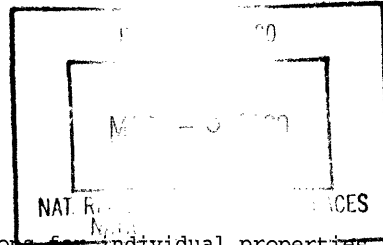


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service



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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

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: Nystrom Guest House
other names/site number: Shoemaker Home

2. Location

street & number 333 Ralston Street not for publication N/A
city or town Reno vicinity N/A
state Nevada code NV county Washoe code 031 zip code 89503

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.)

Ronald M. James SHPO 28 February 2000
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

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 Edson H. Beall
 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):

for 4/6/00
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 (Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>2</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>2</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/Single Dwelling Sub: Boardinghouse

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: DOMESTIC/Single Dwelling Sub: Boardinghouse

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

LATE VICTORIAN/Gothic

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Rubble

roof Composition shingle

walls Stucco over shiplap

other _____

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

Property is:

- 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)

SOCIAL HISTORY

Period of Significance 1875-1950

Significant Dates 1875, 1890, 1904, 1931, 1944

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above) N/A

Cultural Affiliation N/A

Architect/Builder Unknown

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

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets. See 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: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property approx. .25 acre

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	<u>11</u>	<u>257640</u>	<u>4378960</u>	3	___	___
2	___	___	___	4	___	___
	___	See continuation sheet.				

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

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

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Mella Rothwell Harmon, Historic Preservation Specialist
organization State Historic Preservation Office date 12/15/99
street & number 100 N. Stewart Street telephone 775-684-3447
city or town Carson City state NV zip code 89701

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 Sonia Martin
street & number 45 Arbor Oak Court telephone _____
city or town Reno state NV zip code 89509

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.

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 1

Nystrom Guest House, Reno, Washoe County, Nevada

7. Description

The Nystrom Guest House is located at 333 Ralston Street, Reno, Nevada on a 12,935 square foot city lot in an area of town known as the Western Addition. The block on which the Nystrom Guest House sits is bounded on the south by West Third Street, along which the railroad tracks run, and West Fourth Street on the north. West Fourth Street was the historic route of the Lincoln Highway through Reno. Modern casino and hotel/motel development encroaches on the Nystrom block from the east, and as a result the neighborhood has suffered some loss of its residential character. A number of turn-of-the-century houses remain in the area, but their predominant use is no longer single- or multi-family, but rather rooming houses occupied mainly by single men. The historical significance of the area is being recognized, however, and property owners are beginning to restore their buildings. The City of Reno is replacing street trees and furniture in order to enhance the area, which is located within the City's redevelopment area.

The Nystrom Guest House currently faces east, although the house originally faced south, toward West Third Street. The reason for the house's reorientation was its purchase by an enterprising business woman, who bought the entire block in 1897, and between 1899 and 1904, subdivided it into six parcels. The existing house was simply turned ninety degrees to accommodate the east-west orientation of the new parcels. Three other historic houses on the block date to this subdividing episode. Reno buildings were first numbered in 1881, although mail deliveries to individual homes did not begin until ten years later. When the Nystrom Guest House was facing Third Street, it presumably was not numbered. After 1897, when it was rotated to face Ralston Street, it was given the street number 305 Ralston. According to Sanborn maps, the number changed from 305 to 323 at some point between 1904 and 1906. It remained 323 until 1957, when the street numbers on the block were changed again, and the house became 333 Ralston.

The Nystrom Guest House was a grand home when it was built in 1875, by Washoe County Clerk John Shoemaker. A March 30, 1875 article in the *Daily Nevada State Journal* reported on the proposed Shoemaker home: "The western addition of the town of Reno is beginning to loom up considerable. We learn that County Clerk Shoemaker will shortly erect a handsome residence on land lately purchased. Rumor says it will be the finest residence in Reno—to cost about \$4,000." The house first shows up on the Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps in 1885 in its south-facing orientation. The house was built in a basic cross plan, with an overall length slightly greater than its width. The 1890 Sanborn Map shows the dwelling still facing south, but with the addition of a bay window in the center of the front façade, and enclosures at each corner.

