

April 12, 2020

Ms. Cynthia Johnson Elmore
Landmarks Commission
444 S. Fifth Street
Louisville, Kentucky 40202

Re: Liberty Hall (Odd Fellows Hall) Individual Landmark Draft Designation Report dated February 28, 2020.

Dear Cynthia:

The following is a response to the Liberty Hall (Odd Fellows Hall) Individual Landmark Draft Designation Report dated February 28, 2020.

This draft report excludes many important attributes of Liberty Hall (Odd Fellows Hall). For example, it has been minimally altered over its 122 years. The first-floor façade was modified, but in a very sensitive manner that actually strengthens the appearance, and the rear egress stair tower was a fire code-mandated appendage.

Additionally, the building is structurally sound with no apparent exterior deterioration. All of its windows are in good condition. While there was a fire in the 1980s, it has been successfully repurposed into a contemporary function, like many other historic landmarks. In fact, it has been occupied for the majority of its existence until the most recent years that Omni has owned it.

It is uncertain why the report was drafted in such a less than positive perspective, but the preservation community would like to submit the edits below to the report which contribute to the value of this building and why it should be landmarked.

Page 4 Add this sentence: “. . . including a concrete veneer (non-original) covering on the first floor. **This concrete veneer was sensitively added that replicates the side and central bay detailing and dimensioning.** A single one over one double hung windows on either side of the central doorway. All three . . .

Page 5 and 6 Both the west and side facades retain most of their original aesthetic character.

Page 7 The ‘modern’ stair tower most likely was a result of providing a fire-code mandated means of egress, which was not required at the time of original construction.

Page 9 This building has been occupied for over 115 years since its construction in 1898. As with many historic landmarks, it has continually been repurposed for contemporary functions. It recently housed PARC offices and then project management space for the Omni construction. Odd Fellows occupied from 1898 to about 1962 years, or almost 65 years. Other designated local landmarks whose interiors have been significantly altered include: American Standard Building which is now a parking garage); Belknap School which is now a residential building; Colonial Gardens which has been substantially

renovated; Highland's Library which is now used as offices; and the old County Jail which is now government offices.

Page 27

2nd Paragraph: While the National Register does have as one of its considerations for listing the original interior, the lack of the original interior does not necessarily prevent it from being individually listed. Regardless, local landmark designation does not require the original interior to be intact. Many local landmarks have been repurposed with new functions that have greatly modified their interiors.

4th paragraph: instead of 'moderate' level of integrity, we feel it should be a moderate to 'high level' of integrity since most of the original exterior remains, and the modification on the first floor was a very sensitive contextual aesthetic that relates very well to the original construction.

5th paragraph: regarding the 'low level of integrity in setting': The adjacent buildings were similarly distinctive buildings that were demolished, most likely prior to the landmark ordinance enactment. Most other historic landmarks have similar modern settings due to surrounding redevelopment. Liberty Hall should serve as an aesthetic anchor to influence future building designs next to it in a similar quality manner.

Also, there is no mention of the historic Pendennis Club directly across the street of which Liberty Hall (Odd Fellows) does relate to in architectural context.

As noted previously, the first-floor modification actually enhances its historic appearance by using the same detailing and aesthetics. This first floor façade was thoughtfully created and does not merit the 'significantly alteration' description. If anything, it strengthens the 'feeling and association' of this building.

Page 28

1st paragraph: Instead of 'moderate level of integrity in materials and workmanship', should be 'moderate **to high level** of integrity in materials and workmanship'. The original masonry is well built, and the new first floor façade was carefully designed to fit within the context of the original construction. Most historic building no longer have their original windows and thus this should not be a major consideration in the landmarking of this building. As to removal of the original fabric, again, many historic properties no longer have their original interiors. As an example, all of the Whiskey Row buildings have been significantly renovated from their original functions, and several were gutted by a major fire.

Insert this text after the 1st paragraph: the building is structurally sound with no deterioration. There have not been any issues noted regarding its structural integrity. No water damage has been reported and all the windows are in good condition.

Designation Criteria Analysis

- A. No comment
- B. Its location as a site for a significant historic event: Liberty Hall was the meeting location for numerous public organizations such the Kentucky Undertakers Association, which was formed in

September, 1901, at this location; the Letter Carriers (Postal Union) met regularly here; veterans of the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) held meetings here; Sons & Daughters of Liberty had a convention here; and the Kentucky Fish & Game Protective Association, which advocated better wildlife management in the state, used this as a meeting location; And, not only the local IOOF groups meet here, but the statewide IOOF regularly held their state assemblies here.

C. Refer to above

D. Edit: “. . . The eclectic Victorian building retains **MOST** of its architectural detailing which dates to the period of construction. . . . “

While no research has located who the architect was for this building, the design does resemble in several significant aesthetic details the Masonic Lodge that was once just a block to the south of Liberty Hall, on Chestnut Street between Third and Fourth Street. (Masonic Lodge was demolished in 1956). Not only are the functions similar (meeting facilities for civic organizations) but the façade composition is too close to discount this relationship. Masonic Lodge (which also contained the Strand Theater). Built in 1902, Masonic Lodge was 4 years after Liberty Hall was opened. Refer to the attached graphic comparison of features between Liberty Hall and Masonic Lodge.

Masonic Lodge was designed by one of the most prominent architects of Louisville: William Dodd. Dodd created some of the best landmarks of Louisville: Presbyterian Seminary (now known as Jefferson Community College); Ferguson Mansion (now Filson Historical Society), old Louisville Trust, and the Lincoln / Washington Building (now demolished), among many more.

Following his departure from Louisville in 1912, Dodd settled in Los Angeles and continued his illustrious career with more landmark projects there.

While it is not conclusive that Dodd designed Liberty Hall, he definitely had the expertise to create it, and the social connections.

Thus, unless other conflicting data is identified, then William Dodd could be attributed as the architect for Liberty Hall.

E. There was an African American Odd Fellows Hall at 13th and Walnut. While there was segregation in the 1900s, Odd Fellow members who were white did attend special meetings at the African American Odd Fellows Hall. Liberty Hall was a common meeting location for all the local Odd Fellows groups. Thus, African Americans most likely also attended Odd Fellow group special meetings at Liberty Hall.

Summary

Liberty Hall (aka Odd Fellows Hall) has significant architectural and historical attributes which merit local landmark status.

Your inclusion of the above edits is requested in order to provide a more balanced review of this building.

Should you have any questions, please contact the following:

Steve Wiser, FAIA
President Louisville Historical League
LouHist@hotmail.com

Martina Kunnecke
President
Neighborhood Planning & Preservation
NPPKentuckiana@gmail.com