
HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD

Historic Landmark Case No. 10-16

Denrike Office Building

1010 Vermont Avenue NW

Square 216, Lot 0027

Meeting Date: June 23, 2016
Applicant: D.C. Preservation League
Affected ANC: 2F
Staff Reviewer: Kim Williams

The Historic Preservation Office recommends that the Board designate the Denrike Office Building at 1010 Vermont Avenue NW, a historic landmark in the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites and forward the nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.

Architectural and Historical background

The Denrike building is an eleven-story office building on the west side of the 1000 block of Vermont Avenue just north of McPherson Square. Constructed in 1925-26, the Denrike was designed by notable local architect Appleton P. Clark, Jr. It is composed of the traditional early 20th-century three-part commercial block of base, middle and top, but is executed in a Tudor Gothic Revival style that is rare for commercial buildings in the city. The concrete-frame, limestone-clad building is characterized by its Tudor Gothic detailing including vertical window bays separated by pilasters with Tudor arches and spandrels, and by more intricate Tudor-inspired stone carvings at the base and upper stories of the building. Figurative heads are used as imposts and drip molds, while gargoyle-type winged heads in the end bays at the cornice level have a purely decorative use.

The Denrike is one of a collection of 1920s office buildings that surround McPherson Square, today, and that represent the historic northern edge of the city's financial district. During the 19th century, banks and offices related to the city's financial interests were centered on lower 15th Street across from and north of the Treasury Building and around 14th and G Streets. By the early 20th century, however, the development of office buildings associated with the city's financial markets began to push north to McPherson Square and in the process completely transformed what had been a wealthy residential neighborhood of 19th-century residences into a commercial/office building area.

Before construction of the Denrike Building in 1925-26, the site was occupied by a three-story Victorian house built in 1884, which was later the residence of former House Speaker Joseph Cannon (House Speaker from 1903-1911). This house was one of many sizeable and opulent residences that were built around the public square during the second half of the 19th century. The square, first improved in 1872-73 by the joining of two triangular open spaces on either side of a diagonal road into a landscaped square, was initially intended to be named for United States

Army General Winfield Scott, but when that honor went to present-day Scott Circle, the public square was instead improved with a statue of Brigadier General James McPherson and named after that Civil War general. In 1907, millionaire John McLean built the last of the square's grand mansions—the McLean House—on the south end of the square, incorporating the older Hamilton Fish house into it. By that time, however, the square was already beginning to see its gradual shift from residential to office use. Initially, business offices moved into the square's large residences; in 1899, for instance, the Justice Department moved its headquarters from Pennsylvania Avenue into the Lowery and Palmer houses on the north side of the square. Eventually, as the need for dedicated office buildings grew, residential buildings serving as offices became prime candidates for replacement altogether.

The first residential displacement occurred in 1912 when the University Club, established to cater to downtown businessmen, was built on the west side of McPherson Square, replacing several residences. In 1917, the Davidson Building on the opposite side of the square became the first major office building to break ground on the site of former residences. During the 1920s, the square's residential properties were replaced one-by-one by office buildings (principally real estate-related and financial institutions). During the mid-1920s, the local press focused much attention on this change from residential to commercial, often lamenting the loss of the “old” residences, but also recognizing the “march of progress.”

The Denrike Building was constructed during the height of this commercial activity around McPherson Square. As constructed, the building included six shops on the first story and 230 offices in the ten floors above. According to city directories, the offices housed a variety of businesses, many of which were associated with the real estate and construction businesses that were a critical component of the city's financial industry. Banks, mortgage and trust companies, real estate developers, dealers and property sales management companies all emerged during the construction boom years of the 1920s. Indeed, one of the building's largest tenants was the newly formed Great National Insurance Company which the *Washington Post* identified as one of the city's “growing list of financial institutions.”

Evaluation

The Denrike Building is eligible for listing in the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites under Criteria D (Architecture and Urbanism), Criteria E (Artistry) and F (Creative Masters). The Denrike Building embodies the distinguishing characteristics of the Tudor Gothic Revival Style particularly in its use in commercial buildings. The style's historic precedent, Tudor Gothic, was the final development of English Perpendicular Gothic and is characterized largely by the use of the multi-point Tudor arch. The Revival style tends to be more geometric in form than its historic precedent, however, and can be compared to certain expressions of the emerging 20th-century Art Deco aesthetic. Although the Gothic Revival style was favored for commercial buildings in other cities during the early 20th century (i.e. Chicago Tribune Tower; the Woolworth Building, and the American Radiator Building in New York City), the style was less common in this city for buildings other than ecclesiastical ones. Based upon an office building survey conducted of the downtown area, only four fully executed Gothic Revival style commercial buildings were built, including the Denrike Building (1925-26), the Barr Building (1926-27), the Mather Building (1916), and the Securities Building (1926). Of these, the Denrike Building is the only Tudor Gothic example. The building embodies the distinctive

characteristics of the style in its Tudor arched pilasters; its open-book Tudor spandrels; and its gargoyle-like ornament.

The Denrike Building is the work of local master architect Appleton P. Clark, Jr. whose long career, both as an architect and public servant, from 1886 to 1939 had a significant influence on the city's built environment. Clark designed a variety of building types including office buildings, apartment buildings, banks, churches, theaters, schools and private residences. As a private practitioner, he designed five public schools for the District, including Eckington, Petworth, Langston, Wheatley, and Eaton Schools. Although many of Clark's later buildings reflect Classical Revival styles, his early work, including the first *Washington Post* building and the residence known as the Owl's Nest, provide examples of designs inspired by Medieval and Jacobean prototypes. The Denrike Building illustrates Clark's continued interest in Medieval architectural styles, at the same time that its use corresponds with an interest in the Gothic Revival style for commercial buildings nationwide.

For the same reasons above, the Denrike Building also meets National Register Criterion C for Architecture with the Period of Significance corresponding with the building's date of construction--1925-1926. The building retains good integrity with alterations limited to replacement windows, and to the re-cladding of ground floor storefronts. A 2014 re-cladding of the ground floor storefronts with limestone replaced and improved upon earlier marble cladding that was likely undertaken during the 1980s or 1990s.

