

# Scenes from the Past



photo—Fifty Glimpses of Washington, 1896.

The British Legation stood on the northwest corner of Connecticut Avenue and N Street from 1872 to 1931, facing Connecticut Avenue.

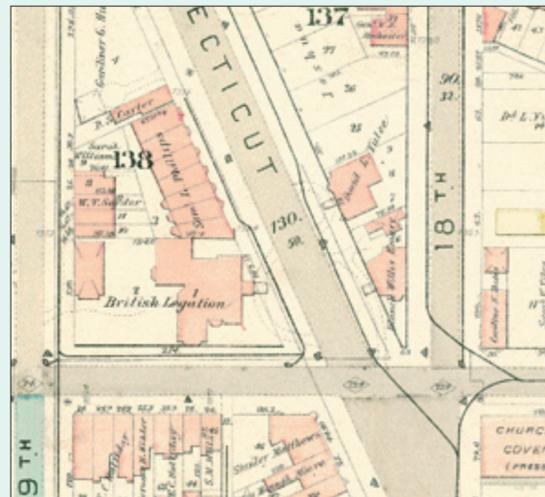
Most office workers and residents making their way up and down the 1300 block of Connecticut Avenue immediately south of Dupont Circle are offered little imagination to what the block appeared like before the construction of massive apartment and office buildings built there in the 1930s, with ground floor retail. Like Dupont Circle itself, it was lined with residential mansions and townhomes that were built beginning in the 1870s, when the area was rather barren. Prior to that decade, the wealthy of Washington resided in lavish homes built around Logan, Scott, and Thomas Circles.

The British Legation complex was built at 1300 Connecticut Avenue beginning in 1872 and was recognized as the first substantial house "of any pretension" built in what was then known as the West End. Located at the

northwest corner of Connecticut Avenue and N Street, it was designed by local architect John Fraser, and built at a cost of \$125,000, an enormous sum for the time, considering that the average townhouse in the city could be constructed for less than \$2,000. It featured a large and ornate Second Empire-style building, office, official residence, stable, outbuildings, and garden, and was first occupied in 1874.

It also had the distinction of being the first foreign-owned legation in Washington. Prior to this, foreign legations tended to rent large homes, changing locations as budgets and fashionable areas waxed and waned. At the time, the area north of K Street was rather undeveloped and remote, and British Minister Sir Edward Thornton recognized a deal when the land was purchased for a mere 50 cents per square foot.

Typical of diplomatic building complexes in the 19th century, it served as both the residence of the minister (embassy) as well as the legation office space for his government (or chancellery). Mary S. Lockwood wrote about the legation in her 1889 tome *Historic Homes in Washington* that "when it was commenced, it was set down in barren wasteland, but today it is the centre of the fashionable residences of Washington."

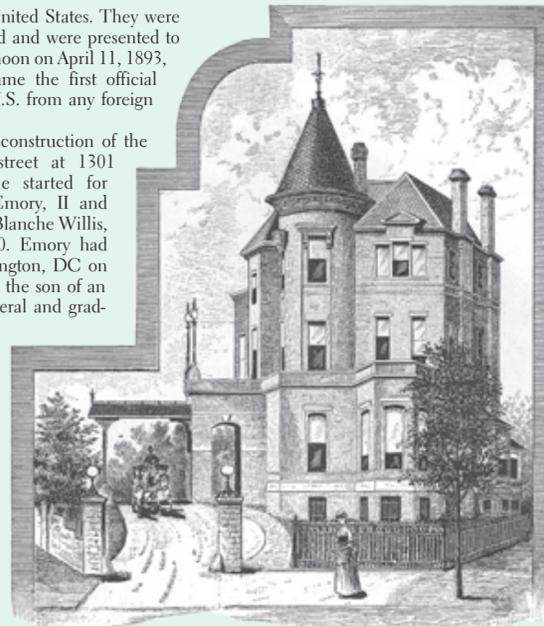


photo—courtesy Kelsey & Associates Private Collection.