Reno's earliest buildings were constructed of either wood or brick. A 1908 aerial photograph of Reno, taken by the Lawrence Captive Airship from 1000 feet, shows the house. Although the clarity of the photograph is less than perfect, the house appears to be wood, painted white. This corresponds with information provided by the current owner, who reports that the original walls, underneath two stucco layers, are shiplap. The first stucco layer was probably added in the 1930s. Beginning in the 1920s, there was an increase in the diversity

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CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 2

Nystrom Guest House, Reno, Washoe County, Nevada

7. Description, continued

of architectural styles and surface treatments in Reno. The reason for this, it seems, was the influence of California styles and materials on Reno. It is often observed that architectural styles in Reno were about 10 years behind other parts of the country, and the appearance of stucco was a delayed California Mission-style influence. Stucco is generally not a suitable material for Reno's climate, so by the 1940s, Reno homebuilders began to steer away from it to more appropriate and practical materials. A second stucco layer was applied to the house in the late 1980s or early 1990s, but this will be removed as part of the owner's rehabilitation project.

Today, the Nystrom Guest House retains the same form it did in 1890, and still faces east as it did in 1899. Also, on the property are two non-contributing buildings, a garage/apartment and a chicken coop. The age of these buildings is unknown, though they were present at the time the Nystroms purchased the house in 1944. The buildings are considered non-contributing for the purpose of this nomination because they have been significantly altered over time.

The two-story house, built in the Gothic style, boasts a classically-Gothic steeply-pitched roof with steep cross gables. The roof was originally shake, but now is covered in composition shingles. The eaves overhang slightly, and the rafters are enclosed. It is not known whether there was ever bargeboard trim on the front gable end, but there is none today. A shallow bay was added to the front elevation ca. 1890. Over the bay window is a style-defining pointed arch window, which opens onto a balcony. Inset into the northeast corner of the front elevation is the semi-enclosed entry porch, which is covered by a shallow gable roof. The porch is three steps high and is entered through an elliptical arch. There is a pointed arch opening along the north-facing wall. The original wooden front door has two small panels in the lower one-third of its height, a glass panel filling the top two-thirds, and a transom above. The door retains its original hardware. The three remaining enclosed corners that represent the infilled cross plan, are inserted under the eaves where the gables cross. The roofs on these spaces are nearly flat, and the eaves are boxed. The rear elevation is devoid of ornamentation. An uncovered rear entry leads into the kitchen.

Fenestration consists of wood-frame, double-hung windows. The windows in the front bay are one-over-one lights, with others along the other elevations ranging from one-over-one to four-over-four. With the exception of the small stained-glass window in the foyer, the windows are tall and narrow, in keeping with the house's Gothic styling. Most of the windows hold original glass, and a stained glass window in the foyer marks the house's earlier grandeur. The front door and all of the interior doors are the original panel doors, with original transoms and molding.

The interior has changed little over the years. The eight guest rooms remain intact on two floors. Two guest rooms on the first floor were created from the dining room. Door frames can be seen behind kitchen cabinets added by the Nystroms. It is assumed that these doors originally led from the kitchen into the dining room.

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CONTINUATION SHEET

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Nystrom Guest House, Reno, Washoe County, Nevada

7. Description, continued

The southwest corner of the building, which was most likely an enclosed porch, was converted into an eating area with a table and bench seating. The original exterior siding can be seen in this space. The most prominent interior feature of the house is an Italian gray marble fireplace in the living room, with an ornate molded cast-iron grate.

The Nystrom Guest House retains sufficient integrity to qualify it for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Although modern casino and hotel/motel development has encroached to some degree on the neighborhood, the remaining period buildings, and the arrangement of blocks and streets dating to the time the Western Addition was first laid out conveys the significance of the Nystrom Guest House to the development history of Reno through integrity of location, setting, and feeling. Further, through integrity of materials, design, and workmanship, the Nystrom Guest House conveys its significance as one of the earliest homes built in the Western Addition. Finally, the house conveys its significance through integrity of association. The house is significant for its association with the divorce trade and the need throughout Reno's history for rental properties. The house continues to offer rental units, and its interior configuration reflects this use, which was established in its early history.

