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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

SEP 20 1989

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 Park Tower

other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 2440 Sixteenth Street, N.W.

not for publication N/A

city, town Washington

vicinity N/A

state District of Columbia code DC county N/A

code DC 001 zip code 20009

3. Classification

Ownership of Property

private

public-local

public-State

public-Federal

Category of Property

building(s)

district

site

structure

object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing

1

0

0

0

1

Noncontributing

0 buildings

0 sites

0 structures

0 objects

0 Total

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously

listed in the National Register 0

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.

Carol B. Thompson
Signature of certifying official

9/18/89
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 Andrus

10/30/89

[Signature]
Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

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)

ART DECO

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation N/A

walls BRICK

STONE/Limestone

roof N/A

other STONE/marble panels

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

Please See Continuation Sheet

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 N/A

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1928 - 1929

Significant Dates

1928

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Harris, William

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

Please See Continuation Sheet

See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

Please 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 # _____

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of property Less than one acre

UTM References

A

1	8
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3	2	3	3	8	0
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4	3	0	9	8	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 nominated property occupies Lot 101, Square 2571 in Washington, D.C.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes the entire record lot that has historically been associated with the property.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Betty Bird
 organization Consultant to the Jonathan Woodner Co. date November 1988
 street & number 2025 Eye Street, N.W., Suite 801 telephone (202)-463-2033
 city or town Washington state D.C. zip code 20006

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Park Tower is a 5-story brick apartment building that faces east onto Sixteenth Street. The building is ell-shaped, wrapping around a French Second Empire style embassy at the corner of Kalorama Road and Sixteenth Street. Park Tower then extends back 212 ft. along Kalorama. The front facade, facing Sixteenth Street, is an excellent example of 1920s modern architectural styling and employs numerous art deco design motifs. Park Tower is in good condition and closely resembles its original appearance. Although the projecting bays that once housed open balconies have been enclosed, this alteration does not affect the essential form and integrity of the building.

The principal facade facing Sixteenth Street is a superb example of 1920s design aesthetic. The facade is divided into five bays with the main entrance to the building located within the central bay. Although the building has a flat roof, it terminates in a profile that steps up to the roof level loggia surmounting the central bay. The facade is detailed in limestone and light-colored tapestry brick. The two end bays are clad entirely with brick and are topped by a flat limestone cornice. Fenestration in the end bays is confined to a recessed single window on each floor. There are recessed spandrels composed of header bricks below each window.

The three central bays are more elaborate and are executed in limestone with brick used for spandrel panels. Each of the two bays flanking the central bay is defined by four limestone salients that project from stylized bases supported by limestone corbels at the second floor level. The salients extend above the cornice line of these bays. The broader salients at each end of the bay are terminated in recessed panels decorated with stylized fletching. The bases from which these salients spring are embellished with an oak leaf motif. The bay itself is topped by a recessed limestone frieze. The frieze is decorated with limestone diagonals that resemble stylized diaper-work. Intersecting chevrons are employed at the second floor level. Three windows are set within the salients on each floor. On the third, fourth, and fifth floor levels, spandrels consist of tapestry brick laid in a chevron pattern.

The recessed central bay is the most prominent and displays the most detail. It is constructed of limestone with brick, tile, and marble used as decorative elements. The entry frontispiece defines the first two stories terminating in an austere limestone frieze. Four salients topped by stylized fletching extend up to the frieze. The spandrels below the second floor window consist of green marble framed by multicolor tile. The sides of the central second floor window are detailed with stacked equilateral triangles. Lettering is

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used as a decorative element; the incised words "Park Tower" dominate the stylized frieze at the top of the frontispiece. Above the frontispiece, limestone piers project up four stories terminating in a roof-level loggia above the fifth floor. A stylized cornice tops the loggia. Tapestry brick laid in concentric rectangles forms the spandrel panels below the loggia and at the fourth and fifth floors. The three windows on each floor are set within the limestone piers. There is a half-octagonal limestone balcony projecting from the central opening of the loggia.

The secondary facades, while attractive, are not detailed with the same level of attention lavished on the Sixteenth Street front. Tapestry brick is used throughout. With the exception of projecting bays that once housed screen porches, the appearance of the north and south walls is utilitarian. The bays feature projecting brick salients extending past the cornice line and spandrels composed of brick headers. There have been two significant alterations to Park Tower. The first is the infill of the projecting screen porches on the north and south side facades and east front facade. This alteration cannot be dated, but seems to have occurred prior to the mid-1950s. This alteration has had little impact on the building's most distinguishing characteristic, the surface texture and articulation of the front facade. The second major alteration to the building is the certified rehabilitation which took place in 1986-1987.

With the exception of the first floor lobby and the configuration of the upper floor corridors, the interior of Park Tower has been completely altered. The 1986-87 rehabilitation replaced apartment units in deteriorated and ruinous condition with new units of contemporary appearance. The 1st floor lobby has been restored to its original appearance. The lobby, which extends across the central three bays of the building, is a tripartite open space. Its character is a blend of modern and traditional elements. A double set of steps within the lobby opposite the entry leads up to the elevators. There is a simple tile basin between the steps. Wrought iron rails, detailed in a geometric style employed in many of Irwin Chanin's New York buildings, surmount the steps. Quarry tile covers the floor. In contrast, the cornice and ceiling treatment in the lobby is traditional, consisting of stock plaster decorative elements. A frieze of alternating urns and palmettes extends below a cornice decorated with acanthus leaves. Swagged bead-and-reel plaster medallions surround the three ceiling light fixtures.

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Park Tower, an apartment building constructed in 1928-1929, is one of Washington's finest examples of pre-International Style modern buildings. It meets National Register Criterion C because it embodies distinguishing characteristics of a period. Designed by William Harris, the building was among the first major buildings in Washington to break away from the Beaux Arts and Colonial Revival architectural expression that dominated the city. While other apartment buildings of later date were designed in a style similar to that of Park Tower, few exhibit the integrated approach to form and detail that mark this prominently sited building. Because of the early date of Park Tower's Art Deco styling and the degree to which it incorporates design themes that dominated 1920s architectural aesthetics, Park Tower reflects important changes in aesthetic philosophy and illustrates a significant expression of this architectural style in Washington.

Park Tower was one of Washington's fashionable addresses during the 1930s. Across from newly developed Meridian Hill Park, the building wrapped around the French Embassy located at the corner of Sixteenth Street and Kalorama Road. The year it opened, Park Tower housed congressmen, physicians, newspaper correspondents, attorneys, and local businessmen (Polk's City Directory, 1930). Congressman Hampton Pitts Fulmer (Democrat-South Carolina), who lived in Apartment 514, was the author of the U.S. Standard Cotton Grading Act that later became adopted world-wide as a standard for grading that commodity (Williamson, p. 279).

Park Tower was designed by architect William Harris for developers Z. Thomas Goldsmith and William Keller. The building itself was financed by Shannon and Luchs who supplied money to construct a number of large apartment buildings during this period. Little is known about the three individuals directly involved in constructing Park Tower. William Harris was an unregistered architect who also designed the LaReine Apartments (1929) at Connecticut and Legation for Goldsmith and Keller and the Ravenel at 1610 Sixteenth Street (1929). His father, Albert Harris, was City Architect of Washington and a partner in the firm of Hornblower and Marshall. According to John Clagett Proctor, William Harris was born in Laurel, Maryland on August 14, 1901. Educated in Washington, he graduated from Carnegie Institute of Technology. In 1926 he entered into association with his father as a member of Harris and Harris, establishing his own firm in January 1927. Proctor further wrote that, "he gives his efforts to general architectural practice, and has designed several apartment houses within the District of Columbia which have been favorably criticized by authorities on modern building. Also, he makes a specialty of medium priced residences, and in this connection has participated in development projects in the city" (Proctor, pp. 229-230).

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Park Tower reflects important changes in aesthetic philosophy that mark American architecture in the 1920s. The early decades of the twentieth century were a time of tremendous ferment for the architectural profession in America. Particularly after World War I, "modern" design assumed a polymorphous quality. Modernism was pluralistic during this period, encompassing the following themes to which Park Tower clearly responds:

1. The search for a style that would be an appropriate expression of twentieth century modern life. In contrast with later visions of modernism, the creation of a national, American modern style was a particular concern.
2. The relationship of tradition to architectural practice. Architects found it difficult to depart from the concept of architectural precedent either in design or ornament.
3. The incorporation of new aesthetic sources and influences. Rather than referring solely to European high style historic precedent, architects began to explore primitive and vernacular models. They were also exposed to new building types -- gas stations, skyscrapers, movie palaces, etc. -- that did not readily lend themselves to historical models and hence furnished appropriate vehicles for architectural experimentation.

This approach to modern design operated within a set of architectural aesthetic preferences that can appropriately be labeled a style. Characteristics of pre-International Style modernism include the following: the importance of mass and silhouette, a preference for bilateral symmetry derived from Beaux Arts axial design, new sources of ornament, lettering used as a decorative element, and a fascination with surfaces and textures of materials. One of the most influential events in establishing this American aesthetic was the passage of the New York Zoning Act of 1916. This act mandated setbacks as a condition for added height and placed a premium on the ingenious massing of tiered elements. The outline of a tall building became as important as the expression of its solidity. Ziggurats received much attention as an appropriate precedent. As considerations of mass and silhouette began to dominate architectural design, the appeal of the play of light and shadow across ornament diminished. Architectural expression became more subtle. The treatment of mass, the use of materials, and the grouping of windows -- rather than the detailing of highly plastic ornament -- produced the visual effect of the building. Because ornament was secondary to the expression of mass, surfaces themselves began to be used in a decorative manner. While the contrast of

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surface texture and material employed in the 1920s is often jarring today, it was an integral part of the design aesthetic of the time.

Park Tower's incorporation of these characteristics of pre-International Style modernism on its Sixteenth Street facade makes it a superb example of 1920s modern design. In 1928 the building was described as being in the "modern American architectural style" (*Evening Star*, August 25, 1928, p. 13). Its forceful bilateral symmetry displays the tenacious influence of the Beaux Arts central axis. Park Tower's stepped roofline produces a ziggurat profile culminating in the roof top loggia. The facade not only plays upon the contrast of brick to limestone but offers a veritable encyclopedia of brick patterns. Executed in tapestry brick, popular in the 1920s for the surface variation that its different colors provided, the facade incorporates spandrels displaying three different bonds -- header, chevron, and concentric stretchers. The texture of the facade is further enriched by the tile en-framed marble panels set above the entry. Sources for much of the ornament lie outside the European tradition. Oak leaves and geometric devices are used for embellishment. Finally, the letters "PARK TOWER" provide the primary interest within the frieze above the entrance.

Park Tower is also an exemplar of Art Deco styling. Art Deco entered the mainstream of popular culture at the Exposition des Arts Decoratifs in Paris in 1925, but evolved into what has been characterized as "an almost universal design passion ... [which] dominated 20th-century art and life for the two decades of the nineteen-twenties and thirties ... [and] produced some of the most notable monuments of a uniquely American contribution to architectural history, the skyscraper" (Huxtable, "The Skyscraper Style," *New York Times Magazine*, April 14, 1974, p. 58 et seq). The dominance of the City Beautiful-Beaux Arts forms of the monumental Federal City coupled with the limitations on verticality imposed by height restrictions impeded the development of the "skyscraper style" in Washington. Consequently there are relatively few major buildings executed in this extremely popular style in Washington, D.C. Park Tower, one of these major buildings, displays an exterior that is a virtual catalog of popular Art Deco motifs.

The classically derived frontispiece on the front (Sixteenth Street) facade displays an ornament that is streamlined in profile but largely classically inspired: symmetrically placed patera and floral motifs set within squares. Traditional architectural devices like ornamental cornices and bilateral symmetry contrast with machine-age, ultra modern imagery that appears in the low relief zig-zag motif incorporated in the surround framing the central windows on the 3rd through 5th floors as well as in the dynamism of the overlapped triangles at the second floor level. Similarly, the rhythm of the projecting

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bays on the rear, the uninterrupted vertical lines of the front stonework and the stepped profile of the main facade are clearly in the mode of the elegant skyscrapers then being built in New York, such as the Chanin building of 1929 by Chanin, Sloan and Robertson or Raymond Hood's renowned Ideal Radiator Building and Daily News Building.

This combination of an image of modernity and machine-age power rooted in traditional architectural expression and articulation is the essence of the Art Deco style. The technology of modern commercial building was developed in the skyscrapers of the 1920s. Although Park Tower could not reach skyscraper heights in the District of Columbia, it still projects the complex and often contradictory imagery of the Art Deco transition between formal traditions of the past and the machine-age future and does so in an exceptionally well-executed manner.

Park Tower exemplifies both 1920s pre-International Style American modernism and Art Deco styling. It is a valuable part of the architectural heritage of the District of Columbia because of the early date of its Art Deco styling and the degree to which it incorporates Art Deco styling. Along with the C&P Telephone Co. Building (Voorhees, Gmelin and Walker - 1928) and the Capital Garage (Arthur B. Heaton - 1926, now demolished), Park Tower was one of the first major buildings in Washington to adopt a self-consciously modern architectural style. The stylistic innovation apparent in Park Tower in 1928 makes it a forerunner of later buildings like the Kennedy-Warren (1932) and the Dupont Circle Building (1931) and an excellent example of 1920s modernism in Washington.

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"Apartment Being Erected on Sixteenth Street." **Evening Star** (September 15, 1928), p. 20.

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"Five-Story Apartment House Planned on Sixteenth Street." **Evening Star** (August 25, 1928), p. 13.

Huxtable, Ada Louise. "The Skyscraper Style" in **The New York Times Magazine** (April 14, 1974).

Kennedy, Lawrence F. et al. comps. **Biographical Directory of the American Congress 1774-1971**. Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1971.

McDevitt, Cleland C. **The Book of Washington**. Washington: Washington Board of Trade, 1927. (Washingtoniana Collection)

Members of Congress Since 1789, Second Edition. Washington: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 1981.

"New Apartment Project on Connecticut Avenue." **Evening Star**, March 9, 1929.

"New Park Tower Apartments Sold." **Evening Star**, July 10, 1930.

Proctor, John Clagett, ed. **Washington Past and Present**. New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., Inc., 1930.

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"Sixteenth Street Apartment Sold." **Evening Star**, July 29, 1961.

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Withey, Henry F. and Elsie Rathburn Withey. **Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased).** Los Angeles: Hennessey & Ingalls, Inc., 1970.

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Card file on D.C. Architects. (National Archives)

D.C. Building Permit No. 117740, August 25, 1928. (National Archives)

D.C. Preservation League/Traceries. D.C. Apartment Building Survey. (D.C. Historic Preservation Office)

Vertical Files in the Washingtoniana Collection (Martin Luther King Library)

INTERVIEWS:

Interview with Mr. Sol Wolberg, Shannon and Luchs Company, Washington, D.C., October 25, 1983.