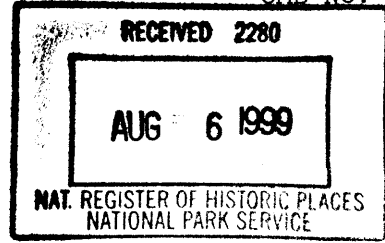


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM**



This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

**1. Name of Property**

historic name Hotel Kernan  
other names/site number Congress Hotel; B-2250

**2. Location**

street 306-312 West Franklin Street  
not for publication n/a city or town Baltimore vicinity n/a  
state Maryland code MD county independent city code 510 zip code 21201

**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this x nomination      request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property x meets      does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant      nationally      statewide x locally. (      See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

[Signature] 7-29-99  
Signature of certifying official Date

In my opinion, the property   x   meets      does not meet the National Register criteria. (      See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting or other official Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

=====  
**4. National Park Service Certification**  
=====

I, hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register  
    \_\_\_ See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the  
    National Register  
    \_\_\_ See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the  
    National Register
- removed from the National Register

Edson H. Beall

\_\_\_ other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

Edson H. Beall

Signature of Keeper

9/3/99  
Date  
of Action

=====  
**5. Classification**  
=====

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property (Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>  1  </u>	_____ buildings
_____	_____ sites
_____	_____ structures
_____	_____ objects
<u>  1  </u>	<u>  0  </u> Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in National Register   0  

Name of related multiple property listing   n/a

=====  
**6. Function or Use**  
=====

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: DOMESTIC Sub: hotel  
COMMERCE/TRADE Sub: restaurant

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: VACANT NOT IN USE Sub: \_\_\_\_\_

=====  
**7. Description**  
=====

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19<sup>th</sup> AND 20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY REVIVALS/French Renaissance

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Stone  
roof Clay tile  
walls Brick; Terracotta  
other n/a

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Hotel Kernan  
Baltimore city, MD

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**8. Statement of Significance**  
=====

Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or a grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance 1903-1932

Significant Dates 1903; 1912; 1932

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

n/a

Cultural Affiliation n/a

Architect/Builder J. D. Allen Co., architect

D. W. & G. H. Thomas, general contractors

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

=====

### 9. Major Bibliographical References

=====

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS)

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Location of Additional Data

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

=====

### 10. Geographical Data

=====

Acreage of Property less than one acre

USGS quadrangle Baltimore East, MD

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
A	<u>18</u>	<u>360220</u>	<u>4350570</u>	C	<u>18</u>	_____
B	<u>18</u>	_____	_____	D	<u>18</u>	_____

See continuation sheet.

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION: The nominated property is described among the records of the City of Baltimore, Department of Public Works, Property Location Division as Lot 41 in Block 530, Ward 11, Section 10 and the vestigial entrance and cornerstone contained within a perpetual easement granted on an approximately 20 ft. by 20 ft. parcel at the southeast corner of Lot 2/11 in Block 530, Ward 11, Section 10.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION: This boundary constitutes the legal description of the property on which the Hotel Kernan is located and describes the portion of the adjacent lot that includes the cornerstone for the Million Dollar Triple Enterprise and the vestigial entrance shared by the Maryland Theater (demolished 1951) and the Hotel Kernan. The vestigial entrance and cornerstone are included with the resource because of their historic physical connection with the Hotel Kernan.

Hotel Kernan  
Baltimore city, MD

=====  
**11. Form Prepared By**

=====  
name/title Betty Bird and Heather Ewing  
organization Betty Bird & Associates date November 30, 1998  
street & number 2607 24th Street, NW, Suite 3 telephone (202) 588-9033  
city or town Washington state DC zip code 20008  
=====

**Additional Documentation**

=====  
Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

=====  
**Property Owner**

=====  
(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name \_\_\_\_\_  
street & number \_\_\_\_\_ telephone \_\_\_\_\_  
city or town \_\_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_\_ zip code \_\_\_\_\_  
=====

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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B-2250  
Hotel Kernan  
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SUMMARY DESCRIPTION

The Hotel Kernan, designed in 1903 by Philadelphia architect John Allen for theatrical impresario James Lawrence Kernan, originally comprised one of three elements of Kernan's "Million Dollar Triple Enterprise." The other two components were the Auditorium Theater (now called Mayfair Theater, in severely deteriorated condition) and the Maryland Theater (demolished 1951). The one-story base of a recessed hyphen (now gone) that connected the Hotel Kernan with the Maryland Theater survives as a vestigial entrance, connected to the west end of the primary facade of the hotel. The six-story plus mansard, French renaissance revival style Hotel Kernan is detailed in brick and terra cotta. The hotel, which faces south onto Franklin Street, is of steel and reinforced concrete construction and U-shaped in plan. The principal (south) facade, the only detailed facade, is finished with a stone base, brick walls, and highly ornate terra cotta detailing. The interior plan of the building consists of public rooms to either side of a central entry on the ground floor and basement level, and hotels rooms disposed about a double-loaded U-shaped corridor on the upper floors.

