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United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

NATIONAL REGISTER

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name City Tavern other names/site number Semmes' Tavern, Indian King, Columbian Inn, Georgetown Hotel

2. Location

street & number 3206 M Street, N.W. not for publication N.A. city, town Washington vicinity N.A. state District of Columbia code DC county N.A. code 001 zip code 20007

3. Classification

Table with 3 columns: Ownership of Property, Category of Property, and Number of Resources within Property. Includes sub-rows for Contributing and Noncontributing resources.

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet. Signature of certifying official State Historic Preservation Officer Date 29 August 1991

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet. Signature of commenting or other official Date State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is: entered in the National Register. determined eligible for the National Register. determined not eligible for the National Register. removed from the National Register. other. (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

**6. Function or Use**

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)  
COMMERCE/TRADE: tavern  
HOTEL: inn

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)  
SOCIAL: clubhouse

**7. Description**

Architectural Classification  
(enter categories from instructions)  
EARLY REPUBLIC: Federal

Materials (enter categories from instructions)  
foundation N.A.  
walls brick  
roof cement shingles  
other N.A.

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

**SUMMARY DESCRIPTION**

The City Tavern is a five-bay, 3-1/2 story brick building that faces north onto M Street, N.W. in Georgetown. The simple Georgian building rests on a raised basement and is surmounted by a side gable roof. In plan, it forms an ell-shaped complex that also includes a 2-1/2 story brick stable that faces east toward Wisconsin Avenue. Significant alterations to the property include exposure of the basement when the level of M Street was lowered in the 1870s and the meticulous restoration of the building in 1961. Both of these changes are typical of alterations to late 18th and early 19th century buildings in Georgetown. The essential form of the building and a significant portion of its interior configuration and fabric remain.

**ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION**

The City Tavern property consists of the tavern building facing M Street and its associated stable facing Wisconsin Avenue. Originally an arched carriage way, now infilled with the westernmost bay of the tavern, opened into a stable yard between the tavern and stable. The stable yard, formerly occupied by a one-story warehouse addition, is now completely infilled with a new one-story addition housing a ballroom/dining room that connects the stable and the tavern.

The basic exterior form of the City Tavern with its elongated vertical proportions, side gable roof, rear dormers, interior end chimneys, and Georgian detailing remains intact. Brickwork provides the decorative interest of the front facade which is laid in Flemish bond; beltcourses between stories are detailed with two rows of stretchers. Window openings in the basement are topped with brick segmental arches; openings on the upper floors with brick jack arches. Basement windows feature single lights; upper floor windows display nine-over-nine and six-over-six sash. As part of the 1960 restoration, a recessed round arched entrance was constructed at the west end of the facade at the location of the former carriage way. The roof is cement shingles above a simple wood cornice. The appearance of the upper 2-1/2 stories of the rear of the building, which is divided into four bays, is largely unchanged.

The interior of the building has been adapted for use as a private club with minimal effect on the surviving historic fabric of the building. Because the wider, westernmost bay was originally a nine foot wide lot subsequently infilled with the carriageway and other additions to the original building, new features like the elevator, restrooms, fire stair, and offices were placed within this bay. A mezzanine

**8. Statement of Significance**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally  statewide  locally

Applicable National Register Criteria  A  B  C  D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions)  A  B  C  D  E  F  G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE  
POLITICS/GOVERNMENT  
ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION  
ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1796-1875

Significant Dates

1796

Cultural Affiliation

N.A.

Significant Person N/A

Architect/Builder

Peter, Walter, Jr. - restoration architect

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

**STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

The City Tavern, constructed in 1795-1796, is a rare surviving example of a federal period tavern building in Washington. From 1796 through the mid-19th century, the building provided a focus for community activity in Georgetown serving as a site of community meetings, business functions, and transportation. The City Tavern meets National Register Criterion A because of its association with the community life of Georgetown; it meets Criterion C because it embodies the basic form and elements of tavern buildings of the period. The City Tavern has undergone three major alterations including the filling in of the original carriage way after the Civil War, exposure of the basement portion of the building when M Street was lowered in the 1870s, and a major restoration of the property in 1961. Because the first two changes are common for Georgetown buildings and the latter was based on extensive documentation, none of the changes have affected the overall form and integrity of the building.

