
HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD

Historic Landmark Case No. 16-18

Union Market

Part of Squares 3587; 3588; 3589; 3590; 3592
Between 4th and 5th Street NE; Florida Avenue and Penn Street NE

Meeting Date: November 3, 2016
Applicant: D.C. Preservation League
Affected ANC: 5D
Staff Reviewer: Kim Williams

The Historic Preservation Office recommends that the Board designate Union Market as an Historic District in the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites and forward the nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. The property meets National Register Criteria A and C at the local level of Significance with a Period of Significance of 1929-1939.



(From Historical Society of Washington, 1949)

Historical background

Union Market is a large complex of wholesale warehouse buildings occupying an approximately 40-acre tract of land located east of Union Station between Florida and New York avenues NE. The complex was conceived in 1928 by a federation of wholesalers called the Union Terminal Market Association, who, in anticipation of the demolition of Center Market and the associated wholesale buildings for construction of the Federal Triangle, sought to establish a wholesale market in northeast DC. Since the wholesale merchants were not in the Center Market building itself, yet were in adjacent privately owned buildings, there were no government contingencies being made for their displacement as were being made for the farmers and merchants of Center Market itself. So, acting on its own, the private association purchased the land, devised a street plan for the wholesale market complex, and established

a standard building form and style for the individual market buildings.¹ Opened as the Union Market Terminal, the warehouses that were constructed in the first years of the market's establishment (1929-1931) are all two-story, buff brick industrial buildings that feature overall symmetry and repetitive Classical Revival-style features. Many of these warehouses were historically connected to the nearby railroad freight lines via railroad spurs.

At the time of the market's opening in February 1931, the *Washington Post* featured a large advertising spread announcing the opening of the wholesale market. The half-page spread included a photograph of the market buildings, boasted of the "expansive" thoroughfares and "commodious" buildings with broad canopies, and entreated readers to "Visit this new food center, conceded to be one of the best planned markets of its kind in the country." In August 1931, about 100 merchants had moved into the complex and plans were underway for expansion. Although the local press anticipated an equally vigorous building campaign in ensuing years, construction continued instead at a relatively modest pace. To begin with, designs for the individual buildings followed the uniform model already established for the complex. Following a World War II building hiatus, however, the standard building type and style had been abandoned as longer and lower, utilitarian buildings with little attention to design or architectural detail were built instead.

In 1930-31, the Union Market Terminal Company opened a large outdoor market to complement the wholesale market buildings and to attract truck farmers to the market center. The company built a series of sheds which still stand in-part across from the wholesale buildings on 5th Street and 6th Street NE, south of Penn Street NE but are not included in the boundaries of this application.

The site upon which Union Market sits was historically part of the approximately 86-acre Brentwood estate. The estate included an 1817 Greek Revival-style mansion designed by architect Benjamin Henry Latrobe for Eleanor Brent, daughter of Washington mayor Robert Brent, upon her marriage to North Carolina congressman Joseph Pearson. The Pearsons' only daughter married a Patterson in the 1830s, and the property, which remained in Patterson family hands throughout the 19th century when the estate was abandoned, became known as the Patterson Tract. Around 1915, the house burned and in 1917, the federal government leased the land from the Patterson family to establish Camp Meigs, a World War I mobilization point for soldiers being prepared for military duty in France.

Architecture

The Union Market complex includes more than six squares of connected warehouse buildings that were constructed over the course of several decades from 1929 until the present. The boundaries of the historic site, however, include only the historic core of this larger complex, comprising two central rows of buildings lining 4th and 5th Streets NE, and two smaller rows on Morse Street NE, south of and running perpendicular to 4th and 5th streets. This core grouping includes architecturally uniform warehouse buildings that were constructed in the first years after the 1929 establishment of the complex. Today, these rows include 74 distinct addresses.

The individual warehouse buildings making up the core of the complex are two-story, concrete-frame, buff brick industrial buildings that feature overall symmetry and repetitive Classical Revival-style details. The details include a simple motif of Classical concrete panels with garland bas-reliefs at the building frieze line repeating the rhythm of the window bays, occasional projecting pediments on center units, and blind arches above rectangular window openings. Windows range from original 6/6 metal sash and 12-light central-pivot metal sash to replacement windows and bricked-in and boarded up

¹ The Union Market Terminal Association acted on its own at the same time that Congress and the District Commissioners engaged in a lengthy public process to identify a site and establish a farmers' market for the soon-to-be displaced farmers of Center Market. This farmers' market was ultimately established in Southwest between 10th and 11th and E and G Streets SW.

openings. Single-story covered loading docks with flat covered roofs project in front of the two-story main blocks. The roofs are supported by metal columns and support railings, except where missing, at the roofline. The standard bay for the buildings—the area between the columns at the arcade—generally defines ownership and tenancy.

