

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

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

| |
|--------------------------------|
| STATE: District of Columbia |
| COUNTY: |
| FOR NPS USE ONLY |
| ENTRY DATE |

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

1. NAME

COMMON:

AND/OR HISTORIC:
Samuel Gompers House

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER:
2122 First Street 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) <u>rooming house</u> |
| ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC Yes: <input type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No | | | |

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME:
Acme Rental Company

STREET AND NUMBER:
1011 Seventh Street 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:
Sixth 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:
Washington

STATE:
District of Columbia

CODE:

STATE:

COUNTY:

ENTRY NUMBER:

DATE:

FOR NPS USE ONLY

7 DESCRIPTION

| | | | | | | |
|-----------|---|------------------------------------|--|---|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| CONDITION | (Check One) | | | | | |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Excellent | <input type="checkbox"/> Good | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Fair | <input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated | <input type="checkbox"/> Ruins | <input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed |
| | (Check One) | | | (Check One) | | |
| | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Altered | <input type="checkbox"/> Unaltered | <input type="checkbox"/> Moved | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site | | |

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

2122 First Street NW, for 15 years the residence of labor leader Samuel Gompers, is a narrow three-story row house with a raised basement. It features a pressed brick facade, now painted grey, and is trimmed with rock-faced stone lintels. A hexagonal bay runs the full height of the house, and is capped by a pyramidal roof with an iron finial. There is a certain amount of architectural interest in the entrance. Above the door is a lintel that is somewhat Sullivanesque; it features a carved foliated design with egg-and-dart cap molding. There is a rather shallow modillion cornice and a steeply pitched mansard roof of slate. Both the stoop and steps have a masonry railing.

Located just one block east of the Le Droit Park section of Washington, the Gompers House was typical of real estate developments in that city between the late decades of the 19th century and World War I. According to Polk's Washington City Directory, the neighborhood during Gompers' years there was largely middle class. Along the 2100 block of First Street NW there resided a music teacher, a draftsman, several managers of large companies, a police lieutenant, a widow and, of course, the president of the American Federation of Labor. Since Gompers' time, the neighborhood has grown older and poorer, and 2122 First Street now serves as a rooming house, as do several other homes on this block. Its original charm has scarcely faded, however, and the exterior architectural features remain unaltered.

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) 1902-1917

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

Born in a London tenement, Samuel Gompers emigrated to America at the age of 16 and followed his father's trade of cigar making. He did much to make the Cigarmakers' Union the first powerful trade union in the country, then entered the national labor scene by helping found the "Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions of the United States and Canada," later reorganized as the American Federation of Labor. As head of the Federation for 38 years, Gompers succeeded in making it the strongest spokesman for organized labor in America. As one historian has noted, Samuel Gompers "more than anyone else created and molded and became the symbol of the A.F.L..... He lived to see it as inextricably a part of American life as the Presidency of the United States, its Congress, and its courts."¹

A narrow three-story brick house with raised basement, Gompers' residence for 15 years during his term as president of the A.F.L. still stands in a row of similar structures on First Street NW. This house was associated with Gompers longer than any other, and served not only as a private residence, but also as a forum for labor debate.

Biography

Samuel Gompers was born on January 27, 1850, in a London industrial slum. His father, Solomon, was a cigar maker who emigrated to America in 1863. Samuel had only a brief formal education before the family arrived in New York. In England he had been apprenticed to a cigar maker, and he resumed this trade in New York's East Side. In 1864 he joined the Cigarmakers' Union. "All my life," he remarked in his autobiography, "I had been accustomed to the labor movement and accepted as a matter of course that every wage earner should belong to the union of his trade. I did not yet have a conscious appreciation of the labor movement. My awakening was to come later."²

¹Louis Filler, in an introduction to Bernard Mandel, Samuel Gompers: A Biography (Yellow Springs, Ohio: The Antioch Press, 1963), pp. xvi-xvii.

²Seventy Years of Life and Labor, Vol. I (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1925), p. 33.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Commons, John R. "Gompers, Samuel." Dictionary of American Biography. 1943. Vol. VII.

Gompers, Samuel. Seventy Years of Life and Labor. 2 Vols. New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1925.

Mandel, Bernard. Samuel Gompers: A Biography. Yellow Springs, Ohio: The Antioch Press, 1963.

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

| LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY | | | O R | 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 | Degrees Minutes Seconds | |
| NW | ° ' " | ° ' " | | ° ' " | ° ' " | |
| NE | ° ' " | ° ' " | | 38 55 02 | 77 00 46 | |
| SE | ° ' " | ° ' " | | | | |
| SW | ° ' " | ° ' " | | | | |

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 |
|--------|------|---------|------|
| | | | |
| STATE: | CODE | COUNTY: | CODE |
| | | | |
| STATE: | CODE | COUNTY: | CODE |
| | | | |
| 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: 9/17/73

STREET AND NUMBER:
1100 L Street NW

CITY OR TOWN: Washington STATE: District of Columbia CODE:

12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>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:</p> <p>National <input type="checkbox"/> State <input type="checkbox"/> Local <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Name _____</p> <p>Title _____</p> <p>Date _____</p> | <p>I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.</p> <p>_____ Director, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation</p> <p>Date _____</p> <p>ATTEST:</p> <p>_____ Keeper of The National Register</p> <p>Date _____</p> |
|--|--|

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8. Significance (page 1)

Samuel Gompers House

Gompers' life in New York's cigar factories proved the most significant of his experiences. It was the custom at that time for one of the workers to read aloud to the others as they worked. All manner of social, economic, and political commentary was read and discussed, and it was here that Gompers was first awakened to the critical works of Marx, Engels, Lassalle, and others. Later, Gompers met Ferdinand Laurrell, a disenchanted Socialist exile from Europe who had a profound influence on his developing philosophies. Laurrell taught him his ideas of the "true Marx," not the Marx of the Socialist Party, but the Marx of trade unionism and labor's own struggle for improved conditions. Laurrell cautioned Gompers against any close alliance with the Socialists, or with radicals of any type. "Study your union card, Sam," Laurrell would say, "and if the idea doesn't square with that, it ain't true."³

Gompers became progressively more involved in the union, and in the late 1870s he became an organizer for the Cigarmakers. Along with Adolph Strasser, Gompers resuscitated the union from a collapse brought on by the period of business depression after 1873. They accomplished four things: established a leadership hierarchy; increased membership dues to build up a fund; concentrated control of that fund with the national officers; and adopted, or prepared to adopt, sickness, accident, and unemployment benefits. "This was the beginning of militant, persistent unionism in America. The cigarmakers' union became a model for all others"⁴

In 1877 Gompers and other union workers organized the "Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions of the United States of America and Canada." This federation was reorganized in 1886 as the American Federation of Labor. Gompers succeeded in making the A.F.L. the strongest voice for organized labor in the United States. He was elected president of the new organization, and served in that position (with the exception of 1 year, 1895) until his death in 1924. As president, Gompers took it for granted that labor could never displace the capitalist in the management of business, and that there was really only one direction toward which labor could unite: more wages, shorter hours, better working conditions. He directed all of his energies toward a realization of these goals for American workers.

³Ibid., p. 75.

⁴John R. Commons, "Gompers, Samuel," Dictionary of American Biography, 1943, VII, 370.

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8. Significance (page 2)

Samuel Gompers House

The A.F.L. moved its headquarters from Indianapolis to Washington, D.C. in 1897 in order to give more direct attention to legislative affairs affecting the union. Gompers' first home in Washington was a small brick row house on H Street NE. "There we lived for a number of years until my son Al married. As we planned to have him and his wife with us, we needed more room. We bought a house on First Street, N.W."⁵ Gompers' salary was small in those days, so the house at 2122 First Street, though fairly spacious, was also rather modest.

Gompers purchased the house in 1902 for \$5,700 and his biographer describes it so:

"[It was] a large, six-room, stone-front building. The living room was small, with a few old-fashioned chairs covered with linen, a piano for [his daughter] Sadie, a bust of Gompers, four or five paintings on the walls, and some bric-a-brac distributed over the room. There was an artificial fireplace on one wall, and the room was heated with a parlor stove. The third floor was fitted up as a workroom and library, where Gompers often worked until three in the morning...."⁶

Gompers and his family lived in the First Street house for 15 years, from 1902-1917. It became virtually a forum for the discussion of important labor issues and problems.

"At all times [Gompers wrote] our home was open to friends and all felt free to come informally. Labor men and other friends came to my home when they could not reach me at my office. Many an important conference has taken place unexpectedly at our breakfast table. I was in the habit of taking groups of friends home to dinner where we could thrash out our problems with comfort."⁷

By 1919 Samuel Gompers was at the height of his power and fame, president of the largest trade union organization in the world. During World War I, A.F.L. membership had skyrocketed from two million to four million members.

⁵
Seventy Years, p. 496.

⁶
Bernard Mandel, Samuel Gompers, pp. 166-67.

⁷
Seventy Years, p. 497.

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8. Significance (page 3) Samuel Gompers House

Gompers participated in the peace negotiations in Europe and thus became an international figure. "He had been lionized by presidents, prime ministers, kings, and generals, and was on terms of mutual confidence with the President of the United States. He was praised as second only to Woodrow Wilson in his influence for liberal idealism."⁸

Gompers' health began to decline just as he reached his pinnacle of power. He suffered increasingly from Bright's disease, and in April 1919 lost his eyesight and could no longer transact business without assistance. This proved a terrible blow to a man who prided himself upon his physical stamina. He lived only 5 years longer. Samuel Gompers died in 1924 at the age of 74, after attending the annual A.F.L. convention at El Paso, Texas.

Gompers worked tirelessly throughout his life in order to increase the laborer's share of the profits of industrialism. His activism on behalf of labor might perhaps distract us from the personal side of his life, but Rosa Lee Guard, a close friend and assistant to Gompers, has remarked upon his "myriad-sided nature," calling him "a creature of poetry and practical action; a dreamer, yet a doer of the world's work"⁹ Fortunately, the house on First Street NW still stands to commemorate him.

⁸Mandel, Samuel Gompers, p. 431.

⁹Quoted in Mandel, p. 173.