The Cosmos Club

- A Self-Guided Tour of the Mansion –

2121 Massachusetts Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20008

Founders’ Objectives:

“The advancement of its members in science, literature, and art,” and also “their mutual improvement by social intercourse.”

Cover Picture:
Anice Hoachlander/Hoachlander Davis Photography
The Cosmos Club was founded in 1878 in the home of John Wesley Powell, soldier and explorer, ethnologist and Director of the Geological Survey. Powell’s vision was that the Club would be a center of good fellowship, one that embraced the sciences and the arts, where members could meet socially and exchange ideas, where vitality would grow from the mixture of disciplines, and a library would provide a refuge for thought and learning.

www.cosmosclub.org
Welcome to The Townsend Mansion

This brochure is designed to guide you on a walking tour of the public rooms of the Clubhouse. Whether member or guest, please enjoy the beauty surrounding you and our hospitality. You stand within an historic mansion, replete with fine and decorative arts belonging to the Cosmos Club.

The Townsend Mansion is the fifth home of the Cosmos Club. Within the Clubhouse, Presidents, members of Congress, ambassadors, Nobel Laureates, Pulitzer Prize winners, scientists, writers, and other distinguished individuals have expanded their minds, solved world problems, and discovered new ways to make contributions to humankind, just as the founders envisioned in 1878.

The history of the Cosmos Club is present in every room, not as homage to the past, but as a celebration of its continuum serving as a reminder of its origins, its genius, and its distinction.

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A place for conscious, animated discussion
A place for quiet, contemplation and research
A place to free the mind through relaxation, music, art, and conviviality
Or exercise the mind and match wits
A place of discovery
A haven of friendship…

The Cosmos Club
A BRIEF HISTORY

The Townsend Mansion, home of the Cosmos Club since 1952, was originally built in 1873 by Judge Curtis J. Hillyer of California, in a form that is unrecognizable today. The original house was brick, about fifty feet on each side, encompassing the Newspaper Room, the Periodical Room, and a portion of the Long Gallery, with the front entryway stairs rising to an entrance on what is now the second floor.

In 1898 Richard H. and Mary Scott Townsend purchased the house. Mrs. Townsend was the daughter of William L. Scott (a Pennsylvania railroad and coal magnate and a Congressman) and the granddaughter of Gustavus Scott (one of the original commissioners of the District of Columbia). She became a social leader in Washington and often entertained at the mansion.

Upon purchasing the mansion Mr. and Mrs. Townsend commissioned John Mervin Carrère (CC: 1905-11) and Thomas Hastings (CC: 1918-19), prominent architects from New York, to carry out renovations in the Beaux Arts style. Carrère and Hastings had studied at the École des Beaux Arts in Paris and formed a partnership in 1885. They went on to design the New York Public Library, the Standard Oil building in New York, and in Washington, the House and Senate Office Building. Carrère and Hastings turned Hillyer’s house into a grand city mansion, which replicates several centuries of French design from the Henri II Library to the Louis XVI main hall.

The richness of the Beaux Arts style can be noted in all the rooms from this period. In addition to the architects, Mrs. Townsend hired the
Parisian firm Jules Allard et Fils to select the ceiling murals as well as the decorative sconces, the iron decorative panels on the staircases, and the marble fireplaces. The Townsend additions extended the mansion footprint to include the Warne Ballroom, the Library, the complete Long Gallery, and the Members’ Dining Room.

The Townsend renovations lasted from 1899-1901, unfortunately Mr. Townsend died from a horse-back riding accident in 1902. Mrs. Townsend continued to live in the mansion until her death in 1931.

Mrs. Townsend’s daughter, Mathilde, and Mathilde’s second husband Sumner Welles, President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Under Secretary of State, owned the mansion until Mathilde’s death in 1949. However, the Welles’ usually lived at Oxon Hill Manor and used the mansion mainly for entertaining. The mansion was leased to the Canadian Women’s Army Corps during World War II.

