

# The International Student House Washington, DC

An Unforgettable Experience  
in International Living

by Paul Feys

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*This is an account of what the International Student House has been and what it has become, as told by the man who was its Executive Director for 23 years. If there is a fault in this presentation, it is in the understatement of the central role of this modest man in the mission of the House; that international relations can be changed one student at a time. It is also important to add that the impact of that “one student” has also changed. A recent alum now living in Prague put it this way: “I’m in touch via e-mail each week with 13 of my ISH friends. I’ve become an international girl. My year at ISH changed my life.” And probably others too.*

*Jerrold Scoutt, Jr.  
Former President  
Board of Directors*

## FOREWORD

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*This history of the International Student House (ISH) in Washington, DC was written for the members of the ISH family.*

*I have relied on records collected during my years at ISH, which included a wealth of information about the early years of ISH, thanks to a diary of the first director, Grace Lowry (which her daughter Elizabeth loaned me 25 years ago), and to numerous meticulously preserved newspaper clippings from that period. When I decided to write this essay, I also discovered a huge amount of documents and records stored in boxes in various locations in the House.*

*After reading through those thousands of pages, I did not even attempt to organize and classify them before returning them to ISH. In the following pages, therefore, I cannot point to particular documents that would be organized and easily verifiable and my notes would fall far short of a professional historian's standards. Nor can I vouch for the accuracy of all my sources. Last but not least, hard as I may have tried to be totally objective, in matters so close to my heart I am not sure I have always succeeded.*

*My objective has not been primarily to present all the factual information on the history of ISH, but to impart a sense of excitement about an institution that has been very dear to many of us. I have also occasionally complemented the written records with unverified anecdotes and hearsay, heeding the Italian saying: "Se non è vero, è bene trovato!," which broadly translated means: "It may not be true, but it has a ring of truth!"*

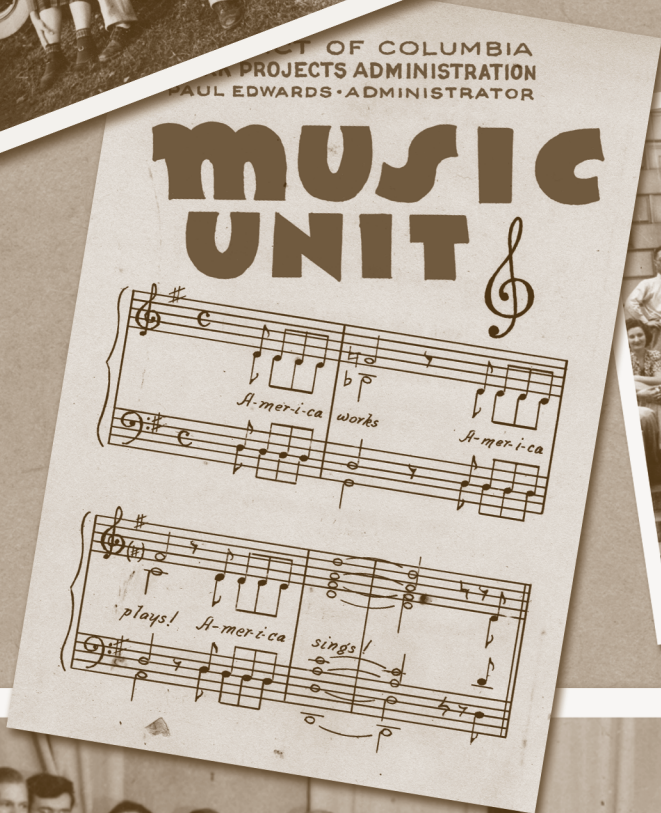
*I want to express my gratitude here to Jane Hart and China Jessup, who have taken the time to read different drafts and have given me invaluable advice on grammar, style, and brevity, and to Rosalind Springsteen for her knowledgeable editing.*

*Paul Feys*





*1937 Outing*



*In front of 1708*



*New Hampshire Avenue - 154*



## THE BEGINNING OF ISH

### *Chapter One*

*The International Student House offers foreign and American students an opportunity for an in-depth experience in international living, to create better understanding and friendship among people from different countries, cultures, races and religions, and to promote peace and cooperation between the nations of the earth.*

### Birth of an Idea

The prospect for peace and cooperation between nations was very dim in the 1930s. The whole world was threatened with violence and war: the rise to power of Hitler in Germany, Italy's invasion of Ethiopia, the brutal Stalinist regime in the Soviet Union, the Spanish civil war, the Japanese aggression in China, open racism in the United States and elsewhere: those factors and many others created a sense of impending world-wide conflict.

It is in this context that the Quakers of the Florida Avenue Meeting in Washington, DC, in 1934 began to ask themselves how they could contribute on the local level to better understanding between people of diverse national backgrounds. Their conclusion was that real peace would come not so much from negotiations between diplomats as from contacts between common people, particularly young people. They also saw the local need for young foreigners, often isolated and lonely here in Washington, to meet and become acquainted with each other and with the local community, sparking growth of respect and understanding for each other.

In November 1934, they sent an invitation to the approximately 300 foreign students who attended the major universities in Washington, DC, to come to the Meeting House for Sunday supper. Almost 100 of the students showed up, and they decided to establish an International Student Club. The Quakers invited them to have monthly Sunday supper gatherings at the Meeting House. A number of American students soon joined the group. Later, weekly Sunday informal teas became part of the club's program.

These occasional activities and meetings inevitably led to the desire for a home where people from all races and nationalities could gather at any time for talks, for meals, for dances, and for entertainment. The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), an active branch of the Quakers, undertook to make that dream come true. Thanks to their initiative, Mrs. Bancroft Davis, a well-known Washington philanthropist agreed to fund the purchase and furnishing of a house for the International Student Club.

The imminent purchase of such a house was officially announced by Clarence Pickett, Executive Director of the AFSC, at

the first annual banquet of the Washington International Club at the Hay-Adams Hotel on May 2, 1936, at which Eleanor Roosevelt was the guest speaker. The director of the International House in New York came to Washington expressly for that occasion.

Thus was the International Student House (ISH) founded in 1936 in the Quaker spirit of peace and with the purpose of offering an “in-depth experiment in international living.” Since then, thousands of students from around the world have lived at ISH and



gained an experience that has profoundly influenced their lives and their outlook on the world. *“I can never look at the world map with the same eyes as before,”* is how a former resident recounts it.

## Mrs. Bancroft Davis

Without the generous support of Mrs. Bancroft Davis, the AFSC might not have been able to purchase a house as early as 1936. Born Anne Hubbard in the late 1850's near Boston, she had married Bancroft Davis, whose family had great

wealth from railroad enterprises. They had two daughters, one of whom was mentally handicapped, and the other who became a social worker in Kentucky.

When Bancroft Davis died in 1934, his widow was astonished at the considerable fortune she inherited. *“My tastes were simple,”* she wrote, *“and I had no ambition to have a lot of money, so when my husband died leaving me a large amount, I was a most surprised person, as I had never thought much about what we had and had never been interested in business of any kind. I was only anxious to dispose of it as soon as possible, before I was called to the great unknown... Being, however, of an intensely economical nature, I was obliged to think of the best way to get rid of it to help the most people, and that filled my brain and heart so fully that I had no time for grief or loneliness.”*

First, she deeded her home at 2410 Wyoming Avenue to the AFSC, stipulating that it be used as an International Hospitality House, and gave the AFSC a Residence Fund Trust of \$106,000 so the overnight guests did not have to be charged. After her death, the neighbors who resented the interracial mix of residents and guests, had it closed by the city government because it was not zoned as a guesthouse. Consequently, Davis House, as it was called, moved in 1950 to its present location at 1822 R Street, NW.

In 1936, Mrs. Davis learned of the International Student Club's dream of having their own home, and she offered the AFSC money to buy and furnish a house. It is said that a new receptionist at the Florida Quaker Meeting, who took Mrs. Davis' first call, politely dismissed her and later told the Director that a “silly old lady” had called to offer \$25,000 to the

AFSC! Only someone new to the charitable giving world in Washington could have been so uninformed about Mrs. Davis' renown for outstanding philanthropy. She had given \$100,000 to Goodwill Industries in Washington (henceforth called the Davis Memorial Goodwill Industries) and she contributed generously to many organizations, especially those that helped people help themselves.

Mrs. Davis did not only provide the funds to buy the house, she also remained very involved in the early years of ISH. She paid for most of the furniture needed, and although her frugal nature at first led her to recommend buying used furniture (mostly from Goodwill Industries), a friend persuaded her that solid new furniture would last much longer. She often came to talk with the students and to learn about their countries. Even though she was well into her 70s, she delighted in dancing at parties and enjoyed teaching the students the Virginia Reel.

In 1946, she made up her mind that it was time for her to die, even though she had never been ill. She confided to her close friends that she had told God she wanted to die, and she was sure He would take care of it; she was in the habit of having things go her way. When she saw no signs of deteriorating health, she said: "I guess He doesn't want me yet!", but later in the year, she caught pneumonia and died after a short illness in December of that year. She was a lady of uncommon fortitude, enlightened humanity, and remarkable generosity.

## Racial Discrimination

The ISH "experiment in international living" which the Quakers launched in the midst of threats of global war was intended to give peace a better chance by bringing together students from different countries and cultures. To quote from a brochure: *"Friends (as the Quakers call themselves) believe that a simple life, a desire for truth and a belief in the common humanity of all men provide a firm basis for a peaceful world. By living together as a group, students of many nationalities, races and religions make a contribution to the cause of world peace and international understanding."*

Because this international project was inevitably also interracial, it came into conflict from the



*Picnic in the Garden*

very beginning with the racial discrimination that prevailed at the time and affected all non-white or "colored" persons, foreigners as well as Americans. In her diary, Mrs. Grace Lowry, the first Director of ISH, noted (we must remember that the respectful term for African Americans at that time was "Negroes" or "colored"): *"One of the greatest problems was housing: many people who rented*



*out rooms to students felt that all colored people must be Negroes, so that Indians, Chinese, and Japanese as well, had doors shut in their faces. Very few hotels would book a colored person, and restaurants just would not serve them. The only eating place where a colored student was sure to be served was at Union Station. Otherwise they had to hunt for a Negro restaurant."*

Such racial segregation prevailed at the time in many parts of the nation, particularly in the South. John F. Kennedy would later call Washington a city combining southern efficiency and northern charm, but in terms of racial relations, it was definitely a southern city.

"One day," continues Mrs. Lowry, "I gave a talk at a church about International Student House. In awed tones, one woman in the audience said: 'Do you mean that you will take colored people into this house?' 'Yes indeed,' I replied, 'they will be welcome.'"



Large public parks were the only places where interracial groups of students could hope to avoid open hostility. A more guarded discrimination manifested itself at some formal functions organized by the International Student Club.

Mrs. Lowry recorded that at a dinner and dance at the Mayflower Hotel in 1937, "The hotel management was worried about having an interracial function, so they required that every colored student be met at the door of the hotel by a white student and be accompanied to the private ballroom."

One outstanding exception was Mrs. Roosevelt. For Christmas 1937, she agreed to receive the students of ISH at the White House. "I was asked to furnish a list of names from the different universities," writes Mrs. Lowry. "When I gave Mrs. Roosevelt's secretary the list, she noted that there was a group from Howard University and said: 'But these must be Negroes!' I replied that I did not think it would make any difference to Mrs. Roosevelt. And indeed, we had a wonderful reception. Louis Achille from Martinique played the gold piano, the student group from ISH sang a few carols, and Mrs. Roosevelt shook hands with everyone. I think it was the first time that a mixed group, Negroes and whites, had been received by a President's wife at the White House." Mrs. Roosevelt continued to invite the students to the White House at Christmas time until 1941 when the United States went to war.

But ugly incidents elsewhere continued for more than a decade. In 1948, after a Jamaican resident had helped a Canadian girl carry her luggage to the bus on Connecticut Avenue, a policeman accosted him and asked him the name of the "white girl." When the student refused, the policeman arrested him, took him to the police station, and charged him with disorderly conduct. The ISH staff and other Quakers had to make several interventions before they released him on bond (\$5.00). Later, after the director contacted the British Embassy (representing Jamaica), the State Department, and the Corporation Counsel of the District of Columbia, the police dropped the charges.



The interracial character of ISH was an enduring cause for suspicion among many outsiders. In 1948, Director Leslie Johnston reported rumors that the House was being watched by the FBI for possible subversive activities, and wondered whether one of the American residents was an FBI undercover agent. In 1959, Director Tom Moore told a residents' meeting: *"Many of our neighbors do not have an accurate idea of what goes on in this House. Some of them feel it must be quite a scandalous place because they have no other concept of circumstances under which people of different races mingle freely."*

The racial conflict continued for decades. An alumna from the 60s wrote: *"Sometimes residents who went out in interracial groups were taunted on the streets in that very racist age. It made us all the more realize what a wonderful place the I-House was (and is!)."*

The ISH members, however, did not passively acquiesce to the prevailing discrimination. They spearheaded the crusade for desegregation in Washington, and public protests and demonstrations were an integral component of life at ISH. When George Washington University in 1946 would not allow Negroes to attend a play at the Lisner Auditorium, for example, ISH students sent a collective letter of protest to the university president. In 1947, the Crystal City Restaurant at Connecticut Avenue and R Street, which had had a fairly liberal attitude till then, refused service to two separate groups of ISH students within one week. The staff protested, but the management replied that they could not risk further loss of business. This led the students to consider the possibility of establishing a new interracial restaurant in the neighborhood, which, of course, proved to be totally impractical. Often,

they would also contact The Washington Post and other newspapers. As long as racial discrimination continued, the House consistently refused to do business with any supplier or contractor who practiced segregation.

The House also extended its hospitality to African-American leaders and artists who were not welcome elsewhere. In 1948, a dinner was held at ISH in honor of singer Paul



Robeson after he and his friends were refused service at the last minute, first at the Mayflower and then at another hotel. After dinner, Paul Robeson wanted to practice for his upcoming recital, but his accompanist had suddenly fallen ill. The ISH secretary was called upon to accompany him on the Steinway piano in the Great Hall, and everybody enjoyed an informal recital. Soprano Marian Anderson was also welcomed at ISH more than once.

