

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Engine Company 17
other names Chemical Company 4

2. Location

street & number 1235 Monroe Street, NE. (Historically 1227 Monroe Street) ☐ not for publication
city or town Washington, D.C. ☐ vicinity
state District of Columbia code DC county _____ code 001 zip code 20001

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☒ nomination ☐
request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic
Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does
not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☒ locally. (☐
See continuation sheet for additional comments).

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments).

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby, certify that this property is:

- ☐ entered in the National Register.
☐ See continuation sheet.
☐ determined eligible for the National
Register.
☐ See continuation sheet.
☐ Determined not eligible for the National
Register.
☐ removed from the National Register.
☐ other (explain): _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Engine Company 17

Name of Property

Washington, D.C.

County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- ☐ private
☒ public-local
☐ public-State
☐ public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- ☒ building(s)
☐ district
☐ site
☐ structure
☐ object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

| Contributing | Noncontributing |
|--------------|-----------------|
| 1 | |
| | |
| | |
| 1 | |

buildings
sites
structures
objects
Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

Firehouses in Washington, D.C.

number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

GOVERNMENT/Firehouse

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

GOVERNMENT/Firehouse

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE VICTORIAN/Italianate

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

Foundation Brick

walls Brick

roof Membrane

other

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Engine Company 17

Name of Property

Washington, D.C.

County and State

Section 7 Page 1

Description Summary:

Engine Company 17 is located at 1235 Monroe Street, N.E. mid-block between 12th and 13th Streets, NE in the Brookland neighborhood of Washington, D.C. Constructed in 1901 in a restrained Italianate style of architecture, the two-story brick firehouse building is one of only two single-apparatus firehouses remaining in the city. The building—characterized by its wide arched apparatus door and its 60-foot tower—continues to distinguish itself in a neighborhood of primarily two-story frame dwellings.

A single-story brick addition is located at the rear of the building. A frame outbuilding (no longer extant) which probably served as a supplementary stable originally stood at the rear of the lot.

General Description:

Exterior:

Engine Company 17 is a two-story building with Italianate-style massing characterized by its four-story corner tower. The building is constructed of ochre colored red brick with matching mortar joints and little ornamentation giving the building a refined and smooth appearance. The building's irregular silhouette is atypical of firehouse construction in D.C. prior to World War I and is a characteristic of only one other firehouse in the city from this period.¹ The building, which measures forty-two feet wide and ninety feet deep, sits upon a low brick foundation and is covered by a built-up slag or membrane roof. The hipped roof tower, originally clad with red clay tiles, currently features a membrane-type replacement roof.

The north (front) elevation is divided into two asymmetrical parts including the two-story main block and the four-story tower. The main block features a single and character-defining, central arched opening with a large apparatus door superimposed by a semi-circular tri-partite transom light above, and a single pedestrian door next to it on the first story. Half of the transom window provides light for the stair landing and the other half for the officers' room. On the second story, a single double-hung window is located above the pedestrian door, leaving a plain brick wall surface over the apparatus door. The 60-foot tower consists of a pedestrian entry door on the first story and two small and narrow slit windows in the second and third stories. At the fourth story and attic level of the tower, beneath the wide, overhanging hipped roof, ranges a group of three single windows on all four sides of the projecting tower. A multi-row tier of brick corbelling separates the main shaft of the tower with this attic level. An exterior door to one side of the tower's third floor provides access to the firehouse roof.

¹ The other asymmetrically massed pre-World War I firehouse is Engine Company 19, located at 2813 Pennsylvania Avenue, SE.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Engine Company 17

Name of Property

Washington, D.C.

County and State

Section 7 Page 2

The east and west elevations of the firehouse extend five bays rearward with a regular arrangement of windows on the second story, superimposed upon a more irregular grouping of doors and windows on the first story. Like on the tower, the side elevations culminate with wide brick corbelling at the cornice line. A one-story brick wing extends across the rear elevation of the building.

The only major exterior alteration to the building other than the tower roof replacement has been the installation of a new apparatus door.

Interior:

The asymmetry of Engine Company 17 required a modification of the typical firehouse plan. The staircase, usually at center rear of the building, was instead located in the tower at the front of the building. The bunkroom, usually at the front of the second floor, was confined to the rear while the stair landing occupied space at the front. The interior of the building was entirely gutted and fully renovated in 2006.

