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## THE ELKS CLUB at 318 PRINCE STREET

by Marilyn W. Burke



For nine decades citizens and travelers have walked the streets of Old Town Alexandria with downcast eyes, aware of the footprints of history beneath their feet. But they often pause to lift their sight to the monumental bronze elk on Prince Street. The history of the 1909 Elks Club Lodge building at 318 Prince Street reflects the phenomena of fraternal organizations in the early 20th century, the spirit of a neighborhood and later, the adaptive use of an outmoded property in an historic city.

During the first half of the 20th century, the southeast corner of Prince and South Royal Streets was a crossroad for the common man of Alexandria. Tobacco and barber shops, the Concordia Hotel,

saloons, a fire station, the Armory, the Gazette newspaper office, Chamber of Commerce, the Waiting Room for the trolley system, a Moose Club, the V.F.W. and the Elks Lodge all enticed men to the vicinity. While the elite politicians and women gathered one block north at City Hall and the Market, masculinity reigned on the 300 block of Prince Street. Perhaps the aroma conscious Victorian women of prior years had long strayed from the region. Warwick P. Miller who lived at the S.E. corner of Prince and Royal circa 1830, reminisced that a very large warehouse on the south side of Prince was filled with animal hides in storage awaiting shipment.<sup>1</sup>

A gender revolution occurred in America about 1900. Historian E. Anthony Rotundo believes that middle-class men revolted against the Victorian female

seizure of morals and virtue within the home. Out of that alarm came the birth of male-only fraternal lodges and club organizations. The Boy Scouts, the Knights of Pythias, the Elks Lodge and countless others were formed--where men exclusively could celebrate their manhood rituals and at the same time revert to their boyhood abandonment. In his book, "American Manhood: Transformation in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era," Rotundo notes that at the turn of the century with the horrors of the Civil War only a glorified memory, sports, militarism, and fraternal organizations declared it was a man's world again.<sup>2</sup>



The Benevolent Protective Order of the Elks was founded by members of the theatrical profession in New York City in 1867. Originally called the "Jolly Corks," they soon changed the name of their group to the "Elks." They said the elk was "purely American" and the animal was to form the basis of their rituals.<sup>3</sup> The "Audubon Nature Encyclopedia" defines the elk as a "more or less sociable animal which has a tendency to gather together in herds."<sup>4</sup> The average bull weighs 700-900 pounds, about the same as the bronze elk figure on the Elks Lodge building at 318 Prince Street today. The founders claimed to be a "fellowship of men with constructive idealism which attracts active and creative men and unites them for purposes of doing things."<sup>5</sup>

Alexandria Elks Lodge #758 was organized on February 9, 1902 with a charter membership of fifty men.<sup>6</sup> The officers were businessmen and tradesmen. Edward J. Quinn, the Exalted Ruler, was an Irish immigrant who ran a grocery and liquor store at Oronoco and St. Asaph Streets (presently the Old Town School for Dogs). H.H. Kelly was a coppersmith; J.M. Hill who lived at 410 Prince was a printer; L.E. Schuman, a confectioner; H.B. Quinn was a machinist; and John N. Lawler ran a saloon. Mr. Thomas E. Downey's trade was a packer; M.D. Delaney was a physician; while W.H.P. Kelley worked as a pipe fitter. Charles Schneider and Champe Walker were the other officers.<sup>7</sup>

The Alexandria Lodge of the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks was instituted in the Odd Fellows Hall at 214 N. Columbus Street. Fifty Elks came from Washington, forty from Baltimore and dozens more from Danville and other cities. After a five hour ceremony, they were entertained at dinner.<sup>8</sup> The Alexandria Gazette declared "The new lodge starts out on the most auspicious circumstances and will no doubt henceforth be a flourishing Alexandria institution."<sup>9</sup>

The first meetings of the Elks Lodge were held on the third floor of 112 S. Fairfax Street (now demolished).<sup>10</sup> On June 10th, 1902 the Elks purchased the Concordia Hotel at the southeast corner of Royal and Prince Streets for \$7,500, paying \$2,500 down and \$5,000 due in five years at 5% interest.<sup>11</sup> (The main portion of this building stands today,

operated as Carr's Antiques and the Prince Royal Gallery).



