

Historic Hotels!

XXV: Washington D.C's *The Mayflower*

This hotel dubs itself as "Washington's second best address." In fact, the Mayflower attracts nearly as many notables as the nearby White House -- no doubt the town's first most desirable address. A true "inaugural address," the Mayflower's tradition of service dates back to the 1925 Coolidge inauguration when one thousand people attended the hotel's grand opening. The day it opened its doors, the hotel boasted more gold leaf than any building in the country except for the Library of Congress, and it was one of the capital's first air-conditioned hotels. The hotel hosted Charles Lindbergh's celebration of his historic flight. Hotel legend has it that during a visit, actress Jean Harlow was so intrigued by the hotel's switchboard that she spent a morning as a stand-in operator. It was here that FDR worked on his 1933 inaugural address, and for years FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover lunched at the hotel nearly every day that he was in town.

Designed by Warren and Westmore, the New York architects who also worked on Manhattan's Grand Central Station, the original hotel boasted 1,057 rooms, including 112 apartments. Hotel workers reportedly spent three months working around the clock just to arrange some 25,000 pieces of furniture delivered from New York. Extensive renovations in the early 1980s restored the hotel to its original grandeur, earning it a place on the list of the National Register of Historic Places.

Furnishings are lavish: poster beds and settees, damask wing chairs, and tiered curtains with matching bedspreads and dust ruffles. Walls are covered with faux-silk wallpaper and decorated with historic prints of local scenes. The bathroom, covered in Italian marble, is luxurious. Light-wood cabinets house an army of fluffy towels.



Renovation work in the early 1990s led to the discovery of a 25-foot skylight blacked out at the beginning of World War II; also uncovered were two large murals by artist Edward Lanning.

The Mayflower is now a Marriott Renaissance hotel and is Washington DC's largest luxury hotel.