8. Significance

The Nystrom Guest House is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its association with several aspects of Reno's social history, including early development (1868-1905) and the divorce trade (1906-1950).

Reno was established when the Central Pacific Railroad laid its tracks along the Truckee River in 1868. Reno became an important freight and passenger center, supplying the mining boom that started in 1859, with the fabulously rich Comstock Lode. The town was laid out on lands owned by Myron C. Lake, who had operated a bridge and hotel there since 1863. Lake deeded 40 acres to Charles Crocker of the Central Pacific for a station and the development of town lots. Lot auctions began on May 9, 1868, with some selling as high as \$1,000. The new town was named Reno, in honor of Civil War hero, General Jesse Reno. The first train from Sacramento arrived in Reno on June 18, 1868. The first train from the east came nearly one year later, after the famous hammering of the last spike at Promontory Point, Utah. As soon as rail traffic began, Reno became a bustling business town and grew rapidly. The first buildings in Reno were saloons and gambling halls, but within 10 years churches, schools, and neighborhoods of single family homes were established (Angel 1881:634-635).

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CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 4

Nystrom Guest House, Reno, Washoe County, Nevada

8. Significance, continued

Early Development (1868-1905)

Reno started life as a railroad town and generally did not distinguish itself in the area of town planning or fashionable architecture. The earliest residential neighborhoods clustered close to the town's core, with the upper class building their large frame homes along West Street, between First and Fifth Streets. Working families and rental tenements located near the railroad tracks and yards. Another cluster of residences grew up south of the Truckee River on High and Park Streets. For its first decade, Reno remained "an overcrowded, under-built, busy, undistinguishable 'railroad' town with little excuse for being other than shipping beef to California and supplying the Comstock with its fifty carloads of necessities everyday via the V&T"¹ (Townley 1983:73).

Over the next ten years, Reno boomed. During the early 1870s four areas of Reno were subdivided. Myron Lake parceled the land south of the river from Arlington Avenue to Holcomb Avenue, and north from Liberty Street. A. J. Hatch subdivided the area between Virginia Street and Arlington, and the Evans brothers developed a tract north of Fifth Street, from Virginia Street to Wells Avenue. The Western Addition, where the Nystrom Guest House is located, extended from Sierra Street west to Keystone Avenue.² Homesites in this subdivision sold for \$150 to \$200. On October 6, 1874, Washoe County Clerk, J. S. Shoemaker bought lots six through nine in Block 2 of the Western Addition from the Contract and Finance Company. The Contract and Finance Company was the financial arm of the Central Pacific Railroad, set up to arrange the complicated means of funding a transcontinental railroad, and apparently to handle its land sales, as well (Angel 1881:273). Corporate officers signing Mr. Shoemaker's deed were Sam A. Hopkins, president, and J. Miller, secretary.

By March 1875, Mr. Shoemaker had plans for a "handsome residence" for his parcels in the Western Addition (*Daily Nevada State Journal* March 30, 1875). With so many new lots being developed, building construction was a major activity in Reno. There were a few general contractors in town, and many individual craftsman building residences and commercial buildings at a furious pace. With no building codes or restrictions, and very few blueprints, carpenters often worked from verbal descriptions. Many a Reno home was built from a picture torn out of an eastern magazine, or from the readily-available plan books. Reno housing styles in the 1870s mirrored designs that were popular in the East and Midwest. The "frame Gothic" flourished in

¹ The V&T was the Virginia and Truckee Railroad, built shortly after the completion of the CPRR. The V&T ran south from Reno to Carson City and east to the mining towns of the Comstock.

² Several of these street names have been changed since they were originally platted. The names used in this document are the modern ones.

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Nystrom Guest House, Reno, Washoe County, Nevada

8. Significance, continued

Reno, as it did in the East. No thought was given to Reno's particular climatic conditions—after all, home ownership was a matter of status, not practicality (Townley 1983:75).