8. Statement of Significance**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- ☒ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad pattern of our history.
- ☐ **B** Property associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information Important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply)

Property is:

- ☐ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious Purposes.
- ☐ **B** removed from its original location.
- ☐ **C** a birthplace or grave.
- ☐ **D** a cemetery.
- ☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ **F** a commemorative property.
- ☐ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets)

Area of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Community Planning and Development

Period of Significance

1901-1957

Significant Dates

1901; 1905

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation**Architect/Builder**

Snowden Ashford

9. Major Bibliographical References**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets)

Previous documentation on files (NPS):

- ☐ Preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ Designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey

- ☐ Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record

Primary location of additional data:

- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other

Name of repository:

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 1

Engine Company 17

Name of Property

Washington, D.C.

County and State

Summary Statement of Significance:

The context for firehouses is described in the National Register Multiple Property Listing: *Firehouses in Washington, D.C.: 1806-1945*. This thematic document divides the approximately 150-year history of firehouses in Washington, D.C. into four periods, distinguished by the organization of firefighting operations and technology, by architectural style and designer. Engine Company 17, originally constructed in 1901 to house the eight-man Chemical Company 4, provides an excellent example of a firehouse from the third period (City Beautiful Movement/Eclectic Period) of firehouse construction. In addition, the building housed one of the first “chemical companies” that served the outlying parts of the District and it was one of the first firehouses built with an electrical system. The firehouse has been a visible landmark of Brookland since its construction. Also, the building illustrates an innovative plan in that it incorporated, possibly for the first time, a combination observation and hose tower. Engine Company 17 is eligible for listing in the National Register under Criteria A and C with Architecture and Community Planning and Development as the Areas of Significance.

Resource History and Historic Context:

Originally built to house Chemical Company 4 in 1901, this firehouse on Monroe Street, NE became Engine Company 17 in 1905 and has since been in continuous operation. Engine Company 17 is a free-standing structure that occupies two city lots. Constructed in Brookland when sites were still readily available for development, the distinctive firehouse with its impressive 60-foot tower was immediately one of the most distinctive buildings in the neighborhood. The Brookland Citizens’ Association had requested the government’s investment in a community firehouse for years in order to protect the neighborhood’s houses. Finally, Congress appropriated \$16,000 for the small station. Hence, the dedication of the firehouse was touted as “Brookland’s Big Day” and “Brookland’s Great Day” by *The Washington Post*. As noted by *The Post*, the “need of adequate fire protection had long been felt in the suburb, and now that it has been furnished a season of even greater prosperity than that of the last few years [are] thought to be in store...”²

The relative low density of the neighborhood at the time probably explains the character and initial use of the station. A chemical company, using horse-drawn apparatus carrying both water hose and tanks of fire-suppressant chemicals, was first housed here probably because the infrastructure of the new suburban neighborhood did not yet always afford accessible street hydrants. And relatively low demand probably explains the single vehicle bay.

Engine Company 17’s prominent tower was believed to have been intended for the dual purpose of drying hoses and for observation of the surrounding area. In general, by 1902, the city’s fire alarm

² *The Washington Post*, October 3, 1901; and December 3 and 13, 1901.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 2

Engine Company 17

Name of Property

Washington, D.C.

County and State

system of call boxes had achieved a level of sophistication that rendered these observation towers obsolete. The Crystal System invented in 1864 consisted of twenty-five alarm boxes or “call boxes” which transmitted signals to Fire Alarm Headquarters which then transmitted the number of the call box to the fire stations, as well as activating the bells in church steeples.³ However, in the case of Engine Company 17, it is likely that the observation tower continued to serve as such for a while. The call box system had not been extended throughout the suburban areas of the District and the general uniformity of low building heights in the neighborhood made an observation tower more effective than downtown, where a single block of buildings between an observer and the fire was likely to obscure the view. In the case of the contemporaneous Engine Company 25 (built 1902) that the tower was intended for both drying hoses and observation.

In any case, the tower’s primary use was still undoubtedly for the necessary hanging of wet, cotton hoses to dry after use. While hose towers had been incorporated into D.C. fire houses for years, Engine Company 17 survives as the oldest station with a hose tower expressed in the exterior design.

While the architect of this firehouse is unknown, it so closely resembles Engine Company 25, built the same year, that it was probably designed by the same architect, Snowden Ashford (for biography of Ashford, see nomination for Engine Company 12 and 25), chief of the Office of Building Inspections at that time. However, it is also possible that the firehouse was designed by Ashford’s predecessor, building inspector John B. Brady.

