

JOINT COMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS OF THE NATIONAL CAPITAL

APPLICATION FORM  
HISTORIC LANDMARK

JOINT COMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS	
Application for Historic Landmark	
Received	4/28/80 EHR
Filed	4/28/80 Att.

APPLICATION TO:

- designate
- amend

summary of amendments \_\_\_\_\_

- rescind

GENERAL INFORMATION

Name of Property ALMAS TEMPLE

Address 1315 K Street, N.W., Washington, D.C.

Square and Lot Number(s) Lot 813, Square 248

Present Owner Almas Temple Club, Inc.

Address 1315 K Street, N.W.

Original Use Clubhouse

Present Use Clubhouse

Date of Construction 1929 (Building permit #125924)

Date of Major Alterations, if any no major alterations

Architect Allen Hussell Potts

Architectural style/period Moorish

Name of Applicant Don't Tear It Down

(If applicant is an organization, it must submit evidence that among its purposes is the promotion of historic preservation in the District of Columbia. A copy of its charter, articles of incorporation, or by-laws, setting forth such purpose, will satisfy this requirement.)

Address of Applicant 1346 Connecticut Avenue, N.W.

Telephone 223-1246

Judith Sobel  
Signature of Applicant or authorized representative

April 24, 1980  
Date

Executive Director  
Title of authorized representative

By-Laws as submitted 10/5/78

310.21 A statement of the prehistoric, historic, architectural and/or cultural significance of the property proposed for designation.

The Almas Temple, located on K Street, N.W. between 13th and 14th Streets, has been the home of the local District of Columbia chapter of the Scottish Rites Temple since its construction in 1929. The Temple, built in the Moorish style by its architect, Allen Hussell Potts, is reminiscent in style of the Alhambra in Granada, Spain.

The Temple is located directly across K Street from Franklin Square in a block that at one time was a highly fashionable residential area, especially from 1851 when Franklin Square was landscaped, fenced and greatly improved, until the 1920's as the area became more commercial. K Street during this period, along with the Dupont Circle area and 16th Street, N.W., was one of the city's most fashionable residential areas. Franklin Square was never intended by Pierre L'Enfant to be a public park, but Congress purchased the square in 1832 to acquire the natural spring that flowed there. Afterwards wooden pipes were laid from the spring to the White House and to most of the downtown fire hydrants. It was still used at the White House as late as 1881. At the corner of 13th and K Streets, on land that is now owned by the national Scottish Rites organization, stood Lindsay House, the house of Washington merchant L.S. Lindsay, constructed in 1856 and used by the Mexican Legation during the Civil War, and adjacent to this the home of Supreme Court Justice Noah H. Swayne, erected in 1860 and lived in by Swayne before and after the Civil War. Among the other many fashionable houses and hotels in this neighborhood were the Hamilton Hotel at the corner of 14th and K Streets; one block to the west (on K between 14th and Vermont Avenue) was Franklin Terrace, two rows of elegant townhouses both built about 1875; and for many years real estate developer Henry K. Willard lived 1333 K Street.

In 1925, the land where the Lindsay and Swayne Houses stood was purchased by the National Scottish Rites organization with the view that they might construct their national shrine here. Instead, it was constructed on its present site on 16th Street and in 1929 a gas station was constructed which still stands as the Firestone Tire Center. This land is still owned by the national Scottish Rites organization.

The adjacent lots, 801 and 802 (now lot 813), 803 and 804 were purchased by the local chapter of the Scottish Rites organization and in 1929 the present Almas temple was built. The Almas Temple, however, dates back to December 22, 1885. In January of 1886 a dispensation was granted to Noble M.W. Bayliss of Washington, D.C. to form and open a temple in the District of Columbia. Under the chosen title of "Almas Temple" and through the endorsement and recommendation of Boumi Temple of Baltimore, a charter was granted by the Imperial Council on June 14, 1886. The name Almas (signifying diamond, according to the chapter) was officially adopted this year. Today the Almas Temple is one of 182 Scottish Rite Temples in North America.