The International Student House was a beacon of racial harmony and understanding. *"The presence of ISH in Washington,"* wrote Leslie Johnston in 1949, *"is particularly appropriate, for here in the nation's capital*

*where human brotherhood is denied in so many spheres of activity, the House assumes something of the character of an oasis. There is no barrier here to the free mingling of people, no matter what their race or creed or nationality... A world torn by so much dissension needs small (and if possible large) 'islands of sanity' where friendship and cooperation are accepted values and where no difference of color or religious belief or place of birth are allowed to interfere with the essential fact of the brotherhood of man."*

*of the guiding principles of their unusual and courageous undertaking. Modestly, humbly, they were content with doing silently what they thought responded to their deep beliefs. They did it consistently, as their second and better nature. I wish to pay a belated but timely tribute of gratitude and admiration to the bold, quiet and generous open-mindedness of the House Board members, successive directors and many, many residents."*



*First ISH Residents*

On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of ISH in 1986, Louis Achille, a native of Martinique and a resident of ISH in the late 30s, wrote this tribute: *"It may not have struck many residents of ISH in the late 30s and early 40s that their House was practically the only place in Washington where persons of different colors and races could associate freely as normal human beings. The embarrassing difficulties shared at the time, on our common outings and for our formal balls, testify to the exemplary attitudes of those in charge of the House and the Club."*

*"Yet these Friends (Quakers) never, to my knowledge, made a great display for our benefit*

## The First House

The AFSC estimated in 1936 that the purchase of a house for students would cost approximately \$20,000 and another \$5,000 would be needed for furniture. Mrs. Davis donate the sum \$25,000 to them in the spring of 1936. In June, they offered \$20,000 to Mr. and Mrs. Victor Kauffmann who wanted to sell their residence at 1708 New Hampshire Avenue, NW, an avenue that was the favorite street of William Howard Taft. That first bid was turned down,

but subsequently they settled for \$23,200. Mrs. Davis willingly pledged to add the estimated \$5,000 for furniture to that sum. Mrs. Alfred (Grace) Lowry was appointed Director of this first International Student House, although her oldest daughter told her: *"How can you take on a job like this? You aren't even a good housekeeper!"*

The five-story house at 1708 New Hampshire Avenue provided space for twelve bedrooms accommodating eighteen students and Mrs. Lowry with her two younger children. There was a roof terrace where Saturday and Sunday teas were served in the summer and which became a popular evening gathering place for the



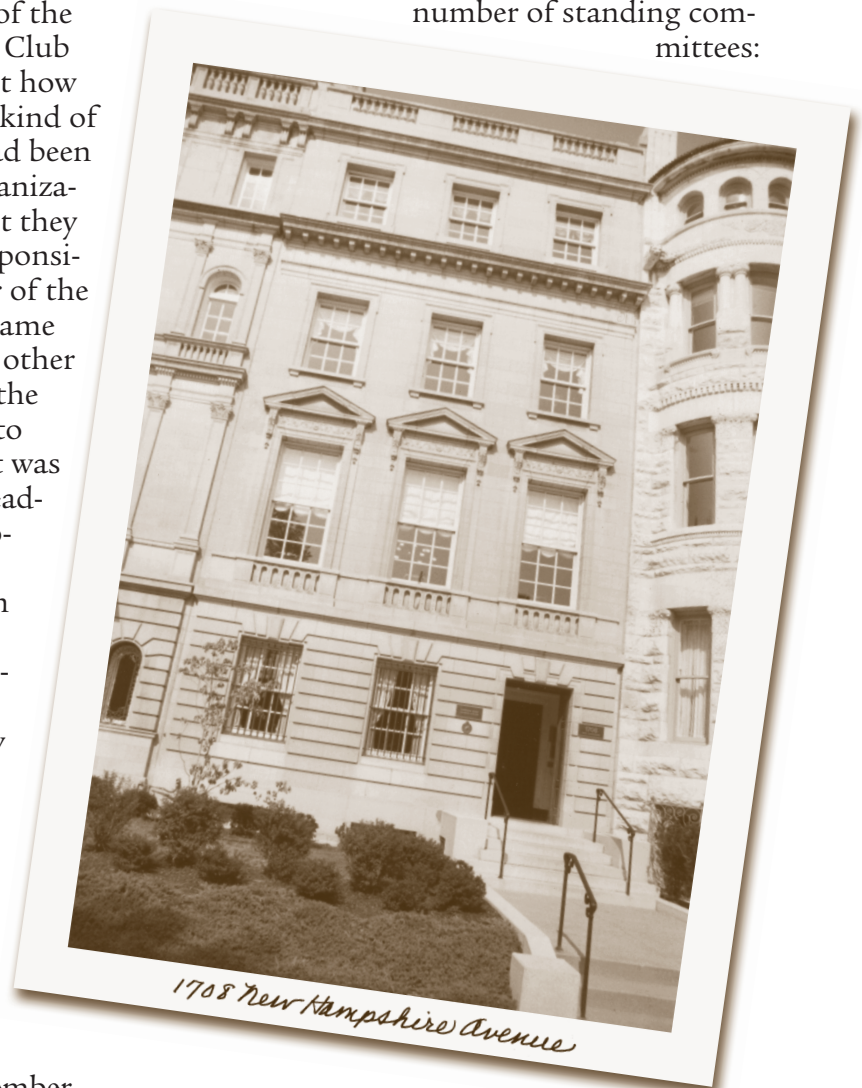
students.<sup>1</sup> There was a large sitting room, a recreation room with a ping-pong table, a “drawing room” with a fireplace, and two kitchens, one to prepare the regular dinners and one for use by the students.<sup>2</sup> Mrs. Lowry asked Mrs. Davis for advice and help in preparing the house for residents. Many of the furnishings were purchased at Strawbridge and Clothier’s in Philadelphia.

While the house was being prepared to accommodate residents, members of the Washington International Student Club came to talk with Mrs. Lowry about how the house should be run and what kind of entertainment to have. The club had been a well-established and efficient organization for two years,<sup>3</sup> so they thought they would be able to assume all the responsibilities for the House. The Director of the International House in New York came to Washington and cautioned that other student houses had failed because the student groups were too transient to assume financial responsibilities. It was agreed, therefore, that the AFSC headquarters in Philadelphia would support the Friends Meeting of Washington. Mrs. Lowry would run the house and the members of the Club would be in charge of the programs, of the Sunday evening lectures/discussions, and of the policy regarding admission to the club. The AFSC Director emphasized that there was one non-negotiable rule: No drinking in the house!

The formal opening of the International Student House was held on Sunday, October 4, 1936, even though some students had already taken up residence in September. The house rapidly became a lively meeting place for students from all over town. Once the House became functional, residents and other members of the Club started

having meals together. A tradition of informal Sunday suppers was introduced: in the absence of the cook, the students would buy and prepare the food themselves and take care of the clean-up. Soon these more intimate suppers proved so valuable for the community living there that they were restricted to residents only.

To organize the various activities better, the International Club established quite a number of standing committees:



Membership, Program, Social, Budget, Ways & Means, Folk Dancing, Tap Dancing, and Sports. Square dancing was introduced on Friday nights,

and the Friday night dance was to become a 30-year tradition. On Tuesday evenings, they had tap-dancing instruction, and on Saturdays, they sometimes held formal ballroom dances, but no dances were permitted on Sundays. The club also started a tradition that would continue for at least 20 years: laboriously prepared theatrical productions, which they would present to different audiences on successive nights.



*Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt*

Because

Mrs. Roosevelt had been the guest speaker at the first International Student Club banquet, when the founding of ISH was announced, she was invited for a visit to the House and came for tea on Sunday, January 30, 1937. She arrived a little early and *“she made such a relaxed entry,”* writes Grace Lowry, *“that it seemed quite normal for her to drop in, and we went upstairs where I introduced the students to her.”* After tea, she wanted to see the whole house. The small elevator was in proper working order, and Mrs. Roosevelt, Grace Lowry, and a Chinese student called Lin Lin squeezed into it. Between floors, the elevator suddenly stopped. Grace Lowry, unfamiliar

with elevators, started to panic, but Mrs. Roosevelt calmly said: *“Oh, I know these things”* and addressing Lin Lin pointed out, *“you must have leaned against the STOP button.”* She pushed another button, and the elevator resumed its ascent.

The next day, in her column “My Day” which she wrote for The Washington Daily News, Mrs. Roosevelt described her visit as follows: *“It poured all day yesterday and I stayed indoors until the afternoon when I had promised to visit International House at 4 o’clock. I was much interested in seeing this house which was given by a very generous woman last year and which seems to be doing a marvelous piece of work for the foreign students in Washington. Young people from foreign lands, attending a university or studying some phases of life in the United States, can find a welcome and make friends in this hospitable house.”*

The club began organizing excursions, some on foot or by bike and some by car to more distant sites such as the Appalachian Trail, the Skyline Drive, and Old Rag Mountain. Grace Lowry mentions how, before climbing Old Rag, they would spend the night at a farm where they could have all the fried chicken they could eat.

Interracial outings in Washington, however, continued to be unpleasant, so Mrs. Davis and Mrs. Lowry tried to find a place in the country where students could have picnics and swim without being bothered. They located a property of three acres with a dilapidated house next to a stream and a very old swimming hole near Route 29, which at the time was the back road to Baltimore. It was well hidden from occasional passersby. Mrs. Davis bought it and it came to be known as “the farm.” The students would often go there, swimming and picnicking and having barbecues (even roasting a whole pig). During World War II, they grew vegetables in a little garden

they cultivated themselves. After a few years, however, the students lost interest in the farm, because the parks in Washington had meanwhile been officially desegregated, making it possible to have excursions there. Mrs. Davis gave the property to the Youth Hostels for a desegregated hostel. Later, the State of Maryland purchased it to dam the little stream, and allegedly a small PEPCO station was built there.

The beginning of World War II inevitably brought a change, and tensions occasionally arose among the students. Minutes of a student meeting in June 1940 report: *“We were reminded that in these serious and trying times we must not forget we are all friends here in spite of what is going on in other parts of the world. We must not hold prejudices but carry out the feeling that was intended to be carried out when the house was started.”*

These were indeed trying times for the House. As the war spread to more parts of the world, the number of foreign students coming to the United States kept declining. Whereas in the first few years of ISH there had been a predominance of students from Europe, Far East Asia, and the Philippines, hardly anyone from these regions could make it during the war. In spite of a considerable increase in the number of Latin American students, soon there were fewer foreign students at the house than Americans. In addition, as many of the Americans signed up for military service, it was hard to preserve a happy atmosphere in the House. ISH maintained its programs and activities, but it was a cheerless period as the whole world got caught up in war.

#### Footnotes

1. The roof terrace was accessible only through two girls' bedrooms, which necessitated some rules for access by young men. According to the minutes of a house meeting in 1949, it was agreed that “the terrace should be closed at 10 P.M. (unless you have pull with the authorities in the barricade preceding the terrace [i.e. the girls living there]). Visitors should give the girls sufficient notice before traversing through their domains and we must respect their wishes and authority over the much coveted territory.” Later, it was agreed that the terrace would be off limits to non-residents.
2. The same minutes stipulate that “Each week, one member is to see that those who use the kitchen are keeping it clean. There is to be a Milk Bottle Fund to which all are to contribute a small gift with which a common store of salt and sugar is to be bought. We are to stop raiding the main kitchen's refrigerator, larder and breadbox. We could not come to an agreement as to what would be a suitable punishment but any offender will definitely be in the doghouse.”

In the early days, management resembled more that of a large family than that of an institution, such as when the Director had to announce in 1946 that the increase in the price of milk necessitated a charge of eight cents for each dinner when milk was requested. In 1959, a broken hinge on the breadbox made it impossible to keep it locked, and the Director had to inform the students that “We have lately come up with insufficient bread on several mornings and want all of you to be aware of the fact that breakfast is often all served before the bread man arrives in the morning. Therefore it is important for you to use good judgment when, besides the allotted two slices for breakfast, you help yourself to some bread for making a small snack.”

3. The International Student Club had an Executive Committee consisting of a President, Vice President, Treasurer, Corresponding Secretary, and Recording Secretary. All but a couple of the officers in the first three years (1934 to 1937) were foreign students.





*The Great Hall*



*Christmas Tea*



*1825 R Street  
before the  
Vanslyck  
addition*



## 1825 R STREET

### Chapter Two

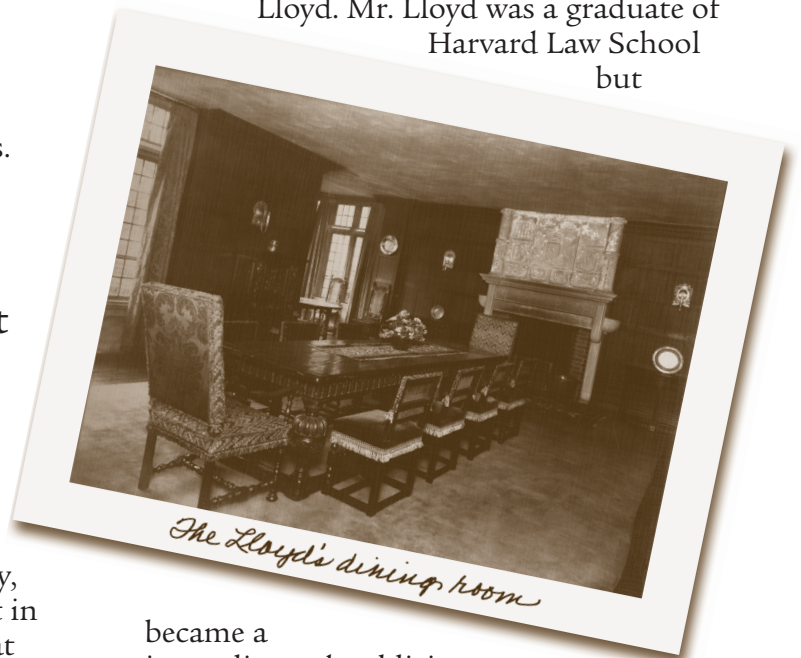
*When World War II ended, more foreign students began to come to the United States and to Washington. It soon became apparent that ISH would need to expand to meet the demand. In 1946, the AFSC started searching for a larger residence. One of the properties for sale at the time was at the corner of Massachusetts and Florida Avenues. On inspection of the building, the AFSC allegedly decided that some of the paintings on the ceilings were too risqué for a student residence. Subsequently, that building at 2121 Massachusetts Avenue became the Cosmos Club.*

By the end of 1946, the AFSC settled on the residence of Mrs. Demarest Lloyd at 1825 R Street. They had closely investigated the building, including the frames and panes of every single window. The price negotiated with Mrs. Lloyd was set at \$144,465. The house at 1708 New Hampshire Avenue, originally listed for \$57,500, was sold for \$39,800 and that sum was matched by local contributions. The AFSC provided the additional \$64,865.

### The Building at 1825 R Street

The residence at 1825 R Street was designed in 1912 by architect Wolcott Clarke Waggaman<sup>4</sup> for Henri Meserve, an international banker from Massachusetts, who spent several years in Korea and opened branch offices of a New York bank in Russia, Italy, Germany, France, and Spain.<sup>5</sup> The house was built in the Tudor style; the drawing room (Great Hall) was modeled after the great hall in Haddon Hall in Yorkshire, England, including the balcony or minstrels' gallery.

After the untimely death of his wife in 1919, and as he spent little time at home because of his frequent and prolonged absences for business, Mr. Meserve sold the house in 1925 to Mr. and Mrs. Demarest Lloyd. Mr. Lloyd was a graduate of Harvard Law School but



became a journalist and publicist. After working in London from 1922 to 1925, he became the Washington

correspondent of the Christian Science Monitor and moved to Washington with his wife Katharine, whose father was a Swedish immigrant, and their three children.



*Students on the main stairway*

In the house at 1825 R Street, they had a domestic staff of at least ten servants, including a downstairs maid, an upstairs maid, a cook, a scullery maid, a gardener, a chauffeur, and a butler. The marriage of Mr. and Mrs. Lloyd ended in divorce, and Mr. Lloyd died in 1937 at the age of 44. By 1946, Mrs. Lloyd was residing alone in the house: her son, Demarest Jr., had died during the war in the Pacific in 1944, and her two daughters, Angelica and Karen, were married.

After she sold her house to the AFSC and moved out, Mrs. Lloyd resolved never to set foot again in the building, in spite of later pleas from her brother and her two children who had each stopped by the House in the 70s and been surprised at its fine condition. She spent the last decades of her life in Georgetown, where she died in 1978 at the age of 85.

