

A CENTURY OF WASHINGTON'S DISTINGUISHED APARTMENT HOUSES



# BEST ADDRESSES



JAMES M. GOODE



## PRESIDENTIAL



1026 16th Street, N.W.; southwest corner of 16th and L streets

ARCHITECT: Appleton P. Clark, Jr., 1922

ORIGINAL APARTMENTS: 46 (16 bachelors; 16 one-bedrooms; 14 two-bedrooms)

STATUS: opened as rental in 1923; converted to  
co-op in 1959

Within weeks of the District of Columbia Zoning Board's vote in 1922 to allow apartment houses on 16th Street, N.W., south of Scott Circle, two were begun—the Presidential and the Jefferson. Both were of classical design, faced with limestone. They remained fashionable addresses until the dignified mansions that surrounded them were replaced by office buildings during the 1940s and 1950s. The Jefferson was converted to a hotel in the 1950s and elegantly renovated in the early 1980s. Of the numerous apartment houses that once graced the old downtown neighborhoods of Lafayette, Franklin, and Farragut squares, only the Presidential still stands. The last hold-out against commercialization in this neighborhood, the Presidential is maintained today in remarkably good condition as a co-op. Although neither design included a public dining room, both the Presidential and the Jefferson offered a high degree of service, with doormen, twenty-four-hour elevator operators, and maid service.

The Presidential was built as an investment by a wealthy widow, Mrs. Clara R. Dennis, for \$350,000. The principal 16th Street front facade was designed with octagonal eight-story bays on each side. The entrance is emphasized by an elaborate Adamesque porch with two pairs of fluted Corinthian marble columns resting on plinths and crowned by an elaborate cornice and balcony. An



Front facade of the Presidential.

octagonal oriel window extending between the fourth and seventh floors above was designed to match the corner projecting bays. Of additional interest on the street fa-



The doorman stands under the imposing stone portico of the Presidential.

acades are the rusticated two-story base, the tripartite windows, the roof's marble urns (since removed), and the shallow second-floor iron window balconies.

The lobby, low-ceilinged by 1922 standards, remains in original condition. The floor is laid with black and white marble squares, while the walls are paneled and embellished with a pair of fluted Doric columns. The most spectacular feature is the elaborate plaster ceiling in the Adamesque design, typical of those in great late eighteenth-century English country houses.

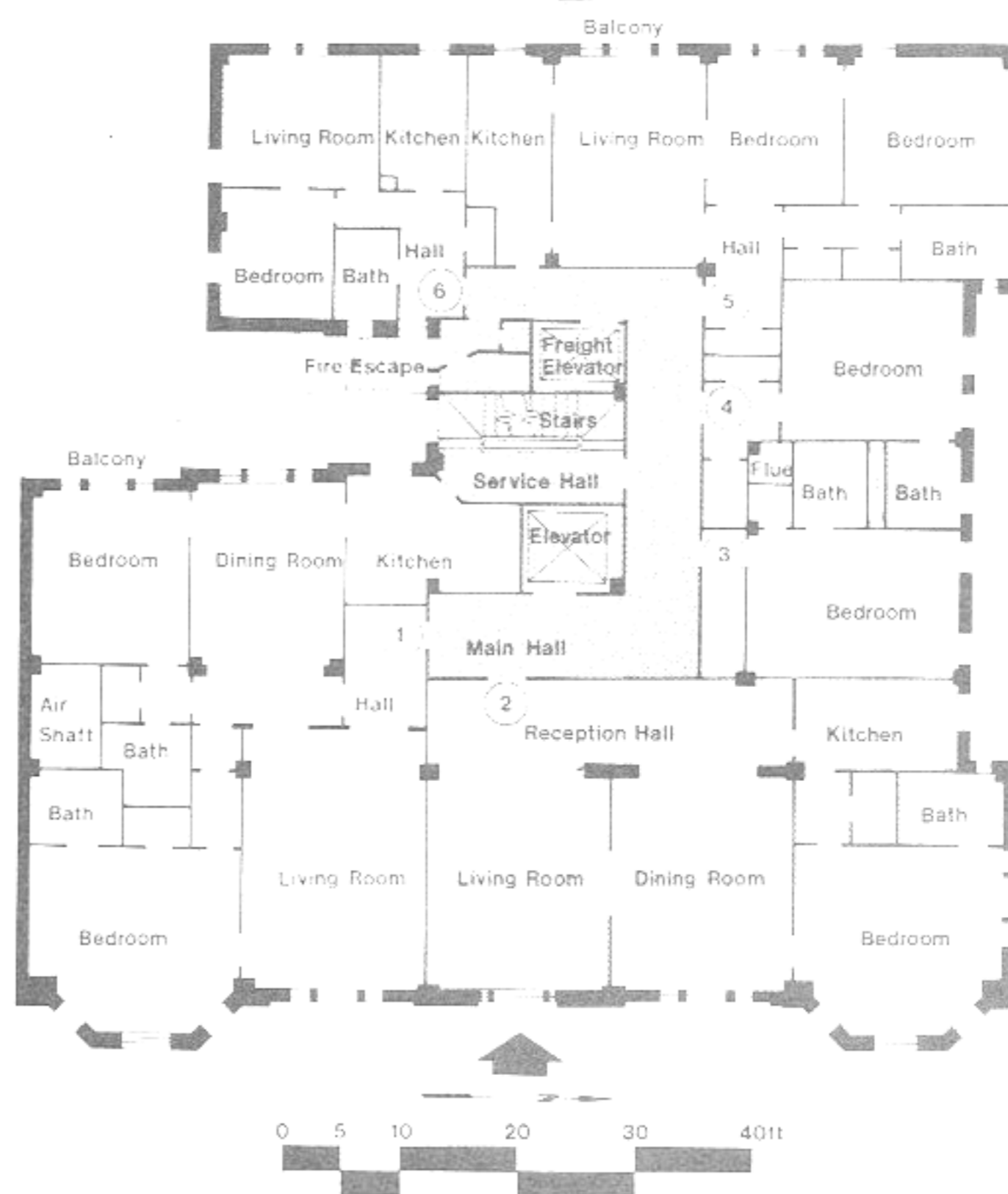
The Presidential was designed with a total of forty-six apartments—four on the first floor and six on each floor above—ranging in size from one to four rooms. On most floors two units were bachelor apartments containing one room and bathroom but no kitchen. The two tiers of the largest apartments, both facing the front, have large foyers, with columns and French doors. The Presidential was designed so that an entire floor could be converted to a single fourteen-room apartment.

Several of the long-term, forty-year residents explained the reason for naming the apartment house the Presidential. In a grandiose scheme, the original owner, Clara Dennis, wanted most of President Harding's cabinet members and their families to live here, one to a floor. Even though the Presidential was only three blocks from the White House, the plan never worked. It is not known if any one floor was ever converted to a single apartment,

although it was so advertised when the Presidential opened in 1923.

Because of its location, as well as its service features, the Presidential was one of the most desirable Washington apartment houses in 1929. A random sample of two-bedroom apartments advertised in the [Washington] *Evening Star* that year shows that monthly rents ranged from \$100 at the Argonne and the Chastleton to \$200 at the Presidential and Meridian Mansions—then among the most costly in the city.

In 1959 the Edmund J. Flynn Company converted the Presidential to a cooperative apartment house. The four first-floor apartments were sold separately as medical office suites. Because of its location, the land value of the Presidential far exceeds the value of the building today.



The typical floor plan of the Presidential contains six units, including two bachelor apartments without kitchens.





The lobby of the Presidential is one of five in Washington designed in the Adamesque style.



## ARCHITECT APPLETON P. CLARK, JR.

The Presidential is an excellent example of the design skill of architect Appleton P. Clark, Jr. (1865–1955), who, through his sense of scale, proportion, and context, skillfully blended this high-rise into the original residential neighborhood. His other apartment houses on 16th Street, N.W., include No. 1424 (now an office building), No. 2001 (now the Brittany), and the Roosevelt Hotel. Among Clark's twenty-seven local apartment houses are two early examples in Georgetown, 3014 and 3020 Dent Place, N.W., designed in 1902–03. A native of Washington, D.C., Clark was trained in architecture in the office of A. B. Mullett for a three-year period after he graduated from high school in 1883. At the age of twenty, Clark opened his own architectural office, where he designed a wide variety of building types over the next sixty years. His prominent office buildings include the Herman Building at 901 7th Street, N.W., of 1885; the Barrister

Building of 1909 at 635 F Street, N.W., now demolished; and the Homer Building at 601 13th Street, N.W., of 1914. Other notable commercial buildings that came from his drafting board included the Home Savings Bank of 1902 at 7th Street and Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., and the Washington Post Building at 1337 E Street, N.W., of 1893, both of which have been demolished. Clark's residential buildings included rowhouses such as those at 1644–1666 Park Road, N.W., and a number of mansions such as the 1911 Craftsman style house built for H. Cornell Wilson at 1609 16th Street, N.W. His institutional buildings include the Foundry Methodist Church and the Central Presbyterian Church as well as two buildings for Garfield Hospital and the Hillcrest orphanage on Nebraska Avenue, N.W. After designing two other orphanages, Clark produced a book, *Institutional Homes for Children* (1945), in which he urged the use of cottages for orphanages to create a more domestic ambiance.



All apartments in the No. 2 tier at the Presidential have a pair of fluted columns set in a wide classical arch between the living room and the foyer.