The building was altered in 1932 and again in the late 1940s and early 1950s, when owner Milton Firey undertook an extensive modernization campaign. Although the building, which has been vacant since 1986, has been stripped of all of its decorative metal exterior trim and much of its interior fixtures and furnishings, a considerable amount of the elaborate plaster detailing in the first floor public spaces as well as the renowned marble bar in the basement still remain. Despite neglect and harsh treatment, the Hotel Kernan still retains its essential physical features and possesses sufficient integrity to convey its significance as one of Baltimore's few remaining grand turn-of-the century hotels.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

The Hotel Kernan is a six-story plus mansard, brick and terra cotta French renaissance revival style building of steel and reinforced concrete construction. The sculptural, highly plastic character of its primary facade relates more closely to its eclectic 19th-century hotel predecessors than to the more restrained revival styles that characterized Baltimore's later hotels and the contemporary Hotel Belvedere. The mid-block building, which faces south onto Franklin Street, is flanked by a large parking lot (formerly the site of the Maryland Theater) on the west and mid-19th century low rise structures on the east. Its rear (north) facade abuts the

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south facade of the Auditorium Theater (Mayfair), the only other remaining element of James L. Kernan's Million Dollar Triple Enterprise; only a small part of the undetailed upper portion of the north facade is visible from the street. The shadow of Kernan's Maryland Theater (demolished in 1951), which was completed before the Hotel Kernan, can be seen on the undetailed brick west facade of the Hotel Kernan. The one-story projecting base of the recessed hyphen that connected the two buildings remains as a vestigial entrance, attached to the southwest corner of the hotel, the cornerstone of the Million Dollar Triple Enterprise, which bears the date "1903," survives next to the west end of the vestigial entrance. The U-shaped plan of the upper floors of the building creates a large light well at the center of the east facade. There are smaller, shallow lightwells notched into the north and west facades as well.

The front (south) facade is the Hotel Kernan's only detailed facade. With the exception of shallow returns at the south end of the west and east facades, the east, west, and north facades are utilitarian in appearance. The south facade is a tripartite composition based on the Beaux Arts convention of base, shaft, and crown. The rusticated stone base of the building, which rests on a granite watertable, was originally designed as a free-standing, 1-1/2 story casino. It features an elaborately decorated central arch that rises above a full entablature marking the top of the base, dramatizing the hotel entrance below. The central arch is delineated by a broken scroll pediment that supports cherubs holding a cartouche. Two circular windows occupy the tympanum of the arch. An arched opening below this central arch originally featured a recessed entrance containing a wide granite stair leading up to the hotel lobby and flanking stairs leading down to a rathskeller and other public facilities in the basement. This entrance echoed the form of the vestigial entrance leading to the hyphen (now gone) that once connected the Hotel Kernan with the Maryland Theater. The original central recessed entry is now hidden from the street by the present ca. 1946 Federal revival frontispiece that houses the double doors providing access to the hotel. Elaborate classical detailing on the base includes fluted pilasters supporting a frieze with rosettes; panels decorated with swags, shields, crotches, and nymphs; and voussoirs with console keystones.

The vestigial entrance, the former one-story recessed entrance to the hyphen that connected the Hotel Kernan to the Maryland Theater (now gone), survives as a shallow element at the west end of the primary (south) facade. (Regulations that went into effect after the Great Fire of 1904 required that steps or stairs be recessed behind the plane of the building.) Rusticated piers resting on a granite watertable frame a massive



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terra cotta arch embellished with ornamented spandrels, egg-and-dart molding, a paneled soffit, and a console keystone decorated with a swag and ornamental drop pendant. The keystone and consoles support a projecting balcony once topped with terra cotta balusters. . Only the metal framework and piers of the balcony now remain. The curved southwest corner of the Hotel Kernan extends down behind the arch. Recessed granite stairs lead up to an entrance at the first floor level and down to an entrance to the basement. Decorative metal bars are placed in front of the blank wall at the top of the stairs.

The variegated material and massing of the shaft of the Hotel Kernan (second - sixth stories) breaks up the bulk of the hotel's street facade and contributes to the hotel's robust, sculptural quality. The shaft is articulated in an a reeded manner that enhances the verticality of this essentially square facade. Piers and arcades that rise the height of the shaft are highlighted by quoins of contrasting color. The rounded return at the western corner of the building echoes the prominent round bay that anchors the southeast corner of the building. Three-story oriels surmounted by balustraded balconies add additional vertical emphasis. Historic photographs indicate the oriels were once clad in what appears to be decorative metal; today their surface is exposed concrete. Additional terra cotta balconies project at the third and fifth story levels to either side of the central element of the building. For the most part, fenestration consists of one-over-one sash, with two-over-two sash in many of the windows within the curved corners. Much of the sash appears broken or damaged.

The tiled mansard roof serves as the crown of the building. The mansard returns around the southern portion of the east facade to the edge of the lightwell. While many of the tiles are missing, the roof retains its original iron cresting. At the southern end of the east elevation, there is a large frame above the roof for a neon sign that reads "Friendship Classic Inn." Hooded window molds, once clad in decorative metal, project from the mansard. Pedimented terra cotta dormers housing paired one-over-one windows interrupt the cornice line.

The east elevation, which faces an alley, is arranged around a central recessed lightwell that begins at the second story. The channeled brick of the first story, which terminates in a corbelled stringcourse, echoes the rustication pattern of the primary facade. The southern block of the U is detailed in buff brick and surmounted by the mansard roof; the remaining portion of the east facade is detailed in common brick and topped by a corbelled cornice. A hexagonal bay of exposed concrete projects east into

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the center of the light well. Window openings are detailed in a utilitarian manner; smaller window openings at the center of the north and south block of the east facade probably indicate the location of original bathrooms.

The west facade was not designed to be exposed, as it is today. The west wall of the Hotel Kernan originally abutted a hyphen that connected the hotel with the Maryland Theater. When the Maryland Theater was demolished in 1951, it left the Congress Hotel, as it was by then named, a free-standing building. The brick facade of the hotel now bears the scar of the former roof line of the Maryland Theater, which was completed before the Hotel Kernan, and displays several brick-up openings that indicate interconnections between the two buildings. The only decorative features on the west facade are a corbelled cornice and faint lettering of "HOTEL KERNAN" visible at the top of the southern end of the west facade.

The entrance at the center of the Hotel Kernan currently provides the only access to the interior of the building. (The vestigial entrance at the west end of the building, which is now sealed, also provided access to the hotel.) Public spaces are situated in the basement and first floor; upper floors house hotel rooms along a double-loaded, U-shaped corridor. The circulation system of the building originally consisted of an open well stair placed near the center of the base of the U and an elevator in the northeast corner of the building. (An additional stair in the demolished hyphen connecting the Hotel Kernan with the Maryland Theater would have provided secondary egress.) In the mid-20th century an elevator was placed within the open well of the stair and a fire stair was placed within the elevator shaft in the northeast corner.

The original, elaborate recessed entrance to the building is intact behind the present ca. 1946 frontispiece. A wide granite stair with balusters leads to the first floor; flanking stairs lead down to the basement, which was originally designed as a rathskeller. The open plan basement houses the celebrated marble bar; the back bar has vanished. With the exception of the bar, this space appears to have been stripped of any decorative features. On the first floor, the central entry leads into a late-20th century registration lobby immediately north of the stair. The dining room, which occupies the eastern half of the floor, appears to be the most intact of the public areas. It retains its full ceiling height and sufficient elaborate cast plaster detail to indicate the original character of the space. Fixtures like doors and hardware have been stripped from the building. The kitchen is located against the north wall of the building at the north end of the dining room. The probable Palm Court at the west side of the front of the lobby is also intact. In 1947, Milton Firey, the

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owner/manager of the hotel, created an L-shaped mezzanine that wrapped around the northwest corner of the building, behind the stair, dropping the ceiling over the former art gallery and registration desk.

The six upper stories above the mezzanine are identical in plan. Rooms are placed on either side of a central U-shaped corridor that extends around the deep lightwell on the east side of the building. Smaller lightwells placed at the center of the north and west facades, and a lightwell notched into the northwest corner of the building, provide light to rooms that would have faced the Maryland and Auditorium Theaters. While the plan of the corridor on the upper floors appears to be intact, no decorative elements remain. The upper floors originally housed suites as well as single rooms. While some rooms had private baths, each floor probably housed lavatories serving several rooms. The floor plan of the upper floors has been reworked to create additional rooms and additional private baths. The building, which declined into a single-room occupancy hotel before being abandoned in 1986, is in fair to poor condition.

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SUMMARY SIGNIFICANCE

The Hotel Kernan, constructed in 1903 for theater impresario James Lawrence "Addie" Kernan (1838-1912), is a locally significant example of lavish hotels of the period. Designed by Philadelphia architect John Allen, the hotel was constructed as part of Kernan's Million Dollar Triple Enterprise, which also included the Maryland Theater (now gone) and the Auditorium Theater (now Mayfair Theater).<sup>1</sup> Kernan, a noted Baltimore philanthropist who founded the J.L. Kernan Hospital and Industrial School at Radnor Park, lived at the hotel until his death in 1912. The Kernan interests sold the hotel in the 1920s. The establishment, which was renamed the Congress Hotel in 1932, was owned and operated by the Firey family from 1938 to 1977. By the 1970s, Kernan's deluxe establishment had declined into a single room occupancy hotel. The hotel has been vacant since 1986. The Hotel Kernan meets National Register Criterion C as one of the few surviving examples of a property type for which Baltimore was once noted. The period of significance of the Hotel Kernan extends from its date of construction in 1903 to 1932, when it was bought at a bankruptcy sale and remodeled.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