Lumber for homebuilding was obtained from the sawmills in Truckee and Washoe Valley at \$35 per thousand board feet. The stone for foundations came from a quarry two miles north of town, and brick was available from three different local suppliers. There were sash factories in Truckee and Verdi, but in many cases doors and windows were ordered through catalogs. So frantic was building activity in Reno during the 1870s, the press reported that “every mechanic in Reno, that can drive a nail, shove a jack plane, or handle a paint brush, has all the work he can attend to. Repairing old buildings and erecting new ones, seems to be the order of the day” (Townley 1983:75). In March 1879, a devastating fire burned a 10-block area east of the Western Addition, destroying 350 buildings (Rowley 1984:27-28). To help the town rebuild after the fire, numerous houses were moved down from Virginia City and the other towns on the Comstock, where a general economic depression left many buildings unoccupied.

During the 1880s and 1890s, mining fell further into a slump and the mining districts lost their populations at an alarming rate. Supported by the railroad, and ranching and farming in the lush Truckee Meadows, Reno managed to increase in size and wealth, while the rest of the state withered. Between 1870 and 1900, Washoe County's population grew nearly 300 percent from 3,091 to 9,141 (Townley 1983:143). The 1880s saw tremendous growth in Reno. Major construction projects included the State Asylum, (now within the Sparks city limits) in 1881, and the University of Nevada in 1884. Real estate prices doubled with the land-buying spree. Those with little money bought one or two properties in less desirable neighborhoods, while the wealthy subdivided whole sections of cultivated fields on either side of the river. The average price for a building site was \$200 and up. A two-bedroom house rented for \$15 per month, if one could even be found (Townley 1983:163). Reno has had, since the beginning, a high demand for rental units for families and single people, and has dealt with this demand in creative ways, including the construction of multiple dwellings on a city lot, expansion of existing houses into boardinghouses and apartments, and the custom of opening one's home to transient strangers (Harmon 1998). It was during this period that the Shoemaker house became a rental.

On October 23, 1897, J. S. Shoemaker and his wife sold their four lots and their Gothic home to Elda Orr for \$2,675.00. It is assumed that Mrs. Orr, who was the wife of Reno attorney John Orr, never occupied the house, but rather operated it as much needed rentals. It was Mrs. Orr who, at some point between 1899 and 1904, subdivided the four lots into six parcels and rotated the house 90 degrees to face Ralston Street. The property remained in Mrs. Orr's ownership until her death in September 1916. Her daughter, Elda Gilcrease inherited the house, and sold it in 1917.

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CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 6

Nystrom Guest House, Reno, Washoe County, Nevada

8. Significance, continued

As busy and prosperous as it was, Reno of the late nineteenth century offered few amenities and was considered by residents and visitors to be dirty and boisterous. In the 1890s, Reno citizens began to look toward community improvement, as the *Reno Evening Gazette* described on April 29, 1896 (reprinted from Townley 1993:163):

Improvement is the spirit of the age, and no town in the United States has greater opportunities than has Reno, not only because she has great material and natural beauty, but because so little has been done. The location is superb, the surroundings magnificent and the townsite beautiful. Let us have an improvement society so that we can advise together and make something of our home. It can be made so attractive that it will attract distinguished visitors as sight-seers and health seekers, and change it from a little trading center to one of the fashionable and wealthy centers of the country. Property would appreciate dozens of times as fast as the expense would run up, and the whole state, and especially our own valley, would prosper.

The town was changing from a wild and woolly western railroad town to a real city. Incorporation was first approved by the Nevada legislature on March 8, 1897, but in 1898, it reversed itself. Official city status was permanently granted on March 16, 1903 (*Reno Gazette-Journal* March 8, 1897).

From its inclusion into the town limits in the 1870s, the Western Addition was a popular place to live. The boundaries of the addition were from Virginia Street west to Vine Street, and north from the railroad tracks to Seventh Street. The Nystrom Guest House, one of the earliest houses to be built in the subdivision, was located at the southern edge of the area, right above the railroad tracks. The blocks first to be developed were those north to Fourth Street. Successful merchants and other professionals, like county clerks, located there and built new homes. The Western Addition served to boost Reno's image, by installing the town's first concrete sidewalks in 1890. Its quiet tree-shaded streets were bordered by neat lawns and flower gardens. By 1900, neighborhoods south of the river usurped the Western Addition's fashionable status. Houses were moved into the new areas on rollers from older parts of town, and from as far away as Virginia City, to take advantage of the land boom. Although many of the homes were owner-occupied at this time, a number, the Nystrom Guest House among them, became rentals and boardinghouses (Townley 1983:235-237).