In later visits, Angelica regaled listeners with her reminiscences of growing up in the house: how as kids they used to slide down the banisters of the stairs when their mother was not looking and how, in her teens, when she stayed out at night longer than permitted, she would sneak in and walk on tiptoes past the butler's quarters. If the door was locked, she had no recourse but to quietly knock on the butler's windows, next to the entrance, and beg him to let her in and say nothing to her parents. She recalled her debutante ball, which lasted all night; early Sunday morning, her father assembled all the Catholics in the party, though not one himself, and marched them to Mass at St. Matthew's Cathedral. They returned to continue the party and enjoy a hearty breakfast.

One day I asked her if it was true that three U.S. Presidents had been entertained at the house by her family. Angelica paused to think: *"Let me count: President Coolidge, yes I think so. President Hoover also. But Roosevelt? No, my father would NEVER have invited him."*

## The Move to 1825 R Street

Originally, the AFSC had hoped to have the new house ready for occupancy in November 1946, but first the kitchen needed to be remodeled for institutional use, at a cost of about \$10,000.



The move to the new house was planned for January 14, 1947, but the Lloyd staff had not finished packing, and the whole operation had to be postponed to the next day. Unfortunately, on the 15th it rained steadily all afternoon. The move took from 8:30 a.m. to 9:45 p.m. When the first load arrived, the hallway was still full of furniture and packing cases. Mrs. Lloyd's butler was upset because he did not expect them so soon, and only regained his usual composure after being assured he could stay at the house until he found other lodging. Forty beds, plus all the furniture of the director, Leslie Johnston, his family and the director's assistant was ferried over from 1708 New Hampshire Avenue to 1825 R Street. The students did not move in until March, because the building did not have the required fire escape. Nevertheless, they had their first dinner at the new house on January 18, 1947. The formal opening tea was held on May 3rd, but after all the tables and chairs had been set up in the garden a sudden dreadful thunderstorm broke out, and everything had to be moved inside in a great hurry. That evening, a Spring Ball was held in the Great Hall, attended by 200 to 300 people.

Beside the work on the new kitchen, other changes were made to adapt the house to its new use. On the first floor, two powder rooms were made into small offices. The butler's room was divided into two single rooms for students; after 1970, it became a ping-pong room, later a student lounge, and finally the present large office. The sitting room on the second floor, currently the TV room, became a room for Quaker meetings for worship, and for reading, quiet games, and small group meetings.

On the present parking lot behind ISH stood a two-story garage. The second floor was turned into a small apartment for the staff, and in 1961, the garage itself was converted into a game room, allowing the ping-pong table to be moved there from the Great Hall. The garage stood there until the late 60s, when it was torn down to make a place for a new volleyball court. Soon afterward it became a much-needed parking lot. The original volleyball court adjacent to 1825 R Street would become the building site for the new wing.

The Great Hall, or Lounge as it was called for a long time, was used every two weeks for Sunday Gramophone Concerts. The audience gathered around the fireplace in winter, or on the sofas in summer, and a student on the balcony played records on a



gramophone or Victrola. The Student Entertainment Committee purchased new loudspeakers for better enjoyment of those musical evenings. To provide live music, the staff made great efforts to raise money for the

purchase of a suitable piano, but the gramophone concerts continued even after an excellent second-hand Steinway piano had been purchased.

Beside the director and his family and the assistant director, the new house could now accommodate 25-30 long-term residents and 6-10 transients every night.

A son born to Valerie and Leslie Johnston, on July 6, 1947, was the only known instance of a child born to parents living at 1825 R Street, since the children of both the Meserves and the Lloyds had been born well before their parents moved into the house.

## Changes in ISH Governance

The Washington International Student Club, founded in 1934 as a self-governing organization, had played a decisive role in the management and direction of ISH. But in 1946, with the prospect of moving to a larger house and taking on increased financial responsibilities, the AFSC decided to disband the club and take full control in the administration of the House. An elected Student Council took over most of the club's activities, without any legal standing.

An International Student House Committee of the Washington Friends Meeting counseled and assisted the AFSC, in Philadelphia, in matters of policy and



*Students in the 1950's in the Garden*

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maintenance of the House. But the need for a more permanent and local group of citizens, particularly to develop local financial support for the House as a supplement to the AFSC's funding, led to the establishment of a Citizens' Council in the fall of 1952. It was composed of 14-16 members, some appointed directly by the AFSC, others by the various local Quaker Meeting Houses. The council soon assumed a more active role in the government of the House under the general authority of the AFSC in Philadelphia. After ISH became independent from the Quakers in 1962, the Citizen's Council evolved into the new Board of Directors.

A policy limiting the length of residence to two years for foreign students and one year for Americans was maintained, but it was specified that there would not be more than five Americans and two residents from any other country living at ISH at any one time.

The move to this larger residence resulted not only in an increase in the number of residents but also in a considerable growth in the non-resident membership. In 1946, there were only about 100 members, including the residents, but by 1949 the non-resident membership had increased to over 300. Such a situation would eventually necessitate a reevaluation of the role of the two groups at ISH.

#### Footnotes

4. Wolcott Clarke Waggaman had a distinguished career, designing 135 elegant homes in 12 years before his untimely death at age 41. His architect son designed the fifth floor of the building, which was added in 1929.
5. Mr. Meserve's initials are incorporated in the mantel piece of the dining room. His first name is spelled "Henri" on the architects blueprints, and "Harry" in the National Cyclopedia [sic] of American Biography. He married his wife Helen in London in 1902 and adopted her daughter Jean from a previous marriage. It is said that he promised to build them an English mansion in Washington, DC, before they moved to the United States.



*Reception in the Great Hall*



*Trimming the  
Christmas tree*



*Working in the garden*



## PROGRESS & GROWING PAINS

### Chapter Three

*The decades following the move of the International Student House to 1825 R Street saw a steady progress but also raised questions about its direction and the scope of its services. Although the number of residents remained limited to 35, the activities of the house greatly expanded. Most of the original traditions were preserved: the meals together, the Friday dances, and the Sunday lecture program.*

A Davis Fund had been set up by a gift from Mrs. Davis to be used for small scholarships “for as many needy students as possible.” Students could also earn some money by helping in the office, especially for reception and telephone duty. In May 1951, however, the office duty was put on a voluntary non-paid basis. Instead, residents were given responsibility for some maintenance jobs such as cleaning the whole house and the garden on Clean-Up Day and polishing all the brass for Christmas, “and there is an amazing amount of brassware in this House!” noted the Director.

The House became better known in the local community and entertained a number of illustrious guests. Mrs. Nehru spoke to a women’s group and served tea at ISH in March 1948. In November 1949 the sister of Emperor Hirohito of Japan and her husband, Abbot Kocho Otani, came for a visit. Over the years, a number of celebrities drew large audiences in the Great Hall: Alistair Cooke in 1949, Pearl S. Buck in 1950, Justice William Douglas in 1955, David Brinkley in 1966, W. Averell Harriman in 1970, Art Buchwald in 1971, to name a few. Marian Anderson came for a reception on March 14, 1953, following

her concert at Constitution Hall. After her arrival at the House, the students learned that she had not had dinner and promptly prepared an impromptu meal for her.

The House was also involved in several initiatives in the late 40s and early 50s to improve the cooperation between



international education programs. Leslie Johnston was involved in 1947-48 in the planning and

founding of the National Association of Foreign Student Advisors (NAFSA), which is now the largest international education association in the world with more than 8,000 members in 1999. In



*Assembled for a group photo, 1950's*

1952, Director Hugh Jenkins sponsored a meeting at ISH of a Regional Conference on International Houses and Centers for the whole Northeastern part of the United States. It included foreign student advisors and representatives of the US government. The conference met several more times in different locations over the next few years and discussed the formation of a National Council of International Houses and Centers, but the effort failed for lack of funds.

## Modern Facilities

After acquiring the building at 1825 R Street, the AFSC did its best to make it as homelike as possible for the students. Converting a private home into a student residence, however, was not altogether satisfactory, as Director Jenkins noted in

1954: *"The House was originally planned for a private family plus servants and is, therefore, either too luxurious or too inadequate as far as rooms are concerned."*

The fifth floor was the most inadequate. It had been added to the building in 1929 to provide a playroom and servants' quarters. It was cold in winter and hot in summer. For a long time the residents up there had to rough it, and not until 1961 was the heating system fixed to provide adequate heating.

As for air conditioning, if it was available at all in the 40s and 50s, it would have been a luxury in student dormitories at that time. The first cooling effort was made in 1959 by installing fans on the fifth floor. Director Tom Moore explained to the students that the purpose of the fans was *"to help drain the hot air out and permit cool air, if any, to come in. It is important to remember that fans are chiefly helpful when there is a perspiring body in the room to be cooled by evaporation facilitated by the moving air. Once Washington warms up there's not much cooling effect from simply blowing some of the hot air out of the room and drawing in hot air from outside."* Speaking of the summer heat, he also reminded the students that *"the heat often tempts us to travel around in our swimming trunks and we would like to ask that at dinner time, at the Sunday tea and at programs at the House, residents see to it that they are not only decently covered but have some degree of formality that is a compromise between what is appropriate to the weather and what they might wear at such occasions in the winter time."*

A window air-conditioning unit was first installed in the library in 1964, so all students could enjoy some relief from the summer heat. Next the rooms on the fifth

floor got window units in 1967, prompting consideration of an increase in rate in those rooms of \$1.00 per week per person during the air-conditioning season. The other bedrooms did not get air conditioning until June 1971. In the dining room, large fans were more proficient at blowing paper napkins all over the room than at cooling the many bodies busily engaged in chewing and talking at the same time. A new, lower ceiling and better lighting installed in the summer of 1963 improved the sound proofing but reduced the volume of air and intensified the heat because of the more powerful lights. Only in 1973 did a generous gift from two anonymous Board members make it possible for the dining room to be connected to the central air conditioning system in the new building. The Board was almost as delighted as the residents, because all their meetings were held in the dining room, usually in the middle of the day.

Unfortunately, appliances like window air conditioners occasionally break down, as evidenced in the following note received much later from a summer resident living on the fifth floor:

*The air stood still  
From wall to sill  
Inside the tiny room.*

*No breath of air  
No fan's fair din  
Did cool the heated gloom.*

*And one by one  
Beneath the sun  
Young men died much too soon.*

Dances in the summer were customarily held in the garden where wooden platforms were constructed to create a level

dance floor over the uneven flagstones. But from 1970 on, the summer dances moved into the new Van Slyck building with its air-conditioned recreation room. Television came to the House in 1955 and was first located in the Great Hall. Later the Davis Room, once used for Quaker meetings for worship and for quiet reading, became the TV room.

Because the dining room could seat 65-70 people, non-resident members were welcome to eat meals at the House. In addition, ISH had an agreement with some colleges (Coe, Colgate, Earlham, and Monmouth) allowing their students who came to Washington for 10-week seminars to join the residents for breakfast and dinner; sometimes, their students could even live at ISH. Special



*Scandinavian night*

groups of foreign trainees also ate at the House for extended periods. To cover its expenses, the Dining Hall, sometimes called restaurant, needed a daily average of 50 dinners served. Because this average was hard to maintain, the staff suggested at one point that dinner be served from 6:00 to 8:30 instead of the



6:30 sit-down dinner, but the tradition of the family-style dinner was too sacrosanct to be sacrificed for pecuniary reasons.

## Clarifying the Role of ISH

The years following World War II saw a significant increase in the number of young foreigners in Washington, DC, both at the educational institutions and in the new embassies being established. From a few hundred before and during the war, their numbers gradually grew to many thousands in the post-war period. This increase would lead to questions about the function and role of ISH:

### Long-term or Short-term?

Since the opening of the House in 1936, a few rooms had been set apart to accommodate visiting foreigners who often could not find suitable lodgings elsewhere, especially if they were “colored.” From two or three rooms at 1708 New Hampshire Avenue, the number dou-



*In the library*

bled at 1825 R Street, including the dormitory for five persons on the fifth floor, which is now

partially divided to accommodate four students. The transient rooms not only provided a service to visitors, they also produced more income than those of long-term residents. Thus it was a tempting option to expand their number. In 1948, Director Johnston even pondered whether ISH should not become primarily a house for transients with merely a nucleus of permanent residents, resulting in a significant increase in income. That idea was never seriously followed up and although rooms for transients were maintained for many more years, by the 60s the House had decisively turned into a long-term residence for students only.

### Student Center or Residence?

A much more complex and prolonged debate developed about the role of the House with regard to non-resident members. The International Student Club had started in 1934 as an organization without a residence, but it had led to the purchase of a house two years later, so naturally all club members saw the House as their home, whether they lived there or not. In everybody's eyes, ISH was to serve both groups equally, and conflict between the two seemed inconceivable.

However, the influx of young foreigners in Washington following World War II resulted in a corresponding increase in the number of non-resident members at ISH. By the late 40s and into the 60s, non-resident members outnumbered residents, often ten to one.

The small membership fee (\$10 a year in the mid 50s) made it an attractive deal for young people, both foreign and American, living outside ISH. Not only did non-resident members have free entry to the House (the front door was kept unlocked during office hours, which stretched from 8 A.M. to 11 P.M. every day, including Sunday <sup>6</sup>),



but also they were entitled to full use of all the recreational, laundry, and library facilities. They could request to receive their mail at ISH and were allowed to take their meals there at a modest price. The full meal plan in 1962 cost \$50 a month; separate meals cost 70¢ for breakfast and \$1.50 for dinner. For the staff, collecting the meal tickets at every meal became an irritating burden, aware as they were of the subterfuges used by some non-residents to avoid handing over their tickets. It was also very difficult to verify which of the many outsiders frequenting the House had paid a membership fee.

It became clear that ISH could not continue in the long run to serve both residents and non-residents adequately. Discussing the role of ISH toward non-residents, the Citizens Council concluded that a choice would have to be made between ISH being a center offering various services to many young people or a residence providing “an in-depth experience in international living,” as the Quakers had originally described it, for a few students. No consensus emerged. The AFSC in Philadelphia and many Council members wanted to hold on to the original Quaker concept, whereas others were convinced that, as a Quaker project, ISH should reach out to more people. The latter group began to consult and meet with international education professionals and government representatives in Washington, who all strongly supported the idea of an organization offering extensive services to foreign students in the Washington area. As a result, part of the Citizens’ Council members

together with the Executive Director left ISH in October 1956 to found the Greater Washington Council for Foreign Students, soon renamed the Foreign Student Service Council (FSSC), which intended not to compete with or duplicate the specific services of ISH but to complement them.

The separation was amicable, and ISH and the FSSC met regularly to find ways of cooperating. In the first five years, they held joint benefits to raise money, which was then divided



equally. In 1962, however, the FSSC Board of Directors voted to hold a separate benefit without first consulting with ISH. Henceforth, both organizations had to compete for support from the same pool of patrons. The resulting animosity between the two endured for several years, but goodwill eventually prevailed and the two organizations explored possibilities of cooperation. In 1973-74, as ISH looked into the possible purchase of an adjacent building, it was with the objective of bring-

ing the two institutions under one roof. Further dialogue continued for two decades, but FSSC was disbanded in 1997.

