

# FOR 57 YEARS IT HAS SERVED US WELL, NOW WHAT?

1746 Massachusetts Ave. N.W. has been the home and workplace of many a well-known Canadian — Vincent Massey, Lester B. Pearson, Charles Ritchie, Ed Ritchie, Marcel Cadieux, Allan Gotlieb — just to name a few. In the past 57 years this elegant, six-storey mansion has seen sixteen ambassadors come and go and the staff increase from five to over 300. Yet, statistics can't tell the real story. Who originally owned this gracious, heritage home? How long did they own it? Why did they sell it to the Canadian government? What will happen to it when the new chancery on Pennsylvania Ave. is built?

The city telephone directories list the following tenants:

- 1909 — 1914 Clarence Moore
- 1915 — 1916 Mrs. Clarence Moore
- 1916 — 1927 Aksel Wichfeld
- 1928 — 1943 Canadian Legation and Chancery
- 1944 — 1946 Canadian Embassy and Chancery
- 1947 — Canadian Chancery

Now for some of the details: Clarence Moore, an entrepreneur interested in developing West Virginia coal mining, oil and timber properties, came to Washington in 1890 and became associated with W.B. Hibbs & Co., which later became one of Washington's more successful banking and brokerage firms.

His first wife, Alice McLaughlin (daughter of Frank McLaughlin who once owned the *Philadelphia Times*) died in 1897 and three years later he married the heiress to the Swift meat packing fortune, Mabelle Swift. In 1901, with the inheritance she received after her father's death that year, they purchased the property on Massachusetts Ave. (in her name), started building on it in 1906 and completed the "mansion" in 1909. Just three years later, on March 16, 1912 he left Washington to vacation in England and to purchase foxhounds. As it was written in the book *A Night to Remember*, by Walter Lord:

"Clarence Moore of Washington...had been dog-shopping, but the 50 pairs of English foxhounds he bought for the Loudoun Hunt weren't making the trip."

Clarence Moore was lost with 1 513 others on the *Titanic* which sank April 15, 1912 after colliding with an iceberg.

An article in the *Washington Post* at the time of the *Titanic* disaster reported:

"Mr. Clarence Moore has been identified with smart Washington circles for the last fifteen years. He was a noted horseman and he exhibited both in this country and in Europe.



*The proposed new Canadian Chancery in Washington, designed by Arthur Erickson, faces out onto John Marshall Place Park and features a large inner courtyard, roof top gardens, a conference centre, art gallery, library, dining rooms and indoor parking. It is expected to be completed by 1988.*

He was for some years master of the hounds of the Chevy Chase Club (1889-1911). His residence, 1748 Massachusetts Avenue (now 1746) completed about three years ago, is one of the handsomest in the city, and is a constant scene of hospitality."

Three years after her husband's death, Mabelle Moore married Aksel C.P. Wichfeld, a Dane who came to Washington in 1910 and had been engaged in banking and the operation of taxicab companies in New York before being appointed as an attaché of the Danish Legation in 1916. The Wichfeld's voyaged constantly and, in addition to their home in Washington, they maintained residences in Massachusetts, New York and Paris. The *Sunday Star*, April 17, 1927, when reporting the sale of the Washington residence to the Canadian government indicated that "while the Wichfelds have lived abroad chiefly for some years, their home here in recent times was the scene of many fashionable gatherings of diplomatic and social circles."

The Wichfelds were divorced in 1932 and she died one year later, leaving three sons from her first marriage. Aksel Wichfeld later married Josephine (Fifi) Widener, daughter of Joseph Widener, an art collector and capitalist. So ends the first part of the history.

In 1927, Vincent Massey presented his credentials as Minister Plenipotentiary, and Canada's first diplomatic post in the United States was established. The Massachusetts mansion was purchased for \$375 000 plus a portion of its furnishings was also acquired for an additional \$100 000. The building at that time doubled as the chancery for the five staff members and the official residence. As it was described in a *Toronto Star* article on May 22, 1982:

"The ornate stone building, its interior rich with carved panelling and gilded mirrors, matched the millionaire taste of Massey, the late heir to a farm-machine fortune who became Canada's first native-born governor-general 25 years later."

From 1927-1946 it served as a combined chancery and residence for the Minister and later, as of 1943 when the legation was raised to Embassy status, for the Ambassador. Yet, as the staff expanded, the space diminished. In 1947 a residence was purchased at 2825 Rock Creek Drive and the original Wichfeld furnishings were moved over there. In 1954 the Department of National Defence constructed a five-storey building at 2450 Massachusetts Ave. to house all the Canadian Defence Liaison Staff. Later two floors on the NAB Building behind the chancery were leased for the Public Affairs and Tourism Staff.