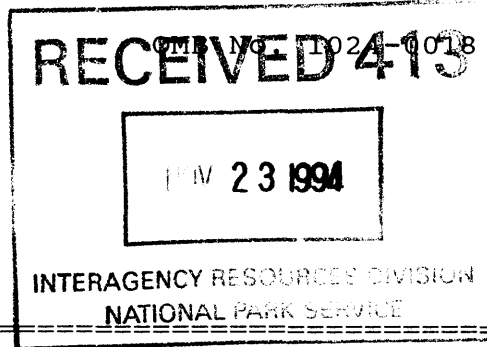


NPS Form 10-900  
(Rev. 10-90)

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM



=====

1. Name of Property

=====

historic name Will Rogers Hotel

other names/site number N/A

=====

2. Location

=====

street & number 524 West Will Rogers Boulevard not for publication N/A  
city or town Claremore vicinity N/A  
state Oklahoma code OK county Rogers code 131  
zip code 74018

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

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

Blake Wade  
Signature of certifying official

November 14, 1994  
Date

Oklahoma Historical Society, S.H.P.O.  
State or Federal agency and bureau

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting or other official

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register  
     See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the  
National Register

     See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the  
National Register

removed from the National Register

other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

Edson B Beall

12-29-94

Entered in the  
National Register

      
Signature of Keeper

      
Date  
of Action

=====

5. Classification

=====

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

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

Category of Property (Check only one box)

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

Number of Resources within Property

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

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

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

=====

6. Function or Use

=====

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: <u>DOMESTIC</u>	Sub: <u>hotel</u>
<u>HEALTH CARE</u>	<u>resort</u>
<u>COMMERCE</u>	<u>department store</u>
<u>COMMERCE</u>	<u>specialty store</u>
<u>COMMERCE</u>	<u>restaurant</u>
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: <u>WORK IN PROGRESS</u>	Sub: _____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

=====

7. Description

=====

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Mission/Spanish Colonial Revival

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation	<u>CONCRETE</u>
roof	<u>ASPHALT</u>
walls	<u>BRICK</u>
	<u>TERRA COTTA</u>
other	_____
	_____
	_____

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

=====  
8. Statement of Significance  
=====

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

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

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

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

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE  
ARCHITECTURE  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Period of Significance 1929-1944  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Dates 1929-30  
1939

=====  
8. Statement of Significance (Continued)  
=====

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation N/A

Architect/Builder Hawk and Parr, architect  
Krumrei, Walter, builder

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

=====  
9. Major Bibliographical References  
=====

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

Previous documentation on file (NPS)

preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.

previously listed in the National Register

previously determined eligible by the National Register

designated a National Historic Landmark

recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Location of Additional Data

State Historic Preservation Office

Other State agency

Federal agency

Local government

University

Other

Name of repository: N/A

=====  
10. Geographical Data  
=====

Acreage of Property less than one acre

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

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	<u>15</u>	<u>265190</u>	<u>4021600</u>	3	<u>    </u>	<u>    </u>
2	<u>    </u>	<u>    </u>	<u>    </u>	4	<u>    </u>	<u>    </u>

N/A See continuation sheet.

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

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

=====  
11. Form Prepared By  
=====

name/title Dr. Mary Jane Warde

organization \_\_\_\_\_ date September 9, 1994

street & number 2806 W. 18th telephone (405) 377-0412

city or town Stillwater state OK zip code 74074

=====  
Additional Documentation  
=====

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.  
A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage  
or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

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

=====  
Property Owner  
=====

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

name Rogers County Historical Society  
street & number P.O. Box 774 telephone (918) 342-1127  
city or town Claremore state OK zip code 74018  
=====



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National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 9

Will Rogers Hotel  
name of property  
Rogers County, Oklahoma  
county and State

Materials: Walls STUCCO  
CERAMIC TILE

**SUMMARY:**

The Will Rogers Hotel in Claremore, Oklahoma is a generally rectangular building with a basement and an irregular height ranging from three to six stories. Built of red brick faced with buff brick, it is Spanish Colonial Revival in style with interior decorative elements associated with the American West. It stands on the east corner of the intersection of Lynn Riggs Avenue and Will Rogers Boulevard in the central business district and fronts onto U.S. Route 66. The hotel, which included a coffee shop, at various times a drug store, a barber shop, a beauty shop, and a bath house, as well as the Montgomery Ward's Department Store, is a fine example of the commercial architecture associated with "the Mother Road" and Claremore's economic life in the 1930s and 1940s.

**EXTERIOR:**

The Will Rogers Hotel is situated approximately one block east of the Burlington Northern Railroad line and on the west side of the current central business district of Claremore, Oklahoma. It stands on the east corner of a primary intersection, Lynn Riggs Avenue (current U. S. Highway 66) and Will Rogers Boulevard. Lynn Riggs Avenue angles northeast to southwest, approximately twenty degrees east of north, paralleling the railroad. Will Rogers Boulevard intersects it at a right angle. Consequently, the primary entrance to the hotel, on the northwest elevation, faces Lynn Riggs Avenue, while the secondary entrance and the entrances to the included barber shop, beauty shop, and former Montgomery Ward's Department Store are on the southwest elevation facing Will Rogers Boulevard. (See accompanying Maps 1, 2, and 3.) Although presently vacant, the hotel remains the most prominent building in Claremore's central business district.

The Will Rogers Hotel is generally rectangular in shape (84' by 135') but is complex in composition and function. Roughly the northeast half of the building housed the Montgomery Ward's Department Store. This section is five stories and a basement on the front, or southwest, elevation but only three stories on the rear. The southwest half of the building, six floors and a basement, accommodated the hotel. The lobby, coffee shop, and kitchen as well as a drug store (later the barber shop) and beauty shop were on the first floor. The second floor of the hotel section included the mezzanine and the ballroom as well as guest rooms. Floors three through five held guest rooms. The sixth floor was devoted to "radium water" baths, "cooling rooms," shower rooms, massage rooms, and a sun deck, all segregated by sex. On the roof were tanks holding the radium water, two elevator shafts, later a heliport, and a

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Will Rogers Hotel  
name of property  
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**DESCRIPTION (Continued):**

small decorative bell tower on the southwest corner. The department store and hotel, while sharing the building, had a common entrance only through the basement.

The Will Rogers Hotel is an excellent example of the Spanish Colonial Revival style applied to a commercial building. The flat roof, varying in height from three to six floors, is concrete with asphalt sealant. All exterior and most interior walls are red brick, but the southwest and northwest elevations are faced with two tones of buff brick and some terra cotta, stucco, and tile. Some interior walls are clay tile and gypsum block. The foundations and floors are concrete.

The southwest elevation demonstrates the incorporation of commercial space into the hotel. On the right is the five-floor Montgomery Ward's Department Store with the sixth floor of the Will Rogers Hotel extending half-way across the store front. Although much simpler in style, the store front continues some decorative elements, particularly window treatments and arrangements on the fourth and fifth floors, established on the hotel, thus unifying the two sections. The roofline of the store front is defined by a simple cornice between pilasters. Each pilaster is topped by a finial supported by an elongated bracket. On both the fifth and fourth floors, there are four wood-frame one-over-one windows with brick sills, with the first and fourth on each floor distanced from the center two. Directly beneath each fifth floor window is a rectangular inlay of lighter toned buff brick. Beneath each fourth floor window is inset a terra cotta shield. There are nine wood frame, one-over-one third floor windows arranged in groups of threes with common brick sills. Each is given additional importance and height with a transom. Aluminum siding covers the second story. On the first floor the store front features a centered, recessed double entrance between metal and plate glass doors and display windows. Beneath the display windows are inset small colored ceramic tiles.

The hotel section presents a much more impressive facade. At the roofline on the southwest elevation is a wide cornice of lighter toned buff brick. Midway across the sixth floor is a small pediment between finials. Beneath the pediment is a pair of windows behind a wrought iron balconet. To the right of the paired windows, in the extension of the sixth floor across the store front, are three randomly spaced windows. To the left are two windows. All windows above the first floor on this elevation are wood frame and one-over-one with brick sills. On the second, fourth, and fifth floors there are three windows at each level. On the third floor, the sixth-floor arrangement of two single windows and a pair is repeated. Above the extreme left fourth-floor window, the paired windows on the third floor, and each of the second floor windows is

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Will Rogers Hotel  
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**DESCRIPTION (Continued):**

a scalloped terra cotta arch extended downward to frame each window. Directly beneath each window on the sixth, fifth, and fourth floors is inset lighter toned buff brick in a rectangular pattern. On the first floor of the hotel proper on this elevation are three entrances. On the right is the secondary entrance to the lobby. It features metal and glass doors beneath the original ornate galvanized metal canopy. Above this door is a scalloped arched transom with multiple lights. To the left of the lobby entrance is a single original glazed wood door providing access to the beauty shop. To the left of the door are two display windows. To the left of the beauty shop is the barber shop. It has a recessed single entrance with the original single glazed wood door between display windows. Over the entrances to both shops the pattern of the roofline cornice with lighter toned buff brick is repeated. Topping the southwest corner of the hotel is a one-story domed bell tower surmounted by a flag pole. On each elevation of the bell tower is an arched entrance over a wrought iron balconet. Below the balconet on the southwest elevation is an arched diamond-shaped terra cotta insignia. Beneath the bell tower the corner of the building at the sixth floor is cut away, leaving space above the fifth floor for a decorative tiled hipped roof. Extending from the fourth floor to the second at the extreme left of the southwest elevation is a vertical neon sign reading "Hotel Will Rogers--Coffee Shop."

The northwest elevation of the building should be considered the primary facade of the Will Rogers Hotel. Except in the cut-away corner beneath the bell tower, the building is a full six floors with the broad cornice of lighter buff brick extending nearly the width of the roofline. The repetition of this cornice above the third floor the width of one room at the extreme left of this elevation gives evidence of a 1939 addition on the fourth through the sixth floors. Windows above the third floor are single, wood frame, one-over-one with brick sills and are arranged in a regular pattern. There are twelve on the sixth floor and thirteen on floors four and five. The exceptions are eleven small ventilation windows just below the cornice on the original sixth floor and two four-over-four windows in the fourth-floor addition. Except in the addition, just below the fifth- and fourth floor windows lighter buff brick rectangular inserts repeat the pattern on the southwest elevation. Above this inset on the fifth floor are terra cotta arches. On the third floor the window pattern varies with, from left to right, a pair, triple windows, two single windows, a pair, a group of three over the primary entrance, a pair, two single windows, triple windows, and two single windows. The first and third pair and the fourth single window have awnings. On the second floor on the left are six pairs of complex windows. Each grouping, with metal frames between concrete lintels and brick sills, includes a pair of multiple-light casement windows with multiple-light transoms set between multiple-light sidelights. To the right of these groupings are five irregularly spaced single wood frame one-

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**DESCRIPTION (Continued):**

over-one windows. The second from the right is substantially smaller than the others. Each has a concrete lintel and brick sill. On the first floor the pattern of complex windows is continued and elaborated. On the extreme left is a double metal multiple-light window with a brick sill. To the right of this window is the first of three complex windows with concrete sills. Each includes double metal frame multiple-light casement windows beneath a fanlight. On either side of the primary windows are single multiple-light casement windows beneath smaller fanlights. The trim around the arches is terra cotta with a design of fig leaves. Framing the casement windows are Solomonic columns with Corinthian capitals. Between the first and second window complex is the entrance to the coffee shop. It repeats the pattern of arches and multiple-light single metal casement sidelights but substitutes a double glazed wood door for the central panels. Over the doors is an ornate galvanized metal canopy. Above the canopy is a neon sign, stating "Cafe." It, as well as the doors, are original. To the right of the second window complex, and centered on this elevation, is the primary entrance to the hotel lobby. It consists of double metal and glass doors beneath a fanlight and terra cotta arch. On either side of the doors are single multiple-light metal casement windows beneath smaller fanlights. These windows have concrete sills. Terra cotta frames around these windows contain a design of fig leaves. Over the door is the ornate galvanized metal canopy stating "Rooms--VACANCY--Suites." There is a second arrow-shaped neon sign over the awning. To the right of the third window complex is a single glazed wood door beneath a brick arch. Spaced to the right of this door are two decorative arches approximately the size of single doors. Each is filled with buff brick laid in a basket-weave design. Filling the top of the arch is a terra cotta cartouche with vines and flowers. At the extreme right of this elevation is a display window beneath a cornice that duplicates the one along the roofline. At the extreme left of this elevation, an irregular section from the third floor down has been patched with stucco.

The northeast elevation, the rear of the Will Rogers Hotel and Montgomery Ward's Department Store, is very utilitarian compared to the public facades. The hotel section, on the right, is six floors while the store section is three floors. Walls are painted red brick. Windows on this elevation are single wood frame one-over-one with few exceptions. On the sixth floor are four widely-spaced windows with the center two being smaller. This pattern is repeated on the fifth floor. The fourth floor has five equally-spaced windows. On the left of the third floor is a grouping of three windows. To the right of this grouping, near the center of the hotel section, is a single glazed wood door opening onto a metal fire escape. To the right of the door are two small single windows, the left the smaller. On the second floor are three widely-spaced single windows. The two on the right are fixed metal-frame replace-

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**DESCRIPTION (Continued):**

ments. The first floor of the hotel section has a single glazed wood door on the left apparently opening onto a basement stairwell. To the right of the door are two single windows. The left has been boarded over. The right is a fixed metal-frame replacement. The three-story store section is topped on the left corner by an elevator shaft. On the third floor are three single windows, grouped one on the left and two on the right. On the second floor are three windows, one on the extreme left, two on the right. The center has been boarded over. On the first floor there is a metal overhead door on the left with a boarded-up overhead door opening to its right. There is a single window on the right of the store section. Above the three-story rear extension of the store, three additional floors, faced with buff brick and forming a southwest wing of the building can be seen at this level. On the sixth floor are two single wood frame one-over-one windows. On the fifth floor are five windows in an irregular pattern. No windows are visible on the fourth floor.

The southeast elevation of the Will Rogers Hotel reveals the differing layout of the store and hotel sections. The three-story rear extension of the store is windowless red brick except for a small ventilation opening on the store elevator shaft. Above this extension may be seen two single wood frame one-over-one windows on the right of the buff brick-faced sixth floor. On the fifth floor four widely-spaced windows are visible. A modern wood catwalk connects the sixth floor of the hotel to a hurricane-fenced deck on the roof of the store. On the fifth and fourth floors of the store section, faced with buff brick, are four single wood frame, one-over-one windows, the second from the right on each floor being smaller. Surmounting the building is the red brick hotel elevator shaft, on which the words "Hotel Will Rogers--Radium Water Baths & Massage" can still be seen.

**INTERIOR DESCRIPTION:**

By far the most impressive part of the interior of the Will Rogers Hotel is the lobby and coffee shop. The lobby is centered on the first floor with the coffee shop on its northeast and the barber shop (once a drugstore), beauty shop, and hallway from the Will Rogers Boulevard entrance on its southwest. The lobby is two stories high with the mezzanine circling it on all except the southeast wall. (See accompanying Map 3.) The dark wood registration desk sits against this wall, with a small rectangular tile fountain serving as the centerpiece of the room.

Great attention was paid to decorating the lobby, mezzanine, and coffee shop. The ceiling is moderately textured cream-colored plaster while the walls are heavily textured in cream-colored plaster. Rust-red paint is brushed across the highest surfaces to create a mottled effect. Wainscoting approximately

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**INTERIOR DESCRIPTION (Continued):**

three feet high encircles the room and columns. It consists of molded plaster painted to resemble dark water-rounded stone. Above the "stones" is a border of plaster cast and painted to resemble four-inch logs with bark. At each door and window opening, the end of the "log" is painted with tree rings. This rustic Western American motif is continued in cast plaster trim around the ceiling, mezzanine, and chandeliers. Here arrowheads, thunderbirds, and "dog iron" branding irons, painted in primary colors, are repeated in running patterns. Otherwise, the Spanish Colonial Revival style of the exterior of the building is continued inside. Doorways into the coffee shop and barber shop are arched, while the arched triple window pattern is repeated between the lobby and the coffee and barber shops. But here spiraling lightning bolts are substituted in the cast plaster frames of the windows for the Solomonic columns found on the exterior windows. Chandeliers, sconces, banisters, and railings along the mezzanine are Italian wrought iron. Floors in the lobby, hall way, coffee shop and mezzanine are black and white terrazzo tile. The ball room on the second floor, opening on to the mezzanine, has a wood floor. Guest rooms are functional but vary as to decor and space, some being suites with kitchenettes separated from the main rooms by arches.

**ALTERATIONS:**

Alterations to the Will Rogers Hotel are generally unobtrusive. A very few of the many windows have been replaced or boarded over, and metal and glass doors may have been added on the southwest elevation of the hotel. The most obvious alteration is that aluminum siding now covers eleven single windows of the second floor of the southwest elevation of the storefront. It is currently under renovation. The construction of the catwalk on the roof is relatively recent. Some awnings over the barbershop windows have been removed, and a balconet was removed from the third-floor double window on the southwest elevation of the hotel. The most prominent missing feature is the large sign along the roofline, reading "Will Rogers" on the northwest elevation and "Hotel" on the southwest elevation. The heavy sediment and mineral content of the "radium water" pumped up to the radium baths made frequent replacement of plumbing, tanks, and bathtubs necessary. Water damage and an infestation of pigeons, now mostly eradicated, have caused considerable damage to the upper floors. But the first and second floor are in good repair and appear much as they did when the hotel was opened, except for some remodeling in a suite of rooms off the mezzanine. In the coffee shop some plaster moldings have been painted over in black and white. The Will Rogers Hotel has retained its integrity of location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, and conveys the feeling of its past environment. Under the auspices of the Rogers County Historical Society, it will probably continue to do so, based on the society's record with its other rehabilitation projects.

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**SUMMARY:**

The Will Rogers Hotel is eligible for the National Register under Criterion A because it is the last remaining example of one of Claremore's most important economic bases, the mineral water baths associated with the local health resort industry. The last and largest hotel built in Claremore, it operated for more than five decades, beginning in 1930. The Will Rogers Hotel is also eligible under Criterion C because it is an excellent example of the Spanish Colonial Revival style adapted to a commercial building, incorporating as well fine decorative elements associated with the American West. The period of significance is 1929 to 1944, the date of construction to the latest date of eligibility. Specific dates 1929-1930 and 1939 refer to the opening of Montgomery Ward's Department Store and the Will Rogers Hotel sections, and a rear addition on the fourth through sixth floors, respectively.

**HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE:**

When the Will Rogers Hotel was built in Claremore, Oklahoma, it was symbolic of the town's heritage as well as a part of its main economic base. The first settlers in the Claremore area in historic times were Osage Indians who arrived early in the 1800s under the leadership of the chief for whom the town is named. Approximately ten years later, this corner of the then Indian Territory was transferred to the immigrating Cherokee Indians. Cherokee ranchers, including Clem Vann Rogers, future Principal Chief of the Cherokees and father of humorist Will Rogers, patronized a small trading center in the area from the 1850s until 1883, when the town of Claremore was platted and incorporated under Cherokee law. The presence of two railroad lines and a number of merchants, small manufacturing concerns, bankers, and professional men made it a town of some prominence by the end of the century. When a local oil prospector struck a peculiar type of water in 1903, it took Claremore citizens only a short while to realize they had a unique resource to exploit. Analysis of the dark, sediment-heavy water smelling of hydrogen sulphide revealed that it contained a number of minerals, allowing it to be marketed as "radium water," efficacious, it was said, for a wide variety of illnesses. Claremore's newest and largest industry was born: it became a health spa on the model of Hot Springs, Arkansas. In 1903 there were only three hotels in town; by 1907, the year the territory became the state of Oklahoma, there were five hotels with two bath houses. By 1911 "Radium Town" on the east side of Claremore boasted fourteen hotels, several combined with bath houses, at which guests stayed for extended periods to "take the waters." The number continued to grow, reaching a peak of about twenty in 1916. Claremore's farm and ranch service businesses, state-owned Oklahoma Military Academy, and status as the seat of Rogers County continued to take second place to the health resort industry as the town's major economic base through the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s.

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**HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE (Continued):**

Perhaps the aging of some of these first hotels and bath houses seemed to offer an opportunity to three entrepreneurs in early 1929. By that time the number of hotels had dropped to six, but it was estimated that 125,000 mineral baths were given annually in Claremore. Guests came from forty states and several countries hoping the waters would alleviate rheumatism, blood disorders, intestinal problems, and skin diseases. Moreover, the federal government was reportedly planning to build a hospital for American Indians there. Louis Abraham, an investor, and Walter Krumrei, a builder, both of Bristow, Oklahoma, were discussing constructing a new hotel in Claremore when by chance they learned that Claremore cafe owner Morton R. Harrison shared their idea. The three soon formed a partnership to fund the estimated \$227,000 construction cost. They received an initial loan of \$180,000 from the First National Bank of Oklahoma City after they secured a commitment from Montgomery Ward & Company to take a thirty-year lease on commercial space in the proposed building. The remainder of construction costs, estimated later by Abraham at \$50,000 from each partner, brought the total to \$330,000.<sup>2</sup> Local enthusiasm for the planned seventy-five-room, six-floor building was high. Krumrei approached the Claremore Chamber of Commerce for a \$10,000 bonus to begin construction within thirty days, and the City Council, interested in increasing its tax base, quickly agreed. The site chosen was on the east corner of Third Street (Will Rogers Boulevard) and Catalayah (Lynn Riggs) Avenue. With the clouded title to the property cleared, an existing building was demolished and construction began in the spring of 1929.<sup>3</sup>

The building erected by the partners became the showpiece of Claremore's central business district. The architects were Hawk and Parr of Oklahoma City, a firm founded in 1914, that had secured its reputation by designing the Masonic Temple in Guthrie, Oklahoma, the First Presbyterian Church of Tulsa, and the Magnolia Petroleum Building, the Cotton-Exchange Building, and Tradesman's National Bank Building in Oklahoma City. In charge of actual construction was Walter Krumrei, a building contractor as well as a member of the partnership. The first phase of the project was completed when Montgomery Ward's Department Store opened on November 30, 1929, under the managership of W. Clay Cloud. At 22,730 feet of floor space, it was one of the largest department stores in the Southwest. The store employed one hundred people at its opening, mostly from Claremore. The buff brick exterior was trimmed in yellow and green. Four car loads of walnut and mahogany furnishings combined with a bronze, cream, and green decor to continue the autumnal color scheme on the interior. Various departments representing Montgomery Ward's inventory occupied the basement, mezzanine, and first two floors. Offices were located over the first floor windows. Seventy-five foot display windows were illuminated at night.<sup>4</sup>



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**HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE (Continued):**

Completion of the Will Rogers Hotel portion of the building took several more weeks. The first thirty-two guests checked in with little fanfare on the night of February 3, 1930. After a week's experimental operation, the formal opening took place on Friday, February 7. A number of Oklahoma notables attended the celebration banquet and dance. Tulsa radio station KVOO broadcast all the festivities, including dance music provided by The Virginians, a Victor recording orchestra from New York. A portrait of Clem Vann Rogers, commissioned by Claremore's Pocahontas Club for the lobby, was presented to the partners. Missing from the festivities was the namesake of the hotel, native son and internationally known humorist Will Rogers, who tacitly acquiesced to having this first structure ever named for him.<sup>5</sup> But Rogers, who had adopted Claremore as his home town, furnished the hotel valuable free publicity when he noted in his newspaper column on February 16, 1930, that the Will Rogers was "the brand-new most up-to-date hotel in the Southwest.... It's six stories high. That's higher than any hotel in London and it's got more baths in one room than Buckingham Palace, where the King lives, has all put together.... Here is the town that you take those wonderful baths that cure you of everything but being a Democrat. I know how proud Christo Columbus must have felt when he heard they had named Columbus, Ohio after him."<sup>6</sup>

The hotel and the "radium water" baths remained a primary component of Claremore's economy for the next four decades. Located two blocks from the railroad and a block from U.S. Highway 66 (along Wichita Avenue, later relocated to Catalayah (Lynn Riggs) Avenue), the Will Rogers Hotel, managed by partner Harrison, offered guests seventy-five rooms, no two decorated alike. These were available at rates from \$2.25 to \$8.00 per night for efficiency apartments with kitchenettes. The solidly constructed building (later designated a Civil Defense shelter) boasted of being completely fire-proof. The sixth floor was devoted to the "famous radium water baths" pumped to tanks on the roof from a 1200-foot artesian well located nearby. Bathers, segregated in the brown terrazzo-tiled facilities by sex, soaked in tubs for half a hour, spent another half hour in "cooling rooms" drying off, showered, and then enjoyed a massage from the hotel's skilled staff. In fact, the masseurs and masseuses at the Will Rogers trained others to work in the Claremore and Hot Springs health resort industries. Many of the guests returned periodically to enjoy the hotel's homey atmosphere. The clientele included comedian Bob Hope, actor Joel McCrea, a number of Oklahoma's governors, and, of course, Will Rogers, who usually occupied a suite on the second floor off the mezzanine. In the post-war years guests could even arrive by helicopter, taking advantage of the first heliport in Claremore. In addition to Montgomery Ward's Department Store, sharing the building was a drug store on the south corner. It soon was replaced by a barber shop, with a beauty shop adjacent. The Coffee Shop in the Will Rogers became a favorite dining place for both hotel guests and Claremore

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**HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE (Continued):**

locals.<sup>7</sup>

In spite of the hard years of the Great Depression, the Will Rogers Hotel prospered. Morton Harrison and Louis Abraham bought out Walter Krumrei in 1943. Harrison sold his share in 1945 to Abraham, who took over management until 1950. Gradually, though, the public lost interest in the "radium water baths" offered by Claremore's facilities, and one by one they began to close and were demolished. Only the Will Rogers continued to offer mineral water baths and massages, but under a fifteen-year lease to a new manager it grew shabby. Still, it survived even after the Will Rogers Turnpike (Interstate 44) drew automobile traffic to the outskirts of town. However, Montgomery Ward vacated its store in August 1968. In 1976 Pearl and Russell Golden bought the hotel in hopes of returning it to its former state and profitability. This included unsuccessful attempts to renovate it as a retirement home. After stripping the hotel of its contents, the Goldenes were forced to default on their mortgage in 1991. The vacant, vandalized building was threatened with demolition until purchased for one dollar from the Bank of Oklahoma NA by the Rogers County Historical Society in 1993. Currently the hotel is being cleaned and stabilized while the society prepares to repeat the success of its rehabilitation projects on two other Rogers County landmarks. With the revival of interest in driving historic Route 66, the Will Rogers Hotel continues to induce travelers to stop in Claremore.<sup>8</sup>

**ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE:**

The Will Rogers Hotel is significant architecturally in that it is a fine example of the Spanish Colonial Revival style applied to a commercial building. The Spanish Colonial Revival style was very popular in Oklahoma in the period from 1915 to 1940, particularly in properties associated with U.S. Highway 66. The use of stucco, tiled roofs, and arches, already familiar along the line of the Santa Fe Railway, reminded the traveler of the California terminus of the "Mother Road." The architectural firm of Hawk and Parr adapted the style on the exterior of the Will Rogers Hotel with the use of wrought iron balconets, arched windows, terra cotta window surrounds, Solomonic columns, and an abbreviated tiled roof below a symbolic bell tower. In the lobby they continued the theme with archways, wrought iron light fixtures and railings, and a tiled fountain. But they added an American Western rustic flavor, embodied in the use of "stone," arrowheads, thunderbirds, lightning bolts, branding irons, and finely detailed logs molded in the terra cotta and plaster trim. The use of the "dog iron" branding iron in the running pattern of ceiling moldings was a direct reference to humorist Will Rogers's ranching background in the Claremore area. He further allowed his cowboy persona to be exploited by presenting a wagon wheel from his California ranch to Louis Abraham. It was

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**ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE (Continued):**

incorporated into the lobby chandelier (since stolen).<sup>9</sup>

The Will Rogers Hotel, a fine example of the Spanish Colonial Revival style but with some unique Western American decorative elements, was similar in size to several large hotels of its day in medium-sized cities in Oklahoma. It is, however, one of the very few surviving. Furthermore, it was unique among those hotels in that it offered guests the "radium water baths" that constituted the basis of Claremore's health resort industry. It was the last such facility operating in Claremore and is the only building associated with the industry still in existence. As such it warrants listing on the National Register.

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NOTES

<sup>1</sup>There is considerable debate as to whether George W. Eaton inadvertently struck water in 1902 or 1903. "Claremore," Historic Downtowns (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Historical Society, 1985), 31; Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, "Claremore, Oklahoma," 1901, 1903, 1907, 1911, 1916, 1925, microfilm, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma.

<sup>2</sup>Joe Cunningham, "The Founding of the Will Rogers Hotel," The Cherokee Nation News, Tahlequah, Oklahoma, October 30, 1973; The Claremore (Oklahoma) Weekly Progress, July 13, 1928, March 14, 1929.

<sup>3</sup>The Claremore (Oklahoma) Weekly Progress, March 21, 28, April 4, 18, 1929.

<sup>4</sup>Bob L. Blackburn, Arn Henderson, Melvena Thurman, The Physical Legacy: Buildings of Oklahoma County, 1889-1931 (Oklahoma City: Southwestern Heritage Press for the Oklahoma Historical Society, 1980), 57, 60-61; The Claremore (Oklahoma) Weekly Progress, April 4, December 5, 1929.

<sup>5</sup>The Claremore (Oklahoma) Weekly Progress, February 6, 13, 1930.

<sup>6</sup>Rogers was actually born and reared on a ranch near Oolagah, about eight miles northwest of Claremore. He claimed Claremore because, he said, New Yorkers could never pronounce Oolagah. James M. Smallwood, ed., The Writings of Will Rogers: Daily Telegrams of Will Rogers, III-2, The Hoover Years, 1929-1931 (Stillwater, OK.: Oklahoma State University Press, 1978), 135.

<sup>7</sup>Will Rogers Hotel flyer, State Historic Preservation Office, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; Cunningham, "The Founding of the Will Rogers Hotel"; Elmo Tanner, interview, Claremore, Oklahoma, July 29, 1994; Rogers County Historical Society Collection, Claremore, Oklahoma; Don Emrick, "Taking the Waters," Oklahoma Today 35 (March/April 1985):40-44.

<sup>8</sup>Cunningham, "The Founding of the Will Rogers Hotel"; Emrick, "Taking the Waters," 41-44; Elmo Tanner, interview, Claremore, Oklahoma, July 29, 1994; The Tulsa World, January 16, 1993; Maggie Box, interview, Claremore, Oklahoma, July 29, 1994.

<sup>9</sup>John J.-G. Blumenson, Identifying American Architecture: A Pictorial Guide to Styles and Terms, 1600-1945 (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1981, revised edition), 9; Elmo Tanner, interview, Claremore, Oklahoma, July 29, 1994.

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**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

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- The Tulsa (Oklahoma) World. 1993.
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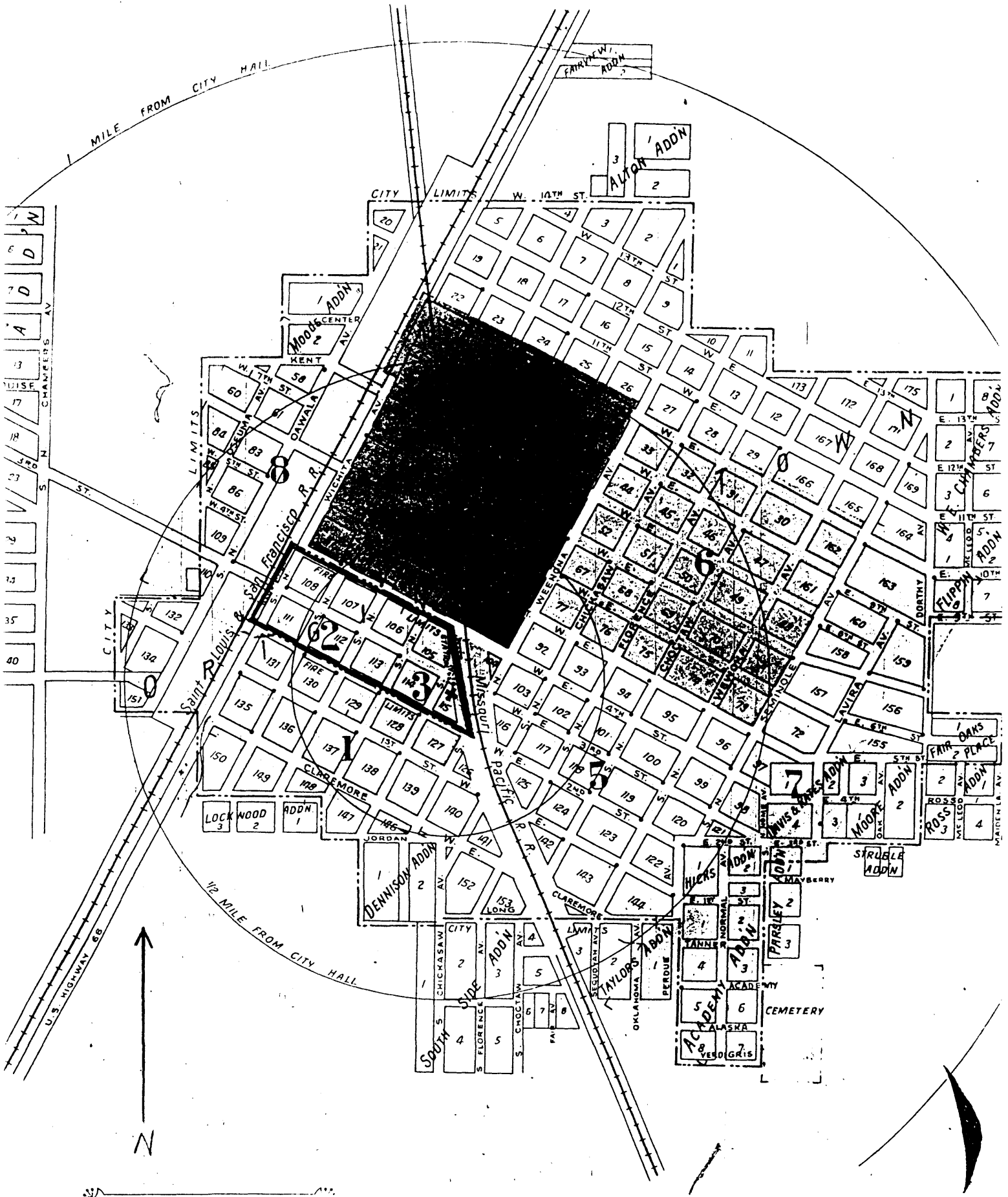
**VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION**

The west 17' of Lot 10 and all of Lots 11 and 12, Block 107, Claremore, Original Town.

**BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION**

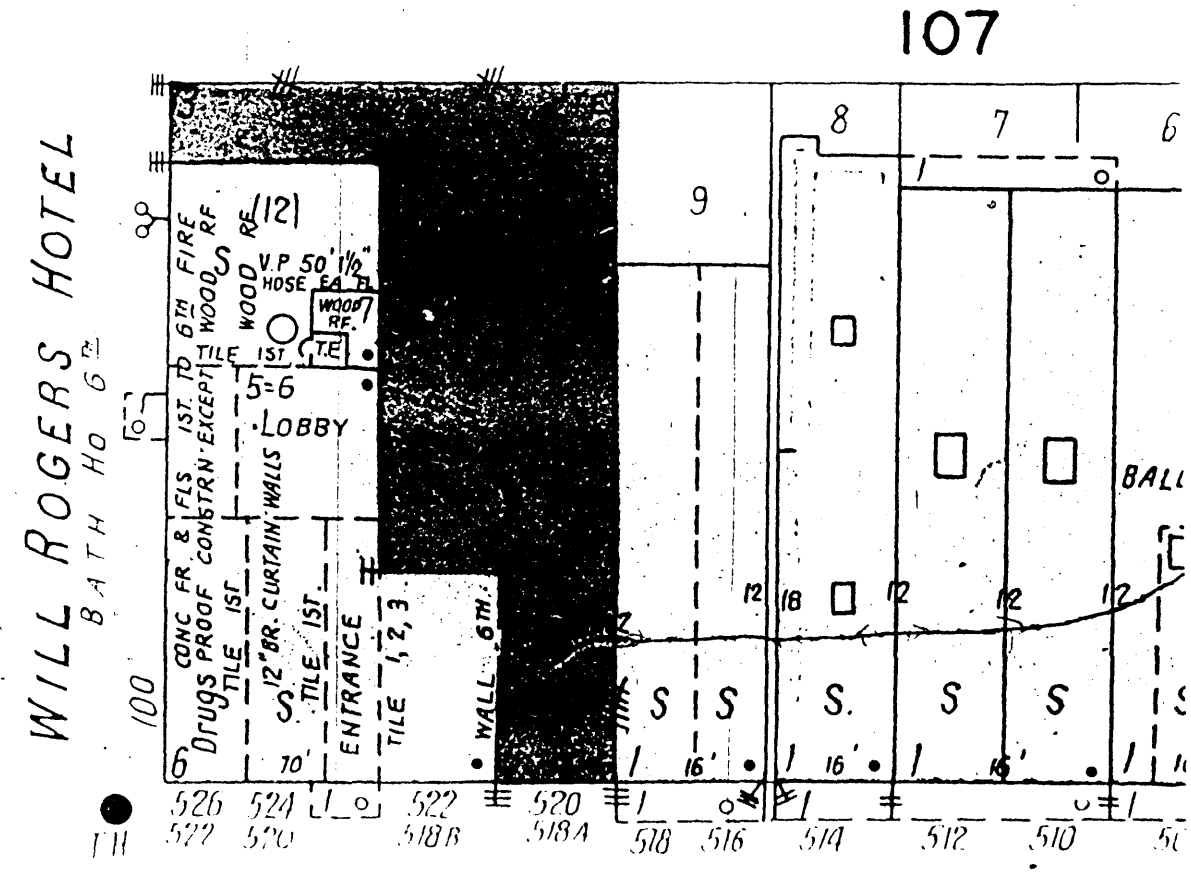
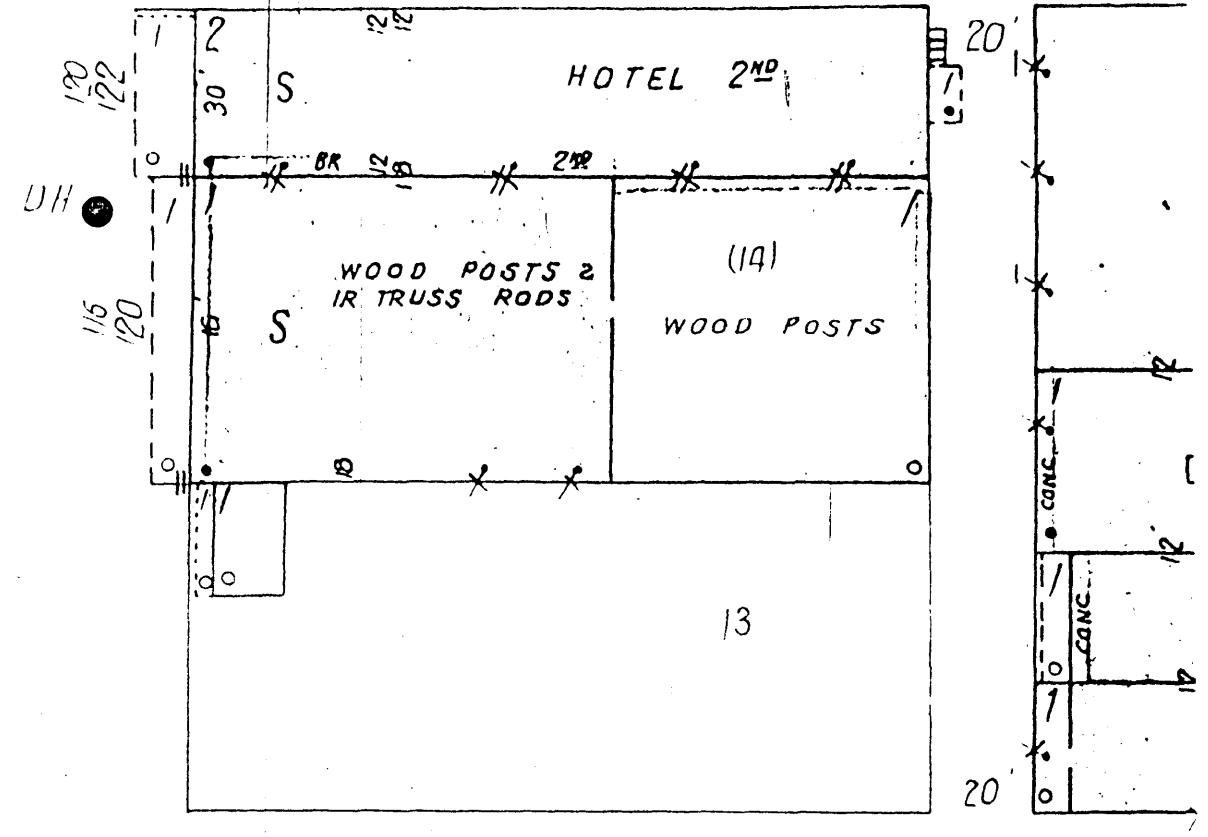
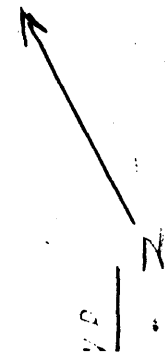
This is the boundary recorded at the Assessor's Office, Rogers County Court-house, Claremore, Oklahoma and that which historically has been associated with the nominated property.

MAP 1  
 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map  
 "Claremore, Oklahoma," 1933



113 115 117 119 121 123

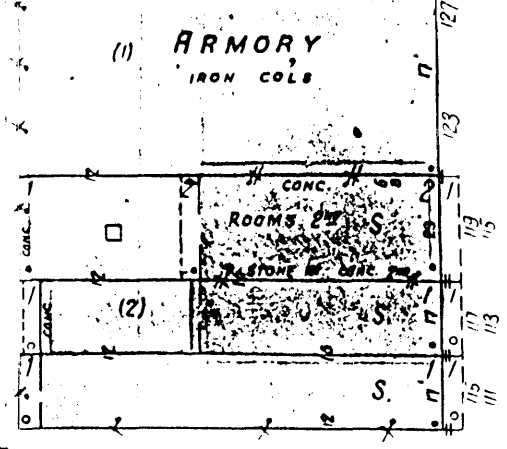
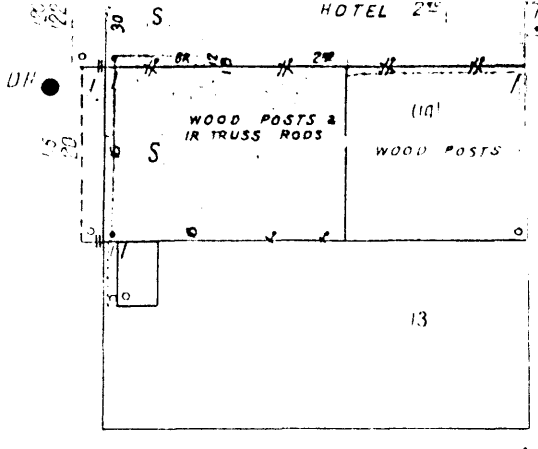
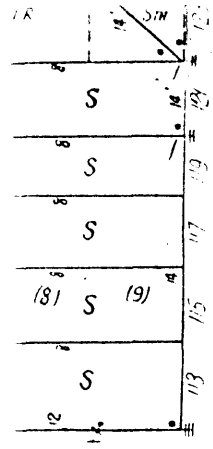
N. CATALAYA AV.



