

# BOOMTOWN, D.C.

By DOROTHY MILLER



They used to call it The City of Magnificent Distances. Nowadays they liken it to the trolley car of days ago, whose motto was "There's always room for one more"

**WE LIVE** in Washington. Greater Washington, perhaps I should say. That must be the census term for describing the pieces of Virginia and Maryland that hang on the District Line, and Silver Spring is our locale. But there is really only one correct and popular name for Greater Washington now: Boomtown, D. C.

My husband is very close to the President. Not so close as Mr. Hopkins. But very close. There in the White House sits Mr. Roosevelt, making monumental decisions. And there, just across Lafayette Park from him, sits my lawyer husband, doing likewise. In the Veterans Administration Building. With sixty-five hundred other people, also very close to the President. None of whom, I might add, knows what he is going to do next. But does Harry Hopkins know that?

We are not newcomers to Boomtown. We're pioneers. We knew Washington when there was no underpass at Thomas Circle, no talk of one at Dupont. Henderson Castle was still The Castle, and not flats. We have lived eight miles from the White House for eight years. And if you don't think that is a long time to stay in Washington, you just check up on how many people have come and gone while we've been rocking on our porch, watching the city stretch out to us. Why, even some of the Democrats have new faces. And as for the Diplomatic Set!

We like Washington, even in these hectic times. But Washington, I think, is a couple of other places, not just one Washington. In fact, or in my fancy, anyhow, Washington is never itself. It is you. Or your reflection.

Say you have come here to see the sights. What you will see will be Tourist Washington. If your pappy has got himself elected to the House or Senate, you





will see Congressional Washington. If you are a Cabinet Member or a member of the Roosevelt clan, you will be at home in White House Washington. If you have flown up from south of the border with a portfolio, you will land in Diplomatic Washington. If you belong to the Military, you will report to Service Set Washington. If a pull or a hunch or the news that the plums are ripe has brought you here to get a job, you will crowd into Wartime Washington. Whoever you are, you will see Wartime Washington now, of course; but only from your own angle, whatever it is.

The only Washington you will never see is the Washington of your dreams.

I could be wrong. Perhaps if you come here very young and rich and beautiful and politically and socially prominent you will also find Dream Washington. Not being all or any of those things, I wouldn't know.

Our Washington is Civil Service Washington. Old Civil Service, which isn't even the same as New Civil Service Washington. Oh, there are Washingtons enough to go around for everybody! But in the words of the immortal Will, all I know about any of 'em except ours is just what I read in the papers.

And how what I read astonishes me! Is Wartime Washington really like that? Goodness!

Eight miles from the White House there stands a Red House. It has a medium-sized yard in front of it and a big yard in back, with a vegetable garden beyond the iris and the lemon lilies. This house was built of brick fifteen or twenty years ago. I think it was painted then, too, and the shrubbery was set out that now bewhiskers it so that it resembles a House of David baseball player. In the spring the forsythia is captured sunshine, gleaming in our living room windows. In the summer one becomes invisible simply by stepping up on the porch and moving to the right or left.

In the winter our cars are snowed in.

This house is not a pretty house. But it is a comfortable, roomy dwelling. There is ample space for our grand piano in the long living room. It is as difficult to park a

Knabe grand as it is to park a Lincoln limousine. That was one of several rea-





## The Washington Monument as a backdrop to the new Jefferson Memorial

limousine. That was one of several reasons we had for renting the Red House, years ago. It has two bathrooms and an oil furnace with maybe a gallon of oil in it. It has a fireplace for which we have a cord of wood that cost us \$19.50. Studded with diamonds, obviously.