Back in 1956, however, only ISH offered the spacious facilities for large

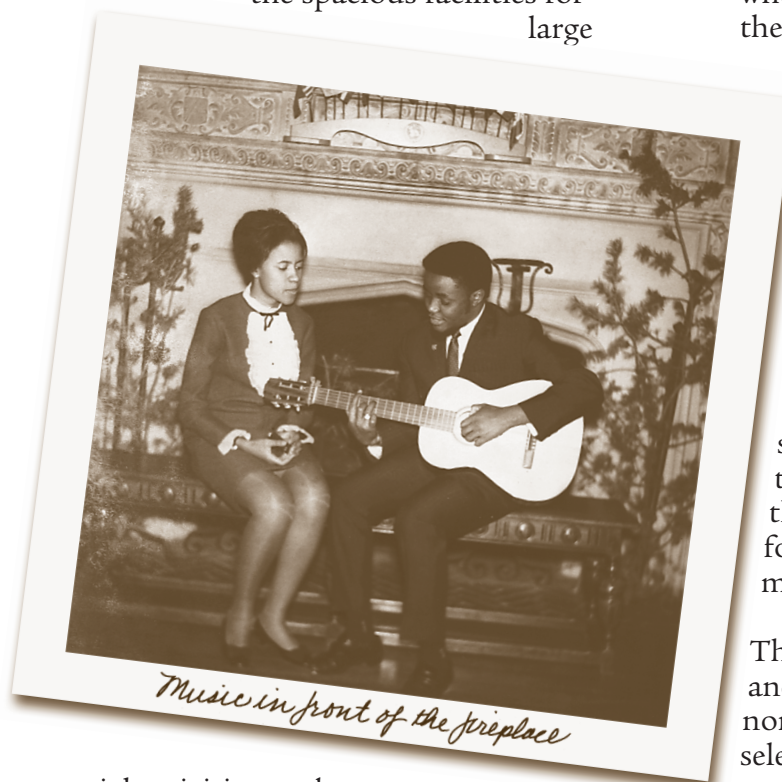
dents at all, among them were many Americans. Non-students often seemed interested primarily in parties and other entertainment, with little consideration for the study needs of the residents. Others who had personal adjustment problems in their daily environment found a non-threatening haven at ISH but did not contribute toward a more mature community. Lastly, the considerable number of foreign and American women among the resident and non-resident members appeared to have acted as a magnet for many young men, especially in the growing international community in Washington, DC. In the late 50s, within five years 24 new foreign embassies were opened. ISH seemed to offer them better opportunities to meet unprejudiced young women than the local population at large, and for many of them, ISH became a favorite meeting and dating place.

This situation troubled not only the staff and the residents but also many dedicated non-resident members who urged a more selective admission and a stricter enforcement of the membership policy. For the residents, the frequent disruption of their study needs by non-residents was aggravated by the fact that the Student Council was elected by and from residents and non-resident members alike. This gave the non-residents a preponderant control in the Council's decisions, sometimes to the detriment of the residents.

The Citizens Council and later the Board of Directors gradually undertook to reduce, if not the number, at least the influence of non-resident members and to give residents a degree of primacy, but it was a slow process. As late as 1971, Alice Korff, Vice President of the Board, expressed her concern *"that the Student Council be truly representative of the resident*

social activities, and the founding of the FSSC did not ease the dilemma for ISH in dealing with the unwieldy number of non-residents. Between the residents and non-residents, a sense of uneasiness developed, which sometimes turned into sharp tensions. The fact that many of the non-residents were not students only aggravated the problem.

The International Student House in Washington, DC, was unique in granting membership to students and non-students alike. The International Houses in New York and in Philadelphia had very restrictive policies regarding membership for non-students, especially if they were American. At ISH, on the contrary, many of the non-resident members were not stu-



*Music in front of the fireplace*

*students and not be dominated by the non-residents. First consideration should be given to the needs and wishes of the current resident population. Also, it seems that to be truly responsive, the majority on the Student Council must be residents."*

Fortunately, outside factors helped ease the tensions as more and more activities and programs became available for students in the Washington area and all kinds of student clubs emerged at the universities. In addition, the decline in the number of non-residents was contrasted with the doubling in the number of residents in 1970, thanks to the new Van Slyck building. In the following decade, the fee-paying non-resident membership ceased to be a separate program. Students from outside continued to be welcome at the House activities but as guests rather than equal partners with the residents.

## General Student Unrest

In the 60s and early 70s, the nationwide student unrest and turmoil were reflected at ISH. Politically radical articles appeared in the monthly newsletters published by the students. They naturally also sympathized with the peace demonstrators, who were occasionally offered hospitality at ISH, sleeping in the Great Hall. The Student Council held many discussions among themselves about power sharing with the Board and the staff and playing a greater role in the management of ISH.

Only a relatively small number of students, mostly from the Western world, espoused such a confrontational attitude. The majority of students from other areas were primarily concerned with obtaining their degrees. An unspoken dichotomy developed in the student community.

By the mid-70s, as the student attitudes everywhere shifted back to serious study rather than student activism, the community at ISH regained a sense of serenity and a more amicable atmosphere, as described by Mrs. Jean-Ellen Maner, the Assistant Director: *"In the relaxed family atmosphere of the House, students learn to appreciate and*



*A snow brigade in front of the House*

*respect the differences in culture, race, religion, and political systems. Moslem students decorate the Christmas tree, Africans organize the snow-shoveling brigade, Chinese from Taiwan welcome and befriend the first residents from mainland China, an Israeli and a Palestinian Arab have a lively exchange of ideas over a cup of coffee, and two Japanese converse in halting English so everyone may understand them. Thus, a real international bond of friendship is created, developed and strengthened, one which will have its impact throughout the world in years to come."*

### Footnote

6. Until 1955, even the residents' rooms had no locks.



*Visiting alumni*



*A Sunday  
Invitation*



*An African Dance*





## ISH BECOMES INDEPENDENT

### Chapter Four

*For the American Friends Service Committee, ISH was only one of the local and national network of Quaker activities grounded in the Quaker beliefs. But after managing and supporting the House for a quarter of a century, the AFSC decided that ISH should be “laid down,” as the Quakers say: either it had to support itself or it would have to close.*

The local groups in charge of ISH made a concerted effort to persuade the AFSC not to withdraw its support until they could develop a significant fund raising campaign. Betty Cooke, chairman of the Friends International Student House Committee, wrote to the AFSC in Philadelphia: “*The closing of the International Student House would be a disaster.*” Professor A. Buel Trowbridge of American University, a leading member of the Citizens’ Council, traveled to Philadelphia several times to plead in person for a gradual “devolvement,” as they called the process of independence.

The AFSC agreed but exerted pressure on the Council and the local community by reducing its financial contribution from \$15,000 in fiscal year 1960-61 to \$9,000 for 1961-62. The Citizens’ Council, for its part, managed to raise \$10,000 from local foundations for the 25th Anniversary Fund in 1961, plus another \$9,000 from the public.

As a first step in the devolvement, the AFSC had the House incorporated in the District of Columbia as an independent non-profit organization in June of 1962. The Citizens’ Council became an indepen-

dent Board of Directors, to whom the AFSC would hand over the responsibility for ISH. The new Board of Directors was composed of 17 men and women, most of whom had been associated with the House before, and it met for the first time on September 30, 1962. The first president was Mr. DeForest Van Slyck.

Immediately after the incorporation of ISH, the Board entered into an agreement with the AFSC under which: 1) the Board of Directors agreed to assume operational responsibility for the House as soon as they proved themselves able to raise the necessary money to meet the total annual operating deficit and 2) the AFSC agreed to provide some transitional support: \$7,000 for 1962-63, and \$3,000 in 1963-64.

The AFSC had already determined earlier that an institution serving only 30 students while depending on outside support for 50 percent of its income was not economically viable. The building at 1825 R Street had been designed for a private family, with very few bedrooms but very large common rooms. There was no space for additional student rooms, whereas the common rooms could serve the social needs of many more residents.

As early as 1954, Director Hugh Jenkins had suggested that constructing a small annex on the adjacent volleyball court owned by ISH would provide an additional 15 single rooms, of which there were too few. By the early 60s, the consensus was that the addition of a dormitory for 30 more students would provide a greater economy of scale, would make better use of the building's common rooms, and would serve more students.<sup>7</sup> In 1960 and 1961, the possible purchase of one of the adjacent houses was actively pursued but proved to be less than desirable.

With judicious foresight, the AFSC stipulated in its 1962 agreement with the new Board of Directors that they would not transfer the deed to the property until the Board had raised sufficient funds for the building of an addition that would double the number of residents.

replace all the water piping in the House would cost another \$15,000; and, "while you are at it," added the architect, "you might as well replace most of the bathroom fixtures and tiling," for another \$15,000.

Instead of relying exclusively on the unpredictable results from the earlier type of fund raising such as theater benefits and an annual bazaar, which continued until 1970, the Board decided to embark upon a personalized campaign to raise money from the public. They set the goal of the first annual campaign at \$25,000.

To obtain wider community support and interest, the Board was expanded to 50 members. The 1962-63 campaign was a surprising success and raised over \$26,000

from individual contributions. In addition, foundations made grants of \$26,000 to ISH. The major renovations were carried out and, thanks to a competent contractor and the free services of a Quaker architect, the total expense did not exceed \$32,000, instead of the estimated \$45,000.

This financial success appeased the concerns of the AFSC and on October 1, 1963, they let the Board assume full responsibility for the management of the

House and for its entire financial support.

In the following fiscal year of 1963-64, income from students rose to 60 percent of the operating deficit. The Board decided to forsake the \$3,000 transitional subsidy pledged by the AFSC. As the number of



*DeForest Van Slyck and Leah Chase*

The financial outlook for fiscal year 1962-63 was precarious. In addition to the declining AFSC contribution, new DC Fire Code regulations required expenditures of \$15,000 for alterations. The urgent need to

contributors increased to 500, the fund-raising goal of \$26,000 was amply met. Ready to advance to the next step, the Board unanimously voted in February 1964 to expand the ISH facilities. The director persuaded the Board that *"It would be desirable to have girls and men in separate buildings. Furthermore, as foreign women may feel uneasy about sharing a room, there should be only single rooms."* The addition was therefore planned as a women's dormitory with single rooms, whereas the men would all be housed in the old building. The new building was to be erected on the existing volleyball court, which was called the spare lot or the west garden. A suggestion by Board member architect, Waldron Faulkner, to first explore the feasibility and desirability of acquiring and remodeling some building adjacent to the ISH property was taken up, but the owners of properties on either side of ISH were not interested in selling. Further study also established that it would be both more convenient and less costly to erect a new structure on the existing property.

The Board hired the services of the architectural firm of Keyes, Lethbridge and Condon to produce a preliminary design with cost estimates. They presented the design in August 1964 with an estimated cost of \$270,174. This figure included \$41,000 for alterations to the old building, particularly the kitchen and landscaping and \$13,000 for furniture. After the Board's approval in October, the AFSC ratified the plans in January 1965. In February, the Board committed itself irrevocably by signing a \$19,000 contract with the architects for the final drawings and for a building permit. The planning for the new construction in the following years was greatly assisted by the fact that the President of the Board at the time, John Hammond, was himself an architect by profession.

Meanwhile, the Board had undertaken a major long-range effort to raise sufficient funds for the construction of the building. Over the next few years, Board President DeForest Van Slyck was untiring in his correspondence and travels to obtain major grants from the large



corporate foundations. Despite his efforts they contributed only a total of \$29,000, supplemented by \$30,000 from local foundations. The Board eventually concluded that it would have to rely on private contributions for the bulk of the funds needed.

An auspicious beginning was made in 1964 by Board members Mr. and Mrs. L. Corrin Strong's pledge of \$100,000 over three years. Other Board members and friends pledged or contributed \$10,000, \$15,000, and even \$25,000, and many more made smaller but significant contributions over the next few years. Thus the Board, without government or corporate support, managed to raise sufficient funds to complete the building project without borrow-



ing any money, not even temporarily, a true testimony to the determination and generosity of that first group of Directors, who set a standard for those to come later.

From 1964 to 1970, annual contributions to the Building Fund averaged \$70,000, with a high of \$96,000 in fiscal year 1968-69, and in the meantime there was no let-up in the regular annual appeal. The Building Fund always managed to stay ahead of all the expenses payable, and not even temporary loans ever proved necessary. On the contrary, the surplus was profitably invested, and between 1964 and 1970, interest and gains from the investments yielded more than \$30,000 in additional funds.

The deed to the property was turned over to the Board of Directors by the AFSC in the summer of 1968, during the presidency of Peter Powers, when it was obvious that sufficient funds would be available for building the addition. Originally, the construction was to start in 1968 and be ready by July 1, 1969, for the new school year, but unforeseen complications in the projected construction expense necessitated a revision of the plans to reduce the cost of such things as eliminating the planned elevator. Finally, a contract was signed in March 1969 with the James Davis Construction Company for \$315,430, and a ground-breaking ceremony took place on May 27, 1969, at which Justice Potter Stewart of the U.S. Supreme Court gave an address and turned the first shovel of earth. The con-



*President John F. Kennedy and 154 students in the White House*



struction work had actually started earlier, and it was completed within the time frame agreed upon, by the end of December.

The total cost of the construction, including the architects' fees, furniture, and modifications to the main building, ultimately amounted to \$438,730, with payments of almost \$127,000 in fiscal year 1969-70 alone. This was a far cry from the original 1964 estimate of \$270,174, but amazingly the Building Fund had grown to a total of \$453,147. Thus, after the last payment had been made, a balance of \$14,417 remained and was transferred to the operating fund.

The new furnishings, ordered well in advance at a cost of \$25,000, were installed in early January 1970, and the building was ready for occupancy. By then, the initial idea of a girls' dormitory had been abandoned, and both men and women moved in on separate floors, the women's floors sandwiched in between the men's. A housewarming party took place on February 7, 1970.

For more than 15 years, the addition remained known as the New Building, an

incongruous name by the mid-80s when major repairs and maintenance work became necessary. Originally, DeForest Van Slyck had suggested that it be named the Alice and Corrin Strong Wing, but apparently they



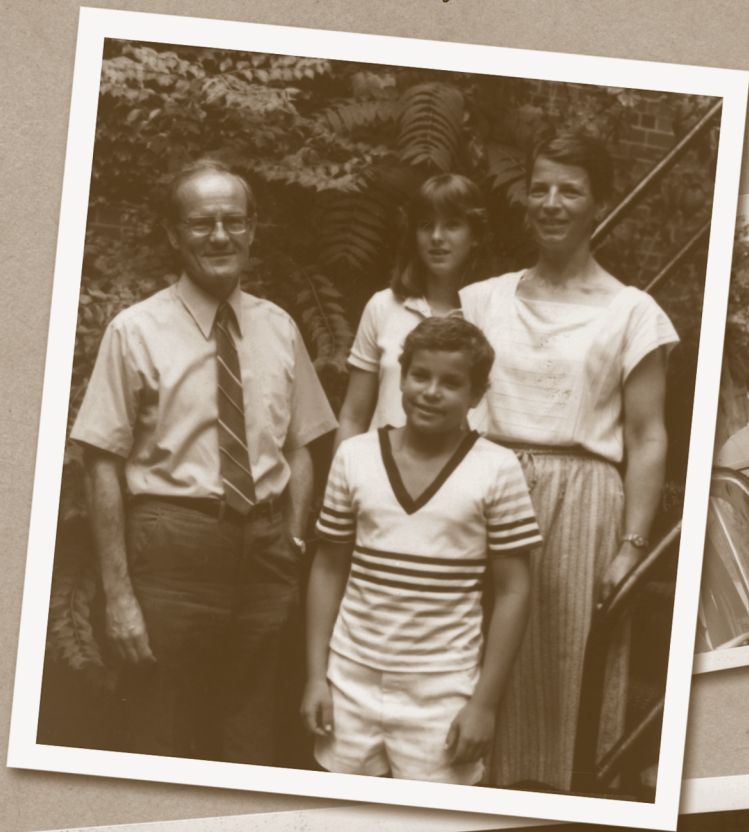
refused the honor. In late 1985, after DeForest Van Slyck had passed away, the Board voted instead to call it the Van Slyck Building, in recognition of his tremendous efforts to raise funds for the project, a designation that Van himself would have opposed while he was alive.

