BROADMOOR

3601 Connecticut Avenue, N.W.; northeast corner of Connecticut Avenue and Porter Street

ARCHITECT: Joseph Abel, 1928

ORIGINAL APARTMENTS: 179 (mostly one-bedrooms and two-bedrooms) and a dozen hotel rooms

STATUS: opened as rental in 1929; converted to co-op in 1948

Similar to Cathedral Mansions, the Broadmoor was designed like a resort hotel surrounded by spacious grounds.
When the Broadmoor opened in October 1929, its location was considered somewhat remote from downtown Washington, for much of upper Connecticut Avenue was still undeveloped. Porter Street, only two lanes wide, wound its way down to Rock Creek Park. Dense woods surrounded the building on three sides. Built as an apartment-hotel by the Washington firm of BraLove, Ernst and McNeary at a cost of more than $2 million, the Broadmoor was named for the famous luxury resort hotel in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

This landmark building was unusual in that it occupied only 15 percent of its 5-acre site, being set well back from the intersection of Connecticut Avenue and Porter Street. Open land around luxury apartment houses was almost nonexistent before World War I when most were built downtown on expensive lots. After World War I construction of luxurious apartment houses began in outlying sections, often wooded, such as Connecticut Avenue, where land was much cheaper. Between 1932 and 1945 most new intown apartment houses were relatively small compared with most of the grand buildings of the preceding decade. It was not until just after World War II that building of luxury apartment houses resumed on large sites with spacious lawns, gardens, and wooded areas; the use of large tracts for apartments reflected good economic times.

The irregular L-shaped eight-story Broadmoor is built of rough tapestry brick. As at other stylish Washington apartment houses of the 1920s, such as Tilden Gardens a block north, many of the bricks in the facade were laid to protrude from the surface at irregular intervals. This elaborate “tapestry” brickwork, of variegated color, adds to the surface texture and contrast. During this decade architects explored ways in which to make both the masses and the silhouettes of their buildings more interesting. Their goal was domestic appearance and ambiance, and the detail on the eclectic facades during the 1920s did much to achieve this effect.

Prominent at the Broadmoor are the eclectic projecting towers and bays with carved limestone panels and window surrounds. Many of these decorative elements are heraldic, such as the cross motifs on the balconies, which relate the building to the Gothic Revival. Slightly raised cornices on many of the projecting pavilions suggest a skyscraper. A massive porte-cochère defines the principal entrance at the apex of the building, similar in scale and massing to those on several other large Washington apartment houses of the 1920s and early 1930s—Alban Tow-

Typical floor plan of the Broadmoor.
The original 1928 Tudor Revival lobby of the Broadmoor was remodeled in 1939 in the Art Deco style shown here.

ers, Sedgwick Gardens, the Westchester, and the Wardman Tower. A semicircular driveway and a herringbone brick sidewalk are defined by brick gateposts on both Connecticut Avenue and Porter Street and lead to the porte-cochère. The outer edge of the driveway is bordered by a curvilinear brick wall. The basic style of the facade might be termed modern Tudor.

The Broadmoor featured many elements associated with a full-service apartment house: the impressive two-
story lobby with a switchboard and front desk; a spacious ground-floor public dining room, in the shape of an elongated Y, originally called the Silver Grill, adjacent to the lobby; and a two-level basement garage for 118 cars. Today the residents use ninety-seven spaces, the staff two spaces, and the guests and dining room patrons, nineteen. In the 1930s part of the roof over the garage and adjacent to the public dining room was used as a terrace for cocktail parties.

A small number of hotel rooms and suites, less than 10 percent of the building, were available for public rental during the 1930s and 1940s, ranging from $3 to $6 a night. Other services included a barber shop, pastry shop, newsstand, valet and laundry service, and beauty shop; the valet shop, beauty shop, and dining room remain in operation. Maid service is also available: three maids work full-time at the Broadmoor and are booked at hourly rates through the front desk. Since 1969 the dining room has been leased to Csikos Restaurant, offering among the best Hungarian cuisine in Washington.

The Broadmoor originally contained 179 apartments and a dozen hotel rooms. Because of changes over the years, there are today 194 apartments, including 32 efficiencies, 105 one-bedrooms, 55 two-bedrooms, and 2 three-bedrooms. In addition Broadmoor residents may rent three bedrooms for the use of their guests. Most apartments originally had an open sun porch, but all of them were later enclosed with glass. Almost all bedrooms have attached baths, a rare feature in pre–World War II apartment houses. Instead of separate dining rooms, most apartments have small dining alcoves separated from the kitchens by pairs of small china cabinets—popular in Washington apartment houses during the 1920s and 1930s. Each unit also contains a small kitchen cabinet with a door opening to the public hall for daily trash removal.

