

# Watergate Hotel Review



Volume 3, Number 4

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## The Gate Post

...A Sighting of Birds & Books

If ever a city and a season were made for each other, Washington, D.C. and spring surely were.

A true voice of this loveliest of seasons: the soft and gentle "turalee-alee" of the bluebird, a near relative to the brown thrashers and robins.

Did you know a robin requires 70 earthworms, or the equivalent in insect food, daily? Baltimore orioles like oranges and other juicy fruits. A Swedish naturalist named this American black-bird, in honor of Lord Baltimore (original proprietor of the Maryland colony) whose family colors, black and orange, are dominant in the plumage of the male. His olive yellow-feathered mate seems drab in comparison, but she weaves one of the finest nests in all of birdom.

A statue of Benito Juarez, 19th-century statesman and president of Mexico, towers above a landscaped triangle adjacent to the Watergate Complex. It is not part of the Complex, but of the city's public memorials...which are the subject of **The Outdoor Sculpture of Washington, D.C.**, by James M. Goode, Smithsonian Building curator. This excellent book contains "walking tour" maps, photos and fascinating data on 400 of the more than 600 outdoor memorials, monuments and sculptures — as varied in subject matter as in size, shape, form and design. An interesting book for one and all, it is available in paperback, \$4.95; hardcover (with supplemental appendixes), \$15. Non-residents may order from: The Smithsonian Bookstore, Washington, D.C. 20560. (Add \$.45 for handling.)

Books are but part of the treasures in the Library of Congress...and in the text of Charles A. Goodrum's delightful book, **The Library of Congress** (Praeger Press). Libraries throughout the country have circulating copies of this interesting, pleasant-to-read book. Area bookshops stocking it include the Trover Shops and Kramer's.

## A Medley of Guest Notes

Antal Dorati, the National Symphony's music director and our "in residence" conductor was awarded a Gold Record by Decca London Records for recording the complete (104) Haydn symphonies with the Philharmonia Hungarica. The project, a first in recording history, involved 281 sessions over a 3½ year period.

General Steel Industries president, James Van Sant of St. Louis, was honored in February as Callaway (Mo.) County's "Man of the Year." At the Award's dinner at William Woods College, Mr. Van Sant dispensed with a speech. He presented instead, at his expense, a concert by pianist Eugene List.

France's outstanding composer-singer, Gilbert Becaud, was in for a concert; then for the Ford's Theater opening of *Gabrielle*, starring Tammy Grimes, another of our guests. As were: the Honorable Bill Ray, Alaska State senator and Senate Finance Committee chairman, and Mrs. Ray; Lehigh University president and Mrs. Deming Lewis; New York Times associate editor and Mrs. Tom Wicker; Lauren Bacall; Diana Rigg; Candice Bergen; Mike Nichols; Sidney Lumet; Vern Goff, Branham, Inc., New York; Romeo Salta, owner of Manhattan's noted Romeo Salta restaurant; members of the National Music Council; New York Junior League; Committee for Economic Development; Shreveport (La.) Art Guild, and the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce.

## First There Was One

Even before any construction began on the residential-commercial Watergate Complex, the single word "Watergate" was (and is yet) commonly used to refer to the ten-acre site or any part of it.

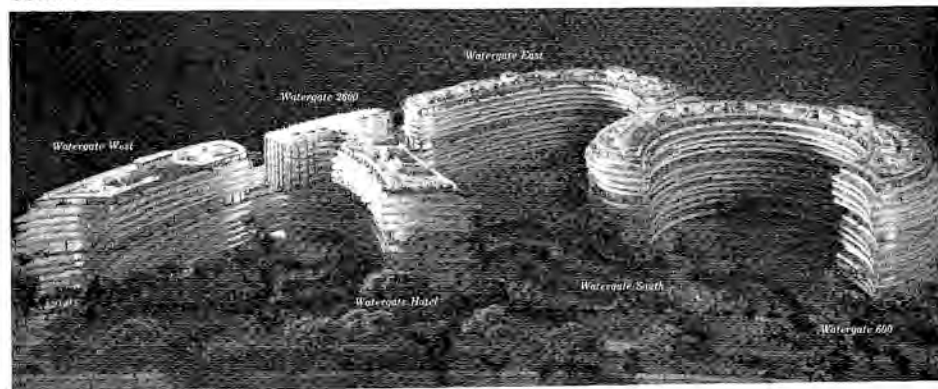
So, it is not surprising that some individuals think the Complex is "one huge building."