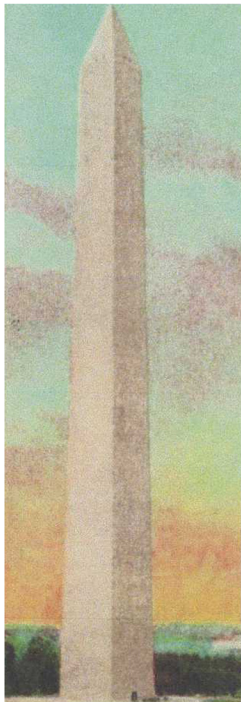
They say there are no apartments or houses to be rented in Boomtown now. I should be sorry to have to hunt one, even with the aid of the War Housing Center. When we came to Washington there were places to be had. But not without a struggle. Because of certain complicated requirements that had to be met for our family I looked at ninety-eight houses, by recorded count, before we leased the imperfect one in which we are living.

Right now it costs us thirty dollars a month more than we paid out for rent eight years ago in the back-country, but not so much as we paid for a six room apartment with single garage space, in that same territory before the crash of 1929.

There's nothing new, I can assure you newcomers, about the difficulties that attend house hunting in Washington.

You will hesitate to buy a house. In the event of transfer it is simpler to walk out of a dwelling in which one has no equity. But had we gambled on staying indefinitely in Washington we could have built up quite a nice little equity to worry about, in eight years. We could make a pretty profit if we had to turn it over now. You'd better buy.

Dear, dear, do I sound like a real estate agent? No, I am only a woman who has lived. In many places. Never in a



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dream house. Never in Dream Washington.

Yet I know so well what Dream Washington looks like to you folks excitedly packing handboxes and barrels, the other side of the mountains! You're moving to Washington, the Marble City, the City in the Forest, where all the buildings are palaces and even the downtown streets are lined with lovely trees. And paved with gold. To Washington, the throbbing heart of the world. To Washington, where anything can happen and everything does. Oh, yes! But not to you.

It will be so thrilling to live in Washington! Everywhere you go you will see big names, walking around in person, on the streets, in the stores, at the restaurants, and going to the movies. You will certainly wave often to the President, riding up and down Pennsylvania Avenue in an open car and a top hat, and you will undoubtedly bump into Mrs. Roosevelt at the A&P or up in the Monument, because everybody knows she goes *everywhere*. Even to England, maybe to China.



As soon as you get the dishes done in the morning you will probably run down to the Capitol to watch the big-wigs making history. There's Wallace! Or is it Barkley? Anyhow, that was Leon Henderson riding that bicycle. It was not Donald Nelson! Two gets you ten it wasn't. Cents, I mean, not dollars. Who do you think I am, Mrs. Morgenthau?

On every corner, alternately, you will see spies and diplomats, here a spy, there a diplomat. The game will be to guess which is which; because you can't very well step up to a gentleman with a beard, yell "Beaver!" and ask, "Are you a Fifth Columnist or the Ambassador from Ally-Oop?" You will *know* he isn't Chief Justice Hughes, because nobody else could look like him even with a beard, even if he isn't Chief Justice any more. Well, he isn't, is he? But who is? Heavens, you can't move to Washington without knowing that! Call up Miss Longnose at the



Library. She can tell you all about those Nine Old Men. They're in a book.

Every day in Washington, and twice on Sundays, there will be parades. You love parades. You'll never get tired of turning out for the bands, even though they always stop playing just as they get opposite you. Maybe there won't be so many parades now, come to think of it, except down to docks. Will there be transports in the Potomac? Anyhow, there will always be the *feel* of parades in Washington, and the echoes of martial music, and the sight of waving flags. Where else, oh where else, could they sing so fervently *God Bless America*?

Oh, it will be exciting to live in Washington! Gloriously exciting. You will go to the White House. Though it's closed to the public now, isn't it, unless somebody invites you in? And that hardly seems likely. Anyhow, you will move gracefully about in the Diplomatic Set, where Princess Martha and Countess Cassini sit languidly sipping cocktails with Madam Perkins and Aunt Bessie Merrylegs. (You're getting mixed up again—that's Black Beauty.) Oh, it will be wonderful to move gracefully about in the Diplomatic Set at the Russian Embassy—even though you have to carry a tray of caviar while you're doing it.