The restrained design of the firehouse suits its location on a minor street. At the time of its construction, little development had occurred in the neighborhood despite the fact that it had been entirely platted.⁴ Only a few modest free-standing frame houses stood in the immediate vicinity of the firehouse. Today Brookland is a viable, full-developed, solidly middle-income neighborhood of which the firehouse is a beloved landmark.

³ Fire Fighters' Association. One Hundred Years of Glory: A History of the District of Columbia Fire Department, 1871-1971. Washington, D.C.: Mt. Vernon Publishing Company, Inc., 1971.

⁴ G.M. Hopkins. Atlas of Washington, D.C., Philadelphia: Hopkins Publishing Company, 1887; and Baist's Real Estate Atlas of Surveys of Washington, D.C. Philadelphia: G.W. Baist, (Vol. 3) 1903.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Engine Company 17

Name of Property

Washington, D.C.

County and State

Section 9 Page 3

Major Bibliographical References:

Baist's Real Estate Atlas of Surveys of Washington, DC. Philadelphia: GW Baist, (Vol. 3) 1896, 1903, 1919, 1925, 1931, 1937, 1945, 1954, 1960, 1968, (Vol. 4) 1927, 1936, 1943, 1959.

Baldwin Memorial Archives, American Institute of Architects Library.

Berk, Sally L. "The History of Washington, DC's Pre-World War II Firehouses," DC Historic Preservation Division, June 1992.

Biographical Vertical Files, Washingtoniana Collection, Martin Luther King, Jr. Library.

Bushong, William, Judith Helm Robinson, and Julie Mueller. A Centennial History of the Washington Chapter, the American Institute of Architects, 1887-1987. Washington, DC: The Washington Architectural Foundation Press, 1987.

Commission of Fine Arts Minutes. Record Group 66, National Archives.

District of Columbia Archives, Record Group 17, the Department of Public Works, Engineering Department Files, 1897-1953, Part VI: Engine Houses, Box 63.

District of Columbia Fire Department. "Fiftieth Anniversary Celebration Honoring D.C.'s Black Men & Women in Blue." Program, July 13, 1985.

Fire Fighters' Association. One Hundred Years of Glory: A History of the District of Columbia Fire Department, 1871-1971. Washington, D.C.: Mt. Vernon Publishing Company, Inc., 1971.

Glass, Darlene and Claude. Video, "History of Engine Company No. 21," n.d.

Holmes, Theodore, Chief. Interview, October 10, 1991.

Kohler, Sue A. The Commission of Fine Arts, A Brief History, 1910-1976. Washington, D.C.: The Commission of Fine Arts, 1984.

McCarl, Robert. The District of Columbia Fire Fighter's Project, A Case Study in Occupational Folklife. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1985.

Vertical Files. "Fire Department: Engine Houses, 1815-1929, 1930-1939, 1940-1959."

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Engine Company 17

Name of Property

Washington, D.C.

County and State

Section 9 Page 4

Washington Perspectives, Incorporated. "Firehouse Building Survey," DC Department of Housing and Community Development, 1986.

Washington Star Archives, Washingtoniana Collection, Martin Luther King, Jr. Library

Withey, Henry R. and Elsie Rathburn. Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased). Los Angeles: Hennessey and Ingalls, Inc., 1970.

Zurier, Rebecca. The American Firehouse: an Architectural and Social History. New York: Abbeville Press, Inc., 1982.

Engine Company 17
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 7,500 square feet

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|------|-------------|---------------|---|------|---------|----------|--|--|--|--|
| 1 | 1 8 | 3 2 7 5 2 3 | 4 3 1 1 1 3 4 | 3 | | | | | | | |
| | Zone | Easting | Northing | | Zone | Easting | Northing | | | | |
| 2 | | | | 4 | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | |

☐ See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Sally Berk, Architectural Historian; Kim Williams (edited, 2007), Architectural Historian

Organization The Capitol Fire Museum date March 2001

street & number 2214 Wyoming Avenue, NW telephone

city or town Washington, D.C. state zip code 20008

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

- X A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- X A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

- X Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional Items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO)

name District of Columbia Fire Department

street & number telephone

city or town state zip code

Paperwork Reduction Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et. seq.*).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Engine Company 17

Name of Property

Washington, D.C.

County and State

Section 10 Page 6

Verbal Boundary Description:

Engine Company 17 at 1227 Monroe Street, N.E. (1235 Monroe Street, N.E. today) occupies Lot 18 of Square 3929 in the District of Columbia.

Boundary Justification:

Engine Company 17 has stood on this lot since its construction in 1901.