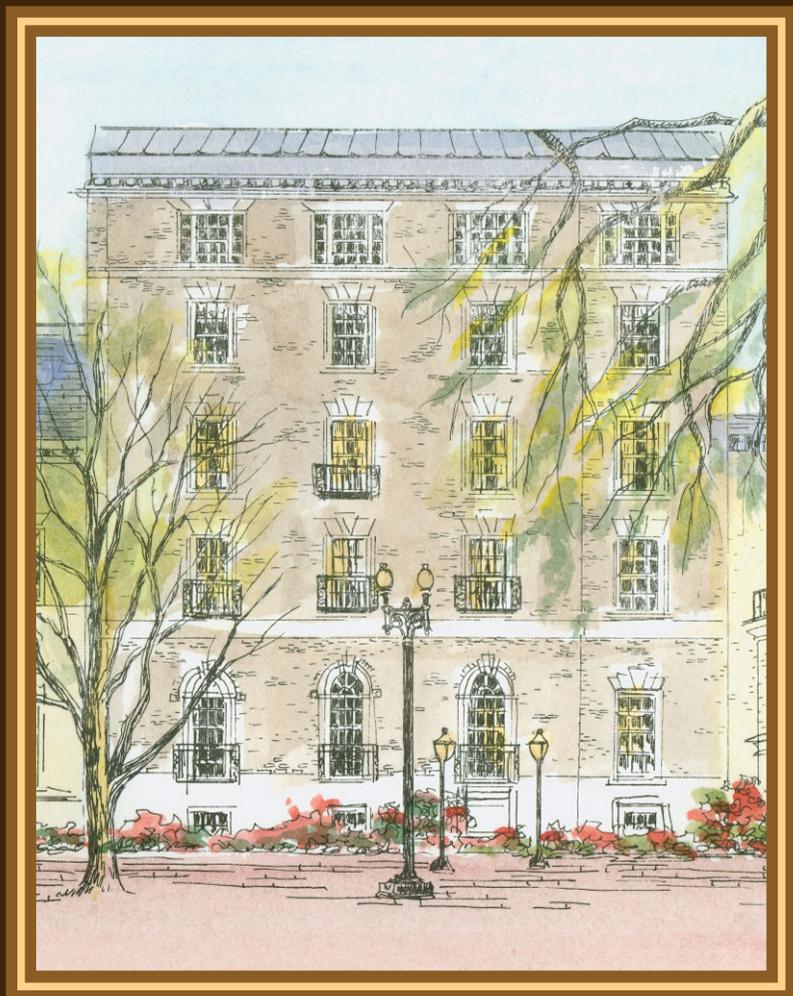


# COSMOS CLUB ON LAFAYETTE SQUARE



1882 - 1952



*Cosmos Club circa 1910*

The Cosmos Club was founded in Washington, D.C. in the fall of 1878 as a “private social club dedicated to men distinguished in science, literature and the arts.” From 1886 until 1952, the Club occupied several historic residences along the northeast corner of Lafayette Square. Women were invited to become members in 1988.

In 1831 there were four houses on Madison Place on the east side of Lafayette Square. The houses were known as the Dolley Madison House, the Tayloe House, the Gunnell House and the Rodgers House. All served as homes to important figures in the country’s history. Though just one short block, Madison Place was, and continues to be, a unique spot in the capital city of the United States.

Madison Place remained the same until the mid-1800s. In 1869, the Gunnell House, which had belonged to the Federal Government since the Civil War, was razed and replaced by the Freedman’s Bank, for which Frederick Douglass served as president. In 1893, when the last resident of the Rodgers House passed away, that house also was torn down to make way for the Lafayette Square Opera House, which opened in 1895. In 1906 it was renamed the Belasco Theatre.

In the late-1800s, two brick buildings were erected on the lots between the Dolley Madison House and the Tayloe House at numbers 23 and 25 Madison Place. These two houses were similar in appearance, each three stories tall, built of brick with a gabled attic.



***Watercolor courtesy of artist Leonida Ivanetich***

The first house was built by William Windom, a Senator representing the state of Minnesota, who accepted President Garfield's appointment to the position of Secretary of the Treasury in 1881. Windom resigned this position and resumed his seat in the Senate after President Garfield's death eight months later. He was appointed again as Secretary of the Treasury by President Benjamin Harrison in 1889.

