



1040

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determination 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 processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Alban Towers Apartment Building  
other names/site number \_\_\_\_\_

2. Location

street & number 3700 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W. not for publication N/A  
city or town Washington vicinity X  
state District of Columbia code DC zip code 20016 county N/A code N/A

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets     does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant     nationally X statewide     locally.

(     See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Robert L. Mallett 7/22/94  
Signature of certifying official Date

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 commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. 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): \_\_\_\_\_

Patricia Andrews      9/9/94  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Keeper      Date  
of Action

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

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>1</u>	_____ buildings
_____	_____ sites
_____	_____ structures
_____	_____ objects
_____	_____ Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register \_\_\_\_\_

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

**6. Function or Use**

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

Cat: DOMESTIC Sub: multiple dwelling  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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

Cat: DOMESTIC Sub: multiple dwelling  
COMMERCE specialty store  
COMMERCE restaurant  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**7. Description**

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

20TH CENTURY REVIVALS  
Late Gothic Revival  
Tudor Revival

**Materials** (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation BRICK  
roof SLATE and  
walls BRICK  
  
other DECORATIVE ELEMENTS: Limestone  
SILLS: Concrete

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

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

**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 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 (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

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

**Areas of Significance** (Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance** 1928-1929  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates** 1928-1929  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Architect/Builder Robert O. Scholz  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)  
SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

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)

- 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: \_\_\_\_\_

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 1.5 acres

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	18	320220	4310700	3	_____	_____
2	_____	_____	_____	4	_____	_____

See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.) Square 1929, Lots 12, 802, 803, 805, 810.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.) The boundary includes the Alban Towers Apartment Building.

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Eve Lydia Barsoum / Architectural Historian  
organization D.C. Historic Preservation Division date June 30, 1994  
street & number 614 H Street, N.W. telephone (202) 727-7360  
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 the SHPO or FPO.)

name Georgetown University  
street & number 37th and O Streets, N.W. telephone \_\_\_\_\_  
city or town Washington state D.C. zip code 20057

**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 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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Section 7

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**RECEIVED 413**  
MAY 27 1994  
INTERAGENCY RESOURCES DIVISION  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Alban Towers Apartment Building  
Name of Property  
Washington, D.C.  
County and State  
Apartment Buildings in  
Washington, D.C. 1880-1945  
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Alban Towers Apartments ~~is an example of a~~ Luxury Apartment House property type. It is located at 3700 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., diagonally across from the National Episcopal Cathedral. As it is on one of the highest points in Washington, it offers views, in addition to the Cathedral, of the city, Potomac River, a gothic church, and an adjacent city park. This multi-wing, brick and limestone building was designed in 1928 and used details from the Gothic Revival and Tudor Revival styles to complement the National Cathedral. The main lobby and hallways have ornate ornamental programs which present choice materials and superior workmanship. Alban Towers is an excellent example of the quality of architectural design and construction that prevailed in the Washington in the 1920s.

Alban Towers Apartments is sited on one of the highest points in Washington, D.C. It was constructed in part of square 1929 on land purchased from the Charles Glover estate. In 1928, Alban Towers was designed to have 125 units (D.C. Permit to Build #6054 and #6036). The project achieved immediate success which enable the developers to purchase the southeastern portion of the square from the Protestant Episcopal Cathedral Foundation in order to construct an additional eighty units (D.C. Permit to Build #127222).<sup>2</sup> Both parts employed Tudor and Gothic Revival details to be compatible with the Cathedral. It is almost impossible to discern the connection.

The building is six-stories high and has an irregular shape which creates seven courtyards. The shape responds to the pentagon formed by the intersection of Wisconsin, Massachusetts, and Cathedral Avenues, and 38th and G Streets, N.W. The building is constructed of tan-colored brick and limestone trim, the choice of a nearly monochromatic scheme is typical of the Late Gothic Revival style. The building's wings feature five-story bays with buttresses topped by owls, balconies, Tudor-arches, tracery, gargoyles, decorative panels with shields and crests, battlements, and finials. The base of the Massachusetts Avenue facade is faced in smooth, ashlar limestone that is interspersed with a few rough-cut stones. The bases of the bays on Wisconsin Avenue are treated in the same manner. The brick bays with limestone trim are five-stories high with butresses topped by owls, balconies, Tudor-arches, and battlements. The secondary entrance on Wisconsin Avenue is through a recessed portico with Tudor-aches. A large, Gothic-

<sup>1</sup> "Apartment Hotel, to Cost \$1,500,00, Being Constructed," *The Washington Post*, February 19, 1928.

<sup>2</sup> "Addition Planned for Alban Towers," *The Evening Star*, September 21, 1929, p. 15.

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inspired chandelier lights the porch. The tertiary entrance is in the center of the Garfield Street facade.

The principal facade, on Massachusetts Avenue, faces the National Cathedral and is defined by a square-shape bay with ornate limestone ornament and tracery. The center bay incorporates the entrance and is highly ornate. All of the apartments in this central bay have limestone detailed balconies. The main entrance incorporates a large porte-cochere which is connected to the building by limestone buttresses. Four Tudor-arches form the openings of the porte-cochere. Brackets with carved heads define the springpoint of these arches. Six of the heads depict medieval men, one head depicts a medieval woman, and the eighth head is believed to be a portrait of Charles Lindberg, who completed his famous voyage the year before Alban Towers was built. The wide frieze at the top of the porte-cochere is a bas-relief which depicts shields with crests. The structure is crowned by limestone finials.

Extensions at either side of the central pavilion have pitched slate roofs and parapet gables. The gables feature bas-relief panels. The Tudor arches contributed a domestic image to the building. This impression was originally reinforced by double-hung, six-over-six, wooden sash windows. The French doors which open onto the balconies still offer this multi-light/domestic connection. Georgetown University acquired Alban Towers in the 1970s and replaced the windows with double-hung, one-over-one, aluminum sash windows. The windows are arranged as singles, pairs, and groups of three. All sills are concrete. Many of the top floor windows are arched and have limestone surrounds. The elevations, except for the 38th Street facade, are crowned by a high parapet with crenelation and stepped gables.

The rear of the building, the 38th Street facade, was executed in buff-colored brick and did not receive ornamental details like the other facades. The rear presaged the design of the large apartment buildings that proliferated on Connecticut Avenue a decade later.

Originally, the foyer of the main lobby was entered through a pair of Tudor-arch doors with diamond-paned leaded-glass. The replacement doors, have large panes of plate glass. A pair of identical doors divides the foyer from the lobby. The foyer and lobby are paved in the quarry tiles that are used beneath the porte-cochere. These tiles, in shades of brown, orange, and ocher, are laid in a geometric pattern.

Opposite the main entrance is a large Tudor-arch which leads to the beauty shop and the apartments on the first floor of the northwestern wing. To the left of the entrance are steps leading down (four feet below street level) to the principle space of the lobby. The existing stair railing was added in the 1930s to conform with the then-popular streamlined aesthetic; they are not particularly



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detrimental to the original design of the lobby. The principle space in the lobby is divided into two generously-sized seating areas, delineated by panelled columns. The nine-inch deep, plaster crown molding in the lobby is comprised of a rope at the bottom and top, separated by alternating roses, acorns, and thistles. These symbols of Great Britain reference the English Gothic vernacular style. The strapwork ceiling is complex in design with a border composed of flowers, leaves, and vines. The central area of the ceiling incorporates a geometric design comprised of flowers, urns, and shields.

The secondary foyer, entered from Wisconsin Avenue, is oriented toward the retail establishments. This foyer has two sides of retail windows with large panes of plate glass with brass and marble surrounds. The crown molding is comprised of rosettes, grapes, and animals. The groin-vault ceilings have a stucco finish which is scored to simulate stone. The corridor walls which lead from this entrance to the first floor apartments are panelled in wood.

Alban Towers' pentagonal site and seven courtyards generated corridors with numerous changes in direction. All of the upper-floor corridors feature an ornamental program with Tudor-arches, pilasters, ornate ceiling moldings, and grotesque brackets.

The walls of the upper-floor corridors have a rough stucco finish and a marble base molding, lending a sumptuous texture that is rarely found in apartment buildings. The double-loaded corridors are divided into semi-private areas by the introduction of Tudor-arches between every three apartments. The arches incorporate pilasters with shafts which feature bas-reliefs depicting six zodiac signs: libra, taurus, gemini, cancer, leo, and pisces. The capitals are comprised of leaves and medallions. Shields are featured in the spandrels above the arches; the left shield depicts a cross and the right shield depicts a dragon. The eight-inch deep ceiling molding is formed by a rope molding, acorns and leaves in the large central section, and dentils at the above.

The floor edges are laid in the same marble as the base molding. The center of the floors were originally intended to be carpeted. The floors in front of the elevators are finished with rose- and beige-color terrazzo laid in a geometric pattern. Medallions are located in the center of the ceilings in front of the elevators; the original chandeliers have been removed. Grotesque brackets which feature men in crouched positions are used to support dropped beams at the intersections of corridors.

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Washington witnessed more apartment construction in the 1920s than any other decade. In the prosperity that followed World War I, Washington experienced a boom in residential construction because of the growing number of federal employees. Salaries of federal employees, however, had not kept pace with the appreciation of land values in Washington. Moreover, there was a decrease in the size of the average Washington household. Thus, apartment construction exceeded the construction of single-family houses and the size of the average individual apartment decreased from four rooms before the war to three rooms after the war. In addition, the scarcity of skilled workers contributed to the decrease in refinements in the individual apartments. Parquet floors, crown moldings, and elaborate wainscoting virtually disappeared. To compensate for the relative modesty of the apartments, developers increased the size of lobbies and invested the best materials and workmanship in the public spaces. Alban Towers (1928-9) was a result of these developmental and economic forces and three important zoning regulations. Alban Towers was designed and built by Robert O. Scholz and David A. Baer, one of the most important apartment building architect/developer teams of the 1920s.

Alban Towers was constructed to be commodious yet economical. For example, although the apartments feature French doors, Tudor arches, and balconies, the walls were stuccoed, a finish not used before World War I. Nevertheless, the public spaces were exceptionally well designed and executed. Italian stone masons, probably those who worked at the National Cathedral, were employed as carvers at Alban Towers. The developer also offered the tenants several amenities that had been introduced to the apartment building type in the 1920s. The first floor accommodated a beauty shop, travel agency, valet shop, grocery store, lunch counter, and public dining room. Each of the upper floors incorporated a maid's lounge and bathroom.

At the time of construction, Alban Towers was advertised as Washington's largest apartment-hotel offering twenty-four-hour maid service. The apartment-hotel was instituted in Washington just prior to World War I by developer Harry Wardman. The mobility of the 1920s increased its popularity, especially among businessmen and congressmen. The proliferation of the automobile is reflected at Alban Towers in the large basement garage and the porte-cochere which accommodated cars.

Three important zoning decisions, spanning three decades, are reflected in Alban Towers. The first, the 1894 Height of Buildings Act determined a building height based on street width and proposed use. As a result of constrained heights, more

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attention was devoted to well-designed facades and luxurious lobbies. The height restriction also resulted in the Washington phenomenon of step-down lobbies; a means of providing a grand entrance by increasing floor-to-ceiling heights without adding to the overall height of the building.<sup>4</sup> All of these characteristics are present at Alban Towers. The 1905 zoning regulation which required apartment buildings more than fifty feet in height to have twelve feet of open space in front of each elevation, also affected Alban Towers. This legislation provided more air circulation and light for the apartments and simultaneously allowed the developer to introduce a lush landscape plan of shrubs and spruce and cedar trees. The 1925 zoning regulation allowed for the construction of apartment buildings on Massachusetts Avenue; thus, Alban Towers could be built.

Many Washington residents testified in 1925 against the construction of apartment buildings on Massachusetts Avenue. Among them was Bishop C.F. Bratenahl of the National Cathedral. Bratenahl was assured of non-detrimental results to the neighborhood when David A. Baer, the developer of Alban Towers, promised that the apartment building would be a stylistic complement to the Cathedral. In return, Baer was granted permission to name his building after Mount St. Albans, the hill on which the Cathedral stands.

To enhance the siting of Alban Towers, Baer left the wooded lot behind the apartments vacant. He feared that more construction would "jam up the apartments and be right on top of the houses across the street."<sup>5</sup> The apartment building in a resort-like setting first appeared in Washington in 1917 with Harry Wardman's construction of Wardman Park.<sup>6</sup> Wardman created several other similar projects after World War I. The park-like settings did not become popular in Washington until several local developers visited similar examples in New York City and Westchester County in 1925. The developers' visit to New York was also largely responsible for the influence of Tudor Revival architecture on Washington apartment buildings in the 1920s.<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, Robert O. Scholz adopted some of these motifs for the design of Alban Towers.

Robert O. Scholz was born in New York City in 1895. His parents, W. Robert and Marie Gleiter, were natives of Germany. After high school, Robert went to Chicago to study at the Armour Institute. As his father was an artist, this interest was

<sup>4</sup> James Goode. *Best Adresses*, xix.

<sup>5</sup> Alison Luchs interview with Mrs. David A. Baer, April 12, 1987.

<sup>6</sup> Sally Berk. *"The Richest Crop."*

<sup>7</sup> Goode, 178.

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encouraged. Between the ages of sixteen and twenty-two, Robert worked in the architectural office of H. Clyde Miller. He came to Washington in 1918 to work for the Navy Department and in 1922 became associated with George N. Ray, a prominent Washington architect.

In 1922, Scholz also became affiliated with the developer, David A. Baer. By 1931, they had worked on at least eight apartment buildings. They gained a reputation as one of the more important apartment architect/developer teams of the decade. In 1934, Scholz opened his own office in the Edmonds Building where Baer had his office. The Robert O. Scholz Company, Inc. operated for the next forty-four years; often in partnership with his brother, Oscar. Scholz was a board member and consulting architect for Perpetual Federal Savings and Loan Association; he designed offices their Bethesda and Silver Spring offices. He was also a board member of First National Bank of Washington and the Metropolitan Board of Trade.

For a time, Scholz lived in Kalorama at 1810 24th Street, N.W. in one of a row of houses he designed in 1924. He died in 1978 at the age of eighty-three after practicing architecture in Washington for more than half a century. He is credited with being one of the seven major architects of Art Deco buildings, both residential and commercial, in Washington.

David A. Baer, the developer of Alban Towers, was born in Georgetown in 1889. He was the son of Alphonse M. and Ameila D., both natives of France. After graduation from high school, he attended George Washington University, receiving a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1910 and a law degree in 1912. In 1924, he formed a law practice with W. Clark Taylor. They wrote "Probate Forms and Procedure in the District of Columbia," generally accepted as an authoritative work on the subject. As early as 1916, Baer was acting as a developer. In the 1920s, his scope of work qualified him as a prominent developer. During that decade, he built at least sixteen apartment buildings with Scholz or the prolific architect David L. Stern. In 1923, Stern designed Baer's Kalorama residence at 2325 Wyoming Avenue, N.W.

Baer choose conspicuous sites to develop his buildings. Examples include: St. Alban's Apartments, 1922, (now the Chinese Embassy) just south of the Taft Bridge at 2310 Connecticut Avenue, N.W.; the Barr Building, 1930, 910 17th Street, N.W., on Farragut Square, and; Keystone Apartments, 1931 (now Burns Memorial Medical Building of George Washington University), at 2150 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W. on Washington Circle. However, Alban Towers became the project which allowed for the most spectacular views of the city. The site was described by Lord Bryce while he was British ambassador to the United States, 1907-1913: "It is a view that reminded one of some of those ample prospects over Rome which the traveler is able

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to obtain from St. Peter Montorio on the Tuscan side of the Tiber, or from Monte Mario."<sup>8</sup>

Baer was an active member of the community. He was president of the Washington Hebrew Congregation, director of the Boys' Club of Washington, on the board of directors of the Colonial Ice Cream Company, president of Woodmont Country Club, a member of the Metropolitan Board of Trade, of the National Press Club, the D.C. Bar Association, and the Masons. When he died in 1947 at the age of fifty-eight, Baer's home was Alban Towers. In a life filled with achievement, Alban Towers is possibly David Baer's greatest legacy.

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<sup>8</sup> Joseph G. O'Keefe, "Bryce, the 'British Yankee'."

<sup>9</sup> In 1986, George Washington University sought a prominent alumnus to name an annual student award and chose David Baer.

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**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number \_\_\_\_\_ Page \_\_\_\_\_

**SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD**

NRIS Reference Number: 94001040 Date Listed: 9/9/94

Alban Towers Apartment Building DC  
Property Name: County: State:

Apartment Buildings in Washington, DC, MPS  
Multiple Name

-----  
This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.

Patricia Andrews  
Signature of the Keeper

9/9/94  
Date of Action

=====  
Amended Items in Nomination:

As submitted, this nomination form had selected Criterion A and C and Architecture as an Area of Significance. A technical correction is made to the nomination form to add Community Planning and Development (to reflect the selected Criterion A). The SHPO concurs in this amendment.

**DISTRIBUTION:**

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