#### Footnote

7. A survey in 1963 indicated that almost 3,800 foreign students were registered at the six major universities in the Washington area (American, Catholic, Howard, Georgetown, George Washington, and Maryland), not counting those at other institutions (like SAIS or language schools). Of that number, only 15 percent were housed on the universities' campus, almost none of them graduate students.



*Elsbeth and Paul Feys  
with Cara and George*



*On outing by car*



*A Greek Dance in the Great Hall*



## NEW CHALLENGES: THE SEVENTIES

### *Chapter Five*

*The fund raising for the new building and its completion in 1969 had been a real success, but some distressing problems in the next few years would not allow the Board to rest on its laurels.*

### Unsafe Conditions in the Neighborhood

In 1968, following the assassination of Martin Luther King, riots broke out in Washington, DC, only a few blocks away from ISH and created an atmosphere of insecurity and fear. At the same time, crime had become rampant in the Dupont Circle area. Several residents were mugged in the vicinity of the House, some robberies occurred even in the House, and there was a shooting in the alley behind the parking lot as one resident drove out. The front door was not kept locked at the time, except at night.

There was obviously nothing the Board could do about such a situation. It would gradually improve in the following years, but the opening of the Dupont Circle Metro station in 1976 brought a measure of safety to the neighborhood.

### Turmoil Among Residents

Once the new building was ready for occupancy, budget projections began to include the income from all these additional rooms without making allowance for a gradual growth from 30 to 60 residents.

Consequently, there was intense pressure from the Finance Committee to fill the new building to capacity as soon as possi-

ble. This pressure may have led to a lowering of the admission standards.

A number of young people straight out of high school were admitted. Overall, they were neither as mature nor as focused on their studies as the rest of the residents. Many of them, instead of pursuing an academic degree, were enrolled in career institutes such as schools for secretaries, cooks, travel agents and decorators. There were also many short-term language students and others waiting for admission to a school. This type of student did not contribute to a mature, well-integrated student community.

More troubling, however, was the admission to the House of severely disturbed students, who were, or should have been, under psychiatric care. There were, in fact, two suicides within 18 months. To the more dedicated and mature residents the situation became increasingly distressing, even threatening. One resident kept a baseball bat under his bed for fear of an attack by his roommate. Some of the students met with the officers of the Board and conveyed their apprehension about the future of the House.

The Executive Committee of the Board reviewed the situation and concluded that it was not the function of ISH to look after



seriously troubled students and that the staff should not be expected to provide emotional support and counseling to them. In May 1972, President William Crocker and the officers decided that a new director had to be sought without delay, even without the approval of the full Board, which would not meet until in October.

dedicated staff to work with. Moreover, some exceptionally mature and supportive residents, many of them students at Johns Hopkins' School for Advanced International Studies, (SAIS) were of invaluable help in bringing stability to the ISH community as the immature teen-age students were gradually eased out. I remember particularly two very helpful students: David Streich, a gentle American from a missionary family, and Albert

Nader from Syria, strong-willed and outspoken, both of them totally reliable to keep the interests of the House in mind.

Of great importance to me was also the support of my wife Elsbeth. As the first director of ISH not to live in the House, I had agreed to stay for dinner at ISH three times a week and go in every Sunday, which would obviously curtail the family time I could spend

at home. We made up partially by deciding that our whole family would come along every Sunday. First there was only Cara, barely one year old, later George also came from the time he was a couple of months old. ISH thus became our extended family, and Jean-Ellen Maner, the Assistant Director, who let the children take their afternoon nap in her apartment became like a grandmother to them. Our whole family continued to be part of ISH on Sundays and at many special events



*Students in 1974 on the old fire escape*

## Acting Director for One Year

In the summers of 1970 and 1971, I had been the substitute director at ISH for six weeks while the director was on vacation. I had thus become acquainted with many of the officers of the Board and worked closely with the staff. When Dr. Crocker asked me in May 1972 to become Acting Director for a one-year renewable term starting on July 1, I was delighted to accept.

Bill Crocker and the other officers of the Board gave me their strong support. I was also fortunate to have a well-qualified and

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until our children became teenagers, but Elsbeth kept coming along for many more years until she started going to college. She contributed to the life of ISH in many ways, such as cultivating the garden, bringing flowers from our own garden to make flower arrangements for the auctions and other events, and baking hundreds of cookies every year for the Christmas tea.

Even with the support and assistance I received from all sides, reversing the situation at ISH and restoring a more mature attitude in the student community was not a matter of instant results. Our efforts could also not lose sight of the need to achieve and maintain a high occupancy rate, which was essential for the financial survival of the House. The situation at the time was quite precarious indeed.

## Financial Survival

ISH was facing a dangerous financial crisis. The income was well under budget because of the low occupancy rate, whereas increased costs of food and major repairs, combined with a generous severance payment to the previous director, raised the expenses well beyond budget. In fiscal year 1972-73, the operating deficit of \$61,300 was only half met by a total fund raising of \$32,000. The president warned the Board that, unless additional funds were received, the House might have to close by Christmas 1973. Indeed, by October of 1973, the bank reserves of ISH were down to \$1,150, whereas the House needed support of \$1,000 per week on average to supplement the income from room and board.

In addition to appealing for special contributions, the Board voted to enact an unprecedented increase of 25 percent in the room and board rates effective October 1, 1973. The increase not only helped put the House on the road to financial recov-

ery, it also had an unexpected side effect on the quality of residents: those who lived at ISH only because it was inexpensive had no longer any incentive to stay on, and the level of interest and participation among the residents increased accordingly.

To ease the financial hardship on some valuable residents who could not afford the higher rates, the Board established a Scholarship Fund. Added to the small amount left in the 1947 Davis Fund, the supplementary scholarships over the next few years gave several students the chance to remain at ISH, for their own and the House's mutual benefit.

By the end of 1973, the reserves had more than doubled, to \$3,000! A gradually increasing occupancy rate of up to 95 percent brought the reserves up to \$20,000 by the end of 1974. In some good years later on, the reserves in the General Fund would grow by as much as \$10-15,000 a year, thanks to increasingly successful fund raising and to operating deficits that were lower than expected.

## Efforts for New Expansion

In late 1972, a report by Robert Duke, a fund raising consultant hired by the Board, recommended, among other things, the expansion of the ISH facilities and closer cooperation with sister organizations, which would achieve a higher public profile for the House. A committee headed by Jerrold Scoutt, Jr. to review the Duke Report confirmed these recommendations in 1973 and made practical suggestions on how to carry them out.

A small Real Estate Committee started looking for a building adjacent or close to ISH, which would not only offer suitable rooms for older scholars and married couples but also provide office space for sister



organizations. The Foreign Student Service Council, the Washington office of the Experiment in International Living, and the Washington Public Affairs Center of the University of Southern California expressed great interest. Jean-Ellen Maner, looking beyond the immediate concern, recommended a long-range vision of an “international village” around ISH, where most of the services for international visitors, students and trainees would be concentrated.

Over the next two years, the committee inspected more than half a dozen buildings on R Street close to ISH, especially two buildings across the street, at 1822 and at 1826 R Street, which seemed to be the best prospects. Meanwhile, the Board launched a campaign for pledges in view of a possible purchase. By July 1974, pledges totaling \$53,500 had been received, with another \$25,000 pledged for 1975.

Unfortunately, several factors combined to defeat these efforts. The buildings surveyed were either not suitable for a mix of residential quarters and office space, or were not zoned for office use. The cost estimates of buying and renovating them kept going up. ISH was in a dire financial situation as it was, and Board members did not want to burden ISH further with a mortgage debt. One by one, all the properties considered found other buyers. Later on, the bleak economic outlook of the mid to late 70s with ultra-high inflation rates, stock market declines, and oil embargoes, made any further efforts look more precarious than before.

From a later vantage-point, the effort to expand again so closely on the heels of the Van Slyck addition may look surprising, if not unwise. But it was a testimony to the vigor of the Board that they earnestly undertook the effort at all. From that time,

they would never lose sight of the desirability of a new expansion, and it would eventually bear fruit 15 years later.

## Fund Raising

The traditional fund raising appeal to private donors could not keep up with the annually increasing operating deficit. The Board therefore explored other venues for fund raising. An International Dinner, with much of the food donated by different embassies, produced a net income of \$3,450 in May 1972, and \$3,700 the following year. By 1974, its purpose was shifted from fund raising to creating goodwill among the friends of the House and giving them an opportunity to meet the students, and so a catering service was hired. After the International Dinners barely broke even in 1974 and 1975, they were discontinued.

In 1974, Board Member Leah Chase proposed a benefit to be held at the Kennedy Center on the opening night of the Venetian Festival on September 30, 1974, under the patronage of the Ambassador of Italy. Originally, there was some reluctance among Board members who held to the Quakers’ disapproval of public display, unaware that in the 50s the Quakers had organized annual theater benefits for ISH. The tentative approval by the Board was almost derailed, however, when the Kennedy Center requested that the reception following the performance be held “in the manner of a masked ball.” That was too much for the Board. Only after the Kennedy Center relented and agreed to dancing with optional hand-held masks, did the Board give its final consent. The benefit raised an unexpected \$18,800 and was greatly enjoyed by all who attended. From then on, theater or other benefits were held every two to three years.

Other strategies to raise money still appeared essential. In 1975, Board Member Wilhelmina Holladay suggested a new way of raising funds: a silent auction of items and services with an international character donated by Board members and friends. The Board agreed to give it a try, hoping to raise as much as \$10,000. The auction took place on March 14, 1976, and resulted in a staggering net profit of \$19,500. One more auction was readily agreed to for the following year, and in March of 1977 it raised \$23,500. Auctions thus proved to be a superb way of raising funds while involving most of the Board members as well as the students, and henceforth they became an annual event. The date was soon changed to the fall instead of the spring to avoid a conflict with the traditional fund raising campaign which always started early in the year. From 1976 through 1994, 18 auctions took place with only one interruption, in 1992. The net profit would range from a high of \$36,000 to a low of \$20,000.

Finding an auction chairperson was a headache for the president every year, but one person could always be counted on to play a pivotal role. Year after year, for each of the 18 auctions, Marion Sanger collected many of the items donated and spent innumerable hours in cramped quarters describing and cataloguing them. She could list by heart almost all the 500-600 items, how much they were valued at, and where they came from. Of course, she received considerable help from many other Board members, but she was unquestionably "Mrs. ISH Auction." Everybody knew that auctions would become problematic once she was no longer able to play her role; there was never any doubt about her willingness.

As it was, by the late 80s more and more organizations had turned to auctions for fund raising and the many auctions held in Washington, DC, made them less profitable. It also became increasingly difficult to find valuable items as the attics of many Board members and friends had been depleted. In the early 90s the net profit had dropped to \$20-25,000 per year, and it no longer seemed worthwhile putting in so much effort for diminishing returns. The last auction took place in 1994. The auction proceeds were supplemented about every two years by additional theater and other benefits. ISH never again came as close to shutting down as it had in 1973. Yet throughout the good



*Auctioneer Harry Bell, 1983*

and the bad times, the Board insisted on preserving its independence, consistently refusing to consider applying for a government grant or joining a collective fund-raising effort like the United Way.

## Changing Customs

Even after ISH became independent from the American Friends Service Committee,



the Quaker spirit continued to be the guiding light of the House, especially the Quaker beliefs in peace and in respect for every single person. But the Board and the staff felt increasingly free to revise and change many of the specific regulations.

The prohibition against all alcoholic beverages had been strictly maintained by the AFSC,<sup>8</sup> but gradually it was tempered and finally replaced by a policy of moderate and appropriate use of alcohol without restrictions of place or time.

When it came to smoking, however, there seems to have been no restriction originally. Residents could smoke anywhere

smoking. The library became smoke-free first. In the dining room, a limited smoking ban during meal times was first introduced in the early 70s. Unsuspecting new residents would reflexively light a cigarette after their first dinner, only to be enlightened immediately by the non-smokers. Later, the smoking ban in the dining room was extended to all times. By the early 90s, the entire main building and all public spaces in the other two buildings had become no-smoking areas.

Restrictive rules on inter-visitation between men and women also underwent a gradual relaxation. For decades, students were to “refrain from visiting private rooms occupied by members of the opposite sex,” and in the 60s,

Director Mrs. Howard Becker persuaded the Board to take advantage of the scheduled expansion to house men and women in separate buildings. The first small breach in the policy occurred in 1961, when the Board approved the Student Council’s request that inter-visitation *with open doors* be allowed *during the day* in *shared rooms*.

General inter-visitation became permissible later but only within strictly specified hours. Finally, in 1972, the Board approved the staff and students’ recommendation that restrictions be lifted and replaced

by an emphasis on respect and sensitivity for others.

The new policy did not turn students into angels. I remember a student complaining one day that his roommate had locked their door and put a sign on it: “DO NOT



and at any time, even during meals. In the late 60s and early 70s, the Student Council even explored the feasibility of getting a cigarette-vending machine in the House. But soon a few residents started an anti-smoking campaign, and subsequent Student Councils managed to obtain enough votes, despite the smokers’ majority, for increasing restrictions on

BOTHER.” But altogether it did bring about a more mature and respectful relationship between men and women. The ratio of female residents, which had been less than-one third of the total number, rose significantly in the subsequent years, evidence that even women from conservative cultures felt no threat from living in the same buildings as men and being allowed to visit each other. Eventually, women would sometimes outnumber men.

Regulations concerning student work also changed with the times. Until the early 70s, residents were expected to sign up for some work duty, such as keeping the house and garden clean and collecting the trash, which proved totally unmanageable. All residents were also required to sign up for telephone duty at the front desk a few hours each month. It was never a complete success, not only because many residents failed to sign up or show up, but also because others without comfortable knowledge of English were all too willing to do phone duty. Instead of answering: “*International Student House, can I help you?*” a couple of new residents were overheard to say: “*International Student House, please can you help me?*” One German alumna told me years later she was so nervous the first time that she answered: “*International Student Help, can I house you?*” “*Oh yes, please,*” replied the caller, “*I really need a room!*” In

the early 90s, the staff decided that more professional-sounding people were needed and selected residents fluent in English, offering them a rebate on their room and board to provide telephone answering service and security throughout the night.

Old traditions changed or were abandoned. Visiting old-time alumni would invariably ask whether we still had the Sunday teas and the Friday night dances, evidence that these two traditions had been very much part of life at ISH since 1936. The Sunday teas did continue, but the weekly Friday dances fell victim in the early 70s to the increasing social and recreational events available outside the House.

