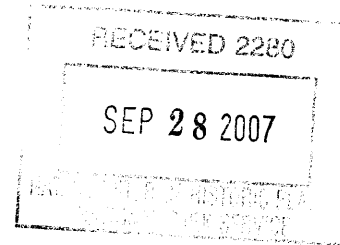


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service



1165

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 an 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 Knickerbocker Apartments  
other names/site number The Knickerbocker

2. Location

street & number 23-25 S. McLean Blvd. NA  not for publication  
city or town Memphis NA  vicinity  
state Tennessee code TN county Shelby code 157 zip code 38104

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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 for in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)  
E. Patrick Minton, Jr. 9/25/07  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date  
State Historic Preservation Officer, Tennessee Historical Commission  
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 certifying official/Title Date  
\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the 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:)  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action  
Edson H. Beall 11.08.07

Knickerbocker Apartments  
Name of Property

Shelby County, TN  
County and State

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

**Category of Property**  
(Check only one box)

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in count)

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

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

Contributing

Noncontributing

1	buildings
_____	sites
_____	structures
_____	objects
1	Total

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

Multi-Family Housing In Memphis, Shelby County, TN 1900-1957

**Number of Contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/Multiple Dwelling  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/Multiple Dwelling  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Craftsman  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Colonial Revival  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE  
\_\_\_\_\_  
walls BRICK  
\_\_\_\_\_  
roof ASPHALT Shingle  
\_\_\_\_\_  
other Limestone  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Iron  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Narrative Description**

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

**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 N/A**

(Mark "x" in all boxes that apply.)

Property is:

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

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

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

**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): N/A**

- 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 # \_\_\_\_\_

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

- Architecture
- Community Planning and Development
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1926-1957  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

1926-1927  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**

(complete if Criterion B is marked)  
NA  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

Unknown  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
  - Other State Agency
  - Federal Agency
  - Local Government
  - University
  - Other
- Name of repository:  
City of Memphis, Memphis Landmarks Commission

Knickerbocker Apartments  
Name of Property

Shelby County, TN  
County and State

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** .44 acres 409 NE Northeast Memphis

**UTM References**

(place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 16 226679 3892166  
Zone Easting Northing  
2 \_\_\_\_\_

3 \_\_\_\_\_  
Zone Easting Northing  
4 \_\_\_\_\_

See continuation sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description**

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

**Boundary Justification**

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Jennifer M. Tucker, Historic Preservation Planner/ Michael Sicuro, Historic Preservation Analyst  
organization Memphis Landmarks Commission/Housing & Comm. Dev. date April 10, 2007  
street & number City Hall, 125 N. Main St., Rm. 443 telephone 901-576-7105  
city or town Memphis state TN zip code 38103

**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 SHPO or FPO.)

name Retirement Partners G.P. (In care of Steven & Karen Woodyard)  
street & number 8210 Talmage Cove telephone 901-757-3740  
city or town Germantown state TN zip code 38138

**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 listing. 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 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 Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20303.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 1

Knickerbocker Apartments  
Shelby County TN

## NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

The circa 1927 Knickerbocker Apartments is a multi-family housing structure located at 23-25 S. McLean Boulevard in Midtown Memphis. The Standard Courtyard form apartment is a two-story red brick building with a U-shaped plan, which lets in light and air to the individual apartments. Designed with Craftsman features such as vertical pane windows and wide overhanging eaves, each apartment unit has windows on at least two sides. Some features on the interior and exterior of the building reflect the Craftsman style, but there are also classical elements in wood detailing. The courtyard of the building is still used as landscaped public space. Knickerbocker Apartments is located in the heart of an area that is rich with similar multi-family housing units, interspersed between large areas of single family housing, built for white middle and upper middle class tenants in the 1910s and 1920s. The apartment building retains its overall architectural integrity.

The east façade of the U-shaped apartment building's north and south wings each feature asphalt shingle hip roofs, wide bracketed 2' beaded board eaves, four bays consisting of 3/1 double-hung Craftsman windows, some in pairs, and multi-light French doors with 4-light transoms that serve as exits to stoops or small balconies. Architectural details includes cast stone bandings around the first and second story windows. The balconies that project from the building match the banding and are supported by decorative brackets. Other exterior ornamentation includes 6" x 6" cast stone squares with a simplified floral motif. They are interspersed below the first floor windows and placed at an angle to form a diamond shape in the wall space between the first and second floors. Wrought iron is also present in the railings and support columns for the balconies. The foundation is concrete and the wall cladding is common bond red brick. There are firewalls that break up the building into four separate parts.



Most of the balcony entries on this U-shaped building face inward, orienting towards the courtyard area, rather than directly onto the street. There are twelve small balconies on the building that are accessed from individual units. They are symmetrically arranged and stacked. The first floor balconies are covered by the one above it, but the second floor balconies are open to the air. There are two on either side of the two street facing ends of the building, two on either side of the north and south section that face inward onto to the courtyard, and four on the short side of the "U," which face the street but are more closely related to the courtyard. The balconies provide only enough room for one or two chairs and are supported by scroll shaped brackets like those below the eaves.

The units of the apartments are blocked off into four sections. There are four entry doors to the building, each of which gives access to four units. These entry doors are located in the courtyard areas, two on the north section and two on the south section. The entries are at grade level and an interior staircase services

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National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Knickerbocker Apartments  
Shelby County TN

both floors, the first of which exists several feet above ground level. Mailboxes for each set of four tenants are in a built-in wall bank just inside the entry doors. These still exist but modern mailboxes have been installed on the exterior of the building for current use.

The two primary entries into the building closest to the street are more formal and decorative with the name "Knickerbocker Apt's" inscribed over each door. Shouldered architrave trim caps the entrances. These entries have quoins of cast stone surrounding the doors. Each of these two entries has paired full-length sidelights of clear leaded glass in a decorative pattern. The entry door itself is wide, heavy, and made of wood. Modern times have made it necessary to install exterior security doors over the historic ones. The two entry doors at the rear of the courtyard are scaled down versions of the primary entries. They still have a cast stone door surround but it is smaller and there are no nameplates or leaded sidelights.



The north and south elevations of the building each feature 9 bays of 3/1 double-hung Craftsman windows, some as individuals, in pairs, or as a band of three; all have plain stone sills. Each elevation also has a single bay that is a recent aluminum enclosure of the original open back staircase.

The west (rear) elevation of the building features 8 bays of 3/1 double-hung Craftsman windows with plain stone sills. A prominent brick smokestack is centered on this elevation. The two rear two-story recessed back staircases have also been enclosed with wide horizontal aluminum siding and feature 6-panel Colonial Revival steel doors and a single-light stationary window at the second story. These rear and side elevation staircases were originally open or at least screened. This was the most convenient way to access one's apartment from the parking area in the back. They lead to the kitchen door of each unit and provide fire escape access. This alteration is the only major change to the structure since its original date of construction and they are less noticeable as being on the rear and side elevations.



## Interior

The Knickerbocker Apartments contains sixteen residential units that vary in size from studio apartments, patio apartments (one-bedrooms), to garden apartments (two-bedrooms or one-bedroom with a sunroom). There are four studio apartments, eight patio apartments, and four garden apartments. Each is consistent in interior details and features.

Inside each of the building's entries, the floor is tile on the ground level and hardwood on the stairs, landings and hallways. The railing is also wood and is original. There is a window on each staircase landing to provide light to the stairwell.



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National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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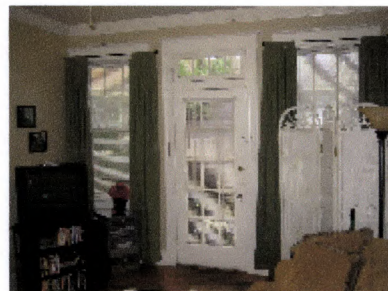
Knickerbocker Apartments  
Shelby County TN

The hallways feature plaster walls, two-paneled doors with door surrounds, and replacement fluorescent light fixtures.