The Nystrom Guest House was one of the earliest houses to be built in the Western Addition, but there were other notable homes built on the block that bear mention. Two doors down from the Nystrom Guest House

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CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 7

Nystrom Guest House, Reno, Washoe County, Nevada

8. Significance, continued

is the Clifford House, which was listed in the National Register of Historic Places³ on March 7, 1983. The Clifford House was built in the Gothic style between 1885 and 1890, within the area's development period of significance. This house was also owned by Elda Orr, and was likely purchased at the same time she purchased the Nystrom Guest House. O. J. Clifford purchased the house in 1905, and the Clifford family retains ownership today.

Until 1983, when it was moved three blocks away to save it from demolition, the Francovich House sat directly across Ralston Street from the Nystrom Guest House. The Francovich house, an imposing two-story brick Queen Anne, was built by the Francovich brothers in 1900, toward the end of the Western Addition's development period. The Francovich's had moved to Reno from Virginia City, and had opened a successful saloon called the Old Wine House. The Francovich House was listed in the National Register on April 25, 1983. Another National Register property, the Humphrey House, is located one block north of the Nystrom Guest House, but is worthy of mention. The Humphrey House was built in 1906 in the Mission Style, a rare example for Reno. One of the earliest stucco houses in Reno, the Humphrey House was designed by prominent architect Fred Schadler. The Humphrey's also owned two small stucco bungalows on Ralston Street that they operated as rentals. These buildings no longer exist. The Humphrey House was listed in the National Register on March 7, 1983.

Development north of the Truckee River followed a northward path in the decades following the establishment of the Western Addition. After 1900, the neighborhoods south of the river and west of Virginia Street became fashionable, but the area between Fourth Street and the university campus developed into a "pleasant, solidly middle-class neighborhood" (Townley 1983). The predominant architectural style (or more accurately, building type) in this newer part of town was a distinctive Reno variant of brick bungalow. The remaining houses along Ralston Street below Fifth Street, retain the character of the development period of Reno's Western Addition, including its Gothic and Victorian architectural styles, and its transition from a neighborhood of single-family residences to one that mixed owner-occupancy with rental properties. The significance of Reno's transient population and need for rental properties began early in its development, but reached a zenith in the 1930s, when the divorce trade dominated Reno's economy.

³ All National Register nominations are on file at the State Historic Preservation Office, Carson City, Nevada.

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Section 8 Page 8

Nystrom Guest House, Reno, Washoe County, Nevada

8. Significance, continued

Divorce (1906-1950)

Nevada had made a name for itself in 1900, when its first celebrity divorce took place. Reno's divorce laws were relatively lenient at the time and England's Second Earl Russell, a member of the House of Lords, came to Genoa to obtain a divorce from Lady Russell so he could marry a young woman named Mollie. The legality of a Nevada divorce was challenged, however, when Lord Russell was arrested for bigamy upon his return to England. Lord Russell's well-publicized divorce was followed by another high-profile divorce involving the president of United States Steel Corporation, William Ellis Corey, who came to Reno for his divorce in 1906. Corey's divorce was scandalous and received nationwide publicity. As shocking as it was, Corey's divorce facilitated the birth of the Reno divorce colony. Hollywood added to the titillating press from Nevada, when America's sweetheart, Mary Pickford, came to Minden to obtain a divorce from her actor husband, Owen Moore.⁴ In 1911, attorney W.H. Schnitzer published and distributed a pamphlet entitled, *Divorce Practice and Procedure Under the Laws of the State of Nevada with Notes and Decisions*. Schnitzer advertised his pamphlet in newspapers from New York to San Francisco. Reno was Nevada's largest city at the time, and received the bulk of the divorce trade. Schnitzer was disbarred for his efforts, but his advertising and the general publicity catapulted Reno into the lofty status of Divorce Mecca. Except for a two-year period during the Progressive Era, when the residency requirement was increased to one year (with noticeably disastrous economic effects), the waiting period for a Nevada divorce was six months. In 1927, during a period of competition among several states for the migratory divorce trade, the Nevada legislature shortened the residency period to three months. This act boosted the industry and divorce-seekers flocked to Reno (Harmon 1998).

