



Headquarters Building (left), Annex and Aztec Garden (right)

Name of Property: Pan American Union Headquarters
City, State: Washington, DC
Period of Significance: 1908–1967
NHL Criteria: 1, 4
NHL Theme:

- III. Expressing Cultural Values
 - 5. architecture, landscape architecture, and urban design
- VIII. Changing Role of the United States in the World Community
 - 1. international relations
 - 2. expansionism and imperialism
- XVI. Architecture
- M. Period Revival
 - 7. Renaissance

Previous Recognition: 1969 National Register of Historic Places
National Historic Context: *American Latinos and the Making of the United States* (2013)

NHL Significance:

- The Pan American Union Headquarters served as the headquarters of a hemisphere-wide regional organization of American states that originated in 1890 and became the hemisphere’s foremost center of diplomacy, which continues to this day. The building outstandingly represents the institutional expression of Pan Americanism; a late nineteenth-century US-led movement directed primarily at improved and stabilized economic ties in the Americas. Treaties and laws crafted within the organization set standards for the conduct of international relations between the United States and Latin America toward peace and security, conflict resolution, nonintervention, and social and economic reform. No other building in America more perfectly embodies the aspirations of the Pan American movement, the development of an inter-American system, and the progression of international relations among the American nations.
- The Pan American Union Building has exceptional value as one of the most significant Beaux-Arts buildings in the United States for its important association with the nationally significant career of noted architect Paul Philippe Cret (1876–1945) and for its illustration of Pan American architecture. Designed by Cret in association with architect Albert Kelsey, the building is recognized as a pivotal design within Cret’s body of work and was singled out by the American Institute of Architects as the building that best characterizes Cret’s Beaux-Arts classical design work. The design is unparalleled in its synthesis of Beaux-Arts architecture



and abundant allegories in the form of North and South American themes and motifs—particularly Aztec, Incan, and Mayan iconography—that express the organization’s goals of promoting trade, unity, and political cooperation between the Americas.

Integrity:

- The Pan American Union Headquarters retains the vast majority of the essential physical features that enable the property to convey its significance as the home, headquarters, and meeting place of an intergovernmental Pan American organization. Limited alterations to the buildings bear little impact on the property’s high degree of integrity.
- The property also retains the essential physical features that enable it to convey Paul Cret’s architectural philosophy that a civic building design should be commensurate with its monumentality, convey its function, and possess an intimacy that invites the participation of its users.
- The plot plan created by Cret and Kelsey is evidenced in the transition between the individual buildings created by the pool and terrace that are axially linked to the interior spaces and the greater landscape.
- Post-period of significance statuary and metal sculpture interspersed on the grounds do not detract from the property’s immediate setting.

Owner of Property: The Organization of American States, a public international organization.

Acreage of Property: Five acres

Origins of Nomination: The Organization of American States contacted NPS with an interest in landmark designation to promote the organization’s prolific history and the building’s architecture. In coordination with the Washington Office, the National Capital Regional Office subsequently prepared the nomination as part of the *American Latinos and the Making of the United States* theme study.

Potential for Positive Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program:

- Designation as an NHL would recognize an exceptional property associated with US policy in the Americas.
- Designation would highlight the collaboration between the NPS and an international institution to showcase an important property, the value of the site, and its continued use as the oldest regional organization in the world.
- Designation would recognize an outstanding illustration of Beaux-Arts/Pan American architecture and the work of a nationally recognized architect at the height of the Beaux-Arts movement.

Potential for Negative Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program: None is known.

Public Comments Favoring Designation (received as of September 9, 2020):

National Historic Landmarks Committee Comments:

- Mention other contributors to the building, such as sculptors, muralists, etc.



- Improve the discussion on Cret's other projects and his design ideals for this building.
- Add to the information about the various diplomatic policies the United States developed to deal with international issues in the Western Hemisphere.
- Identified issues regarding the discussion of certain design elements and the history of the property, which will be addressed in the revised nomination.

National Historic Landmarks Committee Recommendation:

The Committee recommends that the National Park System Advisory Board recommend to the Secretary of the Interior the designation of the Pan American Union Headquarters in Washington, DC, as a National Historic Landmark, with any additions and corrections as noted by the Committee being made prior to the nomination being forwarded to the Secretary of the Interior for action.

Advisory Board Recommendation:

The National Park System Advisory Board finds that the Pan American Union Headquarters in Washington, DC, meets the criteria for designation as a National Historic Landmark and recommends that the Secretary of the Interior designate this property as a National Historic Landmark once any additions and corrections suggested by the National Historic Landmark Committee of the Advisory Board have been addressed.