There was a time - from October, 1965, to the spring of 1967 - when there was just one building. Now, as the scale model below shows, the Complex has six—each a separate, separately-operated entity.

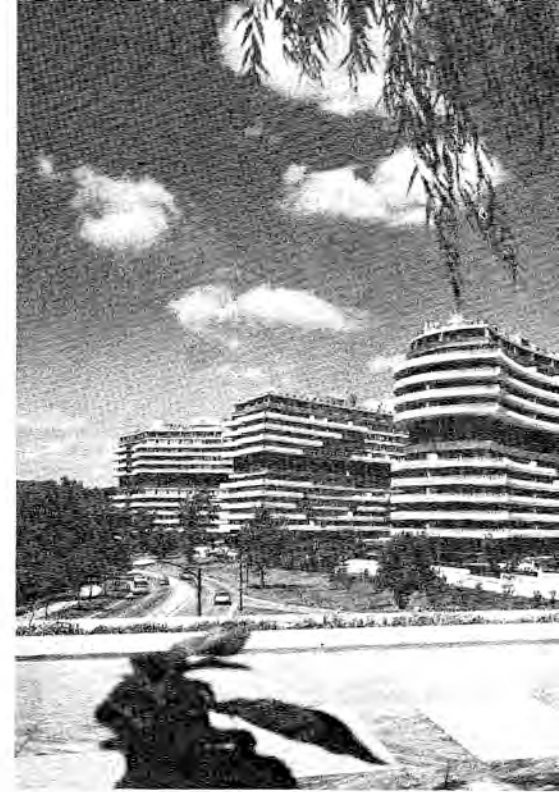
The first on the scene was Watergate East, a private residence of 241 co-operative apartments. It celebrates its tenth anniversary this year and is one of the city's "older" co-ops.

A decade ago Washington had no condominiums and less than five co-operative apartment buildings. Today, the Watergate Complex alone has three, each with its own name, address, resident manager and a board of directors (elected from the owner-membership). All apartments are privately-owned; most are owner-occupied.

The Watergate Hotel (eight-years-young on April 6), and the two office buildings are also separate entities within the Complex that was conceived and built as the Capital City's first residential-commercial community. A pictorial review of its development is on pages 2 and 3.



April 3, 1964. Spring was late that year, but work on the Watergate site was well under way. To its right: part of the property owned for many years by William Corcoran, who founded the Corcoran Gallery of Art in 1874. Toward the upper left: a partial view of the famous Water Gate Inn. The Kennedy Center is now on that side of F Street.



Spring, 1972. From the terrace of one of its six buildings: [l to r] Watergate East, Watergate North, Watergate South, Watergate West, Watergate Center, and Watergate North West.

The year 1948 was the end of an era for Washington Gas Light Company's (WGL) 100-year-old West Station Works. The storage tanks that dominated the Foggy Bottom skyline for longer than one could remember stood empty, never to be used again. (A "New Era" of natural gas had made them obsolete.) On July 24 six and one-half acres of the site were put up for sale, for \$3 million. There were no takers.

During the next decade WGL and the city received various offers and proposals for the area. Each was rejected, for one reason or another. Then, in June of 1960, a ten-acre triangular tract (above) of the WGL property was sold to SGI, an international investment-real estate-development firm founded in the 1860s.

When plans for the riverfront site were announced, some heads shook in disbelief: "A luxury complex in old Foggy Bottom? They're dreaming."

Not a dream, but a foresighted reality. John Hancock provided the mortgage financing, the largest such in the history of the then century-old Boston firm. Riverview Realty Corp. was named sales-leasing agent. Chief architect was the late Luigi Moretti, with the local firm of Fischer & Elmore as associates.

Moretti created a "dynamic, unique design"...free-flowing curvilinear structures of uniform height, in a spacious setting and with spectacular views. His concept for the multi-purpose complex aroused opposition from the city's architects and members of the Fine Arts Commission. After numerous meetings, lengthy delays, and compromises-in-design, the project was given the go-ahead.

In February, 1964, ground was broken for Watergate East. Twenty months later many of its 241 co-operative apartments were ready for occupancy. At this same time, work was progressing on a seven-acre tri-level park with a central courtyard, and covered walkways, escalators and series of stairways leading to each building, the garages, and the more than 70 shops and commercial services now situated around the upper and lower malls, and in *Les Champs*. Occupying the street level of Watergate 600, *Les Champs* was the final phase in construction. It was completed in October of 1972.

