

## **PRESERVATION ALERT: WILL B.F. SAUL GUT THE HISTORIC KENNEDY-WARREN APARTMENTS?**

A January 28, 2008, *Washington Post* article revealed that the B.F. Saul Company plans extensive renovations to the historic Kennedy-Warren apartments affecting both the hallways and apartment interiors in the original building. Although the *Post* article dealt primarily with a rent strike waged by the Kennedy-Warren Residents Association, it also mentioned specific architectural elements that might be lost as a result of the planned renovations.

This article details what ADSW has learned about the planned renovations and the initial steps it has taken to help ensure that the building will not be gutted. Dana Ott, Ira Raskin, Linda Lyons, and Jim Linz collaborated on preparation of this article. All photographs copyright 2008 by Matt Crosby.

### **About the Kennedy-Warren**



Designed in the Aztec Deco style by architect Joseph Younger, the Kennedy -Warren opened with 317 apartments in 1931. The original owners and builders, Edgar S. Kennedy and Monroe Warren, Sr., filed for bankruptcy soon after the building was completed and B.F. Saul obtained the rights to the building. A rear wing was added in 1935 under the direction of supervising architect Alexander H. Sonnemann.

Although a second wing was included in Younger's original plans, and some

foundation footings were prepared in the 1930s, it was not until 1996 that the B.F. Saul Company pursued plans to complete the Kennedy-Warren as originally envisioned by Joseph Younger.

In describing the original Kennedy-Warren building, a November 1996 *Trans-Lux* article noted that "...the exterior of reveals a wealth of Art Deco details from the top of the pyramidal tower roof on down, much of it with an Aztec flavor." The article goes on to praise the wealth of interior details, noting "...inside, aluminum, sometimes combined with bronze, is used extensively in the fine balustrades, elevator doors and even apartment door peepholes and knockers."



Also noted was that the Kennedy-Warren featured one of the earliest examples of a forced air cooling system. The system, still in use, collects cool air from the lower Rock Creek Park side of the building and circulates it throughout the building. As part of the forced air system, an air vent is located above the entry door to each apartment.



*(Continued on page 3)*

*(Continued from page 2)*

Another novel feature of the Kennedy-Warren apartments is the milk shafts. Each unit in the historic wings has a small compartment between the hallway and the kitchen with doors on both the interior and exterior. The milkman would open the door in the hallway to leave milk and other dairy products. The tenant could retrieve the goods by opening the door in the kitchen.



Former tenants of the historic Kennedy-Warren apartments include Lyndon and Lady Bird Johnson, former White House aide and Watergate figure H.R. Haldeman, author P.J. O’Roarke, and the wives of 29 generals serving overseas during World War II.

As many of you may remember, ADSW aided B.F. Saul’s efforts to win approval for construction of the new south wing in 1996, writing a letter of support to the D.C. Historic Preservation Review Board. The new South Wing was completed and opened in 2002.

B.F. Saul did a careful replication of the exterior of the original building in the new construction and a meticulous restoration of the main lobby. However, the interior elements of the Art Deco style seen in the corridors and apartments of the original building were not carried forward in the design of the interior corridors and apartments in the new south wing. For example, even the door knockers in the south wing are not in the Art Deco style.

*(Continued on page 4)*

*(Continued from page 3)*

## **Board Members Visit the Kennedy-Warren**

A historic building is ultimately the sum of its parts, both interior and exterior. ADSW is concerned that the renovation plans noted in the *Post* article could result in the transformation of the remainder of the interior, including the hallways, individual apartments, and spectacular Art Deco Ballroom into a generic contemporary style that would contrast with the period restoration of the main lobby.

Several ADSW Board Members toured the building to get a better idea both of the current condition of the building and the potential effects of the planned renovations on the historic structure. Our tour both heightened our concerns about the hallways and individual apartments, and added a new area of concern—the future of the ballroom.

Subsequently, ADSW's Board of Directors decided to seek a meeting with B.F. Saul to discuss our concerns and possible solutions. The remainder of this article discusses ADSW's concerns in more detail. As of March 25, 2008, B.F. Saul had neither responded to our request for a meeting nor provided comments on this article.

