
6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: Hotel

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: Hotel

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)

Mission Revival

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation concretewalls brickroof tar paperother

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

7. DESCRIPTION

SUMMARY

The Alhambra Hotel is a 1922 commercial building designed in the Spanish Mission revival style, located in the original downtown area of Mesa, Arizona. The hotel is a two story, red brick building distinguished by a low pitch gable roof hidden by a parapet, and an arcaded loggia in front that covers the sidewalk along Macdonald Street. The building exhibits three important stages in its existence: The remnants of the original 1893 Alhambra which burned down in 1921; the reconstructed Alhambra of 1922; and, a large addition of rooms on the rear of the property which were constructed in 1951.

DESCRIPTION

Construction: The Alhambra Hotel is of red brick construction built on a level grade so that the first floor is approximately ground level. From the exterior, the roof appears flat, but this is due to the parapet wall around the top. Actually, the building retains a slightly-pitched gabled roof, probably a remnant of the original Alhambra. The roof faces are covered with tar paper.

There are three types of red brick used in the construction. The western portion of the hotel along Macdonald street was built within the walls of the original 1893 hotel. The middle portion was an addition built in 1922 to replace the large portions that were destroyed in the 1921 fire. The kitchen area is built with concrete bricks but was also a part of the 1922 reconstruction. The eastern "L-shaped" addition and the one story addition on the southwest corner are both built with brick from 1951.

Current Appearance and Alterations: The most prominent feature of the front (west) facade is the arcaded loggia which is constructed of brick and wood but is plaster covered. There are four arches, with the southern arch being wider than the other three. This

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 7 Page 2

difference in width is an original feature from the 1922 period. The ground floor front features light and dark green tile, with the dark along the bottom below the windows. The tile dates to the historic period of significance. There are three storefront windows that are not original to 1922 but are reversible, and are in the original window openings. Over the windows are smaller stained glass windows without a distinct design. There are three doors on the front: a double door leading into the lobby, a single door leading into an office, and a single door leading into the 1951 addition on the southwest corner (listed as 43, 45, and 47 S. Macdonald, respectively). The second floor front facade is stucco covered and has three windows and a doorway. The doorway led to a balcony that was over the arcaded porch and is now closed off, but this is easily reversible. The windows have wood 2/2 double-hung sash within segmental arched openings. This is the dominant window style of the building dating back to the 1893 building and continued in the 1922 reconstruction.

On the north wall there are clear dividing points between the 1893, 1922, and 1951 red brick. There is a single chimney on this wall near the front. The entire north wall is flat, although the 1951 "L-shaped" addition projects out about a foot beyond the older portions.

On the extreme southwest corner of the property is the 1951, one story addition to the building (47 S. Macdonald). Next to this is a two story section (45 S. Macdonald) associated with the wider portion of the arcaded porch described above. The second story of this portion has been rebuilt and displays two window types: on the east facing wall are two double-hung windows with no relieving arch, and on the south facing wall are two large, square windows covered over with exterior shades. Next to this two story portion is the one story kitchen area to the east. This room is of concrete brick construction and is original to the 1922 period. The kitchen roof has a slight pitch and is not original to the period (see integrity section below).

The middle portion of the building was the section constructed in 1922 to replace the wood frame dining room that had been destroyed by fire. The north and south walls each have three windows. There is also a window on the west facing wall of this section. Between this west wall face and the kitchen is a small wood frame storage shed.

On the eastern portion of the property is a large "L-shaped" addition of rooms. This addition encloses two sides of an open area with grass and small shade trees. Leading up to the second floor open air walkway is an iron, circular staircase. In the southeast corner there is a second story room over a carport. On the east and north walls of this addition, the windows are unadorned wooden 2/2 double-hung within rectangular

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 3

openings and alternate between one-and-one-half to two feet in width. The roof of this addition is flat. At the juncture where this addition connects to the 1922 section there is a small basement that dates to at least the 1922 period.

Interior: The interior of the hotel seems largely intact and is in adequate condition for use as a boarding house. In the lobby there is a hole leading to the chimney described above. The hole was for a wood burning Franklin stove that the present owner recently removed, but still has in his possession. There are double-loaded corridors running east-west on both floors. The west end of the second floor hall leads to the front balcony described above. The east end leads to the walkway of the 1951 addition. The rooms and halls have dropped ceilings which the owner is currently removing to reveal the original high ceiling. Some of the beams in the roof are charred, perhaps from the 1922 fire.

