

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

747

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable."

For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Commercial House Hotel

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 146 South Broadway

not for publication N/A

city or town Spring Valley

vicinity N/A

state Minnesota code MN county Fillmore code 045 zip code 55975

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this x nomination _____ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property x meets _____ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant _____ nationally _____ statewide x locally. (_____ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official Ian R. Stewart
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

Date 6/5/01

State or Federal agency and bureau Minnesota Historical Society

In my opinion, the property _____ meets _____ does not meet the National Register criteria. (_____ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official _____

Date _____

State or Federal agency and bureau _____

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the
National Register
See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the
National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain): _____

Edson H. Beall 7-19-01

Edson H. Beall

Signature of
Keeper

Date
of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property (Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

| Contributing | Noncontributing |
|--------------|---------------------|
| <u>1</u> | <u>0</u> buildings |
| <u>0</u> | <u>0</u> sites |
| <u>0</u> | <u>0</u> structures |
| <u>0</u> | <u>0</u> objects |
| <u>1</u> | <u>0</u> Total |

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

Name of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: DOMESTIC Sub: hotel

COMMERCE/TRADE restaurant

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: VACANT/NOT IN USE Sub: _____

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

NO STYLE

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation BRICK

roof _____

walls BRICK; BRICK VENEER

other GLASS; WOOD; STONE; CONCRETE

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or a grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE
ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION

Period of Significance 1916-1950

Significant Dates 1916

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation N/A

Architect/Builder Builder: Lower, Michael
(1874)

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

- Previous documentation on file (NPS)
- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

- Primary Location of Additional Data
- State Historic Preservation Office
 - Other State agency
 - Federal agency
 - Local government
 - University
 - Other

Name of repository: Spring Valley Community Historical Society

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than one acre

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet) Spring Valley, Minn., 1965

| | Zone | Easting | Northing | Zone | Easting | Northing |
|---|-------------------------|---------|----------|------|---------|----------|
| 1 | 15 | 549180 | 4836070 | 3 | _____ | _____ |
| 2 | _____ | _____ | _____ | 4 | _____ | _____ |
| | See continuation sheet. | | | | | |

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Marjorie Pearson, Ph.D.
organization Hess, Roise and Company
street & number 100 North First Street
city or town Minneapolis state MN zip code 55401
telephone (612) 338-1987
date March 2001

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name River Valley Partners, LLC
street & number 323 South Broadway Avenue telephone (507) 281-2093
city or town Rochester state MN zip code 55904

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.). Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 1 Commercial House Hotel
name of property
Fillmore County, Minnesota
county and state

Description

Exterior

The three-story Commercial House Hotel is located in southeastern Minnesota in the city of Spring Valley, in the northwestern section of Fillmore County. The hotel has a prominent downtown site fronting the west side of Broadway, the primary street of the city's business district. The building's forty-four-foot wide front (east) facade extends north from the northwest corner of the intersection of Broadway and Main Street. The south facade extends 106 feet west from Broadway. Sidewalks edge the building's south and east sides. A one-story building abuts the hotel to the north. A courtyard extends from the abutting building along the north side of the hotel. Porter Alley extends northward along the west side of the building.¹

The building was constructed in three phases. In 1874, a two-story brick building above a full basement was erected that extended forty-four feet along Broadway and seventy feet along Main Street. It is faced in red-orange brick over two layers of common brick. A section of the building along Main is only thirty-six feet wide, creating a shallow L plan. In 1882, a two-story wood-frame structure veneered in brick above a full basement was added. This section extends thirty-six feet along Main Street to Porter Alley. The entire building has a limestone foundation. The third phase of construction added the third story, also of wood-frame construction veneered in brick, in 1916. Wood trusses support a shallow gabled roof, concealed behind brick parapets. In 1916, the first-story windows and the front entrance to the building were reconfigured, and new entrance stairs were created.

The main facade of the building fronts Broadway. At the first story the brick has been covered with stucco that has been painted a

¹ The description of the building is based on a site visit conducted by Marjorie Pearson on January 24, 2001. The 1927 Sanborn fire insurance map and recent measured drawings indicate that the front facade is forty feet wide. The forty-four-foot dimension is indicated in accounts of the building's original construction in 1874. *Western Progress*, March 4, 1874.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7

Page 2

Commercial House Hotel
name of property

Fillmore County, Minnesota
county and state

yellow-cream color. A window opening with glass-block infill lights the basement at the left (south) side. A large window opening flanks each side of the main entrance, which is placed slightly off-center on the facade and is approached by a double flight of concrete stairs with paneled walls topped by metal railings. The 9 ft. x 5 ft. 5 in. window opening to the right (north) is framed in wood and contains a single sheet of glass above a concrete sill. The 10 ft. 8 in. x 5 ft. 5 in. window opening (possibly enlarged to this size in 1954) to the left (south) is framed in aluminum with glass-block infill above a concrete sill. Paired aluminum and glass entrance doors flanked by sidelights, above a concrete sill, open from the platform of the stairs. A sign reading "The Old Hotel" is placed on the wall to the left of the doorway. A deteriorating aluminum canopy spans the facade above the first story and is hung from cables attached to the facade at the second story.

As originally constructed in 1874, based on the evidence of photographs, the first story contained six bays with segmental-arched openings. A wood porch with a flight of steps perpendicular to the street sheltered three of the six bays, which included the entrance doors. That porch appears to have been rebuilt or modified sometime between the original construction and the enlargement of the hotel in 1916 (possibly in 1882 when the kitchen section was added).² At present, the appearance of the first story dates from 1916, when structural changes were made, and 1954, when a portion of the hotel was converted for use as the municipal liquor store. In 1916, the wood porch was removed and the double flight of concrete stairs added, and the windows and entrances were rebuilt to incorporate two large show windows flanking an entrance that led to a reconfigured hotel office on the interior. A steeply pitched

² A photograph of the hotel taken in the 1880s show a porch with a flat roof supported by end posts and steps spanning its width. This photograph was reproduced in the *Spring Valley Tribune*, January 6, 1966, and Mary Jo Dathe, *Spring Valley: The Laura Ingalls Wilder "Connection" 1890*, rev. ed. (Spring Valley, Minn.: Spring Valley Historical Society, 1992), 5. A postcard view of the hotel, taken in about 1900, shows a porch with a hipped roof supported by turned posts linked by balustrades and approached by two sets of steps. This is reproduced in *A History of Spring Valley: The Years 1855-1980* (Spring Valley, Minn.: Spring Valley Community Historical Society in cooperation with the Spring Valley Tribune, 1981), 12.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7

Page 3

Commercial House Hotel
name of property

Fillmore County, Minnesota
county and state

canopy sheltered the stairs. The glass-block infill, the aluminum and glass entrance doors, the aluminum canopy, and probably the stucco facing date from the 1954 conversion.

