

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM**

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE:	District of Columbia
COUNTY:	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY DATE	

1. NAME

COMMON:

AND/OR HISTORIC:
American Federation of Labor Building

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER:
901 Massachusetts Avenue, NW

CITY OR TOWN:
Washington

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT:

STATE
District of Columbia

CODE

COUNTY:

CODE

3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	<input type="checkbox"/> Public Public Acquisition: <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress
			Yes: <input type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural	<input type="checkbox"/> Government	<input type="checkbox"/> Park	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation	<input type="checkbox"/> Comments
<input type="checkbox"/> Commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> Industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> Private Residence	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Educational	<input type="checkbox"/> Military	<input type="checkbox"/> Religious	Headquarters, United Association of	
<input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Scientific	Journeyman and Apprentices of the	

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME: United Association of
Journeyman and Apprentices of the Plumbing and Pipe Fitting Industry of
the U.S. and Canada (AFL-CIO).

STREET AND NUMBER: the U.S. and Canada (AFL-CIO), Martin J. Ward, President
901 Massachusetts Avenue, NW

CITY OR TOWN: Washington

STATE: District of Columbia

CODE

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC:
Recorder of Deeds

STREET AND NUMBER:
6th and D Streets, NW

CITY OR TOWN: Washington

STATE: District of Columbia

CODE

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY:
None

DATE OF SURVEY: Federal State County Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN: STATE: CODE

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

STATE:

COUNTY:

ENTRY NUMBER

DATE

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7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
	(Check One)			(Check One)		
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input type="checkbox"/> Unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

In 1915 the American Federation of Labor selected the location for the building that was to be the home of the labor movement in America. "Upon the site when it was purchased was standing a finely built old mansion with a slave pen in the rear. . . . On that site in which slave owners and slaves dwelt, the temple of Labor, the A.F. of L. office building will be erected." The firm of Milburn, Heister & Company was selected to draw up plans for the new building, to be located on the corner of 9th Street and Massachusetts Avenue, NW--then a busy intersection in the path of Washington's expanding business district--and ground was broken late in the year.

In some respects the building is patterned after architect Louis Sullivan's ideas about tall buildings, i.e., that they should have a base, a shaft, and a cornice, each clearly delineated. The base, or first floor, of the A.F.L. building is of limestone, and the central entrance features a stripped-down classical motif. The shaft is of tan brick, its verticality emphasized by the banding of limestone which frames the windows. Limestone spandrels further emphasize the building's seven-story height. A heavy modillion cornice caps this building, a feature rather typical of office construction during the early years of this century.

The United Association of Journeymen and Apprentices of the Plumbing and Pipe Fitting Industry purchased the building in 1955, and remodelled and modernized the interior. The exterior features of the building remain much the same, however, with only a few alterations. The windows have been replaced to allow for air-conditioning, and the entranceway has been somewhat streamlined. Globe lamps, which once flanked the doorway, have been removed, as has the cornerstone bearing this inscription:

American Federation of Labor
 Founded 1881
 This edifice erected for service
 in the cause of
 Labor--Justice--Freedom--Humanity
 1915-1916.

1
 "A.F. of L. Office Building--Ground Broken," American Federationist,
 December 1915, p. 1041.

(continued)

SEE INSTRUCTIONS



SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- Pre-Columbian; 16th Century 18th Century 20th Century
 15th Century 17th Century 19th Century

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) **1916-1956**

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- | | | | |
|---|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal | <input type="checkbox"/> Education | <input type="checkbox"/> Political | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry | <input type="checkbox"/> Science | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape Architecture | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce | <input type="checkbox"/> Military | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications | <input type="checkbox"/> Music | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation | | | |

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

On July 4, 1916, the American Federation of Labor dedicated its new international headquarters, "thus marking the achievement of a purpose that has been a dream of wage-earners since the organization of the movement."¹ President Woodrow Wilson delivered the chief address, declaring: "I am not here to adorn the occasion, but...to express my very deep interest in it and to show how near it lies to my own heart that the legitimate objects of the great labor movement should be achieved."²

The new "national labor temple," as it was often called, was constructed during 1915 and 1916 on the northwest corner of 9th Street and Massachusetts Avenue, NW. This imposing seven-story brick and limestone building served to symbolize the Federation's growth from, in the words of its founder, Samuel Gompers, "a weakling into the strongest, best organized labor movement of all the world."³ As the physical symbol of an organization which, in 1916, embraced some two and one-half million trade-unionists--a majority of the organized workers in America--the building evokes the history and activities of the Federation which it housed for 40 years. In its drive for higher wages and better working conditions, the A.F.L. became the major spokesman for organized workers in the United States, and so it remains--now merged with its one-time rival, the C.I.O.

1 Samuel Gompers, "Editorials," American Federationist, July 1916, p.574.

2 "A.F. of L. Building Dedicated," American Federationist, August 1916, p. 662.

