

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

JUN 2 1993

NATIONAL
REGISTER

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name The Whitelaw Hotel

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 1839 13th Street, N.W.

not for publication N/A

city, town Washington

vicinity N/A

state District of Columbia code D.C. county D.C.

code 001 zip code 20009

3. Classification

Ownership of Property

- private
- public-local (Land Only)
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

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

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

4. 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. See continuation sheet.

Robert L. Mallett
Signature of certifying official

4/29/93
Date

State or Federal agency and bureau _____

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official _____

Date _____

State or Federal agency and bureau _____

5. 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]

7/14/93

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Domestic: Hotel/Multiple Dwelling

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Domestic: Multiple Dwelling**7. Description**

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Italian Renaissance Revival

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Brickwalls BrickStone (Limestone)roof Synthetics (Rubber)other Metal (Cornice)Plaster (Interior Cornices,
Trim)

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

7. NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION**WHITELAW HOTEL: HISTORIC CONDITION****EXTERIOR**

The Whitelaw Apartment-Hotel, a four-story brick building resting on a raised basement, dominates the southeast corner of 13th and T Streets, N.W., amidst a neighborhood of three story late victorian rowhouses. The former apartment/hotel faces west on 13th Street and is topped by a flat roof placed above a deep bracketed cornice. In plan, the building is U-shaped above the first floor. The two wings of the U run parallel to T Street; the base of the U adjoins the alley to the east at the rear of the building.

The Whitelaw facade displays the traditional organization of base-shaft-crown patterned on classical orders. Salients projecting from the corners of the building enhance the solidity of mass conveyed by this compositional device. Handsome brickwork articulates the primary facades on 13th and T Streets. The south and east walls are laid in plan red brick with no decorative treatment. The walls facing north and west are laid in buff tapestry brick. There is a flush water table consisting of grouped stretchers laid in an alternating horizontal and vertical pattern. The water table is further highlighted by header courses running immediately above it and below it. Metal banding frames the fourth floor to demarcate the crown of the building. The one-over-one windows of the first, second, and third stories of the salients are grouped together and framed by bricks laid in a soldier course. A stone sill sets off the base of the frame. With the exception of casement windows flanking the 13th Street entrance and the large picture window flanked by casement windows at the northwest corner of T Street, all windows consist of one-over-one sashes.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

- 1) Architecture
- 2) Ethnic Heritage (Black)
- 3) Social History

Period of Significance

1919-1954

Significant Dates

1919

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

Lewis, John Whitelaw

Architect/Builder

Hatton, Isiah T. (Architect)

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

8.0 A STATEMENT OF THE PREHISTORIC, HISTORIC, ARCHITECTURAL, AND/OR CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROPERTY PROPOSED FOR DESIGNATION.

OPENING STATEMENT:

The Whitelaw Apartment Hotel is significant because it stands as a landmark to the self-sufficiency and perseverance of Washington's African-American middle class during the early twentieth century. The building embodies the successful combination of the economic self help theory and intellectual goals for racial and social freedom of the period. Developer John Whitelaw Lewis sold the building concept to the African American community of the era as a symbol of their coming of age and their right to exist within majority Washington society. The completion of the building project was welcomed into Washington's minority society wholeheartedly. The Washington Bee cites that over 20,000 people celebrated the opening of the Whitelaw, visiting the ballroom and apartments over a five day period.

The building quickly became a focus for cultural, social, and political gatherings of the day (See enclosed descriptions of events from the *Washington Bee*, *The Afro-American* and *The Washington Tribune*, circa 1919-1930.) further solidifying the U Street Corridor area of Northwest Washington as the "Great Black Way."

