

City of Detroit

CITY COUNCIL

Historic Designation Advisory Board

Final Report

Proposed Eddystone Hotel Historic District



By a resolution dated July 20, 2005, the Detroit City Council charged the Historic Designation Advisory Board, a study committee, with the official study of the proposed Eddystone Hotel Historic District in accordance with Chapter 25 of the 1984 Detroit City Code and the Michigan Local Historic Districts Act.

The proposed Eddystone Hotel Historic District consists of the one building addressed as 110 Sproat Street, located on the northeast corner of Park Avenue and Sproat opposite the former Park Avenue Hotel. It is generally situated one block west of Woodward Avenue and three blocks north of the Fisher Freeway (I-75), just north of the central business district. It is across the street from the Park Avenue Hotel, a proposed historic district.

Boundary Description: The boundaries of the proposed Eddystone Hotel Historic District are outlined in heavy black on the attached map, and are as follows:

On the north, the north line of Lot 20 Block 76 Sub Part Park Lots 72, 73, 74, 75, 76 (Deeds), L53 P196;

on the east, the centerline of Park Boulevard;

on the south, the centerline of Sproat; and

on the west, the centerline of alley running north-south from Temple to Sproat, behind the Park Boulevard frontage.

Boundary justification: The boundary description is the same as the footprint of the Kamper-designed historic building.

History:

The Eddystone Hotel is one of three Italian Renaissance-inspired hotels constructed along Park Avenue for Detroit hotel man Lew W. Tuller during the 1920s, a boom period in Detroit's history that saw the construction of a number of luxurious hotels to accommodate the rapidly rising number of visitors to and transient and permanent residents in the city. The Eddystone was part of a grand plan on the part of Tuller and other Detroit developers to emulate the urban character of New York's Fifth Avenue. The Eddystone was planned by Louis Kamper, designer of many of the city's leading hotel buildings and downtown landmarks in the 1920s.

The Eddystone Hotel was the first of three hotels to be built along Detroit's Park Avenue by well-known local real estate developer Lew W. Tuller (1869-1957). Tuller came to Detroit at the age of seventeen from Jonesville, Michigan where he began work with his father, who was an architect and builder. Five years later, with capital furnished by Senator Thomas W. Palmer, he started his own company as a building contractor. He was one of the first to build apartment buildings on Woodward Avenue, north of Grand Boulevard, where he constructed the Saragossa Apartments at the corner of Lothrop and Woodward and the Valencia Apartments next door.

Detroit's tremendous growth as an industrial center in the early 1900s resulted in a rapidly escalating demand for hotel accommodations. In 1907 Tuller erected the Tuller Hotel on the west side of Grand Circus Park at the foot of Park Avenue, at what was then the edge of downtown Detroit, initially enduring skepticism that the hotel was "too far uptown" from the central business district. The Tuller Hotel proved to be such a success that he eventually added five stories to the original building and a few years later built a matching fourteen story annex making a total of eight hundred rooms. The hotel quickly became a local landmark and fashionable destination for both travelers and residents.

With the rise of the automobile industry, the population of Detroit rose 113 per cent from 1910 to 1920, according to the United States Census figures, from 465,766 to 993,739. The tremendous expansion in population and business activity was reflected in the booming market not only for homes and apartment buildings but also for hotels for visitors and

residential hotels for more permanent guests. In 1924-25 twenty hotels were constructed in or near downtown Detroit, adding 5,441 rooms. The neighborhood north of Grand Circus Park became a prime location for new hotel and residential development due to its proximity to downtown and nearby transportation routes.

The south end of Park Avenue near Grand Circus Park had already become a fashionable residential district in the early 1900s with the construction of the Tuller Hotel and other buildings like the Varney Apartments (1892), the Hotel Charlevoix (1905), and the Blenheim (1909) among others. During the 1920s a construction boom hit the south end of Park Avenue as the street became a business and shopping district.

In 1923 property owners formed the Park Avenue Association. Their vision was for Park to take on a character similar to that of New York's Fifth Avenue. The association envisioned the south end of Park Avenue lined with high-class office buildings, shops and clubs, and hotels and other residential development at the north end. Buildings constructed during this period in the south end included the Women's City Club (1923), the Iodent Building (1923), the Park Avenue Building (1923) and the Colony Club (1928).

