NPS Form 10-900 OMB No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

194

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. 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.

RECEIVED 2280
MAR 11 2016
NAT. REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

1. Name of Property

Historic name: Southern Railway Building

Other names/site number: _____

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

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

2. Location

Street & number: 1500 K Street, NW

City or town: Washington, D.C. State: DC County: _____

Not For Publication: ☐ Vicinity: ☐

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

___**national** ___**statewide** X **local**

Applicable National Register Criteria:

X **A** ___**B** X **C** ___**D**

DAVID MALONEY / DC SHPO — MARCH 2, 2016

Signature of certifying official/Title: **Date**

DC HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official: **Date**

Title : **State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government**

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

✓ entered in the National Register

___ determined eligible for the National Register

___ determined not eligible for the National Register

___ removed from the National Register

___ other (explain:) _____

Patrick W. Andrus 4/26/2016

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

Private: [x]

Public – Local [ ]

Public – State [ ]

Public – Federal [ ]

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

Building(s) [x]

District [ ]

Site [ ]

Structure [ ]

Object [ ]

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1		Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use
Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)
COMMERCE/TRADE/Office Building

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)
COMMERCE/TRADE/Office Building

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions.)
_EARLY 20TH CENTURY/Commercial Style_____

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)
Principal exterior materials of the property: __Limestone_____

Narrative Description
(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with **a summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

The Southern Railway Building, constructed, 1928-29, is an imposing eleven-story office building designed by master architect Waddy B. Wood in a reduced Classical Revival style. The building is located at the southwest corner of 15th and K Streets on the west side of McPherson Square in downtown Washington, DC. The L-shaped building measures approximately 217 feet by 179 feet, occupies 30,000 square feet of land, houses 244,550 square feet of office and retail space, and rises 130 feet. The building is a dominant presence along both the K Street and 15th Street streetscapes, though its primary façade faces 15th Street and the square. The Southern Railway building, together with the Investment Building across K Street, the United Mine Workers building south of it on 15th Street, and the Davidson and B.F. Saul buildings across the square, provide visual recognition of the rise of commercial/office building construction in this part of downtown during the first decades of the 20th century.

The building is a steel and concrete frame structure clad with smooth limestone walls and set upon a low granite base. The building is divided into two parts, including the main block and a distinctive temple-form, roof-top setback. The main block of the building is divided vertically into equal sized bays separated by Giant Order pilasters above the raised base of the building

spanning floors 4-7. Simple, punched window openings at the end bays and at the top level of the main block help reduce any dominant sense of verticality. The set-back above the main block of the building features a colonnade with windows between the columns, and on the 15th Street elevation, two, di-style in-antis pavilions at either end.

Classically inspired, low-relief limestone sculpture is reserved for certain elements of the building, including door surrounds, belt courses and cornice lines. Metal panels and metal doors, similarly decorated with low-relief Classical detailing, ornament the windows and door of the building's main floor level.

The interior of the building is highly ornate with rich detailing found in the public areas, such as the entry lobby, the elevator lobby and corridors.

In 1988 and 1995, the Southern Railway Building underwent restoration of its exterior and interior. The limestone walls were cleaned and re-pointed and the interior had a complete mechanical retrofit. Entry doors were punched into the center three bays of the K Street elevation and a canopy installed to advertise the new entry. An interior corridor was cut from the K Street entrance to connect to the elevator lobby of the 15th Street side. A large fountain was built at the intersection of the two corridors, on-axis with the 15th Street entrance.

Narrative Description

Exterior:

The primary façade of the Southern Building faces 15th Street and McPherson Square. This façade is longer than the K Street elevation and offers a prominent and original three-bay entry. The façade extends thirteen bays long and is divided into three horizontal parts consisting of the base, the shaft, and the rooftop set-back or penthouse level. The base of the building generally corresponds with three interior floor levels, including the ground floor stores, and two floors of offices above. However, in the case of the three center bays where the main lobby is, there is only one floor of offices above, since the lobby features a double-height interior space. The shaft consists of office floors 4-8, all within the main body of the building. The rooftop set-back consists of floors 9 and 10-11, whereby the 9th floor serves as a base for the colonnaded, temple above formed by floors 10-11.

The principal entry to the Southern Railway Building is located in the center three bays in the base of the building. These three bays are recessed into the limestone walls and framed by large, double-height surrounds with Greek bas-relief detailing in the cornice, capped by a central acroteria. Small roundel bas-relief sculpture ornaments the frieze below the cornice, while a beaded molding frames the actual opening. Double bronze doors, framed by bronze surrounds and large bronze grilles above them are set within the monumental openings. The building's name, "SOUTHERN RAILWAY" is decoratively incorporated in the frieze above the transom of the double doors. The four storefront openings to either side of the central entries are framed in bronze and span a double-height space, including the ground-level stores and offices above. The

frame around the openings is decorated with bronze roundels and continuous Greek motif, while a central spandrel offers a decorative motif on-center with larger roundels flanking it.

Flagpole standards are located at the top of and to either side of the central of the three entry doors.