Concordia Hotel c. 1895  
Note wing on left

The handsome Concordia Hotel was built in 1880 by B.F. Price for Jacob Bohraus who had owned several ordinaries in Alexandria. The ornate and handsome exterior trim is a combination of millwork and cast iron, with the original entrance on Royal Street. A two-story wing of the building extended eastward, facing on Prince Street and the property extended further east into "a large and artistically arranged garden." The hotel was considered tasteful, with every modern improvement.<sup>12</sup> The owner's widow operated the hotel as "The Bohraus" for a few years after her husband and son died until the Elks purchased the entire site.

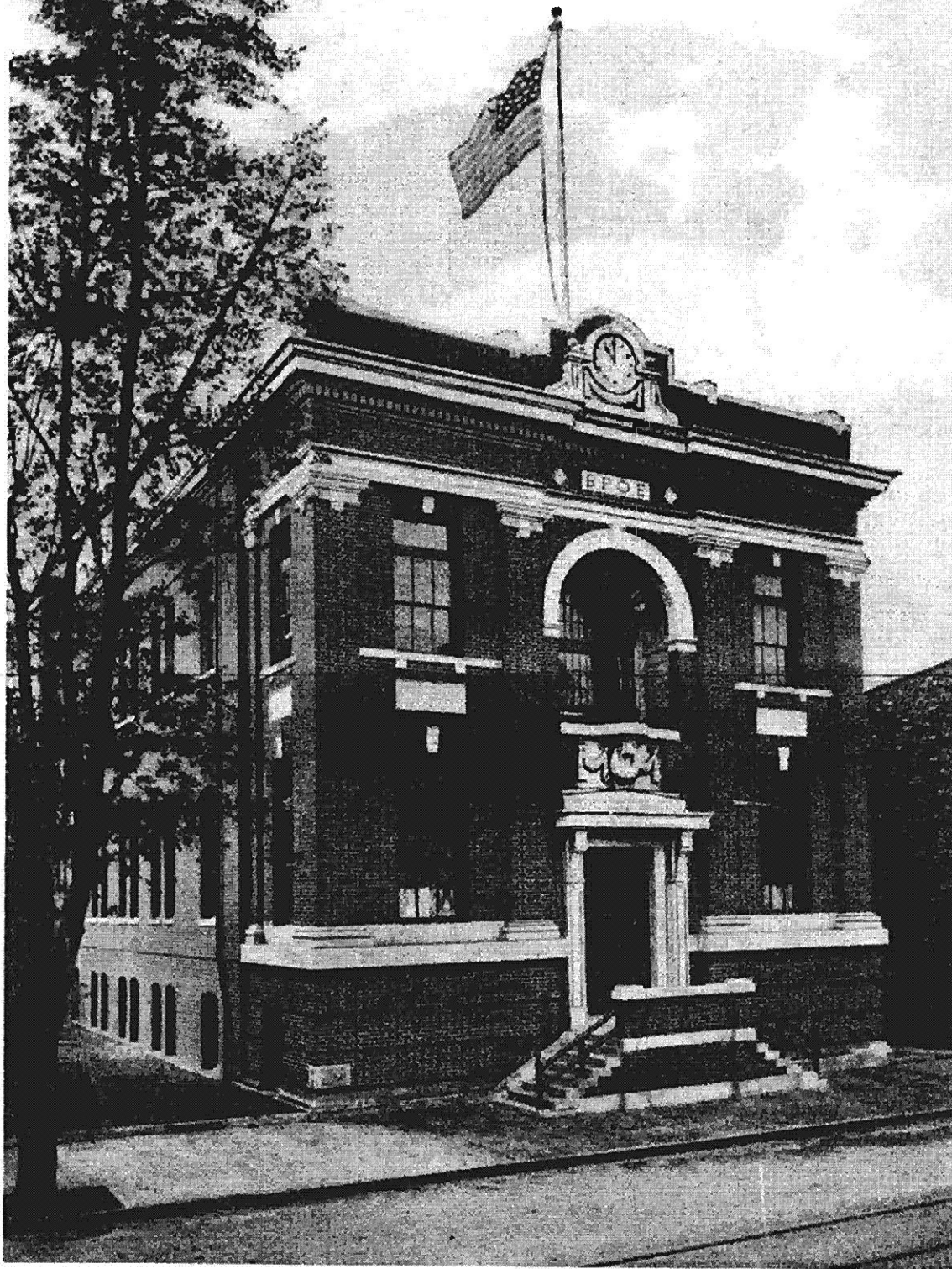
It appears that the second floor ballroom of the hotel was used as a bowling alley when the Elks purchased it. A City Permit for Repairs and Alterations dated October 24, 1902 indicates a \$2,000 conversion of the bowling alley into lodge rooms. The Elks Lodge held their meeting each Monday night on the second floor of the hotel building.