Site: The Alhambra Hotel occupies the same parcel of land in downtown Mesa, Arizona that it did when it was originally constructed in 1893.

Integrity: The major features of the hotel as it was in 1922 remain intact. The large addition to the rear does not impinge on the street side view of the building. There were aluminum awnings over the second story front windows that the owner recently removed but still has in his possession. The wood frame around the middle front window is recent but replicates the older frame. On the north wall, there is evidence of water damage to some of the bricks of the 1893 section. The water damage extends to one of the first floor windows, but is not particularly heavy. The owner recently unboarded a window that was on the north wall of the lobby and is replacing the framing with wood that replicates the original.

When the 1951 addition was built, part of the old wall was knocked through to create a doorway. To connect the second story walkway with the older portion, a window was converted into a door. The old semi-elliptical relieving arch is still visible. On the south wall of the 1922 section, the farthest left of the three first floor windows has been infilled with brick. On the east wall of this section, a doorway has been boarded up, but this is reversible. Directly above this doorway a window has been altered and the arch removed.

Sanborn maps reveal that the one story area that is now the kitchen was originally "L-shaped" in 1922, but has been altered to be a simple square with a new roof. The

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 4

reconstructed second story near the southwest corner has a slightly pitched roof. This second story has marginally impacted the front facade. While the front wall remains intact, there is a visible crack along the line of the new roof. There has been some deterioration in the older portions of the walls and cement has been used to patch the deteriorating bricks. Despite the efforts to expand the Alhambra through the years, the building still retains much of its architectural integrity in that there has been a clear and continuous attempt to conform all additions to the original architectural style. Therefore, the building is deserving of recognition and preservation as an example of Spanish mission revival commercial buildings in Mesa.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)
COMMERCE
TOURISM

Period of Significance
1893-1941

Significant Dates
1893
1922

Cultural Affiliation
NA

Significant Person

Architect/Builder
W. L. Samuels & Sons

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

8. STATEMENT of SIGNIFICANCE

SUMMARY

The Alhambra Hotel, constructed in 1893, is significant under the National Register Criterion "A" as the oldest hotel still in use in Mesa, Arizona. The structure underwent a major reconstruction in 1922 in which it was given a Spanish mission revival style with a large arcaded porch as the dominant feature on the front facade. This style was common in the period and the central portion of the city still has a number of similar arcades. The Alhambra has been in continuous use except for the period of its reconstruction.

HISTORIC CONTEXT-ORIGINS OF MESA, ARIZONA

The origin of the city of Mesa relates directly to the expansion of Mormon settlement out of Utah and into the surrounding territories. In 1877, Brigham Young sent out the Lehi Company to begin settling the Salt River valley and the next year sent out the Mesa Company. On February 14, 1878, the Mesa Company camped five miles east of the Lehi settlement on the Salt River. On July 12, 1878, Theodore Serrine filed for possession of Section 22, the area now known as Town Center.

The town site was set out according to the plan given by Joseph Smith for the City of Zion and used as the basis for all Mormon settlement. The Section was divided into plots of ten acres with very wide streets typical of Mormon towns. The plots alternate in alignment of their lots, running north-south in one and east-west in the next. The lots in the plot containing the Alhambra Hotel were aligned east-west.

Early Mesa buildings were characterized by thick adobe walls, gabled roofs, high ceilings, and a central entry. In 1890, window glass became available in Mesa. When

See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

Arizona Gazette.

Mesa Daily Tribune.

Mesa Free Press.

Mesa Historic Inventory Survey by Linda Laird and Associates.

Phoenix and Salt River Valley Directories, 1898-1941.

Interviews with Wallace Johnson, owner of the Alhambra Hotel, by William Collins, November 12, 1990 and November 25, 1990.

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps.

See continuation sheet

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

Specify repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acres of property less than one

UTM References

A 1 2 4 2 2 5 5 0 3 6 9 7 3 1 0
 Zone Easting Northing

C

B
 Zone Easting Northing

D

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The Alhambra Hotel is in the lot with tax parcel number 138-41-011, located in the northeast quarter of the southwest quarter of township 1 north, range 5 east, of section 22, Mesa, Maricopa County, Arizona.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The nomination boundaries coincide with the historic site of the Alhambra Hotel.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title William Collins
 organization Arizona State University date April 8, 1991
 street & number 818 West 3rd Street telephone (602) 894-2729
 city or town Tempe state Arizona zip code 85281

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 2

the Alhambra was constructed in 1893, it used locally manufactured red brick for its walls instead of adobe, but maintained the high ceilings and gabled roof.