Prior to moving into the Townsend Mansion in 1952, the Cosmos Club had resided in the Dolley Madison House on Lafayette Square for 66-years. The Madison House was sold to the Federal Government in 1940 but, due to the effects of World War II, the Club continued to rent the property. The Club purchased the Townsend Mansion in 1950 and renovated the property before moving in two years later. The Lafayette square property is now used by the United States Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit.
The Clubhouse is known for the distinctive entryway. The Cosmos Club’s insignia is etched into the glass on the front doors. The lobby contains important fine and decorative arts.


The Awards Hall best represents the Cosmos Club in its role as an “extension of the world.” On its walls hang portraits of Club members who have received Nobel Prizes, Pulitzer Prizes, and Cosmos Club Awards.


Centered in the entry from the Main Lobby is a portrait of the Club’s founder, John Wesley Powell. This pastel portrait by Eleazar H. Miller (1831-1921, CC 1893-1899) from 1891 was given by the artist in exchange for dues in 1897.

The Garden Bar

The Bar is located adjacent to the hall leading to the back valet parking area at the far end of the Dining Room. From the Bar guests can enter the East Garden where refreshments are served in the warmer months, and special events are held.

The hall is used by the Art Committee to present changing exhibitions for the enjoyment of our members and guests.
**THE 1878 GRILLE**

The former kitchen, preparation kitchen, and servant’s hall within the Townsend House’s north wing have now given way to the new 1878 Grille, renovated with a full bar during the Summer of 2017. It was previously renovated in 1991 and known as the Smith Dining and Heroy Rooms.

The Club Table welcomes unaccompanied members who prefer pleasant company to dining alone. The 1878 Grille also features a 6-seat bar in the former Heroy Room, while the former Smith Room features banquette seating for a more comfortable atmosphere. To the right of the bar is an Italian Renaissance-style marble fountain. It graced the Old Fountain Dining Room and was originally in the Townsend’s West Garden.

**GARDEN DINING ROOM & WEST GARDEN TERRACE**

The Garden Dining room occupies the former site of the Townsend’s laundry yard. It was renovated in 2017 and provides views of the West Garden.

The West Garden Terrace, with its curving stone path leading to a pond, is splendid in all seasons, framed by hollies that mask the parking area. The gardens are tended by a professional gardener under the supervision of the Garden Committee. Members and guests dine at the tables on the terrace, weather permitting.

A new fountain sculpted by member Ed Frost adds to the ambience. Nearby, the West Garden Alley, with stone terraces at each end, is
bound by specimen plants, flowering shrubs, perennial flowers, and rows of flowering trees. Stone artifacts collected by Mrs. Townsend include two stately griffins, a lantern, and two wellheads.

**LAFAYETTE SQUARE ROOM**

Located off the Garden Dining Room is a private dining space painted with a panoramic, historical mural of Lafayette Square (ca.1888), as seen from the center of the square. It was done by Everett Warner (CC 1942-1963) in 1952, when the Garden Dining Room was added. Lafayette Square was the location of the Cosmos Club before it moved to the Townsend House that same year.

The hall connecting the Dolley Madison Parlor, the Lafayette Room and the Hall of Honors features framed postage stamps featuring Cosmos Club members.

**POWELL ROOM**

The John Wesley Powell Room is used for large Club events, as well as by members for private functions. The walls and exterior structures are part of the Townsend’s Stable and Coach House, which was converted into the present auditorium during 1950-52 and
subsequently remodeled several times. The sculpture located on the far wall is by Club member Joan Danziger ('03) and is on loan from Julius Kaplan ('83).

**DOLLEY MADISON PARLOR**

The previous home of the Club was in Dolley Madison’s former house on Lafayette Square, purchased by the Club in 1886, eight years after its founding. This room was the Billiard Room in the Townsend House. The room contains a wide variety of decorative arts.