GENERAL:

The Whitelaw Apartment Hotel, built in 1918-1919, is an excellent example of architecture created by blacks in response to the increasingly restrictive social and economic climate of the early twentieth century. It originated from the concepts of self-help and racial solidarity that form a continuing theme in black intellectual history. The Whitelaw is particularly significant to black economic history. Black men developed, financed, designed,

9. Major Bibliographical References

Newspapers:

- The Evening Star, November 22, 1919, page 2
- The Washington Tribune, May 21, 1921, Vol. 1, No.2
- The Washington Bee, October 25, 1919, Vol. XL, No.21 & No.18
- The Washington Bee, November 17, 1917, Vol. XXXVIII, No.25
- The Washington Bee, October 5, 1918, Vol. XXXIX, No.19

Books:

- Jones, William H., The Housing of Negroes in Washington, D.C., Howard University Press, 1929
- Goode, James M., Capital Losses, Washington, D.C., Smithsonian Institution Press, 1979
- Goode, James M., Washington's Best Addresses

See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (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 # DC- 363
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of property One Sixth Acre

UTM References

A 18 324000 4309100
 Zone Easting Northing

C _____

B _____
 Zone Easting Northing

D _____

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The subject property occupies Lot 54 within Square 275 in Northwest Washington, D.C.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary defines the entire city lot that has historically been associated with the property.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Ronnie McGhee, Partner
 organization R. McGhee & Associates date 1/20/93
 street & number 925 S Street, N.W. telephone (202) 667-0166
 city or town Washington, D.C. state _____ zip code 20001

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Whitelaw Hotel
Washington, DC

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There were three entrances to the building: the principal entry at the center of the 13th Street facade, a secondary entrance to the first floor on T Street, and a third entrance to the basement, also on T Street. The principal entrance is housed within an elaborate one-story bay, constructed of brick and limestone, that connects the two wings of the building. The entrance doors sit within a limestone Serliana flanked by paired rusticated pilasters executed in brick. The pilasters support a Doric frieze topped by a stepped pediment. "WHITELAW" is incised in the arch of the Serliana. Both of the T Streets entrances are more utilitarian in appearance. The entrance to the first floor consists of double doors below a large three-light transom. A simple brick stoop leads up the entry. A narrow glazed door with 15 lights opened out from the basement. Closer examination of the basement entrance indicate that it was not original to the building (The sill of one of the original windows had been cut down to accommodate the door). The Whitelaw employees a composite hollow clay tile and ribbed concrete slab structural system on the typical floors and originally a wood rafter structural system at the roof.

INTERIOR

The interior of the Whitelaw was composed of public areas on the first floor with small apartment units and transient rooms on the upper floors. Interior non-bearing walls were plaster on wood lath or plaster on clay tile. Trim on the upper floors and stairs is simple. In contrast, the first floor interior was at one time remarkable. These public spaces featured frescoes, wall decorations, elaborate plaster cornices, and exquisite neo-Georgian woodwork. An art glass ceiling hung above the ballroom located within the center of the U on the first floor. These features are now in extremely poor condition. When the building was recorded by the Historic American Building Survey in 1979, it was characterized as deteriorated. Neglect, vandalism, and water damage from a December 1981 fire have exacted a heavy toll. The ballroom has been severely damaged. None of the art glass panels remain, but the frames and some of the glass have been located and negotiations have begun with the current owner to gain their return. The wood cabinetry has been vandalized, and the remaining plaster and woodwork has suffered extensive water damage from the fire. Because of fire damage to the roof, the third and fourth floors continue to suffer from the elements.

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7. NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION (CONTINUED)

THE WHITELAW HOTEL: REHABILITATED CONDITION

EXTERIOR

The buff-colored tapestry brick on the north and west brick facades have been steam-cleaned, uncovering the original three-color brickwork pattern. The deeply raked mortar joint profiles have been pointed and maintained.

The existing wood one-over-one double-hung windows have been replaced on the principal facades. At the principal entry (13th Street facade) the wood fan light transom above the entry door and the 18-light transom and 15-light transom double casement windows (flanking the entrance) have been restored reusing the original window wood with new glazing.