The studio apartments are made up of an entry alcove with a closet, a bathroom, a shared living and sleeping room with a closet, a small dining area, and a kitchen. The patio apartments have a center hallway, a bedroom with a closet, a bathroom, a living room with a closet, a dining room with a built-in butler's pantry, and a kitchen. The garden apartments have a center hallway, a bedroom with a closet, a bathroom, a living room with a closet, a sunroom off the living room, a dining room with a built-in butler's pantry, and a kitchen.

Each unit has hardwood floors, decorative molding along the baseboards, and crown molding. The original two paneled wood doors remain. Some units feature an archway between the kitchen and breakfast room. Operable radiators remain in all the units, but modern window air conditioning units supply air conditioning. Walls are of the original lath and plaster. Most bathrooms contain the original features like the pedestal sinks. There are built-in telephone nooks in the main hallway of each unit. The dining rooms of the garden and patio apartments have built-in butler's pantries with a serving area, two drawers, storage cabinets below and glass-fronted doors on the upper cabinets. There are paired French doors between the living room and sunrooms of the garden apartments.



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National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Knickerbocker Apartments  
Shelby County TN



## Setting and Landscape

The building itself is set back from the street and public sidewalk by about 30.' There is a walkway, which leads from the street to the courtyard. The interior courtyard is landscaped with walkways and small trees and shrubbery. There is a modern 5' wrought iron fence and pedestrian gate at the entrance of the courtyard. The 1952 Sanborn Map shows that there was a row of covered parking structures along the west (rear) side of the lot. Although current tenants still park in the same location, the parking structures have been lost.





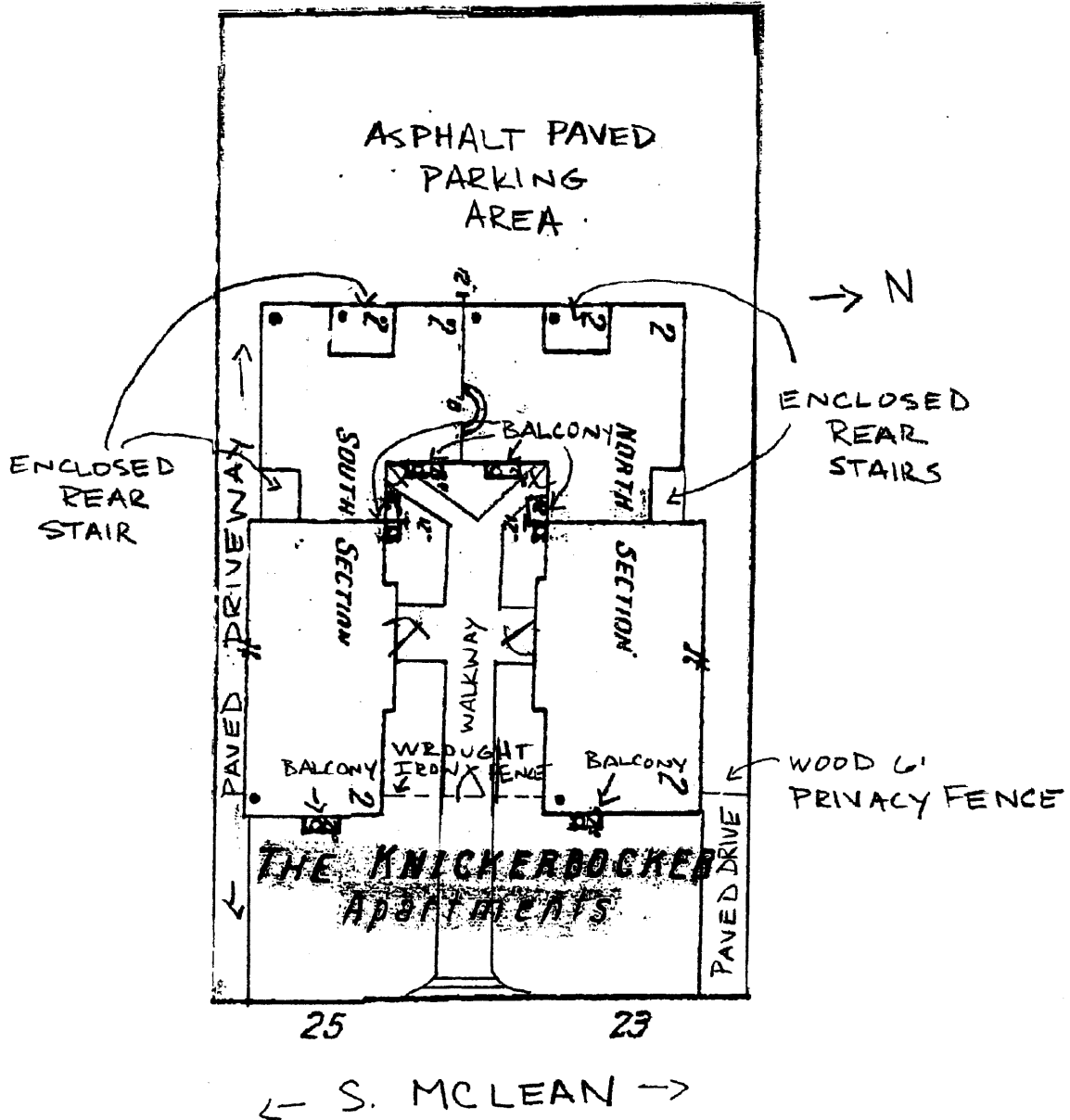
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# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Knickerbocker Apartments  
Shelby County TN