The present Temple was designed by a member of the chapter, Allen Hussell Potts, from the Roland Park neighborhood of Baltimore, Maryland, born September 4, 1888. In Baltimore, he attended public schools, afterwards taking an engineering course at the Baltimore Polytechnic Institute and an art course at the Maryland Institute. After graduating from the Maryland Institute, he attended the University of Pennsylvania in architecture in 1910. He actually attended the Towne Scientific School which is now the School of Engineering.

In 1917, he moved to Washington and became an architect with the Government, first with the Procurement Division of the Treasury Department and later with the Public Buildings Administration until his retirement in 1950. He served

as the Potentate, the chief officer, of the Almas Temple in 1936. Married to Mahattable M. Potts, he resided in Chevy Chase, Maryland and died there on October 15, 1960.

The, for Washington, architecturally unique building, which was constructed at an estimated cost of \$160,000 (including land, approximately \$330,000), has for more than 50 years served a social center for many of Washington's businessmen and government employees (including J. Edgar Hoover, who celebrated 50 years of membership at the Almas Temple before his death). The permit to build (#125924) was issued on July 31, 1929. The builders were Charles H. Tompkins Co. of 1600 K Street, N.W. The four story building is in dimensions 48 ft. wide by 147 ft. deep of brick and reinforced concrete construction with a polychromed terra cotta tile facade .

310.22 If property is proposed for designation principally for its architectural significance, a detailed architectural description of the property, including where possible its original and present appearance.

The four-storied Moorish style Almas Temple at 1313-1315 K Street, N.W. is 48.25 ft. in width on its K Street facade facing south and 147 ft. deep. The Temple which was modelled by its architect, Allen Hussell Potts, after the Alhambra, the castle of the Moorish kings built in the thirteenth century in Granada, Spain, shows a free use of many Moorish architectural motifs. Some of the Islamic elements used in the facade are pointed and horse-shoe shaped arches, the slender columns surmounted by a double zoned capital and impost block, and the flat overall floral ornamentation as executed here in polychrome terra cotta tiles.

In construction, the building is built of brick and reinforced concrete with a flat roof. The facade is divided into three vertical elements with the central element or pavillion projecting. The central projecting pavillion which is elaborately decorated in polychrome terra cotta tiles of deep red, blue, gold, and white is approximately three times the width of the flanking recessed portions of the facade. The entrance to the Temple is through the central projecting bay which has three arches - one wide central pointed arch and two flanking smaller pointed arches. The smaller arches rise about 1½ stories with the central arch rising to almost the top of the second story windows. The area above the arches, as is characteristic of the flat overall ornamentation of Islamic architecture, is covered in the polychrome terra cotta tiles, all of the same design with a central palmette pattern in white (or exposed unglazed terra cotta) on alternating blue and deep red backgrounds with a gold scalloped border. The tiles are reminiscent in design of the wall ornamentation on the entrance to the Hall of Two Sisters at the Alhambra. The arches each rise from a slender Moorish style column with a capital of two zones of elaboration and an impost block above. There is a grouping of three columns on each of the exterior sides of the central bay. All of the columns are on pedestals.

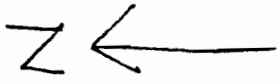
The third story of the central bay is lit by a row of 8 windows set behind a low arcade of horse-shoe arches rising from slender columns. The four fourth story windows of this bay are taller and larger and once again use the pointed arches of the entrance.

The fenestration of the outer bays is varied. The first story windows are small double arched windows rising from columns; the second story has a single horse-shoe arch window on each side; and the third and fourth stories each have identical double round arched windows on each side.

The cornice of the building is decorated in the polychrome terra cotta tiles with a geometric pattern and the central bay has crenellation at the roofline possibly reminiscent of the fortress function of the Alhambra. The fanciful facade of the Almas Temple is primarily of cast concrete blocks laid in vertical banks on the outer bays with the central bay highly colorful and decorated with the polychrome tiles.

The highly decorative exterior is in sharp contrast to the relatively simple, functional interior. One ascends eight steps to enter the lobby of the Temple. The lobby decorated in tiles of the same color scheme as the exterior, leads directly into a large auditorium where the outstanding features are ten huge columns, taken in design from the ancient Temple of Karnak, Egypt. At the back or north end of the auditorium is a high stage.

