forgets its weather findings as soon as it is broadcast."

The fact that weather observations and daily records that have been taken at airport since 1942 are applied to the official records for the city of Washington have frustrated weather enthusiasts and residents for years. Many see them as inaccurate, as it is acknowledged even by local television meteorologists that conditions at the weather station at the end of the runway is likely not the same result one would record at a centrally located city observation station such as that which was at 24th and M Streets for over 60 years.

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

photo—courtesy, Washingtoniana Division, Martin Luther King, Jr. Library.

photo—courtesy, Washingtoniana Division, Martin Luther King, Jr. Library

RESERVATIONS RECOMMENDED

By Alexandra Greeley*

DUPONT GRILLE The Name of the Game

Perhaps the most telling part of dinner at Dupont Grille—the rather racy addition to Dupont Circle's dining scene—is its community presence. Seated in the Jurys Hotel's uniquely structured dining room, which looks and feels a little like a glass atrium, patrons have the eerie feeling of participating in the street's goings on as they look across toward the ever-present Starbucks and Riggs Bank beyond.

Take a recent dinner. Crowds gathered in noisy knots in and around Dupont Circle, a scant few paces away from the New Hampshire Avenue entrance to Dupont Grille. Loud harrumphing and pounding echoed with the night sounds, and brief snatches of big band music swelled through. Benny Goodman and Swing? No, of course not. But the foot-tappers had the same spirit and crowd appeal, and underscored why what's happening is happening on Dupont Circle's streets. And eating in its almost-alfresco dining room/patio/terrace gives its patrons a front row seat for the action. That is, unless the maitre d' happens to sit you way inside, which does not seem to be his first choice.

Surely not every night is party time in the Circle, so when sidewalks are quieter, you can simply eat, gaze out, and reflect on the nature of Washington, food, and possibly your companions. You can also drive yourself crazy deciding which of Chef Cornell Coulon's various appetizers and entrées will fit your bill.

According to local press, Coulon is a protégé of none other than Emeril (Lagasse, of course), the New Orleans chef who needs no further introduction. Having not sampled Lagasse's preparations, I'm hard-pressed to say just what the influences of his Cajun-style former boss might be on Coulon. But his menu has very little of the Cajun, Creole, or frankly, Southern influence you might expect. Instead, Coulon takes a much more solidly contemporary American approach, wresting his food from regionalism to a much broader scope. After all, what fiery Cajun cook would turn out Cashew-Crusted Tempeh, a much more high-flying, big-on-trendy dish than, say, an

Oyster Po' Boy?

And who could pass up this French/Belgium delight, Steak Frites? Not me, that's for sure. Coulon takes this idea and runs. And instead of serving a thin, pan-grilled number with thin, twirly fried potatoes, he slices up a rare, tender steak into tidy strips, and sides them with a mountain of fresh, hot thick fries—and passes on a parsley-flecked butter. And—it seems there's garlic everywhere! Other entrée temptations include pan-roasted grouper, prosciutto and spinach-wrapped tuna, and a grilled ribeye with a smoked gouda-white corn polenta. Study the entrée selections as you might, you will find it hard to pin down any Cajunese.

But Coulon's Southern hand slips in at least one non-Yankee dish: the gumbo of the evening. That's one way to begin the meal, but I'd say a better bet—assuming you like squid—is Coulon's flash-fried squid dusted with the finest of lemon zest. Other possibilities include a Shrimp Ravigote, a Chicken and Mushroom Napoleon with apple and pickled ginger slaw, and the Dupont Grille Chopped Salad. The last might well be expanded into a full-meal salad, I'll bet.

Sorry to say that the dessert menu is not loftier. You can turn to a warm chocolate cake, a white chocolate-cranberry bread pudding, or assorted ice creams, plus one or two other things. It almost seemed that the waitress apologized for so few choices, or maybe nothing really appealed because the garlicky steak still had me in its thrall. □

Dupont Grille, 1500 New Hamp. Ave., NW; tel., 939-9595. Hours: breakfast daily; lunch, Mon.-Fri.; dinner nightly; brunch, Sat. & Sun. Entrée prices: \$16-\$28. Major credit cards accepted.

*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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