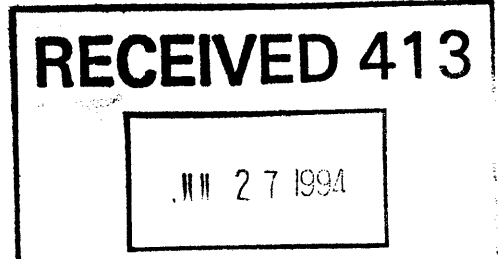


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service



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 The Cairo Apartment Building

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 1615 O Street, N.W. not for publication N/A
city or town Washington vicinity X
state District of Columbia code DC zip code 20009 county N/A code N/A

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 X statewide locally.

(See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Robert L. Mallett 7/22/94
Signature of certifying official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau _____

In my opinion, the property 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
- other (explain): _____

Patrick Andrews

9/9/94

Signature of Keeper

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
_____	_____ Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register _____

Name of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: DOMESTIC Sub: multiple dwelling

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: DOMESTIC Sub: multiple dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19TH CENTURY REVIVAL
Other: Moorish Revival
LATE 19TH AMERICAN MOVEMENT
Other: Sullivan-esque

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE
roof OTHER: Cement and Slag
walls BRICK

other Decorative Elements: Limestone

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

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

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 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 1894

Significant Dates 1894

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation _____

Architect/Builder Thomas Franklin Schneider

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

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(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

Acreeage of Property Less than one acre

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

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	18	323320	4308700	3	_____	_____
2	_____	_____	_____	4	_____	_____
___ See continuation sheet.						

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.) Square 179, Lot 800.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.) The boundary includes The Cairo Apartment Building.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Eve Lydia Barsoum / Architectural Historian
organization D.C. Historic Preservation Division date June 30, 1994
street & number 614 H Street, N.W. telephone (202) 727-7360
city or town Washington state D.C. zip code 20001

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 Cairo Condominiums
street & number 1615 Q Street, N.W. telephone _____
city or town Washington state D.C. zip code 20009

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 Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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MAR 27 1991

INTERAGENCY RESOURCES DIVISION
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

The Cairo Apartment Building
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The Cairo, located at 1615 Q Street, N.W., was designed and built in 1894 by T. Franklin Schneider. It is an example of a Luxury Apartment House. The concrete and steel-frame construction enabled the building to rise for twelve stories. It stands 146 feet high, 100 feet wide, and 115 feet deep and is U-shape in mass with the opening at the rear. The Cairo dominates its surroundings which is primarily comprised of rowhouses. The building's ornament illustrates Moorish Revivalism. Its entrance was modeled after Louis Sullivan's famous portal for the Transportation Building at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition.

The Cairo's Q Street elevation is defined by full-height square-shape and polygonal-shape projecting bays. The elevation was undoubtedly influenced by the state-of-the-art commercial structures which Schneider would have seen during his 1893 trip to Chicago. The facade also employs a tripartite scheme. The first two stories plus basement form a battered base of rough-cut limestone set on a concrete foundation. At the center of the base is a large, deep arch that serves as the building's entrance. It derived from the design of Louis Sullivan's entrance to the Transportation Building at the World's Columbian Exposition. "The Cairo" appears in stylized, embossed letters above the stone arch. The name is surmounted by a row of windows separated by colonnettes with Moorish-inspired capitals. The entrance is defined by a border of repeated geometric designs which derive from Moorish architecture as well as Louis Sullivan's ornament.

The shaft portion of the tripartite scheme incorporates the remaining stories. The shaft is faced in buff brick and defined by rough-cut limestone stringcourses. The first through fourth, seventh, and twelfth floors have stone sills and lintels which are linked by the stringcourses. The remaining floors have stone sills and brick voussoirs. The windows are not original. The two polygonal bays extend above the entrance. They are punctuated by balconies with ornament which includes colonnettes and eagle-like gargoyles. Perhaps these creatures and the fact that the bays are polygonal were inspirations from the Lion fountain in the Lion Court at the Alhambra--the most famous example of Moorish architecture. The polygonal-shape central bays are balanced by the square-shape projecting bays at the building's corners. The building is crowned by a cornice. The shapes of the bays are reiterated in the cornice which incorporates a thick band of brick corbelling and a large projecting frieze which features another geometric pattern derived from Moorish and Sullivan sources.