The second story is faced in red-orange brick laid in English garden wall bond, i.e., four rows of stretchers alternating with a row of headers. The brick appears to be original, but it was reset in 1916 when the hotel was being enlarged. According to a contemporary account, "when the workmen got ready to put in the large iron girders which go over [the large first-floor] windows they found the brick wall was hollow and not bound securely and they thought it best to tear down the entire brick work in front and rebuild it securely."³ The window configuration was changed from six regularly spaced segmental-arched openings to the present arrangement of paired sash in a large opening flanking two single window openings, each with a concrete sill. The wood-framed one-over-one sash are covered by aluminum storm sash. The brickwork has been replaced at the right-hand corner. The building originally terminated in a corbelled brick cornice above the second story.

The third story was added in 1916.⁴ The red-orange brick veneer is laid in running (stretcher) bond and is slightly different in color and texture from the brick at the second story. The window configuration and sash are like that at the second story with paired sash in a large opening flanking two single window openings. The wood sash are covered by aluminum storm sash. The facade terminates in a row of dentils set below a molded metal cornice with stylized end brackets.

The three construction phases of the Commercial House are clearly revealed on the Main Street (south) facade. As originally built, this facade was two stories high above a basement and eight bays wide with regularly spaced, segmental-arched openings. The arches were formed by two rows of header bricks. At the basement level, two windows are still visible and contain remnants of wood-framed

³ *Spring Valley Mercury*, January 7, 1916.

⁴ "The workmen commenced putting up the frame for the third story of the Commercial House. This will be boarded up on the outside and in the spring the brick work will be put on." *Spring Valley Mercury*, January 28, 1916.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 4

Commercial House Hotel
name of property

Fillmore County, Minnesota
county and state

sash. The basement window closest to the Broadway corner has been modified to a square shape and has glass-block infill. The adjacent brick wall surface has been covered with painted stucco. At the first story, all of the openings (except for a doorway in the second bay from the end, which contains concrete-block infill) have been filled in with brick in 1954 when this side of the building was converted for the municipal liquor store. A deteriorating set of concrete steps fronts the doorway, which once led to the dining room. A frame shed structure, added after 1972, partially covers three of the bays at the basement and first story and shelters steps leading to the basement.⁵ At the second story, the eight window openings have stone sills and retain one-over-one wood-framed sash. Six of the windows have aluminum storm sash. The red-orange brick facing the first and second stories is laid in running bond. This facade originally terminated in a corbelled brick cornice. Evidence of its removal is apparent in the brickwork separating the second and third stories. On the third story, added in 1916, the eight window openings are square-headed with concrete sills and contain one-over-one wood-framed sash. The red-orange brick veneer rises to a slightly stepped parapet that is covered by a metal coping.

The five-bay section extending to Porter Alley was added in 1882 to accommodate the hotel kitchen. It was originally two stories high, had regularly spaced, segmental-arched window openings, and was faced with brick and terminated by a corbelled cornice that continued the appearance of the front section of the building. When the hotel was enlarged in 1916, the third story was extended over this section of the building. The window openings followed the line of those on the two lower stories and the brick veneer continued the pattern of the wall surface. Because of water damage, the brick veneer deteriorated, and most of the brick either fell off or was subsequently removed, revealing the underlying wood framing and horizontal wood sheathing. The brick foundation remains in place. The brick veneer has been replaced by concrete block in the last bay and at the Porter Alley corner. Most of the window sash have been removed in this section of the building.

⁵ Photographs of the hotel published in the *Spring Valley Tribune*, January 6, 1966, and March 2, 1972, do not show this structure.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 7 Page 5

Commercial House Hotel
name of property

Fillmore County, Minnesota
county and state

The three-bay west wall along Porter Alley had segmental-arched window openings and was faced with red brick veneer. The brick veneer was covered with stucco, probably in 1954, and the middle bay of the second story was modified to incorporate a doorway onto a fire escape, added in 1954.⁶ The brick veneer at the Main Street corner has been replaced by concrete block. The third story, added in 1916, retains its brick-veneer facing. A door in the middle opening leads to the fire escape. The flanking windows have aluminum storm sash. The wall terminates in a metal strip coping.

The courtyard walls on the north and west side of the building reveal the L-shaped plan. The eleven bays of the long north wall were constructed in three stages. The first two stories containing the six bays closest to the base of the L date from 1874 and have segmental-arched openings. The openings at the first story and basement have been filled in or temporarily covered, while the second-story openings have four-over-four wood-framed sash, covered by aluminum storm sash. A one-story shed structure faced with corrugated metal covers three of the bays at the basement and first story. A structure is indicated at this location as early as 1890, although the existing structure may be of later date.⁷ The five bays of the 1882 section are articulated similarly to the bays of the original section. The brick walls of the original building and the brick veneer of the 1882 addition have been covered or replaced with stucco, probably in 1954. The third story, added in 1916, has a brick veneer punctuated by rectangular window openings with one-over-one wood-frame sash covered by aluminum storm sash. The wall terminates in a slightly stepped brick parapet.

The west face of the L is one-and-one-half bays wide. The basement and first two stories date from 1874 and contain segmental-arched openings. The brick walls are covered with stucco. The third story, added in 1916, is faced with brick veneer and has a single square-headed window opening. The short north face of the base of the L is visible as it rises above the adjacent one-story building. The exposed portion of the first-story wall and the second-story wall

⁶ *Spring Valley Tribune*, January 6, 1966.

⁷ The 1915 Sanborn fire insurance map specifies that this structure is iron-clad.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 6

Commercial House Hotel
name of property

Fillmore County, Minnesota
county and state

are stuccoed; one segmental-arched window is located at the second story. The third-story wall is faced with brick veneer and contains one square-headed window.

A tall brick chimney stack, set on the long north side, rises ten feet above the roofline. This chimney was probably added in 1954 when the heating plant was changed. According to historic photographs, the hotel had at least three chimneys rising from various locations on the roof. These would have been removed when the third story was added in 1916.⁸

Interior

The interior of the hotel has been altered many times as it has been enlarged and needs have changed. No photographs are known that depict the rooms, but Sanborn fire insurance maps and newspaper accounts give some general indication of the historic use of the spaces.

The principal entrance to the interior of the hotel is from the staircase beneath the canopy on the east facade. This leads to a small vestibule with laminated finishes that is separated from the lobby area by a wood and glass door. The lobby area opens to the north; it has a ceramic tile floor that may have been installed in 1916.⁹ A central staircase of wood (partially demolished) leads to a landing, then turns ninety degrees to the south continuing up to the second story. A large room in the southeast corner was converted for retail liquor sales in 1954 and has finishes of the period. A room behind the lobby, in the location of the hotel dining room, has 1950s finishes. A meeting room extends along the Main Street side of the building. The area in the southwest corner that was built to house the kitchen in 1882 most recently contained a bathroom and a bedroom. On the courtyard side, behind the dining room area are two rooms that were used for service purposes. A straight-run staircase at the Porter Alley end of the building

⁸ *Spring Valley Tribune*, January 6, 1966, cites the changed heating system. See note 5 for photographs.