The overwhelming success of the Tuller Hotel together with the economic boom of the early 1920s inspired Tuller to create his own hotel empire. In the mid-1920s Tuller built three more hotels, the Eddystone Hotel, the Park Avenue Hotel and the Royal Palm Hotel, all along Park Avenue just north of Grand Circus Park. The Royal Palm Hotel, located in the south end of Park Avenue just four blocks east of the Eddystone, is already listed on the National Register of Historic Places (Its present name is the Park Avenue Hotel). Estimates of Tuller's financial investment ranged between six and twelve million. His hotels offered accommodations for both transient guests and permanent residents in the "hotel district" of downtown Detroit. They advertised easy accessibility to transportation with locations just one block from two important traffic avenues, Woodward and Cass. The hotels were within walking distance of downtown Detroit and also located in close proximity to the theater district located in the area surrounding Grand Circus Park and the shopping district along Woodward Avenue.

The Eddystone was the first of Tuller's three hotels to open. The hotel, built on the northwest corner of Park and Sproat in 1924, was designed by Louis Kamper (1861-1953), one of Detroit's most prominent architects who was at the height of his career in the 1920s. Kamper had come to Detroit from the offices of McKim, Mead and White in New York and established his own office here in 1888. He was a devotee of Italian Renaissance styling, using it as a starting point for much of the ornament on the Detroit buildings for which he is best remembered.

In 1916 he became involved with J. Burgess Book, Jr. who had just become administrator of his father's large estate. Book had visions of developing Washington Boulevard, not far from the Tuller Hotel in downtown Detroit, into another prestigious commercial

thoroughfare. Together with his brothers Herbert and Frank he was able to acquire control of sixty percent of the property along the boulevard. Louis Kamper was chosen as their architect, and he was responsible for the design of the Book Building and Tower, the Washington Boulevard Building, the Industrial Bank Building and the Book Cadillac Hotel, all built along the boulevard in the 1917-28 period. Kamper designed all three of Tuller's hotels along Park Avenue in the early 1920s. He was also responsible for the design of other residential hotels constructed nearby including the 1923 Carlton Plaza on John R and the 1926 Savoy Hotel (now demolished) on Woodward Avenue.

The thirteen-story, 156-room Eddystone Hotel was built with a restaurant and five shops on the first floor. The shops included the Eddystone Sweet Shop, the Eddystone Beauty Shop and a Western Union telegraph office. The Eddystone reflected the latest in hotel design with a combination of sumptuous interior decorations and luxurious furnishings, particularly in the main lobby. The rooms were simply but tastefully decorated with disappearing Murphy wall beds, rugs, tapestries and the latest electric lamps. The majority of the rooms rented monthly and were designed with large, well-appointed dressing rooms, modern tiled bathrooms, and circulating ice water. The hotel boasted that its restaurant was managed and operated only by women allowing residents the opportunity of eating home-cooked meals.

Tuller apparently overbuilt in Detroit's hotel market. He lost the three Park Avenue hotels in 1928 in foreclosure and was forced into receivership by the Security Trust Co. In that same year Security Trust sold the Eddystone to David P. Katz. David Katz was a Detroit financier who made his fortune through hotels and extensive real estate transactions. He owned a hotel in Miami Beach and five Detroit hotels including the Royal Palm and the Eddystone along Park Avenue and the Fort Wayne Hotel located nearby at Temple and Cass Avenues. Katz owned the hotels until 1966 when the discovery of a two million dollar fraud scheme against him caused the collapse of his business and his health.

The surrounding South Cass Corridor neighborhood began to lose its population during the period following World War II. As suburban development grew, the area lost its middle class occupants who were replaced by lower income residents and the impoverished. As the population density of the area decreased, many of its apartment buildings and hotels were abandoned and later demolished. The Eddystone continued in operation as a residential hotel until the late 1990s when it was abandoned.

The current nationwide trend toward redevelopment of the city core for residential purposes has caused the revival of the South Cass Corridor. A number of older residential buildings in the area are being rehabilitated into apartments, lofts and condominiums. Plans are underway to convert the former Eddystone Hotel and its sister building, the former Park Avenue Hotel, into luxury condominiums.

Description:

The Eddystone Hotel is a thirteen story steel frame, brick, limestone, and terra-cotta-clad building located at the northwest corner of Park Avenue and Sproat Street, six blocks north of Grand Circus Park. The hotel's overall footprint is rectangular, measuring sixty-two feet on Park and one hundred and five feet on Sproat. The Eddystone is thirteen stories in height. The building's Italian Renaissance-inspired exterior treatment is modeled after urban palazzos, with a two-story base finished in large "blocks" of limestone and displaying tall arched openings, a more plain central section above the base, and a highly finished top or attic crowned by an elaborate entablature and cornice.