Well, what the heck. There'll be nothing to prevent your rubbing shoulders with the rich and the fashionable and the powerful in the Mayflower Lounge, the Metronome Room, the Blue Room, and the Troika, where you can speak Russian as well as at the Embassy on Sixteenth Street, every bit as well. Nothing at all to prevent your going often to such like places. Except what it costs to drink and eat in swell jernts. Money's all it takes. You got any?

Oh, Dream Washington is as alluring as any Promised Land that ever was. One moves toward it enchanted yet confused by the prospect of living in such a storybook place. What thrills, what adventure await one! Won't it be *wonderful*, mama?

Yes, darling. But not the way you think.

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You are here. It is evident that you have at last found some sort of place in which to live or you wouldn't be here. You'd be on your way back home. Some people are, already, those cautious ones who have not burned their bridges, those stenographers who have not liked living four to a room in downtown boarding houses, who have also been unwilling to rides buses and street cars to outlying sections. Why, ten full buses will zoom past you before a bus will stop and pick you up!

But you are made of sterner stuff than a little steno, you have your own car, and you are not inclined to retreat in it. Besides, you brought a truck load of furniture along and it costs double to send it back. You move into a house, just any house you can grab. Eventually you get settled—books unpacked, curtains up, pictures hung. Now what?

Well, don't just sit down and wait for the neighbors to call. They never will. You'll get acquainted with them over the back fence. But city people don't rush out and commit themselves formally to social obligations involving strangers unless some compulsion makes them pull on white gloves.

You will get lonesome and homesick once the novelty of being in a new place has worn off. During the first month or two you are here you will think you'd give anything if you could just call up and invite somebody in for a game of bridge. How are Mr. and Mrs. You *ever* going to make any friends? And then in another six months you'll find you have more friends than you can keep up with. You will get sucked into your particular circle gradually, and you will go round and round in it from then on. But you won't spin out of it into the Diplomatic Set or the Congressional Set, or the mysterious, if existent, Cliveden Set (short i, pet) which is in bad repute, anyhow, but rich enough to bear stigma with little pain.

You may—in time you probably will—become Old Civil Service instead of New. That is about the only transformation you are apt to experience. And the only difference it will make to you is that protocol will no longer impress you. If it ever did. Protocol at our low level in the caste system! How absurd! Irritating, too. Ultimately it becomes simply funny, and then you are Old Civil Service.

But I have brought you along too fast into your not too glamorous future. You are still a newcomer and lonesome. What to do? Do the town!

See Tourist Washington. Buy a guide book and go through it from beginning to end. But don't come out of it expecting to know all the Marble Halls by name. Why tax your memory? You can always read what it says over the doors.

The Embassies are all labeled, too. You can read their labels at a glance

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and impress your visitors from home with your vast and intimate knowledge of the metropolis. They are seeing so much they don't notice the signs at the curbs. Old Glory waving over the White House means the President is In Residence. Did they take it down, that time he went out to meet Mr. Churchill? What do you think?

**I**F YOU can almost afford to go to the places that cost money, go; when you haven't any company to double your check. Even if you can't afford to go at all, go anyhow. It gives one a pleasant sophisticated sense of knowing the town to have dined at the Shoreham, the Occidental, Mrs. K.'s and Olney Inn.

Olney is closed for the duration, though, on account of the gas rationing, which doesn't seem to bother Mr. Ickes, who lives next door. We lunched at the Inn on a rainy Saturday in August and were the only patrons being served in the big, beautiful, but empty dining room.

We've dined there when we've waited for an empty table. In eight years we have eaten at practically all the expensive restaurants in and about Washington. Once we've seen 'em we don't have to go back, do we? We've been there. We know as well as anybody just what they're like. The food's O. K.