Some new traditions arose. Board member Anthony Gould offered to come and bake blueberry pancakes for breakfast one Saturday. His pancakes were so popular that he was asked to come back once a month, a tradition which continued for the next 10-15 years. Alumni from those years still remember Mr. Gould’s blueberry pancakes.

The following decade would further demonstrate the vitality of the new independent ISH. It had come into its own without forsaking the spirit of its Quaker founders.

#### Footnotes

8. In 1961, the Embassy of France offered to help with a French nationality dinner at ISH and explained that a French dinner without (French) wine was an oxymoron. But the Quakers in charge deemed the policy of “No Alcohol” to be of a higher standard than French culture and decided that, French dinner or not, the policy would suffer no exception. Fortunately, no lasting damage seems to have resulted in the relations between ISH and the French Embassy!



THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

October 14, 1986

Dear Mr. Springsteen:

Congratulations to you and everyone connected with the International Student House as you celebrate your 50th anniversary.

As a residence and gathering place for young people from many different countries, Student House fulfills its founding charter by promoting world peace through mutual understanding. In a time when international peace is so important a goal for all of us, I appreciate your efforts and send best wishes for every success in the years to come.

God bless you.

Sincerely,

*Ronald Reagan*

Mr. George S. Springsteen, Jr.  
President, Board of Directors  
International Student House  
1825 R Street, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20009



*Student Council, 1980*



*ISH 50th Birthday Celebration, Board member Jane Hart speaking*



## RENEWAL AND GROWTH AT AGE FIFTY

*Chapter Six*

*The 50th anniversary of ISH in 1986 was still years away when the staff began to think of a suitable celebration. It also seemed an appropriate time to come to grips with a major problem that could not be avoided much longer: the deteriorating condition of the main building at 1825 R Street. In addition, the 50 years' milestone was an opportunity to take an overall look at ISH, reviewing the past and making projections for the future. In this context, reviving the old dream to expand ISH again seemed particularly significant.*

### The 50th Anniversary Celebration

For over a year and a half, the staff met with an active group of alumni spanning the five decades since the founding of ISH and planned a grand 50th anniversary celebration. The celebration took place from October 10 through October 12, 1986, with a three-day course of events drawing over 150 alumni from the late 30s to recent years, coming from all over the United States, Canada, Latin America, and Europe. Some had not seen each other for decades and had touching reunions, and there was a festive spirit among all involved. The outside events included tours of the State Department, the Capitol, and the Pentagon, a Washington by Night bus tour, a tour of the National Air & Space Museum guided by Kazem Omidvar, an alumnus working for NASA, and finally a visit to the first ISH building at 1708 New Hampshire Avenue. At the House itself, a Friday night barbecue in the garden was followed by square dancing in the Great Hall, a formal dance followed the Saturday

night Gala dinner, and a closing High Tea was held on Sunday October 12.

While actively participating in the celebrations, the Board had been happy to leave the planning and execution to the staff and alumni. The Board members' main concern was the long-range planning for the future of ISH. The most pressing concern was the choice to be made between renovating the main building or selling it and moving to more modern quarters. In truth, it was never a real choice, because in everybody's eyes ISH had become identified with 1825 R Street, and relocation was out of the question and never came to a vote.

There was also another concern, however: the desirability of a new expansion of ISH as a validation of its vitality after 50 years and as a way to put the House on a sounder economic basis. Renovation and expansion would each necessitate hitherto unthinkable amounts of money. It did not appear possible to do both. But after extensive deliberations, the choice the Board



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made over the next two years brings to mind the advice of Yogi Berra: *"When you come to a fork in the road, take it!"* They chose to do both, although not simultaneously.

## Renovation of 1825 R Street

Visitors to the House saw only the elegant facade and the magnificence of the Great Hall, without an inkling of its physical deterioration and its inadequate living conditions. Continuing to patch up ever-worsening problems was not sustainable much longer. Associate Director and House Manager Barbara Dirks knew the phone numbers of the plumber, the electrician, and the roofer by heart. Leaks from the roof, from one floor to the one below, and through the Great Hall ceiling were almost weekly occurrences. As for the student quarters, they were woefully inadequate, especially in terms of bathrooms. On the fourth floor, one large undivided bathroom was shared by five women students. On the fifth floor, the shower floors had to be replaced every few years and yet kept leaking. A sweeping renovation of the building could not wait much longer.

As a first step, a Building Committee, established in late 1984 under the able chairmanship of former president Jim Wilson, selected the architectural firm of McCartney Lewis. Originally it was hoped that the renovation would also increase the resident capacity, either by expanding the fifth floor over the entire extension of the roof, or by adding a sixth floor, or, alternatively, adding one floor to the Van Slyck building. Those options, however, proved totally unrealistic and were not included in the preliminary blueprints submitted by the architects and approved by the Board in May 1985, with a total cost estimate of \$750,000 (\$650,000 for the actual work, the rest for architects' fees and other expenses). The blueprints included an extension of

the dining room into the garden and a new office behind the existing offices.

The final drawings in May 1986, which included a total electrical rewiring and the replacement of all the plumbing, had more than doubled the cost estimate, to over \$1.5 million. Over the next few months, Jim Wilson spent innumerable hours going over the blueprints in great detail prompting the architect to tell him: "You know the blueprints better than I do!" and eliminating everything that would not put the purpose and the safety of the renovation in jeopardy. In October, the pared down cost estimate of \$1 million was approved by the Board. To everybody's shock, however, when those drawings were submitted to three contractors in 1987, the lowest bid came to \$1.4 million. The Building Committee abandoned the idea of an expanded dining room and of a new office and restricted all the electrical and plumbing work to what was essential for safety. These and other cuts allowed the architects to negotiate with the firm of Whalen & Purdy, selected as building contractors, and to agree to a total cost estimate of \$1 million, as had been previously approved by the Board.

The renovation work was supposed to begin in early October 1987. All the rooms were vacated of all furniture and students by late September, but it was December 7 before the workers actually started the demolition phase. This allowed the residents to hold a Halloween Party in the spooky empty rooms. Once the work got underway, the staff and the residents soon became inured to the dust, the noise, and the blaring radios of the workers from 7 A.M. to 3 P.M. every day, as well as the building materials piled up in the garden, and the parking lot entirely monopolized by the builders.

Some work was necessary in the library to cut an opening to the Van Slyck building, and in the Great Hall to put in a new fire exit door, but the renovation work otherwise remained limited to the three top floors. On the second floor, heavy plastic sheets hung from ceiling to floor in front of the stairs to the third floor, but the warning of “Authorized Personnel Only Beyond This Point” did not hold back anyone after the workmen had left in the afternoon. Students who had lived in those rooms a couple of months earlier looked in awe at walls totally torn down, plumbing fixtures ripped out, and wooden floors entirely removed. One workman would later lose his footing between two beams on the fourth floor and go crashing through the ceiling of the Great Hall; but instinctively he spread out his arms and held onto the beams for dear life until others pulled him up.

The discovery of asbestos in the old walls soon brought the renovation work to a halt, while specialized workmen in spacesuits removed every fiber of asbestos. This unexpected setback delayed the renovation by several weeks and added \$42,600 to the cost. The completion of the work had been projected for September 1, 1988, in time for the beginning of the new academic year, but it was mid-October before the last workmen left. Nobody was happier than all of us on the staff, who had been working through 11 months of dust, noise, and myriad requests from the workmen. For two weeks we were subjected to the deafening sound of jackhammers in the hallway trying to locate a leaking pipe under the concrete floor, which made conversations and phone calls utterly impossible before 3 P.M. In addition, we had to vacate the two existing offices, one after the other, while a pest control company exterminated the

termites found under the wooden floor, which was then replaced by a cement floor. Squeezed together for weeks in one small office, we became closer than ever.

The renovated rooms became available for occupancy only after the District of Columbia building inspectors issued the occupancy permit in December. Eventually, it was January 1989 before residents moved into the renovated rooms, four months late and a quarter of a million dollars above estimated cost.



*50th Anniversary Reunion of 1930s and 1940s alumni*

The total renovation project took place under two Board Presidents and owed much of its success to their vigorous leadership: George Springsteen in the planning phase of the renovation and fund raising, and Jane Hart in the supervision of the work and the major thrust of the fund raising. But more than anyone else it was former President Jim Wilson who, from beginning to end, meticulously oversaw both the planning and the execution of the project and substantially contained its cost. I will always think of it as the “Wilson Renovation.”

## Expansion

If the renovation was an inescapable necessity, the expansion proved to be a one-time opportunity. When Louise Armstrong in 1984 saw an ad in the paper for a 12-apartment building on Riggs Place, right behind ISH, she recognized that no such opportunity to realize the expansion, that had been considered in principle, might recur for many years.



*Soccer at Mrs. Burling's country home*

The purchase of 1824 Riggs Place, however, was not a quick and easy decision for the Board, and more than three years elapsed between the appearance of the ad and the actual acquisition of the building. Projections for the additional income from 30 more residents had to be weighed against the cost of acquiring, renovating, and equipping the property, originally estimated at \$465,000 to \$485,000. Naturally, the Board was both interested and reluctant to commit itself to such an undertaking. President George Springsteen, although his attention was focused on the renovation, strongly supported the idea of expansion but wanted to make sure that the House was not over-extending itself financially.

The acquisition of the building would not have been possible without the assistance of Ron Mitchell, owner of the Washington International Youth Hostel and a friend of ISH. He purchased the property in early 1986 for \$410,000 to hold it until ISH was ready to commit itself. The upcoming renovation, which would require the old building to be totally vacated of residents, gave a sense of urgency to the project. The Board signed a contract with Ron Mitchell on June 22, 1987, agreeing to a purchase price of \$585,000, which included \$175,000 in renovations, with payments of principal and interest deferred for three years.

ISH had to spend an additional \$12,000 for new plumbing, and thousands more for roof repairs, refurbishing the rooms, and installation of window air conditioners in each room. Even then the rooms were by far not up to the standard of the other two buildings. The newly acquired building at 1825 Riggs Place allowed ISH to maintain the same number of 60 residents while the old building was vacated for the duration of the renovation and subsequently increased the number of residents to 90. The income from room and board rose by 50 percent without a corresponding increase in the overhead expenses. Until June 1991, this building housed both men and women, but later it was made an all male residence for security reasons.

## Fund Raising

In October 1986, the Board had agreed in principle to try to raise 1.4 million dollars for both the renovation and the expansion. To assist them in reaching such an unprecedented target, they selected a fund-raising consultant, Fisher Howe, in January 1987. The architects had given the Board a dead-



line of June to receive assurances of adequate funds before they could actually start the renovation work.

After a feasibility study, Fisher Howe concluded that the Board had the capability and dedication to reach the Capital Campaign goal, but not without great efforts and extraordinary generosity on the part of everyone. He suggested that \$200,000 be added to the original goal of \$1.4 million for program development to attract foundations not interested in bricks and mortar. The Board agreed to the \$1.6 million target in May 1987.

Fisher Howe inspired, advised, and guided the Board very effectively. As a first step, he recommended that potential contributors be invited to a complimentary special event, without a word about money. They would all know, he said, why they were invited, yet they would largely accept, as in the limerick:

*The lovely young lady from Kent  
She said that she knew what it meant  
When men took her out to dine  
Plied her with cocktails and wine  
She knew what it meant -- but she went!*

The Capital Campaign Fund, or Building Fund drive, which started under President George Springsteen and continued under President Jane Hart, was chaired by Louise Armstrong. As an auspicious kick-off, the Board allocated to the Capital Fund a sum of \$190,000 already in the hands of ISH from bequests and memorial funds. The rest did not come so easily, but the results of the campaign were nonetheless astonishing. By December 1987, the fund had grown by \$560,000 in contributions and pledges. By the time the renovation ended in October 1988, the Building Fund had accumulated \$945,000, somewhat short of the final cost of 1.15 million dollars plus \$29,400 in fund raising expenses. The last

payment of \$77,000 due to the contractor in December 1988 was made possible through a loan from the Endowment Fund and personal loans from several Board members most of whom “forgave” their loans later on.

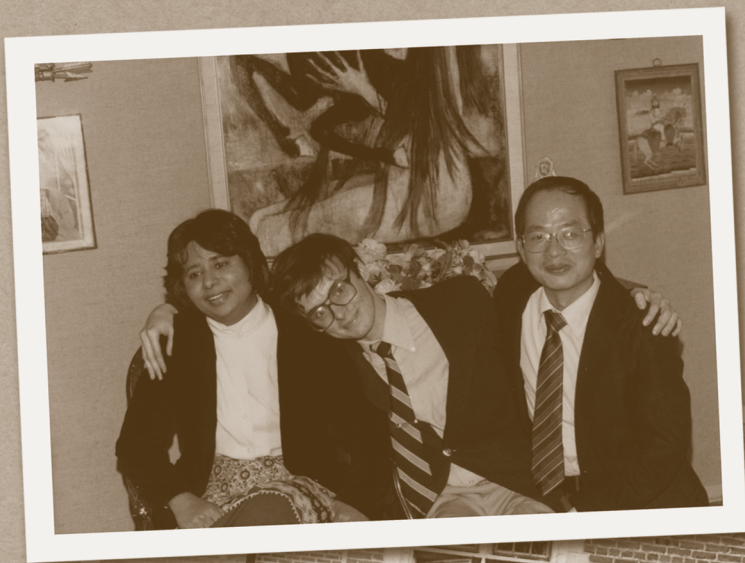
If the Board did not reach the original Capital Campaign goal of \$1.6 million, it was due in great part to the fact that, as in the 60s, none of the anticipated major support from foundations ever materialized. To have raised almost \$1 million in two years mostly from private contributors was an extraordinary accomplishment for a Board that had never before raised more than \$100,000 a year.

None of the Capital Campaign funds were left to even make a dent in the \$585,000 plus accumulated interest needed for the purchase of 1824 Riggs Place, but the three-year moratorium gave the Board some breathing space to deal with that problem. The additional income from 30 more residents made it possible over the following three years to pay some of the principal and accumulated interest to Ron Mitchell. When the total balance “balloon payment” was due in June 1990 as required in the 1987 contract, ISH assumed a mortgage of \$610,000 with Riggs Bank. In the next few years, Mrs. Jefferson (Marvin) Patterson, in addition to her previous and subsequent generosity toward ISH, contributed the bulk of the funds used to reduce the debt on the Riggs Place building through her Marpat Foundation. In recognition, the building was designated Marpat Hall<sup>9</sup>

#### Footnote

9. At an earlier date, after Board member Elizabeth Cabot had made a considerable contribution, former Board President Peggy Beam suggested that the building be called “Cabot Lodge.” In another instance of proposing new names, following a \$160,000 bequest from Grace Fox, Barbara Dirks proposed that the Great Hall be renamed “Fox Hall.” Neither of those suggestions found favor with the Board.





*Time to say good-bye*



*Students in the spring garden*



*A Yemeni student*



## LIFE AFTER FIFTY

### Chapter Seven

*With the renovation and the expansion successfully accomplished, ISH resolutely faced its next half-century. By the end of the decade, the House had settled into its new routine with 90 residents instead of 60. Compared to the intimate family setting of its original 15 residents in 1936, it had become a large institution, yet it continued to offer the same unique international experience but to six times as many students. As an institution, it also joined very slowly the electronic age, acquiring a fax machine and one computer in the early 90s!*

New challenges, of course, would soon appear, of which the most costly but not unexpected one was the need to bring Marpat Hall up to a standard comparable to the other two buildings.