⁹ "The workmen have the floor of the office ready for the cement and tile flooring." *Spring Valley Mercury*, January 28, 1916.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 7

Page 7

Commercial House Hotel
name of property

Fillmore County, Minnesota
county and state

leads up to the second story. Another staircase leads down to the basement.

The second story, built in two stages, originally contained hotel rooms arranged off a central corridor. The wood partitions that created the corridor and rooms are gone, leaving exposed framing. Plaster no longer covers the brick walls in the front (east) section of the building. A staircase (partially demolished) that turns ninety degrees leads to the third story. Brick bearing-wall partitions mark the division between the original building and the rear, 1882 addition. In the rear section, wall finishes are no longer extant, revealing the wood framing with plaster infill. A staircase at the Porter Alley end leads up to the third story.

The third story was added in 1916 and contained hotel rooms arranged off a central corridor. The partitions and ceilings are gone, revealing shallow gabled roof trusses.

The basement contains the former sample room in the southeast corner, as well as staff sleeping rooms, laundry facilities, and the boiler room.

Conclusion

Aside from modifications to openings with brick infill, the exterior of the building largely reflects the character it attained after it was enlarged in 1916. The interior of the building has been modified as uses have changed over time. The three-story red-orange brick structure still provides a major presence on Broadway, the main commercial street of Spring Valley.¹⁰

¹⁰ *Spring Valley Tribune*, June 30, 1955 (special centennial edition) published the ca. 1890 photograph of the hotel cited in note 2 with the following caption: "Few buildings in Spring Valley retained their original appearance as long as the

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 7 Page 8

Commercial House Hotel
name of property

Fillmore County, Minnesota
county and state

Commercial House Hotel shown above. The building on the corner of Broadway and Main, now the Hotel and Municipal Liquor Store, has changed in recent years but it is readily recognizable to most people."

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 8

Page 1

Commercial House Hotel
name of property

Fillmore County, Minnesota
county and state

Statement of Significance

Introduction

The Commercial House Hotel in Spring Valley, Minnesota, is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its significance in the areas of Commerce and Entertainment/Recreation. The property reflects the historical patterns identified by the Minnesota historic context "Agricultural Development and Railroad Construction, 1870-1940." Originally constructed in 1874 and subsequently enlarged in 1882 and 1916, the hotel reflects the development of Spring Valley as a railroad center and regional trade center in the midst of a prosperous agricultural region. The hotel may also be evaluated in the context of tourism in Minnesota in the automobile era.

The Development of Spring Valley As a Railroad and Trade Center

Spring Valley, in the northwestern section of Fillmore County, is situated in what is called the "Minnesota triangle," the portion of the state bounded by the Mississippi River on the north and east, the Minnesota and Blue Earth Rivers on the west, and the Iowa border on the south. This part of Minnesota Territory was opened for settlement as the result of land treaties negotiated with the Dakota Indians in 1851. Many groups came into Fillmore County from New York State, New England, Pennsylvania, and other areas of the old Northwest Territory in the 1850s, attracted by fertile land and ample water sources. Much of the area was heavily wooded, and forests had to be cleared to provide arable farm lands. The village of Spring Valley in the township of Spring Valley was established in 1855 by a group of Pennsylvanians on the banks of Spring Creek. At that time the settlement was reachable only over primitive roads. The village was platted with a modest grid plan by Joseph B. Thayer. I. N. Cummings put up a store on the present site of the Commercial House, and a small log hotel was built by Myron Conklin on what would become the west side of Broadway, south of the creek. H. A. Billings and Cordello Wilkins occupied frame houses. The first commercial streets were Market and Main Streets, close to the banks of the creek. Spring flooding soon made that location less than desirable, so the business section moved somewhat to the

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 2 Commercial House Hotel
name of property
Fillmore County, Minnesota
county and state

northwest along the higher ground of Broadway.¹¹

The village prospered and was described by J. W. Bishop in his ambitiously named, *History of Fillmore County*, published in 1858. Spring Valley contained

some 30, or more, houses. In approaching the town, the eye is first arrested by the handsome, white school house, which crowns an eminence overlooking the village, and was built before the town was two years old, at a cost of over \$1,500. A church will soon be built; meantime, divine service is regularly performed in the school house. Descending the gentle slope from the school house, we come to the steam flouring and sawing mills of Messrs. Stevens & Son. . . . The Spring Valley Hotel, by Farmer, is a well-arranged and comfortable house. Here are two stores, one hardware store and tin shop, and several mechanics. A lyceum has been in operation for several months past, and its weekly sessions are attended by the young and old, with interest and profit.¹²

The population of Spring Valley had grown to 180 by 1860. Nonetheless, its long-term well-being was contingent on the introduction of the railroad.¹³

Minnesota had begun planning for railroads before it became a state in 1858. However, political and financial difficulties delayed the

¹¹ Arthur J. Larsen, "Roads and Trails in the Minnesota Triangle," *Minnesota History* 11 (December 1930): 387-411; Franklyn Curtiss-Wedge, comp., *History of Fillmore County, Minnesota* (Chicago: H. C. Cooper, Jr. and Company, 1912), I: 209; Dathe, 3.

¹² J. W. Bishop, *History of Fillmore County, Minnesota, With an Outline of the Resources, Advantages, and the Inducements and Offers to Those Seeking Homes in the West* (Chatfield, Minn.: Holley and Brown, 1858), 28-29.