Flagpoles are mounted on the flat roofs of the market buildings, while a large neon lettered sign reading UNION MARKET sits atop the roofs of several of the market buildings along 4th Street. Metal railings, missing in places, line the roofline of the loading bays, historically and presently accommodating signs and banners. The repetition of building massing and details contribute to a sense of order, uniformity and master planning to the complex.

Evaluation

Criteria

The Union Market meets D.C. Designation Criteria A (Events) and B (History), and National Register Criterion A for its associations with historical periods and patterns of growth that contributed significantly to the development of the city. The market is directly associated with the 1926 Public Buildings Act which called for the development of the Federal Triangle and engendered the demolition of the long-established Center Market on its site. Union Market grew directly out of this urban planning decision, as a consortium of businessmen sought to provide market space for the city's wholesalers and farmers to provide for the food needs of the city's residents and businesses.

In addition, Union Market meets D.C. Designation Criterion D (Architecture and Urbanism) and National Register Criterion C because as a wholesale market complex, it represents a building type that is unique to the District of Columbia. The complex is further distinguished architecturally for its uniform design scheme of individually built and privately owned buildings. A review of the 1991-1992 survey of the city's historic warehouses revealed that while there are several nodes of industrial buildings in the city, particularly along the railroad tracks in Eckington, and across from the tracks in Ivy City, each of the buildings in these concentrated industrial collections were independently built and do not share common building forms, styles, or details as do the buildings of Union Market. In fact, largely for that reason, the 1992 final report for the Warehouse Survey (Phase 2) singled out Union Market for further study. The report noted that because the complex did not fall neatly in the category of either storage warehouse or manufacturing plant, it should be further investigated in the context of market places as it represents an "excellent example of the market complex where individual stores and warehouses are architecturally unified, but individually owned and operated." Although no further study of market places was undertaken, information gleaned from documentation on the Mount Vernon Triangle Historic District² and the city's surviving individual market buildings highlight the unique character of this market as the city's only planned market complex comprising multiple buildings that adhere to a uniform design scheme.

In addition, in comparison to the city's other industrial buildings, Union Market displays a high level of architectural design and treatment. According to the survey, the city's industrial buildings are, with the exception of certain high-style examples, largely vernacular, utilitarian and industrial in nature. The buildings are characterized by industrial features such as steel sash windows, large overhead doors, loading docks, water towers, and other such features. Ornamentation is generally limited and may be specific to identifying the use or ownership of the particular building. The buildings of Union Market share the characteristic features of the city's industrial buildings, such as steel sash windows and open

² Many of the Center Market merchants moved to Northern Liberties Market, or into newly built commercial market buildings erected to accommodate them, such as the Wittlin-Deckelbaum Building at 502-506 K Street NW in Mount Vernon Triangle.

loading bays, while also paying notable attention to design and ornamental features such as the Classical bas reliefs panels, as well as the uniform arrangement of flagpoles and roof fencing, along with the occasional projecting pediment and blind arch.

The Union Market complex was determined eligible for listing in the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites as part of an extensive community planning process undertaken between 2007 and 2009 that culminated in the *Florida Avenue Market Study Small Area Plan*. The plan, adopted by the DC Council in October 2009, dedicates a chapter to the history of the market. The preservation, renovation and adaptive reuse of the original market buildings is integral to the vision established for the market's future. The plan can be found on the Office of Planning website at: <http://planning.dc.gov/publication/florida-avenue-market-small-area-plan-main-page>

HPO recommends that the Union Market complex be listed in the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites and forwarded to the National Register of Historic Places as a historic district. Based upon a review of the National Register Guidelines for determining building classification, an argument could be made either way for listing Union Market as a building or district. The Guidelines note that "Building" may not only refer to a single building, but to a historically and functionally related unit, and a "District" possesses a significant concentration of resources united historically or aesthetically by plan or physical development. So, while either classification would be appropriate, the designation of Union Market as a historic district is consistent with that established for other complexes of buildings in the city, such as educational campuses and government installations. This recommendation is also influenced by the different purposes established in the preservation law for landmarks and historic districts. Based on the on-going evolution of the market, the stricter standard for landmarks that encourages restoration is less appropriate than the more flexible standard for districts that ensures alterations of existing structures are compatible.

Integrity

Union Market is an active wholesale market complex whose buildings have been altered over the course of its history. Alterations predominantly include the infilling of open loading bays, windows and doors. Almost all of these alterations are additive in nature and readily reversible and do not compromise the integrity of design. The uniform architecture, materials, workmanship, feeling and association remain intact.

Boundaries

The boundaries have been drawn around the historic core of the complex including five rows of connected buildings that comprise 74 distinct addresses of which 70 are "contributing" and 4 are "non-contributing." The four non-contributing buildings were built after the end date of the period of significance.

Period of Significance

The Period of Significance extends from 1929 when the first building was constructed until 1939 when the last building to conform to the established design was completed.