In 1931, Nevada was beginning to feel the effects of the Great Depression. Mining was in a slump, and a devastating drought had seriously damaged crops, and sheep and cattle herds. Seeking a means to ameliorate the growing poverty in the state, the Nevada legislature revised its divorce law once again. This time, it shortened the residency requirement to six weeks and made the grounds for divorce more lenient. This act served to open the divorce flood gates. During the summer of 1931, so many divorce-seekers were in Reno that accommodations were scarce. Some visitors, including women with small children, were forced to camp along the Truckee River until a room could be found. Over the ten years between 1929 and 1939, more than 30,000 divorces were granted by the Washoe County courts. Boardinghouses and rooming houses proliferated through the 1930s, and many new ones were built strictly to exploit the divorce trade (Harmon 1998). *A Guide to the Silver State*, prepared by the Federal Writers' Project (1940:139), described the housing phenomenon: "For a time the rush of divorce-seekers was so great that people with very simple houses found it lucrative to move in with relatives and rent their own abodes furnished; many returned to find that lavish

⁴ Mary Pickford divorced Moore in order to marry dashing actor, Douglas Fairbanks.

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CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 9

Nystrom Guest House, Reno, Washoe County, Nevada

8. Significance, continued

tenants had completely redecorated the houses and left new expensive furnishings when they departed." After World War II the divorce industry continued, but in the ensuing years Las Vegas usurped Reno's Divorce Mecca reputation, and as other states liberalized their divorce laws, there was no longer a demand for a migratory divorce trade, and Reno's divorce industry ceased (Harmon 1998).

The Nystrom Guest House had been a rental since the beginning of the twentieth century, when Elda Orr bought properties along Ralston Street. Mrs. Orr's daughter, Elda Gilcrease, sold the house at 323 Ralston Street to several members of the Lucey family on June 21, 1917. The Luceys occupied the house, but also rented out rooms. The 1917 edition of the Reno City Directory (Polk 1917), lists 323 Ralston as furnished rooms, and Julia Lucey as an occupant and owner. A study covering the period between 1931 and 1934 of addresses provided during divorce testimony in satisfaction of the six-week residency requirement identified six houses in Ralston's 300 block that took in divorce-seekers. The Lucey's house at 323 Ralston was one of them, as was a house at 347 Ralston, built in 1910, and formally named the Ralston Apartments (Harmon 1998).

At some time between 1935 and 1937, the Luceys sold the house to Guido and Felicina Nannini. It has been reported that it was the Nannini's who first stuccoed the Gothic house. The Nannini's owned the house for a short time, selling it to Edith Oakley on May 25, 1939. Mrs. Oakley did not occupy the property until 1944, but leased it to a succession of widows. Running a boardinghouse for the divorce trade, and serving as resident witness in divorce court was a common occupation for women in Reno, and many a widow supported herself in this manner. Operations at 323 Ralston Street continued on in this fashion until May 1944, when Edith Oakley sold the property to Victor and Estelle Nystrom, who had come to Reno from San Francisco with the intent of operating a rooming house business for the lucrative divorce trade.

When the Nystroms acquired the house it was in a state of disrepair. Victor Nystrom, a house painter by trade, set about to repair and repaint the once grand home. Mrs. Nystrom ran the rooming house operation, which included eight guest rooms. Keeping the house fully supplied during World War II was not an easy task, as necessary items, such as bed and bath linens, were difficult to obtain. By chance, Mrs. Nystrom made the acquaintance of one of Reno's prominent divorce lawyers, John Robb Clark, who was able to help obtain the materials necessary to keep the rooming house business going during the war (Martin 1999).