¹³ The role of the railroad in ensuring the growth and future of a town is discussed in Dennis J. Seglum, "Village Life Along the South Branch of the Root River: Forestville, Minnesota, 1853-1910," prepared for Historic Forestville, Minnesota Historical Society, 1992. The fate of Forestville is contrasted with that of Spring Valley, only about twelve miles to the northwest.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 3 Commercial House Hotel
name of property
Fillmore County, Minnesota
county and state

introduction of railroads until the Civil War years. Until that time only towns and villages that had readily navigable water access or were on stage roads experienced any great degree of growth. The first railroad in the state was the Saint Paul and Pacific, which opened a line between Saint Paul and Saint Anthony in 1862. Other lines were built within the state in 1864, but the first railroad across state lines did not start until 1867. A group of investors planned to extend the Southern Minnesota railroad line from LaCrosse, Wisconsin, westward across Fillmore County towards the western part of the state. The line paralleled the twisting route of the Root River to Lanesboro in the central part of the county. Two villages thought that the railroad would continue its route to their centers. To the northwest was Chatfield, the first, although short-lived, county seat on the north branch of the Root River. Preston to the southwest was the successor county seat. Both communities, however, were bypassed. Instead, the railroad ran in a more westerly direction, despite the difficulties of topography including a steep uphill grade, apparently because of the political and financial interests of the parties involved. The Southern Minnesota reached Spring Valley in 1870, and work on the line continued to the west with Spring Valley serving as headquarters for the work.¹⁴

The population of Spring Valley had risen to 1,200 by 1870, undoubtedly aided by the advent of the railroad. The community

¹⁴ Larsen, "Roads and Trails," 391, 395-398; Richard S. Prosser, *Trails to the North Star* (Minneapolis: Dillon Press, 1966), 8-9; Edward D. Neill, *History of Fillmore County* (Minneapolis: Minnesota Historical Company, 1882; reprint, Preston, Minn.: Fillmore County Historical Society, 1982), 301; Curtiss-Wedge, I: 137. Neill, 301, alluded to the murky circumstances: "In relation to the route of the road west of Lanesboro, where it leaves the Root River valley, the inside history would be remarkably rich reading, if faithfully portrayed. Chatfield, being on the main stream, had no shadow of doubt as to it going there; Preston, the county seat, confidently expected the road. Either way would have avoided the terrible grade west of Lanesboro which will forever require a 'pusher' to overcome. But in view of 'other hearts that would bleed' the story perhaps better be left untold in this volume." Among the backers of the line was C. G. Wykoff who had major landholdings along the proposed route. The village of Wykoff was established after the railroad was built. *Spring Valley Centennial, 1855-1955* (Spring Valley, Minn.: Spring Valley Centennial Committee, 1955), 9-10.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 8

Page 4

Commercial House Hotel
name of property

Fillmore County, Minnesota
county and state

incorporated as a village in 1872. The *Andreas Atlas of Minnesota*, published in 1874, depicts the plat of the village, prominently indicating the railroad line, the location of the depot, and the depot grounds. The railroad also promoted the role of Spring Valley as a regional agricultural and trade center. Several grain elevators were erected by the railroad tracks close to the depot. At that time Spring Valley had three hotels. The Hart House, a frame structure located on East Jefferson, is depicted in a woodcut engraving. Nathan Elliott, the proprietor of the Sheridan House, which opened in 1865 on the present site of the Commercial House and replaced Cummings's store, is listed as a patron of the atlas. The Central Hotel and Farmer House, at the northeast corner of Broadway and Courtland Street, had opened in 1857. Parsons' Stone Block, one of the prominent commercial buildings, is also illustrated.¹⁵

The Commercial House's Early History

According to property title records, W. R. Ewing, who had come to Spring Valley from Dunkirk, New York, with his wife and three children after the Civil War, had acquired the property that contained the Sheridan House in 1867. Ewing owned a livery stable that was located to the west of the Sheridan House, and in 1872 had built a new large, brick house located one block west at Washington and Main. That work was carried out by builder Michael Lower. In March 1874, the local press announced that Ewing was going to put up a larger, new hotel on the site of the Sheridan House:¹⁶

The Sheridan House, an old landmark, kept by N. Elliott, is now the property of W. R. Ewing and is to be removed

¹⁵ A. T. Andreas, *Illustrated Historical Atlas of the State of Minnesota* (Chicago: A. T. Andreas, 1874), 134, 375. According to the listing, Elliot was born in New York State and had come to Minnesota in 1872. Although he ran the hotel, he did not own the underlying property.

¹⁶ Property abstract; Dathe, 15-16. Ewing's house, which is still standing, is a brick structure with segmental-arched openings that is surmounted by a hipped roof. Now in private ownership, it was the Pioneer Home Museum for about twenty years. It is illustrated as the C. F. Kumm House in *History of Spring Valley*, 47, 54.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8

Page 5

Commercial House Hotel

name of property

Fillmore County, Minnesota

county and state

. . . and a fine new brick hotel to be erected in its place. The dimensions of the new hotel are 44' feet front by 70' deep, two stories besides the basement, and will contain 32 rooms. It will be one of the finest hotels along the line of the So. Minnesota Railroad and when completed will be a fine addition to the village. West of the hotel is the livery stable of Ewing and he keeps it well equipped with trusty horses and suitable rigs.¹⁷

In that year, the property was sold by Ewing to Nathan Elliott, who planned to run the establishment as the successor to the Sheridan House. Elliott reopened the hotel on October 15, 1874, with a grand ball at nearby Parsons' Hall and supper in his "new and spacious dining halls."¹⁸

Because Lower constructed Ewing's house, it is likely that he also built the new hotel. The local press noted that Lower was erecting the large sign on the roof of the building with the name "Commercial House," commenting that "this mammoth sign fairly represents the enterprise and characteristics of our new hotel and its popular proprietor." Lower had come to Spring Valley after the Civil War from Indiana. Besides his work for Ewing, he is credited with constructing the post office building on the east side of Broadway between Courtland and Jefferson, doing the interior woodwork of the Parsons' Block, and erecting the first railroad depots along the Southern Minnesota line between LaCrosse and Woonsocket, South Dakota.¹⁹

Throughout its history, the hotel has been called the Commercial House or the Commercial Hotel. As built, it was two stories high above a basement and contained thirty-two rooms. The substantial

¹⁷ *Western Progress*, March 4, 1874.

¹⁸ Property abstract; *Western Progress*, September 30, 1874, October 7, 1874.

¹⁹ *Western Progress*, August 21, 1872, for Ewing's house. The sign is discussed in *Western Progress*, March 10, 1875, and April 21, 1875. The sign is illustrated in the first photograph cited in note 2. *Western Progress*, March 5, 1873, for Parsons' woodwork. *Spring Valley Vidette*, August 15, 1879, and November 4, 1879, discuss the railroad depots. See also *Spring Valley Tribune*, June 30, 1955 (special centennial edition).