Riley and Spinks operated a saloon and restaurant on the first floor. Spink's Cafe advertised "Chicken on Toast", "Fine Soft Shelled Crabs" and "Fried Oysters, A Specialty".<sup>13</sup>

On July 13, 1909, the Alexandria Gazette announced that the "Elks will erect a new and modern home, directly east of the present Lodge (old hotel). Plans will be drawn and work will begin in a short time. The building will cost \$25,000 and be modern in all appointments. R.W. Barrett, Howard W. Smith, T.W. Robinson, Zoro Hill, J.W. Bales, F.O. Hill, August Oehlert, Judge Barley and Dr. W.M. Smith will form the building committee.<sup>14</sup> Within a month the plans of architects Wagner and Hamilton were accepted. They proposed that all the property except the corner building at Prince and Royal be torn down and a new structure erected. Mr. Spink's Cafe would also be gutted and put into repair and the second floor of the old hotel would become a reception hall.<sup>15</sup>

Alexandria contractor J.W. Devers was commended in the newspaper for quick work in razing the east wing of the Elks new building. Within five days, he had torn down the two story wing, cleared the Cafe and removed all material.<sup>16</sup> James Dever also constructed a 16'x 16'x 24' addition on the south, behind the Cafe at a cost of \$500.<sup>17</sup> This addition houses the separate stairway to the second floor. Perhaps this brisk work led to Mr. Dever's winning bid over six contenders to construct the new Elks Lodge building at 318 Prince Street. The Elks

B. P. O. E. No 758, Elks Club,  
Alexandria, Va.



*The Elks Club at 318 Prince Street, circa 1915. Photograph  
courtesy of the Virginia State Library and Archives.*

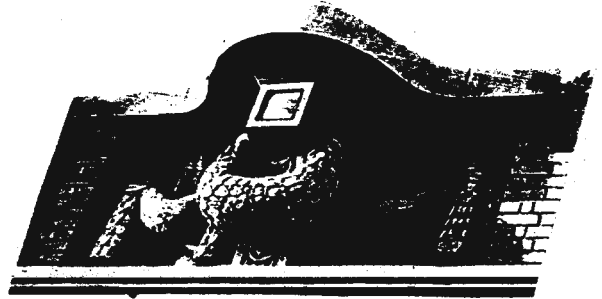
specified that their new building was to be complete in five months.<sup>18</sup> James W. Devers had been in the carpentry business in Alexandria for some time. The architect of the Lodge, William R. Hamilton, also an Alexandrian, was listed in the 1903 City Directory as a woodworker, and he later practiced professionally with Henry K. Field and Company.<sup>19</sup>

### Cornerstone Laying

"Notwithstanding the cold weather (of December 18, 1909) many people, including a large percentage of ladies, gathered in front of the space on Prince Street on which the new hall for Alexandria Lodge, No. 758 Benevolent Protective Order of Elks is to be created, to witness the ceremonies indicant to the laying of the cornerstone. Pistorios's Band was present, and the music discoursed was inspiring. All the airs were familiar...*My Country 'Tis of Three, Carry Me Back to Old Virginie, Nearer My God to Thee, Star Spangled Banner, My Maryland and Dixie*, sent thrills through the assemblage....The members of the Lodge marched in line to the spot where the cornerstone was to be placed and upon being called to order by Exalted Ruler David E. Robey, and an invocation, the cornerstone was slid in position, a metallic box having been placed within, after which the exalted ruler poured water upon the stone.

