

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

For NPS use only

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

received 1984 12 1984

date entered JAN 11 1985

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Blackstone Hotel (D009:15-32)

and/or common Blackstone Centre

2. Location

street & number 302 S. 36th Street N/A not for publication

city, town Omaha N/A vicinity of

state Nebraska code 032 county Douglas code 055

3. Classification

| | | | | |
|---|--|---|--|--|
| Category | Ownership | Status | Present Use | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> district | <input type="checkbox"/> public | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied | <input type="checkbox"/> agriculture | <input type="checkbox"/> museum |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private | <input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial | <input type="checkbox"/> park |
| <input type="checkbox"/> structure | <input type="checkbox"/> both | <input type="checkbox"/> work in progress | <input type="checkbox"/> educational | <input type="checkbox"/> private residence |
| <input type="checkbox"/> site | Public Acquisition | Accessible | <input type="checkbox"/> entertainment | <input type="checkbox"/> religious |
| <input type="checkbox"/> object | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> in process | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted | <input type="checkbox"/> government | <input type="checkbox"/> scientific |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> being considered | <input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted | <input type="checkbox"/> industrial | <input type="checkbox"/> transportation |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> no | <input type="checkbox"/> military | <input type="checkbox"/> other: |

4. Owner of Property

name Blackstone Centre Association

street & number 11308 Davenport Street

city, town Omaha N/A vicinity of state Nebraska

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Douglas County Courthouse

street & number 1819 Farnam

city, town Omaha state Nebraska

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Nebraska Historic Buildings Survey has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date On-going federal state county local

depository for survey records Nebraska State Historical Society

city, town Lincoln state Nebraska

7. Description

Condition

excellent
 good
 fair

deteriorated
 ruins
 unexposed

Check one

unaltered
 altered

Check one

original site
 moved date N/A

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

A large eight story over raised basement structure, the Blackstone Hotel is E-shaped in plan, exhibiting a five part composition to the front facade as a result of projecting central and end pavilions. Faced with dark brick and exuberantly highlighted in light-colored terra-cotta, the Hotel's design is Second Renaissance Revival in style.

Constructed in 1916 at a cost of approximately \$500,000; eight stories over raised basement and sub-basement; E-shaped in plan; steel frame, concrete pan floor system, brick curtain walls with extensive terra cotta trim; a terra cotta cornice displaying modillions, dentils and consoles completes the seventh floor; reconstructed wood trellis roof gardens at the eighth floor are slightly recessed behind a low brick parapet; two wide terra cotta bands extend vertically from the second floor to the cornice at each leg of the E-shaped plan, encompassing a pair of double-hung windows at every floor; terra cotta is also used for horizontal banding defining the building base and upper floors, for coping at the parapet, and for details including window lintels with stylized keystones and window sills; recessed brick courses are used to simulate a rusticated base at the ground floor; original entry replaced in 1961 with flat metal roof that projects from the building to cover the driveway.

The present owners have recently completed a certified rehabilitation of the structure, converting the hotel into first class office accommodations.

8. Significance

| Period | Areas of Significance—Check and justify below | | | |
|--|--|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric | <input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric | <input type="checkbox"/> community planning | <input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> religion |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499 | <input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic | <input type="checkbox"/> conservation | <input type="checkbox"/> law | <input type="checkbox"/> science |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599 | <input type="checkbox"/> agriculture | <input type="checkbox"/> economics | <input type="checkbox"/> literature | <input type="checkbox"/> sculpture |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699 | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> education | <input type="checkbox"/> military | <input type="checkbox"/> social/ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799 | <input type="checkbox"/> art | <input type="checkbox"/> engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> music | <input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899 | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce | <input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement | <input type="checkbox"/> philosophy | <input type="checkbox"/> theater |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900- 1976 | <input type="checkbox"/> communications | <input type="checkbox"/> industry | <input type="checkbox"/> politics/government | <input type="checkbox"/> transportation |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> invention | | <input type="checkbox"/> other (specify) |

Specific dates 1916-1976 **Builder/Architect** Bankers Investment Realty Co./

F. W. Fitzpatrick

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Blackstone Hotel is significant in the commercial development in Omaha as the City's most prestigious hotel following its construction in 1916, and particularly after its conversion in 1920 by the Schimmel family. Architecturally the structure represents a fine example of the Second Renaissance Revival style which was popular for a variety of major building constructions in Nebraska from the turn of the century through the 1940's.

The construction of the Blackstone as a residential hotel in 1916 was part of a larger building trend in Omaha. The twenty years from 1910 to 1930 brought the construction of many apartment buildings and downtown hotels that still make up a good portion of the Omaha skyline. In addition, the Blackstone's location at 36th and Farnam pointed toward Omaha's future, clearly moving away from downtown and into a wealthy suburb.

The land on which the Blackstone Hotel stands appeared on early Omaha maps as adjacent to the holdings of landowners Smith and Dickinson. When Smith's Addition was platted in 1869, the oddly shaped block on which the Blackstone was built was only partly included in the plat. Only when it was purchased by the wealthy banking family of the four Kountze brothers in 1904 was the block lying between 36th and 37th; Farnam and Dewey, laid out in lots.