**HISTORIC CONTEXT**

The City Tavern is one of the few remaining tavern structures in the District of Columbia. In the late 18th and early 19th century, taverns played an important role in urban life, furnishing the setting for commercial and social interaction. In addition to providing provisions and lodging, these buildings housed political meetings and social gatherings and often served as stage and mail stops. In 1796 there were 15 taverns in Georgetown (Holmes, "The City Tavern," p. 1) and several more in the newer and less developed District of Columbia (Bryan, p. 79). The City Tavern is now one of the few structures of this type in the District that is still extant.

The survival of the City Tavern is especially significant in view of the physical history of taverns as a property type. Tavern structures are particularly vulnerable to demolition and major alterations over time. By the middle of the 19th century urban taverns had become functionally obsolete, replaced by boardinghouses and hotels. While buildings survived, their prime commercial siting placed a premium on location, rather than facility, resulting in extensive alterations as new uses were accommodated.

See continuation sheet

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

Apr 29 1991

Please see Continuation Sheet

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # DC-81
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

See continuation sheet

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreeage of property less than one acre

**UTM References**

A 

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3	2	1	0	8	0
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4	3	0	8	0	3	0
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Zone      Easting      Northing

B 

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Zone      Easting      Northing

C 

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D 

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See continuation sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description**

Square 1200, lots 826, 838, and 839 in Washington, D.C.

See continuation sheet

**Boundary Justification**

The property occupies Lots 826, 838, and 839 of Square 1200 within the District of Columbia, which has been historically associated with the subject property.

See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Betty Bird, compiler date May 15, 1991

organization \_\_\_\_\_ telephone 202-463-2033

street & number 2025 Eye Street, N.W., Suite 801 city or town Washington state D.C. zip code 20006

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within this bay between the basement and first floor provided the floor level adjustment for the present grade of the street. Thus the interior configuration of the oldest interior portion of the building, housed within the four eastern bays, is largely intact.

The original first floor of the building had been largely obliterated by storefront uses in the late 19th and early 20th century. The present first floor is new, accommodating the level change required for access from the new grade at M Street. A large dining room/ballroom is located in a new addition opening off the rear of the original building. The distinction between original and new areas of the original structure is maintained by a level change between the dining room and the rest of the first floor. The basement, second and third floors, as well as the attic, are more intact. The second floor, site of the most significant uses associated with the City Tavern, is comprised of the "Long Room" extending across the front of the building, a smaller withdrawing room occupying the eastern half of the original structure, and the original dog-leg stair within the western half of the rear of the building. The "Roof Terrace Room," located within the second floor of the new rear addition, opens off of the withdrawing room. The exposed brick rear wall of the second floor has been preserved in place and now forms the north wall of the Roof Terrace Room. A terrace to the south of this room is enclosed on the east by the upper wall and gable of the west facade of the stable building. Two chambers are located across the front of the 3rd floor, with a third chamber occupying the southeast corner east of the stair. The attic story consists of two similar, dormered rooms to either side of the stair.

The level of finish and approach to the restoration of the City Tavern represents the best of professional preservation philosophy of its time. The building was restored to its earliest period, with original fabric preserved, new fabric replicating older material and additions meticulously detailed in the period of the original. The original brick floor, fireplaces, and hearth were retained in the basement which was adapted for reuse as a taproom, maintaining the rugged, utilitarian character of the original space. Shouldered architrave moulding and six-panel doors are used throughout the building above the basement. Both the doors and the moulding were carefully replicated from existing fabric that remained. Formal spaces on the second floor display an elaborate, scored chair rail original to the building. Like the doors and moulding, new fabric was carefully crafted to match the original. All of the rooms display simple plaster cornices duplicating the profile of elements of the cornices remaining at the time of the restoration. The dog-leg stair, which survived above the first floor, displays square balusters, dropped pendants, and ends with incised S-curves. The new stair below the second floor features more elaborate scroll brackets. Only the two mantels on the third floor are original to the building. These had been removed by previous owners and were reinstalled at the time of the restoration. The original mantels are simple, displaying shouldered architrave openings below entablatures with tripartite divisions. New mantels designed for the second floor repeat the shouldered architrave and entablature division of the original fabric with different detailing. The mantel in the Long Room features an

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elaborate, pedimented overmantel. The mantel in the Reception Room on the first floor was taken from another Georgetown house of the period. This mantel features carved eagles, rope molding, and incised decoration.