October 29, 1965. Watergate East ready for occupancy.



A courtyard view of Watergate East and its curvilinear design.





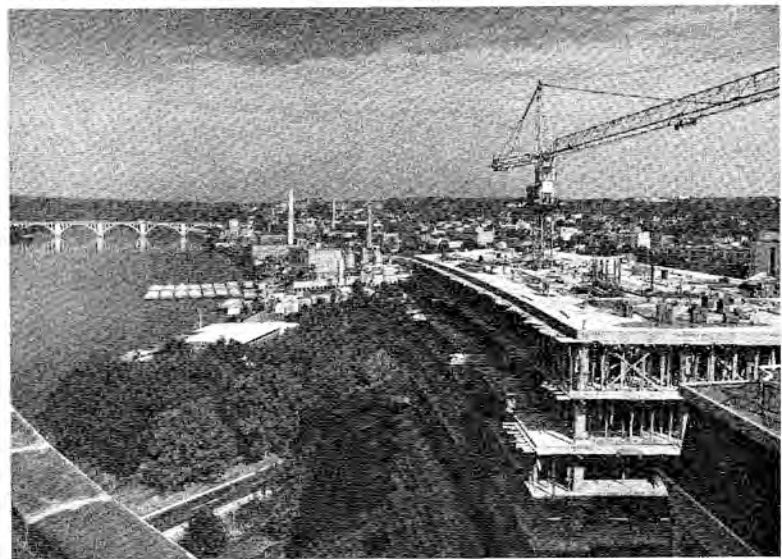


View of the Kennedy Center, a lovely view of the Complex and West, Watergate Hotel, Watergate South, Watergate 600.

February, 1970. Watergate South and Watergate 600 take shape, as does the Kennedy Center across the avenue.



1968. The concrete frame of Watergate West and a panoramic view of Key Bridge, the Potomac Palisades, Georgetown and the upper heights.



April, 1967. The Watergate Hotel [L] and the adjoining Watergate 2600. Fountains, promenades, and an outdoor cafe, open spring to autumn, enhance the tri-level park.

### Co-operative Apartments

- Watergate East** 2500-2510 Virginia Avenue NW.  
Opened October, 1965. 241 apartments.
- Watergate West** 2700 Virginia Avenue NW.  
Opened January, 1969. 143 apartments.
- Watergate South** 700 New Hampshire NW.  
Opened January, 1971. 250 apartments.

### Office Buildings

- Watergate 2600** 2600 Virginia Avenue NW.  
Opened April, 1967. 200,000 sq. feet
- Watergate 600** 600 New Hampshire NW.  
Opened January, 1971. 253,000 sq. feet

*Les Champs* arcade of shops, restaurant and Peacock Lounge is on street level.

A branch of Riggs Bank; international corporations; business and trade associations; doctors; law firms; the Royal Swedish Embassy; Brazilian Mission to the OAS; Italian Embassy Commercial Office; Japanese Embassy annex, and other diplomatic delegations are among the tenants in the office buildings.

### Hotel

- The Watergate Hotel** 2650 Virginia Avenue NW.  
Opened April, 1967. 240 rooms & suites.

Facilities also include accommodations for business and social functions, of up to 200; the Terrace Restaurant and Lounge; the Watergate Health Club, with year-round indoor pool and separate facilities for men and women.



As soon as George Washington had decided where to establish the permanent Seat of Government he "engaged secret agents, posing as private buyers, to negotiate with plantation owners in Maryland and Virginia for an excess of land." When transactions were well along he met with the proprietors, at a George Town tavern, to inform them of the Government's intent and "strike the final bargain." Nineteen signed an initial agreement on March 30, 1791.

Among terms agreed to: the President had sole power to plan the city in whatever manner he pleased; owners would donate acreage for thoroughfares and receive \$67 an acre for Government-designated sites. The remainder would be divided into lots for public auction, with proceeds from every other sale going to the Capital City treasury.

This was the keystone to Washington's scheme for financing the \$1 million-plus Federal District venture. He had already directed L'Enfant to quietly survey a specific expanse. Soon, he could make his next move. Or, so he thought.

