

Georgia Department of Natural Resources

Historic Preservation Division

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Wincoff Hotel Listed in National Register

ATLANTA (May 8, 2009) –The Wincoff Hotel, located on Peachtree Street in downtown Atlanta, Fulton County, was listed in the National Register on March 31, 2009. The property owners sponsored the nomination and a consultant prepared the nomination materials.

Named for the owner William F. Wincoff, the Wincoff Hotel operated as a luxury hotel in downtown Atlanta from 1913 to 1946. It was built with typical early 20th-century “fireproof” construction designed to prevent structural failure in the event of a fire. In the morning hours of December 7, 1946, a fire started on the third floor and quickly spread though an open stair to the upper floors. The stair, which acted as a flue pulling smoke and flames upward through the building, was the only stair (escape route) in the hotel. Guests that were trapped on the upper floors beyond the reach of firemen’s ladders, either jumped to their deaths or were overcome by smoke. One hundred nineteen people died in the fire, which was one of the deadliest hotel fires in American history. Wincoff and his wife, who resided in the hotel, were among the fatalities. In 1951, the hotel reopened as the Peachtree on Peachtree Hotel with fire-safety improvements that included two additional stairs. Between 1967 and 1981, the Georgia Baptist Homes operated the building as a retirement home. For the last 25 years, the Wincoff Hotel remained mostly vacant.

The hotel is significant in the area of social history at the national level because the hotel fire, along with hotel fires in Chicago and Dubuque, Iowa, resulted in new federal fire-safety codes for multi-story buildings. These codes required enclosed corridors and stairs, multiple means of egress, automatic sprinklers, and fire-rated doors separating rooms from corridors. In Georgia, the state legislature passed the Georgia State Fire Safety Act in 1948, which required

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fire-safety improvements for new and existing buildings under the authority of the Georgia Insurance Commissioner.

The Winecoff Hotel is significant in the area of commerce because it is an excellent example of an early 20th-century luxury hotel in downtown Atlanta.

The Winecoff Hotel is also significant in architecture because it is an excellent example of the Neoclassical Revival style in Atlanta built in the first decades of the 20th century and is among the few hotels from that time to survive in downtown Atlanta. Noted hotel architect William L. Stoddart designed the hotel in 1912. The steel-frame hotel is covered with a brick and terra-cotta veneer on the main north and east facades that front Peachtree and Ellis streets. The three-part exterior design includes rusticated cast-stone at the lobby level. The interior features a lobby, mezzanine, and guest rooms on the upper floors, all organized around a central stair and elevator core. A second stair was added in the southwest corner in 1951.

In 2006, the Winecoff was rehabilitated as a luxury hotel. Floors three through 15 were completely rebuilt and the number of guest rooms reduced from 15 to 10 rooms on each floor. The property, now renamed The Ellis, received final certification from the Technical Services Branch of the National Park Service for its rehabilitation of the hotel on August 8, 2008.

The Historic Preservation Division (HPD) of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources serves as Georgia's state historic preservation office. Their mission is to promote the preservation and use of historic places for a better Georgia. HPD's programs include archaeology protection and education, environmental review, grants, historic resource surveys, tax incentives, the National Register of Historic Places, community planning and technical assistance. For more information, call 404-656-2840 or visit their Web site at www.gashpo.org.