

HOTEL CHARLES
(Cooley's Hotel)
1741-1767 Main St. & 9-17 Frank B. Murray St.
Springfield
Hampden County
Massachusetts

HABS No. MA-1294

HABS
MASS
7-SPR11
8-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY
Northeast Field Area
Chesapeake / Allegheny System Support Office
National Park Service
U. S. Custom House
200 Chestnut St.
Philadelphia, PA 19106

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY

HOTEL CHARLES (Cooley's Hotel)

HABS No. MA-1294

Location 1741-1767 Main St. & 9-17 Frank B. Murray St.
Springfield, Hampden County, Massachusetts

USGS Springfield South, Mass. - Conn.
UTM 18.698750.4864025

Present Owner City of Springfield (Springfield Redevelopment Authority)

Present Use Vacant (scheduled for demolition December 1996)

Significance The Hotel Charles complex was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on February 24, 1983 as a contributing structure in the Downtown Springfield Historic Resources Area (63 properties). It was also listed on May 27, 1983 as a contributing structure in the Downtown Springfield Railroad District (11 properties).

The Downtown Springfield Railroad District represents the impact of the railroad on local development. Easy access to rail transportation gave the city a comparative economic advantage which contributed to rapid industrial and commercial growth in the late nineteenth century. At the junction of major north-south and east-west lines, Springfield became known as the "Crossroads of New England."

The Hotel Charles is the successor to Cooley's Hotel, established in 1849 and grown over the years to a complex of five buildings occupying the key parcel between the railroad station and Main St. in Springfield. The tower of the Hotel Charles, erected in 1928, represented the last phase of growth for the hotel complex. It is one of the earliest steel-skeleton and masonry structures in the city and was the third building in the city to reach a height of 125 feet. The hotel represents the growth of the local economy in the period 1870-1929, spurred by a skilled labor force, a diverse industrial base and superb railroad access.

With the decline in rail travel and the general economic depression, the hotel complex turned to supplemental uses. By the 1970s, the Main St. buildings were occupied by an Army & Navy Store and the hotel tower served as low-income and transient housing.

The City of Springfield acquired the Hotel Charles complex in 1988 with the intention of rehabilitating it for market-rate residential use. A major fire in June 1988 completely gutted the complex and led to the immediate demolition of all structures except the hotel tower. The tower has been vacant since that time.

PART I: HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. **Date of Erection:** The sole remaining portion (section D) of the Hotel Charles complex was erected in 1928 and opened in 1929. It represented the final element in the ongoing development of the site, a key parcel located between the railroad station and Main St.

The original Cooley Hotel on the site was a four-story brick block erected in 1849 (exact footprint uncertain). It was expanded with an additional structure in the 1860s (footprint uncertain) for a total of 85 rooms by 1882.

A five-story brick and granite addition in 1890 (sections A1 & A2) tripled the hotel's size and made it the largest in Springfield at the time.

In 1904, a new six-story block fronting on Main St. (section B) was added.

In 1905, a new, five-story grand entrance was built facing the railroad tracks (section C).

In 1928, the eleven-story hotel tower (section D) was erected on the north side of the parcel, replacing the smaller 1849 building and completing development of the site.

2. **Architect:** The architect of the hotel tower (section D) was Albert A. Lavallo of Springfield. He was also responsible for modest alterations to the rest of the hotel complex. Lavallo's work is further represented by the former Hotel Kimball on Chestnut St. in Springfield (cf. National Register of Historic Places: Downtown Springfield Multiple Resource Area).
3. **Original & Subsequent Owners:** Cooley's Hotel was originally established in 1849 by Justin M. Cooley. The proprietor in 1905 was Henry E. Marsh. The hotel's name was changed to Hotel Charles in 1929 with the opening of the new tower (section D). The significance of the new name is not known. The chain of title for the site has not been traced, but information is on file in the Hampden County (Massachusetts) Registry of Deeds in Springfield.
4. **Builder, contractor, suppliers:** No information is currently available on builders, contractors or suppliers of the Hotel Charles.

5. **Original plans & construction:** The Hotel Charles had its origins in 1849 when Justin M. Cooley built a four-story brick block adjacent to the intersection of Main St. and the Boston & Albany railroad tracks in downtown Springfield. The city's growth as the "Crossroads of New England" in the second half of the nineteenth century helped make Cooley's hotel "more widely known to commercial men than any other hotel in New England" (source: Progressive Springfield, Dec. 1890, p. 48). The hotel was expanded in the 1860s and again in 1904, 1905, and 1928.

