

**6. Function or Use**

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Domestic: Hotel  
Diplomat/government office

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Domestic: Hotel

**7. Description**

Architectural Classification  
(enter categories from instructions)

Beaux Arts  
Italian Renaissance

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete (visible below St. level)  
walls limestone facing  
roof composition  
other

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Carlton Hotel is located on the southeast corner of 16th and K Streets, N.W. with the main entrance on 16th Street. It was built in 1926 in the Beaux Arts style derived from palaces of the Italian Renaissance.

The Hotel is rectangular (approximately 170' x 100') with the long side parallel to 16th Street. A circle drive leads from the street to the porte-cochere at the front entrance. The basement contains rooms for hotel offices, a restaurant, kitchen, meeting rooms (or private dining rooms) and a beauty salon and a barber shop. The first floor contains the lobby, a ballroom, two dining rooms and two small lounges. The upper floors contain bedrooms and suites.

The hotel is eight stories plus a full basement. The main elevation, along 16th Street has eleven bays; the K Street (north) and the south (facing the courtyard) elevations each have seven bays. The east wall abuts an adjacent building that is not part of the hotel. The foundation is of reinforced concrete and the walls are of reinforced concrete faced with limestone. The flat roof is built-up roofing on a concrete slab. On the roof there are two one-story structures which house the elevator shafts visible from 17th Street. The structural system is reinforced concrete with steel posts and beams. The hotel contains 19,628 square feet per floor.

The three exposed elevations are nearly identical in design. The overall form of the hotel resembles a large white, stone box articulated by a symmetrical fenestration arrangement pattern. Specific features include the lightly rusticated first floor with round arch openings in each bay that create an arcade effect around the base of the building.

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OMB No. 1024-0018

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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

NATIONAL REGISTER

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Carlton Hotel  
other names/site number Sheraton Carlton Hotel

2. Location

street & number 923 16th Street, NW  not for publication NA  
city, town Washington  vicinity NA  
state District of Columbia code DC county NA code 001 zip code 20007

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> objects
		<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing: NA  
Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register NA

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this  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  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.  
X Carol P. Thompson 5/10/90  
Signature of certifying official STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER Date  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.  
Signature of commenting or other official \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau \_\_\_\_\_

5. 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 6/28/90  
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

Building Permits, National Archives, Washington, DC  
Deeds Records, Recorder of Deeds. District of Columbia  
Carlton Hotel Historic Files  
Goode, James B. Capital Looses: A Cultural History of Washington's Destroyed Buildings, Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1979  
Maps and Titles. Municipal Center, District of Columbia  
McDevitt, Leland D. The Book of Washington, Washington, DC: Washington Board of Trade, 1927  
Tax assessment books, Recorder of Deeds  
Vertical File, Washingtoniana Collection, Martin Luther King Library, Washington, DC  
Washington Atlases  
Washington City Directories

See continuation sheet

**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

NA

Specify repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreeage of property Less than one

**UTM References**

A 

1	8
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3	2	3	4	0	0
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4	3	0	7	6	7	0
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Zone Easting Northing

C 

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B 

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Zone Easting Northing

D 

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See continuation sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description**

The property occupies all of Lot 58, Square 199. Lot 58 is located at the northwest corner of Square 199 and is bounded by 16th Street on the north and K Street, NW on the west.

See continuation sheet

**Boundary Justification**

The boundary includes the entire Lot which has been historically associated with the Sheraton Carlton Hotel

See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Constance Werner Ramirez, President - Glen Alderton, Historian  
organization National Preservation Institute date September 16, 1988  
street & number Nat's Bldg. Museum, Judiciary Sq., NW telephone 202-393-0038  
city or town Washington state DC zip code 20001

**8. Statement of Significance**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally  statewide  locally

Applicable National Register Criteria  A  B  C  D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions)  A  B  C  D  E  F  G NA

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Politics/Government

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Period of Significance

1926-1929

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Dates

1926

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Cultural Affiliation

NA

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Person

Wardman, Harry

Hull, Cordell

Architect/Builder

Mesrobian, Mihran

Wardman, Harry

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The Carlton Hotel is an example of Beaux Arts design used to enhance the commercial value and social prestige of a "Roaring Twenties" hotel just two blocks from the White House. The hotel is significant for its architecture and its use as White House offices during World War II. Built by Harry Wardman, a prolific developer in Washington and London in the 1920's, it was designed by Mihran Mesrobian, a Turkish trained architect. It was occupied by the rich and the famous, and used by the White House for offices during the Truman administration. The Carlton is significant as an example of the influence of the Ecole des Beaux Arts on the new buildings being constructed in the center of Washington, D.C. after World War I. During the decade of the 1920's, a number of both public and private buildings were built in the downtown or "federal" area of the city. The Carlton Hotel is important as it represents the earliest complete commercial design in Washington by the architect Mihran Mesrobian.

