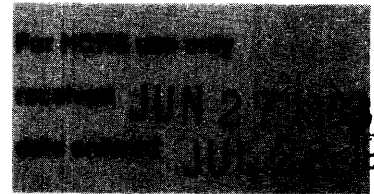


**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**



883

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Meridian Mansions
and/or common Hotel 2400; The Envoy

2. Location

street & number 2400 16th Street, N.W. ___ not for publication
city, town Washington N/A vicinity of congressional district Walter E. Fauntroy
state District of Columbia code 11 county District of Columbia code 001
Congressman

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 type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial <input type="checkbox"/> park
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational <input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment <input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government <input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial <input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: apartment/ condominium

4. Owner of Property

name Envoy Towers Associates/A Joint Venture
street & number c/o David Clark and Associates, 1420 N Street, N.W., T-1
city, town Washington N/A vicinity of state District of Columbia

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Recorder of Deeds
street & number 6th and D Streets, N.W.
city, town Washington state District of Columbia

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title District of Columbia's Inventory of Historic Sites has this property been determined eligible? yes no
date October 7, 1980 federal state county local
depository for survey records District of Columbia Historic Preservation Office
city, town Washington state District of Columbia

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The following information was taken from the "Application Form for Historic Landmark" prepared by David Clark and Associates and filed pursuant to a public hearing procedure on January 22, 1982.

The Meridian Mansions/Hotel 2400 is a seven story apartment building clad in brick and terra cotta. The structure, which sits on Meridian Hill, faces east onto 16th Street across from Meridian Hill Park. In plan the building consists of four rectangular wings bisected by a central axis perpendicular to 16th Street.

The Meridian Mansions/Hotel 2400 is of reinforced concrete construction, clad in pale tan brick and topped by a parapet roof. The building displays an eclectic style that loosely follows Beaux Arts design principles. Ornament has been freely adapted from Italianate precedents. The exterior visually expresses traditional notions of weight and support, derived from masonry construction, typical of taller buildings of this period. The distinctive treatment of the first and seventh stories results in a tripartite system of vertical organization. The first story rises over an ashlar masonry watertable, features ashlar bands laid every seventh course, and terminates in a simple terra cotta cornice at second floor level. This rustication emphasizes the visual role the first story plays as the base of the building. A beltcourse and elaborate cornice frame the top floor which is further distinguished by ornate window surrounds, all executed in terra cotta. The visual demonstration of physical equilibrium is enhanced by recessed planes above the first floor within the principle facade facing 16th Street. The central portion of the building is slightly recessed, articulating the central spine organizing the parti. The two flanking elements created by this recessed plane are themselves divided into three parts by central recessed areas. Balconies clad in terra cotta project out from the recessed areas within these two outer sections. (These balconies, which are also shown on the south in an early photograph, prefigure the extensive use of individual balconies on large apartment buildings. This configuration may be significant because of the pre-war date of construction.) The interpenetration of form creates an a-b-a-c-a-b-a rhythm within the principle facade. The central recessed portion of the building is distinguished by an elaborate terra cotta plateresque embellishment at the 6th and 7th floors. The sides of the building incorporate elements of the principle facade treatment such as the cornices, beltcourses, and rustication at the first floor level. There are balconies only at the sixth floor and the plateresque terra cotta embellishment is repeated only on the sides of A Wing, the wing on 16th Street.

For the most part, openings are treated with austerity. Openings for the one-over-one double sash windows used throughout are marked by concrete sills but are otherwise plain. The first floor windows, which are double casement under transoms, are set off slightly by jack arches with keystones. The only ornate surrounds are the terra cotta ones reserved for the seventh floor. The wide principle entry is framed by a Greek key door surround. A canopy supported by rods extending from lion heads at the second floor level shelters the entrance.

(Continued on Form FHR-8-300)

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

Specific dates 1916-1918 **Builder/Architect** Alex H. Sonneman

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Joint Committee on Landmarks has designated Meridian Mansions a Category III Landmark of value which contributes to the cultural heritage and visual beauty and interest of the District of Columbia and its environs and which should be preserved, or restored.

Meridian Mansions meets the criteria of, and possesses the quality of significance present in other properties nominated to, the National Register of Historic Places for the following reasons:

- (1) It is one of a small number of pre-World War I Beaux Arts luxury apartment buildings which remains in Washington, and retains its integrity of location, design, materials and workmanship.
- (2) It was the residence of Tomas Masaryk when he established the nation of Czechoslovakia and from which the flag of that country was first flown on October 18, 1918.

Much of the following information was taken from "Application for Historic Landmark" prepared by David Clark and Associates pursuant to a public hearing and filed on January 22, 1982.

The building was originally built as an apartment hotel in 1916 by Kennedy Brothers, Inc., a local Washington developer. Its architect, Alex H. Sonneman, and Kennedy Brothers both had offices at 1334-36 H Street, N.W., in 1916. The building permit is on microfilm at National Archives. The cost of the building on the permit is listed as \$950,000.

Meridian Mansions was the work of the Kennedy brothers, developers whose work has influenced the District of Columbia and the evolution of apartment buildings as a type. It was designed by Alex Sonneman, an architect who appears to have done most of his work for the Kennedy and Davis Real Estate Company. The Kennedys built many of the houses in Mount Pleasant and developed the Maryland suburb of Kenwood. They are perhaps best known for their Art Deco masterpiece, the Kennedy Warren apartment house on Connecticut Avenue.

A 1916 article in the Evening Star stated that the building would be "thoroughly in keeping with its aristocratic surroundings" and that it was "expected to be the finest structure of its kind in the National Capital."

9. Major Bibliographical References

Sources of information: Hotel brochures; newspaper clippings at Washingtoniana Room, Martin Luther King Library (under "2400" in Hotel file, Envoy Towers in Apartment file); city directories; assessment records; building permit at National Archives; photographs at Library of Congress (Lot 11504); Hotel Greeters Guides; postcards at Columbia Historical
(Continued on Form FHR-8-300)

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 1.9 acres

Quadrangle name Washington West, D.C.- MD - VA

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UMT References

A

1	8	3	2	3	4	0	0	4	3	0	9	8	3	0
Zone			Easting				Northing							

B

Zone			Easting				Northing							

C

Zone			Easting				Northing							

D

Zone			Easting				Northing							

E

Zone			Easting				Northing							

F

Zone			Easting				Northing							

G

Zone			Easting				Northing							

H

Zone			Easting				Northing							

Verbal boundary description and justification

2400 16th Street, N.W.
Square 2571, Lot 104

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A code county code

state N/A code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Suzanne Ganschinietz, Architectural Historian

organization D.C. Historic Preservation Office

date December 20, 1982

street & number 1133 North Capitol Street, N.E.

telephone (202) 535-1294

city or town Washington

state District of Columbia

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation 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 Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

Carol B. Thompson

title

Director, Dept. of Consumer Regulatory Affairs

date

6/13/83

For NCRS use only
I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register
Signature of the National Register *[Signature]*
Date *7/20/83*
Chief of Registration

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The ornament decorating the building is particularly noteworthy. There are cast iron cartouches at the center of the metal railings on each balcony. The same cast iron cartouche also appears in the middle of each metal rail between the piers of the parapet roof. The variety of terra cotta ornament used exploits the crisply molded detail inherent in the material. The seventh floor cornice is composed of acanthus leaves above an astragal molding interrupted by cartouches above each window. The platersque embellishments consist of draped urns resting on pedestals. Fluted columns with stylized Corinthian capitals surmount the twisted columns that top the urns. A shelf cornice supported by brackets rises from the capitals of the columns. Garlands, torches, cartouches, and keystones ornament the whole. The terra cotta brackets supporting the balconies feature garlands, stylized torches with ribbons, and acanthus leaves. Terra cotta surfaces are thoroughly detailed and worked.