The second floor houses the business offices of the Temple and originally had a balcony which overlooked the auditorium, but has now been closed and is used as additional office space. The third floor houses the member's restaurant, bar and clubrooms, and the fourth floor was originally designed to accommodate band rehearsals and similar activities of the club, but now is used primarily for meeting rooms. The basement houses six bowling alleys.

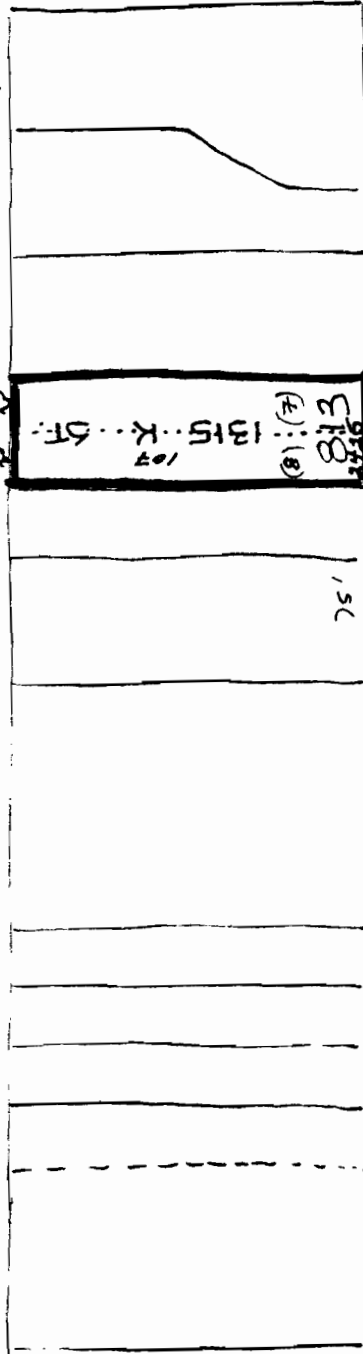


L ST

13 ST

SQUARE 248

PUBLIC ALLEY



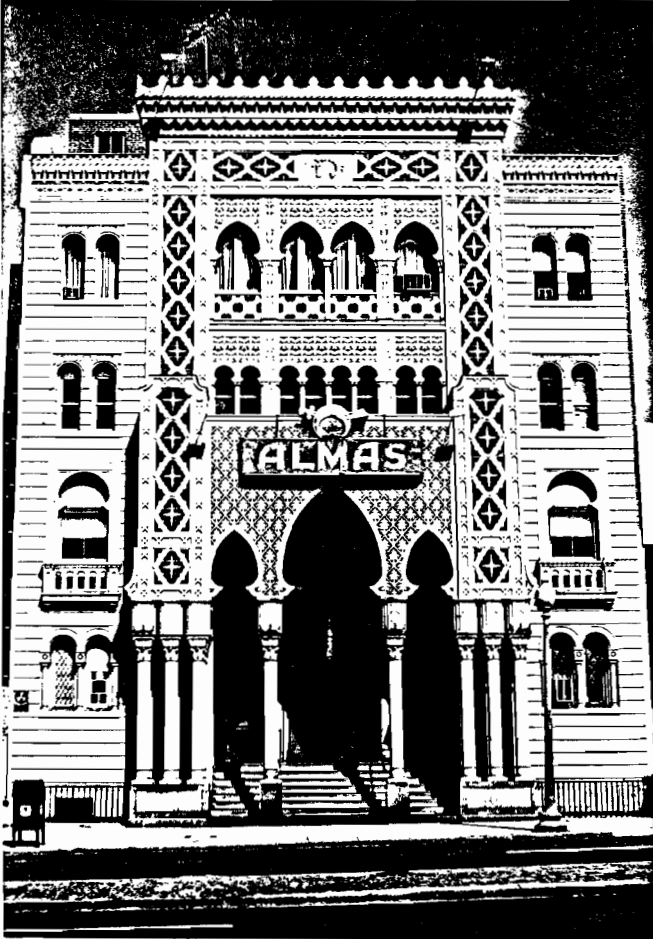
14th ST

7093 SQ FT. LOT 813

K ST.