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8

Page 6

Commercial House Hotel
name of property

Fillmore County, Minnesota
county and state

brick structure with segmental-arched openings and a corbelled brick cornice also featured a wide front porch. From the beginning, the hotel sought to capitalize on its location only two blocks west of the railroad depot. It is likely that the large roof sign was erected to promote its visibility from the station. In September 1875, the train platform was extended west to Broadway to enable passengers on the trains to easily reach the Commercial House for a midday dinner stop, which was testimony to its fine reputation.²⁰

As the name of the hotel suggests, it catered to commercial travelers, namely traveling salesmen who took the train from town to town and were commonly referred to as "drummers." *Western Progress* proudly proclaimed that "the Commercial House is famous among traveling men as the 'boss hotel' on the S.M.R.R." When in a town, a drummer displayed samples of his merchandise in a local hotel, and the local merchants placed their orders. The Commercial House had a sample room set up in the basement to accommodate the drummers. The hotel sent horse-drawn drays to bring the drummers' luggage and cases to the hotel. The salesmen could hire horses and carriages from the adjacent livery stable to travel around town and out to the countryside to visit customers.²¹

Historian Lewis Atherton describes typical village hotels in the late nineteenth century:

Some village hotels were two and three stories tall, with long porches, chairs and settees, where guests cooled off on drowsy summer evenings and lazily watched the parade of strolling villagers. Livery-stable advertisements above the registration desk in the main office called attention to facilities available for side trips. Sample rooms for drummers, perhaps a "saloon parlor" with piano, and a dining room were common. Guests often ate at a

²⁰ *Western Progress*, September 15, 1875.

²¹ *Western Progress*, December 20, 1876; "Drummers Accommodated: A Nineteenth-Century Salesman in Minnesota," *Minnesota History* 50 (Summer 1979): 59-65. The role of livery stables in relation to drummers is described in Lewis Atherton, *Main Street on the Middle Border* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1954; reprint, 1984), 34.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8

Page 7

Commercial House Hotel
name of property

Fillmore County, Minnesota
county and state

single, long table, staffed by waitresses who had acquired a breezy familiarity from the constant joshing of travelling salesmen. Many hotels charged farmers thirty-five cents and drummers fifty for the same noon meal, and no one seemed to object. On the second floor were the guest rooms, furnished with bed, chairs, pitcher and basin, and a chamber pot.²²

Certainly the Commercial House would have fit this description in its early years.

The volunteer fire brigade saved the building when a major fire struck downtown on January 8, 1879. Elliott sold the property in 1879 for \$7,500 to Nelson B. Smith. Business prospered sufficiently that Smith took out a mortgage to enlarge the building in 1882. The rear section that contained the kitchen was added, and the dining room in the middle section of the building was enlarged. Historic photographs indicate that the design of the original portion of the building was continued on the addition, even though the construction methods and materials differed, changing from brick bearing walls to brick veneer over wood framing. The office was located in the southeast corner facing the intersection of Broadway and Main Street, and a writing room was north of the staircase that led to the second story. The sample room was in the basement below the office, and the hotel was heated by steam from a basement boiler.²³

The Commercial House became popular as a site for local activities such as the founding meeting of the local chapter of the Old Settlers Association in 1880. The local press regularly carried announcements of weddings and parties at the hotel, and the dining room was often described as spacious and offering good food. It was the best place to stay in Spring Valley, and its location was cited as a reference point by local merchants. Wilder's Variety Store, for example, advertised its new location on the "corner of Broadway

²² Atherton, 59-60.

²³ The fire is described in *Spring Valley Centennial History*, 11. Property abstract for the 1879 sale and mortgage allowing for the 1882 expansion. The use of the interior spaces is depicted on the 1890 Sanborn-Perris fire insurance map.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 8 Commercial House Hotel
name of property
Fillmore County, Minnesota
county and state

and Main Streets, opposite Commercial House."²⁴

The relationship of Spring Valley and the railroad is picturesquely depicted in an 1880 birds-eye view of Spring Valley, prominently featuring a train chugging across a landscape of the village with farms stretching out to the distance. The Commercial House and other buildings on Broadway are depicted from the rear. In 1890, another railroad line, the Winona and Southwestern, later the Chicago, Great Western, came to Spring Valley. Located to the west of the downtown, it furthered access, enhanced shipping options, and brought even more travelers to the village. When the track laying was completed in Spring Valley, the mayor and city council met the construction train, escorted the workers into the village, and treated them to supper. Such a celebration is an indication of the importance of another railroad link to the community.²⁵

After the Spring Valley Light Company began the operation of its generating plant on July 23, 1893, the hotel was electrified. Water mains were laid in the village streets that same year, so the Commercial House acquired indoor plumbing as well. Spring Valley gained telephone service in 1897. In a photograph taken about 1900, telephone signs are prominently displayed on the front porch of the Commercial House. Undoubtedly, local Spring Valley residents, as well as travelers, would have used the hotel telephone service to place calls.²⁶

²⁴ Neill, 338, for Old Settlers Association founding. Sharon Jahn of Spring Valley has examined the nineteenth-century Spring Valley newspapers, *Western Progress*, *Vidette*, and *Mercury*, for references to the Commercial House. When Richard Sears, a hometown boy who became the founder of Sears, Roebuck and Company, and his mother returned to Spring Valley for a visit in May 1898, they stayed at the Commercial House; *Spring Valley Vidette*, May 13, 1898. For the Wilder's Variety Store advertisement, see Dathe, 48.

²⁵ The birds-eye view is reproduced in *History of Spring Valley*, 1. *Rochester Daily Post*, December 26, 1890, for the reception given to the railroad workers.

²⁶ Neill, 544, stated in 1882: "There is no gas because the people are awaiting the electric light." For the installation of electricity, water mains, and telephone service, see Curtiss-Wedge, 216, and *History of Spring Valley*, 14, 16. See postcard photograph cited in note 2 for telephone signs on the porch. They

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 8

Page 9

Commercial House Hotel
name of property

Fillmore County, Minnesota
county and state

Smith had sold the property in 1885 to Richard and Mary Knights, and Mrs. Knights, by then a widow, sold it in 1898 to J. A. McConnell. McConnell sold to W. C. and Mary Wentworth in 1904. Their son John Wentworth took over the management, but when he decided to relocate to Rochester to work at the Kahler Hotel in January 1914, another manager was needed to keep the Commercial House going.²⁷

By 1915, the Commercial House was the only surviving hotel in town, which by then had a population of about 2,000. Its other, less substantial rivals had all closed, most to be replaced by other commercial structures. Its two earlier predecessors, the Central Hotel and the Hart House, closed in 1889 and 1890 respectively. The Valley House, located across the street on South Broadway, also closed in 1890. The Union Hotel stood until 1898, while the Crescent Hotel lasted until 1910, to be replaced by a factory. Spring Valley had great interest in retaining a good hotel as a symbol of its own prestige, as well as a site to provide hospitality to travelers and local patrons.²⁸

A New Owner for a New Era

Walter M. Sampson and his wife Anna came to Spring Valley to manage the Commercial House in January 1914. He was described in the local newspaper as "an experienced hotel man, and comes highly recommended." The press also promised that he "will find a hearty welcome here from the hospitable people of Spring Valley, who will wish him the best of success." Sampson, born in Excelsior, Minnesota, in 1872 and educated at Christian College, Excelsior, was a member of an illustrious family that had founded and run the eponymous Sampson House in Excelsior since 1883. He had been the chef at the Excelsior establishment between 1899 (when it reopened after being rebuilt because of a fire) and 1906, then took over the

are also visible in Minnesota Historical Society photograph MF4.9 SVr21 taken in about 1910.