At the upper floors, the galvanized metal bands have been repaired and the deeply dentiled metal cornice at the rooftop replicated from salvaged sections of the original cornice. The original wood flat roof was destroyed by fire in 1981. The upper portions of the fourth floor masonry, which now supports the new steel joist roof system, has been carefully re-laid to match the original brick coursing and detailing below the cornice. The roof cornice system is now supported by metal outriggers tied to the rebuilt masonry wall.

INTERIOR

The Whitelaw Hotel interior retains its original composite clay tile and concrete structural system on the upper floors. Damaged slab areas on the typical floors were repaired in place and a topping slab added to provide a level floor surface. The original concrete slabs at the basement and lobby floors (originally only 2-1/2" thick) where structurally unstable and have been replaced with a new concrete floor slab, set as closely as possible to the original elevations.

The interior plan of the Whitelaw was originally composed of public areas on the ground (lobby) floor, apartments and commercial spaces on the basement floor and apartments and transient rooms on the upper floors. The rehabilitated condition retains the public character of the original lobby floor while dedicating the basement and upper floors to apartments. The original plaster on wood lath

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or clay tile partitions have been replaced with gypsum wallboard on metal studs.

At the main lobby interior, utilizing old photographs, salvaged trim, and other remaining elements, a fairly accurate portrait of the original lobby was be constructed. The reconstructed lobby substantially follows the original lobby plan and details. The exquisite original stained and textured art-glass ceiling panels have been completely re-leaded and have been reinstalled in their original positions bordered by plaster trim replicated to match the original plaster at the lobby ceiling. None of the original fresco wall and ceiling paintings were salvageable. However, judging from references in newspaper articles of the era (*Washington Bee*, 1919) the hand painted elements in the art glass ceiling were apparent references to the adjacent wall murals.

The original wood-paneled lobby partition was dismantled and repaired off-site, re-using as much of the original wood as was salvageable. One panel (the easternmost panel from 13th street) of the decorative wood and glass partition has been restored and relocated in its original position with one pair of doors re-used; the second panel has been replicated to match the original.

The interior plaster columns, trim, and cornices have been replicated from salvaged sections of the original plaster. Six of the original column capitals have been salvaged for reuse in the building. The additional required capitals have been replicated using these original plaster samples. The decorative plaster grillage, originally featured to the left of the lobby axis, has been repaired and reinstalled along the central axis of the main hall a few feet from its original location. Plaster trim in the main lobby is painted with gold leaf paint matching the original detailing featured in a 1925 photo of the ballroom and hallway.

The upper floors have been completely renovated and exhibit contemporary finishes, trim and apartment plan configurations. This includes the provision of an elevator and the downsizing of the original corridor layout to provide additional dwelling unit space. The original corridor lobby was isolated from the exterior

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projecting bay on the 13th street facade.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the overall integrity of the original building has been preserved and existing historic stained glass, wood, plaster, masonry, and metal elements stabilized or restored. This, in conjunction with the replication of missing original elements, the historic appearance, details and materials of the building has been reestablished. The lobby appearance is further enhanced by the unexpected discovery of the intact stained glass ceiling elements and their inclusion in the project.

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and constructed the building in an era dominated by discrimination and Jim Crow segregation. At the time it was erected, the Whitelaw demonstrated the capabilities of a race and offered proof that black entrepreneurial efforts could succeed.

The Whitelaw apartment House Corporation, composed entirely of blacks, sold stock to other blacks to finance the building. Isaiah T. Hatton (1888-c. 1921) was the architect. Hatton graduated from DC's M Street High School and probably apprenticed under John Lankford, a notable black architect whose international practice was based in the District. Hatton's other buildings include a second Italian Renaissance Revival building: The Industrial Bank building, the Murray Place Casino, and the Southern Aid Insurance building. The *Washington Bee* noted that "J.C. Reeder is the head carpenter and, indeed, every workman is colored."

John Whitelaw Lewis, the entrepreneur behind the scheme, was one of the most important figures in the black commercial world in D.C. during this era. According to the *Bee*, one of his staunchest supporters, Lewis was a hod carrier who had come to Washington in 1894 with Coxey's Army of the Unemployed. His activities began with the organization of a building association that later became a realty company. He then founded the Industrial Savings Bank. Although at odds with Booker T. Washington's National Business League, Lewis appears to have been a tireless promoter of solidarity and economic self-help for his race. In 1920, he founded the National Mutual Improvement Association of America and became its first president.

The Whitelaw's opening in November 1919 was a momentous occasion. The building, erected at a cost of \$158,000, was the first first-class hotel in the District for black use. It contained 25 apartments, 22 hotel rooms, a parlor, foyer, private dining room, lobby, and ladies' room. Meals were served in the basement "grotto" and in the large first-floor dining room that was also used as a ballroom.

The Whitelaw's construction as an apartment building is also unique. Despite significant real estate holdings in the District, blacks did not seem to be involved in the boom in apartment house construction which took place in Washington in the early twentieth

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century. Howard University sociologist William H. Jones, in his book entitled *The Housing of Negroes in Washington, D.C.*, published in 1929, suggests that the Whitelaw may well have been the first apartment housing erected by and for blacks in the District.

The full significance of the Whitelaw can only be grasped through an understanding of the context in which it was built. In the first decade of the twentieth century, blacks were faced with increasing prejudice and discrimination. the hopes born of emancipation and reconstruction had been dashed by the institution of Jim Crow laws and the gradual disenfranchisement of the race. Theodore Roosevelt's response to the Brownsville Race Riots of 1906 showed that even the Republican party could no longer be relied upon to protect black interests. In 1913 Booker T. Washington wrote, "I have never seen the colored people so discouraged and bitter as they are at the present time."

The District of Columbia always held a special position for black Americans, offering them opportunities not available elsewhere. Civil service employment provided a degree of professionalism and security found in few other cities. During the Taft administration, black political appointments declined and the federal government gradually began to institutionalize discrimination and segregation. The local black community did not submit to Jim Crow meekly. By 1916, the Washington chapter of the NAACP, an organization considered radical at its founding, was the largest in the nation. Race relations in the District continued to deteriorate, reaching their nadir in the riots of July 1919. Nine men were killed and 30 injured in civil disorders that were largely sparked by white aggression fomented by *The Washington Post*. The riots convinced the black community that physical harassment in the District was stopped only because blacks armed themselves and fought their white antagonists.

The Whitelaw rose against this background of constructed opportunities to answer the needs created by intensifying racial prejudice. Blacks were no longer tolerated in white-run social or commercial institutions. Discrimination exacerbated an already critical housing shortage. The Whitelaw demonstrated that blacks possessed both the means and the capabilities to ameliorate these problems. The apartments furnished housing, the hotel supplied

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public accommodations, and the ballroom and grotto provided a dignified and gracious setting for the social expression of an excluded race. But perhaps most importantly this "mammoth monument to the Negro's thrift and energy" (*The Washington Bee*) offered hope that the virtues of self-help and economic solidarity could light the way to survival in an increasingly hostile environment.

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8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE: ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

THE WHITELAW HOTEL: A BRIEF HISTORY

On November 24, 1919, the Whitelaw apartment and hotel complex located on the corner of 13th and T Streets in Northwest Washington, D.C. opened its doors, allowing the public to view its luxurious ballroom, formal dining room with stain-glass ceiling, and modernly-equipped apartments and hotel rooms. The Whitelaw was designed, financed, and built entirely by African-Americans under the leadership of a self-made entrepreneur, John Whitelaw Lewis. Its development, at a time of intense racial segregation, helped fill the need for permanent housing, public accommodation, and a social center for African-Americans in Washington. The Whitelaw was a hope for many African-American professional and intellectual elite, a temporary residence for visiting African-American entertainers, and an elegant and dignified gathering place for African-American socialites. The Whitelaw's success was a prominent display of the power and potential that self-help and economic solidarity held for the African-American community.