The intersection of Connecticut Avenue and N Street is illustrated on this 1887 Hopkins map, showing the British legation complex on the left, and the Emory and Yulee houses at right.

ambassador to the United States. They were rushed from England and were presented to the White House at noon on April 11, 1893, whereupon he became the first official ambassador to the U.S. from any foreign government.

In April of 1879, construction of the house across the street at 1301 Connecticut Avenue started for William Hemsley Emory, II and his wife, the former Blanche Willis, at a cost of \$25,000. Emory had been born in Washington, DC on December 17, 1846, the son of an Army Brigadier General and graduate of the West Point Military Academy. Emory entered the United States Naval Academy in 1862, and was eventually commissioned a Rear Admiral on November 2, 1906. His service included Asiatic, Atlantic and European Stations, command of the USS *Bear* in 1884, and the rescue of the



image—The National Capital, Past and Present (1885).

This etching of the Emory mansion was drawn in 1885, shortly after its construction.



photo—Fifty Glimpses of Washington (1896).

This view, looking north up Connecticut Avenue in 1896, shoes the Williams and Blanche Emory mansion in the foreground at N Street, with the David Yulee mansion behind it.

She went on to describe the complex:

"The front door is approached by asphalt walks, and another leads to the side door on the rear of the house, where the offices of the legation are situated. Two or three small, stuffy rooms in the corner are given to official matters; the rest of the house is the minister's private residence. None but his personal friends can hope to enter behind the 'massive handle of the big front door'; a letter may reach him, a card never. If, by stroke of good luck, you obtain the open sesame to this grand home, you will find a spacious hall from which rises a heavy, oaken staircase."

In 1893, Congress elevated ministries from foreign governments to the status of embassies to the United States. Anticipating this legislative passage, the British Minister at the time, Sir Julian Pauncefote, prepared documents in advance declaring himself the

Greeley Expedition party in 1889.

He commanded the USS *Petrac*, Asiatic Station, during the China-Japan War, protecting Catholic sisters and orphans from Chinese mobs. He commanded the USS *Yosemite* during the Spanish-American War and was posted to London as Naval Attaché at the Court of St. James for four years. He retired on December 7, 1908 after 56 years of honorable service. He died on July 15, 1917 in Newport, Rhode Island, and was buried in Arlington National Cemetery. His wife, Blanche Willis Emory (July 5, 1856-June 17, 1935) and his son, William Hemsley Emory, III, are buried with him.

The Yulee mansion at 1305 Connecticut Avenue was built by David Levy Yulee beginning in June of 1883 at a cost of \$40,000. Its architect was Charles H. Read, Jr. Yulee had moved to Washington, DC permanently

in 1880, although he resided here while serving as the first Jewish member of the U.S. Senate when Florida was admitted to the Union in 1845. He had been born David Levy on June 12, 1810 in Charlotte Amalie, on the island of St. Thomas, during the British occupation of the Danish West Indies, now the U.S. Virgin Islands (ironically the British were his new neighbors along Connecticut Avenue). He changed his name in 1846 to add his father's ancestral, Sephardic surname.

Yulee did not win reelection in 1850, and returned to Florida to establish a sugar plantation along the Homosassa River near Fernandina that remains to this day. He established the Florida Railroad in 1853, a cross-state railroad system with terminals in the deep port cities on Amelia Island on the Atlantic and Cedar Key on the Gulf of Mexico that opened in 1861. The railroad was destroyed and Yulee was imprisoned during the Civil War, but was rebuilt afterwards as the Yulee Railroad. He died while on a trip to New York City in October of 1886, just three years after his house had been completed, and was buried in Georgetown's historic Oak Hill Cemetery.

Real estate developer Susan P. Okie, a resident and developer of houses along the 1700 block of N Street, built the two homes at 1309 and 1311 Connecticut Avenue in 1890.

The British Legation complex was razed in 1931 after the offices were relocated to the newly built British Embassy at 3100 Massachusetts Avenue. It was replaced that year by a Goodyear tire and gasoline service station, which was located on the site until 1954, when the present office building was built by the International Association of Machinists.