Once I ate at a place where Mrs. Roosevelt was eating. That thrilled me, but not the way you think. It was a red, white, and blue thrill I got. Where but in these United States, I thought, could just any woman with a dollar reservation seat herself at lunch with the wife of her country's Head Man? Good old Democracy, I love you!

It was one of the five times since we have lived in the same town that I have seen the ubiquitous Mrs. Roosevelt. She goes everywhere but I do not. I have never been up in the Monument. I've climbed the Statue of Liberty, though.

A cat may look at a king. Lots of us did, several summers ago. We stood for hours that terrific hot day waiting for the King and Queen of England to drive past us in state, up Pennsylvania Avenue to the White House. The picture I took away was that of the little Queen shading her own pretty face with a frilly parasol and not attempting to share her shade with our President's wife. Who knows how much that memory has done to make me think Union Now is taffy talk? And Bundles for Britain pleas have left me as cold as the cold and starving little ones in the alleys of our nation's capital.

Don't get me wrong. I admire our English allies. Our Russian ones, too. Only—for what are we fighting in 1942 if not for what we won in 1776? Good old Independence Day! I like and respect a good Britisher. But a British boot-licker makes me sick to my stomach. And who among us that has read



*The Grapes of Wrath* dares to forget where charity should begin?

Since we have been good neighbors we have also seen our President. Twice. We saw him that time he and the Missis took the King and Queen home for a noonday snack. And before that, in the Arlington Amphitheater on a Memorial Day. It was in the spring of our novitiate. He spoke and we applauded his speech. Applauding also, in a marble box, stood that little dark man whose ashes we later sent home in state aboard a battleship. Best not to speak of that now, perhaps.

Let me see—how many other name-people have I seen about town in eight years of living eight miles from the White House? You'll laugh at the list. But let it dispel for you your dream of seeing important personages daily, all over Washington.

I have seen the Lewises, John L. and Ham, recognized by black eyebrows and pink whiskers. I have seen the similarly unmistakable Charles Evans Hughes, Esquire. And Garner—remember him?—standing outside the Washington Hotel. And in the Carlton, Harry Truman, who was introduced to me or I should not have known who he was. He is, I think, the only Congressman I have seen off the reservation. No, I have met Tom Connally, too.

I have seen the Mexican Ambassador, Senor de Castillo Najera. He was on the sidewalk of the sandy Embassy on Sixteenth Street, and I can put signs and faces from print together when they are put that way for me.

I have met the daughter of Alexander Graham Bell (Mrs. National Geographic Grosvenor) and Dolly Gann, who received with her at a Republican benefit bridge given in the garden of Wild Acres, out beyond Bethesda.

I have met Mary Pickford and Ruth Bryan Owen Rohde and Reinald Werrenrath in the halls of National Park

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College, where I often had occasion to be before our lifelong friends signed their school and its lovely campus over to the Government for a Veterans Hospital. Nurses from Walter Reed, carried to their quarters in Army trucks, are already sleeping under the roof that last year sheltered our schoolgirl nieces.

**B**UT, you protest, still secretly unconvinced that you will not be able to break into charmed circles by the sheer force of your personality, you talk so much about ante-bellum Washington. What is it like living in Wartime Washington now? The answer to the question depends entirely on the person of whom it is asked.

We will all agree on one point. Washington is so overcrowded it is bursting at the seams. This makes complications in the lives of the people whose work takes them downtown. My husband, for instance, reports on his daily difficulties getting lunch. Yet those, I recall, are old stories, newly embellished. He has always had to hurry and to fight his way into eating places at noon, having been allowed a scant half hour (generously increased now to forty minutes) to get to a counter, grab, gulp, and return to his office. It is a damnable system for the digestive one and he has always disliked it.