The Hotel Charles, as the enlarged complex was named, had canopied entrances on Main St. and Frank B. Murray (formerly Liberty) Streets. The main entrance was on the access road (Cooley Place) adjacent to Union Station and facing the railroad tracks. The two-story main lobby, measuring 85 x 28', was located at the center of the complex. The tap room and two storefronts were located in the older Main St. buildings (sections A1 & B, demolished 1988). The barber shop, turkish baths, offices, kitchen and dining facilities, were located in the older sections of the hotel surrounding the lobby (sections A2, & C, demolished 1988).

The 1928 building (section D) accommodated seven small storefronts on Main and Frank B. Murray (formerly Liberty) Streets and a small dining area in the five-story rear wing. The upper floors were occupied entirely by some 200 hotel rooms on ten floors with a single central corridor on each floor. The rooms ranged in size from 145 sq. ft. (9'3" x 15'9") to 286 sq. ft. (13 x 22').

The building was served by a bank of two passenger elevators in the main section and a single smaller service elevator in the rear. There were two enclosed staircases (one public, one service) near the respective elevators. The basement level accommodated boilers, coal storage, switchboards and laundry facilities. Rooms in the new Hotel Charles tower all had private baths, while some of those in the older buildings had shared baths. A newspaper article (Springfield Union, Oct. 21, 1927) noted that the two older buildings on Main St. (sections A1 & B) would be renovated to provide 130 modern hotel rooms.

6. **Alterations and additions:** The Hotel Charles began as Cooley's Hotel in 1849, a four-story brick block erected by Justin M. Cooley at the intersection of Main St. and the Western (Boston and Albany) Railroad tracks in downtown Springfield. The hotel capacity was expanded with an additional structure in the 1860s.

By 1882, the hotel had 85 rooms. In 1890, a five-story brick and granite addition (sections A1 & A2) tripled its size and made it the largest hotel in Springfield. The grand entrance was situated on the access road (Cooley Place) linking Main St. to the passenger platform adjacent to the railroad tracks.

During 1904 and 1905, the 1860s hotel block on Main St. was replaced with a new six-story block (section B). The 1890 grand entrance was replaced by a new five-story block (section C) which served the same function. In 1905, the hotel claimed accommodations for 300 guests and noted that 75 rooms had private baths (Tower, p. 201).

With the opening of Springfield's new Union Station in 1925, Cooley's hotel again felt the need for expansion. In 1928, the original Cooley's block (1849) was demolished and replaced by the eleven-story hotel tower (section D) with the new name Hotel Charles. The tower was designed by local architect Albert Lavalley and built at a cost of \$1 million. It was the third building in Springfield to reach a height of 125 feet.

The onset of the Great Depression, stagnation in the New England economy and the increasing reliance by businessmen on automobile travel rather than passenger rail led to a rapid decline in the hotel's fortunes. By the 1970s, an Army & Navy store occupied most of the Main St. frontage of the hotel complex and the 1928 tower (section D) served mostly low-income and transient tenants.

The Springfield Redevelopment Authority proposed rehabilitation of the complex for market-rate housing in 1987, but a major fire in June 1988 negated that option. The four most heavily-damaged buildings (Sections A1, A2, B, C) were demolished immediately after the fire. The hotel tower (section D) was left standing while options for potential reuse were considered. The vacant tower is scheduled for demolition in December 1996.

B. Historic Context

The town of Springfield was established in 1636 as a trade center for furs and agricultural produce in the Connecticut River Valley of Massachusetts. The opening of the Western (later Boston & Albany) Railroad in 1839 with subsequent connecting lines in all directions boosted Springfield's economy and led to the granting of a city charter in 1852.

Springfield's first railroad station was erected in 1839 just west of Main St. and adjacent to the Boston & Albany rail yards. It was replaced by successively larger stations in 1851 and 1889. A granite railroad arch (1889) carried the tracks over Main St., replacing the earlier grade crossing that had caused numerous traffic and safety problems.