In plan, the building is composed of four long rectangular wings connected by a central spine. The spine runs east-west perpendicular to 16th Street. The wings have been designated A, B, C and D; A Wing is the closest to 16th Street. The plan of the first floor varies from the plan of the upper stories. At ground level the space between C and D wings is utilized as a service drive. The light court between B and C wings has been incorporated into the first floor plan as has the light court between A and B wings on the south. The area between A and B on the north has been used as an interior court.

The structure sits across Sixteenth Street from Meridian Hill Park. It anchors the southeast corner of the block immediately to the north of the Henderson Castle site. Other buildings of similar size and scale line the blocks facing east to the park. However, of the buildings in the three blocks along 16th Street across from Meridian Hill Park, only one building in addition to the Envoy employs the traditional architectural forms that dominate the park.

Since the building has been extensively altered, few interior features survive. The grand lobby area that extends from the 16th Street entrance to the west end of B Wing is particularly notable. The space features a cove ceiling supported by massive octagonal columns. The plaster ceiling is elaborately decorated and the columns are clad in marble and crowned with gilded capitals. Arched openings create an arcaded pattern along the north and south walls. The soffits of the arches are decorated and gilded.

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According to newspaper articles the hotel was opened in 1918, and occupants of 2400 first appear in the 1918 City Directory which also lists suites by number. Later newspaper articles describe 2400 as having "many" seven and eight room apartments and some efficiencies, and as having 78 apartments and 112 transient suites, with 560 rooms in all. The name Meridian Mansions first appears in the 1921 directory; in 1924 this changes to Hotel 2400.

Throughout its life as a fashionable apartment hotel, 2400 was the setting for many society events, home of many prominent individuals, and location of various diplomatic operations. The Bolivian Legation was there as early as 1921; a 1956 article states that 2400 was the home of the Embassy of Jordan and the representatives of 32 foreign governments. Author Frances Parkinson Keyes describes moving into a furnished apartment in Meridian Mansion with her husband, son, and maid. -While her actual mention of Meridian Mansions is brief, her description of her life as a senator's wife provides an excellent picture of the era in which Meridian Mansions flourished. Mrs. Keyes states that it was nicknamed the "Senatorial Beehive" because of the number of senators and their families who resided there. The apartment which she describes as small but well located, rented for \$500.00 a month.

According to the obituary of Frank M. Perper, one time proprietor of the Hotel 2400, the building also witnessed an important event in U.S. business history. In the late 1930's Perper and a guest began plans for a nationwide network of franchised hotels to be called "Holiday Inns." (Washington Post, September 12, 1979.)

However, by far the most significant historical event associated with the Meridian Mansions/Hotel 2400 was the establishment of Czechoslovakia as a nation. Tomas Masaryk, first president of Czechoslovakia, lived here in 1918. Born in Moravia in 1850, Masaryk first came to the United States in 1878. A tireless speaker for Czech and Slovak nationalism, Masaryk lectured at the University of Chicago and traveled throughout the country visiting emigre ethnic centers. He became the recognized leader of the Czechoslovak independence movement and enlisted the support of Woodrow Wilson and other allied leaders for his cause. His residence at 2400 16th Street between July and November of 1918 was particularly significant. It was during this period that the United States recognized the Czechoslovakian National Council paving the way for national unity and independence. The first flag of independent Czechoslovakia was flown from the building on October 18, 1918.

It should be noted that the hotel was built during the heyday of Mrs. Henderson, who was developing the immediate area in her singlehanded effort to make 16th Street a grand boulevard and a new "embassy row." With architect George Oakley Totten, she erected a dozen or so grand structures in the first two decades of this century, and she succeeded in luring a number of embassies to 16th Street. (The French Embassy was at 2460 when 2400 was built.) After Mrs. Henderson's effort to relocate the President's House itself to 16th Street was defeated, Meridian Hill Park was redeveloped over a period of years beginning in 1920, greatly adding to the attractiveness of the 2400 neighborhood. Mrs. Henderson's own residence, a massive brownstone Romanesque edifice of the 1880's stood on 16th Street at Florida Avenue (just across Crescent Place from the site where 2400 was later built.)