A smaller, secondary structure around the corner on Wisconsin Avenue is also associated with the property. This brick stable is 2-1/2 stories high surmounted by a front gable roof. Only the street facade is visible. This facade, which may have been reconstructed at the time of restoration, is detailed in Flemish bond brick. Openings and shape give this building its architectural character. A large stable opening below a segmental arch centers the first floor. This opening frames a diagonally-sheathed wood door. Three six-over-six windows light the second floor. An oculus with a louvred vent distinguishes the front gable. The inside of the building has been completely gutted for modern kitchen facilities and storage. Original framing is intact within the attic story, which can be accessed from the roof terrace of the City Tavern Building.

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For example, Tunnicliffe's Tavern on Capitol Hill was used as a beer hall; the City Tavern as a boardinghouse and electrical shop. Because continuous commercial use is typical of urban tavern buildings, few survive with the amount of interior fabric and integrity of plan remaining in the City Tavern.

The early history of the City Tavern is closely associated with the commercial and political life of Georgetown, an independent city until 1871. Along with the Union Tavern (1796) and the Columbian Inn (1799), both now gone, the City Tavern, constructed between February 1795 and December 1796, was representative of taverns serving the needs of the early republic (Holmes, "City Tavern," p. 4). The City Tavern housed the gamut of civic activity ranging from municipal meetings to dancing classes. Its pattern of use and ownership exemplifies the customary relationship between tavern proprietor and building owner and illustrates the importance of individual tavernkeepers to their establishments.

A 1798 notice describes the property as "a well built three story Brick House; ... a roomy and convenient Store House, now used for a stable, but originally built for and well-calculated for above-mentioned purpose, also a Granary, Kitchen, meat House & all of brick" (*Centinel of Liberty*, October 19, 1798 as quoted by Holmes, "City Tavern," p. 7). Deed records show that by 1799 the property included a lot occupied by a stable on Wisconsin Avenue. Clement Sewall was the tavern's first proprietor, occupying the building from 1796 to around 1799. During Sewall's occupancy, the tavern was closely associated not only with the governance of Georgetown but also with the construction of the first bridge across the Potomac at Little Falls and the first stage line supplementing the Baltimore-Alexandria line. The tavern, known as Sewall's Tavern and City Tavern, housed meetings of the Georgetown Corporation and Mayor's Court and was the site of the Georgetown Bridge Company's meetings. The first stagecoach between Georgetown and Frederick, Maryland originated at the tavern (Holmes, "City Tavern," pp. 5-7).

Charles McLaughlin served as proprietor from around July 1799 to around May 1801. While the Georgetown Corporation continued to meet at the Tavern, the most notable event was a banquet held on June 6, 1800 to honor President John Adams, who was inspecting the growth of the new capital. The *Centinel of Liberty* noted that "the utmost harmony and conviviality prevailed" (as quoted in Holmes, "City Tavern," p. 8).

Despite discontinuous occupancy, the period from 1801 to 1832 was dominated by the proprietorship of Joseph Semmes. After McLaughlin, Joseph Semmes kept the tavern from 1801 to 1805 and again from 1808 to 1812 and from 1822 to 1832, calling it the Indian King from 1801-1805 and the

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Columbian Inn from 1809-1812 and from 1822-1832. However, because Semmes had been keeping taverns in Georgetown since 1789, the tavern was often referred to as Semmes' Tavern. From 1805 to 1808 ownership of the property was in question and Semmes appears to have moved his establishment to locations with a clearer title.

In a pattern typical of major Georgetown taverns in the period prior to construction of the Long Bridge across the Potomac in 1809, Semmes cultivated the tavern as a stage stop, developing stage lines as well as running the tavern. In 1801 he established the first stage line from Georgetown to Port Tobacco, Maryland, extending the line to Leonardtown, Maryland later that year. By 1802 he was running a stage from Georgetown to Annapolis through Bladensburg and by 1804, a stage from Georgetown to Frederick. These latter two stage lines were developed as competitors to existing stage routes. After 1809, when stage lines crossed the bridge rather than using the Georgetown ferry, Georgetown stage traffic declined. Major stage lines did not come into Georgetown unless they were westward routes. Stage traffic received a further blow when the railroad from Baltimore to Washington opened in 1835 (Holmes, "City Tavern," pp. 15-16).