The original Cooley's Hotel was erected by Justin M. Cooley in 1849 at the intersection of Main St. and the railroad tracks. Its convenient location between the railroad station and the

central business district made it popular with commercial travelers, while the dining rooms and meeting facilities made it a favorite of local businessmen and civic organizations.

The development of downtown Springfield reached its peak in the period 1870-1929, when the city earned the nickname "the Crossroads of New England" and became the regional commercial and trade center for the entire Connecticut Valley. Cooley's Hotel flourished and underwent major expansion in 1890, 1904 and 1905.

The city's Union Station (fourth on the site) was erected in 1925 by the Boston firm of Felhumer and Wagner, working with F.B. Freeman, chief engineer of the Boston & Albany Railroad. At a cost of \$1.1 million, it included enlarged passenger facilities, baggage, mail and express services.

The confidence in rail travel expressed by the new Union Station was echoed in the final expansion of Cooley's Hotel, which directly abutted the station. The hotel was dramatically enlarged and renamed the Hotel Charles. The new 11-story hotel tower (section D, erected 1928) was of fireproof masonry and steel construction. It featured 200 rooms (many with private bath) and full elevator service.

With the onset of the Great Depression in 1929, Springfield's economy floundered. Many industries and commercial establishments went bankrupt or moved to more favorable locations. The popularity of the automobile for personal transport and the growth of the trucking industry for commercial and industrial transport led to a decline in railroad usage and a decline in downtown business activity. Union Station closed in the 1970s in response to the decline of rail passenger service.

With the decline of passenger rail service and increasing competition from hotels and motels along automobile routes, the popularity of the Hotel Charles declined. By the 1970s, the Main St. storefronts were occupied by an Army Navy Surplus store. The hotel tower provided accommodations for transients and low-income residents.

Plans to rehabilitate the hotel complex for housing were put forth in the mid-1980s. A major fire destroyed most of the hotel in 1988 and the decline of the regional housing market made rehabilitation of the remaining tower infeasible. The heavily-damaged portions (sections A1, A2, B & C) were demolished immediately after the fire. The vacant tower (section D) is scheduled for demolition in December 1996.

The Hotel Charles represented the heyday of interstate rail travel, when cities and business centers were judged by the quality of their accommodations and amenities. The historical importance of interstate rail access to Springfield is further represented by the adjacent Union Station (1925), which survives completely intact, and by other surviving downtown hotels of

the period (Hotel Worthy, Hotel Kimball, Hotel Henking, Haynes Hotel, Chandler Hotel) which were included in the Downtown Springfield Multiple Resource nomination to the National Register of Historic Places (listed 1983).

PART II: ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. **Architectural character:** The Hotel Charles was a complex of five connected buildings at the southeast corner of Main St. and Frank B. Murray (formerly Liberty) St. in downtown Springfield.

The five-story building and entrance (sections A1 and A2, erected 1890) was described in the National Register nomination (Downtown Springfield Railroad District, 1983) as a panel brick structure with granite trim and oriel windows. A drawing from the time of renovation (Lavalle, 1928) show a south elevation for the western building (section A1) approximately 106' wide with a seven bay fenestration pattern of paired windows alternating with projecting oriels. The south elevation for the eastern building (section A2) was approximately 60' wide with a four bay fenestration pattern of two single windows flanked by projecting oriels. The buildings were demolished after fire damage in 1988.

The six-story addition (section B, 1904) was described in the National Register nomination (Downtown Springfield Railroad District, 1983) as yellow brick with renaissance-revival details. It was demolished after fire damage in 1988. The two Main Street facades (sections A1 & B) combined represented approximately 88' of frontage facing west.

The five story grand entrance block facing the railroad tracks (section C, 1905) is evident in postcard views, but its appearance has not been researched. A drawing from the time of renovation (Lavalle, 1928) show a south elevation approximately 40' wide with a four bay fenestration pattern of single / double / double / single windows. It was demolished after fire damage in 1988.

The sole surviving building (section D, 1928) is an eleven story hotel tower with a narrow rectangular footprint and a five story rear wing. It covers the entire north side of the hotel parcel, from Main St. east to Union Station. It runs approximately 215' along Frank B. Murray St. (formerly Liberty St.) and approximately 46' along Main St., with an estimated gross square footage of 8,500 sq. ft. at ground level. The building features a steel skeleton faced with brick and

cast stone detailing in a style described at the time of construction as "French Renaissance."