The Hotel Kernan, which features one of the most lavishly decorated exterior bases of any Baltimore hotel, is one of a handful of buildings that survive to represent this distinctive property type, for which Baltimore was particularly noted. Baltimore proved a fertile setting for hotel development. As a trade and transportation entrepot, the city required transient housing for the hundreds of travelers and businessmen passing through the city. In addition to lodging, hotel rooms offered temporary office space for traveling salesmen to display their samples. Moreover, until well into the 20th century, Baltimore hotels provided permanent as well as transient housing, since the city came late to apartment living.

Baltimore enjoyed a distinguished tradition of fine hotels, boasting one of the three most important American hotels of the early 19th century. David Barnum's six-story, 200 room City Hotel (built 1825, demolished 1889), designed by William Small, was among the world's grandest hotels, setting a standard for the type. Frances Trollope called Barnum's "the most splendid in the Union" and Charles Dickens praised it as "one of the most comfortable of all the hotels in the United States."<sup>2</sup> Barnum's set the standard for public hospitality that Baltimore's other renowned antebellum hotels, all now gone, adopted. Early hotels included the Fountain Inn, the

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Eutaw House (constructed 1835, demolished 1916), and the Gilmore House/St. Clair Hotel (constructed ca. 1840, demolished 1897).

In contrast to the inn from which it ultimately evolved, the American hotel developed as a large, multi-room facility that offered a variety of public spaces like lobbies, ballrooms, dining rooms, specialized restaurants, smoking rooms, and bars. Many hotels featured large suites for residential, rather than transient, living. During the 19th and early 20th century, hotel residents could enjoy elegant meals and comfortable, stylish quarters without the expense of servants or furniture.<sup>3</sup> As American hotel design progressed and became more specialized toward the end of the 19th century, technological innovation became essential to the evolution of larger and larger hotels. Steel-frame construction and equipment like elevators, bathrooms, lavatories, and heating systems became increasingly important.<sup>4</sup> Baltimore's later grand hotels, which exemplified this type, included the St. James Hotel (built 1874, demolished early 1960s), the Rennert Hotel (built 1885, enlarged 1893, demolished 1941), the Altamont Hotel (built 1886, demolished 1965), and the Emerson (built 1911, demolished 1971). Of the dozens of grand hotels in Baltimore, only two turn-of-the-century grand hotels now remain -- the Hotel Kernan and the Belvedere (built 1903).

The Hotel Kernan provides a splendid example of how hotels served as settings for ostentatious display. With his theatrical background, James Lawrence "Addie" Kernan possessed the showmanship required to build and operate an establishment that functioned as a social stage. The son of a feed store owner, Kernan was educated at Loyola College and Mount St. Mary's. As a young man working in the transportation department of the B&O Railroad, Kernan lived in the Fountain Hotel, one of Baltimore's grand antebellum hostelries. A rabid partisan during the Civil War, Kernan enlisted in the Confederate Army, was captured, and spent nearly two years as a prisoner of war at Point Lookout.

Despite his conventional job at the B&O, Kernan was drawn to the theatrical world. John Wilkes Booth was a childhood friend and his older brother, Eugene Kernan, invested in theatrical ventures. When Eugene Kernan's lessor defaulted on a loan in 1866, Eugene appointed Addie Kernan receiver of the burlesque house near Baltimore Street and Jones Falls.<sup>5</sup> Addie Kernan helped pioneer burlesque entertainment in Baltimore. After his first theater burned in 1873, he reopened his Fallsway operation as the Central Theater, later rechristening the house as the Monumental Theater and Bridge Theater. He booked a variety of well known acts, including the exotic dancer Little Egypt, whose gyrations caused Baltimore's police to shut down the theater.

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Kernan relished offering popular, mass entertainment. He operated a Summer Garden featuring bands and nightly concerts in an annex across Jones Falls from the Monumental. The Summer Garden boasted pool tables, bowling alleys, a shooting gallery, a woman diver, a boxing ring, and a gas-lit bicycle track for bicycle races. When he took over the historic Holliday Street Theater in 1890, he transformed it from an expensive, elite theatrical establishment to a low-priced venue for melodramas and other populist entertainment. He expanded his empire to include three theaters in Washington -- the Grand Opera House, the Lafayette, and the Empire -- as well as four theaters in Buffalo.

In 1890 Kernan also bought the Howard Auditorium (later reworked as the structure within the Mayfair Theater) on Howard Street between Franklin and Center. Located in an area dominated by warehouses and granaries (Kernan's father's operation had been in the same block), the Howard's primary audience was students. Kernan quickly instituted the successful practices that marked his other operations. He introduced vaudeville double bills and made the lobby itself an attraction. He transformed the lobby into the Eden Musee, a wax museum featuring tableaux with automatons.