But I am not one who is obliged to fight my way through crowds. I have friends who go voluntarily into the mines, just for the thrill and the money in it. They love the rush and crush they move in. I do not yearn for pandemonium, and I do not have to sit in a stenographic pool; so I don't. I am a homebody with two nice phones, who has not gone downtown to shop for more than a year.

There's free if not easy parking in Silver Spring and I can make my purchases there when not in the mood to dial numbers. From my friends with leisure I hear that it is Christmas week all the time now, in Woodward and Lothrop's, and all the shopping district stores.

Our pocketbooks, of course, were the first to know we are at war. Weren't yours? The increased cost of living cannot be peculiar to Boomtown. But ceilings and freezing and rationing and Leon will fix all that, if they haven't already done so.

High prices seem to me at the moment to be inconsequential crosses, and this ten percent stuff is comparatively easy, however wide open it cracks our budget. I have just received a long distance phone call telling me that my nephew Jack, the only boy in my immediate family (except an infant under two; will they have a new war ready for him in another twenty-five years?), this son so dear to us all, the last of our line to bear the family name, leaves for a



training camp at seven tomorrow night.

There he goes, ours, our own, and we may not follow him, not even so far as the train that will carry him off to the wars. He is not my son. What right have

to weep? I weep for your sons, mothers, I weep for my brother's son, my only brother's only son. I weep for the marching off of that dear little boy whose grimy hand I used to hold protectingly, who goes forth now to protect me.

Wartime Washington. Wherein is it different from the Washington of last year? What do we lack that we had, that mankind must have to live? We have love still, that makes the heart to break. We have work, too much of it, and rest, too little. We have clothes to wear, the same old clothes we had or more expensive new ones.

We have a roof to cover us, and enough good food, whatever we have to pay for it, however it is rationed. We have transportation, though we worry about it all the time. The buses are so crowded, and our tires have a million miles on them, and people cannot walk the distances they have to go in cities.

**WE WORRY** about transportation; so does everybody else. But we don't stay home to worry until our gas coupons are all used up. We go where we want to go. As far as Bolling Field, half a week's gas supply away, to carry fried chicken and chocolate cake to my Navy Legionnaire husband's younger Army Legionnaire brother. "Some of the young fellows call me 'Pop'," he says, "which makes me feel kind of old." But you were not too old to volunteer, young man, for your second war! And where is Walter now? He knows, Uncle Sam knows. We know not. But at least we've had a safe-arrival cable from Sans Origine.

What don't we have in Wartime Washington? What else is there to have in life, when you reduce everything to the common denominators? There is no other essential to living but recreation. And don't we have that? Oh, don't we!

Wartime Washington is as gay, they say, as the gay Paree of a quarter of a century ago. It is full of men in uni-

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form, soldiers, sailors, marines, aviators—bucks, gobs, cadets, generals, admirals, and the Commander-in-Chief. With every officer walks a proud and pretty woman. With a sailor walk two girls—why, usually, two?

There is something stimulating about a uniform that makes a town full of uniforms seethe with excitement. We are alarmed by rumors, we are shocked by disasters, we are saddened deeply by the deaths of our far-away heroes. We buy bonds. We do what war work we can. We salvage, we save. Yet eat, drink, and be merry is the watchword of the hour. The parties we attend are as lively as ever, though there are few parties being given this winter of 1942 by people of our means.

Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow they die. Yes, even *we*, perhaps, if the air raids come. Got your blackout shades? Got your sandbags yet? Oh, yes, we got our sand. But the cat used it up. How's about another drink?

**C**ONGRATULATE me. I am not one who is obliged to fight my way through crowds. Perhaps I seem to live a cloistered life. Perhaps I do, though I step about in quite a worldly fashion. I am a sheltered woman and a busy one. There are thousands of women like me here on the Potomac.

My husband and I learned long ago how to go places for recreation in Washington and not be trampled on. This is how. Go at the off hours. Go early, preferably. Or go late. But don't go at the rush hours unless you want to push and shove, and be pushed and shoved.

