

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	OCT 31 1975
DATE ENTERED	JAN 2 1976

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC Grand Union Hotel

AND/OR COMMON

Grand Union Hotel

**LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER

14th and Front Streets

\_\_NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Fort Benton

\_\_ VICINITY OF

2

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

STATE

Montana

CODE

30

COUNTY

Chouteau

CODE

015

**CLASSIFICATION**

**CATEGORY**

\_\_DISTRICT

BUILDING(S)

\_\_STRUCTURE

\_\_SITE

\_\_OBJECT

**OWNERSHIP**

\_\_PUBLIC

PRIVATE

\_\_BOTH

**PUBLIC ACQUISITION**

\_\_IN PROCESS

\_\_BEING CONSIDERED

**STATUS**

OCCUPIED

\_\_UNOCCUPIED

WORK IN PROGRESS

**ACCESSIBLE**

YES: RESTRICTED

\_\_YES: UNRESTRICTED

\_\_NO

**PRESENT USE**

\_\_AGRICULTURE

COMMERCIAL

\_\_EDUCATIONAL

\_\_ENTERTAINMENT

\_\_GOVERNMENT

\_\_INDUSTRIAL

\_\_MILITARY

\_\_MUSEUM

\_\_PARK

\_\_PRIVATE RESIDENCE

\_\_RELIGIOUS

\_\_SCIENTIFIC

\_\_TRANSPORTATION

\_\_OTHER:

**OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

Harold Thomas

STREET & NUMBER

Grand Union Hotel

CITY, TOWN

Fort Benton

\_\_ VICINITY OF

STATE

Montana

**LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Chouteau County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Fort Benton

STATE

Montana

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE Helena, Montana Historical, Architectural Survey Prepared for Urban Renewal Project

DATE

1968

\_\_FEDERAL \_\_STATE \_\_COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS

Montana Historical Society Library

CITY, TOWN

Helena,

STATE

Montana

# 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

## DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Grand Union Hotel, located on Front Street, Fort Benton, Montana, has been called the "most historic edifice in the State," William H. Todd furnished the incentive to build the hotel. The present owner is Harold Thomas and the structure is still used as a hotel. Walls are of solid brick and bearing. The building is three stories high and measures 115 feet long by 85 feet wide. The style could be called "Grand Union Victorian" or "eclectic". Thomas Tweedy was the architect and he, Frank Coombs, W. G. Jones, and others built the hotel. Construction was started August 15, 1881, and completed November 2, 1882.

The architectural character of the building is unique. The bricks, made in Fort Benton, are carefully fitted into excellent bold decorations,

The distinct red brick is accented by the cream-colored brick used for the trim and decorative features. The building does not fit easily into a given style but there are some Renaissance Revival details to be noted. The tall windows have a modified or flattened curved head with a projecting cream brick trim and keystone. The ground floor windows predate the arrival of the railroad and plate glass commercial facades, so are of wavy sheet glass in wooden frames. Each room was once heated by its own wood stove and had its own fancy chimney.

The lofty chimneys that pierced the skyline were removed in the 1960's after they started to crumble but the exterior of the building remains basically the same as it appeared in 1882.

The interior is especially historical. The lobby is dominated by a wide, black walnut staircase. The lobby desk is very ornate. All the interior mouldings were made by hand, using wooden planes. A saloon, saddle room where cowboys stored their saddles for the winter, dining room, kitchen, and a secret lookout room where guards watched gold shipments occupy the first floor. A ladies' stair leads to elegant parlors above, for ladies never entered rooms adjoining saloons at that time. The bedrooms are still furnished with black walnut, marble topped sets which were shipped by way of the river. The fine furnishings added \$150,000 to the \$50,000 cost of the building alone.

The building has been restored by its present owner and is one of the show pieces of the town. The hotel can often boast near or full occupancy although it no longer serves the great cross-section of clientele that it did in the 1880's and 1890's.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES November 2, 1882

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Thomas Tweedy

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Built at the height of the steamboat era on the upper Missouri, the Grand Union welcomed early travelers to spend a few nights in its luxury at the very head of navigation before they set out to less "civilized places" like Virginia City, Helena, Missoula, Idaho and points west on the Mullan Road or a thousand other booming towns that are now only ghosts. To the docks near where the Grand Union stands, steamers brought everything from stamp mills and boilers to square grand pianos and crystal wine glasses, which were then transferred to ox team freight wagons. The Fort Benton that was this Great Transportation Center is reflected in this very substantial building. Its design shows the pride and hope for a prosperous Montana and the developing frontier.

In the early 1880's, Fort Benton appeared to have an expanding future as the commercial 'metropolis' of the Northwest. The town was the head of steamboat navigation on the Missouri River, where goods were transferred to overland transportation for shipment to the gold camps of Montana, over the Mullan Road to Washington or Idaho, to Utah, and to Canada via the Whoop-Up Trail.

The construction of the Grand Union reflected the faith of the city's boosters in this future. Fort Benton played host in the early 80's not only to fur traders, cowboys, prospectors and farmers; the guest list of the hotel in these years includes visitors from such sophisticated cities as London, New York and Ottawa. If all went according to plan, the Grand Union Hotel would become the headquarters for the capitalists then rushing in to stake their claims to the wealth of the Northwest.

Within six years, however, the railroads had stretched their tracks to the boom towns of Helena and Great Falls, completely by-passing Fort Benton. Only four boats tied up at the wharves in 1888 and the last commercial cargo arrived in 1891. The shining vision of Fort Benton as the commercial hub of the vast Northwest - and with it the hopes the Grand Union would become the Waldorf of the West - came to an abrupt halt.

Although already part of the Historic District of Fort Benton, the Grand Union deserves recognition in itself, for this elaborate structure is not only architecturally rare for this region, but also represents the peak of the steamboat era on the Missouri.

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Ellingsen, John D., The Grand Union Hotel, Fort Benton, Montana, A Symbol of an Age.  
M.A. Thesis, Montana State University, Bozeman, Montana, June, 1971.  
River Press, Fort Benton, Montana. November 30, 1881, November 8, 1882.

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 1/4 acre

UTM REFERENCES

A 

1	2
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5	2	4	7	8	0
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5	2	9	5	5	0	0
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B 

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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

47° 48' 59" North latitude  
110° 40' 03" West longitude

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Susan W. Curtis, Planning Aide

August 25, 1975

ORGANIZATION

Division of Parks and Recreation, Montana Department of Fish and Game

STREET & NUMBER

Mitchell Building

TELEPHONE

(406) 449-2532

CITY OR TOWN

Helena

STATE

Montana

# 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL \_\_\_ STATE X LOCAL \_\_\_

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

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

TITLE Montana State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE September 30, 1975

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

*Noting*

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

DATE 1/2/96

ATTEST

DATE 12/31/75

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER