

56-1841



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 National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. 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.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: Ballard House
Other names/site number: Hotel Hanson, Hotel Florence, Spring Grove Hotel and Café, Giants of the Earth Heritage Center
Name of related multiple property listing:
N/A
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location

Street & number: 163 West Main Street
City or town: Spring Grove State: MN County: Houston
Not For Publication: N/A Vicinity: N/A

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,


I hereby certify that this 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 meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

national statewide local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

A B C D

| | |
|--|------------------------------|
|  <hr/> Signature of certifying official/Title: Amy Spong, Deputy SHPO, MNHS | 10.5.17 <hr/> Date |
| <hr/> State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government | |

| | |
|---|-------------------|
| In my opinion, the property <input type="checkbox"/> meets <input type="checkbox"/> does not meet the National Register criteria. | |
| <hr/> Signature of commenting official: | <hr/> Date |
| <hr/> Title : | |
| State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government | |

Ballard House
Name of Property

Houston County, MN
County and State

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain):


Signature of the Keeper

11/27/17
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

Ballard House
Name of Property

Houston County, MN
County and State

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

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

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

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCE/TRADE/hotel

COMMERCE/TRADE/restaurant

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RECREATION & CULTURE/museum

EDUCATION/library

Ballard House
Name of Property

Houston County, MN
County and State

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE VICTORIAN/Stick/Eastlake

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: Foundation – STONE: limestone

Walls – WOOD: weatherboard, shingles

Roof – SHINGLES: asphalt

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

The Ballard House, currently known as the Giants of the Earth Heritage Center, is a late nineteenth century vernacular commercial building with modest Stick style detailing. It is situated on an approximately .25 acre commercial lot at 163 West Main Street in Spring Grove, Minnesota. Roughly bounded by Main Street on the north, an alley to the south, and the adjacent buildings to the east and west, the site consists of all of Lot 28 and the western 21 feet of Lot 27 in Mons Fladager's Original Plat of Spring Grove, which has always been the town's primary business district. The nominated property is adjacent to the north and west boundaries of the site, leaving a narrow yard on the east side and a small rear courtyard. It is a single edifice with three structurally distinct components: an original hip-roofed rectangular section that runs parallel to Main Street and a historic east wing that is believed to be a very early addition. This is comprised of two conjoined, gable-roofed, rectangular sections that run perpendicular to the original section from the east end of its south side. In contrast to the two and one-half stories of the original section, the east wing's north section has two stories and its south section has one and one-half stories.

The building has a masonry foundation, wood framing, wood clapboard and wood shingle siding, double-hung windows, an asphalt roof with shallow eaves, and a central chimney. Its most significant exterior features are a symmetrical street-facing front façade, a shallow full-width front veranda with a pent roof, and prominent gabled dormers with decorative trusses and shingled siding on its north, east and west sides. Significant features of the building's interior include the size and configuration of its rooms, the wooden central staircase that dominates the front foyer, and historic finishes that are predominant throughout. Insofar as it retains its historic

Ballard House

Name of Property

Houston County, MN

County and State

form, style, interior configuration, setting, location, and many of its historic building materials, the building enjoys relatively high historic integrity and easily conveys a sense of its historic use as a small-town commercial hotel of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Narrative Description

The Ballard House is on the south side of Main Street in Spring Grove, Minnesota, in Mons Fladager's Original Plat of Spring Grove (lot 28 and the western 21 feet of lot 27). It is a single building comprised of three distinct parts: a rectangular section that runs east / west and a rectangular wing, comprised of two contiguous rectangular sections, that comes off the east end of its south side to form an L-shaped structure (see sketch map of building sections). Although there are no historic records of construction available, the east-west section is believed to have been the original hotel, constructed in 1893, and the east wing is understood as an addition, built sometime before March of 1895, that enlarged the first floor dining room and provided two additional second floor guest rooms, as well as separate staff housing.¹

The building is situated along the northern and western boundaries of lot 28, leaving an approximately 24' wide strip along the east property line as a side yard, an approximately 46' x 43' area south of the building as a back yard, and an irregular, narrow strip west of the east wing as a courtyard. Within the courtyard is a raised deck constructed of contemporary resin planks, distinguished on its north and west sides by large murals designed by Sallie DeReus, based on original paintings by Norwegian artist Sigmund Aarseth and executed by Sallie DeReus, Doug Eckheart, and Lisa Beiwel (photo 5).² The deck connects to a walkway in the yard below, which features a landscape of grass and shrubbery and a recent bronze sculpture of Sigmund Aarseth.

Building Exterior

The original section of the building measures 46' x 26' and runs parallel to Main Street (photo 1). It is two and one-half stories, with a standard-pitch hipped roof with shallow eaves, a ground-floor veranda with a pent roof supported by wood brackets on its north side, and a central brick chimney. It has prominent gable-roofed, shingled dormers with decorative gable trusses on the north, east, and west sides, and a small shed-roofed gable on the south side. While the approximately 18' x 20' two-story north section of the east wing has a gable roof and its approximately 23' x 14' one and one-half story south section has a salt box roof, both sections run perpendicular to the original section from the east end of its south side (photos 2 and 3). Because the two sections of the east wing are of different widths and their roof ridges are not aligned, they are visually distinct from each other—and from the original section—from every angle of view.

¹ Although written records are scarce, physical evidence and local anecdotal history supports the concept of two or three construction phases. The newspaper accounts, historic photographs, and land records detailed in Section 8 indicate that the original section of the hotel was completed in November of 1893 and suggest that the east wing was completed in the following construction season. Figure 1, taken before removal of the neighboring blacksmith shop and painting of the hotel in early 1895, shows the hotel in its present form.

² "Outdoor Murals at Heritage Center to Honor Late Norwegian Artist," *Spring Grove Herald* (hereafter *SGH*), August 13, 2013.

Ballard House
Name of Property

Houston County, MN
County and State

The foundation of the entire building is of rough-cut limestone laid in irregular courses. Walls of all three sections are balloon-framed—with closely-spaced two-inch wood studs, wood joists, and wood roof framing—and are clad with wood clapboard siding on the building's first and second floors, and with wood shingles on the dormers and the south façade of the east wing's north section (photo 3). Cladding is historic on the west façade of the building's original section and contemporary on the other exterior walls. Likewise, exterior doors and narrow double-hung windows are recent reproductions of the building's historic ones, except for the window and door in the west gable of the west façade of the original section. The aluminum gutters, downspouts, and asphalt roof shingles all are contemporary.

The building's primary façade faces Main Street, to the north, and is situated so close to it that the plank floor of its full-width veranda reaches the public sidewalk. Flush with the sidewalk at both ends, the veranda floor ramps up about four inches to the double-leaf central door, where its sidewalk edge is marked by a short stretch of wood railing that is approximately as wide as the door. At the east end of the veranda, a similar railing delimits the area in front of a single-leaf door. Both doors have narrow wood leaves with glass panels and glass transoms. Fenestration on this side of the building is symmetrical, including both single and paired double-hung, one-over-one, narrow wood windows with wood framing.

Also visible from Main Street, the east façade is asymmetrical because of differences between the roof heights and styles of the building's three structural sections, as well as their fenestration (photo 3). At ground level, the one and one-half story south section of the east wing features a small pent-roofed porch constructed of contemporary resin planking and surrounded by a painted wood railing (photo 3). Because the sloping grade at this end of the building exposes about two feet of the stone foundation, the porch is served by a short flight of stairs that lead to a wood door with a nine-light glazed panel. Also at ground level, there is a small lean-to shed adjoining the north section of the east wing at its north end. Viewed from this side, differences in the size and distribution of the three sections' windows are apparent. While the tall, narrow one-over-one windows of the original section are evenly and symmetrically spaced, and the similar windows of the east wing's north section align with them, those of its south section are shorter, wider, and irregularly spaced.

The secondary south and west façades are only visible from the rear alley and back yard (photos 4 and 5). Because of the building's L-shape, both consist of one façade from the original section and at least one façade from the east wing. Fenestration is sparse, with smaller window openings than exists on the north and east sides and markedly less regular spacing. Windows are double-hung, one-over-one, narrow wood windows with wood framing and, except for a pair of first-floor windows at the south end of the east wing's west elevation and another pair of first floor windows in its south elevation, are installed singly.

The first floor of the original section's south façade is concealed by a windowless, one-story lean-to addition that is completely covered by one of the Sallie DeReus murals (photo 5). A contemporary wood railing at the outer edges of its roof creates a balcony several feet below a second-floor door and just beneath a window serving an interior landing between the building's

Ballard House

Name of Property

Houston County, MN

County and State

first and second floors. Above the landing window is the shed-roofed dormer window at the center of the original section's south façade. To the east, the sloping grade at the south end of the east wing exposes the limestone foundation at its south façade. Fenestration of the clapboard wall above is sparse and windows are uniformly small, with a pair of windows at the west end of the first floor and two single windows at the center of the second floor.

Since the distance between the west façade of the original section and a neighboring building to the west is less than a foot, it is not completely visible from any angle. With limited access to this part of the building, it is only possible to view its historic wall cladding at close range. The west façade of the east wing has two segments—one at the north, bordering the deck, and another at the south, defining the east side of the courtyard. These are separated by a narrow, north-facing wall just wide enough for the contemporary single-leaf door that connects the deck to the interior of the east wing's south section (photo 6). The north segment of the east wing's west façade features a contemporary glazed double-leaf door and one window south of it on the first floor, as well as a north window and a central window opening fitted with an air-conditioning unit on the second floor (photos 5 and 6). The south segment of this façade has historic basement windows, hidden by the contemporary deck, and a pair of windows at the first floor (photos 4 and 6).

Building interior

The organization of the building's interior varies from floor to floor. It has an unfinished two-room basement under the original section and the north section of the east wing, interconnected rooms surrounding a staircase on its first floor, and second and third floors primarily characterized by a series of small rooms that can only be accessed from a central hallway in the building's original section. The organization of the east wing's south section is distinct from that of the remainder of the building, insofar as it has no basement, its first floor has a historic secondary entrance, and its second-floor rooms—served by their own stairway—do not connect to the rest of that floor, or to the third floor. Although the plaster walls and ceilings of the first floor's north rooms have been covered with removable panels and embellished with brightly-colored decorative murals, and the walls and ceilings of its south rooms are finished with contemporary pine paneling, historic finishes are visible throughout the rest of the building. These include tongue-and-groove pine flooring, wood baseboards and door moldings, paneled wood doors with transoms, and plaster walls and ceilings.

Basement (map 1)

The plan of the two-room basement reflects the footprint of the building's original section and the north section of the east wing. Accessed by a wood stairway on its south side (under the original section), the basement's north room has a concrete floor, parged stone walls, a parged brick footing along its west wall, and an unfinished ceiling that exposes the joists of the floor above. The west end of its south wall is about eight feet south of its east end, creating a slightly L-shaped space that protrudes into the basement of the east wing. Although they have been sealed and covered by the ground floor lean-to addition, an exterior wood door and two small window openings—one filled with glass block and the other containing a multi-light wood

Ballard House

Name of Property

Houston County, MN

County and State

window—are extant at the west end of the south wall. The room has two additional window openings: one at the north end of the east wall that has been filled in and parged and another at the north end of the east wing that is filled with glass block. In the center of the room, east and west of the staircase, timber and metal posts support two wood north-south beams that reinforce the joists above (photos 7 and 8).

The basement's south room lies under the north section of the building's east wing, and is accessed through a door just east of the basement staircase. Its most striking features are the low concrete footings that run along the east and west walls, and a larger one near the center of the room that supports timber posts that reinforce the floor above. A small window opening high in the west wall contains glass block and is concealed beneath the patio above, and a south doorway is filled with concrete block (photo 9).

Although there are no construction records or photographs of the basement dating to the period of significance, an unpublished memoir by Pierce Brown (son of the 1942–1959 hotel owners) offers some information about its organization and uses during the years when his family operated the hotel. Consistent with the current interior floorplan (map 1), Brown describes a relatively open basement with access to the back yard, and a perceptible division between the areas beneath the original section of the hotel, where the floor was finished, and the north section of its east wing, which had a dirt floor. During this period, the basement housed the building's furnace and water heater, as it does today, as well as laundry equipment, a shower, and space for butchering chickens.³

First floor (map 2)

The building's main entrance, the double-leaf door at the center of the north façade, leads to a small foyer dominated by a historic wood staircase with carved wood newel posts and turned wood balusters, finials, and drops along its wood-wainscoted right side (photo 10). Other historic materials in the foyer and the hallway that runs along the staircase include tongue-and-groove wood flooring, wood baseboards, and plaster walls, as well as acoustical ceiling tile that may date to the period of significance. In addition to the staircase and the hallway, the foyer has direct access to adjacent rooms east and west of it that, in turn, connect directly to a series of rooms to the south.

The room west of the foyer (the “northwest room” indicated on map 2) has historic wood flooring, baseboards, and plaster walls, contemporary built-in shelving on its west side, a gypsum board ceiling with contemporary track lighting, and a historic paneled wood door on a contemporary sliding track at the entrance to the room just south of it (photo 11). This second room (the “west room”)—which also has historic wood flooring and baseboards, and a gypsum board ceiling—gives way to a lean-to addition at the south end of the building that is constructed of plywood and chipboard, with an unfinished ceiling. These materials indicate the lean-to addition's relatively recent construction, but do not obscure the historic exterior wall on its north

³ Pierce Brown, “Early Years at the Florence Hotel / Spring Grove Hotel / The Ballard House,” n.d., Giants of the Earth Heritage Center.

Ballard House

Name of Property

Houston County, MN

County and State

and east sides. From a door at the east end of this wall, it is possible to return to the central hallway that connects to the foyer and front entrance.

East of the foyer is a double-leaf glass door that opens to a large rectangular room (the “northeast room”) that runs from north to south, occupying about one-third of this floor’s total area and decorated with murals by Sigmund Aarseth. While the north half of this room is in the original section of the building, its south half comprises most of the first floor of the east wing’s north section. Like the rooms to the west, it has tongue-and-groove wood flooring with historic floor heating grates, wood baseboards, and gypsum board ceilings and track lighting. Although the north, south, and east walls retain their historic door and window openings (photos 12 and 13), the west wall has three large non-historic openings. These accommodate a contemporary double-leaf glass exterior door at the south, a large glazed panel in the middle, and the double-leaf glass interior door to the foyer at the north. A contemporary wood door at the east end of the south wall leads to a small room with tongue-and-groove wood flooring, contemporary pine paneling on its walls and ceiling, and track lighting. This is open to a room with similar finishes at the building’s south end that, in turn, provides access to a pine-paneled contemporary restroom and an exit to the courtyard through paneled wood doors at its north end. An overhead beam, the narrow north and south wall sections that support it, and an indentation in the floor below it are vestiges of an earlier wall that divided this room from north to south. The building’s southeast exterior door is near the center of its east wall (photo 14), and a small quarter-turn wood staircase at its southwest corner leads to the second floor.

Once again, historical accounts provide some insight into the organization and uses of this floor of the building during the period of significance. A 1924 real estate listing describes a large dining room (the first floor’s northeast room), an office (the first floor’s west room), a parlor (the first floor’s northwest room), and a kitchen (the first floor’s east room), all of which typically would have been located on the first floor of a late-nineteenth or early-twentieth century commercial hotel.⁴ A 1929 newspaper story about a chimney fire in the hotel “annex” indicates that the hotel kitchen was in the east wing, along with four “sleeping rooms,” which is consistent with Pierce Brown’s description of the kitchen and family quarters at the south end of the east wing, and compatible with the current floor plan.⁵ Finally, Brown’s description of the first floor as having two large rooms west of the front entrance and one to the east, and a dining area that extended south to the kitchen, is consistent with both the 1924 account and the current first-floor plan. The two west rooms that would have been the hotel’s reception area and general office in early years became the Browns’ private quarters during their tenure, and the large east room continued to serve as a dining area throughout the period of significance, with the eventual use of part of the lunch counter as a bar (figures 6 and 7).⁶

Second floor (map 3)

⁴“Hotel for Sale at Auction,” *Winona Republican Herald* (hereafter *WRH*), December 16, 1924.

⁵“Spring Grove Hotel Annex Damaged by Fire; Loss \$1,500,” *WRH*, December 18, 1929.

⁶ Pierce Brown, “Early Years at the Florence Hotel.”

Ballard House

Name of Property

Houston County, MN

County and State

Access to the north end of the second floor is via the historic wood staircase in the first floor's foyer, which leads through a half-turn landing that includes the hotel's early wall telephone and a double-hung wood window in its south wall. At the top of the stairway is a narrow east / west hallway with wood floors and baseboards, plaster walls and ceiling, a central flue with a historic heating register, and a double-hung window at its east end (photo 16). Along the length of the hallway, seven paneled wood doors with wood transoms, surrounded by decorative wood molding, open to six nearly identical plaster-walled rooms (photo 15) and a pine-wainscoted lavatory. Each room has a single one-over-one double-hung wood window, except for the northeast room (which has a pair of windows facing north and a single window facing east), the southwest room (which has a single-light exterior door in place of a window), and the lavatory (which is windowless). Some of these rooms have plaster ceilings, others are finished with acoustic tile, and all have historic heating registers in their floors.

From the south side of the hallway, just east of the stairway to the first floor, a shorter hallway leads south to a paneled wood door and transom like the others on this floor. This opens to a large room that fills the entire second floor of the north section of the east wing (the "east room" indicated on map 3). South of the room's entrance, along the west wall, was once a north / south hallway that served the two guest rooms at this location. Removal of the hallway's east wall has effectively created a west alcove that opens to the rest of the room through a wood-framed opening (photo 17). The door and transom at the end of the original hallway is still present, setting off the southwest corner from the rest of the room. Although the tongue-and-groove wood flooring matches the floor in the original section of the building, a continuous seam just inside the entryway clearly indicates the transition from the original section into this part of the building, and the imprint of the east / west wall that once separated the two guest rooms is evident. The room has contemporary wood baseboards, gypsum board wall and ceiling surfaces, windows on its east and west sides, and no access to the south section of the east wing through its south wall.

The four rooms on the second floor of the east wing's south section can only be accessed from the small quarter-turn wood staircase at the southwest corner of its first floor. Inside the plywood-paneled staircase, stairs lead past an inoperable wood door in the building's west wall to an alcove in the room above. This is defined by a turned wood railing along the staircase to its south, the staircase wall to the west, and the north and east walls shared with the rest of the room. In the kitchen west of the alcove, a 1950s-era built-in sink unit fills the lower part of the north wall, with standard wall-mounted cabinets above. The east wall has a matching upper cabinet unit at its north end and a wood-framed opening that gives access to an adjacent room. The wall to the south contains a small one-over-one double-hung window. Finishes in this room consist of vinyl tile on the floor, plywood paneling on the walls and gable ceiling, and acoustical tile on the flat ceiling of the east side. To the east, a similar-sized room (the "south bedroom") has small double-hung windows on its south and its east sides, a flue in the center of its east side, and an attic access panel in its ceiling. It has a carpeted floor, plywood wall paneling, and acoustical ceiling tile (photo 18). A doorway at the west end of this room's north wall opens to a second room (the "north bedroom"), similar in size to the others, with a small double-hung window in its east wall, a bathroom in its northwest corner, and the same surface finishes as the room south of it. Fixtures in the bathroom appear to date from the mid-twentieth century, and its surface

Ballard House

Name of Property

Houston County, MN

County and State

finishes are similar to those in the other three rooms on this floor of the east wing's south section: vinyl floor tile, plywood wall paneling, and acoustical ceiling tile.

The second floor's layout, with the separation between the east wing's south section and the rest of this floor, reflects its historic use as sleeping quarters for two distinct groups. While the rooms north of the dividing wall accommodated paying guests, those to the south provided private accommodations for the hotel manager's family and/or staff. The existence of a residential kitchen is not documented during the period of significance and, given Pierce Brown's description of his family eating meals prepared in the hotel kitchen, seems doubtful under their ownership. Classified advertisements placed by the subsequent owner, however, indicate that the south section was sub-divided into two apartments sometime between late 1962 and late 1963.⁷ In addition to installation of the upstairs kitchen, this required the installation of an exterior stairway, now removed, that accessed the currently-inoperable door in the south section's stairwell.

Third floor (map 4)

Only the original section of the building has a third floor, which is accessed by a second flight of the historic wood staircase that joins the first floor's front foyer and the second floor hallway (photo 19). As between the first and second floors, it makes a half-turn at a landing that has a double-hung window before reaching the floor above. At the third floor, which consists of three moderate-sized rooms off a U-shaped hallway that surrounds the stairs, a plain wood railing with square balusters surrounds the stairwell on three sides to join the gable ceiling at the south wall (photo 20). Facing the stairs, the hallway runs east-west to reach two rooms on these sides of the building, and gives access to a smaller north room directly in front of the staircase. Like the one below, this floor features tongue-and-groove wood flooring and baseboards, plaster walls and ceilings, and the three doorways that line its hallway have transoms and are framed by carved wood molding. Their original doors have been removed and currently are in storage. The identical fenestration of all three rooms is sized for a pair of double-hung windows, as exists in the north and east rooms, but one of the west room's west-facing window openings has been modified to accept a wood door (photo 21). This 1914 alteration once permitted access to supplementary guest rooms above the adjacent butcher shop but has not served that function since at least 2008, when that building was replaced by the one that stands today.⁸

Integrity

The Ballard House has been in near-continuous use since its construction, and exclusively served its original functions as a hotel and/or restaurant until the 1980s. It is in good structural condition and retains much of its historic integrity. Although there are no construction records dating to the period of significance, historic photographs and newspaper articles, Pierce Brown's

⁷ *Winona Daily News* (hereafter *WDN*), September 21, 1962, 16 and October 24, 1963, 16.

⁸ William Fried (Giants of the Earth Acting Executive Director), discussion with Jane Bisel and Steve Williams, Spring Grove, Minnesota, March 28, 2017.

Ballard House

Name of Property

Houston County, MN

County and State

memoir, and close examination of the present-day structure all convey an understanding of the early building that is consistent with its current appearance.

The earliest known photograph of the hotel, dating to ca. 1894 (figure 1), exhibits the features that characterize it today. These include a three-part structure comprised of the hip-roofed original section and the two gable-roofed sections of the east wing, a pent-roofed front veranda, a symmetrical front façade, prominent roof dormers, a central chimney, wood clapboard and shingle siding, and the decorative wood shingles and trusses of the dormers. Subsequent photos (figures 2–5) document little change to the primary façades during the period of significance, but newspaper accounts and a 2013 study outline recent exterior restoration and rehabilitation work that included covering the original wood clapboards with vinyl siding, replacing some windows, and installing decorative window shutters in the late 1980s—and reversing these changes after 2010. Under the building’s current ownership, deteriorated and missing exterior features—notably damaged wood siding, the front porch flooring, and historic windows lost in the 1980s remodeling—have been replaced with new ones custom-fabricated to replicate the originals, and original materials in usable condition have been retained.⁹ Interior work also has reused historic materials insofar as possible, and has prevented damage to first floor walls and ceilings during electrical upgrades by running new wiring between the original plaster surfaces and gypsum board or wood paneling.¹⁰ Introduction of these materials, as well as the glazed panel and contemporary glass door in the wall between the first floor’s hallway and its northeast room, is neither irreversible nor disruptive of the interior plan.

Over its approximately 125-year history, the building’s interior has evolved to meet changing needs, but nonetheless retains its fundamental organization. Very early in the period of significance, the building’s original form was altered by construction of the east wing, which required removal of parts of the east end of the original section’s south wall. The portion of the wall that surrounded the opening between the north and south ends of the first floor’s northeast room is visible in photos from the 1940s (figures 6 and 7), but has since been removed. On the second floor, addition of the east wing required an opening only as wide as a standard doorway, which (along with the seam in the flooring) still marks the transition into this section of the building. Although their locations are clear, two more walls were removed in recent years: one that divided the first floor’s southwest room from north to south and another that divided the large room of the east wing’s second floor from east to west. The other recent change to the layout, erection of the lean-to addition and the exterior deck, does not affect the relationship of the early rooms to each other.

⁹ Marlene Deschler, “Family Discovers Norwegian Grandmother, Dedicates Porch in Her Honor,” *SGH*, November 4, 2015; Craig Moorhead, “A Giant Task: Spring Grove Organization Has Some Big Goals,” *SGH*, December 31, 2013; Michael Schmidt and Andy Anderson (Giants of the Earth board members), email to Jane Bisel, December 7, 2016; Robert C. Vogel, “Intensive Survey and National Register of Historic Places Evaluation of the Ballard House, 163 West Main Street, Spring Grove, Minnesota,” 1913. State Historic Preservation Office Inventory Files. Minnesota Historical Society.

¹⁰ Marlene Deschler, “Heritage Center Remodeling Project Underway,” *SGH*, September 28, 2010; Michael Schmidt and Andy Anderson, email to Jane Bisel, December 7, 2016.

Ballard House

Name of Property

Houston County, MN

County and State

In short, this building easily conveys its history as a small-town commercial hotel of the late-nineteenth and early-to-mid twentieth centuries, and has good integrity of feeling and association and good integrity overall. Through more than twelve decades of nearly continuous use, it has retained good integrity of design and still exhibits its most significant character-defining features. Among these are its L-shaped form; its design as three integrated structures with differing wall heights; its roof pitches and styles; its prominent dormers with decorative wood trusses; its central chimney; the symmetrical fenestration, dual front entrances, and shallow, full-width pent roof of its front façade; and the spatial organization and distinctive front stairway of its interior. Because the building interior has retained most of its historic materials, including the character-defining front staircase and most of its surface finishes, it has fair integrity of materials and good integrity of workmanship despite a significant loss of exterior building materials. Finally, it also has excellent integrity of location and good integrity of setting, insofar as it remains in its original location on Spring Grove's Main Street, along with a majority of the buildings present during the period of significance.

Ballard House
Name of Property

Houston County, MN
County and State

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 grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCE

Ballard House
Name of Property

Houston County, MN
County and State

Period of Significance

1893-1946

Significant Dates

1893

ca. 1894

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Ballard House is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A. It is locally significant in the area of Commerce, as a privately-owned hotel built to serve the specific needs of commercial travelers arriving in Spring Grove, Minnesota, by rail and later by automobile. In addition, as the best (and, for the most part, only) hotel in Spring Grove, it served a variety of community functions. These included acting as a community and commercial center where commercial travelers could forge relationships and offer their wares to local businesses, and providing office space for itinerant doctors and dentists in the era before such professionals had permanent local offices. Because the hotel was closely associated with the development of local travel infrastructure, and with the growth of Spring Grove as a rural commercial center, the period of significance begins with the hotel's construction in 1893 and ends in 1946, with the loss of regular passenger rail service and a decline in the economic impact of local small businesses.

Ballard House
Name of Property

Houston County, MN
County and State

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

The Ballard House in Spring Grove, Minnesota, is significant as a local example of a privately-owned commercial hotel constructed in the late nineteenth century. Like other commercial hotels built across the United States between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Ballard House represents a type of travel accommodation that is distinct from the roadhouses, taverns, and stagecoach inns that served the pioneers of Spring Grove Township during its settlement era (1852–1878). Constructed between 1893 and ca. 1894, the hotel was designed to meet the needs of business travelers arriving by rail, and served this function well during most of the period in which Spring Grove functioned as a local commercial center and commodities distribution hub (1879–1945). Economic changes and the rise of automobile travel, however, transformed the hotel and the rest of the Spring Grove business community during the modern era (1946–present). From this perspective, the Ballard House’s history can be understood to parallel Spring Grove’s evolution from a frontier outpost to a commercial center for the surrounding agricultural region, and, finally, to a small Midwestern town of the twenty-first century.

Settlement of Spring Grove Township, 1852–1878

Located in the extreme southeast of the state of Minnesota, in Houston County, Spring Grove is approximately 5 miles from the Iowa state line and 15 miles from the Mississippi River. It is situated in an unglaciated area comprised of a series of broad ridges, drained by numerous small rivers and creeks, rising from the plains below. Given its topography, cited by some for its resemblance to eastern Norway,¹¹ as well as rich soil and relative accessibility, the area was quite attractive to European-American settlers in the mid-nineteenth century. By 1848, the United States government had recently re-settled Native Americans of the Ho-Chunk (Winnebago) tribe to this region from their ancestral lands to the east and was preparing to forcibly remove them again.¹²

The first European residents of Houston County, as elsewhere in Minnesota, were adventurous land speculators from New England and the mid-Atlantic states intent on claiming some of its abundant farmland before it could be offered for sale. Although a man named John Vale may have staked a claim near Spring Grove as early as 1851, James Smith of Pennsylvania, who came from Lansing, Iowa, to claim 320 acres of section 11, is recognized as the first to establish a dwelling in Spring Grove Township. Smith opened a tavern on “the Brownsville Road” (now Spring Grove’s Main Street), a territorial trail that ran from Brownsville, 35 miles to the east, to the now-defunct village of Elliota, 15 miles to the west. He also offered rudimentary accommodations for travelers—which made him Spring Grove’s first innkeeper, as well as its

¹¹ Carlton C. Qualey, “A Typical Norwegian Settlement: Spring Grove, Minnesota,” *Norwegian-American Studies and Records* 9 (1936), 54–66, accessed September 14, 2016, www.naha.stolaf.edu/pubs/nas/volume09/vol09_5.htm.

¹² Houston County Historical Society, “Native American History of Houston County,” accessed October 9, 2016, <http://houstoncountyhistoricalsociety.org/nativeamericans.html>; Chad Muller, *Spring Grove: Minnesota’s First Norwegian Settlement* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2002), 7.

Ballard House

Houston County, MN

Name of Property

County and State

first business owner. Before long, he would also be its first merchant, its first postmaster, its first Justice of the Peace, an early county commissioner, and the originator of Spring Grove's name.

Within a few months, Norwegian families began to arrive in the area from settlements in southern Wisconsin and northeastern Iowa.¹³ These people were on the forefront of a wave of Norwegian immigrants who streamed into southeast Minnesota during the second half of the nineteenth century, seeking to buy good farmland and to live near others who shared their culture and beliefs. With the arrival of more Norwegian families, the area comprised of modern-day Spring Grove and neighboring Wilmington and Black Hammer townships became known as "Norwegian Ridge," and soon defined Spring Grove as the cultural center of a Norwegian immigrant community that eventually would be recognized as Minnesota's oldest.¹⁴

By the time the first territorial survey had been completed in 1854, settlers had already claimed most of the land in the vicinity and awaited the opening of a land office to formalize their ownership. Many of these were "Yankee" speculators from eastern states planning to sell to the next wave of settlers. James Smith was one of those who moved early, purchasing his claim from the U.S. government when the Brownsville land office opened in 1855, and platting a town site on it before selling his property and moving to nearby Caledonia, thus leaving the development of the community he had founded to others.

Early development of roads, travel, and hospitality facilities

During the settlement period, Spring Grove's location on the road from Brownsville, with its land office and Mississippi River steamship landing, and Elliot, which was on both the Dubuque Trail and the Fort Atkinson Road, favored commercial growth.¹⁵ In about 1854 stagecoach service was introduced along this route, which covered the two hundred miles to Mankato, Minnesota, within two years.¹⁶ Since the flow of traffic during the settlement period created obvious opportunities for trade, Smith's original outpost was quickly joined by an establishment known as the Pumpkin Tavern that operated from a log cabin and could sustain travelers with food, liquor, and a few beds that each might be expected to accommodate as many as four men. On Smith's departure, William Hinckley of Connecticut bought his inventory and opened a new general store and Robert McCormick acquired Smith's tavern, renaming it the Stage House. Before the end of the decade, Hinckley's store had become a wayside hostelry known as the Prentis Hotel, and Norwegian Mons Fladager, newly arrived from Wisconsin, had purchased the Pumpkin Tavern and the 40 acres upon which it stood and opened a general store. Eventually, this acreage would become Spring Grove's business district and Fladager would be recognized as one of its most prominent citizens.

¹³ Jane Briggs Palen, *Soil, Timber and a Spring: The Story of Spring Grove, Minnesota* (Spring Grove, MN: Spring Grove Past, Present and Future, 1991), 7; Qualey, "A Typical Norwegian Settlement."

¹⁴ Chad Muller, *Spring Grove: Minnesota's First*, 9; Qualey, "A Typical Norwegian Settlement."

¹⁵ Arthur J. Larsen, "Roads and Trails in the Minnesota Triangle, 1849-1860," *Minnesota History* 11, 4:387-411; Percival Narveson, "Spring Grove to Recall Those Days in the 1850s," *Historical Sketches of Houston County*, Chad Muller and Georgia Rosendahl, eds., St. Paul, MN: Kvasir House Press, 2013, 37.

¹⁶ Sydney L. Roppe and Blayne Onsgard, *History of Spring Grove: An Abridged History of Spring Grove, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, and the School*, Spring Grove, MN: Onsgard Publishing, 1952, 6.

Ballard House

Name of Property

Houston County, MN

County and State

By 1860, Fladager had platted his property for building sites and leading village residents had organized Spring Grove's first village meeting. There were ninety-eight families in Spring Grove Township and seven businesses in the village, including the Stage House, the Prentis Hotel, and the Fladager store. All but twelve of the families were of Norwegian origin and the only businesses not owned by Norwegian-Americans were the two hotels.¹⁷ The flow of would-be settlers continued, although prime farmland was already in short supply. When the Homestead Act of 1862 offered free land in what was then the western frontier, new settlers and Township farm workers who wanted land of their own sought to settle in central Minnesota or the Red River Valley, and Spring Grove effectively became a stopping-off point for Norwegian immigrants seeking a more permanent home. However, the number of families and businesses had more than doubled by the time the 1870 census was taken, and the business community had developed to include businesses that manufactured goods for domestic, agricultural, and commercial use (flour, beer, cabinets, wagons, shoes, and bricks).¹⁸ Among the new arrivals of this decade were veterinary surgeon and writer Matthias Schmidt-Nilson and his wife, Anna, farmer Lars Dokken, and the family of carpenter Nils Gjerdingen—all of whom would figure in the eventual establishment of the Ballard House.

Commercial Growth of Spring Grove Village, 1879–1945

Although population growth leveled with the loss of available farmland in the 1870s, infrastructure improvements and the increased accessibility of markets and services contributed to a decline in the pioneer culture of self-sufficiency and a corresponding growth of a local business community that catered to the needs of the surrounding agricultural region. Hoping to expand the market for locally-made goods and improve access for consumers, the local business community supported the proposed expansion of the Chicago, Clinton, Dubuque, and Minnesota Railroad by partially funding construction of track for a new spur line running from Reno, south of Brownsville on the Mississippi River, through Spring Grove, and northwest into the Root River valley. This would connect with the company's existing rail line between St. Paul and Chicago and provide daily service to Spring Grove.

The initiation of rail service on October 13, 1879, directly spurred the economic growth of the community and provoked a building boom.¹⁹ Mons Fladager, anticipating this development, platted two additions to the village, entrepreneurs from Decorah, Iowa, opened a lumberyard near the tracks, and the railroad built a grain elevator that received 10,000 bushels of wheat, oats, and barley in the first year—prompting McCormick & Co. to build a second one in 1880. Coupled with the Homestead Act, the railroad helped to increase the flow of would-be settlers through Spring Grove, where many had friends and relatives. As well, it significantly contributed to building the village into a commodity shipping center serving the surrounding agricultural area—rather than a frontier outpost whose chief attractions were a general store, a post office, and a church—and facilitated broader access to goods and services previously

¹⁷ Roppe and Onsgard, *History of Spring Grove*, 5.

¹⁸ 1870 U.S. Census of Spring Grove, Minnesota, cited in Qualey, "A Typical Norwegian Settlement," and Roppe and Onsgard, *History of Spring Grove*, 6.

¹⁹ Muller, *Spring Grove: Minnesota's First*, 96.

Ballard House

Name of Property

Houston County, MN

County and State

available only in distant towns and cities.²⁰ Before long, Spring Grove became the most prosperous community in its area, with a thriving new business district that included four general stores, two drug stores, two restaurants, three blacksmith shops, a hardware store, a harness shop, a cobbler, and two hotels.²¹

In the decade after the railroad's arrival, Spring Grove became an incorporated village of 394 inhabitants, almost double the population of 1880. A local newspaper began publication, wood sidewalks were laid alongside unpaved streets, a new opera house opened, and the railroad tracks were upgraded to standard gauge. Within a few years, the newspaper described the local real estate market as "better than the Colorado silver mines," and municipal water and telephone service were available.²² The stagecoach route that had served the village's early settlers was functionally replaced, and rustic accommodations such as those provided by the Stage House and the Prentis Hotel no longer served the needs of the traveling public. Recognizing this, enterprising Norwegian-American farmer Teman Gilbertson built a large brick hotel on Spring Grove's Main Street, at some distance from the train depot, in 1879. The Gilbertson Hotel was successful, and enjoyed a reputation as Spring Grove's principal hotel for much of the decade during which it operated.²³

In 1881, Mathias and Anna Schmidt-Nilson purchased lot 28 on Spring Grove's Main Street from Mons Fladager to build a two-story frame hotel and rooming house, which they called the Schmidt Nilson Hotel, thus providing another lodging option. The Schmidt-Nilsons lived on site and operated a restaurant and pharmacy in the building until selling the property to Lars Dokken in June of 1886.²⁴ Four months after this transaction Dokken purchased lot 54, across Main Street from the hotel property, from Fladager.²⁵ Historical accounts indicate that the Schmidt-Nilson property was used as a rooming house under Dokken's early ownership, when the only overnight accommodations for travelers were at the Gilbertson Hotel and in a few rooms above the hardware store, and that it once again was known as a hotel in the late 1880s. Under the management of Dokken's son-in-law, Hans Gjerdingen, it was called the Spring Grove House or, more simply, "the Spring Grove hotel."²⁶

Spring Grove's "new hotel"

Hans and Lina Gjerdingen purchased the lot 28 and 54 properties from Dokken in March of 1893, sold a half interest to local resident Brady Foss in May, and had the hotel moved across the street in July to make way for a larger hotel. By the end of November, the new building had been constructed, plastered, and was open for business. Advertised as "strictly first class," it was

²⁰ Qualey, "A Typical Norwegian Settlement."

²¹ Britt Unni Skjervold Geving, *An Evolving Heritage: The Norwegian-Americans in Spring Grove, Minnesota, the 1850s to the 1990s* (M.A. thesis, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, 2001), 24.

²² *SGH*, Feb 22, 1894, 2; *Caledonia Argus* (hereafter *CA*), December 4, 1897, 1.

²³ Franklyn Curtis-Wedge, ed., *History of Houston County* (Winona, MN: H.C. Cooper, 1919), 527-28.

²⁴ "Landmarks Fall at Spring Grove," *WDN*, February 13, 1961, 7; Houston County Recorder, deed books 29:374 and 41:370.

²⁵ Houston County Recorder, deed book 44:96.

²⁶ Charles S. Bryant, *History of Houston County* (Minneapolis: Minnesota Historical Company, 1882), 470; "Landmarks Fall at Spring Grove," *CA*, January 25, March 1, and December 27, 1890.

Ballard House

Houston County, MN

Name of Property

County and State

named the Ballard House—although locals would initially know it as “the new hotel.”²⁷

Although there is no known record of the east wing’s construction, it was certainly built during the hotel’s first year, possibly during the construction season of 1894. The earliest available photograph of the property, taken before May of 1895, shows the building as it appears today (figure 1).

The Ballard House was designed as a “commercial” hotel, a type of travel accommodation that emerged during the late nineteenth century specifically to meet the needs of business travelers. Like the Ballard House, other early commercial hotels typically were privately-owned and constructed in business districts, within walking distance of the local railroad depot. Their principle function was to provide meals and overnight accommodations for men, primarily travelling salesmen looking for a convenient and inexpensive place to sleep, eat, and transact their business before promptly moving on. However, much of their business came from their lunchrooms, which provided quick meals for rail passengers and crew members, as well as local residents.²⁸

Although modest by today’s standards, with their characteristically small rooms and shared bathrooms, the hotels offered other amenities geared to the needs of the era’s business traveler. These typically included the services of a staff member with a pushcart (as shown in figures 2 and 3) or a horse-drawn cart to help transport sample cases to and from the depot. Inside the hotel, guests had use of a ground-floor lounge or “writing room,” and a dedicated “sample room” for displaying wares and taking orders (or larger guest rooms that could accommodate this). It was also common, in smaller towns, for itinerant professionals to serve clients from such hotels. During the 1890s, the newspapers of both Caledonia and Spring Grove mention regular visits to Spring Grove by a barber, as well as dentists, veterinarians, and a clairvoyant—all of whom worked from the Ballard House during their stays.²⁹ By the early 1890s, there were several commercial hotels in the nearby rail towns of Houston and Fillmore Counties, among which were the Williams House in Caledonia (ca. 1890), the Hotel Chase in Hokah (1893), the Mabel House in Mabel (1879), and the Commercial House in Harmony (early 1890s).³⁰

²⁷ Houston County Recorder, deed book 56:68; *Caledonia Journal*, May 3, 1893; “Landmarks Fall at Spring Grove,” *CA*, July 15, 1893, 2. An 1886 plat map shows the building designated “hotel” on the south side of Main Street, with a smaller building and a livery stable to the north (*Standard Atlas of Houston County, Including a Plat Book of the Villages, Cities, and Townships of the County*, Chicago: George A. Ogle and Company, 1896, 69).

²⁸ John A. Jakle and Keith A. Sculle, *America’s Main Street Hotels: Transiency and Community in the Early Auto Age* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2009), 4 and 11–12; Lisa Pfueller Davidson, “‘A Service Machine’: Hotel Guests and the Development of an Early-Twentieth-Century Building Type,” *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* 10, 113–129, accessed September 20, 2016, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3514344?seq=1&cid=pdf-reference#references_tab_contents.

²⁹ Jakle and Sculle, *America’s Main Street Hotels*, 11; Davidson, “A Service Machine,” 116–118; and “Harmony Hotel to be Removed,” *WDN*, August 6, 1969, 8. For examples of professional use of the Ballard House, see *CA*, April 12, 1890 (barber), May 24, 1890, and February 7, 1891 (dentist), and *SGH*, November 16, 1893, 2, February 23, 1899, 4 (dentists), and January 31, 1895, 3 (clairvoyant).

³⁰ “Caledonia Commercial Historic District,” National Register of Historic Places nomination, accessed January 25, 2017, <https://focus.nps.gov/AssetDetail/NRIS/94000830> (Williams House); *SGH*, September 28, 1893, 2 (Hotel Chase); “Mabel House: The History,” accessed January 25, 2017, <http://www.mabelhousehotel.com/?page=history> (Mabel House); and “Harmony Hotel to be Removed” (Commercial House). Interestingly, the Mabel House had

Ballard House

Name of Property

Houston County, MN

County and State

Frequently the early commercial hotels were associated with a livery stable where guests arriving by rail could lease horses and buggies, and/or hire a driver. This was certainly true of the Ballard House, which advertised its relationship with a "good livery" and the availability of "our own" rigs and drivers, as well as its willingness to sell "fine baled hay" and deliver it anywhere in the village.³¹ In the hotel's first five years, its relationship with the livery (located behind the former Schmitt-Nilson Hotel building) was particularly close, as they shared the same ownership.³²

Although it was often managed by others, the hotel thrived under local council member Thorvald Doely's ownership, beginning in March of 1895, despite the establishment of a short-lived competitor just two doors east.³³ Within a few months of purchasing the hotel, Doely had bought the twenty-one foot strip of lot 27 that now constitutes the property's side yard, removed the previous owner's blacksmith shop from it, and given the hotel exterior "a neat coat of paint."³⁴ Other early improvements included connecting the hotel to the new municipal water supply, and giving it a "thorough renovation."³⁵ Although the Ballard House had hosted community functions under its previous owners, it was noted for a number of larger gala events, including a masquerade ball and other evening "socials," once this work had been completed.³⁶

After Doely's death in 1907, Spring Grove restaurant owner H. B. Hanson purchased the property, completely refurnished it, and hosted a banquet for the Spring Grove business community to celebrate its re-opening as the Hotel Hanson (figure 3). The gala celebration featured an ambitious menu of delicacies, such as "Celestine oyster consommé [sic]," and prompted the local paper to pronounce the hotel "the best on the [Reno to Preston railroad] branch."³⁷ Just three years later, Henry and Leonard Halvorson were next in a string of short-term owners that included B. E. Garness (1912), Ed Kirkelie (1913), and Hans Morken (1914). Finally, under the ownership of John Schmidt of Caledonia (1914) and the beginning of long-term oversight by manager Oscar Gran, the hotel re-acquired stable, longer-term direction.³⁸ Gran, whose previous experience included operating the failed competitor on Spring Grove's Main Street, quickly changed the Hanson Hotel's name and installed a new heating system. Under his management, as the Hotel Florence, the hotel continued to be a popular stopping-off point for commercial travelers, as well as longer-term boarders (figure 4). With its "well-spread tables and neatly kept rooms being filled to capacity every day," the hotel's business grew to the

been a stage coach hotel in nearby Riceford until the railroad bypassed that community in favor of Mabel and prompted an immediate relocation.

³¹ *SGH*, November 30, 1893, and January 11, 1894.

³² Gjerdingen and Foss (1893–1894), Foss and his father (1894–1895), and Thorvald Doely (1895–1898). See *CA*, May 3, 1893; Houston County Recorder, deed books 56:524 and 61:56; *SGH*, February 22, 1894, 2 and February 10, 1898.

³³ *SGH*, June 25, 1903; February 15, 1906; and October 19, 1907.

³⁴ *SGH*, March 7, 1895, 2; May 13, 1895, 3; and October 17, 1895, 2.

³⁵ *CA*, December 4, 1897; *SGH*, February 10, 1898.

³⁶ *SGH*, December 28, 1893, 2; November 15, 1894, 3; December 31, 1898, 5; January 9, 1899, 4; and February 23, 1899, 4; and *CA*, January 21, 1899.

³⁷ *SGH*, September 19, 1907.

³⁸ Houston County Recorder, deed books 79:388 (Hanson purchase); 89:188 (Halvorson purchase); 89:330 (Garness to Kirkelle sale); 95:461 (Morken purchase); and 89:533 (Schmidt purchase).

Ballard House

Name of Property

Houston County, MN

County and State

point that it was necessary to expand in order to meet demand.³⁹

Although Oscar Gran and his wife continued to manage the hotel and its kitchen, respectively, Schmitt sold the property to Edward Colvin in 1916 and, within a year, Colvin sold half his interest to Charles Davis.⁴⁰ After the peak of a forty-year surge in business travel in 1920, the Hotel Florence and other commercial hotels across the nation began to fill a growing percentage of their guest rooms with local community members seeking short-term living accommodations.⁴¹ The 1920 census of Spring Grove Village, for the first time since the hotel's construction, enumerated seven men it identified as "boarders" at the hotel, as well as the Grans, a staff of three, and a local couple who were enumerated as a separate household.⁴²

With dissolution of their partnership in 1924, Colvin and Davis advertised the Hotel Florence as "the only hotel in Spring Grove" and sold it at auction.⁴³ The new owner, Martin Swenson, owned and lived in the property for eighteen years—although he initially leased the restaurant, and later the hotel, to others.⁴⁴ With a complement of guests that included local business owners, laborers, truck drivers, and travelers, the hotel was viable throughout the Depression, and was conspicuous in 1937 as one of the Spring Grove businesses that sponsored local programming on a LaCrosse, Wisconsin, radio station (figure 5).⁴⁵

Arthur and Palma Brown leased the property from Swenson in 1939, purchased it in 1942, and continued to own it for almost two decades.⁴⁶ The memoir written by their son describes the hotel's operation during this period in some detail, painting a picture of a busy family-run business that increasingly derived much of its income from the hotel's restaurant (figure 6). Mrs. Brown made most of the food, with help from her daughters when they were not waiting tables

³⁹ *SGH*, October 14, 1915 (reprinted July 28, 1977, 6). The building's current owners believe that the door in the west gable's window opening was installed to allow direct access to supplementary guest rooms above the butcher shop next door (William Fried, *Giants of the Earth* Acting Executive Director, discussion with Jane Bisel and Steve Williams, Spring Grove, Minnesota, March 28, 2017).

⁴⁰ Houston County Recorder, deed books 84:2 and 55:469.

⁴¹ David A. Fyfe and Deryck W. Holdsworth, "Signatures of Commerce in Small-Town Guest Registers," *Social Science History* 33, 1:19, accessed September 20, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40267991>.

⁴² 1920 U.S. census, Spring Grove Village, Houston County, Minnesota, NARA digital publication T625 ("Records of the Bureau of the Census, 1790–2007," Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1992), cited in "United States Census, 1920," *FamilySearch* online database, accessed January 30, 2017, <https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MWBM-NF1>.

⁴³ Houston County Recorder, deed book 117:193.

⁴⁴ Houston County Recorder, deed book 149:161.

⁴⁵ 1930 U. S. Census, Spring Grove Village, Houston County, Minnesota, NARA microfilm publication T626 ("Records of the Bureau of the Census, 1790–2007," Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 2002), cited in "United States Census, 1930," *FamilySearch* online database, accessed January 30, 2017, <https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:X389-9BS>. For radio sponsorship, see advertisement in *SGH*, June 17, 1937, 4.

⁴⁶ Georgia Rosendahl, "History of the Ballard House is Interesting and Varied," *SGH*, October 13, 2010, 10; 1940 U.S. census, Spring Grove Village, Houston County, Minnesota, NARA digital publication T627 ("Records of the Bureau of the Census, 1790–2007," Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 2012), cited in "United States Census, 1940," *FamilySearch* online database, accessed January 30, 2017, <https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3QS7-L9MT-CZTZ?cc=2000219&wc=QZX5-MK5%3A790104601%2C794454301%2C801271601%2C801271602>; Houston County Recorder, deed book 149:161.

Ballard House
Name of Property

Houston County, MN
County and State

or cleaning the guest rooms. The Browns operated a bar alongside the lunch counter and provided gaming machines, until they became illegal in the state of Minnesota, as well as jukeboxes and pinball machines (figure 7). Under their ownership, the hotel's patrons were still comprised of a regular clientele of travelling salesmen and locals who rented rooms by the week or month, in addition to people who regularly patronized the bar and restaurant alone. Local residents adopted the bench in front of the hotel as a place to meet, or to relax and watch the people and traffic on Main Street, and former residents occasionally stayed at the hotel when they returned to visit.⁴⁷

Spring Grove's Modern Era: 1946–present

Spring Grove enjoyed enviable prosperity, overall, after the Second World War.⁴⁸ However, as elsewhere in the United States, with prosperity came profound social and economic changes. The transportation and hospitality industries were among the sectors transformed during this era, as the interstate highway system took shape and more Americans acquired cars. In Minnesota, train ridership had reached its peak three decades earlier and a network of state and local roads served most of the locations that could be reached by rail—along with many others.⁴⁹ Some of the state's trunk highways essentially paralleled the rail lines, as Minnesota Highway 44 did through western Houston County. By 1940, this thoroughfare was a paved road that incorporated Spring Grove's Main Street and offered constant access to the markets and offices of the surrounding region.

Combined with better roads and the end of war-time gasoline and tire rationing, the inherent flexibility of automobile travel contributed to a continual decrease in short-distance train ridership after the mid-1940s. Regular passenger service through Houston County on the Reno-Preston branch line ended after the approximately fifteen miles of track east of Caledonia washed out in a flood on June 16, 1946, and the railroad elected not to re-build. However, a mixed passenger and freight service continued to serve Spring Grove twice daily over the remaining track between Caledonia and Preston until September 23, 1949.⁵⁰

Although freight service through Spring Grove lasted until the mid-1970s, the decline of passenger rail service and the rise of automobile travel destined Spring Grove to begin losing its privileged status as a rail hub and commercial center for the surrounding rural community after 1946. Although the town continued to grow and prosper into the 1950s and reached its historic population peak in 1960,⁵¹ many of the small businesses that once sustained Spring Grove and

⁴⁷ *WRH*, June 21, 1947, 1.

⁴⁸ "Area Postwar Activity: Auditorium Prominent in Spring Grove Plans," *WRH*, January 25, 1946, 4.

⁴⁹ Schmidt, Andrew, et al., *Railroads in Minnesota, 1862–1956*, National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Listing Form, 2007, 11.

⁵⁰ John C. Luecke, *Dreams, Disasters, and Demise: The Milwaukee Road in Minnesota*, Eagan, MN: Grenadier Publications, 1988, 214–217; "Preston – Caledonia Morning Train Officially Off," *SGH*, September 29, 1949, 1.

⁵¹ Geving, "An Evolving Heritage," 71; for population numbers, see Qualey, "A Typical Norwegian Settlement" and the following U.S. Census Bureau bulletins, accessed October 20, 2016: "Population 1920: Number and Distribution of Inhabitants," 240 (http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/41084484v1_TOC.pdf), "Minnesota," 542 (<http://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1940/population-volume-1/33973538v1ch06.pdf>), "Number of Inhabitants: Minnesota," 25–19 (<https://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/>

Ballard House

Name of Property

Houston County, MN

County and State

attracted guests to its commercial hotel were replaced by a series of large manufacturers who became the town's principal employers.⁵²

Predictably, the 1950s were difficult for the hotel, which was re-named the Spring Grove Hotel and Café under Arthur and Palma Brown's ownership. Although the Browns entered into several contracts to sell the property, none of these buyers was able to complete their contract until 1959, when the hotel finally changed hands.⁵³ The subsequent owner began attempts to sell the property within three years, and did not find a buyer until 1965.⁵⁴ Finally, during the 1970s, another new owner closed the second and third floors of the building and operated the restaurant, alone, until the early 1980s.

After several years of vacancy, a local nonprofit tourism and economic development group re-opened the property in 1989. With limited restoration and remodeling, it was returned to use as an antique store, snack shop, and tourist information center that bore the hotel's historic name. Ultimately, after more than a decade of this adaptive reuse and acquisition by a local heritage group, the Ballard House became known as the Giants of the Earth Heritage Center in 2009, and began to serve its current function as an educational, cultural, and research center focusing on the heritage of Norwegian Ridge.

Significance of the Ballard House

The Ballard House represents one of the principle types of lodging to emerge during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: the small-town commercial hotel of the American Midwest. Unlike the wayside tavern hostelries and stagecoach stops that preceded it, its accommodations were designed specifically to meet the needs of travelling salesmen and itinerant professionals arriving by rail and, later, by car. Like other hotels of its type and time period, the Ballard House was located in Spring Grove's central business district, close to its rail depot, and offered meals and overnight accommodations to travelers and local community members. Although its facilities were modest compared to those of the modern American roadside motel, it facilitated commerce and community life by providing such amenities as temporary office space for itinerant professionals, convenient access to transit (and a livery stable, during the appropriate time period), and a public restaurant and front porch that offered a setting for meals, socializing, and business. Although similar hotels once existed in many towns along the railroad routes, they are now a dwindling resource.

With good overall integrity and a more than five decade history of association with rail travel and the development of local commerce, the Ballard House is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A, in the area of Commerce. It is locally significant as an example of the privately-owned commercial hotels that served Midwestern rail and

documents/18543820v1p25ch2.pdf), and "Minnesota: 2010, Population and Housing Units" (<https://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/cph-2-25.pdf>).

⁵² The largest of these were Mansfield Industries (1948–1964), Control Data (1965–1971), and Northern Engraving (1971–present).

⁵³ *WDN*, August 13, 1959, 5.

⁵⁴ *WDN*, September 21, 1962, 16.

Ballard House

Name of Property

Houston County, MN

County and State

automobile commercial travelers of the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries, as well as their local community. Its period of significance extends from the 1893 construction of the hotel's original section through 1946, the era in which the hotel played a vital role in sustaining local commerce and providing food, lodging, and a shared sense of community to residents and travelers alike.

Ballard House
Name of Property

Houston County, MN
County and State

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Ballard House

Name of Property

Houston County, MN

County and State

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Ballard House

Name of Property

Houston County, MN

County and State

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Ballard House
Name of Property

Houston County, MN
County and State

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 # _____
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
 - Other State agency
 - Federal agency
 - Local government
 - University
 - Other
- Name of repository: Giants of the Earth Heritage Center

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): HU-SCG-025

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property .25

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates (decimal degrees)

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- | | |
|-----------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 43.56069 | Longitude: -91.63844 |
| 2. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 3. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 4. Latitude: | Longitude: |

Or

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

Ballard House
Name of Property

Houston County, MN
County and State

NAD 1927 or NAD 1983

| | | |
|--------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Zone: 15T | Easting: 609964.63 | Northing: 4823982.01 |
| 2. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 3. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 4. Zone: | Easting : | Northing: |

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

All of Lot 28 and the western 21 feet of Lot 27 in Mons Fladager's Original Plat of Spring Grove, Minnesota

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

These were the historic boundaries of the Ballard House property for all but the first two years of the 1893–1946 period of significance, and include the original (1893–1895) hotel property.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Jane Bisel and Steve Williams, Principals
organization: Blue Planet Museum Consulting, LLC
street & number: 1223 Skyline Drive SW
city or town: Rochester state: MN zip code: 55902
e-mail jane@blueplanet-consulting.com
telephone: 507.280.6888
date: May 19, 2017

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Ballard House
Name of Property

Houston County, MN
County and State

Property Location: Aerial Photographic Map

**163 West Main Street, Spring Grove, MN
The Ballard House**



| | | |
|-----------|-----------|------------|
| NAD 1983 | Easting | Northing |
| Zone: 15T | 609964.63 | 4823982.01 |

Ballard House
 Name of Property

Houston County, MN
 County and State

Property Location: Street Map

**163 West Main Street, Spring Grove, MN
 The Ballard House**



| | | |
|-----------|-----------|------------|
| NAD 1983 | Easting | Northing |
| Zone: 15T | 609964.63 | 4823982.01 |

Ballard House
 Name of Property

Houston County, MN
 County and State

Property Location: Topographic Map

**163 West Main Street, Spring Grove, MN
 The Ballard House**



| | | |
|-----------|-----------|------------|
| NAD 1983 | Easting | Northing |
| Zone: 15T | 609964.63 | 4823982.01 |

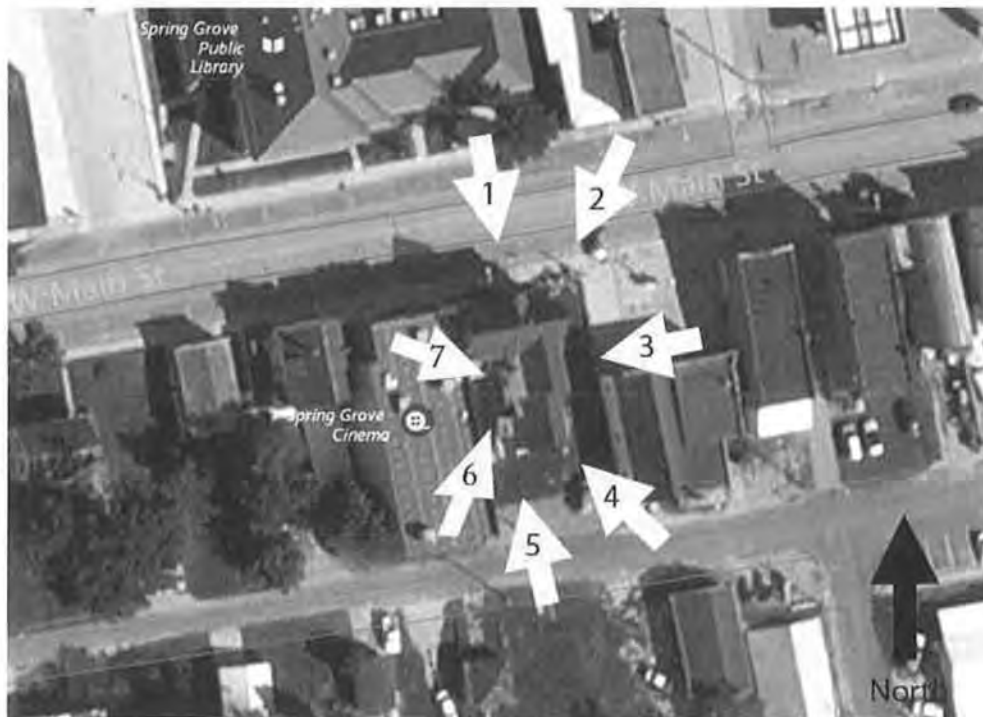
Ballard House
Name of Property

Houston County, MN
County and State

Sketch Map of Building Sections (on first floor plan)



Exterior Photo Key

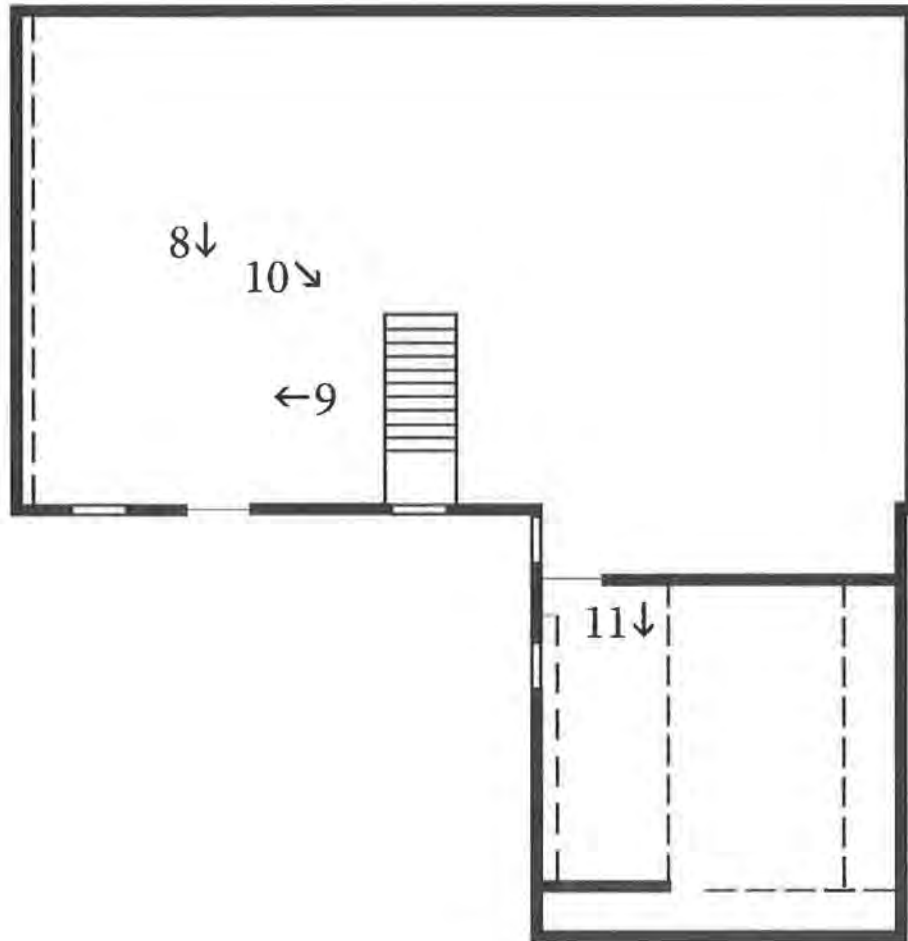


Ballard House
Name of Property

Houston County, MN
County and State

Interior Sketch Maps / Photo Key (not to scale)

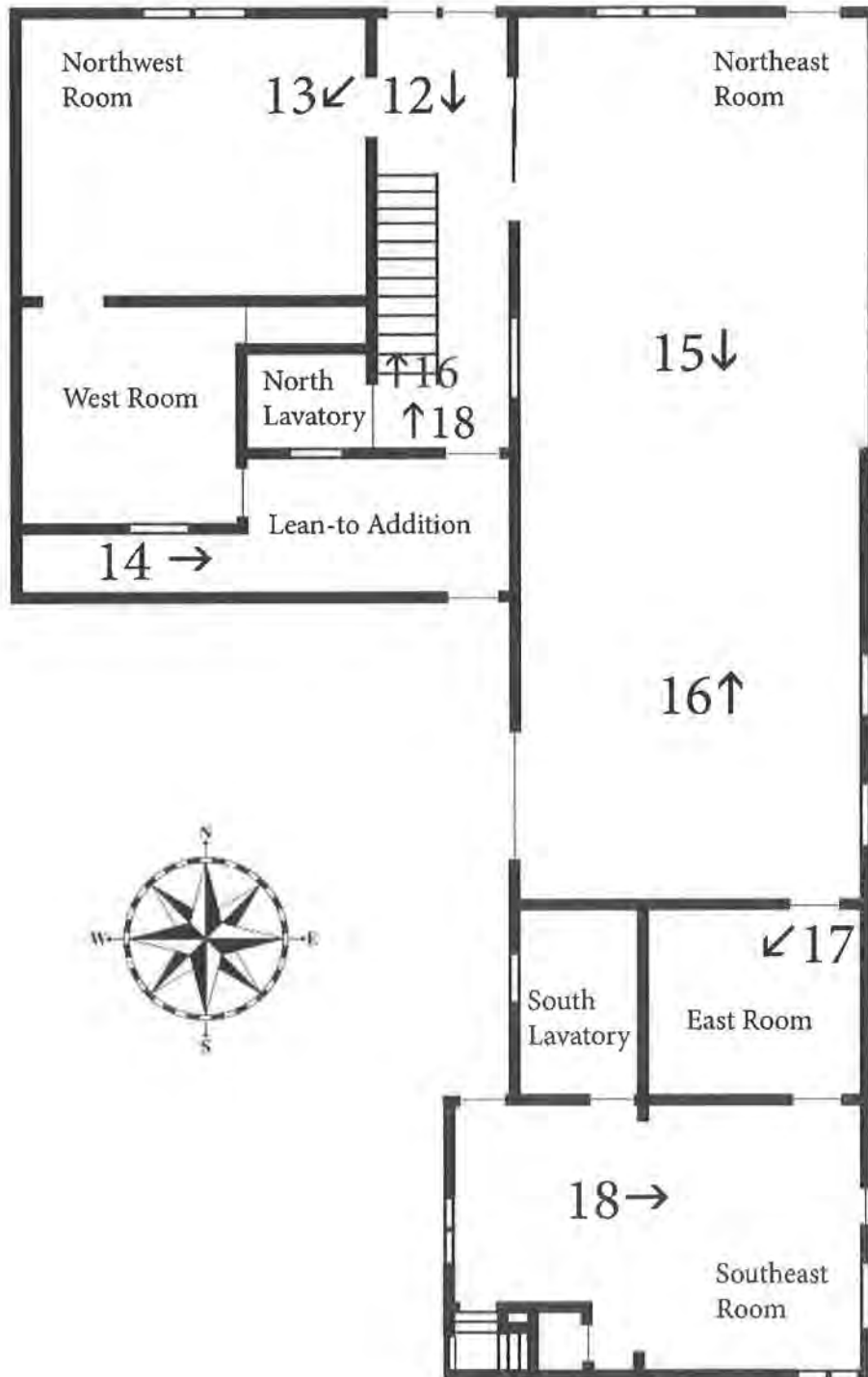
Map 1: Basement



Ballard House
Name of Property

Houston County, MN
County and State

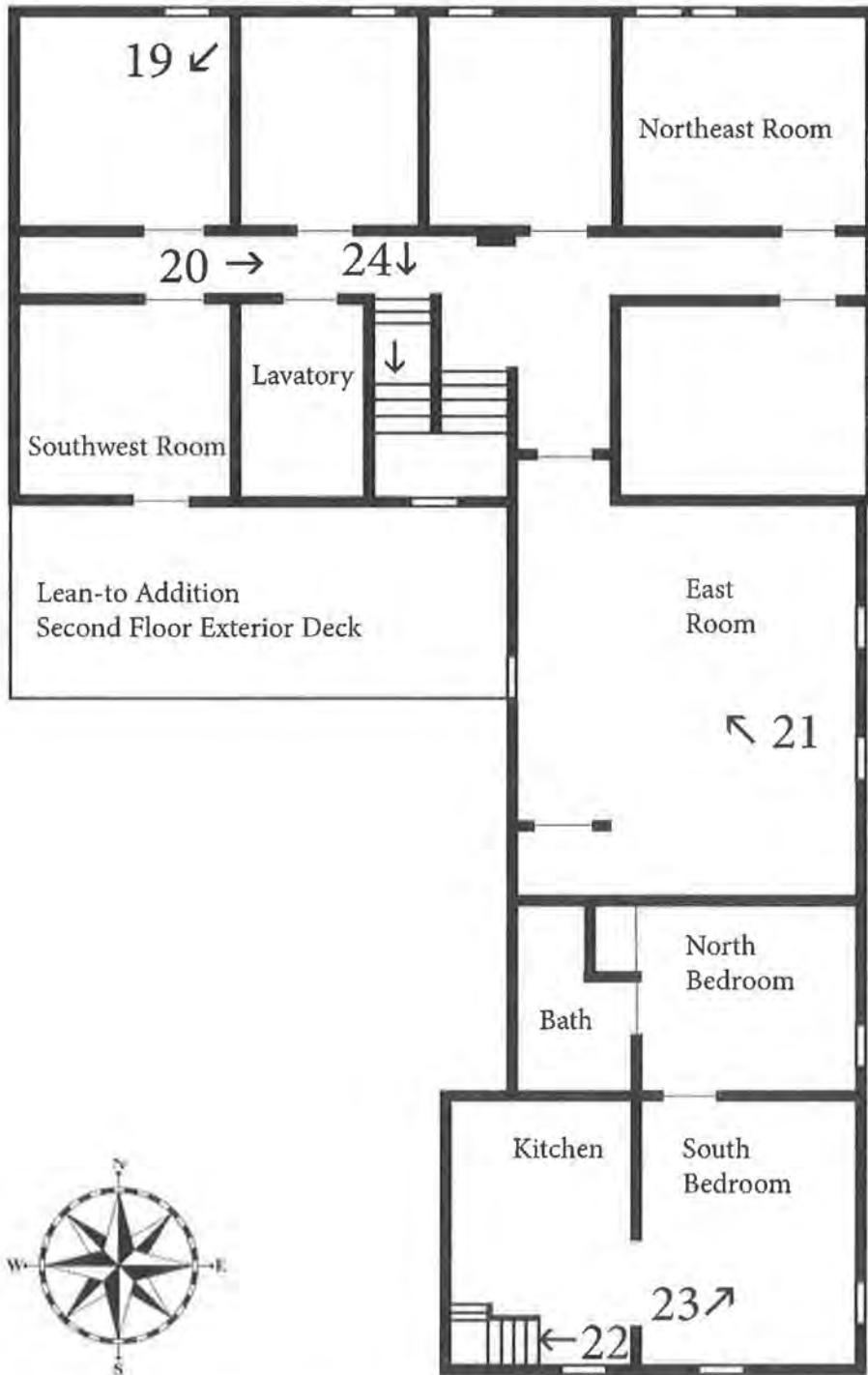
Map 2: First Floor



Ballard House
Name of Property

Houston County, MN
County and State

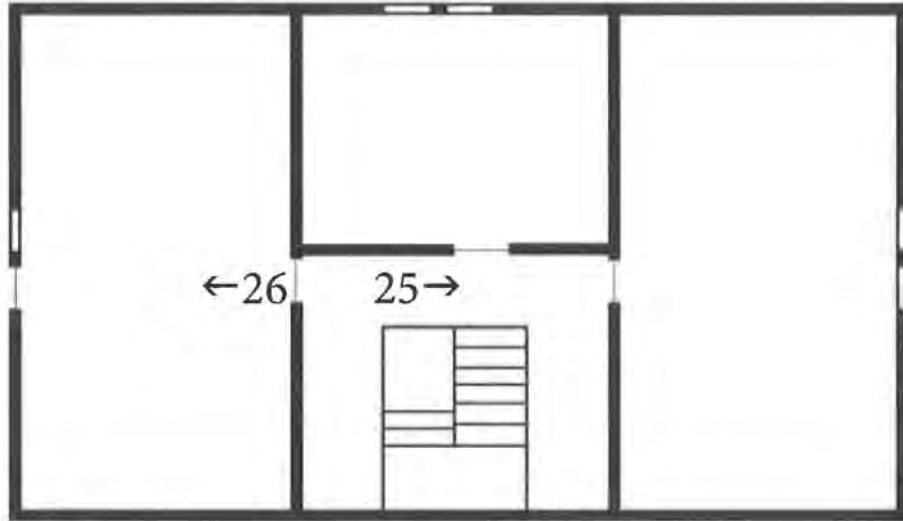
Map 3: Second Floor



Ballard House
Name of Property

Houston County, MN
County and State

Map 4: Third Floor



Ballard House
Name of Property

Houston County, MN
County and State

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Name of Property: Ballard House

City or Vicinity: Spring Grove

County: Houston

State: Minnesota

Photographer: Steve Williams

Date Photographed: 9/14/2016

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

1 of 21. (Houston County_Ballard House_0001)

North façade, looking south

2 of 21. (Houston County_Ballard House_0002)

North and east façades, looking southwest

3 of 21. (Houston County_Ballard House_0003)

East façade, looking west

4 of 21. (Houston County_Ballard House_0004)

South façade, looking north

5 of 21. (Houston County_Ballard House_0005)

South and west façades, looking northeast

6 of 21. (Houston County_Ballard House_0006)

West façade, looking southeast from courtyard deck

7 of 21. (Houston County_Ballard House_0007)

Basement, north room, looking west

8 of 21. (Houston County_Ballard House_0008)

Basement, north room, post and beam detail, looking southeast

9 of 21. (Houston County_Ballard House_0009)

Basement, south room, looking south

Ballard House

Name of Property

Houston County, MN
County and State

10 of 21. (Houston County_Ballard House_0010)
First floor, foyer and staircase, looking south

11 of 21. (Houston County_Ballard House_0011)
First floor, northwest room, looking southwest

12 of 21. (Houston County_Ballard House_0012)
First floor, northeast room, looking south

13 of 21. (Houston County_Ballard House_0013)
First floor, northeast room, looking north

14 of 21. (Houston County_Ballard House_0014)
First floor, southeast room, looking east

15 of 21. (Houston County_Ballard House_0015)
Second floor, northwest room, looking southwest

16 of 21. (Houston County_Ballard House_0016)
Second floor, hallway, looking east

17 of 21. (Houston County_Ballard House_0017)
Second floor, East room, looking northwest

18 of 21. (Houston County_Ballard House_0018)
Second floor, south bedroom, looking northeast

19 of 21. (Houston County_Ballard House_0019)
Second floor, staircase to third floor, looking south

20 of 21. (Houston County_Ballard House_0020)
Third floor, hallway and east room, looking east

21 of 21. (Houston County_Ballard House_0021)
Third floor, west room, looking west

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.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including 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 Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

United States Department of the Interior
Here
 National Park Service

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| Ballard House |
| Name of Property |
| Fillmore, Minnesota |
| County and State |
| Name of multiple listing (if applicable) |

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number Additional information Page 41

Historic Photographs

Figure 1. The Ballard House, ca. 1894. Houston County Historical Society.

Figure 2. The Ballard House, ca. 1900. Houston County Historical Society.

Figure 3. Hotel Hanson, ca. 1908. Houston County Historical Society.

Figure 4. View of Main Street from the northwest, Hotel Florence at right, ca. 1918. Houston County Historical Society.

Figure 5. View of Main Street from the northwest, Hotel Florence at right, 1937. Houston County Historical Society.

Figure 6. Owner Palma Brown and waitress Lois Vickerman at the hotel lunch counter, ca. 1940. Pierce Brown, "Early Years at the Florence Hotel / Spring Grove Hotel / The Ballard House," n.d., Giants of the Earth Heritage Center.

Figure 7. Owner Arthur Brown and hotel employee Leslie Jetson, with local residents Orlando Schansburg, Ole Mueller, and Clarence Tollefsrud at the hotel bar, ca. 1945. Pierce Brown, "Early Years at the Florence Hotel / Spring Grove Hotel / The Ballard House," n.d., Giants of the Earth Heritage Center.

United States Department of the Interior
Here
National Park Service

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|--|
| Ballard House |
| Name of Property |
| Fillmore, Minnesota |
| County and State |
| Name of multiple listing (if applicable) |

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number Additional information

Page 42



Figure 1.

United States Department of the Interior
Here
National Park Service

| |
|--|
| Ballard House |
| Name of Property |
| Fillmore, Minnesota |
| County and State |
| Name of multiple listing (if applicable) |

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number Additional information

Page 43



Figure 2.

United States Department of the Interior
Here
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

| |
|--|
| Ballard House |
| Name of Property |
| Fillmore, Minnesota |
| County and State |
| Name of multiple listing (if applicable) |

Section number Additional information

Page 44



Figure 3.

United States Department of the Interior
Here
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

| |
|--|
| Ballard House |
| Name of Property |
| Fillmore, Minnesota |
| County and State |
| Name of multiple listing (if applicable) |

Section number Additional information

Page 45



Figure 4.

United States Department of the Interior
Here
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

| |
|--|
| Ballard House |
| Name of Property |
| Fillmore, Minnesota |
| County and State |
| Name of multiple listing (if applicable) |

Section number Additional information

Page 46



Figure 5.

United States Department of the Interior
Here
National Park Service

| |
|--|
| Ballard House |
| Name of Property |
| Fillmore, Minnesota |
| County and State |
| Name of multiple listing (if applicable) |

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number Additional information

Page 47



Figure 6.

United States Department of the Interior
Here
National Park Service

| |
|--|
| Ballard House |
| Name of Property |
| Fillmore, Minnesota |
| County and State |
| Name of multiple listing (if applicable) |

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number Additional information

Page 48



Figure 7.



HERITAGE CENTER

JASON BOURNE
FRI 7 SAT-SUN 4&7 5G

NEX



W. B. HENNING

TAGE CENTER

CAMP

CINEMA

THEATRE

W. B. HENNING

W. B. HENNING

































VERB ADJEKTIV

INSTEAD OF CHAIRS







FIRE ESCAPE

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Requested Action: Nomination

Property Name: Ballard Hotel

Multiple Name: _____

State & County: MINNESOTA, Houston

Date Received: 10/12/2017 Date of Pending List: 11/14/2017 Date of 16th Day: 11/29/2017 Date of 45th Day: 11/27/2017 Date of Weekly List: _____

Reference number: SG100001841

Nominator: State

Reason For Review: _____

X Accept Return Reject 11/27/2017 Date

Abstract/Summary Comments: This nomination does an excellent job of documenting the history of a commercial hotel in a small rural town.

Recommendation/
Criteria

Reviewer Roger Reed Discipline Historian

Telephone (202)354-2278 Date 11/29/17

DOCUMENTATION: see attached comments : No see attached SLR : No

If a nomination is returned to the nomination authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the National Park Service.

Minnesota Historical Society
State Historic Preservation Office
345 Kellogg Blvd West, St. Paul, Minnesota 55102
651-259-3451



TO: Paul Loether, Keeper
National Register of Historic Places

FROM: Gimmy Way

DATE: October 5, 2017

NAME OF PROPERTY: Ballard House

COUNTY AND STATE: Houston County, Minnesota

SUBJECT: National Register:
 Nomination
 Multiple Property Documentation Form
 Request for determination of eligibility
 Request for removal (Reference No.)
 Nomination resubmission
 Boundary increase/decrease (Reference No.)
 Additional documentation (Reference No.)

DOCUMENTATION:

Original National Register of Historic Places Registration Form
 Multiple Property Documentation Form
 Continuation Sheets
 Removal Documentation
 Photographs
 CD w/ image files
 Digital Map
 Sketch map(s)
 Correspondence
 Owner Objection
The enclosed owner objections
Do Do not constitute a majority of property owners

STAFF COMMENTS: