

Scenes from the Past . . .



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In previous articles in this series, descriptions were provided of two of a group of photographs taken in the early 1960s of the east side of 17th Street between Church and R Streets—then, as now, lined primarily with small commercial establishments. (The photographs were donated to the Historical Society by Margaret Veerhoff, whose art gallery was for several years located on the west side of 17th Street following its move from Connecticut Avenue and prior to its more recent relocation to Georgetown. See, “Scenes from the Past,” *InTowner*, November 1993, page 14 and June 1994, page 8.)

The only business in those blocks still operating today at the same site is the Trio Restaurant at 1537-17th Street. The upper photo—also from the Veerhoff gift—of the southeast corner of 17th and Q Streets shows the Trio in the building situated on the north half of 17th Street’s 1500 block, encompassing addresses nos. 1529 to 1537.

Based on old Real Estate Atlases, city directories and telephone directories, it appears that this multi-use brick structure was erected in 1927 on lots previously occupied by two of a row of six townhouses facing on Q Street (probably the first on their sites, built about 1880). The corner store (at no. 1537) of the “new” building was occupied during its first four years as a delicatessen, followed through most of the 1930s by a branch of the Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company (otherwise known as the A&P). Following occupancy by a restaurant named the Charpal Grill in the early ‘40s, the Trio luncheonette moved in, becoming especially popular with young World War II government workers who had recently settled in the neighborhood.

As George Malios, present owner of the Trio remembers, his father, Peter, took over the luncheonette in 1950 and gradually changed it into the present restaurant—keeping the name partly because there were three children in the family. Among the major changes in the building's and restaurant's developmental history brought about under the Malios ownership was the late 1960s conversion of the adjacent store on the south (no. 1533) from the Gem Cleaners & Launderers to the Fox & Hounds Lounge, which shares the Trio kitchen; the early 1970s acquisition of its neighbor to the east on Q Street—the Copley Plaza Italian-American restaurant (the owners of which lived upstairs)—transforming it into a pizza shop; and the innovation in the 1960s of adding the sidewalk serving area, one of the first in the city.

(Considering the many sidewalk cafés that now flourish in Washington, it's difficult to realize that such activity was actually illegal here until 1961. As described in Washington Post and Evening Star newspaper articles of that time, Harry Zitelman, co-owner of Bassin's Restaurant on the northwest corner of Pennsylvania Avenue and 14th Street—now part of the JW Marriott Hotel site—began a lengthy, determined, and eventually successful drive to change DC law to allow emulation of sidewalk cafés he had enjoyed in Paris in the late 1950s. Additional convincing by Zitelman was required to permit the serving of alcoholic beverages on such “public space”; but we can particularly thank the then president of the District's Board of Commissioners, Walter N. Tobriner (who also had been enamored by Parisian cafés), for getting his fellow commissioners to agree on liberalizing the law in 1962 that brought about what has become an integral part of the Washington life, especially in the Dupont Circle area.)

The store immediately south of the Trio, at no. 1533, had been used as a laundry almost since the building was erected—from 1929 to the mid-1950s by a branch of the Palace Laundry chain, then by Gem Cleaners & Launderers, until becoming the Fox & Hounds. The upstairs address (no. 1535) has always been listed in city directories as residential, and since the early 1970s as the Helena Apartments. The other stores in the “Malios” building, nos. 1529 and 1531, at the south end (not shown in the photo) were for most of their early years the Swagart Meat Market and Ross Tailor Shop; later, the Diplomat Liquor store, followed more recently by American Image Hair Salon and nowadays a branch of Gallery 2000. The building housing the Copley Plaza and now Trio Pizza at 1624 Q Street has been used as a restaurant since 1931, a conversion of one of the former townhouses.

Included in the 1960s view is a delivery truck of the Evening Star, at the time the city's oldest and probably most respected newspaper, which was, unfortunately, to disappear in 1981. Not visible in this lower photo, of course, is the most recent, 1995, remodeling of the Trio's interior.

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