- **Max Weyl** (1837-1914), Fall Landscape, c. 1890. This painting by the local Washington artist was given to the Club by member Everette James (CC 1981-2017).
- **Dolley Madison portrait and letter.** This lithograph is believed to be after the Gilbert Stuart portrait, which also served as the model for the Dolley Madison portrait in the Magazine Room. The letter reads: "Mrs. Madison regrets that a light sprain of the ankle will deprive her of the pleasure of passing this evening with Mrs. Senton[sic] to whom she offers her love and her congratulations for the Bride. July 10, 1838."
- **Maria Longworth Nichols Storer** (1849-1932), Aladdin Vase, 1882. From a series of 6 vases decorated by Storer, the founder and patron of Rookwood Pottery.
- **After Guido Reni** (1575-1642), Beatrice Cenci, late 18th to early 19th century. Gift of Dr. Samuel M. Dodek (CC 1973-2000) in memory of his wife on the occasion of the election of
the first women members of the Cosmos Club, October 25, 1988.

**GOLD ROOM**

This room was formerly Mrs. Townsend’s downstairs parlor for receiving persons not intimate with the family. The six paintings on display are by William Henry Holmes - a geologist, artist, and 13th President of the Cosmos Club. The National Museum of American Art has an impressive collection of his work. The first artworks to be displayed at the Club came from Holmes. Looking clockwise around the room, starting from the doorway:

- A Woodland Pool, 1919
- Study of an Old Mill, c.1920
- Loading the Seine, Potomac Fisheries
- Cattle in Rock Creek Park
- Landscape
- Horsemen in a Storm

**MAIN STAIRCASE AND LANDING**

As one climbs the grand staircase, on the first floor landing you will find an Edwardian Hepplewhite style tall case clock made by James Jones Elliott in London. It was restored to working order in 2017 and can be heard in the Lobby and 1st floor corridor chiming on every quarter hour.

At the head of the stairs is a 16th century silk Chinese Kakemono, or painted scroll, by Choc Tung Chun. It depicts a mountainous scene with figures, houses, and lush foliage. It has elaborate, calligraphic inscriptions in the upper left and right, with numerous seals. This writing is a poem by Hua Huang Third Secretary Chinese Legation and is translated into English along the bottom. It was presented to the Club in 1923 by Mrs. Rufus Hildreth Thayer in honor of her husband, who was president of the Club in 1901.
Named after member Frank Warne (CC 1911-1948), this early 18th century Beaux Arts style (1705-1730) ballroom was an addition to the Mansion during the 1899-1901 renovations. The ballroom underwent a major restoration project, in 2011-2012, guided and funded by the Cosmos Club Historic Preservation Fund. The restoration was completed in 2016 with the installation of the draperies. In 2017 the Warne Ballroom Restoration Project was recognized with a District of Columbia Award for Excellence in Historic Preservation in the Stewardship Category.

Using circa 1910 photographs, expert craftsmen and consultants worked to refinish the original parquet floors and restore the paint and paintings on the ceiling and walls including the canvas overdoor paintings, lunettes, and ceiling mural. The ceiling mural has received several different attributions, such as: Aurora Driving the Chariot of Dawn, the wedding of Poseidon, and the tale of Galatea. Areas of damaged plaster were remolded and the gilding was retouched or replaced. As for the lighting, one of the two original chandeliers was
returned to the Club and restored, while the other was replicated in France; the wall sconces were removed, cleaned and restored with new glass pendalogues. The draperies, the last project of the restoration, took four years to complete. The original fabric for the draperies was replicated in France, the embroidering of the valences in India, and custom trims and fabrication in the United States.

The Club Wisteria, transplanted from the Tayloe House on Lafayette Square, provides a lavender flowering spring canopy over the patio overlooking the West Garden.

**Newspaper Room**

This room was formerly the anteroom to the Ballroom, with the two pocket mirror doors in the archways that can be opened when desired. Today, it is used to provide international newspapers to members and guests on a daily basis.