Erected in the mid 40s, 1824 Riggs Place needed major renovation, especially to turn it into 24 proper student rooms instead of 12 apartments of two rooms each. In six of the apartments, the room in the back could only be reached through the front room, with the result that students in the back had to walk through the front room, leaving no privacy to the resident there.

Although room rates were quite a bit lower than in the other two buildings, it became increasingly difficult to find applicants willing to take a room in Marpat Hall, except for those who absolutely wanted to save money.

Before a decision on the necessary improvements was reached, the house at 1837 R Street, next to the Van Slyck building, was put on the market, a house that ISH had

seriously considered buying twice before, in the 60s and in the 70s. President Philip White suggested trying to sell Marpat Hall and buying 1837 R Street instead, which would give ISH three adjoining buildings. In spite of his year-long efforts, however, neither the purchase of 1837 R Street nor the sale of Marpat Hall proved feasible.

Consequently, in June 1992, the Board voted to go ahead with the renovation of Marpat Hall. A Riggs Place Renovation Committee, chaired by Captain “Buzz” Pearson, reviewed designs and cost estimates from three contractors. While we were discussing the bids submitted by the contractors, Buzz declared, seemingly out of the blue: “Everybody knows that for good construction work you need a check or a pole.” For a moment, I was totally puzzled: a check for sure, and a large one at that, but a pole instead of a scaffolding? I could already visualize workers clambering up and down a pole! The light dawned on me when Buzz went on to propose that, among the contractors, we select the one

who was an immigrant from Poland. A Czech or a Pole.

The proposal selected had a cost estimate of \$199,600 and was scheduled to start in early January 1993. It would take 3 months, one floor at a time, so the other two floors could continue to be occupied in rotation. The work actually started one month late and took approximately 6 weeks per floor. The dust and the noise every weekday from 7 A.M. to 3 P.M. tested the patience of the



*A chat in the garden*

remaining residents, but they were rewarded with significantly improved quarters, including totally new bathrooms and

separate access to each room. The work was completed by the end of June at a final cost of \$237,600. A special appeal for that purpose had raised only two-thirds of the amount needed, and ISH renegotiated its loan with Riggs Bank to pay off the balance.

In the meantime, the idea of enlarging or adding to the dining room, shelved during the 1987 renovation, became a topic of discussion again. Plans for a glass enclosure behind the dining room, at a cost estimate of \$26,000, were approved by the Board. Unfortunately, the DC Historic Preservation Commission vetoed the granting of a building permit, even though the change would not be visible from outside the garden. Instead, Jim Noonan, resident manager, with his wife Fran, built a small patio on the same spot with space for a couple of tables.

## Progress in Programs

In 1992, an Embassy Liaison Committee was established to improve and expand relations with the different embassies, at a time when an ISH alumnus from the early 70s, Juan Aguirre, was the Ambassador of Paraguay in Washington. Under the dynamic leadership of former Board President Herb Schmitz, regular meetings were organized at the House between educational attachés of different embassies, and they established their own committee under the chairmanship of Gudrun Luecke-Hogaust, the enthusiastic representative from the German Embassy. These meetings soon led to a hitherto unheard of collaboration between several embassies: the embassies of Germany, Japan, and Russia offered ISH residents and Board members several joint cultural and artistic programs of the highest caliber. Individual embassies also began to invite ISH resi-



dents to cultural programs at the embassies or to offer performances at the House by some of their visiting musical and artistic groups. The spirit of cooperation was boosted by the fact that ISH was able to house interns working at different embassies. The participation of ISH in many cultural events organized by embassies was to become a regular feature of the overall ISH program.

## Looking Toward the Year 2000

In early 1994, the Board and I had agreed that I would retire by the end of March 1995. I suggested that the entire organization and policies of ISH be reviewed and the future course of ISH be mapped out before the search for a new director would start. President China Jessup established an ISH 2000 Committee with Jerry Scoutt as chairman. After several months of intensive meetings, the committee's report was approved in May 1994 as the master plan for the future course of ISH. The report did not propose any radical changes but did call for a rejuvenation of the Board and for more Board involvement with the residents. It recommended that the Executive Director's task be divided in the future between two people, an administrative "inside" director and a fund raising "outside" director, but this division eventually proved undesirable and too costly.

At the same time, China Jessup encouraged former President Phil White to undertake the huge task of codifying all the policies

and regulations concerning the three components of ISH, Board, staff, and residents. The only governing documents at that time consisted of the by-laws, the Board Committee descriptions, the job descriptions



for the staff, and the students' brochures and instructions. Many of the long-standing regulations were consigned to the institutional memory and had never been made a matter of record. The efforts of Phil White and his committee produced an ISH Manual, which unified and consolidated the full range of the governing and administrative traditions of ISH. In conjunction with the ISH 2000 policy document, it described the practical procedures for carrying out these policies.

Thus, when I retired on March 31, 1995, the International Student House, after almost 60 years of existence, was headed toward a sounder and more organized future than ever before.





*Christmas caroling*



*Tea in the Great Hall*



*Summer hospitality of Mrs. Ella De Burling*



## FROM FORMAL ELEGANCE TO RELAXED INFORMALITY

### Chapter Eight

*In its ornate Tudor setting and in a period of formal events and strict dress codes, ISH developed many elegant traditions early in its history. As times changed, however, those traditions gave way to a more relaxed and informal atmosphere. Here are three illustrations of this evolution.*

#### Sunday 4 O'clock Tea

The Sunday Tea has remained the one unbroken tradition going back all the way to 1936, but earlier residents attending a Sunday tea now can be forgiven for concluding that it is not the same tradition. Originally tea was served at 4 o'clock on both Saturdays and Sundays, but only the Sunday Tea has continued uninterrupted. Until the early 80s, it was a dress-up affair, served in the Great Hall, or in the garden in summer, from elegant tea urns by Board member hostesses. It attracted as many as 150 or more students and visitors and was often followed by a program of speakers or entertainment. Because of the large attendance, the staff in 1967 requested and received an allocation of \$100 "for reserve cookies over and above those contributed by the hostesses." Later, the attendance gradually decreased, but it remained a formal affair as long as Board member Gladys Scott Roberts was the firm and intrepid chairman of the Sunday Tea Committee. She was untiring in calling for "tea ladies" for every Sunday and most times showing up herself to supervise them. Nobody could replace her, and after she died in early 1985, the staff gradually took over from the hostesses. Soon it became routine for the House to prepare and serve the tea on Sundays.

Without outside hostesses, the event soon took on a more informal style. After a while it appeared preferable to serve tea in the dining room in a less formal setting and less of a burden for the kitchen. The number of visitors or friends from outside slowly dwindled, and in the end, it evolved into a simple Sunday afternoon snack time for the residents, with the exception of special occasions like the Valentine's Tea and the Christmas Tea. Yet alumni and friends may still show up any Sunday and find conversation with residents and other visitors around a cup of tea and cookies.

#### Sit-down Dinner

Serving dinner family-style every day in a rather formal style had been a long tradition. A 1963 directive specifies that "girls are not to wear slacks for dinner, and on Sundays and special days, boys should wear coats and ties." At the appointed time, the residents would gather in front of the dining room and wait for the chimes to announce that the food was ready on the tables. Nobody sat down until after a moment of silence, a Quaker tradition, signaled by the tapping of a glass. A Japanese alumnus still remembered it 15 years later in these words: "Your little bell is ringing right now while I am reading your newsletter, and every resident's meditation

before your delicious dishes and many conversations among many nationalities." New residents were introduced at dinner the very day they arrived, and there were almost daily announcements. At each table, students waited until all had finished eating, quite a test of patience when one of them had arrived late, was a slow eater or a loquacious talker, or, as in many cases, all of the above. The clearing of the tables was regulated almost in a military manner:

*"For clearing tables, not more than two people should leave the table: One takes all serving dishes to the pantry, and one scrapes the plates at the serving cart, NOT at the table. When the table is completely cleared, one of these people should bring the dessert."* (1963 regulations). A later regulation would request that the table be cleared by *"the person seated at the south or west end of the table"* and the dessert brought in by the *"person seated at the north or east end of the table,"* and that apparently without a compass. Coffee was

By the mid-70s, the students' busy schedules made them reluctant to sit around waiting for everyone to finish and to spend another 15 minutes in the Great Hall for coffee and dessert. As a first step to loosen the old tradition, coffee and dessert began to be served in the dining room, and students could leave as soon as they finished. Later, because of problems with staffing the kitchen on weekends, the staff decided to serve Saturday dinner cafeteria-style, to the delight of the socially active residents. The cafeteria-style was extended to the Friday dinner some time later.

In 1988, the addition of Marpat Hall increased the number of residents from 60 to 90, and the dining room could no longer accommodate all the residents at one time. Since then, dinner has been served cafeteria-style every day, with the exception of Sunday noon dinner, when generally enough residents are absent to provide adequate seating for everyone else, and for special evenings such as the international dinners, when additional tables are squeezed in to make space for everybody.

## Thanksgiving Celebration

For Thanksgiving Day, some residents go home or spend the day with friends. Many of the others gratefully accept Mrs. Ella Poe Burling's invitation to spend the day at her Rich Neck Manor estate in Maryland. The Thanksgiving celebration at the House, therefore, has traditionally been held the weekend before. Until the late 80s, it was a very formal and elegant affair held in the Great Hall on the Saturday evening. Residents dressed up, some Board mem-



served afterwards in the Great Hall, and it became customary for a while to have the dessert in the Great Hall as well.



bers and other guests were invited, and the first turkey was ceremoniously carved in everyone's presence by a paterfamilias, a role played for many years by Anthony Gould. The leisurely and multi-course dinner, with a fire blazing in the fireplace, was followed by a program prepared by American residents to explain the origin and meaning of Thanksgiving – sometimes in a serious manner, often in a humorous and even irreverent way.

Such an event, unavoidably, was very labor intensive and involved a great deal of moving tables, chairs, china and cutlery upstairs, not to mention bringing up all the food from the kitchen. It became harder and harder to find kitchen staff willing to put in such long hours on a weekend evening. In the late 80s, to relieve the burden on the kitchen, the dinner was moved to the dining room; only the refreshments before and the program afterwards were still held in the Great Hall. In spite of the change of locale, the dinner remained for many more years a very elegant celebration. Little by little, however, it started losing much of its formality. Perhaps the low point occurred when a new staff member joined the others for the Thanksgiving dinner straight from her daily jogging and still in her running clothes. It was only a matter of time before the celebration was further simplified by canceling the special

Saturday evening dinner and replacing it with a Thanksgiving menu at the regular Sunday dinner.

These are but a few examples of the many traditions that, like society at large, have evolved and been simplified over the years. Those who remember the old times may mourn the disappearance of the elegant and formal events. But



*Gladys Scott Roberts, left; James Wilson, right*

the change has been one of style rather than of substance, as many visiting alumni have attested. The same friendly, open, convivial atmosphere reigns among the present residents, and the “in-depth experience in international living” flourishes in the relaxed informality of today just as well as in the formal elegance of yesterday.



*Annabelle's  
40<sup>th</sup> year of  
service at 15H*



*Kitchen staff, 1989*



*Door lock in the Great Hall*



## GHOSTS

### Chapter Nine

*Tales of tragedy: Hidden closets, door that leads nowhere, concealed cellar, secret safe, human hand buried in the soil, visions of ghosts...*

*The house at 1825 R Street is full of riddles and secrets. The paneling in the dining room conceals, not too well any more after 80 years of use, a walk-in silver safe. A trap door in a supply closet leads to a former wine cellar. In the previous master bedroom on the fourth floor, which is now a quadruple room, a small jewelry safe is hidden behind one of the panels, and another larger panel gives access to a small closet. Most intriguing is the secret door in the Great Hall, an exact replica down to the keyhole of the actual entrance door in the same wall, but not opening up or leading anywhere.*

Tales of real and alleged tragedies have added a spooky ambience. According to a rumor, the young daughter of the original owners, Mr. and Mrs. Henri Meserve, fell to her death from the Great Hall balcony on the night of the house-warming party, prompting her parents to leave the house forever. The facts, unfortunately, do not support this rumor. It is true that the Meserves had one daughter, Jean, from Mrs. Meserve's first marriage, whom Mr. Meserve had legally adopted. But she could not have died in childhood, since in 1947 she visited the House with her husband, Nicholas de Basily. There is no record or evidence of another Meserve child. Yet the sadly touching tale of little Miss Meserve has persisted and been handed down from one group of residents to the next. Poor little Miss Meserve: she has fallen off the balcony, or down the stairs in other versions, in tales so often told and retold that

she has become the prime source of ghost stories at ISH.

The death of the ghost's presumptive mother, Mrs. Meserve, is a different story. Henri Meserve had married her in London in 1902, and when his business called him back to the United States, he allegedly promised to build her an English mansion in Washington. Unfortunately she passed away in 1919. One would expect her, especially being English, to haunt the house built for her and where she had lived so briefly, but, to my knowledge, no apparitions have ever been sighted.

There are other authentic stories. The year after ISH had moved into the house, one of the musicians who had played at the 1948 New Year's Eve dance collapsed on the way down the stairs from the Great Hall and died shortly afterwards. Annabelle Neal,

who since 1954 has arrived at the house every morning at 5:30 A.M. to prepare breakfast, claims that she has seen more than once a man dressed in a white suit slowly walking down those stairs.

More recently, in the early 90s, a new resident reported that an old woman of gentle demeanor



*Board member Marion Sanger serving tea*

appeared in her room at night several times. When she described the apparition to our in-house expert, Annabelle did not hesitate one moment. *"That's Mrs. Maner,"* she exclaimed, *"I often see her in the pantry in the morning."* Jean-Ellen Maner had been the House Manager and Assistant Director from 1972 to 1979 and had died unexpectedly in her sleep six months after retiring.

In the 60s and 70s, the night-man, Chico, repeatedly reported that he had heard wailing and dragging of chains in the basement during the night and was too scared to go investigate. Unlike Annabelle, however, he was known to take a nip from the bottle and a nap in a chair while on night watch, and the ghosts provided a good excuse for his work being only half done in the morning.

Other events contributed to the ghost ambience at ISH. Director Hugh Jenkins remembers that a desiccated human hand was found buried in the soil when the volleyball court, where the Van Slyck Building now stands, was resurfaced in the 50s. The troubling enigma was resolved when a former medical student resident nonchalantly disclosed that, while packing to move out, he had thrown out the window some old "materials" from his first-year anatomy class.

In the 80s, a rounded marble slab was found buried in the garden. Some students put it upright in the ground, making it look like a tombstone. Residents started wondering later who was buried under there. Old photographs of the garden, however, show a marble bench of which the alleged tombstone appears to be a broken piece.

As for the extra door in the Great Hall, pragmatic people will see only a symmetry intended by the architect. Those with a more vivid imagination see a secret entrance to another world, like the looking-glass in *Alice in Wonderland*.

*"Chacun à son goût!"* There is enough evidence for believers and unbelievers alike. But one must admit, a house like 1825 R Street would not seem genuine if it could not claim its own ghosts.