1952 Sanborn Map



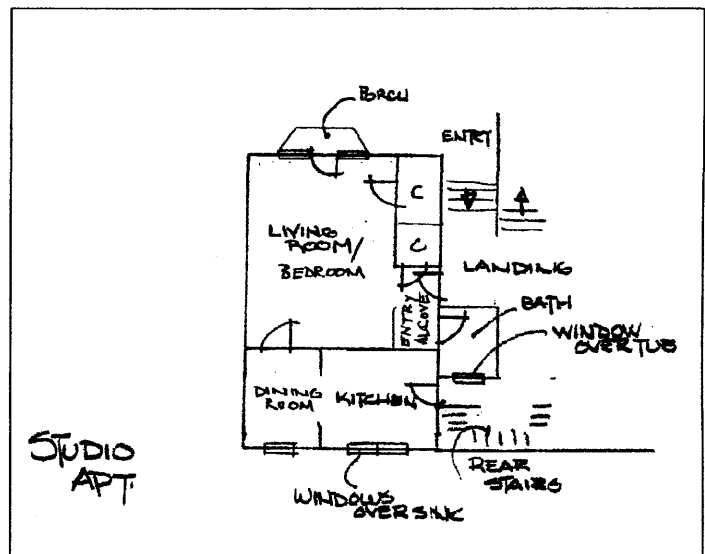
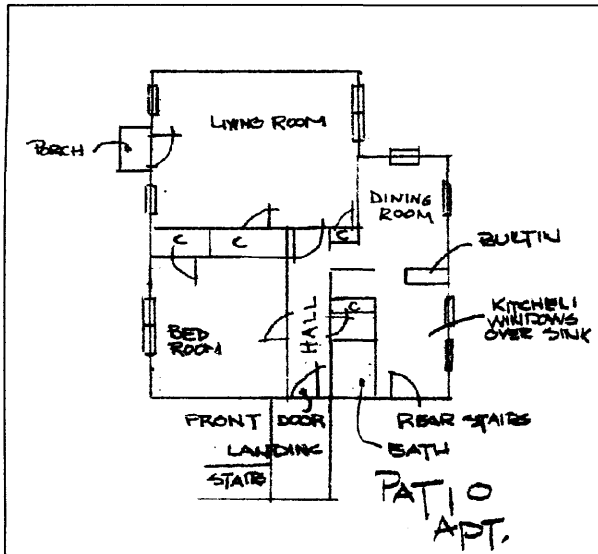
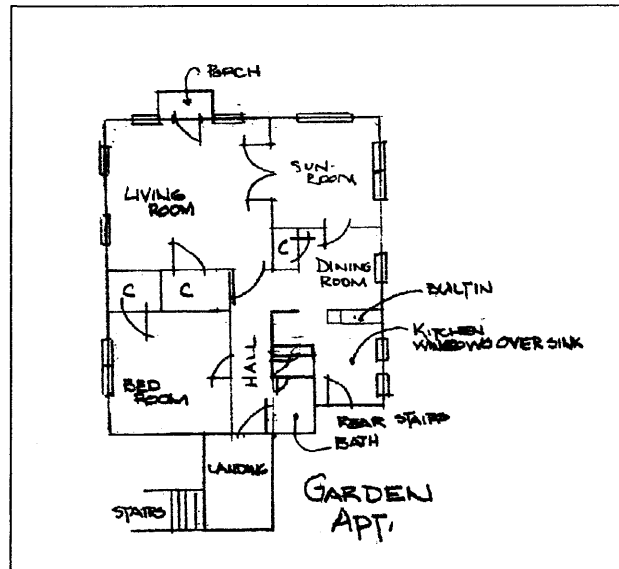
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# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Knickerbocker Apartments  
Shelby County TN

