



Watergate East

Historians
for
File
only

Dear Neighbors,

This publication is intended to mark and to celebrate the end of the first twenty-five years of Watergate East.

It also marks the start of the first year in which we shall own the land on which our singularly lovely building stands.

Watergate is an enduring part of American history. There is pride in living here and in being able to watch, from our unique viewpoint, the unfolding of that history in Washington.

For my part, I enjoy living here. I enjoy the fine building and service, the unmatched convenience, and best of all, the good neighbors.

Thanks,

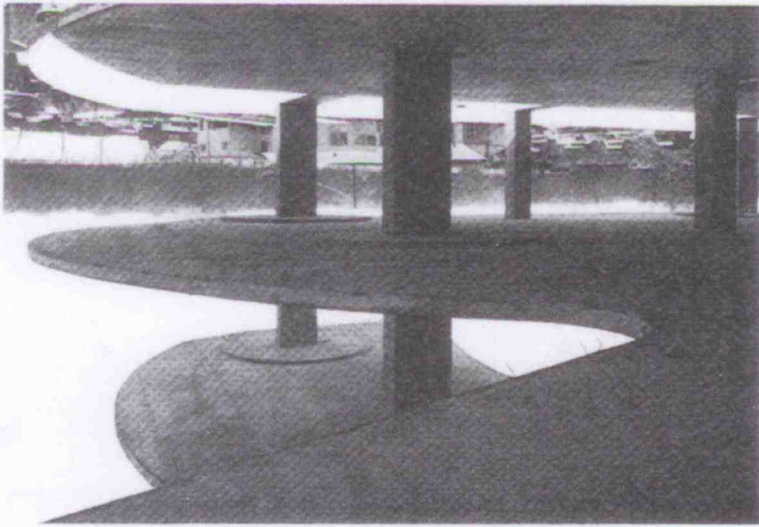
Dean Mitchell

Dean Mitchell
President

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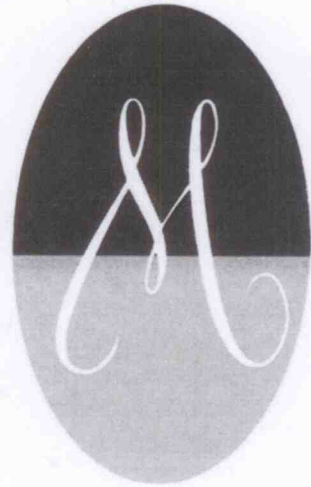
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A Drama in Foggy Bottom

atergate East



A Drama in Foggy Bottom

In the early 1960's, a small parcel of land in northwest Washington overlooking the Potomac River became, for a moment, the focus of considerable architectural and political activity. What was done on these 30 acres was destined to influence architectural and cultural thought in the United States and other parts of the world.

This small site in the Foggy Bottom neighborhood was on rather low-lying ground. On parts of it there had been the Heurich Brewery, the Watergate Inn, the Blue Bell Waffle and Doughnut Shop, and blue-collar housing.

Housing in Foggy Bottom was substandard, wrote Suzanne Unger: "A 1944 survey by the Washington Housing Authority revealed that of 186 dwelling units in the blocks bounded by Virginia and New Hampshire Avenues and 23rd Street, a quarter had no water and a fifth had no electricity. Almost 90 percent of these dwellings were rental properties. As elsewhere in the city, this substandard housing had fallen to those with the least freedom of choice. The neighborhood was now predominantly black."¹

The neighborhood began to change in 1947, when the State Department moved to its new building at D and 23rd Streets. This move made living in the area attractive to some Department employees. After the Washington Gas Light Company dismantled its plant in 1954, private development started. Construction of the Potomac Plaza, a complex of office and apartment

buildings that was intended to cover 12 acres and cost \$100 million, was begun in 1957. It was to include luxury apartment houses, office buildings, a 1000-room hotel, restaurants, shops, a theater, an ice-skating rink, a swimming pool, a 2000-car underground garage, and a yacht basin. The construction of Potomac Plaza was curtailed in 1960, after only two buildings—Potomac Plaza and Potomac Plaza Terraces—had been completed.

Slowly individuals and companies purchased the little brick row houses and renovated them. The renovation of the area was similar to what had been happening in Georgetown in the 1930's. These small-scale renovations set the stage for Watergate.

Our 30-acre parcel was very attractive because of its proximity to the center of Washington, its closeness to transportation, and its overlook of the Potomac. The site lay in the middle of a confusion of existing and planned streets and highways, and it was once described as "wrapped in spaghetti maze."²

Both the Watergate and the Kennedy Center are close to downtown, the White House, and the State Department. They have easy access to Capitol Hill via the Rock Creek Parkway and the Southwest Freeway. The Foggy Bottom Metro stop is two blocks away.

Attracted to this ground was the Società Generale Immobiliare (SGI) Rome, Europe's largest

¹ Suzanne Sherwood Unger, "Foggy Bottom Blue-Collar Neighborhood in a White-Collar Town," *Washington at Home* (Washington, D.C.: Windsor Publications, Inc., 1988).

² Wolf Von Eckardt, *The Washington Post*, December 16, 1962.