The box contains the following articles: American flag, copy of the building resolution, list of building committee, roster of the lodge, constitution and by-laws of Grand

Lodge, by-laws of Alexandria Lodge, copy of Alexandria Gazette, coins of currency, copy of programme of... performance and names of those who contributed coins that went into the box. The box was... sealed and a cornet solo, *My Old Kentucky Home* was played. Addresses were made...and tribute was paid to the ladies present. The Lodge was indebted to the ladies in a large measure for its success. Addresses and congratulations of the Washington Lodge, Baltimore, and Charlottesville were received."<sup>20</sup>



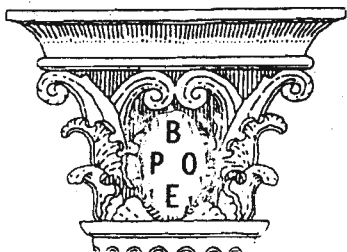
The classic Beaux-Arts architecture of the new Elks Club building was a significant statement of the strength and vigor of the Lodge. Architect Ernest Flagg, a master of the style, had just created a sensation with his 1908 New York Singer Tower--the tallest building ever constructed. The Beaux Arts format of emphasized corners and monumental central-arched openings created an academic classicism and was appropriate for ceremonial buildings.<sup>21</sup> In Alexandria, the Beaux Arts style of the Burke and Herbert Bank at King and Fairfax Streets had been acclaimed during its 1904 construction.<sup>22</sup> The two-story pilasters and exuberant ornamental detail of the new Elks Lodge proclaimed a building of importance in 1909. The brickwork was Flemish bond

as were the jack arches. Limestone keys, window sills, the cornice with dentils and copings are Beaux Arts style.

A limestone tablet above the door is inscribed B.P.O.E.

The highest arch displays a clock. Many citizens have assumed it to be in disrepair and "stopped" at 11:00 o'clock. Upon close inspection, the clock shows no evidence of working parts.<sup>23</sup> A 1925 Gazette article mentions the traditional Elks 11:00 p.m. toast to "all brothers everywhere, land or sea, and a remembrance of absent brothers at that hour."<sup>24</sup> Other Lodge emblems display a clock at that time. It is assumed the clock was purely ceremonial. A limestone portico at the front entrance supports a thundering, proud bronze elk.

The Gazette reported on July 15, 1910 that "the handsome bronze elk arrived today and was placed in an alcove above the entrance with the head and antlers slightly projecting beyond the building line. The effigy is a fine piece of work in bronze and weighs about 1,000 pounds."<sup>25</sup>



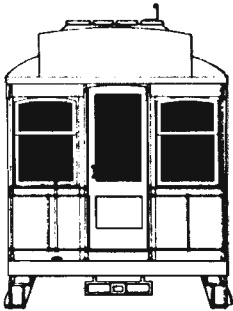
The 50'x 90' foot building has 15" solid brick walls at the basement level and 13" solid brick at the first and second levels.<sup>26</sup> A rathskeller contained billiard, pool and card rooms, buffet, and tub and shower baths. The first floor was built with a reception hall, ladies parlor,

library, secretary's office and an auditorium with a stage. The auditorium seated 400-500 people. The top floor was devoted to the Lodge room and the necessary anterooms.<sup>27</sup> A photograph of the Lodge Room in the Lloyd House Library collection shows a ceiling of intricate design, ornate crown moldings, substantial furniture and a mounted elk-head.<sup>28</sup>

In order to envision the activities of the Elks Club, it must be associated with two prominent institutions--the Armory adjacent to the south lot line at 210 South Royal and the Washington-Virginia Electric Railway with tracks on Prince Street in front of the Elks Club and a major passenger station on the Royal and Prince Street corner.

The Armory, built in 1880 and enlarged in 1887, shared many activities with the Elks Lodge. The robust castellated brick structure housed the Alexandria Light Infantry. The Infantry held a national reputation for style and skill. The 40' x 90' hall had a seating capacity of seven hundred. Trade fairs, political rallies and banquets were held in addition to the military use. Older residents still recall it as a Soldiers Rest in 1898 for Spanish American War troops, later as a roller skating rink, and the site of a temporary morgue following the 1947 major airline disaster at National Airport.<sup>29</sup> The Armory and Elks Club provided overflow space for each other. Both halls were filled when Col. Theodore Roosevelt spoke at the Armory in 1929.<sup>30</sup> The Armory burned after a basketball game on January 21, 1953, the eve of

Eisenhower's inauguration ball.<sup>31</sup> The city cleared the site and provided a playground for neighborhood children.



The Elks Club was an organization of the common man, and the Washington-Virginia Railway allowed him to attend his daily chores, his work and his pastimes.