In the 1890s, as Addie Kernan's entertainment ventures reached their peak, he concocted plans for his "Million Dollar Triple Enterprise" that would consist of two theaters and a hotel. The Auditorium Theater (now the Mayfair) would rise on the site of the Howard Auditorium. The Maryland Theater would be constructed on Franklin Street, and the Hotel Kernan would rise on Franklin Street adjacent to the Maryland Theater and backing into the Auditorium. These establishments would upgrade the type of entertainment Kernan presented.<sup>6</sup>

Kernan's vision for the Million Dollar Triple Enterprise shifted several times over the ten years it took to complete it. The scheme originally contemplated two new theaters and a ten-story hotel. Later plans depict a one-story casino instead of the hotel.<sup>7</sup> The Maryland Theater and Hotel Kernan would be constructed on the site of small, 19th-century commercial buildings facing Franklin Street. The Auditorium Theater would rise on the site of the Howard Auditorium. Kernan's architect was John D. Allen, a Philadelphia architect and engineer with wide-ranging experience designing theaters.<sup>8</sup> Little is known about Allen, who first appears in Philadelphia city directories as an architect in 1890. Business directories tout interior art decoration and theater work as his specialties. By 1918 Allen is listed as president of the A. C. Axle Manufacturing Company; he is last listed in 1923. Allen's architectural projects included designs for new construction and alterations of theaters, auditoriums, and amusement parks

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in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Brooklyn, New York, and Atlantic City.<sup>9</sup> In his design for Kernan's Million Dollar Triple Enterprise, Allen shows a sure hand with the popular architectural vocabulary for hotels and theaters. The contractor was D.W. and G.H. Thomas.<sup>10</sup> Frank Sims of Philadelphia designed the hotel decorations, which were executed by Henry Arens. Minch & Eisenbrey provided furniture and carpets and Thomas Boland was the plumbing contractor."<sup>11</sup> Newspaper articles noted that "the work of construction has been as far as possible by Baltimore labor and with Baltimore material."<sup>12</sup>

By the end of 1902, as construction began, the Million Dollar Triple Enterprise consisted of the two theaters linked by a casino, which replaced the hotel. Rather than demolishing the Howard Auditorium, the Auditorium Theater appears to have been constructed around the existing structure.<sup>13</sup> In July 1903 a fire within the casino, then under construction, virtually destroyed its interior and seriously damaged its exterior terra cotta. Kernan then returned to his original scheme of a hotel and two theaters, incorporating the surviving street facade of the casino into his hotel.<sup>14</sup>

In architectural style, the Hotel Kernan adopted a loose version of the French renaissance revival style popularized by the premier hotel architect of the day, Henry J. Hardenbergh of New York. Its lively facade held its own with the festive Maryland Theater next door, consistent with the popular idiom of hotel design in Baltimore. Late 19th century hotels like the St. James, Rennert, and Altamont featured picturesque rooflines with mansard roofs punctuated by towers and dormers; load-bearing masonry facades enlivened with projecting bays; and prominent entry features. The Hotel Kernan, like the contemporary Belvedere and the later Emerson, retained the hallmark hotel mansard. However, the Hotel Kernan was transitional in style, adopting the picturesque facade articulation and highly plastic ornament of the earlier hotels. It translated the refined French renaissance revival vocabulary of the fashionable contemporary hotels into a more theatrical baroque. The base of the building, originally designed as the facade of the free-standing casino, gave the building particular panache.

The Hotel Kernan opened to great fanfare on September 3, 1905, the crowning piece of Kernan's Million Dollar Triple Enterprise. The opening was scheduled to coincide with the beginning of the fall season for the two theaters, which were inaugurated the preceding year.<sup>15</sup> Kernan invited leading lights of Baltimore to the opening, including noted Baltimore architects E. Francis Baldwin and Charles Cassell]. An enormous rathskeller, later billed as Baltimore's first nightclub, was housed in the basement. A grand dining room occupied the eastern half of the first floor;

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the western portion of the first floor served as an art gallery displaying Kernan's personal collection of 19th century drawings and paintings. Hotel rooms were located on the upper floors.

A newspaper article describing the opening details the twin concerns of technology and luxurious public spaces that characterized American hotel building at the turn of the century:

The first impression of the visitor upon entering the lobby is one of magnitude, artistic beauty and solidity. He is impressed with the massive marble and gold columns with their Corinthian capitals, the marble floor and wainscoting, the finely polished mahogany furnishings and the general air of elegance. The beautiful marble quarter circle which forms the front desk and office counter [now gone] contrasts well with the other fittings.