## **Apartment Interiors Could be Guttled**

Entering the individual apartments in the original building is like opening a time capsule. The units are largely unchanged from the day the Kennedy-Warren opened its doors in 1931, having the original hardwood floors, bathroom fixtures and ceramic tile, and Hoosier-style kitchen cabinets. The high ceilings, curved archways, thick plaster walls, and wide wood moldings instantly return the visitor to the ambiance of the Art Deco era.



*(Continued on page 5)*

*(Continued from page 4)*

Although some changes were made through the years, such as replacement of kitchen appliances and countertops, kitchens could be returned to their 1930s look easily and economically. For example, damaged kitchen floors could be replaced with linoleum, once again widely available and having the benefit of being a “green” product. The kitchen appliances could be replaced with newer models designed to evoke the look of the 1930s. The original countertops could be replicated.

By contrast, the *Washington Post* article on the proposed renovations indicates that apartment floor plans will be changed and that there will be “upgrades consistent with new buildings....” This suggests that the existing apartments might be gutted, with removal of existing original features, such as hardwood and ceramic flooring, plumbing fixtures, kitchen cabinets, and some, if not all, of the original plaster walls.

ADSW has requested a meeting with B.F. Saul management to discuss our concerns and explore options for modernizing the building without destroying important parts of its history. Among the issues ADSW wants to discuss are:

- What alternatives were considered before the current plan was adopted?
- Will all apartments in the original building be renovated?
- How extensive are the planned renovations?
- What efforts are being made to retain the ambiance of the original apartments?

### **Architectural Details in Corridors May Be Lost**

The *Washington Post* article suggested that many architectural elements in the corridors, such as the Art Deco door knockers, milk shafts, and forced-air vents, may be removed as part of the renovations.

Following on from the concerns listed above, the ADSW wants to determine what efforts B.F. Saul will make to retain the architectural integrity of the corridors. For example:

- Will the Art Deco door knockers be retained?
- Will the Art Deco designs in the ceiling arches be retained?
- What will happen to such elements as the milk shafts and the forced-air vents over the doorways?

*(Continued on page 6)*

- Will the hallways be shortened or narrowed?
- Will the original doors be retained?
- Will the current mismatched lighting fixtures be replaced with Art Deco -style fixtures of uniform design that replicate the original fixtures?



### **Condition/Future of Ballroom an Added Concern**

One area of continued concern that was not discussed in the *Post* article is the future of the Ballroom. As architectural historian James Goode points out in his book, *Best Addresses*, the Kennedy-Warren was one of the few apartment buildings constructed in the Washington, D.C. area to have a ballroom. Many of our members have fond memories of Art Deco Balls held at the Kennedy-Warren more than two decades ago and the periodic performances by Doc Scantlin and His Imperial Palms Orchestra in the 1980s.



ADSW is particularly concerned about the possible effects of the planned renovations on the Ballroom. The Ballroom has not been used for many years and is in disrepair, suffering from years of neglect. At least two areas of serious decay are clearly visible in the ceiling. Specific issues related to the Ballroom include:

- How does the Ballroom fit into the overall renovation plans?
- What steps will B.F. Saul take to repair existing damage and ensure that further damage will not result from renovations to the floors above?
- Will the Ballroom be restored, as James Goode indicated in the latest edition of *Best Addresses*, or converted to some other use?

The Ballroom, if restored and put back into use, could once again serve as an asset to residents, while simultaneously helping to attract new residents. For example, ADSW's bi-monthly film restoration series at the Charles Sumner School could be moved to the Ballroom. This would provide a benefit to Kennedy-Warren residents and help market the Kennedy-Warren to other attendees.

Throughout all of its 25 years, ADSW has actively promoted the Kennedy-Warren as one of the Washington area's architectural gems. For years, the Kennedy-Warren has been a popular stop on our annual tour of Washington's Art Deco architecture. In 2005, when ADSW hosted Decophiles from around the world before the Eighth World Congress on Art Deco, two busloads of international visitors stared in amazement at the incredible restoration of the lobby. Pictures of its magnificent restoration were shared with Decophiles around the world. But while our international visitors recognized the grandeur that once was in the ballroom, they were saddened by its decay and disuse. Wouldn't it be nice to report to Decophiles around the world that B.F. Saul will restore the Ballroom with the same careful attention given to the lobby.

### **Demand for "Original" Apartments Exists**

Although real estate agents and home improvement television programs frequently urge sellers to "update" their kitchens and baths to facilitate a sale, many Decophiles are purists, preferring to live in homes and apartments that have not been altered over time. For these individuals, finding a house or apartment with its original kitchen cabinets, tile bathrooms, and plumbing fixtures is more important than central air-conditioning, dishwashers, or granite countertops. The historic wing of the Kennedy-Warren offers such Decophiles a rare opportunity to live in an unspoiled building, and ADSW believes that authentic apartments in the Kennedy-Warren would find a market among them.

## **Conclusions**

In ADSW's opinion, the planned renovations could essentially turn what has been for almost 80 years Washington's most famous apartment building, into yet another façade project, stripped of almost all interior architectural elements beyond the lobby. We are hopeful that the B.F. Saul Company can be convinced to ensure that the historic parts of the Kennedy-Warren remain one of Washington's "Best Addresses."

ADSW encourages its members and friends to write to the B.F. Saul Company to voice your concerns about the planned renovations. Letters should be addressed to

B. Francis Saul II  
B. F. Saul Company  
7501 Wisconsin Avenue Suite 1500  
Bethesda, MD 20814-6522

You can also contact B.F. Saul by email at <http://www.bfsaul.com/contact.html>

We also encourage you to become actively involved in ADSW's efforts by contacting us at [preservation@adsw.org](mailto:preservation@adsw.org).

## **Update on Other Preservation Issues**

**Linda Lyons, Education Chair and Acting Preservation Chair**

### **Waffle Shop, 10th Street NW**

An agreement was drafted and signed by the interested parties to have the Waffle Shop dismantled and re-erected at a site on 7th Street across from the new Convention Center. In this agreement the developer commits to undertaking this expensive and demanding procedure while not objecting to the Waffle Shop's receiving D.C. landmark status. This is an unusual solution to this kind of problem, but it appears to be the best that can be arranged. The Waffle Shop facade and its intact interior are too good to lose.

A D.C. Historic Preservation Review Board hearing on the landmark application is scheduled for March 27. The HPBR's staff report proposes landmark status for both the exterior and interior of the shop. We expect no opposition.



## **Falkland Apartment Complex, Silver Spring**

The historic Falkland apartment complex, located at the intersection of 16th Street and East-West Highway and a pioneering FHA-financed garden apartment complex, is threatened with partial demolition for the sake of “smart growth.” This nationally significant landmark property from the New Deal Era should have been recognized by Montgomery County long ago. Landmark designation for the entire Falkland complex (a small portion was previously landmarked) was recommended by the Historic Preservation Commission and approved by the Planning Board on December 6.

But another round of approvals was needed. The HPC voted again on February 27, and the Planning Board will evaluate again on May 1. After an anticipated positive vote, the matter will be sent to the Montgomery County Council for final approval.

## **Perpetual Bank Building, Silver Spring**

This early Modernist structure has an important history in Silver Spring and is associated with an architect ADSW knows well, Robert O. Scholz, who designed several Washington Art Deco apartment buildings, including the General Scott on Scott Circle. In addition, much of the building’s design was overseen by the nationally known Bank Building and Equipment Corporation of America which also makes this building very significant. Landmark designation has been recommended by the HPC.

The Planning Board considered this building twice, on January 10 and March 20, and finally voted not to grant landmark status. But since the HPC has recommended designation, the matter will be sent to the Montgomery County Council with reports from both bodies.

## **Lee Shopping Center, Arlington**

The original design of this classic mid-century neighborhood shopping center was prepared by renowned Washington architect Mirhan Mesrobian (Dupont Circle Building, Sedgwick Gardens apartment building) in 1941, but after the war it was modified by another regionally important architect, Allen Joyner Dickey. Dickey maintained the footprint of the building as designed by Mesrobian with its parking plaza, allee, and glazed corner building, but reconceived the facades in the Moderne style. The shopping center, which is in very good condition, was constructed of high quality materials, such as limestone and aluminum, and includes many fine Moderne decorative elements.

Unfortunately, on January 26, the Arlington County Board voted not to protect the shopping center from demolition and replacement.