The developer, John Whitelaw Lewis, felt he had a mission to improve the life of blacks in Washington, D.C. He came to the District in 1894 as a bricklayer's assistant and gradually worked his way up to become a formidable businessman and community leader. In 1913 he founded Industrial Savings Bank, the first successful black banking institution in Washington. In a continuing effort to serve his community, he formulated a plan to build the Whitelaw Hotel. He chose a black architect, Isaiah T. Hatton, to design it, black construction tradesmen to built it, and he convinced the African-American community to finance it by selling them shares in the building for \$12 apiece.

The Whitelaw was a first-class hotel. It had 25 apartments and 22 rooms which offered many amenities that had never before been available to Washington's black community. One local newspaper described the opening of the Whitelaw as the first time that African-Americans ate under electric lights. The Whitelaw became a favorite gathering place for the local black community. The celebration of any notable event in the black community was surely held in the Whitelaw's ballroom, and numerous black celebrities such as Duke Ellington, Cab Calloway, Joe Louis, and Thurgood Marshall, stayed at the hotel.

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The Whitelaw did not exist in a vacuum; rather, it was an integral part of the U Street corridor, or "Black Broadway": the cultural, social, and economic center for African-Americans in Washington from the 20s to the 60s. It was the "place to be," both day and night, for young and old of all classes. Thriving nightclubs, theaters, restaurants, and shops, owned mostly by African-Americans, lined the streets. Redd Foxx, the former star of the TV series *Sanford and Son*, said of U Street: "All the black entertainers wanted to be there. See, the audiences in Washington were some of the best, maybe the best. Very intellectual, dressed sharp." The neighborhood is also fondly remembered by its former residents. Stanley Mayes, who grew up near 14th and U Streets, identified his neighborhood as "the one I read about in my schoolbooks, an ideal neighborhood where everybody knew everybody and looked out for you."

In the 1960s the U Street neighborhood and the Whitelaw fell from grace. The neighborhood was devastated during the 1968 riots which followed the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and this area, which had been the heart of the black community, came to exemplify urban decay. The Whitelaw was abandoned in the mid-seventies for numerous building code violations and subsequent fires turned the former hotel into a hollow, reflecting the impoverishment around it.

In the eighties, the neighborhood began to change again. Gentrification slowly encroached upon the area, a municipal office building was placed on 14th and U, and new and renovated theaters, restaurants and businesses emerged on the scene. The Whitelaw, however, remained an eyesore, and several for-profit organizations tried to develop it into market-rate housing, but could not make the financing work. Finally, in 1990, Manna, Inc. a non-profit housing development corporation succeeded in pulling together an innovative financing package in the form of a public/private partnership with the goal of creating affordable housing in the gutted remains of the Whitelaw.

In the past, the fates of the U Street neighborhood and the Whitelaw Hotel rose and fell together. In the present (1993), the completed building is once again symbolizing the revitalization of the U Street Corridor neighborhood. Restoration of the Whitelaw,

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its apartments and ballroom, to their original grand appearance and reinstalling its primary use: housing, has reestablished its relationship to the surrounding neighborhood and returned the building to its former prominence in the community as a residence and gathering place.

END STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

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8. PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Period of Significance of the Whitelaw Apartment Hotel extends from the building's dedication in 1919 to approximately 1954, the date of the Supreme Court's ruling on segregation in public places. The date 1954 is significant because it indicates the beginning of the demise of the forces which created and maintained the need for separate public accommodations. Within ten years of this date the elements which fostered the concentration of African-American cultural and social activity in the U Street Corridor had begun to dissipate, spreading to other areas of the region. The Whitelaw had begun its long slow decline in prominence.

END STATEMENT OF PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE

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