

# Brooklyn Daily Eagle

## Brooklyn's Fabled Hotel Bossert on Market; Watchtower Seeking Bids

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### Broker Estimates Could Bring Bid in \$100 Million Range

*By Linda Collins*

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BROOKLYN HEIGHTS — In what some are saying came as no surprise, The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society announced Monday that the former Hotel Bossert in Brooklyn Heights is on the market. As the Eagle has been reporting over the past several years, the Jehovah's Witnesses have transferred their printing and shipping operations to Wallkill, N.Y., and have consolidated their operations in Brooklyn, resulting in a decrease in the number of staff members and thus the need for residential space.

The Bossert, at 98 Montague St., corner of Hicks Street, is one of several properties in Brooklyn Heights that the Watchtower has put on the market in recent years.

It's been used as a residential building for the organization's headquarters staff since it was acquired in 1988 so the majority of the 224 units are described as "spacious one-bedroom apartments, along with studios."

There are also a few single rooms without kitchens for temporary guests and short-term volunteers, spokesperson Richard Devine told the Eagle Tuesday.

"The building, as originally conceived by Louis Bossert [built in 1909], was as a residential hotel, so it has always been a combination transient and residential hotel," Devine said.

As has been its custom, the Watchtower has attached no asking price to the property and is seeking bids and a private transaction. There is also no stated deadline for the receipt of bids, according to Devine, who estimates the process should take no more than a few months.

"Interested buyers can contact the real property office at Watchtower," he said.

"Qualified buyers will be given a bid package and can come back with what we hope will be a fair bid."

Most local brokers declined to "guestimate" what the fabled Bossert will bring, except

Arlene Waye of Awaye Realty.

“This is a phenomenal property. It will probably bring a price in the \$100 million range,” she told the Eagle. Timothy King, a senior partner at Massey Knakal Realty Services Brooklyn, agreed that the property was phenomenal.

“This is perhaps one of the most unique and most well-maintained trophy assets in Brooklyn. The Watchtower organization is well known for impeccable maintenance standards and the Bossert reflects this level of care. It will be a challenge for a new owner to run the building with the same level of care and attention to detail,” King said.

Declining to put a price on it, King added, “I have no doubt that this asset will attract attention from forward thinking investors who will bid aggressively. It is likely that the ultimate purchaser will pay a record breaking price for this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.”

According to a Watchtower fact sheet, the Italian Renaissance Revival-style building was built by lumber magnate Louis Bossert as an elegant apartment hotel in 1909 and extended back to Remsen Street in 1912.

They note that Francis Morrone, in his book, “An Architectural Guidebook to Brooklyn,” said it was described as “the Waldorf-Astoria of Brooklyn.” Morrone adds that the Bossert was once famous for its Marine Roof, a two-level rooftop restaurant with a nautical motif “affording magnificent views of Manhattan.”

The Watchtower and local Heights’ denizens recall that the Marine Roof was a popular nightclub up to World War II and among its attractions was well-known pianist Freddy Martin and his Orchestra. The Bossert hosted many celebrities and during the 1950s was the home of several Brooklyn Dodgers. It was also the site of the Dodgers’ celebration of their World Series victory in 1955.

A bar on the ground floor, with a Montague Street entrance, was a popular hangout for players and fans.

One resident recalled that TV experimenter John Hogan and advertising executive Elliott Sanger conceived the idea of a classical music radio station over dinner one night at the Bossert in 1935. That station became WQXR.

### **Restoration**

After leasing it beginning in 1983, the Watchtower purchased it in 1988 and undertook a restoration of the entire building in accordance with Landmarks Preservation Commission standards for the historic district, winning awards for the work that was done in returning the building to its former turn-of-the-century elegance and charm.

Among these awards were the 1991 Lucy G. Moses Award for the renovation of the

lobby and the Brooklyn Heights Association's Special Award for Architectural Excellence presented in 1993. According to Devine, the restoration was "a tremendous job." The Marine Roof had gone to ruin and collapsed so the entire roof area has to be rebuilt. The lobby was in disrepair and the Italian marble damaged.

"We had to replace about 2,500 square feet of it," said Devine, describing it as Botticino Classico marble. "And we had to go to the original quarry in Italy to get it."

Other restorations in the lobby included rebuilding the lobby ceiling ("much of which needed to be re-cast") and restoring the marble pillars to their original state.

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