
HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD

Historic Landmark Case No. 21-04

Annie's Paramount Steak House

1519 17th Street NW (original location)

1609-1611 17th Street NW (current location)

Square 0170, Lot 111

Square 0180, Lot 22

Meeting Date: December 17, 2020
Applicant: DC Preservation League
Affected ANC: 2B

The Historic Preservation Office recommends that the Board designate the buildings at 1519 and 1609-1611 17th Street NW, the historic and current site of Annie's Paramount Steak House, a historic landmark. HPO recommends that the Board forward the nomination to the National Register of Historic Places with Social History/LGBTQ as the Area of Significance and with 1948-1985 as the Period of Significance.

Background

In 2017, the DC Historic Preservation Office received a grant from the National Park Service as part of its Underrepresented Communities Grant Fund to undertake a historic context report for Washington's LGBTQ Resources. That context study, completed in September 2019, identified and developed several themes associated with LGBTQ history and culture and prepared a guide to determining, identifying, evaluating and nominating LGBTQ resources. The report identified Annie's Paramount Steak House under the theme *Community Development—Social Spaces and Places* for potential listing in the National Register as "one of the earliest LGBTQ friendly establishments in the District." Annie's Steak House occupied the building at 1519 17th Street during the early years of its association with LGBTQ history until it moved in 1985. Since 1985, the restaurant, which continues to have important associations with the LGBTQ community, occupies the buildings at 1609-1611 17th Street NW. For that reason, this nomination covers the two non-contiguous properties under a single landmark cover. The buildings are contributing buildings in the Dupont Circle Historic District.

Architectural and Social History Summary

In 1948, Greek immigrant George Katinas purchased the building at 1519 Seventeenth Street, NW. The building, constructed in 1878 as a store and dwelling, was later home to the Paramount Café. Katinas changed the name to Paramount Steakhouse and grew his new restaurant with the help of his family, including his sister, Annie Katinas Kaylor. In the early 1960s, George added his sister's name to the restaurant because her engaging personality had become popular with the patrons. As early as the 1950s, the restaurant was identified as a haven in Washington's gay community largely because the Katinas family, particularly Annie, was accepting of all individuals no matter their sexuality or lifestyles. According to the nomination, Annie recounted

in an interview later in life that the family was initially unaware that the restaurant was becoming a “gay” bar, and that “It was a gradual thing without us even being aware of it.”

In the post-World War II era, when society at large and the federal government forced many individuals to hide their sexual preferences for fear of being arrested and charged with criminal behavior, being declared mentally ill, and/or losing their jobs, restaurants like Annie’s provided the LGBTQ community a safe space for carefree dining and social interaction. During this period, Annie’s allowed people to engage freely and to form bonds that proved crucial to the community in its fight for civil rights in the 1970s. Following the passage of anti-gay legislation in the 1970s, when the city saw the widespread establishment of gay bars and night clubs, Annie’s remained an important center of the LGBTQ community, events and activities. Annie’s occupied the building at 1519 Seventeenth Street, NW from its establishment in 1948 until 1985 when the restaurant moved to 1609 and 1611 17th Street.

In 1985, the Katinas family moved the restaurant one-and-one-half blocks north. To gain greater space, the two early 20th-century commercial buildings at 1609 and 1611 17th Street NW were joined on the interior to form a single interior space. Following the move, *The Washington Blade* reported, “The Paramount has become an institution in the Gay community... There was never much concern about history being left behind when the Paramount moved to its new place. It’s people who make history.” When Annie’s relocated, the building at 1609 17th Street NW became home to “JR’s Bar” which carries on the site’s identity as a lively gay bar.

Evaluation

Annie’s Paramount Steakhouse meets DC Designation Criterion B (History) and National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) Criterion A (Events) with Social History/LGBTQ as the Area of Significance and for its association with “historical periods, social movements, groups, institutions, achievements, or patterns of growth and change that contributed significantly to the heritage, culture or development of the District of Columbia or the nation.” Annie’s Paramount Steak House is significant as an early gathering place for members of the LGBTQ community in DC in the post-World War II era during a period of widespread homophobia. While certain restaurants, bars, and nightclubs became associated with the LGBTQ community around the city and particularly in the Dupont Circle neighborhood during the gay rights movement of the 1970s, Annie’s stands out for having earned its place as a haven for the gay community more than two decades earlier.

Period of Significance

The period of significance extends from 1948 when the restaurant was established at 1519 17th Street NW, to 1985 when it moved to 1609-1611 17th Street NW where Annie’s continues to serve the community as a popular gathering place for the LGBTQ community.