The trolley was an integral part of the lives of Alexandrians--it brought the evening newspaper, visiting relatives, transported the tourists to Mount Vernon and the children to school.

The location of the Railway most certainly influenced the Elks purchase and erection of **their new Lodge**. A new loop track passed in front of the Lodge on Prince in 1903. The street was finished by repaving with vitrified brick and granite curbs. A station was established on the S.W. corner of Prince and Royal (now the Cavalier Antique Shop) It was a center of Alexandria activity. Visitors in the Nation's Capital rode the trolley from D.C., to Mount Vernon, passing along the Royal Street line. In 1907 the "Historic Route" was enhanced by a new Mount Vernon terminal. (The present road circle in front of the mansion was built as the trolley turn-around area.) Trolley tickets had advertisements regarding historic sights to visit in Old Alexandria such as Christ Church and the Carlyle House. A government worker or shopper could ride from the corner of Prince and Royal to 12th and

Penn Ave. in 25 minutes. During rush hour a car left every 10 minutes -- for the sum of 15 cents.<sup>32</sup>

Thousands of out-of-town Elks stopped and paid greeting to their Alexandria Elk brothers. The brown and cream cars lettered with gold carried the Elks Club members to their meetings and brought the public to their special events.

The neighborhood was bustling when the Elks Lodge was completed in 1909. As people were preparing for Christmas, the Gazette claimed "Window Shades Made to Order Make Very Useful Gifts", as did the 25 cent neckties and the \$1.50 parlor cabinets. The Christmas turkey cost 20 cents per pound and the A & P at 525 King Street sold lemons for the Holiday toddy for 20 cents a dozen.<sup>33</sup> One thousand children were entertained by the Elk's Santa Program.<sup>34</sup> Across Prince Street where the fire station is today, stood three small antiquated houses. Aunt Arie, an African American located next to the small older firehouse, sold taffy for one cent a cake, the middle building was a tonsorial saloon and next to Fleishmans Alley (named for a local hotelier and Elks Lodge leader) stood John Churman's bakery, formerly a toy store run by a German named Stieff. There was a plumber and tobacco store on the N.E. and N.W. corners of Royal and Prince Streets and a grain and feed supply nearby. The bells and wagons of the Relief Hose and Line Company #1 at 319 Prince Street clanged down the street.<sup>35</sup>

The period 1920-1930 was

probably the peak of activities for the Elks Club. They had about 500 local members and nearly a million nation-wide.<sup>36</sup>

Bazaars were held to provide funds for their many charities. In 1924, seventeen children were sent to Richmond for care by a renowned orthopedic surgeon. One bazaar claimed to be:

"UNPARALLED IN ITS MAGNITUDE  
UNIQUE IN CONCEPTION  
DAZZLING IN BRILLIANCY  
STARTLING IN ORIGINALITY"<sup>37</sup>

The hall became so crowded that the vaudeville acts were postponed. But the baby and beauty contests, educated trained pigeons, Welsh acrobatics, the "Handcuff King" and radio concert proceeded as planned, even as news spread throughout the crowd of President Woodrow Wilson's death.<sup>38</sup>

The Alexandria Elks Lodge was probably best known for the regular Wednesday night dances. Gentlemen were charged \$1.10 and ladies were admitted free in 1924. The dances were by invitation which commented "Don't be afraid to bring your Mother, wives or sweethearts. We will see they are treated as if they were in their own homes."<sup>39</sup>

This author was not granted access to the Elks Lodge files and memorabilia. However, Mr. Morris Levinson, whose membership in the Alexandria Elks Lodge has spanned 70 years (1923-1993), kindly shared memories of the bar, card playing and slot machines in the rathskeller. The proceeds were donated to the Elk's charities.<sup>40</sup>

In 1920, the Elks Lodge sold the old hotel building on the corner of Royal and Prince to the Local Union #1665 of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America for \$12,500. The Elks retained ownership of a parking space at the rear of the building but granted the union a right to use the "coal house on the land as long as said coal house remains standing."<sup>41</sup>

The first floor came to be used as a grocery and was the Safeway prior to the construction of the present Safeway building.