The square bays on the front facade are extended around the corners to the side facades. Accordingly, they are faced with buff brick. The remaining portions of the side elevations are faced in red brick without decorative trim. The rear elevation is a stepped U-shape form. Thus, there are more windows in the rear apartments.

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The roof is flat and was originally covered with cement and slag according to the building permit. The roof originally accommodated a garden with tropical plants.

The original interior of the luxury apartment building included 100 units with a total of 350 rooms. Two pairs of centrally located stairs and elevators, with ornate cages, provided access to the upper floors. The plan was arranged so that units could be easily enlarged or reduced in size. Single rooms without private baths were available as were large suites which included a kitchen and bath. It is apparent from rate schedules found in advertisements, that the Cairo functioned as a hotel and a permanent residence. Occupants were offered a variety of amenities: an ornate public lobby and reception rooms on the first floor; a large dining room in the southeast corner of the twelfth floor--meals could be added to the monthly rental fee; bowling alleys; a ballroom; drugstore; bakery; billiard room, and; rooftop garden--which allowed for breathtaking views of Washington and its environs.

The Cairo received two minor additions by Schneider. In 1897, a small (16' x 11'), one-story glass and iron conservatory was constructed at the rear. In 1904, another one-story addition was erected to the east (20' x 100') and the rear of the building (26' x 29'). As reported in the *Evening Star*, this addition included an expansion of the original billiard room and enabled the public dining room to be relocated to the ground floor.

Apart from these additions, the next eighty years left the interior of the building essentially unchanged. The Cairo had remained in the hands of the Schneider family until 1955 when the architect's daughters and heirs sold the building because of the neighborhood's continuous decline since World War II. The building and neighborhood continued on this course until the early 1970s when a revitalization of the Dupont Circle area began. In 1972, the severely deteriorated building was sold to the Inland Steel Development Corporation. In 1976, they hired local architect Arthur Cotton Moore to renovate the building. The interior was gutted and converted into rental units: sixty-six efficiencies, forty-four one-bedrooms, and sixty-six two-bedrooms. Much of the rear courtyard was filled by new construction which included garden and duplex apartment units. In 1979, the Cairo was converted into condominiums.

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The Cairo, a luxury apartment building at 1615 Q Street, N.W. is the tallest privately-owned and -built structure in the District of Columbia. In 1894, it became Washinton's first apartment building to be built with a steel frame. The public and professional outrage that followed its construction in 1894 led to legislation, still in effect today, which limited the height of buildings in the city. Thus, the Cairo is directly associated with events that affected the physical development of Washington, D.C. It also introduced a critical technological achievement which influenced the architectural form of future apartment buildings. The architect, builder, and owner of this controversial building was noted local architect Thomas Franklin Schneider. The Cairo was the most significant building in Schneider's career.

THE BUILDING:

On February 19, 1894, D.C. Permit to Build #1121 was issued to architect, owner, and builder T. Franklin Schneider for the construction of a \$425,000, 100-unit, 350-room apartment building. The construction of the twelve-story, steel-frame apartment building was to be the largest non-public structure allowed to date in Washington, D.C.

Nine months later, a brief article in the *Evening Star* (October 20, 1894) noted the rapid rate of erection, made possible by its steel frame, a construction system relatively unused in Washington during this time. The article outlines the construction schedule--to be completed by mid-November 1894--as well as the type and quantity of materials used. (The building was completed in December.) The article also noted rental rates and the fact that many leases had already been signed. Although the *Star* praised the building, it did not receive acceptance from the public at large. From the time the permit was issued to many years after the building was completed, the building was attacked on many fronts. Neighbors were angered by the Cairo's great size. They complained that it blocked light and views and that it posed a great safety hazard; in case of fire, there was no equipment that could reach the upper floors. There were also complaints about the fact that the building was out of scale with the rest of the neighborhood. It was, in fact, out of scale anywhere in the city.

Architects complained that the building was aesthetically displeasing. The building was the object of a scathing review in the nationally circulated *Architectural Record*. The author of the article, the thirteenth in a series on "Architectural Aberrations," complained that much of what was privately built in Washington was "outrageously bad." He remarked that it was "really pitiful to note how little effect the seemliness and decorum of the older public buildings have had upon the projectors of shops and dwellings." He held that public

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regulation created a beautiful Washington and believed, "the right of an American citizen to do as he likes with his own has gone far to destroy its beauty." The author also wondered why a city, with plenty of land on which to expand, found it necessary to build structures taller than five stories. He followed his rhetorical question with a detailed description of the Cairo:

Alas!... A vandal has been convinced that the sky-scraper would pay, and, being unrestrained by statute or propriety, has carried this revolting notion into execution. The result is "The Cairo," the present aberration...

A ten-story building in a ten-acre lot is necessarily an architectural aberration; and a twelve-story building in a city of magnificent distances is a contradiction in terms... What kind of sky-scraper is the Cairo? It is the worst kind... It is a box full of holes. True, the bottom is of stone, which is properly used as a substructure when the substructure supports the superstructure, but meaningless when both substructure and superstructure are hung on steel frames... True the basement is of masonry, but it is not massive or strong of aspect, being painfully weak and thin. Moreover, it is not set off by any architectural devices as an essential division of the building. It is not even clear where it stops for in the middle it goes a story higher than in the flanks, and in both places stops without any architectural punctuation, as if the builder had merely run out of stone and had to take to brick at this point.

As to the relation of voids and solids there is properly no such relation. The ends and the center are projected a little, and the windows are varied in form, some being square-headed and some round-headed. But it is plain that these dispositions have had no more artistic origin than the desire to 'obtain variety,' and variety without purposes is mere confusion. The terminal pavilions are lean and hard, the central projections confused in mass and crude in detail, the fenestration architecturally nothing at all. Making this front various has only accentuated the fact that it is monotonous...

It is curious how the effect of boxiness, inherent in the original parallelopiped, is enhanced by all the things the architect has put on it ostensibly to relieve it of that appearance. The balconies at the angles, at the center, and between the two, are merely box-like troughs, and so is the

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cornice a mere projecting box. It almost seems as if the designer must have projected these boxes in a cynical spirit, as if instead of trying to mitigate the boxiness of the building, he were intent upon aggravating it and 'rubbing it in.'

There may be as bad buildings elsewhere as the Cairo, we freely admit, and bad for the same reasons and in the same way. The owner and architect may inquire why we single out his bad twelve-story box for animadversion, and let the other bad twelve-story boxes go? It is because other bad twelve-story have an excuse for their existence, if not for their badness, which his box lacks. 'A twelve-story building in a twelve-acre lot,' is an absurdity as well as an outrage, and a twelve-story apartment house in Washington is gratuitous and inexcusable, and denotes a deeper dye of depravity than it would in a more crowded city, where land is not to be had...(Architectural Record, pp. 472-476.)

The author concluded that it was unfortunate that the Cairo was permitted to be erected, but he was grateful that Washington had taken steps to prevent the construction of additional buildings of this size. The author was referring to the 1894 regulations that the District Commissioners passed which determined a building height limit of 90 feet for residential streets and 110 feet for commercial streets. This amendment to the local building code was further supported by Acts of Congress in 1898 and 1910 which set height limits at 90 and 110 feet for residential and commercial structures, respectively.

Despite unfavorable reviews and an unfortunate nickname, "Schneider's folly," the Cairo was advertised in a glowing twelve-page prospectus. The booklet provided photographs and illustrations of the interior and exterior, plans of the private and public spaces, and a brief description of the amenities at the Cairo. The prospectus boasts that all rooms have views to the exterior and do not rely on light shafts. The building was artificially lit only by electricity, a technological advancement which most contemporary developers used in conjunction with gas lighting.

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THE ARCHITECT: Thomas Franklin Schneider

T. Franklin Schneider was a noted Washington, D.C. architect who played a key role in shaping the city's built environment at the turn-of-the-twentieth-century. During his forty-five year career, he designed over two-thousand residences and nineteen apartment buildings, the Cairo was his third.

Schneider was born in Washington in 1859 to parents who had emigrated from Germany as children and who had established a printing business in the city. He graduated from a local public school in 1875 and soon after began an apprenticeship in the prosperous firm of Cluss and Schulze. The variety and abundance of work in the office provided Schneider with enough experience to launch his own career. In 1883, at the age of twenty-three, Schneider opened an office at 929 F Street, N.W. with five-hundred dollars of borrowed capital. It is important to recognize that Cluss and Schulze designed Washington's first apartment building, Portland Flats, during Schneider's tenure at the firm.

Schneider's ambition and acute business sense enabled him to enjoy immediate success in his architectural and real estate ventures. In 1889, the *Evening Star* dubbed him "The Young Napoleon of F Street." An article offers an early perspective on this important local architect:

'The Young Napoleon of F Street.' That is the term applied to a certain young architect of this city by his friends. 'Why, it's just a few years ago that I was going to school with him playing 'Old Man' and buying a cent's worth of taffy, which we divided at recess,' said an acquaintance. And it was just last Saturday that the young Napoleon paid \$175,000 for a row of lots on Q Street, occupying the whole front of the square between Seventeenth and Eighteenth Streets. Upon this square he will erect a row of residences. Just across the street is another row of some thirty pressed-brick houses which he completed last year. His operations in building for the past four years have been upon the most extensive scale.

When the young man came out of school he put out his shingle as an architect over a modest little office in the third story of a building on F Street, where he still holds forth. He got a start and put his money into a house, devising the plans himself. When it was built he sold it at a profit. This was the beginning. He has kept on building and selling, putting his profits into other buildings. Many of his houses were sold before completed and payments were made, which he would immediately resolve into bricks and mortar for another

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venture. Good judgement in buying lots, taste and ingenuity in planning, the architectural features of the residences and business ability to keep his money moving, gathering profit as it rolled, have made him one of the solid men of the city. He is a young looking man, with a slight mustache, and a modest retiring air, but he certainly is what the Westerners call 'a hustler.'

As the article stated, Schneider designed and owned several of his projects. Combining his talents as an architect and his skill in real estate speculation, he became one of Washington's first successful architect-developers. Most of his design work was done in conjunction with his own financial investment.

In 1893, after ten years of practice, Schneider published a book of photographs and fifteen renderings depicting his work to date. *Selections from Work of T.F. Schneider, Architect, Washington, D.C.* was partially funded by advertisements purchased by his subcontractors. It included such buildings as the rowhouses on Q Street, the Forest Inn at Forest Glen, Maryland, his own fifty-room house at 18th and Q Streets, N.W., and the about-to-be-constructed Cairo. Schneider's early buildings reflect his eclectic taste. His rowhouses incorporate various motifs from the Romanesque Revival, exotic revivals, Victorian architecture, and the Beaux-Arts tradition. Schneider was also one of the few local architects influenced by Louis Sullivan's idiosyncratic style. Schneider's work was primarily single-family residences until 1894 when his focus shifted to apartment buildings, many of which were designed in accordance with Beaux-Arts principles.

Schneider retired as an architect sometime in the 1920s but continued to manage his large real estate holdings. During his retirement, he designed a house for himself and two daughters on Broad Branch Road at the edge of Rock Creek Park. He died after a brief illness in 1938. According to the *Evening Star* obituary, the highlight of his career was the Cairo. He was survived by his second wife, his son, T.F. Schneider, Jr., and his daughters, Florence and Ethel.

Schneider's extant work includes: The Iowa, Logan Circle; The Albemarle, 1704 T Street, N.W.; The Woodley, Columbia Road and Mintwood Place, N.W.; California Court, 2125 California Street, N.W.; The Ethelhurst, 15th and L Streets, N.W.; the 1700 block of Q Street, N.W.; the 1300 block of Wallach Place, N.W., and; Schneider's Triangle, Square 53 on Washington Circle. Between 1888 and 1906, Schneider designed nineteen apartment buildings, nine of which still stand. Of those nine, five are contributing structures in historic districts listed on the National Register of Historic Places and another has been rehabilitated.

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"The Portland." *Evening Star*, January 12, 1884.

Schneider, T. Franklin. *Selections from Work of T.F. Schneider, Architect,*
Washington, D.C. 1893.

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**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number _____ Page _____

SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 94001033 Date Listed: 9/9/94

Cairo Apartment Building DC
Property Name: County: State:

Apartment Buildings in Washington, DC, MPS
Multiple Name

This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.

Patrick Andrews
Signature of the Keeper

9/9/94
Date of Action

=====
Amended Items in Nomination:

As submitted, this nomination form had selected Criterion A and C and Architecture as an Area of Significance. A technical correction is made to the nomination form to add Community Planning and Development (to reflect the selected Criterion A). The SHPO concurs in this amendment.

DISTRIBUTION:

- National Register property file
- Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)