The remnant of the Hotel Charles represents one of Springfield's earliest and tallest examples of steel skeleton construction in the early modern period. It is judged to be a fair example of the neoclassical design model for tall buildings, visually organized with a base (floors 1 & 2), shaft (floors 3-9) and capital (floors 10-11) loosely derived from the proportions of classical columns. The brickwork, terra cotta and concrete details are typical of the period and represented on many other downtown buildings.

2. **Condition of fabric:** The masonry facing of the Hotel Charles is in generally good condition, although breakage, cracks and missing elements are visible from street level. The steel skeleton has not been exposed, but a 1996 structural survey concluded that it would probably be found inadequate. Interior access is prohibited for safety reasons, but the Springfield Building Commission reports that interior finishes are heavily damaged by fire, water, weather and vandalism.

B. Description of Exterior

1. **Overall dimensions:** When acquired by the City of Springfield in 1988, the complex of five buildings enclosed 168,990 square feet of space. According to copies of the original plans (dated from Feb. 1928 to April 1929), the eleven-story portion of the 1928 building (section D of the complex) measured 45'6" along Main St. (west elevation) and 143'2" along Frank B. Murray (formerly Liberty) St. (north elevation). The five-story rear wing extended eastward another 73' along the north side of the parcel to Union Station.

The hotel tower represented approximately 73,000 square feet, or 43% of the original floor area of the complex. It included 200 of the hotel's 390 rooms and measured approximately 46 x 215' overall.

2. **Foundation:** The remnant of the Hotel Charles includes a full basement with regularly-spaced support columns. The foundation is not visible above grade.
3. **Walls:** The street elevations on the north and west sides of the Hotel Charles tower exhibit the only notable detailing. The street level stores and entrances are separated by panels of dark green marble. The first two floors are faced with flush blocks of yellow stone capped by a cast concrete cornice and a cartouche with the letter "C" at the northwest corner of the building. The 12" reinforced brick curtain walls are dark brown tapestry brick of random coloration. The two highest floors

are marked by diaper-patterned brickwork, cast yellow panels joining the windows between floors and a series a cast roundels below the cornice.

The south and east walls, where the hotel tower rose above adjoining buildings, are brown common bond brick with no ornamentation or significant detailing.

4. **Structural systems & framing:** The steel skeleton and concrete floors indicated on the 1928 plans are not accessible for inspection due to safety concerns. Based on the date of construction, the demolished sections are assumed to have been standard masonry and heavy timber construction.
5. **Fire Escape:** An exposed metal fire escape runs down the east side of the eleven-story tower to the roof of the five-story rear wing.
6. **Chimneys:** There are no chimneys on the remaining section of the Hotel Charles visible from street level.
7. **Openings**

a. **Doorways and doors:** The main entrances to the hotel were through the adjoining buildings (now demolished). Their appearance is not readily discernible from historic photographs.

The street level entrances to the hotel and shops in the remaining tower are all boarded up and not accessible for inspection. Centrally located on the north elevation is a recessed entrance with a sheet metal overhang surmounted by an arched window and a scrolled terra cotta cartouche of the letter "C". A narrower and shallower recessed entrance is located farther east along the same elevation.

b. **Windows and shutters:** The surviving windows are simple one-over-one double-hung wood sash on all elevations. They are arranged in a geometric grid pattern with regular spacing, except where interior staircases presumably intrude. The windows at the highest level (eleventh floor) are topped by arched terra cotta panels.

8. **Roof**

a. **Shape & covering:** The flat roof is not visible from street level, but is assumed to have been a standard "built-up" roof with integral drains. The southeast corner of the building extends above the roofline, presumably to provide roof access.

b. **Cornice:** The north and west elevations of the remaining tower exhibit a shallow terra cotta cornice detail in an arcade pattern, topped with a sheet metal coping. The south and east elevations show only a metal flashing with no additional cornice elements.

c. **Sign:** A narrow metal sign identifying "HOTEL CHARLES" is affixed to the northwest corner of the building between the third and seventh floors.

C. Description of Interior

1. **Floor plans:** Interior access to the Hotel Charles is prohibited for safety reasons. Original (1928) floor plans have been photographically reproduced as part of this documentation.
2. **Interior features & finishes:** Interior access to the Hotel Charles is prohibited for safety reasons. Prior to issuing the condemnation order, the Springfield Building Commission reported that the interior was heavily damaged by fire, water and vandalism. Historical sources suggest that interior finishes in the remaining tower (section D) were very modest, since the hotel's lobby and prime public spaces were in the adjoining buildings (now demolished).