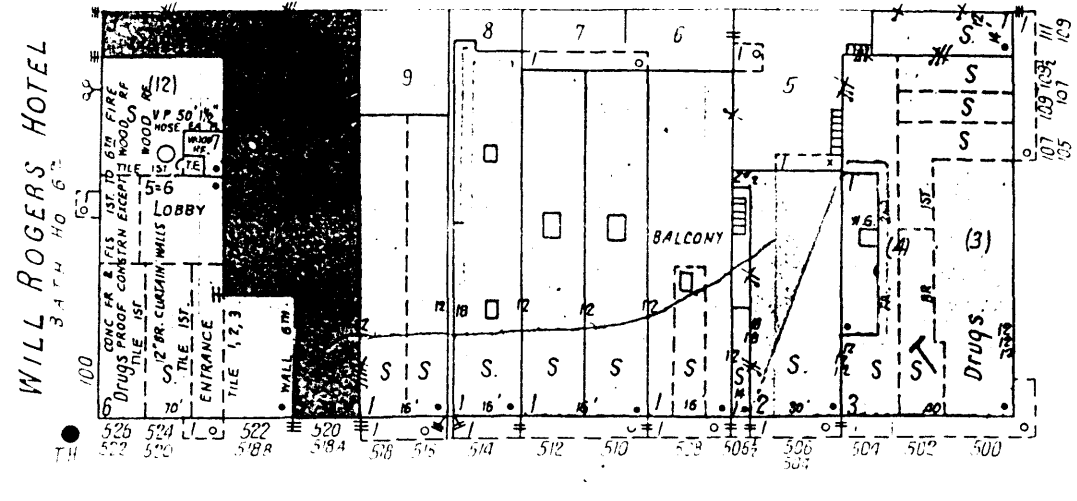
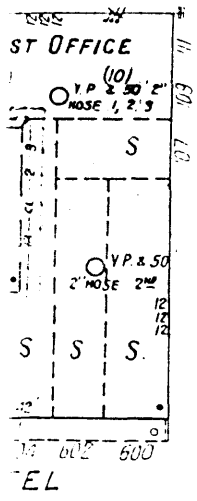
**MAP 3**  
 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map  
 "Claremore, Oklahoma," 1933

W. 3RD ST.

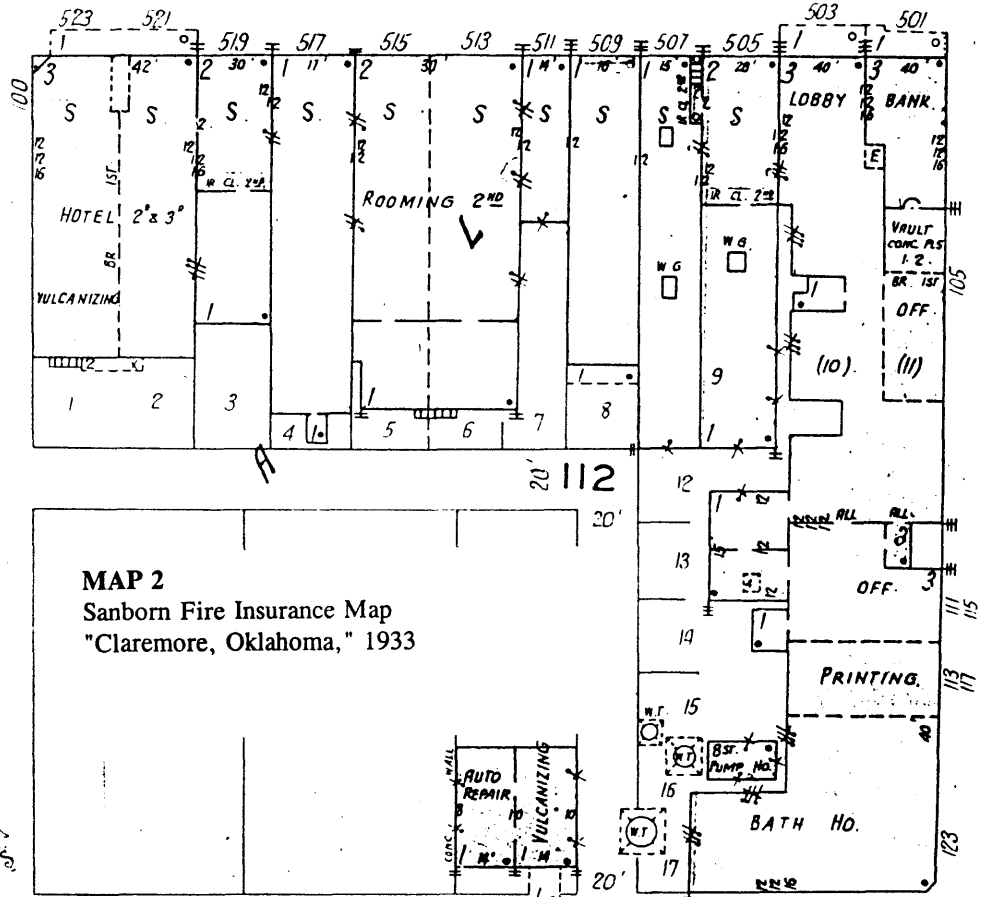
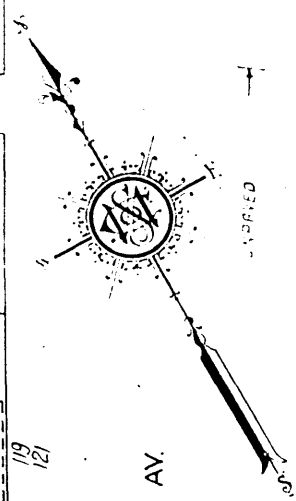
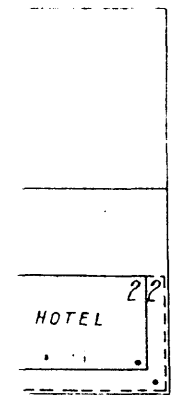
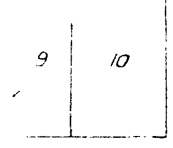
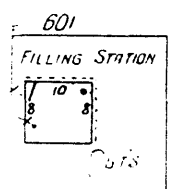




80' AV.  
ON. MISSOURI



6" W P 8" W P  
W. 3RD ST.



**MAP 2**  
Sanborn Fire Insurance Map  
"Claremore, Oklahoma," 1933

508 FILLING STATION  
510