The third story of the building, above the tall openings of the lower level, is defined by 13 bays of squarish window openings, fitted with two-light replacement windows. These openings are cleanly punched into the wall and relatively flush with it. A beltcourse with an alternating rhythm of repeating garland, rosette and shell motifs separates the base of the building from the "shaft" of the building above.

Floors 4-8, which rises to 110 feet, constitute the "shaft" or middle part of the building. Within this middle section, floors 4-7 are joined together by giant Order pilasters, while the eighth story offers a row of equally spaced punched window openings that visually serves as a cornice above the colonnade of giant Order pilasters. On the fourth floor, pairs of fixed windows are separated from the windows above by stone spandrels. On floors 5-7, tri-partite replacement windows with metal, rather than stone, spandrels separate the floors and fill in the space between the pilasters. The pilasters are made of smooth limestone and feature Doric capitals with guttae. A wide frieze is decorated with incised metope carvings, centrally aligned above each pilaster. A slightly projecting box cornice caps the giant Order colonnade of the wall. The eighth floor of the building consists of a row of single, punched window openings (two per bay) that extends the full length of the building and serves as a final attic story or cap to the main body of the building. Similarly, the two end bays of the building, not framed by the giant Order pilasters, include single, punched windows that provide an exterior frame to the colonnade.

The "top" of the building, the rooftop setback or penthouse, consists of floors 9-11. It is set back from the middle section and is separated from it by an elegantly carved cornice characterized primarily by its repeating lions' heads. The rooftop setback reaches 130 feet and the height of the city's height limit. Visually distinct from the body of the building below it, the setback appears as a temple raised upon a base. The base, being Floor 9, strictly consists of a row of equally arranged square window openings aligned above those of Floor 8, but of course, set back from it. The temple itself features a long central wing of 16 bays and two end pavilions with two columns arranged in antis. The 16-bay colonnade of this recessed penthouse features double-story Doric pilasters with superimposed windows separated by metal spandrels. The end pavilions, which provide open balcony areas, project slightly from the colonnade with fluted Doric columns framed by engaged pilasters and visually supporting the architrave above.

The north elevation facing K Street is somewhat shorter, spanning 11 instead of 13 bays, with the inside 9 bays articulated by Giant Order pilasters spanning floors 4-7 as on the 15th Street façade. Like on 15th Street, the two end bays are not included within the colonnade, but form end piers to it. The first story of this elevation is similarly defined by tall, ground floor openings, including three on-center entry doors cut into the building as part of the 1995 renovation. Sympathetically done, these new entrances were expanded from the original window openings. The entrances are simply cut into the wall, providing openings that lead to a recessed entry. The

recessed entry doors are modern, but the original bronze window frames and spandrels have been retrofitted to the new recessed entry. Three contemporary metal canopies project from the three wall exterior openings, clearly identifying them as an entrance. As on the 15th Street side, there are tall storefront openings to either side of the new entrances.

The floor levels on the K Street side are similarly arranged as on the 15th Street side, with an elaborate garlanded cornice separating the building's base from its middle and a secondary cornice with lions' heads separating the building's middle from its top. The setback is similarly articulated, but here, the colonnade lacks the end pavilions with its in antis columns and consists instead of unadorned walls acting as end piers.

The western end of the K Street elevation abuts the smaller Peyser building, revealing the U-shaped footprint of the Southern building and the light-well facing the west.

Interior:

The interior of the Southern Railway Building consists of upper floor professional offices and a lobby and retail space at the ground floor. Storefronts open directly onto 15th Street along with a grand entrance lobby to the office building, while a newer retrofitted secondary entrance opens onto K Street. A grand reception from the 15th Street entrance leads to a central corridor that in turn leads to a bank of elevators that provides access to the offices in the upper floors. This elevator bank is also now connected to a corridor that runs perpendicular to the principal one and that offers access to the secondary K Street entrance. All of the public spaces are elegantly appointed. The 15th Street lobby area spans the width of the three exterior entrance bays and rises a full two stories in height. The floors are laid in a gleaming white marble, with black marble framing the edge and symmetrically placed black marble squares forming a grid pattern. The walls are similarly of marble, but offer a warm and contrasting beige hue with noticeable striations. The marble extends from the black marble baseboards to the ornate crown molding, while a coffered ceiling spans the full width of the lobby. The marble walls are not unadorned, but feature recessed panels, double-height pilasters and a frieze with Art Deco-type bas relief carvings separating the double-height lobby from a mezzanine space above it. From this lobby, a tall central opening leads into the elevator lobby where banks of elevators are located on either side of a central corridor. Beyond the banks of elevators, this central corridor intersects at a fountain to the perpendicular corridor that provides access to the K Street entrance of the building.

None of the individual offices were inspected. However, it is known that a conference room in the penthouse level, which originally served as the office of Southern Railway Company president, still retains its original fireplace and stone mantel. Historic photographs of the building under construction and of the president's office are hanging on the walls in the building manager's office off of the K Street lobby.

INTEGRITY

The Southern Railway Office Building retains a high degree of integrity. The building is located in the heart of downtown at its original site across from McPherson Square and within the same office building setting that the building's construction helped to engender. The highly articulated building designed by notable architect Waddy B. Wood retains its original design, materials and craftsmanship. The original smooth limestone walls with their bas relief ornamentation and the sculpted metal panels are all intact. The interior—highly ornate for Washington, D.C. standards—retains its original materials and finishes, such as its marble floors and walls with Art Deco-inspired sculptural ornamentation, and its carved and coffered wood ceiling. The building retains a palpable feeling of the past and its association with early office building design in the city.

The major alterations to the building, namely opening up the K Street side and connecting this secondary entrance to the 15th Street side via the elevator banks, were done in a historically sympathetic manner and do not detract from the historic character of the building.

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.)

- [x] 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.
- [x] 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 grave
- [ ] D. A cemetery
- [ ] E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- [ ] F. A commemorative property
- [ ] G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

Areas of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions.)
COMMUNITY PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT
ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance
1929

Significant Dates
1929

Significant Person
(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder
Waddy Butler Wood

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Southern Railway Building at 15th and K Streets, NW meets National Register Criteria A and C at the local level of significance with Community Planning and Development and Architecture as the Areas of Significance. The Southern Railway Building was constructed in 1928-29 as the executive headquarters building for the Southern Railway Company at a time when the company operated a system of over 125 merged southern railroads and was considered one of the country's most successful railroad conglomerates. The headquarters building at 15th and K Streets was the first purpose-built building by the company in the city. Upon its founding in 1894, the Southern Railway Company established its headquarters in Washington at 13th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue in a building that had been constructed in 1871 as the offices for the *National Republican* newspaper and later became the offices of the Richmond and Danville Railroad. This first Southern Railway Building, long a landmark on Pennsylvania Avenue, suffered a major fire in 1916, resulting in its demolition a few weeks later. A new building was erected to replace the charred ruins, but this building was demolished ten years later when the federal government acquired the property as part of its plans for the Federal Triangle.

In March 1928, the Southern Railway Company elected to build its new headquarters at 15th and K Streets, facing McPherson Square. Construction of the building engendered the demolition of several older buildings on the site and continued the transformation of McPherson Square from a Victorian-era residential neighborhood to a commercial area of office buildings, many related to the financial industry. The Southern Railroad Building meets Criterion A for its association with the railroad industry and for its role in the transformation of McPherson Square in its period of transition from residential to commercial.

The Southern Railway Building designed by master architect Waddy Butler Wood stands as one of the city's most elegant and refined office buildings in Washington, D.C. of the 1920s. The building is designed in a reduced Classical Revival style consistent with other substantial buildings in the city from its period. However, it also provides an early expression of the Art Deco Movement in its ornamentation and even features some proto-Modern elements (such as punched window openings) that mark the building as an early example of the city's architectural transition away from purely Classical building forms and traditions. The eleven-story Southern Railway Building with its giant Order colonnade and distinctive rooftop setback designed to meet the city's specialized zoning code meets National Register under Criterion C as an excellent example of its building type and style, and as an excellent representation of the work of master architect Waddy B. Wood.

The Period of Significance for the Southern Railway Building is 1929, the year in which the building was completed and dedicated.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

The Southern Railway Company in Washington: Its Beginnings

The Southern Railway Company, a system of almost 150 merged railroad companies at its height, was organized in 1894 by financier J.P. Morgan with the consolidation of the Richmond and Danville Railroad (formed in 1847) and the East Tennessee, Virginia and Georgia Railroad (formed in 1887). The South Carolina Canal and Railroad Company originally chartered in 1827 and eventually one of the Southern Railway Company's subsidiaries operated the country's first regularly scheduled passenger train. Throughout much of the 20th century, the Southern Railway Company acquired railroads throughout the southern states; by the 1970s, it served all of the states south of the Ohio and Potomac rivers and east of the Mississippi, except West Virginia. In 1982 the Southern was merged with the Norfolk and Western Railway Company and thereafter was operated by Norfolk Southern Corporation, a holding company.

Upon its founding, the Southern Railway Company established its headquarters in Washington with its main offices located at 13th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue. The 13th Street headquarters, no longer standing, was originally constructed in 1871 in a grand Second Empire style for the National Republican newspaper offices and was purchased by the Richmond and Danville Railroad for its offices in 1887. When the Richmond and Danville was incorporated into the Southern at its founding, the building at 13th and Pennsylvania Avenue became the new company's headquarters. In 1899, the Southern Railway Company enlarged the building, creating an imposing seven-story structure with a prominent central tower that vied with its nearby neighbor, now known as the Old Post Office Pavilion. The building, long a landmark on Pennsylvania Avenue, suffered a major fire in 1916, resulting in its demolition a few weeks later.[1] A new building was erected on the site to replace the charred ruins.

Ten years later, in 1926, the federal government began negotiations to acquire certain properties along Pennsylvania Avenue for the construction of federal office buildings (the Federal Triangle). At that time, the Southern Railway Company office housed 2,200 employees with an annual payroll of over $4,000,000. With the prospect of having to move its offices from where it had been headquartered for 40 years, the Southern Railway Company, already at the cusp of decentralizing the company, considered the option of leaving Washington altogether. In December 1926, Southern Railway President Fairfax Harrison succinctly noted:

> "No decision has been reached as to where our operating headquarters are to be in the future. Such a decision cannot be made until we know certainly that we must move from the location where we have been established for 40 years. If and when Congress shall authorize the expropriation of our Washington office building, our

[1] James Goode, *Capital Losses.* Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1981, p. 383.

decision as to the future will be made promptly, and that decision will be solely on the merits of the company's own problem of efficient administration."[2]

Concerned about the loss of a major employer in the city, local trade associations and business leaders began lobbying the Southern Railway Company to keep its headquarters in the city.[3] According to the local press, the head of the Chamber of Commerce, the president of the Board of Trade and the president of the Merchants and Manufacturers Association held a conference with the company emphasizing its importance to the city in an effort to convince it to retain its headquarters in Washington. At the same time, of course, other cities including Atlanta, GA; Alexandria and Richmond, VA; and Charlotte, NC were also vying to attract the company to their cities. The Southern Railway Company deferred any formal commitment to this city or others until the federal government confirmed its "taking" of its building.

Over one year later, in February 1928, Congress passed legislation authorizing the appropriation of $2,680,000 for the purchase of the Southern Railway building at 13th and Pennsylvania Avenue. By March, the Company had purchased a site at 15th and K Streets for construction of its new headquarters building, effectively announcing its decision to remain in the city. However, although the Southern Railway Company kept its executive headquarters in the city, it also transferred the accounting department to Atlanta thereby reducing the company's workforce in D.C. from 2,200 employees to 1,000.[4] The Company's Atlanta offices were enlarged to accommodate this influx of new workers.

Construction of the Southern Railway Building

Through its agent Harry Wardman, The Southern Railway Company obtained the site at 15th and K Streets at McPherson Square for $1,600,000 having failed to acquire another site at 13th and I Streets, NW. At the time of purchase, the site consisted of a series of eleven lots between the University Club (United Mine Workers Building) on 15th Street and the Peyser Building (Security Savings and Commercial Bank) on K Street, improved with three-and four-story residential and commercial buildings. The Southern Railway Company lost little time in having the site re-zoned from its 90-foot height limit to that of 110 feet.[5] As constructed, the Southern Railway Building rose to 130 feet high, with a setback at the 110-foot height limit, as allowed by zoning regulations.

In July 1928, demolition crews began clearing the site of its predecessor buildings (many of the displaced businesses moved across the street to the Investment Building and to other neighboring office buildings) in preparation for construction of the present building on the site. Designed by

[2] "Southern is Undecided Over its Future Home," *The Washington Post*, December 14, 1926, p. 8.
[3] "Southern Railway Parley Tomorrow, Business Leaders Arrange Conference on Offices with Harrison," *The Washington Post*, December 16, 1926, p. 16.
[4] "Southern Obtains New Building Site for Offices Here," *The Washington Post*, March 7, 1928, p. 18.
[5] "Railroad Structure Will be 110 Feet High: Zoning Commission Changes 90-Foot Regulation for K Street Corner," *The Washington Post*, March 29, 1928. See also, "Plans for New Railway Building Being Drawn," *The Washington Post*, April 1, 1928, p. R1.

Waddy Butler Wood in the architect's personal expression of a Classical Revival style with emerging Modern features, the Southern Railway Building began construction in December 1928 with an official cornerstone laying ceremony with Masonic rituals. Grand Master James T. Gibbs of the Grand Lodge of the District of Columbia officiated and according to newspaper accounts of the time, used the same trowel and gavel that George Washington used in laying the cornerstone of the U.S. Capitol. Within the cornerstone, the Southern Railway Company placed a copper box, filled with a variety of historic artifacts relevant to the history of the railway company and the country, including a printed list of the names of approximately 10,000 Masons in the employ of the Southern Railway Company.[6] Based upon drawings of the building, local accounts claimed that "when completed the new building will rank, if not exceed in attractiveness of design other buildings abutting or adjacent to McPherson Square."[7]

Transformation of McPherson Square from Residential to Office Buildings

Before the Civil War, the neighborhood around McPherson Square was largely a mixed-race, working class residential area. Following the Civil War, however, as Washington began to grow beyond its small downtown footprint, the tenor of McPherson Square changed along with the city's downtown. The area around F Street was transformed into a bustling commercial and business district, pushing the city's historically residential area further out. The blocks close to the White House, especially around the city's squares—Lafayette, McPherson and Franklin Squares—became prime locations for Washington's leading businessmen and political figures. These early leaders built grand mansions and town houses close to, but fashionably removed from the city's downtown. Luxury hotels were interspersed among the residences, offering businessmen and politicians the opportunity to live there for part of the year, and when in residence, entertain on a grand and lavish scale without having the expense and burden of a second home.[8] Wormley's, a black-run hotel that operated from 1870 to 1895, stood at the southwest corner of 15th and H Streets, while the Shoreham, built in 1887 stood across H Street on the northwest corner. Welcker's Hotel was located across from Wormley's, while the Arlington Hotel, built in 1868 stood further away on Vermont Avenue between H and I Streets.

At McPherson Square, Hamilton Fish (Grant's Secretary of State) occupied a house on the south end of the park. In 1875, real estate developer Archibald Lowery erected an opulent Second Empire-style mansion at the north end of the square with its principal entrance facing Vermont Avenue.[9] Over the next two decades, the prestige of the square continued to grow. In 1884, Michigan Senator Thomas Palmer built a grand Romanesque Revival-style residence adjoining the Lowery House and moved in, thereby adding to the already distinguished list of occupants on the square (Mrs. Phoebe Hearst and the Cornelius Vanderbilt family both lived in the Lowery House at different times). In 1907, millionaire John McLean and his wife who had been living in the 1860 Hoover-Fish House, hired architect John Russell Pope to design a block-long

[6] "Southern to Lay Its Cornerstone," *The Washington Post*, December 20, 1928, p. 20. For a list of the artifacts included within the cornerstone, see "Southern Railroad Corner Stone Laid," *The Washington Post*, December 21, 1928, p. 20.
[7] "Southern Railway Site Being Cleared," *The Washington Post*, July 15, 1928, p. R1.
[8] "900 Fifteenth Street: A History and Evaluation," EHT Traceries, March 22, 1999, (DC HPO Vertical Files), p. 26.
[9] James Good, *Capital Losses*, p.100.

Renaissance-inspired palace that incorporated the walls of the older house into the new construction. The McLean House featured ornate and excessive interiors designed for lavish entertaining and was the epitome of the late 19th century residence of the city's socially and financially elite.

By the first decade of the 20th century, as new banks, brokerage houses, real estate offices and investment groups sought to locate themselves within the city's financial district, the residential buildings fronting McPherson Square became prime candidates for replacement. This physical displacement began in 1912 with the construction of the University Club.[10] Established to cater to downtown businessmen, the University Club was constructed on the west side of McPherson Square, replacing several residential row houses on the site and converting two others for club use. Five years later, in 1917, the Davidson Building was constructed across the square, becoming the first major office building to front on McPherson Square. In 1919, the Liberty Savings Bank at the southwest corner of 15th and I Streets built its bank building on the site of the "old John Chamberlin's," a grand Second Empire-style residence and local gathering place.

The nine-story Edmonds Building at 913 15th Street, completed in 1923 and rising above its neighbors, was seen as a catalyst for more intensive development.[11] Over the next five years, the trend continued intensively, and McPherson Square was transformed. The local press focused much attention on this change, often lamenting the loss of the "old" residences, but also recognizing the "march of progress." While a similar trend of residential-to-office building affected other downtown areas, McPherson Square was more specifically considered "the center of investment houses and real estate organizations" and the northern edge of the city's financial district.[12] As highlighted in a 1922 article, the financial district had reached K Street:

> "Washington is rapidly becoming a financial center, and Fifteenth Street is its "financial row." From the Treasury to K Street, investment bankers and brokers have spread and multiplied. They have occupied storerooms and office space in side streets, constructed new buildings and have turned historic residential sites into banking rooms. Never before has there been such an influx of bond houses and brokerage firms as there has been in the past years…"[13]

By 1929, with completion of the Southern Railway Building and just before the stock market crash, McPherson Square was surrounded by office buildings. On the east side of the square, between the newly built Davidson and Edmonds buildings, the B.F. Saul Company inserted a pair of high rises, including its principal office—the B.F. Saul Building—and the adjacent

[10] Many of the square's large residences had already been converted to office use by then. For instance, in 1899, the Justice Department moved its headquarters from Pennsylvania Avenue into the Lowery House, later expanding into the adjacent Palmer House.
[11] See "Large Office Building Planned," *The Evening Star*, May 21, 1921 and "New Edmonds Building Sold," *The Washington Post,* August 5, 1921, p. 33.
[12] "Buckingham Hotel, McPherson Square, Sold for $250,000: Section is Becoming Big Business Center," *The Washington Post*, March 21, 1926, p. R1
[13] "Capital Is Growing as Financial Center: Fifteenth Street to K is Becoming a Veritable Wall Street of Washington," *The Washington Post*, Jan. 1, 1922.

Colonial Mortgage Company Building, while the Insurance Building occupied the south end of the block. On the west side of the square, the once-dominant University Club was joined by the newly completed Southern Railway Building. On the north end of the square the Investment building, the H.L Rust Building, the Department of Justice building, and around the corner on Vermont Avenue, the Denrike Building filled out the northern edge of the square. At the northwest corner of 15th and K Streets, the Lowery House (occupied since 1899 by the Justice Department) managed to survive the wrecking ball, but in keeping with the nature of business on the street, was taken over in 1921 by William H. Saunders, & Co., a prominent realty company.[14]

The eleven-story Southern Railway Building remains a dominant physical presence on McPherson Square and is architecturally one of the most significant office buildings in downtown, DC. The building, constructed in one year, opened to the public in August 1929. The next day, a large photograph hailing the building appeared in the *Washington Post*. Perhaps recalling the luxurious private railroad cars of the past, the executive offices of the company, housed in the 10th and 11th floors of the buildings, were serviced by a private elevator in a separate lobby alcove.

The End of the Railroad Era

In 1953, the Southern Railway Company became the first railroad company to pull all of its trains by diesel engines, thereby marking the end of the steam engine era. Sensitive to the historical significance of the event and the steam engine, the Southern Railway Company then donated to the Smithsonian Institution its locomotive 1401—one of its most famous heavy Pacific Class engines. This "thoroughbred" so named by enthusiasts due to its ability to cruise easily at 80 miles per hour pulling as many as 14 cars, had logged two million miles during 25 years of service from 1926 to 1951. Engine 1401, after being restored and painted green and gold based on the company's original color scheme, was, in 1961, brought through the streets of D.C. to its new home in the Smithsonian's Science and Technology building. Since then, the steam engine has become the most viewed engine in the country, keeping alive the romance of the rails in the Era of Steam.[15]

In 1983, the Southern Railway Company merged with the Norfolk & Western whose headquarters were in Norfolk, Virginia. The Southern Railway Building on McPherson Square was vacated. It was renovated in 1988, including a mechanical retrofit, and again in 1995. The Southern Railway Office Building presently serves as a private office building with a number of tenants.

Waddy Butler Wood: Architect of the Southern Railway Building

Waddy Butler Wood (1869-1944) was a talented local architect who practiced architecture in the city for 48 years, from 1892 to 1940, during a period of great development in the city. His talent,

[14] See "Business District Invading Former Residential Section," *The Washington Post*, 12/17/1921, p. 13/14 and "Real Estate Firm Goes to K Street," *The Washington Post*, June 5, 1921, p. 45.
[15] See an earlier, unprocessed, National Register Nomination for the "Southern Railway Executive Office Building" dated May 1995 (Vertical Files, DC Historic Preservation Office).

enthusiasm, and family background served him well and he became a much sought after architect. Wood grew up in Ivy, Virginia, and studied engineering at the Virginia Polytechnic Institute for two years. He left school at the age of 18 to join a C&O Railroad Engineer Corps survey. He moved to Washington in 1891, determined to fulfill his dream of becoming an architect. He was hired as a draftsman, but through self-education and determination, Wood began his own practice in 1892. His early projects included modest residences in northeast Washington. His first major commission came in 1895, when he was retained by the Capitol Traction Company to design the company's new car barn on M Street in Georgetown. A year later Wood designed the East Capitol Street Car Barn. Soon, Wood's charisma and upper class status allowed him access into Washington society and he was soon designing houses for some of the city's most distinguished residents.

In 1902, Wood formed a partnership with Edward Donn, Jr. and William I. Deming. The popularity of the firm grew with Wood serving as the principal designer. The firm was known for its outstanding and imaginative designs. In 1912, the partnership was amicably dissolved. As an independent architect, Wood continued to capture prestigious commissions. He focused his attention on commercial and government work, undertaking residential work only for mansions of Washington's elite. During this period, Wood designed buildings for large corporations such as the Potomac and Electric Power Company (999 E Street, NW), the Union Trust Company (738-740 15th Street), the Masonic Temple (801 13th Street, NW), the Southern Railway Company (1500 K Street), the Commercial National Bank (1405 G Street, NW) and the Department of the Interior.

His commissions for private interests and large residences included the remodeling of the Chevy Chase Club and the old Holton Arms School, several houses in Chevy Chase, the residence of Henry Fairbanks (later remodeled for Woodrow Wilson), the estate of Dr. Cary Grayson and his own house, Leeton Forest both in Fauquier County, Virginia.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

"Business Acts to Keep Southern Offices Here," The Washington Post, December 15, 1926.

Corkill, Steve. National Register Nomination Form (draft), Southern Railway Office Building, 1995.

"Fairfax Harrison, Ex-President of Southern Railroad Is Dead," The Washington Post, February 3, 1938, p. XI.

"Fund to Purchase Southern Railway Building Provided," The Washington Post, February 8, 1928, p. 20.

James Goode, Capital Losses. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1981

"Plans for New Railway Building Being Drawn," The Washington Post, April 1, 1928, p. R1.

"President Urges $2,680,000 to Buy Railway Building," The Washington Post, January 31, 1928.

"Public Views Railway Offices," The Washington Post, August 27, 1929, p. 20.

"Railroad Structure Will be 110 Feet High," The Washington Post, March 29, 1928, p. 20.

"Southern is Undecided Over its Future Home, The Washington Post, December 14, 1926, p. 8.

"Southern Awaits Loss of Building to Consider Move," The Washington Post, December 18, 1926.

"Southern Railway Decides to Retain Head Offices Here," The Washington Post, December 24, 1927, p. 1.

"Southern Obtains New Building Site for Offices Here, The Washington Post, March 7, 1928, p. 18.

"Southern Railway Site Being Cleared," The Washington Post, July 15, 1928, p. R1.

"Southern to Lay It[s] Corner Stone: Railway will Have Rites by Masons at 15th and K Streets Site Today," The Washington Post, December 20, 1928, p. 20.

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 # _____
____ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:
_X___ State Historic Preservation Office
____ Other State agency
____ Federal agency
____ Local government
____ University
____ Other
Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property _.75 acres (32,673 square feet)_____

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates
Datum if other than WGS84:_____
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)
1. Latitude: 38.902069 Longitude: -77.035057

2. Latitude: Longitude:

3. Latitude: Longitude:

4. Latitude: Longitude:

Or
UTM References
Datum (indicated on USGS map):

☐ NAD 1927 or ☐ NAD 1983

1. Zone: Easting: Northing:

2. Zone: Easting: Northing:

3. Zone: Easting: Northing:

4. Zone: Easting : Northing:

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The Southern Railway Building at 1500 K Street, NW occupies Lot 832 of Square 199.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The Southern Railway Building has been associated with this lot since the building's completion in 1929.

---

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: _Eli Pousson and Kim Williams_____
organization: _D.C. Historic Preservation Office_____
street & number: _1000 4th Street SW_____
city or town: Washington, D.C._____ state: _____ zip code:_20024___
e-mail_kim.williams@dc.gov_____
telephone:_202 442-8840_____
date:_November 2015_____

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.

- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property: Southern Railway Building

City or Vicinity: Washington, D.C.

County: State:

Photographer: Kim Williams

Date Photographed:

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

View looking southwest showing east (15th Street) elevation and north (K Street) elevation
1 of 10

View looking west from McPherson Square showing east elevation and south side wall where exposed
2 of 10

Detail view looking southwest at east elevation
3 of 10

Detail view looking west showing two of three entrance doors
4 of 10

Detail of southernmost entrance door on east elevation
5 of 10

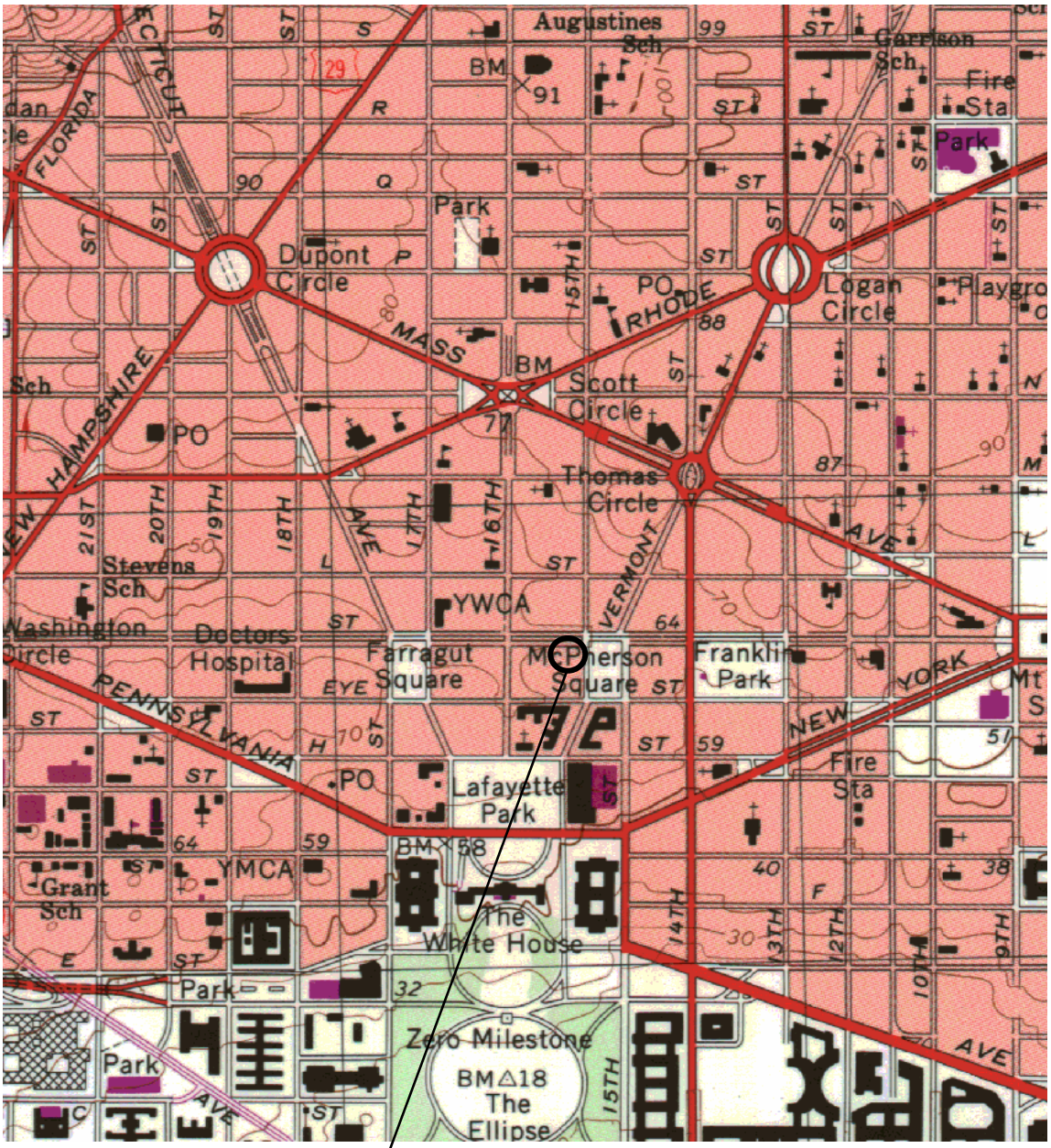
Detail of window bay on east elevation
6 of 10

View looking south at north elevation (K Street) showing alterations to window bays to create new openings into office building
7 of 10

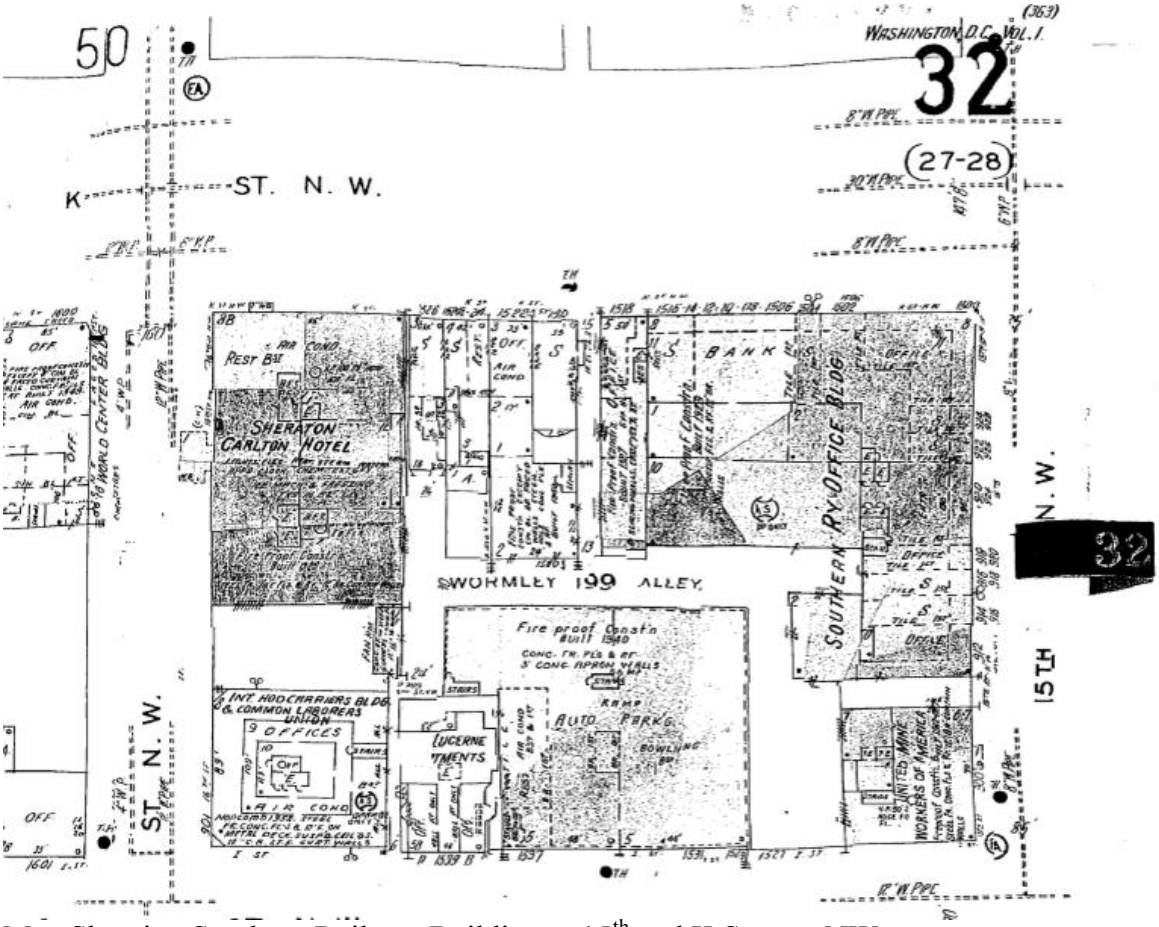
View showing historic window surround moved from exterior wall to entry vestibule wall at new entrance on K Street
8 of 10

View looking south of interior entrance lobby
9 of 10

View looking north at end wall detail of interior entrance lobby
10 of 10



Southern Railway Building
1500 K Street NW
Latitude: 38.902069 Longitude: -77.035057
(USGS Washington West Quad Map)



Map Showing Southern Railway Building at 15th and K Streets, NW
(Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1959)

Site Map of Southern Railway Building showing National Register Boundaries of property

Key to Photographs

1929 Photograph of Southern Railway
(*D.C. Historic Preservation Office*)

Interior View of Lobby of Southern Railway Building, no date
(*D.C. Historic Preservation Office*)

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.460 et seq.).
Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including 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 Office of Planning and Performance Management. U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

VERMONT AV NW
1000

metro

15 ST NW
900
K ST NW
1400

SOUTHERN RAILWAY
1500
K STREET
Drinker
Biddle
&Reath
LLP
TOW AWAY
NO PARKING
ENTRANCE
7AM-10PM
MONDAY-SATURDAY
IF TOWED 221-5000
SOUTHERN RAILWAY

SOUTHERN RAILWAY

1500 K STREET
1500
K STREET
1500
K STREET
ASTRO

ACCESSIBLE
15TH STREET
ENTRANCE
ACCESSIBLE
15TH STREET
ENTRANCE
PLEASE USE
THE 15th STREET
EXIT

DIRECTORY