

Scenes from the Past...

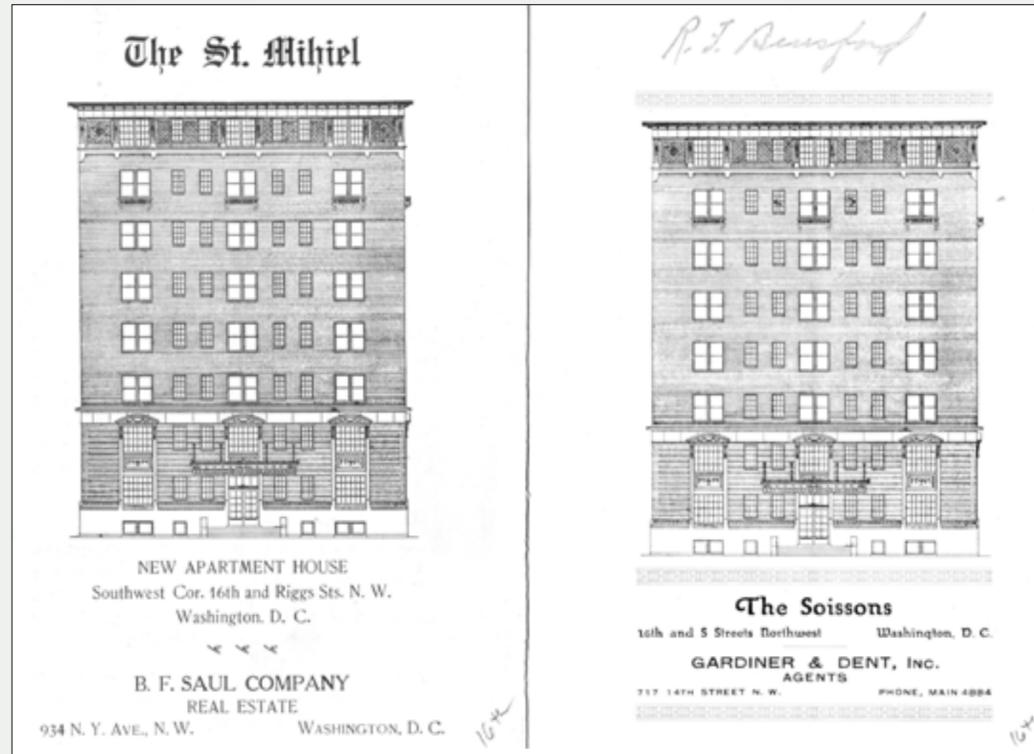


photo—Paul K. Williams—The InTowner.

The St. Mihiel apartment building at 1712 16th Street, on the corner of Riggs Place, as seen today.

The two, similar apartment building in the 1700 block of 16th Street, NW – the St. Mihiel at No. 1712 and the Ambassador at No. 1750 – were both built to the designs of architect Frank R. White in 1920, but were constructed by two different owners and construction firms. Although their façade designs differ today, their original floor plans were virtually the same when the buildings opened for business in 1921. White had, apparently, finished designs for the Ambassador first, as its façade drawing was used to market both buildings in promotional literature produced by the two different owners.

The 63-unit Ambassador, located at the southwest corner of 16th and S Streets, was awarded its building permit in February of 1920. It was originally to be called The Soissons after a French town on the Aisne River about 60 miles north of Paris. The building was owned by Ernest G. Walker, who hired the construction firm of Bush Inzer to build the \$200,000 structure. Its apartments rented from \$47.50 to



illus.—courtesy Kelsey & Associates private collection.

The sales brochures for both the Ambassador and St. Mihiel apartment buildings used the elevation of the Ambassador (originally The Soissons) apartment building on their covers, despite the St. Mihiel having a different design.

\$100 per month in 1921, depending on size and location.

Ernest George Walker had been born in Embden, Maine in 1869, and first worked in Washington as the City Editor and political writer for the *Washington Post* before he ventured into the real estate business. He also fancied himself an historian, and he authored two history books on his hometown in Maine, as well as a history of the Gridiron Club in DC. He and his wife Romaine lived at 3307 R Street in Georgetown.

The 48-unit St. Mihiel, located on the southwest corner of 16th and Riggs Place, was granted its building permit in April of 1920. It was named after the Battle of Saint Mihiel, a World War I battle fought between September 12 and 15, 1918, by the American Expeditionary Force and a number of French troops under the command of U.S. General John J. Pershing against German positions in the western front of France. Its apartments rented from \$50 to \$140 per month in 1921, depending on size and location.