I'll give you an example of our tactics. We like best to patronize our fine large neighborhood picture show. However, we went to see a city movie the other night and came home without a single bruise. We went early. That's the simple trick.

We dropped into an unpretentious coffee shop on I\* Street for dinner at about five-thirty, and did not have to wait at all to be seated and served, though the place was full when we left. In the center of the movie zone, at restaurants where liquors are served, customers expect to form queues and wait thirty or forty minutes for tables, after which they stand in lines sometimes a block long outside of the movie theaters.

The outer-edge coffee shop we patronized had neither atmosphere nor elegance. But our four-course dinner was well-cooked, and cost us, to our astonishment, only sixty-five cents apiece. The only thing to remind us of the war as we ate was the young lady war worker seated nearby who still wore her identification picture on her coat lapel. I was on the alert all evening for a WAAC or a

\*Or Eye Street as we've sometimes seen it spelled.—*The Editor*.

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WAVE, but the only woman I saw in uniform was a very tired-looking Red Cross worker. My escort said feminine uniforms were plentiful enough in the daytime.

After eating we drove away, down I, down Fourteenth to F Street, where I alighted. My husband, who can walk and will, when necessary, took the car on to a night parking lot a few blocks out of the theater area. There he locked and left it for fifteen cents, as he has done for years.

**T**HERE is no box-office line at the Capitol Theater at six-thirty or shortly after on a midweek evening. (Beware of Saturday and Sunday and holiday downtown movies, though. We haven't tackled one of them since 1935.) We went right into the palatial showhouse practically by ourselves, and got our favorite center cross aisle seats without knocking anybody down.

Soon the audience, with Art Brown at the organ, was singing lustily, "Mammy's li'l baby loves shortnin', shortnin'—" exactly as we used to sing it on hayrides before our other World War. What's so different about Wartime Washington?

When we left the theater it was crowded. But we weren't. Not once, all evening long. We're city-broke. You soon will be, one way or another.

Out on the street newsboys were shouting: "Three U. S. Warships Sunk!" It brought us back from make-believe and laughter with a start. We're at war! But what can we do about it? We can't think about it all the time or we'll go crazy. We have to sleep. We're yawning now. Let's hurry home to bed. We've eight miles to drive.

We may move even farther away from the White House. Yet strangely enough, we do not actually want to leave Washington. We know it isn't the safest place in the country to be. Black-outs make us jittery. They are very real. Before, during, and just after an air-raid rehearsal of darkness we talk about wishing we were back in our native unthreatened Middle West.

But when George Riley, the columnist, printed the rumors that have circulated among us for months, we were all upset. The Veterans Administration might be the next bureau to go, he said. It might be carted off to Kansas City or Columbus. Him and his ready predictions!

What does he know about it, even if he did call the turn on the insurance outfit? We won't give the matter a serious thought unless General Hines himself says Git!

Even then we won't want to go. (Unless there has been an air raid.) We'll resent having to go. Why should we be thumped on the soles of our shoes

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with a nightstick and told to get moving just to make room for all these upstart newcomers? We're war workers, too. Of course we're still working over the last war, mostly. But claims from this one are coming in fast. Alas, alas, alas!

Well, that's war.

**I**T IS finished, my picture of Wartime Washington. I wonder how it has come out. Like a blurred snapshot? Like a surrealist painting, full of meanings that can't be got at by the sane? Like as not. But the more confused it is, the more it seems the work of a mad sub-genius, the more exactly is it a blueprint of Boomtown, D. C.

Beautiful dreamer, be not dismayed by my distortion of the charming scene. Your Washington may not be like mine. Our Washington is nothing like the Roosevelts'. We live eight miles from the White House. And even if Mr. and Mrs. Harry Hopkins eventually move out we'll never be asked to move in.

**THE AMERICAN  
LEGION  
MAGAZINE**

JANUARY 1943