studio, patio, and garden apartments  
drawn by Nancy Jane Baker



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National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Knickerbocker Apartments  
Shelby County TN

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## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Knickerbocker Apartments, located at 23-25 S. McLean Boulevard in Midtown Memphis, is being nominated under Criteria A and C for its local historic contributions to community planning and development and architecture. The building is an excellent representation of speculative real estate ventures during the first few decades of the twentieth century in Memphis. Constructed circa 1926, the Knickerbocker Apartments is an example of the sort of apartment built to house the burgeoning middle-class population that migrated into the city from surrounding rural areas to seek jobs. Architecturally, the Courtyard form apartment is a fine example of Craftsman design in Memphis. This is shown in the low pitch roof with wide eaves, vertical pane paired windows, and leaded glass sidelights. Classical elements are also found on the building in the entry quoins and scroll brackets below the eaves. The interior of the building retains plaster walls, wood trim and the historic floor plan. The Courtyard site plan arrangement is defined through its use of semi-public/private shared outdoor space within the physical confines of the multi-family housing structure. This property is being nominated under the registration requirements for multi-family housing set forth in the Multiple Property Documentation Form for Multi-Family Housing in Memphis, Shelby County, TN 1900-1957.

The Knickerbocker Apartments is located in the Idlewild Subdivision that was platted in 1889 when this part of Memphis was an independent town called Idlewild. The development of this town and its subsequent absorption into the city of Memphis boundaries is explained fully in the Multiple Property Submission, Residential Development in Memphis 1865-1960, (NR 12/17/98) and the associated nomination, for the Idlewild Historic District (NR 3/5/99). Between 1923 and 1926, Nellie H. Hasford owned the parcel of land where the Knickerbocker was constructed. She then sold the land to Aaron Thomas and Robert Cohen, who developed the property and owned it until 1927. The address does not appear in the city directories, nor are tenants listed, until 1927 so is it likely that the aforementioned men built the apartments in 1926-1927. For whatever reason, perhaps financial difficulties, they sold the property in 1927. It was a common practice for investors to form a company, build and manage apartment buildings, and hold onto them as long as they were a profitable venture.<sup>1</sup> Mr. William Cumming Johnson is one example of a Memphis businessman who was involved in this type of speculative development by purchasing the Knickerbocker property in 1927. He continued to own the property until his death in 1958.