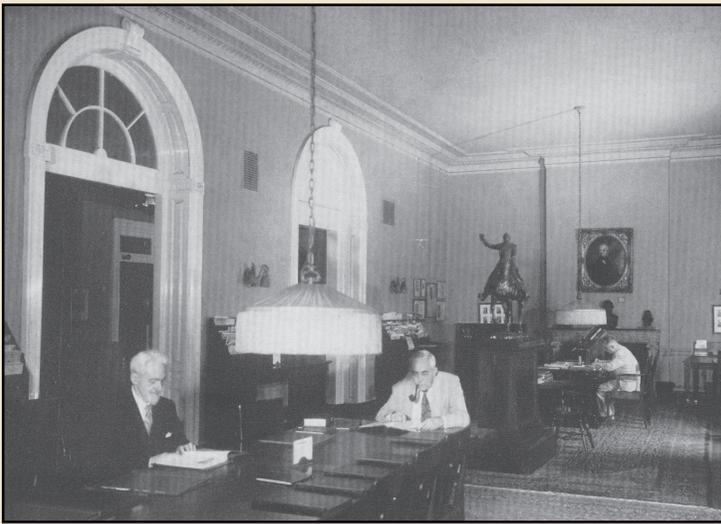


The second house was built by Senator Reuben Fenton of New York and rented for several years by Colonel Robert G. Ingersoll. Ingersoll was a prominent lawyer and famous orator who often was referred to as “the most eloquent man who ever spoke from a public platform.” Due to his strong anti-Christian sentiments, Ingersoll also was known as “The Great Agnostic.” Such was the strength of his personal creed that instead of a family Bible, he had a bound copy of the complete works of William Shakespeare in which he recorded births, deaths and marriages.

Eventually, both the Windom House and the Ingersoll House were purchased by the Cosmos Club. The major scientific societies in Washington met regularly at the Cosmos Club. It was the birthplace of many kindred organizations, among them the National Geographic Society in January of 1888. In the late 1800s Lafayette



*Photo courtesy of Volkmar Kurt Wentzel*

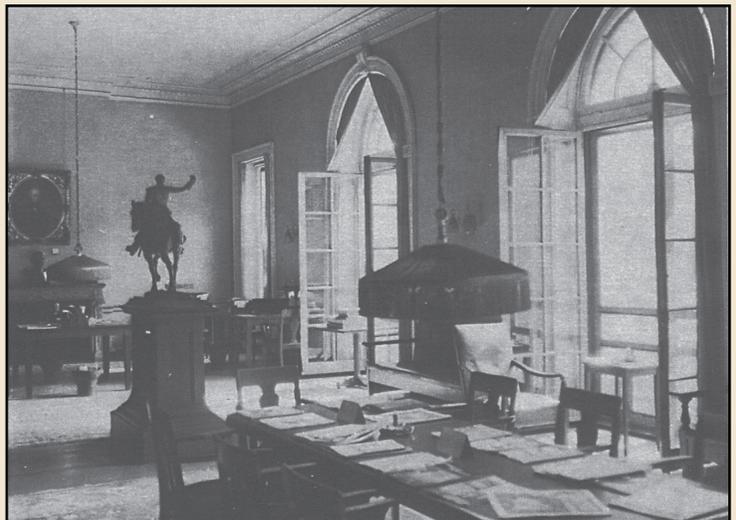


Square was at the height of its glory.

The Cosmos Club membership continued to grow and the costs for maintaining and improving the Club's properties on the Square continued to escalate.

After many attempts to fund improvements to their facilities, the Cosmos Club, at a board meeting in March of 1909, concluded that a new "five story fireproof building" should be constructed on Madison Place. A resolution directed the Club's president to appoint a building committee to select an architect as well as to appoint a finance committee to raise \$100,000 for the new structure. At the same board meeting, architect Thomas J.D. Fuller's sketched plans for the new building were approved. The new addition to the Cosmos Club complex was completed in 1910.

The brief era of national peace after the war years of 1917 and 1918 were not ones of placid contentment for the Club. As one Cosmos Club member put it, "a cloud no bigger than a man's hand" appeared on the horizon in the form of a proposal that the federal government should take the Club's property as a site for departmental





*Courtyard outside the Cosmos Club building*



*Courtyard outside the Cosmos Club building in 2009*



offices. The growth of the executive branch of government in the vicinity of The White House between World Wars I and II cast serious doubt that the Club could maintain its presence on Lafayette Square. In March of 1930 the Club's fears were realized when Congress directed the Secretary of the Treasury to acquire all the privately owned land on Madison Place.