The hotel, which has been two years in the process of construction, is modern and up to date in every detail. It contains 150 rooms, luxuriously furnished, each of which is light and airy. They are arranged single double and en suite and nearly all have private baths.... [The hotel] is lighted throughout by electricity, ventilated by the latest exhaust fan system and heated by steam.<sup>16</sup>

Advertisements for the Hotel Kernan played up its "plunger elevator system" noted that the facility was "absolutely fireproof" and "perfectly safe." The Hotel Kernan's advertisements also touted its sumptuous amenities like its cuisine, "hygienic barber shop," and "special attention to after-theatre supper parties and private banquets." Leading performers, like Adelina Patti, appearing at Kernan's theaters were featured entertainers in the dining room, rathskeller, and palm garden.<sup>17</sup> Clearly the Hotel Kernan provided an opportunity for guests to enjoy the trappings of a luxurious life only available to the wealthiest private households.

The two theaters comprising the Million Dollar Triple Enterprise exhibited the same exalted taste as the hotel. Addie Kernan exercised stern censorship to guarantee that the upgraded vaudeville fare was suitable for family audiences.<sup>18</sup> Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplin both played in vaudeville acts at the Maryland Theater. Later performers included Will Rogers, Weber & Fields, Al Jolson and Eddie Cantor.<sup>19</sup> The Auditorium, leased to the Schubert organization, featured legitimate theater. With the decline of vaudeville, the Maryland Theater was converted to a legitimate stage in 1927.<sup>20</sup> Nestled between Kernan's two theaters and on the same block with the Academy of Music, the Hotel Kernan became the favorite of theatrical people and road show personnel.<sup>21</sup> Described as "the hub of



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theatrical life and the headquarters of sportsmen,"<sup>22</sup> it hosted Henry Fonda's wedding to Margaret Sullivan.<sup>23</sup>

Kernan was a self-made man who never forgot his humble roots.<sup>24</sup> He was an active Democrat, serving as both a Park Commissioner and Jail Commissioner. A generous soul, he assisted Confederate veterans and Catholic charities. His obituary noted that he typically wrote out checks to various organizations serving the needy three times a week.<sup>25</sup> He is best remembered, however, for his work establishing the James Lawrence Kernan Hospital and Industrial School for Crippled Children. In a state reluctant to provide public hospitals or facilities for children with special needs, Kernan's generosity was immensely important. Kernan became involved with the hospital in 1909 when Ada Mosby wrote to him requesting the loan of a piano to the Hospital for Crippled and Deformed Children, an institution housed in small buildings in the 2000 block of North Charles Street. When Kernan visited the makeshift facility and learned that Ada Mosby was the daughter of John Mosby, one of the heroes of the Confederacy, he gave the hospital a piano and became increasingly involved with its patients. In 1910 Kernan purchased the Radnor Park estate of William H. Ferguson for the hospital and gave the hospital \$10,000 to adapt it for their use. The following year the hospital voted to change its name to honor Kernan, who visited the hospital every Sunday. Kernan then incorporated his hotel and entertainment enterprises, retaining a life interest in \$340,000 worth of stock which was to be transferred to the hospital upon his death.<sup>26</sup>

Kernan remained actively involved with both the hospital and the hotel. In December 1912 Kernan died in his rooms at the hotel after a brief bout of pneumonia. Active until the end, he had taken dessert in the hotel dining room and watched games of pool in the billiard room on the night he took ill. At his death, he was eulogized by Cardinal Gibbons and memorialized for his "unfailing faith in Baltimore" on the editorial page of the Baltimore Sun.<sup>27</sup> Kernan's provision for the hospital in his will was so generous that in 1916 his son unsuccessfully contested both the will and the earlier incorporation of his father's hotel and entertainment interests.<sup>28</sup>

After Kernan's death, the decline of vaudeville and changing tastes in entertainment ultimately led to the dismantlement of his empire. Kernan's successor operation sold the Hotel Kernan to a Michigan company.<sup>29</sup> In 1932 the Penn Mutual Life Insurance Company of Philadelphia, the mortgage holder, bought Kernan's "Million Dollar Triple Enterprise" at a bankruptcy auction for \$225,000.<sup>30</sup> The Philadelphia insurance company immediately made "extensive renovations" and changed the hotel's name to the Congress Hotel.

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They operated the Congress Hotel through 1938, when Penn Mutual sold the hotel to M.J. Firey, a third-generation hotel operator from Kingston, North Carolina, for \$150,000. The Firey family would continue to own and operate the hotel for nearly 40 years. The theaters remained on the market.<sup>31</sup> In 1942 motion picture operator C. W. Hicks bought the Maryland Theater and adapted it for motion pictures. It was demolished for a parking lot in 1951.<sup>32</sup>