While touring southern states in May, he learned that 15 proprietors had refused to sign deeds of transfer, due to a dispute over the amount of land they were asked to make available. Not until late June was he able to again confer with the owners, some of whom were new. In April and May, much of the land had been sold and bought in speculation--something the President hoped would not occur. (At least, not as yet.)

The men at this meeting were shown a partial sketch of L'Enfant's "magnificent plan." *Magnificent?* That "crazy Frenchman" wanted 3606 acres, of a total 6111, just for *thoroughfares*. Streets 100 to 160 feet wide! A mile-long avenue! Give their land for such madness? Never.

The mere 541 acres for Federal sites, with the "president's house and other great departments situated on rising ground adjoining Hamburg" (now part of Foggy Bottom) displeased many, as did the remaining 1,964 acres divided into 20,272 lots. Their half share would be "no great benefit."

The President was prepared. Their share of city lot sales, he said, could yield 10 times the amount the land would bring if sold as farms. Also, he reminded them, Philadelphia was most anxious to be the permanent site of the National Capital. (For decades to come, this threat to move the nation's Seat of Government elsewhere was used to keep District officials and residents in line, as it did the men at that June 29 meeting.)

Some compromises and changes were made, and L'Enfant was asked to complete the plan so that engraved copies could be readied for the first auction.

### The Selling of A City

The President needed funds desperately. By selling lots at 20% to 60% above original cost, the Government's gain on 10,136 lots would exceed \$1.5 million. An early auction, he reasoned, would begin to provide the needed funds.

L'Enfant disagreed: "When stately edifices, parks and gardens are completed then it will be time to allow private individuals to buy land, within limits, and to erect buildings...under restrictions that they harmonize with the surroundings." He recommended the money be borrowed and that no further changes be made in his design "for a city for the future...when this nation would be powerful and populous."

The "obstinate dreamer" pleaded in vain. Three auctions were held: in October, 1791 and '92, and "the worst," in September, 1793. In truth, all were a disaster. The Government's share from sales was a humiliating \$16,000.

Records show the standard lot was 5265 square feet. Highest bid averaged \$534; lowest, \$160. Of lots sold, the three commissioners bought four; the President's secretary, one; the President, four, of which Square #21 is now part of the Kennedy Center grounds, across from the Watergate Complex.



The failure of the first auction was attributed to failure to have engraved plans ready; the weather, and subversive rumors that the Government would never reside here. (It was no secret that some Congressmen and "other irreconcilables" opposed the site.)

"Unsettled conditions in Europe; the depressed state of business; tightness of the money market, and the rumors" adversely affected the other two, and resulted in many purchasers defaulting or being behind in deferred payments.

An audit of the future city's accounts in October, 1793, showed receipt of Maryland's \$72,000 pledge and \$79,000 of Virginia's \$120,000. Cash from lot sales: \$16,000. Total receipts to date: \$167,000. Cash on hand: \$18,000.

Hoping to disarm the "venture's enemies," Washington had told Congress, in 1791: "There is a prospect, favored by the rate of sales, of ample funds forthcoming..." Now, he dare not report the same. Yet, save the Federal City he must. But how?

[To be continued...]

The Watergate Hotel Review is distributed within the Watergate Complex and mailed to individuals, civic and business leaders and firms in North America and overseas. Please address correspondence, news releases and changes of address to

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**Gabor Olah-de-Garab**  
 Vice President-General Manager

The variety of services available within the Watergate Complex is considerable. Some, however, are not "right in front of our eyes." The Watergate Secretarial Service, for example, is in suite 250 of Watergate 600. (Phone 338-6225.) It has a notary public, as does the Riggs Bank. The Travel Agency, formerly in the Mall, is still around... to the left of the Watergate East entrance. A branch of Interstate Building and Loan is to the right. "Never on weekends." Remember that if you're heading for the Watergate's U.S. postal substation on a Saturday. It's open Monday thru Friday only, until 6 pm. Peoples Drugstore, open every day, has licensed pharmacists on duty. The Medical Arts Optician is in Les Champs, as is an Espresso Bar. Sandwiches, soft drinks, ice cream and pastries are also among its offerings.

In the hotel: car rental and chauffeured limousine service, in the lobby. Private function rooms for meetings, seminars, luncheons, receptions and other business or social functions, of limited number, are on the Terrace Level. The Watergate Health Club, on the lower level, has sauna, whirlpool bath, and exercise rooms for men and women. Here, too, is the place for an expert massage, and an invigorating swim in the year-round indoor pool. Membership is available by the week, month or year.