A sampling of Memphis city directories shows the change in tenants who lived at the Knickerbocker Apartments. As stated in the context "Multi-Family Housing in Memphis, Shelby County, TN 1900-1957," Memphis had more renters than homeowners during the first part of the twentieth century. Most renters in apartment buildings such as the Knickerbocker were middle-class individuals or couples. By the WWII years, the influx of new residents (military and related work fields) changed the demographics of renters. More working class and transient renters arrived in Memphis and leased apartments such as this one. Post WWII the trend continued and, today, apartments such as the Knickerbocker, are rented to students or individuals just entering the job market. Apartment buildings in Memphis started out as more permanent or semi-

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<sup>1</sup> Shelby County Property Deed Books 1923-1927.

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# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Knickerbocker Apartments  
Shelby County TN

permanent homes for individuals and couples. The Knickerbocker Apartments (and others in the city) is now considered a temporary place to live. The figures given below show how this apartment building is representative of the changing demographics of the city.

The first listing for the Knickerbocker is in the 1927 City Directory. Records indicate that there were sixteen residential units, which included studios, patio apartments (one-bedrooms), and garden apartments (two-bedrooms or one-bedroom with a sun room). Due to superstition, none of the units were numbered "13." Instead, the units jumped from Unit 12 to Unit 14 and were numbered up to Unit 17.

In 1927 two apartments were not leased. The first tenants included married couples, three widows, and two single women in their own units and one woman living with her widowed mother. Miss Lillian G. Bowers was a secretary at the firm of Williams White & Company, Inc., which was located downtown. Miss Mary Cowen was a bookkeeper at Bry's, a department store downtown. Miss Eva E. Blair was a nurse at the Dr. Willis C. Campbell Clinic, a medical office that exists today. Of the married couples, the husbands held a variety of positions but generally in the middle and upper middle economic strata. Some of them are as follows: Mr. Henry G. Turner was a district traffic manager, Mr. Fred F. Munson was a railroad claim agent, Mr. Edward Flourney was a traveling salesman, Mr. Alger P. Clark was a factory rep, and Mr. Lee A. Keane was an engineer. Classified ads from 1927 show that a five-room apartment, the largest units with two bedrooms, in The Knickerbocker rented for \$70.00 a month. This was on the high end compared to other similar listings that ranged from \$50 to \$90 with \$60 being about average.<sup>2</sup> Comparative figures for smaller apartments at the Knickerbocker are not readily obtainable.

By 1930, there had been a turnover of all the tenants. Three units were vacant, which was not unusual given that the country was now in the throes of The Depression. The four single females living at the apartment were widows, not single women. Two of the widows were working, a change from the 1927 tenant list when "widow" was listed as an occupation. There were two single males, one of who worked as an agricultural agent. There were seven married couples living at the Knickerbocker Apartments in 1930. The husbands worked as a foreman, marine engineer, traveling salesman, etc. about the same economic level as the 1927 tenants.<sup>3</sup>

By 1935, all the tenants had turned over again with the exception of Mrs. Leila Harmon, a widow who lived in Unit 14. Mrs. Harmon was the property manager. The Depression was still taking its toll, with four vacant units. The ratio of married couples, widows, and single men and woman remained about the same. There were seven married couples, three widows, one single female, and one single male. Occupations were listed

<sup>2</sup> Classifieds, *Commercial Appeal*, 10 April 1927, Section 5, page 5.  
R.L. Polk & Company, *Memphis City Directory of 1927*, 1470.

<sup>3</sup> Polk, *Memphis City Directory of 1930*, 1462.

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# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Knickerbocker Apartments  
Shelby County TN

as supervisor of sales, druggist, bank teller, bill collector for Goldsmith's Department Store, manager of the Memphis Theater, and salesman.<sup>4</sup>

In 1940, only three out of sixteen tenants were the same as in 1935. Mrs. Harmon was still living in Unit 14, Mr. & Mrs. George C. Houston were in Unit 1, and Mr. & Mrs. Warren W. Carpenter were still living at the Knickerbocker but had moved from Unit 17 to Unit 16. By 1940, Mr. & Mrs. Erwin W. Jones were tenants at the Knickerbocker in Unit 15. Mr. Jones was an adjuster at the Physician's Business Bureau. He and his wife continued to live here for some time. The couple was still living in Unit 15 in 1945, but in 1950 Mr. Jones' widow, Mrs. Mable Jones is the only resident listed for Unit 15. Telephones had also become common among the middle-class by 1940 and thirteen of the sixteen units had phone service.<sup>5</sup>