No time limit was set, and no immediate action was taken by the government. The Club continued on in its Madison Place location, making only necessary repairs and no renovations. The deteriorating properties soon became a heavy financial burden on the Club's membership.

By 1922, the Club had increased the size of its facilities nine times, and its property on Madison Place was considered one of the most valuable real estate investments in Washington. Eventually, in September of 1939, the government offered \$1 million for the Cosmos Club's holdings on Lafayette Square, slightly less than the tax assessment at the time. Since the government was bound by law ultimately to take possession, the Club

voted in March of 1940 to accept the offer. The Club's holdings on Madison Place were transferred to government ownership. However, the build-up and entry into World War II delayed the government's plans for the buildings on the Square. Consequently the Cosmos Club leased the buildings back.

During World War II, no construction of government-owned offices could begin. Even at the end of the war, the government made no move to break their lease, and the Cosmos Club continued to rent the property until 1952, when the Club moved to their current home on Massachusetts Avenue.

During times of crisis, the Cosmos Club was an active haven for scores of scientists and specialists detailed to Washington on various missions connected with the war. For instance, at a meeting at the Club on December 6, 1941, informal discussions were held that laid the foundation for the Manhattan Project, a top secret effort to discover a means of separating plutonium from uranium, leading to the development of the first atomic bomb. By the end of 1942 the first self-sustaining chain reaction was achieved,



and the atomic bomb was a reality, eventually leading to the end of World War II. The Manhattan Project ultimately employed more than 130,000 people and cost nearly \$2 billion.

Following the Club's move, two government agencies, the National Science Foundation and the Office of the Administrator of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration occupied the former Cosmos Club as well as the Dolley Madison House until 1964.

During President Eisenhower's second term, construction of new office space for the executive and judicial branches of the government was a top priority. In 1960, the General Services Administration announced that two modern office buildings were to be built on Lafayette Square, one on Madison Place and one on Jackson Place, after most of the current buildings were razed, including the former home of the Cosmos Club. Although the plans for this modern office complex construction had been approved by 1962, First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy became involved and boldly stated "the wreckers haven't started yet, and until they do, [the square] can be saved." President and Mrs. Kennedy prevailed, and by the mid-1960s definitive plans were made for the "Lafayette Square Restoration Project," utilizing the architectural plans of their friend John Carl Warnecke. The historic houses





remained and, indeed, Lafayette Square was saved.

Part of the restoration of Madison Place included the nine-story red brick Howard T. Markey National Courts Building, which was completed in September of 1967. The building was occupied by the United States Court of Claims and the United States Court of Customs and Patent Appeals. Under the Federal Courts Improvement Act of 1982, the United States Court of Customs and Patent Appeals and the Appellate Division of the United States Court of Claims were merged to become the United States Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit.

The Federal Judicial Center occupied the Dolley Madison House and the former Cosmos Club building from 1968 to 1992. When the Federal Judicial Center moved to new offices on Capitol Hill, the United States Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit acquired the three historic houses for additional offices. Extensive renovations were completed and these historic houses now serve as conference, reception and office space for the United States Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit which strives to honor and preserve the history and legacy of Lafayette Square.



*Color Photography by Shannon Chambers and Robin Reid*



THE COSMOS CLUB, FOUNDED IN 1878 FOR  
"THE ADVANCEMENT OF ITS MEMBERS  
IN SCIENCE, LITERATURE, AND ART,"  
OCCUPIED SEVERAL HOUSES ON LAFAYETTE SQUARE  
FROM 1882 TO 1952 INCLUDING THE  
ADJACENT MADISON AND TAYLOE HOUSES  
AND THIS BUILDING, WHICH REPLACED  
HOUSES AT 23 AND 25 MADISON PLACE.  
THE CLUB CONTINUES TO PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE  
IN WASHINGTON'S INTELLECTUAL LIFE  
AT ITS PRESENT LOCATION AT  
2121 MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE, N.W.



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ON LAFAYETTE SQUARE  
1882 - 1952**

United States Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit  
Lafayette Square  
Washington, DC 20439