
HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD

Historic Landmark Case No. 11-04

Hamilton Hotel
1001 14th Street, NW
(Square 248, Lot 0812)

Meeting Date: November 29, 2012
Applicant: The D.C. Preservation League
Affected ANC: 2F
Staff Reviewer: Kim Williams

After careful consideration, the HPO recommends that the Board designate the Hamilton Hotel at 1001 14th Street, NW as a historic landmark to be entered into the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites. The HPO further recommends that the nomination be forwarded to the National Register of Historic Places with a positive recommendation for listing at the local level of significance.



Historical and Architectural Background

The Hamilton Hotel is a large eleven-story Beaux Arts-style hotel building located at the northeast corner of 14th and K Streets across from Franklin Square in downtown D.C. The current building was erected on the site of the original Hamilton Hotel—an 1851 brick building constructed as a private school, but used as a hotel beginning in the 1860s. Designed by noted local architect Jules Henri de Sibour, the new Hamilton Hotel building opened in 1922 with 300 rooms and generous public rooms that became important meeting and social spaces for a larger

community of union labor leaders. The building is a concrete and steel frame structure, clad in Indiana limestone and featuring Classically inspired *bas relief* ornamentation. It has a U-shaped footprint, providing natural light in all of the rooms, and features a distinctive arched entry pavilion between the two principal wings of the building.

The Hamilton Hotel was constructed during a period when the hotel as a building type was evolving in this city and nationwide. From the 1870s through the early 1900s, hotels in Washington were small in scale and varied in terms of the guests they served and the facilities they provided, ranging from modest to luxurious. With the development of structural steel frame, hotels, like office buildings, began to increase in size. The first large steel frame hotel in D.C. was the new Willard Hotel, constructed in 1900. Other less luxurious hotels described as “popularly priced, first-class commercial hotels” followed. Such hotels combined the amenities of luxury hotels with services for the growing middle class or white-collar workers and tourists.

As part of its amenities, the Hamilton offered meeting rooms, a gracious dining room, and eventually a cocktail lounge known as the “Rainbow Room.” These public facilities attracted members of the city’s business community, and in particular leaders of labor unions and labor associations. William Green, who served as president of the American Federation of Labor from 1924 until his death in 1952, actually lived at the Hamilton Hotel. During this time at the Hamilton, Green presided over meetings considered important to the history of the labor movement.

The Hamilton Hotel served continuously as a hotel through 1972 at which point the Salvation Army purchased it and converted it into an apartment building for single women. In 1979, the building became an office building and then, in 1996, was restored to use as a hotel. At that time, the building was enlarged by a roof addition, set back from the historic building massing.

Evaluation

The Hamilton Hotel meets D.C. Criteria A (*Events*) and B (*History*) and National Register Criterion A (*History*) for its association with the history of the labor movement and the community of labor leaders that lived and worked in the District of Columbia from the 1920s through the 1960s. The most notable member of this community during the period of significance was William Green, President of the American Federation of Labor (1924 to 1952), and a resident of the Hamilton Hotel throughout the period of his leadership.

The Hamilton Hotel is further eligible under D.C. Criterion D (*Architecture and Urbanism*) and National Register Criterion C (*Architecture*) as a good example of a downtown Beaux Arts-style hotel designed by noted master architect, Jules Henri de Sibour. The popularly priced hotel, with its extensive meeting spaces, exemplifies the broader trends of hotel design and development during the hotel building boom of the 1920s.

Although the Hamilton has been enlarged by a rooftop addition, the building maintains its integrity. The addition is set back from the main plane of the building and does not compromise the original massing, architectural design, materials or craftsmanship.

The Period of Significance for the building extends from 1922 until 1972, the period during which the building served, uninterrupted as a hotel, and including the residency of William Green.