3 Quoted in Bernard Mandel, Samuel Gompers: A Biography (Yellow Springs, Ohio: The Antioch Press, 1963), p. 524.

(continued)

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

American Federationist, the magazine of the American Federation of Labor. Various issues, especially December 1915, July 1916, and August 1916.
Federal Writers' Project, Works Progress Administration. "American Federation of Labor." Washington, City and Capital. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1937.
 Taft, Philip, The A.F. of L. in the Time of Gompers. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957.
 Taft, Philip, "American Federation of Labor--Congress of Industrial Organizations." Encyclopaedia Britannica. 1967 ed. Vol. I. (Continued)

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			O R	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE		LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds		Degrees	Minutes	Seconds
NW	° ' "	° ' "		°	'	"
NE	° ' "	° ' "		38	54	12
SE	° ' "	° ' "		77	01	28
SW	° ' "	° ' "				

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: less than 1 acre

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE

11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE: Carol Ann Poh, Survey Historian

ORGANIZATION: Division of History, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation, National Park Service DATE: 9/21/73

STREET AND NUMBER: 1100 L Street, NW

CITY OR TOWN: Washington STATE: D. C. CODE: _____

12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

As the designated State Liaison Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National State Local

Name _____

Title _____

Date _____

NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

 Director, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date _____

ATTEST:

 Keeper of The National Register

Date _____

SEE INSTRUCTIONS



**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
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(Continuation Sheet)

STATE	
District of Columbia	
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(Number all entries)

7. Description: (1) American Federation of Labor Building

This building, which housed the A.F.L. for 40 years, maintains a quiet dignity even today. The following observation, though made in 1946, has not lost its validity: "the A.F.L. building remains visually and otherwise, an asset to the city.... There is a hint of streamlining about the building which blends well with the new and the old here."²

2

Edmund G. Monk, "Labor's High Command Seated in Capital," Sunday Star (Washington), September 1, 1946, p. B-2.

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Continuation Sheet)

STATE District of Columbia	
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8. Significance: (2) American Federation of Labor Building

A reporter present at the dedication of its large new office building at 9th Street and Massachusetts Avenue called the occasion one "toward which the wage-earners have looked for years, when there might be in this country a national labor temple which could be the center of a movement to protect and bring betterment into the lives of the workers."⁵

After 1924, the Federation was confronted by attacks from both right and left, and suffered a precipitous decline in membership. Many employers attempted to eliminate the influence of labor unions from individual plants and even entire industries; the giant steel companies, for example, simply refused to bargain collectively with any union. On the left, the A.F.L. faced criticism from dissidents for its traditional conservative tactics, as well as from proponents of a national labor party. Once Franklin Roosevelt took office in 1933, however, a dramatic change took place. The National Industrial Recovery Act, which guaranteed labor "the right to organize and bargain collectively through representatives of their own choosing," greatly stimulated workers to join the unions and to fight for their right to security from economic deprivation in time of sickness and in old age.

During this same period, the A.F.L. leadership faced an internal crisis, in the form of attempts by workers in the mass production industries to unionize. The majority of these workers were semi-skilled operatives, and sought to establish industrial unions--in direct opposition to the traditional craft union policies of the Federation. The A.F.L. defeated a resolution to permit the mass production industries to organize on an industrial, or "vertical" basis, in 1935, but eventually recognized the fact that unions in manufacturing would have to be allowed to function as industrial unions wherever the needs of workers made such a structuring necessary. After prolonged negotiations, the American Federation of Labor merged with the Congress of Industrial Organizations on February 9, 1955. The new association, known as the A.F.L.-C.I.O., needed more room than the building at 9th and Massachusetts could provide, and subsequently moved to larger headquarters in the 800 block of 16th Street, NW. By 1970, membership had reached almost 16,000,000.

5

"A.F. of L. Building Dedicated," American Federationist, p. 658.

(Continued)

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(Continuation Sheet)

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8. Significance: (3) American Federation of Labor Building

The significance of the A.F.L. in American labor history can scarcely be overestimated. Completion of a "labor temple" indeed signaled that the labor movement had finally come into its own. In the words of Samuel Gompers:

The completion of the A.F. of L. office building in Washington in 1916 marked a period of achievement in the history of the labor movement that represented constructive progress, dependability, and sustained activity.... It was a proud moment for me when I was privileged to escort the Chief Magistrate of the United States to speak to our labor men from all over the country to dedicate our new home....⁶

The American Federation of Labor Building was--and remains--a symbol of labor's victory.

6

Samuel Gompers, Seventy Years of Life and Labor, Vol. I (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1925), p. 547

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM**

(Continuation Sheet)

STATE District of Columbia	
COUNTY	
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9. Bibliographical References; (1) American Federation of Labor Building

United Association of Journeymen and Apprentices of the Plumbing and
Pipe Fitting Industry Journal. Special issue, "New United Association
Building," April 1958.