

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC
The Northumberland Apartments
AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER
2039 New Hampshire Avenue, N.W.
CITY, TOWN
Washington
STATE
D.C.
VICINITY OF
Walter E. Fauntroy
COUNTY
District of Columbia
CODE
11
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT
001
NOT FOR PUBLICATION

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC ACQUISITION	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT
			<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL
			<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY
			<input type="checkbox"/> PARK
			<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
			<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
			<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
			<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME
Northumberland Apartments, Inc.
STREET & NUMBER
2039 New Hampshire Avenue, N.W.

CITY, TOWN
Washington
VICINITY OF
District of Columbia
STATE
District of Columbia

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.
Recorder of Deeds

STREET & NUMBER
6th & D Streets, N.W.

CITY, TOWN
Washington,
STATE
District of Columbia

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE
District of Columbia Inventory of Historic Sites

DATE
January 5, 1979
FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS
D.C. Historic Preservation Office

CITY, TOWN
Washington,
STATE
District of Columbia

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

EXCELLENT
 GOOD
 FAIR

DETERIORATED
 RUINS
 UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

UNALTERED
 ALTERED

CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE
 MOVED DATE _____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Northumberland Apartments, designed by Albert H. Beers and built in 1909-10, by Harry Wardman, occupies a significant lot on New Hampshire Avenue, N.W. The irregular shape of the lot, created by the intersection of this major diagonal avenue and the grid of L'Enfant's 1791 plan for the Federal City, dictated the shape of the building. The Northumberland's eclectic, classical facade blends harmoniously with the buildings in the area and contributes to the visual variety and richness of the New Hampshire Avenue streetscape between Sixteenth Street and Florida Avenue. The building remains an unaltered element in a neighborhood identity created by Victorian rowhouses, large apartment buildings, and churches and institutional buildings. The variety of building types and styles, and the unusual spatial configuration of the short blocks and irregularly-shaped lots, creates a richness of streetscape seldom found so intact in the city today.

Albert H. Beers designed the Northumberland in an eclectic early-twentieth century adaptation of eighteenth-century classicism. Its design and conception were French in origin, illustrating Beers' familiarity with the current fashion in apartment design. The quality of construction, materials, and craftsmanship found in the building is exceptionally high. The Northumberland stands in its original state; this unaltered condition contributes significantly to the building's importance. The Northumberland is perhaps the only such example of an early-twentieth century luxury apartment building left intact in Washington.

The Northumberland is approached by a semi-circular driveway. The building is red and white brick and dressed limestone and features an eclectic collection of classical architectural elements. The facade is divided into three horizontal bands. The upper and lower bands are white brick and stone and are each two stories high. The configuration of the fenestration is the same on both levels, although the scale is smaller in the upper band. The windows are paired vertically - an arched window above a square one - and contained within a quoined Gibbsian surround that encompasses the windows and the spandrel between. Similar limestone quoins are also found at the corners of the two bands. The middle band of three floors is rough red brick. The rectangular windows are unusually large and are capped by pressed brick jack arches with stone console keystones. An elaborate metal bracketed cornice forms a projecting cap for the building and eloquently defines the roofline. The variety and richness of the materials and textures contribute to the impressive dignity of the Northumberland. Other detailing, including limestone ledges and quoins, add a decorative element.

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of the facade is the Palladian-inspired recessed entry. The curved space, framed by two pairs of Ionic columns and pilasters, is sixteen feet high and over twenty-two feet wide. Above is a four-foot high entablature capped by two classical stone urns. The wide door, with its elliptical fanlight and sidelights, is set in a deep niche. The fenestration plays a major role in determining the feeling of the facade. The windows are usually large for the period, some measuring over six and a half feet square. The variety of sash types, including 16/1, add to the richness of the design. Consoles and metal ornamentation provide additional embellishment. The consoles are two types - metal under the projecting cornice and limestone above the windows. The former are lavishly

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8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY) Social history
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1909/1910

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Harry Wardman/Albert H. Beers

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Joint Committee on Landmarks of the National Capital has designated the Northumberland Apartments as a Category II Historic Landmark which contributes significantly to the cultural heritage and visual beauty and interest of the District of Columbia. The Northumberland, built in 1909-1910, embodies the distinctive characteristics of an early-twentieth century luxury apartment building. It is a rare example of such a building that has retained its integrity of location, design, materials, and workmanship. Both its exterior and interior, which is notable for its rich variety of decorative detailing, sumptuous materials, and skilled craftsmanship, remain essentially unaltered. One of Washington's most prolific and significant residential builders, Harry Wardman, built the Northumberland early in his career. In 1920 the building became a cooperative apartment building. As the oldest, continuously self-managed cooperative, it was a pioneer in a field of housing new to the District of Columbia in the early years of this century.

The concept of apartment living was imported from turn-of-the-century France and had become well-established in this country by the first decade of the twentieth century. The Northumberland was built at the zenith of the luxury apartment era in the United States. Its location on New Hampshire Avenue, N.W., one block east of Sixteenth Street, was at the heart of one of the most fashionable areas in town. Washington was then growing at a rapid rate and was acquiring a sophistication and worldiness worthy of the capital city of a great nation and emerging world power. The city was attracting old and new money; those with social standing and those trying to achieve it. This influx of wealth contributed to the great demand for palatial, pretigious residences.

Harry Wardman (1872-1938), was still in the early stages of his spectacular career when he built the luxurious Northumberland Apartments in response to the housing market and social climate in Washington. The building launched him firmly into the forefront of the development/real estate business. A native of England, Wardman came to America in 1889. Nine years later, after a stint in the dry goods business, he apprenticed himself to a Philadelphia carpenter to learn the building trade. In 1902 he came to Washington and built his first houses, a row of frame dwellings on Longfellow Street, N.W. His career as a builder/developer prospered and by the early 1920's he had built more than 5,000 houses, 250 apartment houses, and a number of other buildings. At the time of Wardman's death in 1938 it was said that one of every ten Washingtonians lived in a Wardman home. Among his more notable buildings, along with the Northumberland, are the Dresden, the Carlton Hotel, the Wardman Park, and the Hay-Adams Hotel. Wardman's architect for the Northumberland was Albert H. Beers. Little is known about Beers. He lived in Fairfield, Connecticut from 1879-1901, and worked in Bridgeport. In 1904 his name first appeared in Washington city directories as an architect. Although he practiced in this city for only a short time, he made a considerable reputation for himself. When Beers died in Baltimore in 1911, at the age of 52, The Washington Evening

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decorated with deeply chased acanthus leaves. The latter are classical in style and serve as the keystones in the jack arches above the windows. Other decorative metal details include four types of molding (dentil, egg and dart, ogee, and plain), a large floral frieze, and chamfered metal panels.

The exterior of the Northumberland, in spite of its variety of materials and architectural elements, hardly prepares one for the explosion of decorative features and materials in the main public space of the building. The lobby has been described as unique among Wardman's many buildings. Some connoisseurs of architectural history consider it the most distinctive lobby in the city. Eclectic in design and decoration, it reflects the taste in vogue in New York City luxury apartments at the turn of the century. It boasts two huge fireplaces and four columns with ornamental capitals. The staircase and lighting fixtures exhibit fine handwrought iron work. The central staircase with white-grey marble steps branches at the landings with separate marbleized staircases leading to each wing of the building. The three stairways are well related visually. Facing the entrance at the first landing are three original curved stained glass windows with heraldic monograms (the initial N).

The two fireplaces, which face one another, are 6' 2½" high, 9' wide, and 1½' deep. The construction is wood, marbleized to match the color of the walls. The two marbleized staircases curve slightly and extend 6' 2" from the lobby to the first floor. Each is headed by a finial in the form of an obelisk 5' 7" tall, contain six marble steps, and six unusually shaped balusters. Quasi columns form the end of the staircases, complete with eclectic capitals and elements of decoration that form part of the over-all lobby pattern. An elegant arch highlights the entrance to the corridors. The main staircase to the first landing has thirteen marble steps. The lobby floor consists of the same ceramic tile and decorative pattern as is found in the corridors. The transom over the door is in the form of an arc and is decorated with an impressive marbleized border.

The lobby of the Northumberland is distinguished by a wealth of decorative ornamentation associated with European architectural embellishments derived from classical, medieval, gothic, and renaissance motifs. Its great size (44 feet x 26 feet) and height (13 feet) allowed the architect and builder great freedom in designing the motifs that make up the decoration. The marbleized walls, columns, side staircases, and fireplaces provide an elegant background for the ornamentation. The yellowish color of the imitation marble blends harmoniously with the basic buff color of the decorative plasterwork, accentuated with touches of gilt.

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The scale, arrangement of decorative elements, and the quality of plaster ornament are unique. Approximately one-third of the wall space is devoted to adornment. The decorative elements are predominantly foliate, although the vertical festoons (55 in all) combine fruit, floral, and foliate motifs. There are seven different varieties of moulding, the three major patterns consisting of the acanthus leaf, beade, and ovolo alternating with acanthus, plus a classical frieze of wreathed laurel, all of which are repeated on the wall at the first stairwell landing, thereby further dramatizing the setting for the stained glass windows. All of the decorative ornament consists of finely executed plasterwork, except for the horizontal acanthus decoration and two cartouches that appear above each fireplace, both of which are of carved wood. The four columns are adorned by composite capitals which culminate in groteschi superimposed upon stylized acanthus leaves and fleur de lis.

The over-mantel decoration - one of the most striking features - consists of an imaginatively executed armorial adornment which incorporates heraldic devices: a knight's visor complete with plume, penants, various medieval implements of war, and escutcheon upon which is emblazoned a crowned and smiling chimera. The moulded plaster ornament, together with the columns, and the over-all color scheme contribute to a sense of stylistic unity. Of special significance is the fact that the lobby is in excellent condition and the original plaster decoration is intact.1/

The lobby of the Northumberland, spectacular in 1910 and perhaps unique among Washington apartment buildings for its state of preservation, is not the only notable public space in the building. Other common areas received the same attention to detail, if not so elaborately. The graceful curvilinear corridors, measuring 6' 4½" wide, are capped by deep cornices that add a sculptural effect to the space. The tile floors are embellished by a red and white Greek fret design that is eight inches wide. The design is repeated as a cross-band at various intervals. An eight-inch high grey marble border complements the plaster cornices and adds richness to the halls. Although the ten-foot wide stair landing is currently interrupted by a fire wall, the original spaciousness and graciousness are still apparent. The three large windows at the landing still contain their original leaded panes.

The apartments in the Northumberland are unusual for their layout, detailing, and craftsmanship. The seventy units are arranged in tiers and range in size from efficiencies to four-bedroom units. One-bedroom units predominate. Many of the apartments have spectacular views of the city, the Capitol, Meridian Hill Park, the Washington Monument, and the Masonic Temple. One apartment provides a view of the Capitol from five different rooms. The spaces in the apartments are well-proportioned and spacious and have plenty of wall space to insure workable furniture arrangements. The floor plans were designed for easy circulation of guests. Every

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apartment had a vestibule or foyer and the two largest units had foyers 40' x 6½' and 21' x 6' in response to the demand for large reception areas suitable for entertaining on a grand scale.

The kitchens are usually galley units, perhaps because of the building size or perhaps because of the fashion in Paris at the time, where large apartments tended to have small kitchens. Many still have their original glass cabinets. The bathrooms, generally rectangular in shape, featured five-foot white tile walls, white tile floors (of an unusual 3/4" tile no longer made in this country), porcelain claw-foot bathtubs, circular nickel-plated brass shower rings, (the Northumberland was one of the first apartment buildings in Washington to have showers) medicine chests with beveled mirrors, and a glass shelf with pierced cylindrical metal holders for soap, drinking glass, and toothbrushes. The last item was considered to be quite a refinement at the time.

Another exceptional feature of the Northumberland's apartments are the paraquet floors. Each room, including the kitchen, of every apartment, has an individually designed parquetry pattern. Not only were the patterns unusual but so was the quality of the workmanship. The quality of the moldings, door and window trim, and the baseboards was equally high. Walk-in closets, a novelty at a time when armoires served as closets, glass window fenders, cove ceilings, and unusual brass and crystal Edwardian chandeliers were additional features that enhanced the apartments. A number of units also had decorative fireplaces with Edwardian cast bronze firescreens with scenes of reclining female figures on them.

The construction of the Northumberland is unusually solid. The foundations are reinforced concrete, 36 inches wide. Exterior walls run from 22 inches thick at the first floor to 13 inches at the 7th floor. The walls are solid plaster and steel mesh. Ceiling heights are 9' 3", except on the 7th floor, where they are 9' 6". The floors between the apartments are 18 inches thick and are soundproofed, fireproofed, and insulated with cinders or "coke," which served as the sub-foundation of the floor.

Local tradition holds that the construction costs of the Northumberland were so high that Wardman vowed never again to include such fine details and expensive materials in his buildings. An examination of his many other structures does in fact reveal the uniqueness of many of the Northumberland's features.

1/ The discussion of the lobby of the Northumberland was taken from a similar section in the Landmarks Application submitted by the Northumberland Apartments, Inc., dated 1/31/78.

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Star described him as a "well-known architect" who designed "many buildings erected by Mr. Wardman." Toward the end of his life Beers designed a number of apartment buildings for the affluent. Along with the Northumberland, he also designed the Dresden (1909), the Brighton (1909), and the Toronto (1908). He was familiar with the French architectural styles and conventions for luxury apartment houses at the turn-of-the-century; the Dresden and the Northumberland are particularly fine examples of his work. Beers also designed other types of buildings, ranging from private houses to apartment buildings, for many other clients, in many parts of Washington, including Georgetown, Capitol Hill, Kalorama Heights, the Sixteenth Street corridor, Mt. Pleasant, and the Columbia Road area.

The Northumberland's fashionable address on New Hampshire Avenue gave some assurance to Harry Wardman of a successful project. It also helps explain the use of costly materials and workmanship throughout the building. The extravagant details and carving and rich materials are a reflection of the taste and life-style of upper-income Washingtonians in the age of conspicuous consumption in the pre-income tax Gilded Age. Washington society in 1910 was not unlike the social elite in other major East Coast cities, with the added flair and drama of the diplomatic corps. The members of the socially and financially elite were attracted to the spacious, luxurious, conveniently-located apartments in the Northumberland. They included congressmen, judges, authors, educators, clergymen, upper-eschelon government and armed forces staff, civic, business, and financial leaders, and people listed on the Capital's Social Register.

The Northumberland functioned as a luxury apartment hotel, with all the attendant amenities, from 1910 to 1920. A restaurant catered to culinary demands and a large, appropriately-dressed staff of servants attended to various other needs of the residents. Mail chutes, fireproof construction, security (including wall safes in every apartment), and quarters in the basement for chauffeurs were among the other benefits of the exclusive building. Also, the size and lay-out of the apartments was conducive to the large-scale entertaining popular among the residents for many years.

Grand-style entertaining went on in the building even after its conversion to a cooperative apartment building in 1920. The social cachet and tradition of the luxury apartment hotel was maintained. The Depression did not significantly effect the life style of the residents of the Northumberland. Until the late 1940's the Northumberland was known to be an address for "old Washington;" its amenities, ambience, and location held the same allure in 1940 as they did in 1910.

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The Northumberland was incorporated as a cooperative in 1920. It is the oldest, continuously self-managed cooperative apartment building in Washington. In 1920 the concept of resident management was new; residents making all decisions on costs, maintenance, and services was a novel idea. The Northumberland was a pioneer in this new field of housing. Its clientele and building were distinguished, as was its quality of management. During the Depression, when coops across the country floundered or folded, the Northumberland managed to raise employee salaries, make improvements, and omit monthly assessments to the stockholders. Since World War II the residents of the Northumberland have been primarily professionals, reflecting the change in the nature of cooperative housing; although originally for the wealthy, the concept spread to include the middle class. Throughout the 1960's and 1970's the Northumberland has maintained affordable urban housing in a piece of period architecture. The management has contributed to the maintenance of the integrity and identity of the area by resisting changes to the building itself. The Northumberland still stands as a monument to a by-gone era, both social and architectural. The building still serves as a memorial to an enterprising builder and his architect, skilled craftsmen, and the skills of the resident-managers who have maintained the building as a viable urban dwelling for over half a century.

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Bibliographical References:

The Washington Evening Star

The Architectural Record

National Archives

Andrew Alpern, Apartments for the Affluent, 1975

American Architect and Building News

Elite List, Social Register, and Blue Book

Board Minutes, Northumberland Apartments, Inc.

Conversations with various persons familiar with the Northumberland,
Harry Wardman, the City of Washington, turn-of-the-century architecture
and history.

The Application form for Historic Landmark status in the District of Columbia
submitted by the Northumberland Apartments, Inc., dated 1/31/78.