The Emory mansion and the Yulee mansion at 1301 and 1305 Connecticut Avenue, respectively, were razed by the time the Wilkins Security Corporation constructed the apartment house on their site in 1916. It was designed by architect Clarke Waggaman and was built at a cost of \$150,000.

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



photo—Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.

David Levy Yulee was the first Jewish member of the U.S. Senate, and the owner of the mansion at 1305 Connecticut Avenue.



photo—Naval Historical Society.

Rear Admiral William H. Emory is pictured here, seated at far left, when he served as the Commander, Third Division of the U.S. Atlantic Fleet's Senior Officers and their Flag Lieutenants visit to the Governor-General of Australia. The "Great White Fleet" tour lasted from December 1907 to February of 1909.

## Neighborhood Art Exhibits Not to Miss

By Anthony L. Harvey

**Mexican Cultural Institute**  
2829 16th St., NW; (202) 728-1624  
Mon.-Fri., 10am-6pm. Admission, Free

The Mexican Cultural Institute is celebrating both the restoration and expansion of its ground floor art galleries and the start of festivities in honor of the 2010 bi-centennial of the Mexican revolution with a gem of a focused art show entitled "The Ceramics of Paquimé and Mata Ortiz: Tracing a Family Legacy." It includes both contemporary hand-made pottery from the small Mexican town of Mata Ortiz along with relatively ancient examples from the nearby ruins of the much earlier northern Chichimeca city of Paquimé. These are both roughly 100 miles south-southwest of Ciudad Juarez in the present day state of Chihuahua.

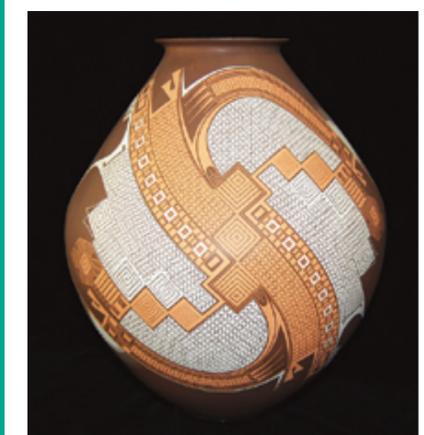
The pottery on display ranges in style and appearance from exquisitely designed and geometrically patterned pots with dramatically sweeping swaths of decorative borders interspersed with such figures as those of corn and macaws — these being contemporary work from Mata Ortiz — to anthropomorphic and zoomorphic vessels



tery. This he did using local clay, locally made bores and polished stones or bone to produce a brilliant, smooth finish, and paints from the minerals and clays of the mountains near his small town to decorate the pots.

After perfecting his craft, Quezada began teaching his artistry, both to family members and to others in Mata Ortiz. As noted in the show's press release, "Whole families have devoted themselves to this work . . . Over 400 of Mata Ortiz's 2,000 people [now] create pottery. Before Quezada began teaching pottery, most in Mata Ortiz had been employed by the railroad, in cattle ranching, and in farming a dry land. The pottery has brought prosperity to a formerly poor town."

The fine show features a wide range of contemporary Chihuahuan pottery — both traditionally styled Paquimé masterworks and wildly imagined new forms of contemporary pots, figures, and other ceramic pieces. All are both visually striking and handsomely crafted. On view through October 17. □



of humorous sophistication which had been found in the ruins of Paquimé or buried in nearby caves.

The pottery from Paquimé is primarily from the 13th through 15th centuries when the city was at its height as an important trading center, thanks to its strategic location midway between the thriving native American cities in Arizona and New Mexico and the great centers of Meso-America, especially that of the Aztec Empire in the Valley of Mexico. After a period of decline, Paquimé was apparently attacked, destroyed, and then abandoned in the mid to late 15th century. Spaniards found only ruins in 1565.

One man — Juan Quezada — serves as the remarkable link between this earlier culture and that of today's Mexican inhabitants of northern Chihuahua. Quezada, 40 years ago, discovered examples of Paquimé pottery in caves near his home in Mata Ortiz. These pots, and their sophisticated artistry, inspired him to learn the art of making pot-

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