M.J. Firey's son, Milton, a Cornell Hotel School graduate, made extensive changes to the hotel. Like Baltimore's other hotels, the Congress suffered hard use during World War II. When Milton Firey inherited his father's hotel in 1945, he immediately began major alterations using the Southern Hotel Journal's study of modernization, "The 100-Room Hotel Study," as his guide. Firey made several exterior changes to attract automobile travelers on Franklin Street, which was also Route 40, a major route west. The present Federal revival frontispiece was installed, masking the original recessed entrance, which was "certainly not an attractive invitation to a passing motorist." A well-lit projecting marquee and new roof-top sign transformed the pedestrian scale of the original building to the automobile. On the interior, Firey reworked the public spaces, particularly on the west side of the building. He partitioned an existing mezzanine into commercial office space and leased the dining room as office space to a bank, a lawyer, and an insurance company, and constructed a mezzanine in the upper portion of the former "Peacock Alley" [probably the original Art Gallery] in the northwest quarter of the building. On the upper floors he installed vinyl wall covering to cover the extensive cracks in the interior walls.<sup>33</sup>

The Business Editor of the Sun noted that "what the Congress is doing is being done by hotels here and across the nation, that is, creating more guest rooms in the same floor area, by eliminating waste space and more efficient layouts."(sic) Firey started another \$250,000 five year program of improvements in 1950, followed by an additional series of changes costing \$150,000. He installed a new elevator and added 42 new guest rooms and bathrooms in 1955. He also added room air conditioning and installed vinyl wall coverings in all the guest rooms.<sup>34</sup> The innovative manager even returned the hotel to its theatrical roots. He invited the Vagabonds, one of Baltimore's oldest little theater groups, to establish their theater in the basement rathskeller.

However, even Firey's management skill could not overcome forces set in motion by the automobile. Like Baltimore's other downtown hotels, the Congress Hotel's doom was sealed by suburban flight and the decline of the

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center city. By the 1970s, the once proud Hotel Kernan had become a single room occupancy hotel whose rooms rented for less than \$5/day.<sup>35</sup> "The once-posh Congress had declined almost to derelict status. It was by then a great, crumbling hulk of a building, a ceiling-cracked, pipe-clanking, plaster-fallen parody of the palace that once had gleamed so brightly beneath the flood lights."<sup>36</sup>

In 1977 Angelo and Samuel Palumbo purchased the run-down building, which they continued to operate as a single-room-occupancy hotel. A newspaper article from the period noted that "the Congress became shabbier and shabbier, like an old movie star down on his luck."<sup>37</sup> Sam Palumbo, who was an engineering draftsman in the Baltimore city housing department, claimed that he sank \$100,000 into the hotel, but in 1979 he was cited for 174 housing code violations, including a lack of smoke detectors.<sup>38</sup> Entertainment venues in the building, however, were code compliant and enjoyed greater success.

The old rathskeller in the basement became the Marble Bar. Roger Anderson and his wife Leslee operated the music club from 1978 to 1995.<sup>39</sup> The Marble Bar was a vital element of Baltimore's music scene, providing a stage for emerging acts too original for other clubs.<sup>40</sup> During its heyday the Marble Bar booked emerging talent like the Psychedelic Furs, REM, X, and Squeeze before they became nationally recognized.

The Hotel Kernan has been vacant since 1986. The building, which is occasionally used for television and film shoots, is in deteriorated condition. Vandals have stripped the decorative metal that once clad the exterior oriels and the hood molds above the dormer windows. Despite the Firey-era alterations and subsequent deterioration and vandalism, the Hotel Kernan retains sufficient integrity to convey its historic associations as a representative example of a grand, turn-of-the-century Baltimore hotel. The robust character of the hotel's facade is still readily apparent despite changes at the entrance and missing decorative elements. On the interior, most of the distinctive elements of the basement and first floor public spaces remain intact. Major changes associated with hotel remodeling appear to have been concentrated on the upper floors and in the mezzanine inserted in the northwest corner of the first floor. The original entry surround and processional stairs are intact behind the present entry frontispiece and the marble bar still dominates the basement space. The dining room space and front portion of the first floor lobby also survive to provide evidence of the lavish character of the decorative program.

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Endnotes:

1 The Auditorium Theater (Mayfair Theater), which is at present in severely deteriorated condition, is not included in this National Register nomination. The Auditorium Theater (Mayfair Theater) has been under separate ownership from the hotel since the late 1930s and has had no functional relationship with the Hotel Kernan since it was converted to a motion picture house in the 1940s. The Maryland Theater, adjacent to the hotel and demolished in 1951, was always more closely identified with J. L. Kernan and the hotel.

2 Nikolaus Pevsner, *A History of Building Types*, p. 175 and Carleton Jones, *Lost Baltimore*, pp. 118-119.

3 Elizabeth Cromley, *Alone Together*, p. 19.

4 Pevsner, pp. 178-186.

5 Kernan's biographer notes that the Baltimore News reported that the "variety shows" at Kernan's first house were "rather askance." (Shirley Cammack, "James Lawrence Kernan, 1838-1912," p. 5).