The photographic print on canvas over the mantel is of Mathilde Townsend, daughter of Mary Scott Townsend and Richard Townsend. She later became the wife of Sumner Welles. This copy, acquired in 2015, is from the portrait painted by John Singer Sargent; the original is in the National Gallery of Art. Mathilde presented the painting as a gift to her mother.
The bronze statue of Lafayette on horseback is by Club member Paul Wayland Bartlett (1865-1925, CC 1914-1925) after an original in the Louvre. Bartlett studied in Paris with Emmanuel Frémiet and Auguste Rodin, and at the École des Beaux-Arts.

PERIODICAL ROOM

The Periodical Room, with over 130 publications, has one of the most comprehensive collections of magazines and scholarly journals in any private library in the area.

JOHN P. MCGOVERN LIBRARY

Today, the original library offers a collection of novels, biographies, and histories, including books written by Club members, which are prominently shelved on the wall to the left of the door from the Periodical Room. In 2000, it was renamed McGovern Library, in honor of John P. McGovern (CC 1953-2007). A bust of Mr. McGovern and the framed dedication document can be found to the right of the door to the National Geographic Room.
The Library is in the Henri II style with the exception of the mantel, which is in the French Renaissance style. It is a copy from the Chateau at Blois in France, a picture of which is displayed to the right of the mantel. The original fireplace has an ermine and a fire breathing salamander representing the King of France and the Duchess of Burgundy.

Above the bookcases on the east wall is a photographic print of “The Founding of the National Geographic Society” by Stanley Meltzoff. This event took place at the Cosmos Club on January 13, 1888, and the figures are identified on a page from Harper’s magazine that same year, displayed on the table to the left of the print. Another important art object is the bust of Harvey W. Wiley (1844-1930, CC 1883-1930) by Gutzon Borglum, c. 1927. Wiley was the father of the Pure Food and Drug Act and Borglum is best known for sculpting Mount Rushmore.

The founders included in the articles of incorporation of the Cosmos Club “the acquisition and maintenance of a library.” At the end of its first year, 1879, the library consisted of 47 volumes and a few periodicals. Today the collection has grown to over ten thousand volumes.

**NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC ROOM**

This room was named in honor of National Geographic Society, which was founded at the Cosmos Club on Lafayette Square. There are busts of John Wesley Powell and Alexander Graham Bell, both founders of the Society. The shelves hold bound volumes of National Geographic Magazine, a collection of the Loeb Classical series of Greek and Latin translations, a collection of books by and about Powell, a collection of Garden books, and a new collection of materials about the city of Washington.

Elegant stairs lead down to the East Garden Terrace
with its replica of a mannerist fountain sculpted by Pietro Tacca for the Piazza Annunziata in Florence. There are few other copies of the original 17th century fountain in other collections in the United States and abroad.

THE LONG GALLERY

This room was formerly less gallery-like because the two panels between the first three pilasters were absent, so the stairway was open at the top. This room served as the Townsend’s “family” room.

Portraits hang in the gallery of three U.S. Presidents who were Cosmos Club members: Taft, Wilson, and Hoover. President Hoover’s portrait is labeled “mining engineer,” as this was his qualification for Club membership (1921-1934).

Other notable portraits are the one over the mantel of Henry Clay by Samuel Waldo (American, 1783-1861), and the one to the right of the fireplace. It is of Club Founder, Colonel Garrick Mallery by Eliphalet Frazer Andrews from 1882. A more recent addition is the portrait of Walter E. Washington (CC 1969-2004), former Mayor of Washington, DC, by Simmie Knox, 2004. Mr. Washington is remembered for calling the vote to allow female Club members in June of 1988.

MEMBERS’ DINING ROOM

In the Townsend House, the circular alcove in this room was used for breakfast. The elaborate marble server is French, installed and used by the Townsends: “A carved, mottled rouge, marble server, Louis XIV style with four supporting legs in coupled pairs ending in pedestal bases. The tops of the legs are covered with oversized lion mask ormolu mounts. Surmounting
the legs is a serpentine modified splash board with broken arch back board. In the center of the broken arch is a bronze mask of Maria de Medici surrounded by scrolled acanthus leaf garland, ca.1900.”

The painting over the fireplace is “Yosemite” by Thomas Hill from 1882. He, along with Bierstadt, Moran, and Cole, comprised the famous four painters of the West in this period. The painting over the marble server is a copy of Veronese’s “The Rape of Europa” by Thomas Beggs (CC 1955-1990).

The adjoining, modern Crentz Room was added by the Club and features exhibitions organized and curated by members of the Art Committee.

THIRD FLOOR

MAIN STAIRCASE AND LANDING


BEDROOMS

There are 12 rooms and suites in the Townsend Mansion available for overnight guests. The adjoining Hillyer House contains 22 more, including one suite, and a business center. The first floor of Hillyer House features the work of noted local photographer and member Fred Maroon. The Annex adjacent to the Mansion contains 23 guest rooms.

The Club has reciprocity arrangements with other clubs around the world. Information on reservations is available at the Front Desk.
Billiard Room

Besides billiards, this room is very popular for small receptions. When the Townsend family lived in the Mansion, this was a bedroom with a dressing room on the side. In the back, where the bookshelves are, was a sunroom with windows all around.

All drawings, letters, and other memorabilia in the Billiard Room are drawn from the Club’s Art and Archival Collections. Leland Howard recalled: “In the early days of this century, it was the custom of many members to spend time between the close of the official day and dinner at the Club, in discussions with other members, in the Billiard Room.”

John Wesley Powell was an avid player, despite the loss of one arm during the Civil War. His special cue stick keeps a place of honor, by the door. Note the map case on the wall, a gift from the National Geographic Society commemorating its founding in the Club. At the far back is a nude by George Luks, who had studied at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. His work was included in the New York Armory Show in 1913.

Card Room

This room is set aside for bridge players for their regular games. Chess boards are available as well. Most of the photographs are remastered or originals by Volkmar Wentzel (1915-2006, CC 1974-2006) photographer for the National Geographic. The framed engraving depicting women in a Gothic Revival style church pew is based on a painting by A. F. D. Millet, late 19th century, French.

The hallway between the Billiard Room and Card Room features four lithographic portraits of Native American chiefs. The original portraits by Charles Bird King were in the collection of the National Gallery of
Art, but have since been lost in a fire. The painting of Senator Ambrose Sevier of Arkansas, a little further down the hall, has been attributed to George Caleb Bingham. The far end of the hall has several historical military prints, as well as a display case with sextants and octants. The rest of this hall and the adjoining one leading to the Presidents’ Suite contains a collection of fine prints and engravings illustrating nautical themes.

**PRESIDENTS’ SUITE**

Three conference rooms, named for the three Club members who were Presidents of the United States—Hoover, Taft, and Wilson— are used for private meetings and dining. The Board Room at the end of the hall is also used for meetings.
FOURTH FLOOR

Writers’ Room

This room is a hideaway for members seeking a relaxed setting for reading, writing, or conversation. The Writer’s Room features framed covers and illustrations of publications by noted authors who are members of the Club.

Fitness Center

If you cross the hall from the Mansion to the Annex building you will find the Fitness Center, which houses an excellent selection of exercise equipment.

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Members of the Cosmos Club volunteer their time and expertise to serve on more than twenty active committees. Their contributions and their work contribute to the life of the Club. This self-guided tour was prepared by members of the House, Garden, and Art Committees. It was edited in 2017 by Rachel Nellis, Club Archivist, and Stephanie Frost, Art Collections Manager and Curatorial Assistant.

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Billiards Room: T Y Johnson Photography
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“The most fruitful meeting of minds…
It must take place in an atmosphere conducive to free exchange of views, to a certain sort of intellectual expansion; it must also take place where many intellectual roads cross and where ideas of the most different sorts will encounter each other. Such a place is the Cosmos Club.”

Waldo Leland, 1943