

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 Ambassador Apartments

other names/site number Jewell Court, Hotel St. Nicholas

2. Location

street & number 206 - 210 Farmington Avenue

not for publication N/A

city or town Hartford

vicinity N/A

state Connecticut

code CT

County Hartford

code 003

zip code 06103

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, 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

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 commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

_____ 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): _____

Ambassador Apartments
Name of Property

Hartford, CT
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
<u>1</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> buildings
<u>0</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> sites
<u>0</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> structures
<u>0</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> objects
<u>1</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> Total

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

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/multiple dwelling

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/multiple dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS/

Italian Renaissance

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation concrete

walls brick

other/ cast stone

roof synthetic

other

Narrative Description

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

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 patterns of our history.
- ☐ B Property is 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.)

- ☐ A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ B removed from its original location.
- ☐ C a birthplace or a 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.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1917 - 1957

Significant Dates

1917

1921

1925

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Berenson and Moses

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)
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 # _____
- ☐ 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 repositories: 1) Hartford Public Library

Ambassador Apartments
Name of Property

Hartford, CT
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 0.8

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1 18 691769 4626602
Zone Easting Northing

2 _____
Zone Easting Northing

3 _____
Zone Easting Northing

4 _____
Zone Easting Northing

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 Nicholas Paul Kraus

organization Heritage Consulting Group. date October 12, 2007

street & number 82 Bethlehem Pike, Suite 200 telephone 215-248-1260

city or town Philadelphia state PA zip code 19118

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

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 the SHPO or FPO.)

name _____

street & number _____ telephone _____

city or town _____ state _____ zip code _____

Paperwork Reduction Act 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.

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National Park Service**National Register of Historic Places**
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Ambassador Apartments
Hartford County, CT

The Ambassador Apartments is located at 206-210 Farmington Avenue in the Asylum Hill neighborhood of Hartford, Connecticut, immediately west of the center of the city. The five-story H-shaped apartment building was designed in the Italian Renaissance style by the noted local architecture firm Berenson and Moses and constructed in stages from 1917 – 1921.

Setting: The neighborhood adjacent to the building is a mix of commercial buildings, apartment buildings and single-family dwellings (Photo 1). To the north of the site, the setting consists of apartment complexes and early twentieth century institutional buildings. West of the site are single family, Victorian homes from the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century apartment buildings. South of the site are multi-family residences and a modern, mid-rise college building (Aetna Institute for Corporate Education). East of the site are church and institutional buildings as well a funeral home. The blocks surrounding the subject property to the north, east, west and southwest contain many buildings that are contributing resources to the National Register listed Asylum Hill Multiple Resource Area (MRA). This MRA is significant for its late nineteenth century architecture that is representative of the neighborhood's upper middle class progeny.

Site: The Ambassador Apartments faces Farmington Avenue and is centered on the block between Sigourney and Laurel Streets. The Ambassador is sited on a rectangular parcel of land with the building assuming nearly 100-percent coverage. The footprint of the building assumes an H-shape allowing for deep courtyards between the projecting wings (Photo 1). The south elevation of the Ambassador is setback from Farmington Avenue and features a lawn with mature trees and plantings. The deep, south courtyard contains a centered walkway with grass and shrubs along the building (Photo 2). At the front of the courtyard, the walkway is bordered by two balustrades which protrude from the front, interior corners of the wings. These balustrades are painted cast stone and have columns topped with light stanchions adjacent to the walkway (Photos 5,6). The east elevation is fenced and only accessible through a rear gate or fire exits. On the north end of the building, the courtyard is fenced and the ground is covered in gravel. The west elevation is built to the lotline and abuts an unrelated, paved parking lot. The facade and front courtyard is accessed by a central concrete walkway which is fully landscaped. Between the elevation and the sidewalk, the yard is planted with mature trees and shrubbery.

Structure: The Ambassador Apartments was constructed utilizing wood framing and masonry bearing walls. The exterior of the building consists of brick and cast stone bearing walls supported by a concrete foundation. Corridor walls throughout the building are loadbearing.

