

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form



1054

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 process, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Samuel Gompers Memorial  
other names \_\_\_\_\_

2. Location

street & number Massachusetts Ave., 10<sup>th</sup> and L Sts., N.W., Reservation 69  not for publication  
city or town Washington  vicinity  
state D.C. code DC county n/a code 001 zip 20036

3. 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. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments).

Joe Wallis Acting F.P.O. 8/28/07  
Signature of certifying office/Title Date

National Park Service

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).

DAVID MALONEY, ACTING SHPO 2-27-2007  
Signature of certifying office/Title Date

DC HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. State/Federal Agency 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): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the Keeper Patrick Ardus Date of Action 10/11/2007

Samuel Gompers Memorial  
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.  
County and State

### 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**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
_____	_____	buildings
_____	_____	sites
_____	_____	structures
_____	_____	objects
1	_____	Total
1	0	

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

Memorials in Washington, D.C.

**number of contributing resource previously listed in the National Register**

0

### 6. Function of Use

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

RECREATION and CULTURE: work of art

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

RECREATION and CULTURE: work of art

### 7. Description

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

20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY REVIVALS: Beaux Arts

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation \_\_\_\_\_

walls \_\_\_\_\_

roof \_\_\_\_\_

other Bronze \_\_\_\_\_

### Narrative Description

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

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## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Samuel Gompers Memorial

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### DESCRIPTION

The *Samuel Gompers Memorial* is the focal point of Reservation 69, the triangular parcel of land on the north side of Massachusetts Avenue situated between 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, and L Streets, N.W. The bronze monument erected in 1933, designed by Robert Aitken, represents *École des Beaux-Arts* design principles.

The planar base of this sizeable, all-bronze memorial suggests an abstract mountain or a throne. Projecting forward from the center is an over-lifesize Gompers, wearing a three-piece suit. He has taken off his overcoat, thrown it across the back of his chair, and sits ready to talk. The intensity of his facial features and hands (his left hand holds papers that rest on his leg while his right hand clenched slightly with its elbow perched on the chair's armrest) reflects Gompers' role as the preeminent turn-of-the-century negotiator for the working class. The large and strong hands also pay homage to his years, beginning at the age of ten, spent laboring as a cigar roller.

The central, tapering pedestal, that supports Gompers' chair, features his name in raised letters and incorporates sloping flanks that are taller. The flanking sides establish large surfaces at eye-level for quotations. The pedestal features a striated finish; it is smoother beneath his name and the quotes (to facilitate ease in readability). The inscription at the left reads as follows:

So long as we have held fast to voluntary principles and have been actuated and inspired by the spirit of service. We have sustained our forward progress and we have made our labor movement something to be respected and accorded a place in the councils of our republic. Where we have blundered into trying to force a policy or a decision, even though wise and right, we have impeded, if not interrupted the realization of our own aims.

The quote on the right side states:

No lasting gain has ever come from compulsion if we seek to force, we but tear apart that which, united, is invincible. There is no way whereby our labor movement may be assured sustained progress in determining its policies and its plans other than sincere democratic deliberation until a unanimous decision is reached. This may seem a cumbrous, slow method to the impatient but the impatient are more concerned for immediate triumph than for the education of constructive development.

On top of these walls of words are six over-lifesize figures. Two figures sit at the outer corners, a mother suckling her infant (on the left) and a boy reading a book (on the right). In terms of Renaissance symbolism, the woman represents Charity (this should be understood as the Christian concept of brotherly love—agape—as opposed to almsgiving), while the boy's book is an attribute of Faith. James Goode has described the seated

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boy as symbolizing the overthrow of industrial exploitation by education.<sup>1</sup> Standing above either seated figure is a man and an allegorical woman. The winged allegorical figure on the right side wears a helmet and holds a balance, palm branch, and sword wrapped with crossed ties. Her various attributes make her a conflation of Fame (wings), Victory (palm), Justice (scale and sword), and Faith (who may wear a helmet to ward off heresy). On the left side, the allegorical figure embraces a fasces.<sup>2</sup> In the language of art, fasces represent authority. An olive branch, a symbol of peace, wraps around the bottom of the fasces. This woman has removed her liberty cap and placed it on top of the fasces in order to wear a crown, the traditional symbol of sovereignty, power, victory, and the attainment of honors.<sup>3</sup> She looks at the two bare-chested, muscular men who shake hands, over a block or table, at the center of the monument.

