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## HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD

Historic Landmark Case No. 10-17

### The Westory Building 607 14<sup>th</sup> Street, NW (Square 253, Lot 66)

Meeting Date: June 28, 2012  
Applicant: The D.C. Preservation League  
Affected ANC: 2F  
Staff Reviewer: Kim Williams

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After careful consideration, the HPO recommends that the Board designate the Westory Building at 607 14<sup>th</sup> Street, NW 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.



### Historical and Architectural Background

The Westory Building is an architecturally distinctive, Beaux Arts-style office building constructed in 1907-1908 at the corner of 14<sup>th</sup> and F Streets, NW in the city's downtown business district. The nine-story building, erected as a speculative office building on the site of a former dwelling, was constructed in the initial years following the publication of the 1902 McMillan Plan. Although the McMillan Plan focused its vision on the city's monumental core, its publication inspired the city's business community to champion civic improvement in the business district and to work together to adequately reflect the "rising aspirations for a national

capital.” The Westory Building, with its rusticated terra cotta base, its tall central shaft of brick, and its ornately decorated terra cotta attic level which rose well above the surrounding building stock, was a showcase for new office building construction, and as such, perfectly reflects the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century City Beautiful attitude.

Prior to construction of the Westory Building, the site was home to a three-story Greek Revival-style dwelling known as the Stone House and built circa 1849 by Washington engraver William J. Stone as a wedding present for his son, Dr. Robert King Stone. (Dr. Stone was President Lincoln’s personal physician.) At that time and in the decades that followed, this part of downtown was a fashionable residential neighborhood located just east of the White House. In the post-Civil War era, commercial buildings and uses began to replace residential ones, and by the 1880s, a concentrated financial and retail district had developed at the nearby intersection of 14<sup>th</sup> and G Streets, a trend that continued into the 20<sup>th</sup> century and spread further westerly and northerly as the years progressed.

Despite the commercialization of the area, Stone’s widow remained in the house until her death in 1905. In 1907, the real estate firm of Westcott & Story (after whom the Westory Building was named) purchased the property from the Stone Estate on behalf of Colonel George H. Higbee from Iowa. Higbee, who has no other known associations with real estate development in D.C. worked with the local real estate firm Westcott & Story to speculate on the rising promise of the city’s commercial development. Higbee hired out-of-town architect Henry L.A. Jekel and nationally known builder George A. Fuller to design and build his new downtown office building. Although Jekel’s current reputation is based upon his many Romantic Revival-style houses of the 1920s in Riverside, California where he lived after moving there from the East coast, his early career featured several commercial buildings in East coast cities, including the 1902 seventeen-story skyscraper in Philadelphia, known as the Pennsylvania Building which closely resembles his 1907 Westory Building.

As designed by Jekel, the Westory Building is a nine-story steel-frame “skyscraper” with brick cladding and white-glazed terra cotta ornamentation. The building is arranged according to the standard Chicago School tri-partite organizing principle of base, shaft and capital. Ornamentation is reserved primarily for the double-story columned base and the upper, attic level where a row of roaring lions’ heads separates it from the plain brick walls forming the building’s main shaft. As the building neared completion in 1907, the local press called the building the “Flatiron’s Revival.” This designation was most likely due to the building’s corner site and narrow frontage along F Street, and to the fact that the new building soared above the buildings around it like that of the Flatiron.

Just prior to and following construction of the Westory Building, other Classically inspired and similarly scaled buildings were constructed in the immediate vicinity, including the Interstate building (1912) within the same block of F Street; the Federal-American National Bank building (1925-26); the Colorado Building (1903); and the Commercial National Bank building (1917) all located at different corners of the intersection of 14<sup>th</sup> and G Streets, just one block north of the Westory. In 1991 and then again in 2002, the Westory Building was added onto on both the 14<sup>th</sup> Street and F Street sides and heightened by a rooftop addition. These additions, along with contemporary multi-story construction in the vicinity, were all built to the city’s maximum height limit creating a more uniform roof-scape and diminishing the “skyscraper” and “flatiron” effect of the office building.

Upon its completion, the Westory Building housed retail at street level, offices for a range of professionals in the upper floors, and a bar and restaurant at the basement level (The Thos. F. Keane Chop House, described as a “Resort for Gentlemen” in period advertisements). By 1910, the Calvert Company—a high-end clothing store—moved into the ground floor space, contributing to the growing retail clothing industry along F Street.

### **Evaluation**

The Westory Building is eligible for listing as a D.C. Landmark under Criterion D, *Architecture and Urbanism* and Criterion E, *Artistry* and under the National Register Criterion C, *Architecture*. The nine-story, three-part Westory Building provides an excellent example of an early 20<sup>th</sup>-century, multi-story, steel-frame commercial “skyscraper” as this part of downtown transitioned from a largely residential area to a strictly commercial one. The 1907 building with its highly decorative terra cotta detailing provides an excellent illustration of the Beaux Arts style and is an excellent representation of the City Beautiful Movement as applied to office building design.

### **Integrity**

Although it has been altered both through additions and interior renovations, the Westory Building retains integrity of location, setting, design, materials, and workmanship that strongly establish the integrity of association and feeling between the existing building and the rich history of commercial development along the F Street corridor. Throughout the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, in the 1940s, 1955, and 1967, the building was altered in several different campaigns that resulted in the elimination of the original entrance on 14<sup>th</sup> Street and the original show windows on 14<sup>th</sup> and F Streets. In 1991 and then again in 2002, the building was substantially enlarged by 11-story additions to the north and east and by a rooftop addition. Still, the original nine-story building is clearly distinguishable, and its highly decorative ornamentation fully intact. Despite the fact that the building no longer towers above the neighboring buildings, this aspect of the building is not, in itself, the reason for which the Westory is significant.