The 1945 City Directory provides a good indication of occupations changing to accommodate the war effort. Memphis was a hub of military and military-related business during World War II. Several of the Knickerbocker tenants worked at Fisher Aircraft and Mr. Charles H. Perry, living in Unit 6, was in the U.S. Navy. Other tenants worked at the Internal Revenue Service, the U.S. Post Office, and as a service or repairman at the National Cash Register Company. Continuing the trend for telephone service seen in the 1940 directory, in 1945, only Mr. & Mrs. Irvin H. Ellis in Unit 12 do not have phone service.<sup>6</sup>

Some of the occupancy changes in the Knickerbocker Apartments most likely results from the major impact of the Depression and WWII regarding the economy and demographics of the country. By the mid-1950s, the Memphis directories indicate less tenant turnover and a return to non-military or non-military related occupations. Interestingly, the marital status of the tenant population remained about the same throughout the period of significance for this property. Up until 1950, married couples made up the majority of tenants, followed by widows, with single males and females being only nominal.<sup>7</sup>

The Knickerbocker Apartments is an excellent example of a middle-class apartment building constructed in the 1920s in Memphis. It is one of dozens that still exist in Memphis from that era. Today, tenants in this and similar buildings are more likely to be students or individuals just starting out in the job market. The Knickerbocker is intact and retains its historic and architectural character. The building compares favorably with nearby Courtyard apartments that also feature Craftsman influence and balconies such as 130 N. McLean and The Mayflower Apartments at 35 N. McLean. The courtyard garden continues to be landscaped and enjoyed by the residents and the units have maintained their original form and features. Historically and architecturally, the Knickerbocker Apartments is a good representation of early twentieth century apartments in Memphis. Its significance as a Courtyard type apartment building exemplifies the development pattern of multi-family housing in Memphis during the 1920s as identified in the Memphis Multi-Family Housing MPS.

<sup>4</sup> Polk, *Memphis City Directory of 1935*, 1277.

<sup>5</sup> Polk, *Memphis City Directory of 1940*, 1208; *Memphis City Directory of 1945*, 1555; *Memphis City Directory of 1950*, 1016.

<sup>6</sup> Polk, *Memphis City Directory of 1945*, 1555.

<sup>7</sup> Polk, *Memphis City Directory of 1950*, 1016.

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National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Knickerbocker Apartments  
Shelby County TN

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON WILLIAM CUMMING JOHNSON

William Cumming Johnson and his wife, Elizabeth Evangeline Harvey Johnson lived near the intersection of Goodlett Street and Central Avenue, on the western border of what is now known as East Memphis. By 1958 Johnson moved further east to 5277 Shady Grove Road, which is just east of White Station Road.<sup>8</sup> He was a prominent local businessman, first in cotton and then in real estate. Johnson was a lifelong Memphian who was born in 1870 and managed to start his own company with a few colleagues by 1892 at the age of 22. He was educated at Southwestern Presbyterian University in Clarksville, TN and at the University of Michigan, where he studied chemistry. His first company was Tennessee Fibre Company. He went on to own and manage the Broadway Coal & Ice Company and the Memphis Tractor Company. He was also elected as President of the Memphis Chamber of Commerce in 1917.<sup>9</sup>

Johnson was a major player in the local cotton business from the 1890s through the 1920s. He used his knowledge of chemistry to develop several new cotton processes that helped the U.S. in World War I. He invented a way to purify and bleach the fiber from the hulls of the cottonseed, which was then used in gun cotton and smokeless powder. It was also one of the primary ingredients in the powder used by the U.S. during World War I. After the war he modified the process and turned the fiber into paper stock and related products. In the Cotton Row Historic District (NR 8/1/79) there is a Johnson building at 110-116 S. Front Street that is most likely built by and named after him. This is now part of the offices of Hnedak Bobo Group, a large well-known local architectural firm that specializes in rehabilitation of historic properties, among other things.<sup>10</sup>