However, no significant construction occurred in Kountze's Subdivision. The surrounding subdivisions were irregular, of varying size, and chopped up the neighboring land. Thirty-Sixth Street had always jogged to the east at Farnam, and Farnam had narrowed west of 36th, because of the irregular platting. No doubt this point of change in block layout at 36th and Farnam affected its popularity for residential construction, and the site remained open, covered by a grove of maple trees until 1916.

By the teens, Farnam had become the main street of Omaha's Gold Coast neighborhood. First developed in the late 1880's and early 1890's, the Gold Coast was established with the construction of homes of the wealthy in the first decade of the twentieth century. Among the neighborhood's residents were business, financial and social leaders who lived in homes designed by architects in a variety of the newest styles. Although along a streetcar line, Farnam Street was still primarily residential in the teens.

9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 1.5 acres

Quadrangle name Omaha, North, Nebr.-Iowa

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A

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| Zone | Easting | | | Northing | | | | | | | | | | |

B

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| Zone | Easting | | | Northing | | | | | | | | | | |

H

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|------|---------|--|--|----------|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Zone | Easting | | | Northing | | | | | | | | | | |

Verbal boundary description and justification

All of lots one through five of Block 5, Kountze Subdivision, an Addition to the City of Omaha, Douglas County, Nebraska, except those portions deeded to the City for street purposes; constituting all of the integral historically associated real estate.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A code county code

state N/A code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Lynn Meyer, Preservation Planner, and Garneth Peterson

organization Omaha City Planning Department date 1982

street & number 1819 Farnam telephone (402) 444-5208

city or town Omaha state Nebraska

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature Marvin D. Knott 11/19/84

title Director, Nebraska State Historical Society date

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

Entered in the National Register

date 1-11-85

Keeper of the National Register

Attest: date

Chief of Registration

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The Bankers Realty Investment Company built the Blackstone in 1916 as a family hotel, as opposed to an apartment house. The Company clearly stated that in family hotels, residents rented by the year rather than the day, and received hotel services. Apartments were available in sizes varying from one to six rooms, although none contained kitchens or dining rooms. The hotel also provided three roof gardens, which offered a fine view of the Omaha skyline. In addition, the owners emphasized the Blackstone's convenience for all Omahans, since it was easily reached by three streetcar lines and by automobile along a paved Farnam Street. For the "club man", a brief streetcar trip conveyed him to the Happy Hollow and Country Clubs, with the Field Club only a few minutes walk on 36th Street.

Along with its primary function of "providing a home for people who wish to enjoy all the advantages of the most convenient and luxurious form of communal housing, the Blackstone also aimed to serve as a center of the City's social functions. An ad in Omaha's weekly society newspaper, The Excelsior, identified not only the eighth floor ballroom and roof gardens as available for gatherings, but also the ground floor dining room, which was open to non-residents of the building. Clearly the Blackstone owners sought to create a luxurious residential hotel and social center for the wealthy neighborhood in which it was built.

Although other residential hotels such as the El Beudor at 1804 Dodge and the Flatiron at 1722 St. Mary's Avenue were also built in the teens, they were most often located downtown. The construction of the Blackstone on West Farnam was similar to apartment building construction that was increasingly occurring not only in the West Farnam Gold Coast neighborhood, but in Dundee and along Park Avenue as well. This apartment construction continued into the 1920's and 1930's and eventually became more popular than the residential hotel.

Perhaps because of the number of available apartments, the Blackstone never lived up to its first owners' plans. However, the purchase of the building by Vienna born Charles Schimmel in 1920 turned the Blackstone into a "symbol of elegance" for Omahans for half a century. Under Schimmel, the hotel published its own magazine, The Blackstonian, and maintained its own Pierce Arrow, which met visiting dignitaries arriving by train. The pastry shop and various dining rooms were famous for their fine food, and the Orleans Room, for sixteen years, was the only Nebraska restaurant to receive Holiday Magazines Award of Excellence. Under the Schimmels, the Blackstone operated as a hotel, although it retained a number of residents as well.

Schimmel owned not only the Blackstone, but four other hotels in Midwest cities, operated by his sons. In July, 1950, Hotel Management magazine awarded the Schimmel children the "distinguished service cross" for their abilities, calling their hotel chain "one of America's most successful family enterprises."

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Over the years, the Schimmels continued their standard of excellence at the Blackstone. In 1956, plans were announced for a new addition to the south of the building, but it was never constructed. A remodeling in 1961 replaced the Classically detailed entrance on 36th Street with a flat metal carport. In October, 1968, Edward Schimmel sold the Blackstone and two other hotels to the Radisson Management Corporation of Minneapolis. Although the Radisson Corporation changed the name to the Radisson Blackstone and planned extensive remodeling, their effort was unsuccessful. The hotel was forced to close in 1976 and has remained vacant since that time.

The Blackstone Hotel is architecturally significant as a fine example of the Second Renaissance Revival style of architecture, a style popular between 1890 and 1920. Like other revival styles of this period, the Second Renaissance Revival style represents the return to a more disciplined architecture based on classical and renaissance examples, in reaction to the picturesque eclecticism of the preceding Victorian era. Features of the Blackstone Hotel that are representative of this style include the brickwork simulating a rusticated base, the distinct horizontal divisions created by terra cotta bands, the variation of the windows, and the use of classical details.

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