*Middle East night*

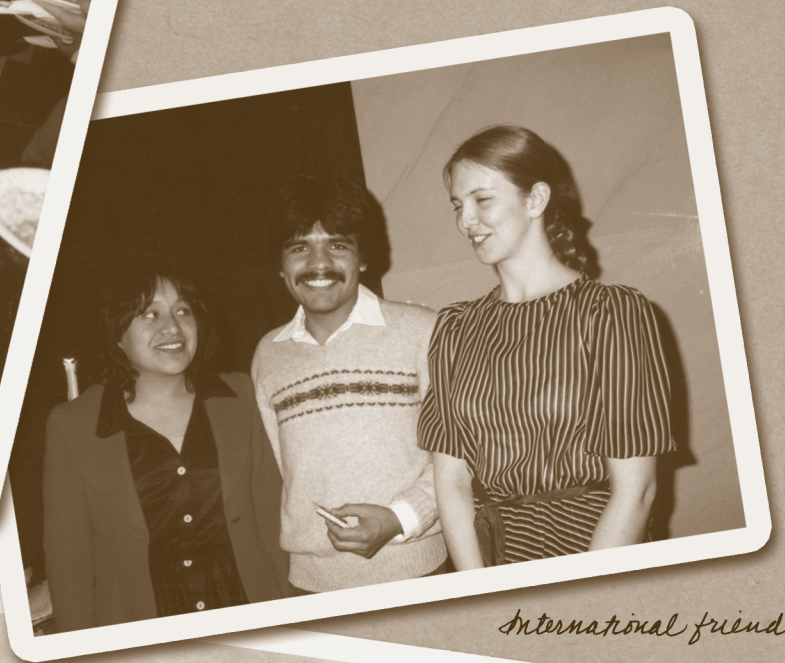


*Japanese Taiko drummers*





*Thanksgiving table  
at Mrs. Burling's house  
at Rich Neck Manor*



*International friends*



*Along the beach at Rich Neck Manor*



## PERSONAL MEMORIES

### Chapter Ten

#### *We Are the World - 1985*

*After a talent show, all of us form a large circle, hand in hand, in the Great Hall, singing “We are the world, we are the people” and swinging to the music. The mood is serious, there is an intense feeling of solidarity and brotherhood. Everyone is very much aware that a few among us will soon return to a home where there is no freedom and no equality. Here at ISH, we are indeed the world in all its diversity, we are the future with its promise of peace. Here we are brothers and sisters, we do not even notice color or origin any more. Only after leaving ISH and finding ourselves back in our old homogeneous environment does the absence of diversity strike us: “It was so strange when I got back home to Japan,” writes an alumna; “everybody here is Japanese!”*

#### **An Alumnus from Laos—1982**

A letter arrives from Laos: an alumnus from 1962-63 has spent the last 7 years in a “re-education camp,” but has been able to smuggle out some letters. He remembers not only the correct address of ISH, but also the countries of his roommates and the names of people who helped him. He appeals for medicine, clothing, and moral support. We try to send help through the American Friends Service Committee’s “Indochina Project” and Mennonite organizations.

A year and a half later, a letter from Chicago: he escaped from the camp, fled across the Mekong River on a tiny raft and, after months of delay in Thailand and Germany, has finally arrived in the USA. He gratefully remembers Annabelle: “*The first time we had pancakes for breakfast, the kind*

*lady advised me to take two instead of four. She was right: two pancakes were more than enough.*”

#### **Thanksgiving at Mrs. Burling's**

Year after year, on Thanksgiving Day, a packed bus carrying as many as 50 people pulls up at Rich Neck Manor in Claiborne, Maryland. Mrs. Burling and other Board members welcome everyone personally. Inside, drinks and snacks are ready. An invigorating walk follows on the long stretch of narrow beach; some collect horseshoe crab shells or pieces of driftwood. Back at the house, a feast of Thanksgiving food awaits. With plates heaped up high, everybody sits wherever there is space, the lucky ones around the fireplace. Afterwards, a vigorous game of soccer gives the brave ones a healthy workout, while others watch or remain inside

reading. As it gets dark, we all board the bus for a sleepy or a singing return home. "This was the best day since I arrived in Washington," many have said. Many years later, alumni still remember Thanksgiving Day at Mrs. Burling's.<sup>10</sup>

## An Apache Love Song - 1988

Thanksgiving dinner at the House: several alumni recounting their ISH experiences to the residents. Willem de Reuse tells about his studying American-Indian cultures and practicing Indian songs in his room, particularly one Apache love song. His neighbor, Pat Fuke, does not seem to



mind, in fact he asks Willem to teach him that song. Weeks later, Pat is killed in a hit-and-run accident while jogging in Rock Creek Park. Now Willem sings the haunting Apache love song in tribute to Pat, in hushed silence and then heartfelt applause.

## An Alumnus from Haiti - 1995

A 1948-49 alumnus from Haiti shows up for his first visit in 46 years. I show him the dining room, the Great Hall, and the library, and introduce him to a couple of

residents. On his way out he says: *"I knew there was still a part of me in this house, but when I walked in the door, I was not sure whether I would still find it. Now I know: it is still here. You may not see it, but part of my heart is still here."*

## "If Only the Nations of the World Could Learn to Live Together as We Did at ISH!"

One evening at the daily sit-down dinner, no staff members are present to introduce a newly arrived resident from Turkey. The next morning, Nikos from Greece tells me: "I took it upon myself last night at dinner to introduce our new friend from Turkey. I hope that was OK." Could anyone have made a more significant introduction than Nikos?

A Korean and a Japanese find out they are taking the same courses. They begin to discuss their classes, and soon they become inseparable friends. At the end of the year, they promise to visit each other in their respective countries.

A Pakistani student comes to apply, and as I show him around the house we run into an Indian resident. I introduce them to each other and leave them to themselves. Half an hour later, the Pakistani, back in my office, declares: "My friend from India has persuaded me to come and live here."

"So long," says a small Nepalese student, looking up at his tall American roommate, as they say goodbye. "So short," counters the American, bending down for a final hug. They have become very close friends. Now they laugh loudly to conceal their emotions as they go their separate ways.

A German Ph.D. candidate reluctantly accepts the only vacancy, in a double room



with a Korean roommate, waiting for a single room to become available. Some time later he no longer wants the single room that has opened up, he wants to stay with his roommate. After returning home, he writes: *"Sharing a room with Kim has been the most unexpected benefit from my stay at ISH. Having traveled to many countries, I had thought of myself as an internationalist. My long talks with my roommate about Korea have made me aware of how limited my horizon had been. Kim and I have become real friends and will visit each other. I would suggest that all residents stay in a double room, at least for some time."*

## Christmas Eve Dinner - Every Year

On Christmas Day, ISH is totally quiet and almost empty. The few residents who remain at the House are invited for dinner by Board members. One year, Pam Mixer invited thirteen of them. Christmas Eve is when a special in-house celebration is held. After refreshments in the Great Hall, residents and staff, and whatever family or guests may be present, sit down around a few tables in the dining room to enjoy a special menu, usually filet mignon. Dessert is a large *Bûche de Noël*, courtesy of Mrs. Chase. After dinner, Santa Claus appears and distributes presents to all the students, Marion Sanger has done his shopping for him, ever since the 60s. Great surprise and true joy! Most residents staying behind at ISH are not from Christian countries, but the small presents give them a taste of the Christmas spirit.

## There Is No End to Learning

In my first year at ISH, I am told that one student shows up at breakfast in his pajamas. When I get a chance to talk to him privately, I carefully explain that pajamas are not habitually worn in the House, not even at breakfast. "Sir," he responds proud-

ly, *"this is what I wear in my country, Pakistan, in my house and outside."* Embarrassment, apologies, but I have much more to learn.

I introduce a student from Czechoslovakia as a Czech, and instantly learn that Slovaks do not want to be identified as Czechs, even when they still shared the country of Czechoslovakia. At dinner, I am puzzled when I ask a Japanese resident:

*"Don't you*



*want any dessert?"*

and she answers "Yes" but then embarrassedly refuses the dessert I offer her. I learn that in many cultures "yes" means "that's right," and she meant: *"That's right, I don't want any."* I learn not to look surprised when a student loudly belches at the dinner table, because in his country it is an expression of appreciation for the food. When an African resident approaches me with a request, he walks up too close for

my comfort, so I back up. He moves up, and I back up again, and he moves up again, until I am stuck against the counter. Then I remember that in Africa and many other parts of the world, the “personal space” that people need for comfort is much smaller than for Westerners.

And I learn again and again that young people from all over the world can be wonderful, warm, generous and tolerant, and that sometimes two people from opposite poles of the earth fall in love with each other.

## A Remarkable Wedding

A young woman tells me confidentially that she and a recent alumnus have become engaged and plan to be married at the end of her studies. She asks if they could have the wedding in the Great Hall. “Of course,” I say. The two come from the most dissimilar cultures possible. She has not told

her family yet, is not sure how her parents will react, and is afraid they may not want to attend the wedding. “If my parents do not come, will you act as my father at the wedding?” she asks me, “you are like a second father to me.” I am deeply touched, but I hope for her sake that her parents will come. And they do, six months later, as do the parents of the young man. At the reception after the wedding, I watch the two sets of parents who have not met before. Will they restrict their contact to polite formalities? I see them walk towards each other and extend uneasy greetings. But then the two fathers go sit down together on a sofa, while the two mothers find another place to huddle. They communicate in halting English, their only common language. Later, when they leave, the two mothers embrace. What a portent for that marriage! What a portent for global understanding!



*Concert in the Great Hall*





*Music practice in the Great Hall*

#### Footnote

10. Many others deserve recognition for inviting students to their homes year after year for picnics, tennis and swimming: Mr. and Mrs. William Breese in Accokeek, starting in 1948; Mr. and Mrs. Buel Trowbridge in Arlington; Mr. and Mrs. Austin Kiplinger in Poolesville; Emily Gardiner in Great Falls; Marion Sanger, Jerrold Scoutt, and Perry Sellon, all in Bethesda, Herb and Joyce Schmitz at their summer house in Berkeley Springs, West Virginia, and, in winter, Betty Cooke for a walk through the woods and hot spiced tea afterwards.



Board members  
 Front: China Jessup,  
 Marion Sanger,  
 Ella Busling,  
 Nancy Buschmeyer  
 Back row:  
 Anne Boardman,  
 Carmel Gestile,  
 Helen Smith,  
 Philip White,  
 Leah Chase



Richard England



Present Executive Director  
 Richard Colkins, Paul Feys



## CONCLUSION

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*The longest and most cherished chapter in my professional life came to a close when I retired at the end of March 1995. My contribution to the history of ISH must also end there.*

After months of being immersed in all the ISH records, my principal and lasting impression is of the vast number of people who have made it the truly unique place it has been since 1936, and it makes me humbly aware of the small and imperfect role any single one of us has played. Besides the few people who are mentioned here by name, there are countless others who have played significant roles. ISH is a collective product of profound reflection, unselfish efforts, and magnanimous generosity on the part of innumerable Board members, staff members, and contributors. We must include here the thousands of students who have lived at ISH since 1936, so many of whom have not only enjoyed their stay at ISH but have also contributed to making it a better place to live. We have all gained from our association with ISH.

Residents have experienced ISH as a welcoming home, an immediate family in an unfamiliar city. “I am ISH-sick more than homesick” wrote an Egyptian student from a university out West after his first few months at ISH. Because I cannot quote the hundreds of similar expressions I want to conclude with one written by Jack McAndrew, a high-school teacher, who spent a sabbatical year at ISH in 1979-80 while working for the US Senate.

*“During the summer, I had the opportunity to reflect on my stay at the International Student House. My internship at the U.S. Senate was a unique experience. However, the most meaningful aspect of my one-year leave was the opportunity to be a resident at ISH. The stimulating discussions, the chance to re-examine many of my beliefs, being exposed to the intellectual inquisitiveness of the residents and participating in the family atmosphere of the House far exceeded my hopes of what to expect when I first arrived at 1825 R Street in September 1979.*

*I was impressed by the civility and caring of all the residents and staff for the well being of the total body, their willingness to share responsibilities. Even in these troubled times I have been optimistic that mankind will peacefully meet the challenges of the 20th century, but my faith in mankind was certainly rekindled by my ten-month stay at ISH.*

*I will always cherish my stay at ISH! The many friends I made, the interesting people I met and the good times will long be remembered, and the realization that we can live in harmony will never be forgotten.”*

I too will always cherish my time at ISH.

## APPENDIX

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### EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS OF ISH SINCE 1936

1936-1946: Grace (Mrs. Alfred) Lowry.  
She took a leave of absence  
in 1943-1944 to work with a  
Quaker relief operation in  
France during World War II.  
During that time, Edith T.  
Maul was the Acting

Director.

1946-1950: Leslie and Valerie Johnston

1951-1956: Hugh and Juanita Jenkins

1956-1957: Percy H. and Helen Baker

1957-1960: Tom and Anne Moore

1960-1967: Frances (Mrs. Howard)  
Becker

1967-1968: Miss Joan Bouchier

1968-1972: John and June Yungblut

1972-1995: Paul Feys

1995- Richard Calkins

### PRESIDENTS OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS SINCE 1962

June 1963-May 1965: DeForest Van Slyck

May 1965-May 1968: John Hammond

May 1968-May 1971: Peter G. Powers

May 1971-May 1974: Dr. William Crocker

May 1974-May 1976: Peggy D. (Mrs.  
Jacob) Beam

May 1976-May 1979: Jerrold Scoutt, Jr.

May 1979-May 1981: Herbert K. Schmitz

May 1981-May 1984: James M. Wilson, Jr.

May 1984-Oct.1987: George S.  
Springsteen, Jr.

Oct. 1987-Oct.1990: Jane (Mrs. Parker T.)  
Hart

Oct. 1990-Feb.1993: Dr. Philip C. White

Feb. 1993-Feb.1995: China (Mrs. Peter)  
Jessup

Feb. 1995-Feb. 1998: Robert Patterson

Feb. 1998-Feb. 2001: George Springsteen

Feb. 2001- Andrea Tebbets



## AFTERWORD

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*In the few years since the retirement of Paul Feys the International Student House has changed principally in technology. It is now fully computerized. It has high speed internet access and has ten individual work stations. It also has a web site which is interactive, and a chat room for alumni for updating and exchange of addresses. Contrast this with most of the 65 years of correspondence by post; a student inquiry arrived, Paul responded with an application, which took some days to arrive. Application was posted back, then a mailed response from ISH as to acceptance, the total correspondence taking two or three weeks, often more.*

*Residents now all have computer access for their academic work and for constant accessibility to home. It is a different world in this technical sense, but at ISH the ambiance, the personal experiences of living with scholars of many nations is the same and as unique as ever. The unforgettable exchanges and friendships, and the life-altering new understandings attained continue, new with each season's new arrivals at 1825 R Street.*

*The International Student House expresses with affection its gratitude to DeForest Van Slyck for his years of wise and generous service and his vision for the future of The House.*

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*Paul Feys was born in 1926 in Ostend, Belgium. He studied theology in Louvain and earned an MA in philosophy at the Gregorian University in Rome. As a member of the Missionaries of Africa, he became a teacher and later a director in schools for the training of missionaries in Belgium and in England, and for the education of African priests in Rwanda and in Tanzania. He came to the United States in late 1969 and taught Latin at Sidwell Friends School in Washington, DC. In July of 1972 he became the director of the International Student House and served in that capacity until March of 1995. His wife Elsbeth is German-born, and they have two children, Cara and George. For many years the whole family participated in the life of the International Student House on Sundays and at special dinners and activities; and as the children grew up the House became their second home.*