The monument also incorporates a variety of artifacts representing industrial and craft production. The man on the right balances a cogwheel with his left hand. A miniature steam locomotive engine is located next to the seated boy. A motor (or generator), a sheet of metal with a multitude of rivets, and an anvil are located behind the central figures. From the rear, the viewer can easily recognize a large flame wafting from the central block, perhaps meant to be understood, from this position, as a combustion chamber. Flame is also often associated with vigilance and eternal life.

A swag of bound laurel leaves drapes over a medallion at the center of the rear of the pedestal. The medallion's relief depicts two strong hands grasping the other superimposed over the continents of North and South America. An outer ring incorporates: "American Federation of Labor Organized November 15 1881." An inner ring features: "Labor Omnia Vincit." This phrase plays off the famous Roman motto: "Omnia Vincit Amor" i.e., Love Conquers All. The following quote is inscribed below the medallion:

Say to the organized workers of America that as I have kept the faith I expect they will keep the faith. They must carry on. Say to them that a union man carrying a card is not a good citizen unless he upholds the institutions of our country and a poor citizen of our country if he upholds the institutions of our country and forgets the obligations of his trade associations.

This L'Enfant reservation was officially named Samuel Gompers Memorial Park in 1951. It is predominantly comprised of turf, with a few benches and shade trees along the walkway in the eastern half of the park; trees line the L Street edge.

<sup>1</sup> James Goode, *The Outdoor Sculpture of Washington, D.C.* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1974) 276.

<sup>2</sup> A bundle of wooden rods and an axe carried by attendants of Roman magistrates and used to scourge and behead on demand.

<sup>3</sup> (originally worn by a Roman slave to signify his freedom and later adopted by French revolutionists)

**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 pattern of our history.
- B** Property 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 as yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

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

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or 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.

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

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

**Area of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Art

**Period of Significance**

1933

**Significant Dates**

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

**Cultural Affiliation**

n/a

**Architect/Builder**

Robert Aitken

**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 files (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:  
NPS, National Capital Region Headquarters

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### SIGNIFICANCE

The *Samuel Gompers Memorial* is a good example of the Beaux-Arts monument. It honors the first and longest-serving president of the American Federation of Labor. Robert Aitken created the memorial. It was erected by the American Federation of Labor at a cost of \$117,408, under an Act of Congress approved March 5, 1928 (45 Stat. 193). Located one block west of the American Federation of Labor Headquarters (1916-1956), its dedication ceremony was held on October 7, 1933. The memorial is significant under Criterion C in the area of Art.

For more than half a century, Samuel Gompers (1850-1924) was the preeminent spokesman, advocate, organizer, and leader of the labor movement in this nation. He was born in London to an indigent Jewish family whose financial situation forced him to begin work at the age of ten. He found employment in his father's trade—making cigars. In 1863, the family emigrated to the United States and settled in New York City. Samuel and his father continued working as cigarmakers and joined a local union. Around 1870, the skill of the cigarmaker was threatened by the mold, a tool that allowed certain aspects of the work to be subdivided which significantly simplified the production process. Gompers participated in a few unsuccessful strikes. Ultimately, the Cigarmakers' Union allowed less skilled workers to join their organization, an acknowledgement that technological advancements were inevitable. In the early-1870s, Gompers became active in the union while opposing socialism, which he saw as a threat to the success of trade unionism. By the end of the decade, he began thinking about a national federation of trade unions. In 1881, Gompers was instrumental in creating the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions of the United States and Canada. This organization survived for five years, before it was restructured as the American Federation of Labor (AFL) in 1886. The weak, often fractious, and limited set of trade unions of the 1880s grew in strength over time. Throughout the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the eight-hour day was the most important demand of the labor movement.

In time, the AFL legitimized the institution of the trade union and its right to organize workers and bargain for them. The establishment of the AFL is a testament to Gompers' determination, despite the problematic circumstances. Throughout his long career, as the first and longest-serving president, Gompers surmounted formidable barriers including: hostile employers—who typically utilized the police powers of a sympathetic government; factions established by pro-socialist laborers; and the deeply divisive aspects of the labor force regarding religion, ethnicity, and race. Gompers was also successful because he was a pragmatist and would not allow ideal goals to undermine small advancements that aided workers' interests. His accomplishments, ultimately, resulted from his formidable powers of persuasion and an immense network of friends and contacts.

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Robert Ingersoll Aitken (1878-1949) was born and raised in San Francisco. Initially, he studied art for a year under the sculptor Douglas Tilden and the painter Arthur F. Mathews at the Mark Hopkins Institute of Art. In 1897, Aitken opened his own studio and achieved some recognition at the local level. Four years later, he succeeded Tilden as the Professor of Sculpture at the institute and was elected as a Fellow of the National Sculpture Society the following year in 1902. Aitken held the teaching position until 1904, when he left for three years of study and work in Paris. When Aitken returned, he decided to establish his studio in New York City rather than San Francisco, because of the earthquake and fire of 1906. Aitken's Beaux-Arts training was immediately appreciated in New York. He was made an academician by the National Academy of Design in 1914 and taught at the Art Students' League until he became Director of Schools at the National Academy of Design.

Aitken's reputation as a sculptor was firmly established by the Panama-Pacific Exposition held in San Francisco in 1915. His creation of vigorous allegorical nudes for *Four Elements* and *The Fountain of the Earth* reflected influences from Michelangelo and Rodin. After serving in the army during the First World War, Aitken returned to New York to a steady stream of commissions for monuments, portraits, and medals. In 1930, he won the competition for the *Samuel Gompers Memorial*; it received final approval from the Commission of Fine Arts in 1933. In 1931, he began working on the frieze depicting famous artists for the Columbus Gallery of Fine Arts in Ohio, completed in 1938. In 1932, his equestrian *Major General Oliver Otis Howard* was erected on the Gettysburg Battlefield. That year, he also received the commission for the western pediment of the U.S. Supreme Court. In 1933, he received a contract for several sculptural elements at the National Archives, including *Guardians of the Portal* (granite relief, Pennsylvania Avenue facade), *The Past* (sculpture on pedestal, Pennsylvania Avenue side), *The Future* (sculpture on pedestal, Pennsylvania Avenue side), and several medallions for the frieze. Aitken's versatility, as well as his Beaux-Arts training, made him sought after and accepted by the classicists seeking to embellish Washington during the 1930s.

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Name of Property

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### BIBLIOGRAPHY

American Federation of Labor Building, National Historic Landmark form (1973).

Goode, James. *The Outdoor Sculpture of Washington, D.C.* Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1974.

Gurney, George. *Sculpture and the Federal Triangle.* Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1985.

[www.aflcio.org](http://www.aflcio.org)

Yellowitz, Irwin. "Samuel Gompers: a half century in labor's front rank," *Monthly Labor Review* (July 1989): 27-33.



Samuel Gompers Memorial  
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.  
County and State

## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of Property** less than one acre

### UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

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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 Eve L. Barsoum, Historian

organization National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers date May 2003

street & number 444 North Capitol Street, N.W. telephone 202.354.1822

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 SHPO or FPO)

name U.S. Government, administered by the NPS, NCR, National Mall & Memorial Parks

street & number 900 Ohio Drive, S.W. telephone 202.485.9686

city or town Washington state D.C. zip code 20242

**Paperwork Reduction 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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Samuel Gompers Memorial

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## Verbal Boundary Description

The *Samuel Gompers Memorial* is located in Reservation 69, at the intersection of Massachusetts Avenue and 10<sup>th</sup> Street, N.W. The boundary of the object includes the land occupied by the memorial.

## Boundary Justification

The boundary of the *Samuel Gompers Memorial* has been historically associated with the object.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY NAME: Gompers, Samuel, Memorial

MULTIPLE NAME: Memorials in Washington, D.C.

STATE & COUNTY: DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, District of Columbia

DATE RECEIVED: 8/31/07 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 9/17/07  
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 10/02/07 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 10/14/07  
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 07001054

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N  
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N  
REQUEST: N SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: N NATIONAL: Y

COMMENT WAIVER: N

ACCEPT  RETURN  REJECT 10/11/07 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

RECOM./CRITERIA Accept c  
REVIEWER Patrick Andrews DISCIPLINE Historian  
TELEPHONE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE 10/11/2007

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N

If a nomination is returned to the nominating authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the NPS.



KARL MARX

SAMUEL GOMPERS MEMORIAL

WASHINGTON, DC

EVE BARSOUM

FEB 2004

NCR

FACING NORTHWEST

1 OF 2

PENN 18 ST (NO. 5) 018  
376 20\*\* N H N-2-64 2(024)



SAMUEL GOMPERS MEMORIAL

WASHINGTON, DC

EVE PARSONS

FEB 2004

NCR

FACING SOUTH

2 OF 2

PENNA 18 ST (No. 6 2012  
376 28\*\* N N N-C 71 20024)

Please refer to the map in the  
Multiple Property Cover Sheet  
for this property

Multiple Property Cover Sheet Reference Number: 64500992