D. Site

1. **General setting & orientation:** The Hotel Charles complex occupied the entire southeast corner parcel at Main and Frank B. Murray (formerly Liberty) St. in downtown Springfield, just north of the stone arch that carries the elevated railroad tracks over Main St. The complex was built out to the lot lines, with the exception of an access road on the south side of the parcel (Cooley Place) running from Main St. to the Union Station platform, adjacent to the railroad retaining wall. The sole remaining building (section D) fills the entire north side of the parcel from Main St. to Union Station. It is surrounded by mixed commercial development typical of urban central business districts.
2. **Historic landscape design:** The hotel complex occupied the entire parcel with no setback or landscaping along Main St. or Frank B. Murray (formerly Liberty) Street. Historical descriptions and views indicate that the south side of the parcel incorporated an access road (Cooley Place) between the raised railroad tracks and the grand entrance to the hotel, with covered access to Union Station.
3. **Outbuildings:** None observed or noted in historical documentation.

PART III: SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. **Architectural drawings:** Copies of the 1928 plans for expansion and alteration of the Hotel Charles were found at Springfield City Hall, 36 Court St., Springfield, MA 01103 and have been photographically reproduced as part of this documentation package.
- B. **Historic views:** Postcards, photographs, advertising flyers and newspaper articles relating to the Hotel Charles are preserved in the Connecticut Valley Historical Museum of the Springfield Library & Museum Association, 220 State St., Springfield, MA 01103 (tel. 413-263-6800).
- C. **Interviews:** None
- D. **Bibliography**

1. Secondary sources

Bauer, Frank, At the Crossroads: Springfield, Massachusetts, 1636-1975. Springfield, MA: USA Bicentennial Committee of Springfield; 1976. The Cooley Hotel complex is clearly visible between the two railroad sheds in the reproduction of an 1875 birds eye view of Springfield (p. 60).

Green, Mason A., Springfield 1636-1886: History of Town and City. Springfield, MA: C.A. Nichols & Co.; 1888. Cf. the Western Railroad (p. 478-479).

Johnson, Clifton, Hampden County [MA] 1636-1939. New York: The American Historical Society; 1931. Cf. the Western Railroad, pp. 508-511.

Tower, James E. (ed.), Springfield Present and Perspective. Springfield, MA: Pond & Campbell; 1905. Note interior photograph of Cooley Hotel lobby (facing page 199) and the description of the hotel (pp. 200-201).

2. Periodicals:

Progressive Springfield, Dec. 1890, p. 48.

Inland Massachusetts Illustrated, 1890, p. 75.

Springfield Union, October 21, 1927, p. 6. & September 3, 1928.

E. **Likely sources not yet investigated:** City of Springfield (MA) Building Dept. and Assessors records. Most early records were destroyed by the City Hall fire of 1905, but subsequent records are likely to survive.

F. **Supplemental material**

Massachusetts Historical Commission, Statewide Historic Resource Survey & City of Springfield Comprehensive Historic Resource Survey: Hotel Charles (Springfield Area 3000, #14, recorded 1979).

National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places: Downtown Springfield (MA) Multiple Resource Area (listed Feb. 24, 1983).

National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places: Downtown Springfield (MA) Railroad District (listed May 27, 1983).

PART IV: PROJECT INFORMATION

The City of Springfield, acting through the Springfield Redevelopment Authority under the Court Square Redevelopment Plan, plans to clear the Hotel Charles site with financial assistance from the United States Dept. of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The remnant of the Hotel Charles, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, will be demolished. Pursuant to 36 CFR 800, regulations implementing Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (16 U.S.C. 470f), HUD and the City of Springfield have consulted with the Massachusetts State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation and have entered into a Memorandum of Agreement with those parties which requires that HABS/HAER documentation of the Hotel Charles be completed before demolition.

This documentation was prepared in November and December 1996.

Prepared by: Museum Resource Consultants
Title: Gregory Farmer, Principal
Date: December 1996

LOCUS MAP

(Source: USGS Quadrangle Springfield South, MA - CT)