The building sits opposite the former Park Avenue Hotel, which is located on the southwest corner of Park and Sproat. The two former hotels are vacant and are among the few remaining structures that have survived the decline of the surrounding neighborhood. The two hotels are located just two blocks east of the newly designated Cass Park Historic District and one block west of Woodward Avenue, Detroit's primary thoroughfare.

Above the limestone-clad base, the primary façade material on the street-facing east and south elevations is yellow brick. The yellow brick extends a few feet around the corners onto both the north and west elevations. The remainder of the north and west elevations are finished in common buff-colored brick. The east and south elevations, and the first bay of the west elevation, are similar in composition with smooth limestone ashlar on the first and second floors forming the building's base and decorative terra cotta window treatments on the third, fourth and twelfth floors. A denticulated cornice serving as a belt course separates the second and third floors. The building is capped with a decorative terra cotta cornice. The windows from the second to the thirteenth floor are one/one double-hung wood-frame windows.

The Eddystone exhibits the vast expanse of plain wall surfaces of a tall building relieved with decorative Italian Renaissance-inspired detailing. The south elevation facing Sproat is symmetrical and seven bays in width, the five center bays each containing paired windows and the end bays each a single window in the third to thirteenth stories. The windows in the third story are framed by terra-cotta trim – balustraded balconets below the window bays, window surrounds, and spandrel panels above the window bays, each displaying an arch form containing a large rondel above each window, that are topped with a dentiled cornice beneath the fourth-story windows. The square-head windows of the fourth floor are outlined in terra cotta with raised outer edges. Those in the central-height part of the façade between the fifth and eleventh floors are set into the brick façade with no trim save plain slab limestone sills. The windows of the twelfth floor display terra-cotta surrounds echoing the design of those in the third story with balustraded balconets but of more simple design, with rosettes in the frieze in place of the arches. A terra-cotta beltcourse separates the eleventh and twelfth floors. The building is crowned with a tall decorative terra-cotta entablature and cornice, the entablature with a chevron-like band below a projecting arcade with detailed corbels supporting the bases of the arches, and a projecting cornice with a decorative fringe.

This decorative detailing continues along the east elevation and the first bay of the west elevation.

The hotel entrance is located in the south elevation facing Sproat Street. The inner bays of the smooth ashlar first floor contain five large arched openings with the lobby entrance doorway in the center arch flanked by two storefront windows. The two end bays of the first floor have square-head storefront windows. All first and second-floor windows have been boarded up. The simple entrance retains remnants of an aluminum canopy. Two flagpoles extend from carved stone shields above either side of the entrance. Each shield displays an emblem of a wrapped torch.

The east elevation is composed of five bays, containing sets of paired double-hung windows, from the second to the thirteenth floors. The center three bays of the first floor contain arched windows and the end bays contain storefront entrances. The entrance closer to the corner of Park and Sproat contains a setback aluminum-framed doorway with remnants of an aluminum canopy. Two flagpoles extending from shield-patterned supports identical to the supports on the south elevation rise between the arches.

The north elevation is plain with no decorative detailing and with one casement stairway window opening per floor. The west elevation contains five bays, four containing sets of paired windows and one that contains one window and continues the decorative detailing of the south elevation. The words HOTEL EDDYSTONE are painted at the top of the north and west elevations. The flat roof is covered in asphalt and has a small one-story brick penthouse, with industrial windows, that houses the elevator machinery.

The main entrance to the hotel from Sproat is through a small vestibule that leads to the main lobby in the center of the building, where the hotel elevators and stairwells to the upper floors are located. Commercial space is located on both sides of the lobby with frontage along both Sproat and Park. The original floor plan provided for five stores on the first floor, but that space was later altered into two larger spaces, one on either side of the lobby entrance. The Eddystone has been vacant for many years and the interior has suffered extensive damage from exposure to weather and vandalism. The first floor had been remodeled at one time but a few damaged remnants of the original detailing remain, including some paneling in the lobby and decorative support columns throughout the first floor.

The upper floors still retain their original floor plans with the guest rooms located on the east, south and west sides of the floor and the elevators, main hallway and stairwells located on the north end of the floor. The rooms have paneling with simple decorative plaster detailing and white tiled bathrooms. The interior finishes have deteriorated from neglect and exposure; the original fixtures have been removed by scavengers.

Criteria: The proposed historic district meets criteria A & C as provided in the Michigan

Local Historic Districts Act and in local ordinance. These criteria refer to resources:

A. that are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; and

C. that embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction;

Note: This report is substantially derived from the National Register of Historic Places certification form for the Eddystone Hotel, nominated in 2005.

Major Bibliographical References

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EDDYSTONE HOTEL HISTORIC DISTRICT

Boundaries of the proposed district are outlined in heavy black lines