The Alhambra was a part of the first spurt of building to satisfy the tourist trade in the early 1890's. The first hotel in Mesa was the Hakes Hotel which was constructed in 1890 and went out of business shortly thereafter. The Hakes was followed by the George W. Serrine House and the Kimball House, which were the only operating hotels in Mesa when the Alhambra opened in November 1893. It contained eighteen rooms, described in the Mesa Free Press as "elegant and cozy". Its location on Macdonald Street just south of Main placed it in the center of the town's business activity. In 1893 there were about one thousand residents in Mesa. Besides the construction of the hotels, the 1890's also saw the founding of the first newspaper in 1891, the first railroad line into town in 1895, and the introduction of electricity in 1897. The most significant alteration to the Alhambra during this time was the addition of porches over both front and back facades in 1898. Photographs from the period reveal that it was surrounded by several trees.

Mesa continued to grow and prosper in the early decades of the 20th century. Despite the 1921 cotton crop failure, in general, agriculture, Mesa's largest industry, was developing rapidly. This was a result of the construction of a number of dams on the Salt and Verde rivers that allowed for a more predictable and greatly expanded irrigation system throughout the Salt River valley. Tourism was also an expanding business, second only to agriculture (and catching up rapidly). The climate was the major draw for tourists as it was for all the cities in the valley. Mesa also advertised Buckhorn Mineral Wells, located on the Apache Trail to the east of town, as a tourist draw and lauded its "curative effects". In 1925, Mesa went on the "Main Line" of the Southern Pacific Railroad, meaning that tourists no longer had to make transfers to reach the city. Another major tourist attraction was the Mormon temple, which had been dedicated in 1927. With the new temple came recognition of Mesa as the leading community of Mormons in Arizona, a distinction it still retains.

New hotels were built to serve the growing tourist trade: the Metsford (1921), the expansion of the Rex (1921), and the El Portal, the largest hotel in Mesa (1927). The growth of the Town Center also included the Toggery (1921), for many years Mesa's largest department store, the Nile Theater (1925), a new Southern Pacific Depot (1930), West High School (1936), and a new City Hall and Post Office (1937). Other developments in the Mesa town site included new street lighting systems, free mail delivery, and the expansion of road pavement (considered by contemporaries to be a major step towards modernization). With the Main Line rail line came a shift in

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 3

business activity towards the Broadway Road area. This period also saw the beginning of development outside of the Town Center and into the surrounding agricultural areas.

On January 6, 1921, a small fire broke out in the rear, wood frame portion of the Alhambra but was quickly brought under control by the fire department. However, early on Friday morning, April 15th, another fire broke out and nearly leveled the hotel except for the front brick portion. Five men were injured by the blaze and one, Harry Scores, died four days later. The fire was suspected to have been started in the basement by a cigarette from one of the men who slept there.

On June 3, 1921, the owner of the property, O. C. McElrath, announced that the hotel would be reconstructed into a modern hotel of 34 rooms. The new Alhambra would use the still standing brick portion of the old structure but would be constructed in a Spanish Mission style with a large arcaded porch. Its modern features were to include steam heating and indoor lavatories. The contractor was W. L. Samuels & Sons and the initial cost estimate was about \$40,000. However, it was not until August 19th that the financing arrangements were completed and the contractor given the go ahead.

However, McElrath had difficulties with the reconstruction costs. By August 19th, the estimated expenditure had dropped to \$15,000. Still, McElrath was unable to complete the rebuilding and on March 5, 1922, he sold the property to H. H. Hall, a newcomer to Mesa from Texas. Hall announced that he expected the hotel to reopen within a month. Unfortunately, just a few days later, on March 11, 1922, Hall's home was completely destroyed by fire. The loss was only partially covered by insurance. It is possible that this loss forced Hall to give up his interest in the Alhambra, for McElrath returned as owner when the hotel was finally reopened.

After 1926, McElrath was no longer associated with the hotel. Management of the Alhambra changed often, but it continued to serve as a hotel. In 1926 the Alhambra Beauty Parlor was located in a front section of the hotel. In 1949, the name of the hotel was changed to the Pioneer Hotel and in 1951, the large addition of rooms was added to the back.