Always a male organization, the headlines of the Gazette in May, 1957 proclaimed, "City Police Arrest Four in Raid of Stag Night Show at Elks". Ten plainclothes men arrested four Baltimore dancers for disorderly conduct and indecent exposure.<sup>42</sup>

Similar to most fraternal organizations after World War II, membership in the Elks Lodge gradually declined. The building was put up for sale. Neighbors vehemently protested a proposal for purchase and renovation by a local architectural design firm; they insisted that residential use only should be allowed in the old Elks Club building, not a business. City Hall agreed. Some of the most interesting buildings in cities have been owned by financially pressed or charitable nonprofit enterprises least able to maintain them. Adaptive use allowed the private sector to recycle buildings of local interest and has returned them to the tax roll.<sup>43</sup> The adaptive use of such properties has been a common result of strong local

preservation programs in the Old and Historic District of Alexandria.

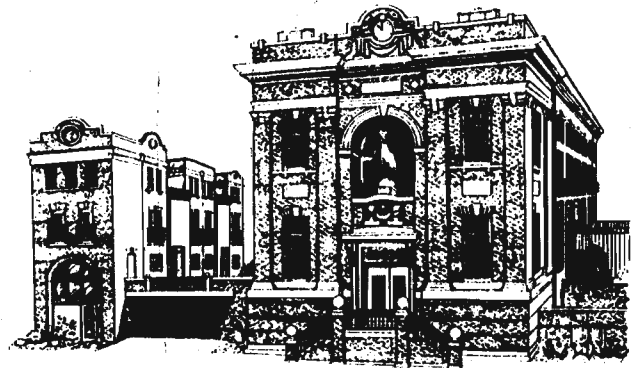
A new era began with the 1984 purchase by the Prince Street Development Corporation and a transformation of the Elks Club Lodge into the Prince Street Club, a condominium association. There was virtual "condomania" in the city of Alexandria in the 1970-80's. The number of condos increased 6,000% in the Washington Metro area and Alexandria boasted the most units per capita. In 1983, one in 20 Alexandria residences was a condominium, although there were very few in Old Town.<sup>44</sup>

Developers Melvin J. Berman, a District native with a Civil Engineering degree from Cornell and his son Michael B. Berman sought to create a club atmosphere for eleven condominium units reflecting the lodge hall construction. They previously had made a similar conversion of an Alexandria Odd Fellows Hall. The civil engineers were Kephart and Chan, 1028 Duke Street, and the firm of Brown, Donald, LeMay and Page, 1370 Prince Street, was the architect of the project.<sup>45</sup>

Nine condo units were planned for the Elks Lodge building plus a two-unit new infill building on the east. The residences were connected by a central plaza over a thirteen space underground garage.

The Site Plan was approved by the City on June 5, 1984. The Prince Street Development Corporation made a Public Offering on January 18, 1985. Preliminary plans produced an outcry from concerned

preservationists, most objecting to the planned removal of original building elements. They spoke of the "trite Art Deco character" and "frivolous change."<sup>46</sup> Mayor Beatley intervened and requested the retention of the bronze elk. Controversy reigned over painting the deep red brick building. The Board of Architectural Review Hearings were never dull. In the end, the exterior envelope was preserved, except the side windows were enlarged. All original exterior decorative features and the elk were saved. The four new rooftop structures were not built as approved by the City and still disturb many citizens.



The Prince Street Club

The renovation featured high ceilings and individually designed interiors. The master suites were expansive, becoming a kind of seraglio. Original capitals and columns were retained. Some of the maple floors and plasterwork details were saved. The developer's agreement with the City to renovate and build new playground equipment in the Royal Street Tot Lot Park now assures park access to the

condo residents.<sup>47</sup> Each condo unit is different, all have extensive light and glass.

They range from 1,091 to 1,985 square feet in size. The first unit was sold in November, 1986 and the final one in July, 1988. The total unit sales price of the project was \$3,162,000.<sup>48</sup>

The Prince Street Club Condominium has successfully retained the friendly club atmosphere of the Elks Lodge. Most summer evenings find residents gathered on the

Courtyard. Neighborhood news is exchanged in the lobbies and garage. Building Manager Harold Payne provides friendly and expert care for the property. The firemen are still the best neighbors. Now men and women---artists and accountants, doctors and directors, bankers and builders---are united in a manner similar to the claim of the Elks Club founders: "...a fellowship of active and creative men..." (AND women!).<sup>49</sup>

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**EDITORIAL STAFF:** Marilyn  
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