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Exterior: The Ambassador Apartments is an intact and representative example of the Italian Renaissance style. The facade is highly articulated with Italian Renaissance inspired ornamentation. The main (Farmington Avenue) elevation consists of buff colored brick with a painted cast stone base and cast stone ornamentation (Photo 2). At the four corners of the main elevation, the brick is patterned to appear as pilasters and topped with slightly protruding cast stone capitals (Photo 8). Floors 2-5 each have balconettes with cast-iron railings. Windows on the main elevation are generally aluminum replacements, but original leaded transoms remain above the two 1st story windows within the courtyard. All window openings on the elevation feature cast stone surrounds and the 4th story balconettes are supported by cast stone brackets. Above the 5th floor, the elevation is ornamented with a pressed metal cornice with modillions and brackets, each also formed of pressed metal. The parapet is brick with cast stone coping and is pedimented over the main entrance to the lobby.

The front courtyard provides the main entrances to the apartment building (Photo 3). There are three entrances in the courtyard, one secondary entrance on each wing and the center entrance servicing the lobby. The wing entrances are slightly askew from one another but are of similar design cast stone entablatures and pediment. The main entrance contains a modern aluminum projecting vestibule structure with a double-leaf, aluminum door and original fan-lite transom. The entrance is flanked by two window units, each with paired 6-over-6 replacement glazing topped with wood fan-lite transoms (Photo 4). Every window on the 2nd floor is ornamented with a cast stone bracketed head.

The west elevation consists of two divided wings finished in buff colored brick and connected by a recessed hyphen (Photo 7). The southwest wing is more greatly detailed than the northwest wing and continues certain elements of the front elevation. At the extreme southwest corner, the cast stone belt courses, cornice and base wrap around from the front of the building and there is a simulated brick pilaster. The remainder of the southwest section of the west elevation is limited in detailing with a simple belt cornice and sheet metal spandrels at three vertical bays. The northwest section of the west elevation has no cornice and its only ornament is former arched windows on the first floor which have been enclosed. The hyphen between the sections is covered by an exterior, steel fire escape.

The north elevation is utilitarian in nature and void of any ornamentation. The northern ends of the two wings are constructed of red brick and each feature steel fire escapes. Between the two wings, in the rear courtyard, the building is finished in buff colored brick but has no cornice and only

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Ambassador Apartments
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simple, cast stone window sills. The only ornamentation is the arched window openings on the west wing, though the arched glazing has been filled.

The east elevation is strictly utilitarian in nature. While near the front elevation the tan brick wraps around to the east elevation, it is replaced by red brick beyond the first bay. The elevation beyond the first bay is recessed and has no ornamentation.

Interior: The interior of the Ambassador Apartments is defined by its corridors. The corridors are double-loaded and run the length of each wing (Photo 17). Within the west wing corridors are Renaissance Revival transoms which mark the location of an original elevator shaft (Photo 11). The corridors are connected by a central hyphen which provides access to an elevator and original wood stairway (Photo 12). On the 1st floor, the hyphen is occupied by the building's lobby which features an ornamental plaster ceiling (Photos 9, 10). The apartment units have minimal ornamentation, though all have hardwood plank floors and certain units have brick fireplaces (Photo 13).

There are 128 apartment units laid out on 5 floors. The layout of the units has changed over time and the existing demising walls appear to be modern and date from the 1976 renovation campaign. All apartments have a bathroom, kitchen, living room and bedroom(s). The finishes in the apartments are generally modern and only one on the 5th floor retains original fixtures including a bathtub and kitchen cabinets, though the cabinets have been altered (Photos 14-16). Within the southern section of each wing, there are apartments that have fireplaces (Photo 13). Originally there were 8 apartments with fireplaces, though these have been subdivided. The southernmost apartments on each wing have access onto the front balconettes.

All units have a combination of flooring materials. The living rooms and bedrooms have hardwood, plank flooring. Certain units have pine floors while others are oak. The hardwood floors are the same in each apartment but differ by apartment in specimen and plank width. Bathrooms and kitchen floors are generally finished with vinyl tiles although certain units retain ceramic tiling.

Walls inside the units consist of metal lath and plaster that has been covered by a sheet of drywall. The drywall abuts the door and window openings and wooden molding has been installed on top. Molding consists of tall baseboard and window and door casing. While stylistically compatible, the moldings throughout were installed in 1976. The apartments generally have acoustic drop paneled ceilings though in limited instances the ceilings are plaster. The majority of internal doors are

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**Ambassador Apartments
Hartford County, CT**

modern, flush wood doors though a limited number of closet doors are wood paneled. In the larger units, modern wood French doors are utilized to separate the living room from bedrooms.

The kitchens and bathrooms are generally modern in appearance and the fixtures have been updated over the years. The bathtubs are wall mounted steel and porcelain and have tile surrounds. The kitchens have modern wood cabinets, aluminum sinks and modern appliances.

The building consists of an unfinished basement with apartments above. The first floor main lobby is accessed via the main entrance through the courtyard. The lobby has been altered by the installation of modern features and finishes (Photo 10). Opposite the entrance, the lobby has been subdivided into offices with drywall demising walls. The remaining portion of the lobby features an ornamented plaster ceiling with modern lighting and exposed sprinkler conduit (Photo 9). The plaster ceiling has been altered with the addition of new demising walls. The lobby floor is finished with modern granite tile that matches the baseboard made of the same material. Entrances to the lobby have either 1-lite fire doors or flush steel doors and there is one modern elevator. At the northeast corner of the lobby is a wooden stairway and a corridor that connects to the east wing via a small flight of stairs.

The corridor arrangement in the building follows the footprint of the building as the double-loaded corridors assume an H-shape and are centered in each wing. On the east wing, the corridor runs north to south and is accessible via two exterior emergency stairways, one wooden stairway, a modern elevator and through the connecting hyphen. On the west wing, the entrances are symmetrical to the east wing, though the elevator is non-operational. Each corridor is divided into a north and south quadrant by a steel, one-light fire door. The corridor floors are finished with modern, commercial tile squares and accented with wood baseboard. Corridor walls are unornamented plaster that has been covered with a layer of drywall. Ceilings in the corridors were originally unornamented plaster but have been covered with an acoustic drop ceiling. The corridors are lit with recessed fluorescent light fixtures. Apartment doors are flush wood with wood trim which has been installed over the modern drywall. In the east wing, the elevator cab and doorway is modern and lies flush to the corridor wall. In the west wing, the elevator is inoperable and the doorways have been covered with drywall. Above the drywall are highly stylized wood moldings and transoms, most likely remaining from the original elevator (Photo 11).

On floors 2-5 the east-west hyphen is separated from the wings by fire doors. Between the fire doors is the central elevator and stairway. The floors are finished with modern ceramic tiles and the

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**Ambassador Apartments
Hartford County, CT**

walls are plaster covered in drywall, accented with wood baseboard and chair rail. The elevator doors are flush metal. The ceilings are acoustic drop panels.

Alterations: The exterior of the building is generally intact although certain changes have been made since the Ambassador's construction. The most noticeable change to the exterior of the building was the installation of new windows. Originally constructed of wood, the current windows are aluminum 8-over-1, 6-over-1, 4-over-1 and 1-over-1. Additionally, the wood trim around the windows has been wrapped in aluminum sheet metal. On the western wing, the first floor windows on the northern section of the wing were formerly topped with an arched transom, but the arches have been filled and only the 6-over-1 paired windows remain. On the front elevation, the balconette doors have been replaced with smaller glass doors and sidelights and the openings made smaller on the 5th floor. Within the courtyard the all three entrances have been replaced with modern materials. The entrances on the wings are anodized aluminum doors while the main entrance in the hyphen is an aluminum and glass projecting vestibule structure with a double-leaf door. On the entire exterior of the building, all basement windows have been filled with Concrete Masonry Units and finished with painted stucco.

The interior of the Ambassador Apartments has undergone various renovations campaigns since its opening in 1921, with the earliest occurring in 1925. The most thorough renovation occurred in 1976 when the building was purchased by Aetna Insurance Company. The interior of the Ambassador has been adapted to meet the changing needs of its residents. In 1976, the lobby was partitioned to make an office for the building superintendent. The original H-shaped corridor arrangement, however, does remain. Throughout the building, corridor, bathroom and kitchen floors have been replaced with new vinyl tile. In the majority of the building the original, unornamented plaster ceilings have been covered with acoustic drop panel ceilings. In the corridors new fire doors have been installed to meet modern fire code and. In all corridors and in the majority of apartments spaces the original plaster walls have been covered in drywall, with new wood molding installed over the drywall. In certain apartments, doors have been replaced with new drywall demising walls to change the configuration of rooms.

Integrity: Although the Ambassador Apartments has undergone numerous renovations, it retains a great deal of integrity. The building continues in its historic use and although interior finishes have changed, the corridor plan remains generally unaltered. The original interior circulation is still legible and utilized today. The exterior of the building appears much the way it did when opened in 1921. The Ambassador Apartments, though altered to meet the needs of a changing clientele,

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retains a significant amount of historic fabric. The building is legible as an example of Italian Renaissance architecture and has integrity as an apartment hotel.

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Hartford County, CT**

The Ambassador Apartments, located at 206-210 Farmington Avenue, Hartford, Connecticut stands as a well preserved example of a 1920s apartment building. Completed in 1921, the building was constructed during an important decade in the residential development of the city. The building is individually eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its role in the transition of Hartford's residential development from single-family dwellings to apartment complexes and Criterion C in the area of architecture as a representative example of the Italian Renaissance style and the work of noted local architectural firm Berenson and Moses.

History of the Building

As documented in the Hopkins City Atlas of Hartford from 1880, the Ambassador property formerly extended north to Niles Street. The property was owned by local businessman Pliny Jewell. The Jewell family achieved its status and wealth through the operation of the Jewell Belting Company. On site was a twenty-eight room estate house setback nearly 100 feet from Farmington Avenue.¹ The site was served by a sweeping front driveway and included a greenhouse and carriage house.² In 1909, Pliny Jewell leased the estate to Connecticut Governor George L. Lilley to utilize as his state residence. Only three months into his term, Governor Lilley passed away and the property reverted back to Pliny Jewell.

Following Jewell's death, the property was owned by the Jewell estate until it was sold to Dunn & Waterman in 1912. The property was then sold to the Colonial Real Estate Company in 1914 or 1915. During this period the Jewell home was occupied by Warren D. Chase of the law firm of Back and Chase and president of Rowe Caulk Company. Under the ownership of Colonial Real Estate Company, the Jewell estate was subdivided into three lots, one main lot reaching north from Farmington Avenue past the house and two at the rear of the property.³

On May 6, 1916, the future site of the Ambassador Apartments was sold by the Colonial Real Estate Co. to local builder and real estate developer Nicolo Carabillo. At the time of the sale, Carabillo said a 60 unit apartment building would be erected on the site.⁴ In March 1917, a building permit was issued to Nicolo Carabillo "for the erection of a twenty-tenement house on Farmington Avenue, near Jewell Court, to cost about \$60,000." Instead of building the planned

¹ "Jewell Property Sold for \$18,000." Hartford Courant. 6 May 1916: 2.

² Sanborn Fire Insurance Map: 1900.

³ Sanborn Fire Insurance Map: 1917.

⁴ "Jewell Property Sold for \$18,000." Hartford Courant. 6 May 1916: 2.

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tenement house, Carabillo instead chose to build a complex with 128 apartment suites.⁵ The building to be erected was designed by the Hartford architectural firm Berenson and Moses, and would be completed in three stages.

Designed in the Italian Renaissance style, the 5-story apartment hotel was said to be the largest of its type when constructed.⁶ The apartment building was originally known as Jewell Court but was renamed the Hotel St. Nicholas by Carabillo in 1921. As Carabillo's crowning achievement, the building was to be grand and spare no luxury as all rooms would have outside exposure, bath connections and a telephone. The building would have additional conveniences including a "barber shop, bowling alleys, ladies' restroom and roof garden."⁷ At the rear of the building was to be an Italian garden accessible through French doors from the dining room. It was reported that "arrangements have already been partly made for a chef who has an enviable reputation both here and in Europe, and a feature will be made of the dining room, which is said to be the largest between Boston and New York."⁸

In December 1920, prior to its completion, the Hotel St. Nicholas suffered a devastating fire in the northeast wing of the building. Although contained by firewalls, the fire caused the roof to collapse in the northeast wing and "richly furnished apartments suffered by fire and water."⁹

By March 1921 the entire "H" was complete and featured 128 apartment suites and 375 tenants.¹⁰ The apartment building featured parking garages for the tenants' motor vehicles and services including a barber shop, manicure shop and tailor shop. In the west wing, a large dining room served the tenants and outside customers. The dining room was described as "spacious, well designed, decorated and lighted, and will accommodate more than 300 diners, and still leave room for dancing."¹¹

Although the St. Nicholas offered the finest of amenities in the Hartford apartment market, Nicolo Carabillo was unable to turn a profit and was forced to sell the building prior to foreclosure. In 1925 the St. Nicholas was purchased by Max Myers and Samuel Gross. The new owners planned to rehabilitate the basement and sections of the first floor including the dining

⁵ "New Hotel Ready By October 1." Hartford Courant, 8 July 1920: 22.

⁶ "St. Nicholas Hotel Sold for \$600,000." Hartford Courant, 3 October 1925: 7.

⁷ "New Hotel Ready By October 1." Hartford Courant, 8 July 1920: 22.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ "Chief Moran Calls Refuse Chutes Bad Menace for Houses." Hartford Courant, 19 December 1920: 1.

¹⁰ "Name of Jewell Court Changed." Hartford Courant, 6 March 1921: 17.

¹¹ "Hotel St. Nicholas Restaurant Opened." Hartford Courant, 27 March 1921: 2.

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**Ambassador Apartments
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room.¹² With the change in ownership, the St. Nicholas was officially renamed the Ambassador Apartments.

The Ambassador Apartments was owned by Max Myers and Samuel Gross, under the corporate name of Ambassador Realty Company, until 1953 when it was sold to the Gateway Company for \$450,000. Gateway undertook a “modernization” program for the Ambassador and removed the last remaining business from the first floor. Following the renovation, the Ambassador was sold in 1958 to Mutual Real Estate Investors, Inc., for \$650,000.

Although constructed as a luxury apartment building in an upper-class neighborhood, the Ambassador lost its luster as the neighborhood declined through the mid-to late-20th century. Citing the need to provide housing for its workers and protect its office complex, Aetna Insurance Group purchased 16 properties on the block bounded Farmington Avenue and Laurel, Niles and Sigourney Streets, including the Ambassador. In 1976, the Ambassador was described as “in more recent years, it housed a combination of steady, reliable tenants, and not-so-steady unreliable drifters, rats and cockroaches.”¹³ Aetna undertook a complete renovation of the Ambassador including the replacement of fire doors, installation of a security system and upgrade of the electrical system. In addition, all 132 residential units were renovated. Renovations included “new linoleum floors, new cabinets, new appliances, upgraded hardwood floors, drywall and new electrical fixtures.”¹⁴

Throughout the next two decades, Aetna continued to maintain and upgrade the Ambassador. Work included the removal of asbestos in 1991, installation of new boilers in 1992, and small repairs such as bathroom renovation repairing fire damage. The most substantial recent renovation occurred in 1993 when entrance doors, windows and window trim were replaced at a cost of \$1,000,000. After 25 years of ownership, the Ambassador was sold by Aetna in 1999.

¹² “St. Nicholas Hotel Sold for \$600,000.” Hartford Courant. 3 October 1925: 7.

¹³ “Aetna’s Ambassador Apartments Get Facelift and New Security.” Hartford Courant. 25 January 1976: D1.

¹⁴ Ibid.

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**Ambassador Apartments
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CRITERION A: SIGNIFICANCE IN COMMUNITY PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

The Ambassador Apartments is significant in the area of community planning and development as an important vestige from the period during which Asylum Hill transitioned from a city of single-family dwellings to apartment buildings.

Rise of the "Multi-Family Residence"

Recognizing the potential profits that could be achieved as a result of soaring population growth and increased land prices, real estate developers sought to reinvent the notion of apartment living to overcome the stigma associated with multi-family living arrangements. A new movement in apartment building design followed the opening of Richard Morris Hunt's successful Stuyvesant Apartments in New York City in 1870, the first apartment building designed for a middle class clientele. In the decades that followed, apartment building construction flourished in cities throughout the country. The new generation of apartment buildings featured sumptuous entrances and public spaces with marble floors and paneling, crystal and iron chandeliers, imported carpets, paneled wood wainscoting, ornate plaster ornamentation and elaborate staircases and elevator cages. The concept of apartment living became increasingly desirable to the middle class as the new era of apartment buildings also incorporated the latest technological advances such as central hot water heating, gas lighting, and fully equipped bathrooms in each unit. New apartment building forms evolved as the architects sought to increase light and ventilation. Among the varied forms architects experimented with in the early 20th century were: "L," "H," "U" and "E" plan arrangements and groupings of buildings around central courts.

These evolutions in multi-family residential design resulted in elegantly styled apartment buildings that offered a host of conveniences and domestic technologies. In Asylum Hill, apartment buildings grew in popularity with the rise of middle-class white collar workers, specifically those employed in the insurance industry.

Residential Development Patterns in Hartford

As Hartford became increasingly populated through the middle of the nineteenth century, Hartford's elite began to resettle in the Asylum Hill area, west of downtown. The land in Asylum Hill was divided into large estates and was sparsely populated. Increased immigration in the mid-to-late nineteenth century increased the need for more affordable housing in Hartford.

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Combined with the increase in pollution in downtown Hartford, areas closest to downtown were abandoned by the elite and their houses were converted for multiple resident use. Throughout the last decades of the nineteenth century, the elite and growing middle class chose Asylum Hill as an escape from overpopulated residential neighborhoods. The grand estates of Asylum Hill were subdivided and new, smaller single family residences were constructed.

In order to contend with the demand for housing in Hartford, developers began to demolish houses in favor of apartment buildings. These apartment buildings were first developed to the south and east of Bushnell Park in south Hartford.¹⁵ In the mid-1890s, apartment buildings began to be constructed north of downtown as well.

Through the first decades of the 20th century, residential development in Hartford was concentrated in westward expansion and increased density. As Asylum Hill became fully developed, residents in search of land to build single-family dwellings continued west to neighborhoods such as Blue Hills.¹⁶ With the city nearly built-out, developers took to demolition and construction of apartment buildings in even the most exclusive neighborhoods. While quality and size of apartment buildings throughout the city varied greatly depending on the market to be served, those constructed in Asylum Hill were luxurious and built to serve Hartford's middle and upper-class, specifically those employed by the burgeoning insurance industry.

The early apartment buildings constructed on Asylum Hill replaced many of the grand mansions constructed in the 19th century. These buildings were generally less than three stories tall and contained large apartments of greater than five rooms. Construction of these apartments was driven by the success of early buildings constructed on Farmington Avenue and the influx of clerical workers that moved into the neighborhood following the arrival of Aetna Life and several other insurance companies.¹⁷

Although early apartments in Asylum Hill tended to be large, by 1920 the most popular sized apartments were 3 and 4 rooms. Throughout the city, apartment buildings were in demand, and they tended to serve clientele within walking distance of their workplace, therefore those constructed near industry tended to have smaller apartments and fewer amenities, while those near white collar offices tended to be larger and more luxurious. During the 1920s, apartments

¹⁵ Hartford Courant Article from 1897 announcing construction of apartment building on Washington Street and article from 1892 announcing a 5-story apartment building at Main Street and Linden Place.

¹⁶ "Realty Topics." Hartford Courant. 1 October 1915: 18.

¹⁷ "Changes in Farmington Avenue." Hartford Courant. 27 June 1915: Z5.

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were seen as the salvation for the city's dwelling problem, and as a way to simplify life for the elite who were looking for a desirable home with modern amenities.¹⁸ The apartment buildings constructed during the 1920s tended to be designed in revival styles including Tudor, Colonial, Spanish Colonial and Mission, though stripped Classicalism and Art Deco styling were also utilized.

The boom of apartment building construction in Hartford occurred after the First World War and following an initial period of low occupancy rates the popularity of apartment living led to unbridled development. In 1920, there were 125 apartment buildings in Hartford; by 1930 that number had doubled to 256.¹⁹ The apartment boom was short-lived as by 1927, Hartford real estate agents began to claim that excessive apartment development and increased accessibility to single-family housing in the suburbs had created a surplus of apartments in the city.²⁰

Despite the surplus of rentable apartments, developers continued to build apartment buildings of various sizes for a number of years. In 1926 the first Co-op was constructed in the suburb of West Hartford which foreshadowed the growth of apartment complexes in the suburbs. Into the 1930s, apartment buildings continued to be built in Asylum Hill and West Hartford including mid-size and large buildings ranging from 50-200 apartments until the depression brought construction to a halt. Although property within Hartford continued to be redeveloped as multiple unit dwellings, including buildings constructed for public housing, demand shifted to Garden Apartment complexes which were constructed in wooded, suburban areas. The ease of transportation due to improved roads pushed most residential development outside of the city of Hartford. Throughout the middle of the 20th century, the apartment buildings constructed in previous decades were converted from large, middle and upper class dwellings to smaller tenement-style housing void of luxury and services.

Asylum Hill

By 1880 the elite began to subdivide the estates into house lots usually 60 to 70 feet wide by 150 feet deep. The majority of Asylum Hill was developed by 1896 with a mixture of houses and institutional buildings. Architectural styles varied greatly within the neighborhood and included Queen Anne, High Victorian Gothic, Second Empire, Romanesque, Tudor Revival, Shingle and Stick Style and the beginnings of Classical Revival.²¹

¹⁸ "Apartments Solve City's Dwelling Problem." *Hartford Courant*. 24 August 1924: D1

¹⁹ Geer's Hartford City Directory, 1930. Price and Lee Co. Hartford City Directory, 1940.

²⁰ "Apartment Surplus Is Seen Here." *Hartford Courant*. 24 April 1927: 23.

²¹ "Asylum Hill Multiple Resource Area" National Register of Historic Places, 1979.

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The area near the Ambassador Apartments site was generally more densely populated than the rest of Asylum Hill and consisted primarily of middle-class residences. The Ambassador Apartments site remained a cohesive estate under the ownership of Pliny Jewell until the mid-1910s when the property was subdivided and developed with homes, auto garages and the subject apartment building. At the turn of the 20th century, early apartment buildings were constructed on Imlay Street and Farmington Avenue. These early apartment buildings foreshadowed the change in Asylum Hill development from single-family homes to apartment living. The 20th century has seen the demolition of the large estate homes in favor of apartment buildings and commercial buildings, particularly along Farmington Avenue and Niles Street. Many of the large houses were converted for apartment use in the mid-to late 20th century as the socioeconomic condition of the neighborhood shifted. To service the booming insurance industry, many small apartment buildings were constructed in the 1950s and 1960s and typically contained mostly studio and one-bedroom units.²² The neighborhood currently is a mix of 19th century houses, 20th century apartment buildings and modern commercial developments. Today, Asylum Hill is home to over 180 apartment buildings.²³

CRITERION C: SIGNIFICANCE IN ARCHITECTURE

The Ambassador Apartments is significant in the area of architecture as a representative and intact example of a 1920s Italian Renaissance style apartment building and an important work of the architectural firm of Berenson & Moses. The nominated resource embodies the form, massing, and characteristic details representative of a 1920s apartment building.

The Italian Renaissance Style

The Ambassador was designed in the Italian Renaissance style of architecture. The Italian Renaissance style gained in popularity in the United States following WWI, when Americans first became familiar with the architecture of Italy as photographs became increasingly available depicting the Italian countryside and villas. Derived from the 20th century classical revival, Italian Renaissance style buildings feature strong classical organization and features. In design,

²²Neuwirth, Robert. "Renovation or Ruin." National Housing Institute. Issue #137, September/October 2004.
<http://www.nhi.org/online/issues/137/LIHTC.html>.

²³"Asylum Hill Multiple Resource Area" National Register of Historic Places, 1979.

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buildings of the style are elegant, stately compositions often executed in monochromatic stone or smooth stucco.

Identifying features of the style represented on the Ambassador Apartments include: symmetrical façade, low pitched roof, wide overhanging eaves supported by decorative brackets, long projecting wings, and carefully balanced ornamental features such as the iron balconies and the use of both arched and bracketed windows enframements. The execution of monochromatic materials, such as the buff colored brick, cast stone, and pressed metal painted in a stone color, reflect the distinctive character of the style retrained by the influence of building economics.

The Architect

The architectural firm of Berenson and Moses was founded in 1917 by partners Julius Berenson and J.F. Moses.²⁴ While the firm remained in existence for just over a decade, they were one of the most active firms in the city during the 1920s, having designed plans for over 170 completed projects. The partnership dissolved in 1932, reflecting the downturn in construction during the Depression.²⁵

Berenson and Moses is responsible for a diverse portfolio of projects types including single-family houses, apartment buildings, commercial buildings and ecclesiastical structures. The firm did not specialize in one style of design, but instead adhered to architectural trends as well as the desires of its clients. Berenson and Moses designed buildings in a range of styles including: Italian Renaissance, Jacobethan Revival, Colonial Revival, Georgian Revival and Art Deco. The firm's most recognized commission was the Beth Hamedrash Hagodol Synagogue which was designed in 1922. Designed in the Romanesque Revival style, it was one of two synagogue commissions for Berenson and Moses.²⁶ Although diverse in style, the firm's commissions were generally brick structures with cast stone detailing. The Ambassador is a significant commission for the firm due to its size and Italian Renaissance ornamentation, which perhaps reflected the desire of developer Nicolo Carabillo to construct an apartment building in the likeness of those found in his native land.

²⁴ Ransom, David F. "Biographical Dictionary of Hartford Architects." Connecticut Historical Society Bulletin 54 (1989).

²⁵ "Berenson and Moses Dissolve Partnership," *Hartford Courant*, July 31, 1932.

²⁶ "Historic Synagogues of Connecticut Multiple Property Listing" National Register of Historic Places, 1995.

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CONCLUSION

The Ambassador Apartments has stood as an important apartment building in the city of Hartford since its opening in 1921. The Ambassador Apartments is significant for its role in Hartford's transition of residential development from single-family dwellings to apartment buildings and as an intact example of a 1920s apartment building designed in the Italian Renaissance style.

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Verbal Boundary Description

Beginning at a point on Farmington Avenue that is 200' west of northwest corner of the intersection of Farmington Avenue and Sigourney Street, proceed west 120' along the sidewalk line to the western boundary of Jewell Court. Then proceed 297' north along the west property line, turning east for 120' along the rear property line of the subject building. Then proceed 297' south along the east property line and return to the point of origin.

Boundary Justification

The boundary is the current and legal boundary of the nominated property.