In the 1920s, Johnson moved onto his second career as a real estate developer. Besides owning The Knickerbocker Apartments, he developed subdivisions such as Glenview (NR 10/7/99), Hedgmoor, and Richland.<sup>11</sup> Johnson also made civic contributions in Memphis. In 1925 he was the President of the Shelby County Anti-Malaria Board in Memphis. He was also a leader on bond drives during World War I and served on the board of the YMCA.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>8</sup> "Mrs. Johnson, Girl Scout Leader, Dead," *Commercial Appeal*, 13 July 1930, Section 1, page 10.

<sup>9</sup> "W.C. Johnson, Developer, Dies," *Commercial Appeal*, 15 September 1958, 26.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

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His first wife was also famous for her civic involvements, especially in the Girl Scouts of America. She was a member of the Nineteenth Century Club and she and her husband were charter members of the Memphis Country Club. They attended First Congregational Church, located in the Central Gardens Historic District (NR 9/9/82). Mrs. Johnson was from a prominent New York family and was educated in art in both Manhattan and in Paris. They had three sons, William C., Jr., Harry B., and Burton H. Johnson. She died in July of 1930, at age 58, while visiting relations in New York. W.C. Johnson had a second wife, Georgia Early Johnson, who inherited the Knickerbocker property when he died in 1958.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> "Mrs. Johnson, Girl Scout Leader, Dead," Section 1, page 10.

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## VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION AND JUSTIFICATION

The boundaries of this property extend only to its legal lot size, as per recorded by the Shelby County Tax Assessor. Its eastern boundary fronts 100' along the west side of S. McLean Blvd., which is located several lots south of Madison Avenue. Its north and south boundary lines abut other land parcels and are approximately 192' in depth. The western boundary (rear) does not adjoin an alley but rather abuts another land parcel that faces one street to the west. The total square footage of this parcel is 19,209.96 sq. ft., which covers .44 acres of land. The property is located in the Idlewild Subdivision on lot W PT 7.

The boundary of the nominated property includes all the property associated with the Knickerbocker Apartments. The boundary for this property was chosen, as it was the legal defined property on which this apartment building sits. It has the Shelby County parcel ID number 01704700005.



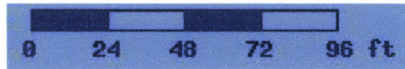
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## TAX MAP



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### **PHOTOGRAPHS**

Photos by: Jennifer Tucker and Nancy Jane Baker  
Date: January 2003  
Negative: Tennessee Historical Commission

There have been no changes to the building since the photos were taken.

1 of 23

East façade, facing west

2 of 23

East façade of north wing detail, facing northwest

3 of 23

Courtyard Entrance

4 of 23

Eave and window detail on north wing

5 of 23

First story window of southern wing, with banding and wall ornaments

6 of 23

Detail of wall ornament beneath window

7 of 23

North elevation, facing southeast

8 of 23

South elevation, window well

9 of 23

West elevation, enclosed rear staircases, facing northeast

10 of 23

Detail of staircase railing

11 of 23

Interior view of staircase landing window, looking down into courtyard

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Interior, Studio unit, looking through entry, entry alcove, into main room

13 of 23

Interior, Studio unit, looking towards western wall in main room. Door is balcony access.

14 of 23

Interior, door and baseboard trim

15 of 23

Interior, Patio unit, living room looking into hallway

16 of 23

Interior, Patio unit, living room, courtyard wall, with balcony access

17 of 23

Interior, Patio unit, closet door in bedroom

18 of 23

Interior, Patio unit, looking into kitchen towards rear door

19 of 23

Interior, Garden unit, balcony door looking east onto McLean Ave.

20 of 23

Interior, Garden unit, view from sunroom into living room

21 of 23

Interior, Garden unit, living room closet door

22 of 23

Interior, Garden unit, dining room built-in china cabinet

23 of 23

Interior, Garden unit, bathroom