Augmented by a particularly fortuitous location, the tavern continued to serve as a focus of urban Georgetown life in the early decades of the 19th century. The Bank of Columbia, which was the first bank in the District of Columbia and on whose board of directors George Washington served, occupied the adjacent building until the bank moved around 1807. The bank building was then occupied by the Office of Indian Trade through the 1820s, after which the bank building housed the Mayor of Georgetown's offices and "Town Hall" until Georgetown became part of the District of Columbia in 1871 (Holmes, "City Tavern," pp. 20, 25-26). In 1801, the Collector of Tax used the City Tavern as his headquarters on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. The Georgetown Bridge Company continued to meet at the tavern, which also housed Bank of Columbia, Union Bank, and Georgetown Mutual Insurance Company stockholders' meetings. Although Semmes was Roman Catholic, his tavern was the site of at least one meeting to discuss the completion of the Protestant Episcopal Church (Holmes, "City Tavern," pp. 4-26). The tavern also housed dramatic performances, recitals, and "new collections of wax figures... [including] the late duel between Burr and Hamilton." Cotillions were held in "Mr. Semmes' Long Room" and notices of public auctions of land in Virginia, Maryland, and Kentucky at the tavern appeared in the newspapers. Its location continued to be a central factor in its importance (Holmes, "City Tavern," pp. 17 and 22).

From 1813 to 1822, Semmes moved his tavern to Water Street. During this hiatus, the City Tavern housed a boarding house run by Mary and Margaret Coolidge. Mr. Generes' Dancing School continued to hold classes in the building. The Long Room, more often referred to as the "Assembly

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Room" during this period, was the site of numerous cotillions and lectures. By late 1822 newspaper notices reveal that Semmes had returned to his former location and was accepting boarders. The tavern continued as a seat of commerce accommodating meetings of the Georgetown Potomac Bridge Company and the Falls Bridge Turnpike Company, which built the Georgetown Pike. Semmes' Tavern served as the point of embarkation for the elaborate ceremony attending the laying of the cornerstone for the Georgetown lock of the C & O Canal (Holmes, "City Tavern," pp. 26-28).

After Semmes' death in March 1832, two successive proprietors briefly operated the tavern. The Lang family then controlled the building from 1834 until the 1870s. George McCandless kept the tavern, then referred to as the "United States Hotel" to reflect changes in the terminology for temporary lodging, from 1832 until his death in June 1833. Owen Connelly followed him as proprietor of the U.S. Hotel through June 1834. By July 1834 Mrs. Eleanor Lang took over the tavern and renamed it the "Georgetown Hotel." The widow of John Lang, who ran an Oyster House in Georgetown until his death in 1820, Mrs. Lang bought the property in 1838 rather than rent it as previous tavernkeepers had done. In 1863 she bought the "Town House" west of the tavern, later connecting the nine foot space between the buildings above the carriageway. The tavern continued to serve the Georgetown community. Omnibuses connecting Georgetown and Washington left the Georgetown Tavern six times a day, replacing the stage traffic of an earlier era. Penmanship and French lessons were offered there and at one time a "Bowling Saloon" occupied the rear of Mrs. Lang's Hotel. John Lang assisted his mother in the business and became the proprietor upon her death around 1866. John Lang died in 1870 and the property was then run by Eleanor Lang's grandsons, John R. Lang and William Lang. Although City Directories show the Lang family's continued association with the hotel, by 1875 the hotel was listed as the "Morgan House" with Richard W. Morgan as the proprietor. The use of the building as a hotel ceased in 1898 (Holmes, "City Tavern," pp. 29-35). Between 1900 and 1960 the building housed an assortment of commercial uses including a grocery and fruit store, a paint supply store, an auto supply store, an antiques store, wholesale liquor store, and a printing firm (Elizabeth J. Miller, Draft D.C. Landmark Application for the City Tavern, p. 4). In 1960, the City Tavern Association purchased the building and restored it for use as a private club (Holmes, "City Tavern," p. 35).