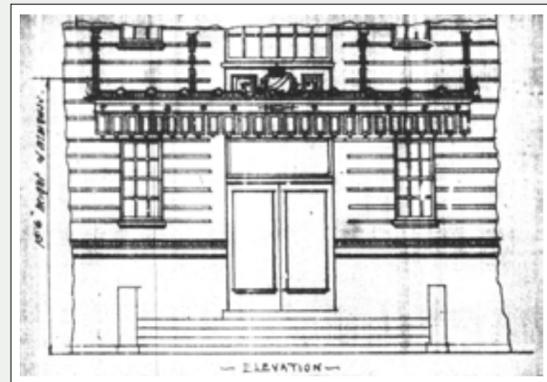
Herman R. Howenstein both owned the buildings and the construction firm that built the \$200,000 St. Mihiel. He was born in St. Louis, Missouri in 1877 and came to Washington with his parents at the age of two. He attended local public schools, and eventually graduated from The George

Washington University Law School. He operated the Howenstein Realty Corporation, a real estate investment and building company located at 1418 H Street, NW for much of his 50-year career in building homes, apartments, and financing real estate deals throughout the city.

Both apartment buildings were built to be fireproof, “to meet the demands of a large class of tenants,” according to their sales brochures. The buildings would have resident staff to accept packages, operate elevators, and answer a telephone switchboard. Although produced by two different owners using two separate marketing firms, the promotional brochures shared the same language, and read:

“All rooms are large and very well lighted. The bath rooms are thoroughly modern and equipped with fixtures of the highest type – including bath tubs with showers. The floors throughout are of best grade oak, expensively finished and waxed, the woodwork being white and mahogany finish. Specifically designed electric fixtures of the most approved type are installed and all living rooms are supplied with a base plug for lamp, vacuum cleaner, or other attachment. Each apartment has large closets.”

Architect Frank Russell White was born in Brooklyn, New York on May 2, 1889. He attended public schools in



illus.—courtesy Kelsey & Associates private collection.

Frank Russell White's design for the Ambassador apartment building's entrance.



photo—Paul K. Williams—The InTowner.

The Ambassador apartment building at 1750 16th Street, on the corner of S Street, as seen today.

New York, and attended the Pennsylvania Military College between 1903 and 1904. He first came to Washington in 1908 to work as an architect for the Harry Wardman Company, for which he worked for the next 25 years.

He specialized in apartment building designs for Harry Wardman, but also designed more than 5,000 single-family houses for the Wardman Company. He and his wife Carolyn resided for most of his career at 4645 Alton Place, NW.

Perhaps his best known apartment building is the Wardman Park Hotel & Apartments at 2660 Woodley Road in Woodley Park, completed in 1917. White also designed three of the Clifton Terrace buildings in 1917, located at 14th and Clifton Streets, and, in 1918, the famed Chateau Thierry Apartments at 1920 S Street.

White established his own practice in 1922 with an office at 1340 F Street. One of his primary clients included Christian Heurich, for whom he designed the Heurich Building at 1627 K Street in 1939.

The Great Depression was difficult for many of the country's architects, but apparently especially so for Frank White. He was arrested in Baltimore on October 26, 1931 on the charge of altering and raising \$1 bills to represent \$100 bills. He pleaded guilty in December of that year and served a two-year prison sentence. He resumed his architecture practice by 1939, and died at his Alton Place home of a blood disorder in 1961.

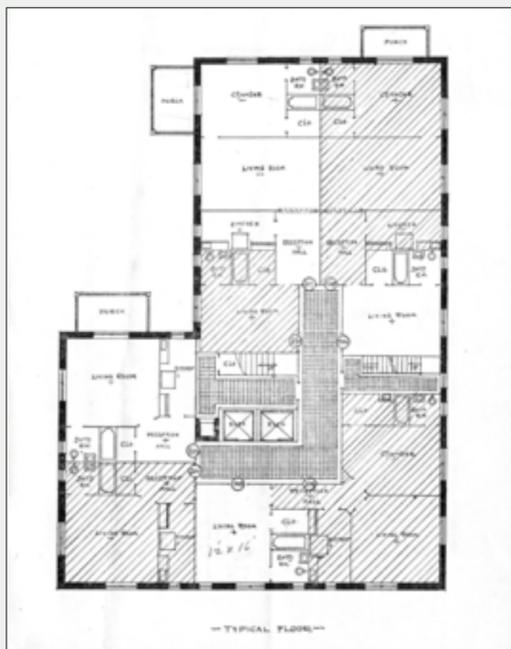


photo—courtesy Kelsey & Associates private collection.

Architect Frank Russell White.

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illus.—courtesy Kelsey & Associates private collection.

The original, 1920 floor plan of the Ambassador apartment building.