The relationship between Reno's divorce lawyers and the boardinghouse operators was a mutually beneficial one. Boardinghouse operators would supply clients to the lawyers, who would in turn supply tenants for the boardinghouses. Tenants also needed a resident witness. The job of resident witness was an important one. Those seeking a six-week Nevada divorce had to swear under oath that they had come to make Nevada their permanent home. In order to make such a claim the plaintiff had to affirm that they had been in Nevada

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8. Significance, continued

everyday and night for an entire six week period. Resident witnesses were the ones responsible for knowing the comings and goings of their charges so they could corroborate the plaintiff's statement in court. This testimony was taken seriously by the court, even though most of the divorce-seekers already had return tickets home and would leave Reno as soon as the final decree was issued (Harmon 1998).

Mrs. Nystrom, with the help of her new ally, John Robb Clark, quickly established her rooming house business, and as soon as the war was over and gas rationing ended, the divorce trade picked up again. Those who could not afford Reno's famous (and expensive) dude ranches, chose to serve their residency in its boardinghouses. The Nystrom Guest House became a popular place for divorce-seekers to stay, and Mrs. Nystrom was a busy resident witness. She allowed no hanky-panky in her house; the women stayed on the top floor, and the men on the bottom floor. Each morning she served coffee, fruit, and toast to her 20 to 30 tenants. She watched over the guests, noting the presence of each one of them every day, as required by law. If someone went to California for a weekend visit, Mrs. Nystrom made sure he or she made up every day spent away from Nevada (Martin 1999).

Going to the Washoe County Courthouse was a weekly event. Mrs. Nystrom always took her little daughter, Sonia, with her when she went to testify. Sonia would sit in the lobby of the Courthouse waiting for her mother to complete her business. Mrs. Nystrom frequently celebrated with her guests when a final decree was received. She oversaw the tradition of throwing wedding rings in the Truckee River,⁵ and attended parties at Reno's popular night clubs. Many of Mrs. Nystrom's guests became her life-long friends (Martin 1999).

During the 1960s, the divorce trade quietly ended. Most states had liberalized their divorce laws and inexpensive and quick Mexican divorces were recognized as legal in most states, as well. The need for a migratory divorce trade ceased. Mrs. Nystrom's business continued, however, catering to a different clientele. Mrs. Nystrom operated her rooming house until her death in 1997, and her daughter Sonia inherited the house, and she continues to operate it as a rooming house.

The Nystrom Guest House is representative of housing trends in Reno. The house was built as the grand home of a county official during Reno's earliest expansion phase. It saw the continued demand for land and housing in Reno when it was turned 90 degrees in the 1890s to accommodate further subdivision. As Reno grew, it demanded rental space for both short-term and long-term residents. The Nystrom House met that need early, and it was prepared to fill the housing shortage that resulted when Nevada liberalized its divorce

⁵ The tradition of throwing one's ring in the Truckee River after receiving a final decree exists within the realm of myth. Although, there are reports of the practice, some deny it ever happened.

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law in 1931, creating a rush of divorce-seekers needing to establish short-term residency. Now, the house is ripe for preservation, and for recognition of the role it has played in Reno's history.

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10. Geographical Data

Verbal Boundary Description

A .25-acre lot identified as Assessor's Parcel Number 07-274-14, Reno, Washoe County, Nevada, located in Section 11, T. 19N, R. 19E MDM, USGS 7.5-minute quadrangle, *Reno, Nev.*, 1967, photorevised 1982.

Boundary Justification

Resource boundaries includes all land commonly associated with the town lot identified as Washoe County, Nevada APN 07-274-14.

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Nystrom Guest House, Reno, Washoe County, Nevada

The following information applies to photographs 1 and 2:

Name of Property:	Nystrom Guest House
Location of Property:	Reno, Washoe County, Nevada
Location of Negatives:	State Historic Preservation Office 100 N. Stewart Street Carson City, NV 89701
Name of Photographer:	Mella Rothwell Harmon
Date of Photograph:	January 1, 2000
Photograph 1:	Front elevation, facing west
Photograph 2:	Front elevation, facing southwest