

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

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE: <b>District of Columbia</b>
COUNTY:
FOR NPS USE ONLY
ENTRY DATE

**1. NAME**

COMMON:

AND/OR HISTORIC:  
**American Federation of Labor Building**

**2. LOCATION**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
**901 Massachusetts Avenue, NW**

CITY OR TOWN:  
**Washington**

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT:

STATE  
**District of Columbia**

CODE

COUNTY:

CODE

**3. CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input type="checkbox"/> Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	Public Acquisition: <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment			
<input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input type="checkbox"/> Military <input type="checkbox"/> Museum			
<input type="checkbox"/> Park <input type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific			
<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Comments			
<b>Headquarters, United Association of Journeymen and Apprentices of the Plumbing and Pipe Fitting Industry of the U.S. and Canada (AFL-CIO).</b>			

**4. OWNER OF PROPERTY**

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

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

CITY OR TOWN:  
**Washington**

STATE:  
**District of Columbia**

CODE

**5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.:  
**Recorder of Deeds**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
**6th and D Streets, NW**

CITY OR TOWN:  
**Washington**

STATE:  
**District of Columbia**

CODE

**6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE OF SURVEY:  
**None**

DATE OF SURVEY:  
 Federal  State  County  Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN:

STATE:

CODE

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

STATE:

COUNTY:

ENTRY NUMBER

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

7 DESCRIPTION

(Check One)

CONDITION

Excellent  Good  Fair  Deteriorated  Ruins  Unexposed

(Check One)

(Check One)

Altered  Unaltered  Moved  Original Site

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

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

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

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

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

1

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

(continued)

SEE INSTRUCTIONS



**SIGNIFICANCE**

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

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

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

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

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

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

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

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

<sup>1</sup> Samuel Gompers, "Editorials," American Federationist, July 1916, p.574.

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

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

(continued)

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

American Federationist, the magazine of the American Federation of Labor. Various issues, especially December 1915, July 1916, and August 1916.

Federal Writers' Project, Works Progress Administration. "American Federation of Labor." Washington, City and Capital. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1937.

Taft, Philip, The A.F. of L. in the Time of Gompers. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957.

Taft, Philip, "American Federation of Labor--Congress of Industrial Organizations." Encyclopaedia Britannica. 1967 ed. Vol. I. (Continued)

**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	LATITUDE		LONGITUDE
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds
NW	0 ' "	0 ' "	0		
NE	0 ' "	0 ' "	38	54	12
SE	0 ' "	0 ' "		77	01
SW	0 ' "	0 ' "			28

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: **less than 1 acre**

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

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME AND TITLE: **Carol Ann Poh, Survey Historian**

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

STREET AND NUMBER: **1100 L Street, NW**

CITY OR TOWN: **Washington**      STATE: **D. C.**      CODE: \_\_\_\_\_

**12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION      NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION**

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

National       State       Local

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Title \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
Director, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date \_\_\_\_\_

ATTEST:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Keeper of The National Register

Date \_\_\_\_\_

SEE INSTRUCTIONS



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

(Continuation Sheet)

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

(Number all entries)

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

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

2

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

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Continuation Sheet)

ST. District of Columbia	
COUNTY	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

(Number all entries)

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

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

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

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

5

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

(Continued)

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

(Continuation Sheet)

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

(Number all entries)

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

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

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

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

6

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

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

(Continuation Sheet)

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

(Number all entries)

9. Bibliographical References; (1) American Federation of Labor Building

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