The design of the Carlton Hotel was intended to attract those who demanded "the best in good living" (The Book of Washington, 1927). Wrought iron gates were imported from a Tuscan villa for use in the Giardino. A pink Carrara marble fountain was placed in the side courtyard, and the interior had elaborate paneled and stenciled ceilings. The Grill, along the north side of the first floor, had vermillion drapes, arched windows and chandeliers. Hand-carved furniture was imported from Italy for the stone-walled lobby to integrate with actual antiques like a 17th century banner and two chairs from Blenheim Palace. Marble topped console tables and regency writing tables furnished the women's writing room on the mezzanine level. Suites boasted baby grand pianos, all bathtubs were an extra six inches in length, and there was a telephone in every bath room. All this added up to making each guest feel like he was the prince in his own Italian palace. The interior design firm was A. E. Wardman and Company.

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Frieze windows above the first floor cornice denote a mezzanine level. Above that, on the third floor, there are a series of six-over-six windows with rusticated surrounds, stylized protruding keystones and alternating pedimented and arched hoods. Above this are two floors of unadorned double windows. The sixth floor is treated as a frieze wrapped above the quoins and contains applied shields protruding from the corners. The double windows, in a line with those on the fourth and fifth floors, have been shortened slightly to increase the illusion of foreshortening and the sense of height. A heavy modillion cornice surrounds the building and above it are pedimented and arched windows, alternating like the ones on the third floor but in reverse rhythm, with monitor windows above them. Each bay above the cornice is divided by pilasters supporting a final simple fascia cornice topped by dentils immediately under the gutter that surrounds the top of the building. The dentil pattern is repeated around the top of the elevator shaft housing on the roof, thus ensuring that the design motifs are carried through to even the roof details which can be seen only from some distance.

Important decorative elements include the use of classic (renaissance) detailing of the fenestration, the triglyphs and decorated metopes of the first floor frieze, window pediments and the rusticated stone with quoins. The corners of the first floor are emphasized by the use of the typical Renaissance detail of a pedimented, and grilled, window set into a rusticated round arch recessed panel which, being slightly higher than the arcaded arches, interrupts the frieze. The entrance archway in the center of the 16th Street elevation is handled in a similar manner, but with the full arch open and with an applied decorative carved head in the keystone. This corner detailing with the quoins extending from the first to the fifth

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floor and the applied heraldic shields just below the building cornice (at the 6th floor) serve to anchor the corners of the composition and enhance the contrasting sense of lightness of the first floor arcade. The nine first floor arched windows on the 16th Street elevation (west) and the five on the north and south elevations are separated by rusticated pilasters. At the top of each arch, a molding block has been inserted between the extrados and the frieze immediately above.

The only other significant exterior feature is the porte cochere at the 16th Street entrance. A one story, flat roofed cover, it is completely separate from the hotel except for the connecting glass hyphen between the curb of the driveway and the interior of the hotel. The port cochere is supported by four columns on either side of the driveway. The columns support a broad entablature that includes a frieze with decorated metopes and a modillion cornice. The roof is flat and the ceiling is sectioned into square panels.

Significant interior features include public rooms in the basement and the first floor and the suites on the seventh floor. The 16th Street entrance leads into a large rectangular lobby parallel to 16th Street that contains the elevators and alcoves for the registration desk and newsstand on the east interior wall. To the right or south end is a corner room called the State Room (originally the Music Room) with a door leading to the small courtyard. A large bar extends from the interior east wall. Behind this room, along the south side of the building is the Crystal Room (formerly the dining room). At the north end of the lobby, the plan is similar with a small lounge (originally the library) in the northwest corner and the restaurant (originally the Grill) along the north (K Street) side. Between

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the north and south rooms is an interior ballroom, called the Chandelier Ballroom (formerly the Giardino), and, between it and the Crystal Room, a small anteroom. On the basement level, there is room along the K Street side (originally the Carlton Night Club) and spaces currently devoted to hotel offices (originally three private dining rooms or meeting rooms), the kitchen and furnace room. At the south end of the basement is a women's beauty salon and a barber shop.

The motif of arches used on the exterior of the first floor is continued around the lobby with arches in the interior walls through which are entrance to the various rooms and alcoves. The dark wooden "Florentine" ceiling is articulated with decorated boxed beams connecting the exterior and interior "arcades." Between the beams are panels decorated with applied patterns in octagons and simpler diamond and circular applied patterns. The over-all effect is the dark, carved wooden ceilings of Italian Renaissance palaces. In the State Room and Crystal Room, the ceilings and beams have been painted dark brown with stylized stenciled designs of flowers and shells in muted creams and reds.

The President's Suite and other large suites were all located on the seventh floor where the longer windows were located.

The exterior of the hotel appears to have been unaltered except for the blocking of the basement windows. Originally the windows along K Street allowed light into the Carlton Night Club Room at the north end of the basement. The current renovations have closed up those windows.

Alterations to the interior of the hotel have occurred during the various remodelings. The most significant changes have been made

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to the Giardino and the rooms to either side of it. Originally designed as a two story courtyard with the mezzanine windows around the upper story and a ceiling painted to look like the sky. The mezzanine area to the south contained the Women's Writing Room and the mezzanine area to the north contained the Men's Lounge. This mezzanine area has been changed over the years and the spaces enclosed and turned into hotel offices. The major changes include the elimination of the Women's Writing Room, the balconies overlooking the Giardino, and dropping of the ceiling except for a central panel that still shows the ceiling painting. A glimpse of the decorative details at the mezzanine area, including a caryatid, can be seen through service doors at the mezzanine level. The glass doors that were formerly between the Giardino and the anteroom leading to the dining room have been enclosed in a solid wall. Other changes include a new ceiling in the former music room (southwest corner of the first floor) and re-stencilling (in 1979) of the ceiling of the dining room (now the Crystal Room). In the Carlton Room, formerly the Grill Room, facing K Street, the original ceiling is still in place. One of the windows has been changed into a door to allow access from K Street.

On the upper floors, small bedrooms, probably designed originally for guests' staff, have been enlarged and the original 250 bedrooms have been reduced to 202 bedrooms. All the bathrooms have been redone in the current remodeling and many of them are in new locations. All the interior decoration of the President's Suite and the other suites on the seventh floor is new.

The hotel sits back about 20 feet from the inside edge of the sidewalk along 16th Street and about 15 feet from the inside of the sidewalk on K Street. Grass and small plantings fill these



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spaces. To the south side of the hotel is the Italian style courtyard enclosed by a high wrought iron fence. The courtyard was designed as part of the hotel with originally a marble fountain in the center, that has been replaced with an iron fountain fixture.

Despite the interior alterations to ceilings and guest rooms to accommodate the hotel business, the building still retains its integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association. The Carlton Hotel is an important example of Italian Renaissance style and the work of Mihran Mesrobian and the ambition of Harry Wardman.

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Other hotels in Washington in this period exhibit a variety of designs, most of which were executed in brick on a stone base. In contrast, the Carlton's use of stone and the continuation of Renaissance Revival details from the basement to the roof gave a real sense of the hotel as a palace. In addition, Wardman always promoted the hotel as "uncompromisingly exclusive."

Harry Wardman (1872-1938) was an immigrant from England, who stowed away on a ship for Australia and was put ashore in New York when he was discovered. By the time of his death, he had become the principal builder in the District of Columbia. A flamboyant and innovative developer, he erected over 400 apartment buildings and 5,000 houses. It is estimated that when he died, ten per cent of Washington's population lived in buildings he had constructed. His buildings included low-cost housing, provisions for children and added playgrounds, as well as a high quality of materials. Wardman maintained his own lumber mills, full-time carpenters and an office of architects. In addition to housing, he is noted for such important buildings as the Chastleton (16th Street, N.W.), Highlands and Woodward Apartments, the British Embassy, the Wardman Park Hotel (now the Sheraton Park) and the Hay-Adams Hotel (begun in the year the Carlton was completed). Wardman also razed many significant buildings in his quest for land to be developed. This included the Anderson House, designed by H.H. Richardson, built in 1881 and demolished in 1925 to make room for the Carlton.

Of all of Wardman's works, the palatial Carlton was to be the jewel in the crown of this self-made man. Gambling that he could produce the greatest modern but select (250 rooms) residential hotel in America, he spent millions on construction and furnishings. Unfortunately, in the crash of 1929, Wardman was

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forced to sell the Carlton and many of his real estate ventures. The former carpenter continued, however, in his trade as a master builder, albeit on a smaller scale, until his death in 1938.

Mihran Mesrobian (1889-1975) attended the Academie des Beaux Arts in Istanbul and received his diploma in 1908 after being admitted to advanced standing when only fifteen years old. After graduation, he worked in Smyrna as the town's municipal architect until he was promoted to the position of chief architect for the restoration of the Dolmabahce Palace, the main palace of the Sultan, in Istanbul. He served in the Turkish Army during World War I as a military engineer and was a prisoner of war in Egypt before returning to the palace architect job. In 1920 he emigrated to the United States and arrived in Washington in 1921. By 1924 he was working as a draftsman for Harry Wardman and in 1926 he received a National Award for Excellence from the American Institute of Architects' local chapter for his design of the Carlton Hotel.

Mesrobian conceived of the idea of employing Renaissance prototypes to create the reproduction of an Italian palazzo; for example, his ceilings were influenced by the Davangati Palace in Florence. It is apparent that Wardman worked closely on all details with his architect and spared no cost. Mesrobian also designed the Annex of the Wardman Park, now the Sheraton Park Hotel. The Carlton Hotel is significant in politics or government because of its role during the Truman administration. Due to the extensive renovation of the White House in 1948-1950, President Truman and his family moved to Blair House, the White House's guest house across Pennsylvania Avenue. At that time the Carlton Hotel was chosen for official entertaining, since the Blair House could not accommodate the large numbers formerly

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entertained in the East Room or the Dining Room of the White House. Almost all official functions were held at the hotel, often in the formal dining room (The Carlton Room) on the north end of the hotel, parallel to K Street. In order to ensure that protocol was followed, President Truman often had to enter through one of the arched windows from K Street to precede his guests, who were entering through the hotel lobby. Truman held many of his official meetings, as well, in the hotel (Carlton files, photos of the "Truman Committee"), which met regularly.

Presidential involvement with the hotel predated the Truman administration. For instance, its very opening was significant enough that President Calvin Coolidge snipped the ceremonial ribbon at the opening of the Hotel on October 1, 1926.

The Carlton Hotel's association with the many famous and infamous guests indicates its role in the commerce and hotel activities in Washington. John L. Lewis, president of the United Mine Workers, and his pit-booted miners were in the 1930s, the hotel's only paying guests. The hotel was also occupied by members of the United Steelworkers who moved its Washington headquarters to the Carlton in 1933 (Shallett). By World War II, Howard Hughes maintained a full-time suite (available when Hughes was not there to any uniformed personnel who needed a room at no charge). Cordell Hull, Secretary of State under Franklin Roosevelt, and author of the Good Neighbor policy toward Latin America and instrumental in the Organization of American States, did most of his official entertaining there. The hotel's private dining room was used then for state dinners and the Cabinet members would often adjourn there for dinner, sometimes accompanied by FDR himself. To encourage such patronage, the hotel invested in sterling silver and gold plate service for one hundred diners. (Saturday Evening Post, 1950) Hull eventually made the hotel his home, the only one with a private kitchen, and entertained there, both publically and privately over an eleven year period (Shallett). The State Department continued to use the hotel for official guests even after Hull had left. Even Bernard Baruch has a Washington office in the Carlton (Shallett).

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Hollywood and television stars, such as Katherine Hepburn and Benjie, the dog, have been regular guests. In his last years, General John J. Pershing of World War I fame (who had lived at the Hotel during Prohibition) later "skipped" Walter Reed Hospital's Institutional Thanksgiving dinner for his remembered favorite dish, the Carlton's duckling in orange wine sauce. (Washington Times Herald, November 27, 1942) Foreign diplomats entertained regularly at the hotel and the "hostess with the mostest," Ambassador to Luxembourg, Perle Mesta, gave debutante parties there, as did Arthur Godfrey. Cowboy Gene Autry broadcast his radio show from the hotel. From 1965 to 1985, every United States President has had his hair clipped by the Hotel barber.

The period of significance has been limited to 1926-1929, the ownership by Harry Wardman, because the construction and reputation of the hotel from that time has established the character treatment and clientele ever since. In 1953, the Carlton was purchased by The Sheraton Corporation.

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James C. Massey  
September, 1988  
National Preservation Institute  
Information same for all photographs

1. General View, looking SE, with K Street facade at left and 16th facade at right (note temporary construction chute and walkway on facades)
2. General View looking NE, with 16th Street facade at left and south facade at right
3. Front (16th St.) facade, looking east
4. South Facade, looking NE
5. Main Entrance and Porte Cochere, 16th Street, looking NE
6. Main Lobby, 1st floor, general view, looking SE (photo to be supplied)
7. Main Lobby, detail of decorative work on wall and ceiling, looking E
8. Bar, 1st floor, 16th & K corner, general view looking NW (get correct name of room)
9. Meeting Room, 1st floor, south side, detail of decorative wall and ceiling work, looking N
10. Living Room Suite (name?), looking NE

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SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 90000911

Date Listed: 6/28/90

Carlton Hotel  
Property Name

District of Columbia DC  
County State

N/A  
Multiple Name

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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.

*for* Patrick Andrews  
Signature of the Keeper

6/28/90  
Date of Action

=====

Amended Items in Nomination:

Delete "politics/government" as an area of significance, and Harry Wardman and Cordell Hull as significant persons.

The period of significance should be limited to 1926 to correspond to the date of construction.

The nomination is officially amended to reflect these changes.

Verified by telephone with Glen Leiner of the D.C. SHPO, 6/28/90.

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DISTRIBUTION:

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