Many major changes have been made inside the Broadmoor over the years. In 1938–39 both the public dining room and the lobby were renovated. The Tudor-style lobby, with open balcony, was changed to streamlined Art Deco with some Colonial Revival elements included. In 1942, when Washington had a serious housing shortage, the Broadmoor converted unused space in the public corridors on the ground floor into eighteen bedrooms and baths for women officers of the Army and Navy.

In 1949 these became hobby rooms that are now rented by the residents.

LIFE AT THE BROADMOOR

Much of the history of the Broadmoor appears in a booklet written by a committee of residents chaired by Stephen Kent in 1983:

Unfortunately, there are no written records available of the many distinguished or extraordinary people who have stayed in this building. A few individuals with long memories have been able to recall some of them. Among the families prominent in the business world of the city who made their homes here were the Hoehingers, the Mazors, and the Zlotnickis. At any time prior to conversion to cooperative status, there were a number of members of Congress in residence. The flamboyant Senator Huey Long of Louisiana moved here from the Mayflower Hotel in March 1934, and maintained his Washington residence in apart-

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The president of the board of directors at the Broadmoor, Claudius Easley, has lived there since before it was converted to a co-op in 1948.

ment No. 601 until his assassination the following year. His three bodyguards were in constant attendance wherever he was. Senator John Sparkman of Alabama and Senator Prentiss Brown of Michigan were long-time residents. Representative and Mrs. Richard Nixon of California stayed here temporarily while house-hunting (January-June 1947). In the late thirties, the coach and nearly the entire Washington Senators baseball team lived in the building for about three years during the baseball season. The bar, in the Silver Grill, is reputed to have been their principal watering hole during that time. Japanese Minister Isoda, General Suma, and Secretary of Embassy Iguchi were residents until their apartments were confiscated by the State Department and they were sent to internment at the Bedford Springs Hotel in Pennsylvania in 1941. Mr. George Meany, the labor leader, lived in apartment No. 419 for several years, and Heifetz Menuhin, a well-known concert pianist, resided in apartment No. 308 for a year or two during which time her brother, Yehudi, one of the leading violinists of the 20th century, was a frequent visitor. Throughout the war and until 1950, Archduke Otto of Hapsburg, then claimant to the Austro-Hungarian throne, lived in apartment No. 315. His younger brother, Archduke Felix, also resided here until he was drafted into the U.S. Army. Secretary of Labor and Mrs. Mitchell were resident members in apartment No. 213 from 1956 to 1960. The last living descendant of President Lincoln, Robert Todd Lincoln Bechwith, resided in apartment No. 108 in the early 1960s.

CO-OP CONVERSION

A watershed year for the Broadmoor was 1948, when the rental apartment-hotel was converted to a cooperative apartment house. The federal government’s failure to remove World War II rent controls after the war resulted in a rash of such conversions. During this inflationary period apartment house owners were not receiving adequate returns on their investments. The same conditions of inflation had prevailed immediately after World War I.

The Broadmoor was the largest and most prestigious apartment house to become a co-op up to 1948. It was also the city’s second co-op organized on a membership
basis: each owner had one vote at special and annual shareholders meetings rather than the traditional prorated votes based on the number of shares of stock owned in the co-op (computed by the size of the apartment).

The Broadmoor Cooperative Apartments, Inc., became a reality on 16 August 1948. The new corporation purchased the building and the land from the original builders and owners, the firm of Bralove, Ernst and McNerney, for $2.375 million. The cost to the members was $2.5 million, however, because they also needed to pay a commission of $125,000 to the Flynn Company. Edmund J. Flynn, the city’s oldest and leading co-op apartment house specialist at that time, organized the Broadmoor as a co-op and served as the first president of the board. In order to legally establish this co-op, Flynn was required to sell 60 percent of the apartments by 15 November 1948. Although no public announcement of the conversion was made until 21 August, during the first week 100 apartments were sold, and most of the remaining 94 units were sold by early September. Because all of the apartments were occupied, many outside purchasers had to buy from floor plans without inspecting the actual units; this was unusual, as one would normally inspect at close range an apartment before purchasing it.

The settlement and transfer of title occurred on 1 November 1948.

The reaction to the co-op conversion was varied. Some residents welcomed it, others were resigned to it, a minority were vehemently opposed. A group of thirty-six residents brought suit against the original owners and the Broadmoor Cooperative Corporation, claiming that the conversion violated the rent control law. The court decided in favor of the co-op on 9 December 1948 and allowed the board to evict those renters who refused to move. The Edmund J. Flynn Company turned over the management of the board to the newly elected officers at the first annual meeting in April 1950.

A reminder of World War II at the
Broadmoor are these decals still attached to
a row of the outer overhanging apartment doors.