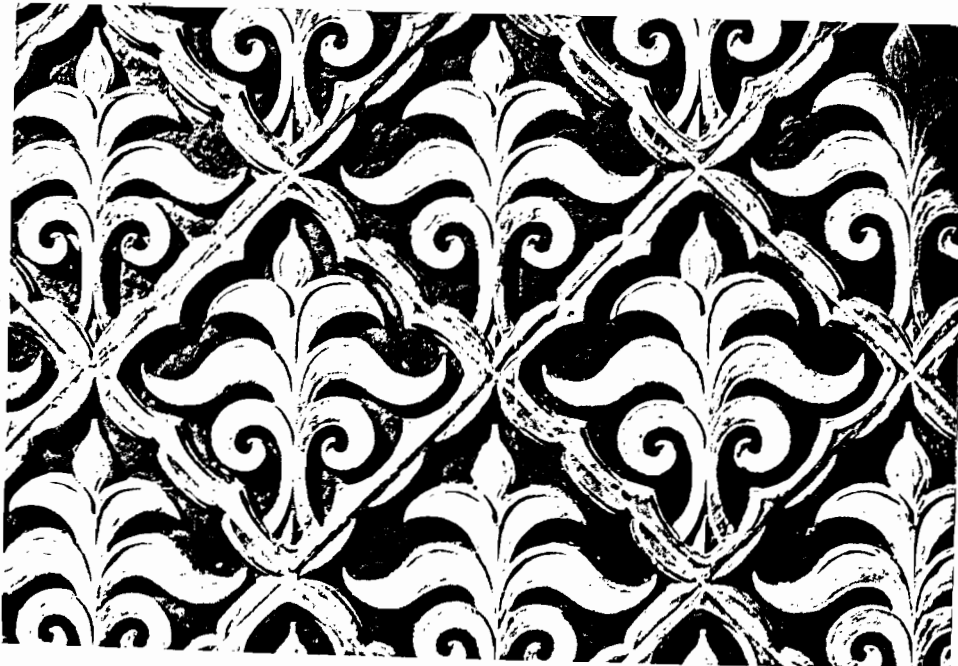
ALMAS TEMPLE

310.25 Contemporary good quality photograph(s) of the property proposed for designation which provide a clear and accurate visual representation of the property and its setting; specify view, date of photograph and list credits, if any. 8" x 10" glossy photographs are preferred. In addition, applicant may supply slides (Applicant shall submit two copies of each photograph or slide.)



ALMAS TEMPLE  
1315 K Street, N.W.

March 1980  
by Betty Kotcher  
K Street facade



Detail of the  
polychrome terra  
cotta tiles

310.26 A list of bibliographic and other sources used to prepare the application; indicate where the reference material is archived.

Baist's Real Estate Atlas of the District of Columbia, 1903, 1965.

City Directories: 1895-99, 1912, 1914-1919, 1922, 1925-32, 1933-1934.

District of Columbia Building Permit #125924, July 31, 1929 and #125491 , July 17, 1929, National Archives.

Evening Star, p. 6, May 1, 1929

Evening Star, p. 13, August 3, 1929.

Evening Star, p. 17, October 11, 1929.

Evening Star, p. A7, April 17, 1930.

Evening Star, p. A10, April 22, 1930.

Evening Star, p. A4, January 17, 1936.

Goode, James. Capital Losses. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1979.

Grabar, Oleg. The Alhambra. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1978.

Michalowski, Kazimierz. Karnak. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1969.

Pothorn, Herbert. Architectural Styles. New York: Viking Press, 1971.

The Junior League of Washington. An Illustrated History of the City of Washington. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977.

Washington Post, October 16, 1960, p. B 14

Washington Post, p. B 2, October 17, 1960.

Photographs : Martin Luther King Library, Photo 6687, January 12, 1907, 13th and K Streets, N.W. looking Northwest. from the Washington Star, January 12, 1907.

INTERVIEWS:

Glock, Martha. Treasury Department Library, Washington, D.C.

Jacobs, William. Recorder, Almas Temple Club, Washington, D.C.

University of Pennsylvania Alumni Office. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.