While the 20th century commercial uses have resulted in significant alterations to the ground floor of the building, the upper floors remain largely intact. Because M Street was lowered in the late 19th century, these lower floor alterations, which are typical of those found in commercial buildings, had little effect on the primary public spaces associated with tavern and hotel use. The Hopkins Map and Sanborn Maps show that the tavern itself changed little from 1887 to 1956. The 1887 Hopkins Map, the earliest on which the property is depicted, shows a J-shaped property most likely comprised of the

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stable along Wisconsin, an ell to the rear of the tavern on the west, and a warehouse connecting the ell to the stable. The 1888 Sanborn, shows one large two-story brick addition at the rear of a 3-1/2 story building on the east. The addition adjoins a two-story brick structure facing Wisconsin Avenue. The entire property is denoted "Morgan House." The 1903 Sanborn Map more closely resembles the Hopkins Map with the stable, now labelled dwelling, connected to the 3-1/2 story building by a two story brick addition to the west. The 1928 and 1956 Sanborn Maps show the entire rear lot of the tavern building occupied by infill structure; in the 1928 map an "auto show r'm" is located in the tavern and a store in the stables. Historic American Buildings Survey photographs and reminiscences of the restoration reveal that the front of the City Tavern had been covered by pebble-dash stucco. Notes on architectural drawings also indicate that the stable had received a false front extending above the present gable. Nevertheless, the appearance of both the tavern and the stable, combined with map evidence, suggest that both buildings retain their earlier form. This contention is reinforced by the rafters of the stable which appear to date to the mid-19th century.

The 1960-1962 restoration was carefully undertaken and is an excellent example of the preservation philosophy of its day. After careful research determined the tavern's significance and that it served as the site of the banquet honoring President John Adams, the building was purchased for restoration. In 1959, the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) documented the structure prior to the restoration work with both photographs and data pages. The architectural firm of Macomber and Peter was retained with Walter Peter in charge of the work. Major changes required by the adaptive reuse were accommodated in the stable, courtyard, and footprint of the mid-19th century western addition. The building was restored to its original appearance with mid-19th century fabric altered or removed. Surviving ornament was replicated; original mantels that had been removed were returned, and a period mantel from another Georgetown building was installed. The first floor of the building, which had not been exposed until the 1870s, was detailed in the architectural style and materials of the original facade above. Because of this careful restoration, the City Tavern continues to convey its associations with the history of Georgetown and still serves as an excellent example of this important property type.

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NOTES FOR PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE

The property is located within Georgetown and represents a significant element of that community's early development. At the founding of the Nation's Capital, Georgetown was a distinct tidewater town, like Alexandria, Virginia, with its own well established identity and separate government. Georgetown continued as an independent town until 1871 when Congress directed that it be absorbed into the District of Columbia.

In the early 1870s, "M" Street was lowered by 10 to 16 feet and, by 1875, the main facade of the property was altered substantially. The basement was exposed for the first time and the otherwise original appearance of the property subsequently received storefront and entranceway alterations.

The association with the Lang family, which continued from 1834 until 1875, is a key component of the social history of the property. The Langs owned the property (unlike previous tavernkeepers who leased it) and expanded it into the neighboring building. As described in Section 8 (page 4) the property, under Lang ownership, was very much a social hub of 19th century Georgetown. After the Lang association, the property remained in use as a hotel until 1898 when it was let to various commercial tenants. After the Langs left, there was little measurable social history tied to the property. Several damaging alterations were made to it as well.

The City Tavern has been presented as an important late-18th and early-19th century resource. The author believes that by 1875 the physical changes to the building and its setting, the amalgamation of Georgetown into the larger city of Washington, and the transfer of the property from the Lang family to others makes 1875 the strongest date on which to end the period of significance.

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Architectural Drawings - 1961-62 Restoration (City Tavern Archives).

Boyd's City Directories, 1914 - 1960.

Bryan, W.B. "Hotels of Washington Prior to 1814," **Columbia Historical Society Records**, Vol. 7, 1904, pp. 71-107.

City Tavern Association Archives.

D.C. Building Permits, National Archives, RG 351.

D.C. Sanborn Maps.

Goode, James M. **Capitol Losses**. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1979.

Historic American Buildings Survey documentation (HABS DC- 81).

Holmes, Oliver W. "The City Tavern: A Century of Georgetown History, 1796 - 1898," **Columbia Historical Society Records**, Vol. 50, 1975-76, pp. 1 - 35.

Holmes, Oliver W. "The Colonial Taverns of Georgetown," **Columbia Historical Society Records**, Vol. 51-52, 1955, pp. 1 - 18.

Hopkins Map of 1887.

Miller, Elizabeth J. Draft D.C. Landmark Application for the City Tavern, 1981 (City Tavern Archives).

Schwartz, Nancy B., comp. **Historic American Buildings Survey District of Columbia Catalogue**. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1974.

Smith, Kathryn Schneider, ed. **Washington At Home**. Northridge, California: Windsor Publications, 1988.