6 Biographical information on Kernan taken from *Baltimore: Its History and Its People*, Vol. 2, pp. 373-374; Shirley Cammack, "James Lawrence Kernan, 1838-1912;" and "J. L. Kernan Dead," *Sun*, Dec. 15, 1912.

7 See "Kernan Houses Ready," *Sun*, Aug. 31, 1904; "Kernan's New Maryland Hotel," *Sun*, March 8, 1904; "Kernan's Maryland Theatre and Casino Annex," *Sun*, Dec. 2, 1902; and "Mr. James L. Kernan's New Hotel and Theater," *Sun*, Aug. 25, 1903

8 "Throws his hotel open," *Sun*, Sept. 3, 1905.

9 Sandra L. Tatman and Roger W. Moss, *The Biographical Dictionary of Philadelphia Architects: 1700-1930*, pp. 7-8.

10 G. H. Thomas was married to Kernan's daughter, Adelaide.

11 "Throws his hotel open," *Sun*, Sept. 3, 1905.

12 "Kernan Houses Ready," *Sun*, Aug. 31, 1904.

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- 13 Maryland Inventory of Historic Sites Form for the Mayfair Theater.
- 15 While the Maryland Theater opened in the fall of 1903, it was "opened . . . somewhat hurriedly and in an unfinished state." "Kernan Houses Ready," *Sun*, Aug. 31, 1904.
- 16 "Throws his hotel open," *Sun*, Sept. 3, 1905.
- 17 Advertisement, *Baltimore Sun*, September 5, 1905.
- 18 ❖ J. L. Kernan Dead, ❖ *Sun*, Dec. 15, 1912.
- 19 "C. W. Hicks Buys the Maryland Theater," *Sun*, April 13, 1942.
- 20 "Maryland Theater is Sold; Vaudeville May Come Back," *Sun*, April 14, 1942.
- 21 "A Bit of Theatrical History," ❖ *Gardens, Houses, and People*, James L. Kernan Co. Vertical File (ca. 1950), Maryland Room, Enoch Pratt Free Library.
- 22 "Congress Hotel Sale Announced," *Sun*, March 23, 1938.
- 23 David McQuay, ❖ "Guitarist Jazzes Up the Congress," *News-American*, Jan. 21, 1977.
- 24 *Baltimore, Its History and Its People*, p. 374.
- 25 "J. L. Kernan Dead," *Sun*, Dec. 15, 1912.
- 26 Shirley Cammack, "James Lawrence Kernan, 1838-1912," pp. 25-28.
- 27 "J. L. Kernan Dead, ❖ and Editorial, *Sun*, Dec. 15, 1912.
- 28 Shirley Cammack, ❖ "James Lawrence Kernan, 1838-1912," p. 36.
- 29 ❖ "A room at the Congress: Would you believe \$15 a night?" ❖ *Sun*, April 11, 1978.
- 30 ❖ "Kernan Holdings Sold for \$225,000," ❖ *Sun*, July 21, 1932 and "A room at the Congress: Would you believe \$15 a night?" *Sun*, April 11, 1978.

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- 31 "Congress Hotel Sale Announced," *Sun*, March 23, 193 8.
- 32 Carleton Jones, *Lost Baltimore*, p. 229.
- 33 Grace H. Woolley, "Saving \$20,000 Annually in a House of 125 Rooms," pp. 33 - 36.
- 34 Carroll E. William, "Big Expansion by Congress Hotel Planned," *Sun*, June 16, 1955.
- 35 Tom Nugent, ❖ Once-grand Congress Hotel serves an invisible clientele: the lonely, the down-and-out," *Sun*, April 11, 1978.
- 36 "A room at the Congress: Would you believe \$15 a night?" *Sun*, April 11, 1978.
- 37 ❖ Guitarist Jazzes up the Congress," *News-American*, Jan. 21, 1977.
- 38 Housing Dept. aide cited as code violator," *Evening Sun*, Nov. 27, 1979.
- 39 Roger Anderson died in 1984. (David Zeiler, "The Marble Bar closes an era, *Catholic Review*, June 5, 1985.)
- 40 David Zeiler, 'The Marble Bar closes an era, *Catholic Review*, June 5, 1985.

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**MARYLAND COMPREHENSIVE HISTORIC PRESERVATION PLAN DATA**

Geographic Organization:

Piedmont

Chronological/Developmental Periods:

Industrial/Urban Dominance, A. D. 1870-1939

Prehistoric/Historic Period Themes:

Architecture, Landscape Architecture, and Community Planning

Resource Type:

Category: Building

Historic Environment: Urban

Historic Function(s) and Use(s):

Domestic: hotel

Commerce/Trade: restaurant

Known Design Source: J. D. Allen Co., architect

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"Kernan Interests to Keep Operating," Baltimore Sun, March 29, 1932.

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"'Romance is Dead,' whispered Leonard," Baltimore Sun, May 26, 1939.

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