²⁷ Property abstract; John Wentworth obituary, *Rochester Post and Record*, September 27, 1915.

²⁸ Notes from Sharon Jahn to Marjorie Pearson, February 7, 2001.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8

Page 10

Commercial House Hotel
name of property

Fillmore County, Minnesota
county and state

management of the hotel. The Sampson House was highly regarded for its cuisine: "The kitchen is in charge of a chef who is noted for his culinary skill, and for the artistic construction of those viands and confections which appeal to the most exacting and fastidious palates. Those who desire the best in the line of food and careful attention find every want supplied in that direction." The Sampsons brought the same attention to the kitchen and management of the Commercial House. They announced that they would make a specialty of Sunday dinners for their patrons. The interior of the hotel was repainted and new iron beds with the "best mattresses" were installed. Ads with the Sunday dinner menu appeared regularly in the *Spring Valley Mercury*, and a notice for Thanksgiving dinner advised patrons to reserve a table early.²⁹

The widowed Mary Wentworth sold the hotel to Sampson in September 1915, shortly before her son's sudden death. Sampson immediately embarked on a campaign to improve and enlarge the building. In so doing he was responding to local needs and the demands of travelers, as heralded in the local press:

The Commercial House is a two-story building but not large enough to take care of the transient business of the city and it was earnestly desired that it be enlarged and improved in order to give Spring Valley a hotel that would fill all the demands made upon it. . . . When completed these changes and improvements will make the hotel one of the best, for a city of the size of Spring Valley to be found in the state. . . . Spring Valley is certainly pleased in having [the hotel] fall into the hands of so energetic a manager as Mr. Sampson whose long experience in the hotel business guarantees to us a first class, up-to-date hotel.³⁰

Drummers were still an important element of the business, and

²⁹ *Spring Valley Mercury*, January 9, 1914, February 20, 1914, October 2, 1914, November 13, 1914. For Sampson in Excelsior: *National Health Journal* 8 (June 15, 1899), Special Illustrated Minnetonka Edition; *Minneapolis Journal*, August 16, 1906.

³⁰ *Spring Valley Mercury*, September 24, 1915.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 8

Page 11

Commercial House Hotel
name of property

Fillmore County, Minnesota
county and state

Sampson built two new sample rooms and added the third floor to double the number of rooms to accommodate travelers. To attract local patronage he enlarged the dining room. He also enlarged the office and built a new entrance. While the front facade of the hotel had to be rebuilt to accommodate two large show windows and the new entrance arrangement, the design of the new third story reflected the character of the original building. Apparently the work was done by local carpenters, for mechanics' liens were filed on the property by two local lumber companies. When the work was completed in October 1916, the Sampsons presided over a "house warming" and celebratory banquet for the local citizens, who "congratulated the proprietor and his wife for having built such an excellent home to house the traveling men."³¹

Others also took advantage of this "excellent home." The *Spring Valley Mercury* regularly published accounts of performances given at Allard's Opera House by traveling entertainers who stayed at the Commercial House. Visiting doctors who specialized in treatment without surgery set up consultation rooms at the hotel.³²

In 1916, the railroad was still the principal means of transportation between Spring Valley and other localities, and the village continued to benefit from the presence of two railroad lines, the Southern Minnesota, by then the Chicago, Milwaukee, and Saint Paul, running east-west, and the Chicago Great Western, running north-south. Each company was running two passenger trains a day in each direction through Spring Valley. A contemporary advertisement for Spring Park, a proposed real estate development, touted the location of Spring Valley on two railroad systems, "which alone makes it a railroad center for a vast surrounding territory." The tracks crossed southwest of the downtown at Parsons and Territorial Road, and each line had its own depot. Thus Spring Valley became a transfer point, and the Commercial House was well-positioned to offer meals as well as overnight facilities to travelers. The city of Rochester to the north was a major destination for transferring passengers seeking medical treatment

³¹ Ibid.; property abstract; *Spring Valley Mercury*, October 27, 1916. See notes 3 and 4 for work on the third floor.

³² See, for example, the story in the *Spring Valley Mercury*, February 23, 1917.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8

Page 12

Commercial House Hotel
name of property

Fillmore County, Minnesota
county and state

due to the presence and continuing expansion of the Mayo Clinic and the affiliated Saint Mary's Hospital. Residents of Spring Valley also made day-long excursions to Rochester on the Chicago, Great Western Railroad.³³

By 1916, a major change was coming to communities like Spring Valley because of the expanded use of the automobile and the increasing agitation for improved roads within and between towns. That year a north-south inter-city highway known as the Burlington Way, extending from New Orleans to Duluth, was marked ("blazed") through Spring Valley with distinctive signs. An east-west route through Spring Valley called the LaCrosse-Sioux Falls Air Line was marked in 1918.³⁴

The state of Minnesota was prominent in the "good roads" movement. With the guidance of State Highway Commissioner Charles M. Babcock, the state constitution was amended in 1920 to allow state highway funding (previously a county responsibility) and to set up a system of trunk highways. Route 59, a north-south route, extended from the Iowa border to Lake City on the Mississippi River through Spring Valley. Route 9 extended from LaCrescent to South Dakota, east-west, through Spring Valley.³⁵

In the early years of the twentieth century, the railroads helped to promote better roads to make it easier for farmers to bring their products to the railroad depots, local markets, and cooperatives. Dairy farmers especially benefited from smoother roads, as their milk was less likely to get churned as they brought it to the local dairy. Spring Valley with twelve creameries was the center of one of the richest dairy regions in the state. While railroads remained crucial for hauling freight, as the roads improved, the automobile made it much easier to travel between towns located a relatively short distance from each other, and

³³ Prosser, 220-221; *Spring Valley Mercury*, July 28, 1916; *Preston Post*, January 17, 1916; *Rochester Daily Post*, January 29, 1916.

³⁴ *Rochester Daily Post*, October 12, 1916; "Minnesota Trunk Highways," *Good Roads*, November 2, 1918, 168.

³⁵ Arthur J. Larsen, *The Development of the Minnesota Road System* (Saint Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1966), 455-462.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 13 Commercial House Hotel
name of property
Fillmore County, Minnesota
county and state

passenger train traffic diminished.³⁶

When Sampson purchased the Commercial House, the livery stable west of the hotel on Porter Alley off Main Street was still operating, and the railroad brought most people to town. By 1930, the livery stable was gone, and automobiles populated Broadway. Under such changed circumstances, hotel owners like Sampson and hotels like the Commercial House had to adapt to survive. Sampson chose two alternatives. He continued to emphasize dining and service to the local community, and the hospitality of Sampson and his wife Anna was widely renowned. Notices of dinners and other entertainments given by Spring Valley residents at the hotel regularly appeared in the local newspaper. Sampson was active in local civic affairs, joining the Community Club when it formed in the early 1920s. This organization, which represented local merchants and businesses, was superceded in 1939 by the Kiwanis Club, which held its weekly meetings at the hotel.³⁷

Sampson also decided to promote an alliance with long-distance and charter bus services that largely replaced the passenger trains, making the hotel a stop for the Jefferson Bus Lines and the Scenic Hawkeye line. The springs, underground rivers, and caves of the surrounding area, including the famous Mystery Cave, helped make Spring Valley a tourist attraction.³⁸

³⁶ Ibid., 367-368, 394-397.

³⁷ The livery stable is illustrated in *History of Spring Valley*, 48. The electric poles in the photograph help establish the time period. Contrasting views of Broadway in 1910 and 1930 are illustrated in MHS photographs MF4.9 SVr21 and MF4.9 SVr15. Harold Strand, a retired bellhop at the Commercial Hotel, described the Sampsons' hospitality and the Kiwanis association; *Spring Valley Tribune*, June 6, 1966. For the Community Club, see *Spring Valley Mercury*, December 18, 1925.

³⁸ Strand also discussed the bus line connection. Edgar F. Zelle, the owner of the Jefferson Lines had taken over the Jefferson Highway Transportation Company in 1925 and worked out a deal with the Northland (Greyhound) Bus Company to control the bus routes in the southern half of Minnesota. In 1930 he bought the Red Ball Line and expanded into Iowa and Missouri. The Amber Room in the Jefferson Lines Mason City bus terminal was reputed to be one of the best restaurants in town, which suggests that reliable station stops with good food,

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 8

Page 14

Commercial House Hotel
name of property

Fillmore County, Minnesota
county and state

Mrs. Sampson died in 1938. In 1945, Walter Sampson brought in his sister Lula Sampson Plecker and her husband Ernest to help him operate the hotel. At his death in 1949, he left the hotel to them, and they continued to operate it until Ernest's death in 1953.³⁹

Subsequent Changes

In August 1954 Lula Sampson Plecker Sunne (who had remarried) sold the property to the village of Spring Valley. The local government converted the interior space in the southeast corner of the building for use as the municipal liquor store. At that time, window openings were bricked in on the Main Street side, the large show window was modified, the entrance doors to the building were changed, and a new aluminum canopy surmounted by a sign reading "on sale LIQUOR off sale" added above the entrance steps. The village council converted the basement sample room for use as its meeting space. A fire escape was added at the rear of the building facing Porter Alley, interior partitions were changed, and two heating plants installed in an effort to obtain more hotel residents. The hotel operation was leased successively to Arthur Albrecht, Paul Bartz, and Bud Hennessey; the last continued until 1966, when he sold off many of the hotel furnishings. The local police station moved into the former hotel lobby in 1969, but the upper floors remained vacant.⁴⁰

In 1972, the village put the building up for sale, and subsequently the municipal government moved into a new building at Courtland and

like the Commercial House in Spring Valley, were important to the bus service. See Margaret Walsh, *Making Connections: The Long-Distance Bus Industry in the United States* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2000), 69, 107-111. The hotel remained a bus stop until 1981, when bus service to Spring Valley was discontinued; *History of Spring Valley*, 58. *The WPA Guide to Minnesota* (New York: Viking, 1938; reprint, with a revised intro. by Frederick Manfred, Saint Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1985), 410-411, discusses some of the local attractions.

³⁹ *Spring Valley Tribune*, July 7, 1938, May 12, 1949, March 26, 1953; *Minnetonka Record*, May 5, 1949.

⁴⁰ *Spring Valley Tribune*, June 6, 1966, March 2, 1972, April 13, 1972.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 8

Page 15

Commercial House Hotel
name of property

Fillmore County, Minnesota
county and state

Washington. The hotel was sold to Frank Kummer and then owned by his widow until 1985, and has had several owners since then. In 1999 it was sold to River Valley Partners of Rochester, which plans to convert the building into apartments.⁴¹

Conclusion

The Commercial House stands today as a physical reminder of the commercial development of Spring Valley. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, it served the needs of business travelers and traveling salesmen who arrived on the railroad and provided an essential link between the local merchants and the larger world. Furthermore, it served the local community as a site for meetings, weddings, and parties. It was the best place to stay when important visitors came to town, and it served as a reference point for local merchants. The prominence of the hotel was enhanced after it was enlarged in 1916 under the ownership of Walter and Anna Sampson. With an emphasis on fine dining in a small town, main street setting, the Commercial House provided amenities that continued to attract traveling salesmen, visiting performers, and travelers enroute to such larger cities as Rochester and the Twin Cities. Such amenities continued to bring business from the residents of Spring Valley, who valued the prestige that it brought to the town. As automobiles supplanted passenger trains, the Commercial House began to serve passengers on long-distance and charter bus services, as well as tourists drawn to the scenic wonders of Fillmore County. For its significant contribution to the commercial life of Spring Valley and its contribution to tourism in the automobile era, the Commercial House is eligible for the National Register under Criterion A.

⁴¹ Property abstract.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 9 Page 1 Commercial House Hotel
name of property
Fillmore County, Minnesota
county and state

Bibliography

SOURCES CONSULTED

Andreas, A. T. *Illustrated Historical Atlas of the State of Minnesota*. Chicago: A. T. Andreas, 1874.

Atherton, Lewis. *Main Street on the Middle Border*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1954; reprint, 1984.

Bishop, J. W. *History of Fillmore County, Minnesota, With an Outline of the Resources, Advantages, and the Inducements and Offers to Those Seeking Homes in the West*. Chatfield, Minn.: Holley and Brown, 1858.

Curtiss-Wedge, Franklyn, comp. *History of Fillmore County, Minnesota*. Chicago: H. C. Cooper, Jr. and Company, 1912.

Dathe, Mary Jo. *Spring Valley: The Laura Ingalls Wilder "Connection" 1890*. Rev. ed. Spring Valley, Minn.: Spring Valley Historical Society, 1992.

"Drummers Accommodated: A Nineteenth-Century Salesman in Minnesota." *Minnesota History* 50 (Summer 1979): 59-65.

History of Spring Valley: The Years 1855-1980. Spring Valley, Minn.: Spring Valley Community Historical Society in cooperation with the Spring Valley Tribune, 1981.

Larsen, Arthur J. *The Development of the Minnesota Road System*. Saint Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1966.

_____. "Roads and Trails in the Minnesota Triangle." *Minnesota History* 11 (December 1930): 387-411.

Minnesota Historical Society. Visual Resources Database. Photographs MF4.9 SVr15, MF4.9 SVr21.

"Minnesota Trunk Highways." *Good Roads*, November 2, 1918, 168-169.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 9 Page 2 Commercial House Hotel
name of property
Fillmore County, Minnesota
county and state

National Health Journal 8 (June 15, 1899), Special Illustrated
Minnetonka Edition.

Neill, Edward D. *History of Fillmore County*. Minneapolis: Minnesota
Historical Company, 1882; reprint, Preston, Minn.: Fillmore
County Historical Society, 1982.

Prosser, Richard S. *Trails to the North Star*. Minneapolis: Dillon
Press, 1966.

Seglum, Dennis J. "Village Life Along the South Branch of the Root
River: Forestville, Minnesota, 1853-1910." Prepared for
Historic Forestville, Minnesota Historical Society, 1992.

Spring Valley Centennial, 1855-1955. Spring Valley, Minn.: Spring
Valley Centennial Committee, 1955.

Walsh, Margaret. *Making Connections: The Long-Distance Bus Industry
in the United States*. Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2000.

WPA Guide to Minnesota, The. New York: Viking, 1938; reprint, with
revised introduction by Frederick Manfred. Saint Paul:
Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1985.

NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

Minneapolis Journal, August 16, 1906.

Minnetonka Record, May 5, 1949.

Preston Post, January 17, 1916.

Rochester Daily Post, December 26, 1890; January 29, October 12,
1916.

Rochester Post and Record, September 27, 1915.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 9 Page 3

Commercial House Hotel
name of property

Fillmore County, Minnesota
county and state

Spring Valley Mercury, January 9, February 20, October 2, November 13, 1914; September 24, 1915; January 7, January 28, July 28, October 27, 1916; February 23, 1917; December 18, 1925.

Spring Valley Tribune, July 7, 1938; May 12, 1949; March 26, 1953; June 30, 1955 (special centennial edition); January 6, June 6, 1966; March 2, April 13, 1972.

Spring Valley Vidette, August 15, November 4, 1879; May 13, 1898.

Western Progress, August 21, 1872; March 5, 1873; March 4, 1874; March 10, April 21, September 15, 1875; December 20, 1876.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 10 Page 1

Commercial House Hotel
name of property

Fillmore County, Minnesota
county and state

Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property occupies south half of Lot 5 (formerly Lot 6) of Block 7 of the Original Plat of the Village of Spring Valley.

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes the city lot that has historically been associated with the property.

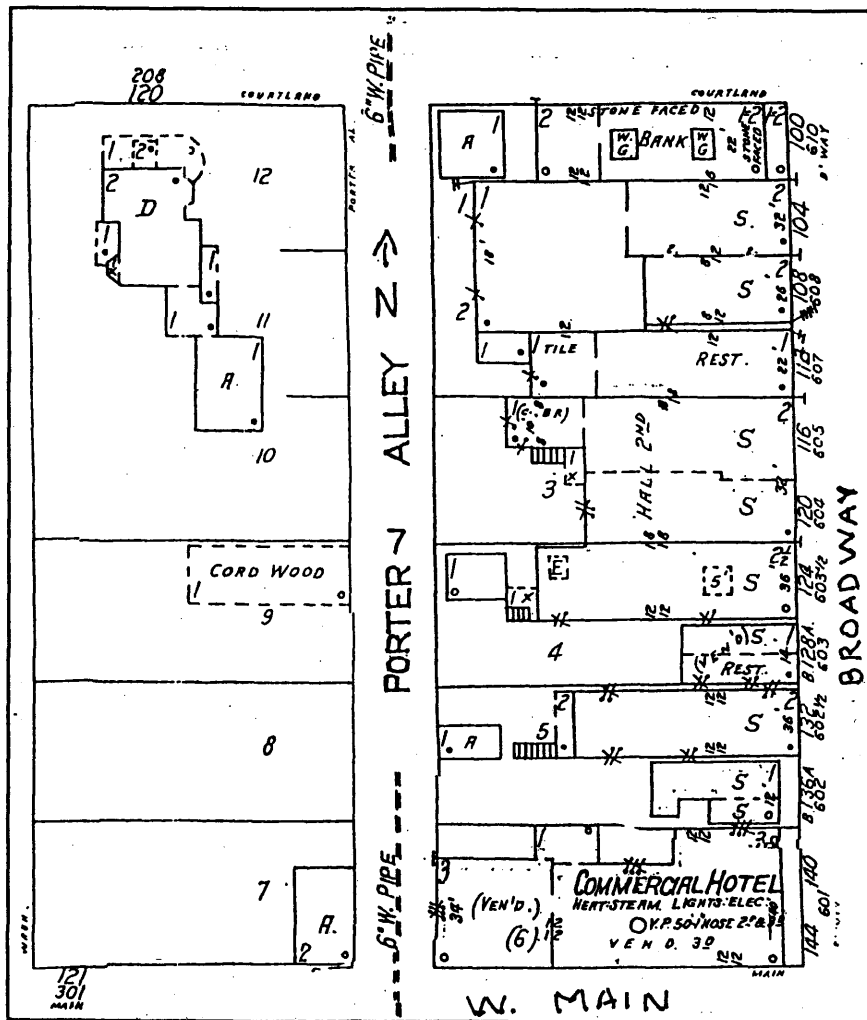
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 10 Page 2

Commercial House Hotel
name of property

Fillmore County, Minnesota
county and state



Site map of Block 7, of the Original Plat of the Village of Spring Valley, showing relationship of the Commercial House to other block structures. From Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, Fillmore County (New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1942).

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 10 Page 3

Commercial House Hotel
name of property

Fillmore County, Minnesota
county and state



Commercial House Hotel, Broadway and Main Street,
Spring Valley, Minnesota, in the 1880s. From
Spring Valley Tribune, January 6, 1966.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 10 Page 4

Commercial House Hotel
name of property

Fillmore County, Minnesota
county and state



Commercial House Hotel, Broadway and Main Street, Spring Valley, Minnesota, in about 1900. From *A History of Spring Valley: The Years 1855-1980*.

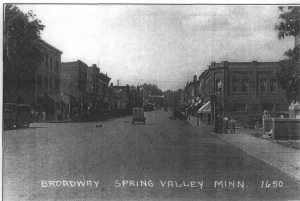
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 10 Page 5

Commercial House Hotel
name of property

Fillmore County, Minnesota
county and state



Broadway, looking north, with Commercial House Hotel at left, Spring Valley, Minnesota, in about 1930. From Minnesota Historical Society Photograph Collection.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 10 Page 6

Commercial House Hotel
name of property

Fillmore County, Minnesota
county and state



Commercial House Hotel, Broadway and Main Street, Spring Valley, Minnesota, in 1966. From *Spring Valley Tribune*, January 6, 1966.