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A Post article from 1936, when the Hotel 2400 changed hands, describes its redecoration with some mention of the public areas and one, two and three bedroom furnished apartments. Photos of the lobby and dining room accompany the article which is the earliest found on 2400.

In the 1940's a dispute arose over the use of the penthouse. Built at the same time as the hotel, the "luxurious nine-room rooftop apartment" was occupied until 1944. District officials claimed its use as living quarters violated the building heights law enacted in 1910 which prohibited human habitation above the height of the building. This dispute was finally resolved in 1952 by an act of Congress, signed by President Truman, that allowed use of the penthouse as office but specifically not living quarters.

Ownership and management of 2400 is unclear from newspaper clippings and other information on hand. There is some indication that true ownership may have been masked in one case, perhaps for purposes of financial manipulation. In any case, barely a year after a sale in December 1956, the owners of the hotel were in financial trouble and were finally declared insolvent by the New York State Attorney General in January 1958. In June of that year the hotel was seized for a local tax lien and in July the maids and handymen staged a sit-down in the lobby for unpaid wages. Court cases followed and control of the hotel was removed from the management company and returned to the owner.

In March 1962 it was announced that the Adam Clayton Powell Foundation intended to purchase the building to remodel it into a home for elderly Negroes (like the Roosevelt two blocks away). The plan was initially opposed by the current manager who had an option to buy at a lower price. Neighborhood groups also opposed the plan on the basis that the site was not suitable for the elderly and that the hotel best served the neighborhood by continuing as a fully integrated hotel. U.S. Chief of Protocol Angier Biddle Duke had also asked Powell to drop the plan because the hotel offered "badly needed" apartments to African diplomats. The hotel was also being used extensively for foreign visitors connected with nearby Meridian House Foundation. A Drew Pearson article of September 1962 did not help Powell's cause as it called attention to his real estate ventures as well as his recent and much criticized junket to Europe. Pearson also lists 2400 as the residence of the Congressman's receptionist, Corinne Huff, who accompanied him to Europe. Although an extension of time was granted for Powell's financial arrangements, which involved an FHA loan, it was announced in March 1963 that he had abandoned his attempt to purchase 2400.

After the Powell deal fell through, the building was sold to New York investors. The building's conversion to 334 units (efficiencies to two bedrooms) and its name change to Envoy Towers followed. According to another newspaper article, the Federal Wrecking Company ripped out interior walls to rearrange the living space, but high ceilings, wide corridors, large windows, and ornamental plaster in the lobby were preserved. Further, the lobby had been decorated "in keeping with its marble columns and moldings." Speciality shops were to ring the lobby. By this time the last of the rooftop pavilions and light standards that surrounded the roof gardens had disappeared.

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Despite the renovation via the "biggest" FHA-insured loan, the owners defaulted on the loan and the Envoy Towers was repossessed by FHA. In 1968 FHA leased 161 units for use as temporary homes for persons displaced in the April riots. HUD held the building until 1972 when it was sold to a "housing entrepreneur" from California. Rent strikes and other troubles followed and HUD foreclosed again in 1976. By 1977 the building was 75% vacant, maintenance at a minimum, and the old hotel was once again for sale.

In 1976 HUD again acquired the property and sold it to the current developers, Envoy Towers Associates.

The Envoy Towers (Meridian Mansions) was declared eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places by the Secretary of the Interior on January 13, 1978.

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Society; 16th Street Architecture (Commission of Fine Arts, 1978); George J. Koveton, Tomas G. Masaryk 1850-1937: A Selected List of Reading Materials in English, Washington: Library of Congress, 1981 (European Division, Library of Congress).