

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Commercial Block

other names/site number Commercial Hotel

2. Location

street & number 1111 to 1119 First Avenue West not for publication

city or town Spokane vicinity

state Washington code WA county Spokane code 063 zip code 99201

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 nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Wayne M. Sampson 9/13/93
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State of 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 certifying official/Title _____ Date _____

State or Federal agency and bureau _____

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the 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:)

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Patricia Andrews

10/15/93

Commercial Block
Name of Property

Spokane County, WA
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

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

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

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

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1		Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)
Single Room Occupancy Hotels in the Central
Business District of Spokane, WA, 1900-1910

**Number of contributing resources previously listed
in the National Register**

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: hotel

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Commercial and vacant

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Commercial Style

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation stone
walls brick

roof tarpaper
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.)

Property is:

- 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 of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Community planning and development;
Social history

Period of Significance

1906-1940s

Significant Dates

1906

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Isaac J. Galbraith

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(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:

Historic Preservation Office, Spokane Regional Council

Commercial Block
Name of Property

Spokane County, WA
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property ca. 1/3 acre (100 x 156 ft)

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1

1	1
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4	6	7	8	9	0
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5	2	7	8	0	0	0
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Zone Easting Northing

3

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Zone Easting Northing

4

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--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

 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 Craig Holstine, Historian

organization Archaeological & Historical Services date April 1993

street & number Eastern Washington University telephone (509) 359-2239

city or town Cheney state WA zip code 99004

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 SHPO or FPO.)

name John H. and Min Ha

street & number 110 South Madison telephone _____

city or town Spokane state WA zip code 99204-0580

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 1

Commercial Block
Spokane County, WA

7. Description

Spanning the center lots of the block between Jefferson and Madison streets, the Commercial Block forms the centerpiece in a row of single room occupancy (SRO) hotels on West First Avenue. Its unreinforced masonry construction in red brick laid in Flemish bond complements that of its neighboring structures, the Otis Hotel on the east and the Norman and Jefferson hotels on the west. Designed by architect Isaac J. Galbraith and built in 1906, the Commercial Block shares interior side walls with the adjacent Norman, constructed in 1908, and the Otis, erected as the Willard in 1910-1911. Although architecturally prosaic, the four buildings together present a streetscape reminiscent of the turn of the century period from which they date, and constitute perhaps the last remaining unintruded continuous facades of single room occupancy hotels in Spokane.

Facing north onto West First Avenue, the three-story, 44-foot high Commercial Block retains excellent integrity in its 100-foot wide facade above street level. The symmetrical fenestration pattern of single, one-over-one wood sash windows with brick sills is repeated on both sides of paired windows positioned centrally on both levels. Label or drip molds cap the window openings, providing decorative relief on an otherwise uninterrupted surface. Just above the third-level windows, a subtle string course of raised brick appears to form a mantle on which rest brackets supporting a protruding metal cornice. Metal coping covers a low parapet which slopes outwardly from a centered recessed plaque with raised letters proclaiming the building's original, and present, appellation, "COMMERCIAL." Screened from view is the structure's flat roof behind the parapet.

Cast iron piers and beams define the four commercial and retail bays on the ground floor. The bays are of equal dimension, with recessed entries flanked by various glass and cladding covering what were originally display windows. Immediately above are similar mixes of unmatched materials (wood shingles, brick, and fiberboard siding) covering the transom spaces. Original glass panes remain in the boarded-over transom above the main entryway, which is covered over at the center of the building's ground floor between the two inner commercial bays. So long as the structure housed the Commercial Hotel, the entryway provided access to the residential units on the upper levels. As with the exteriors, the interiors of the street-level bays have been modified over the years and retain little or none of their original integrity.

Occupying two lots, the Commercial Building covers an approximate 100 by 100 foot square. The building's stone foundation surrounds a basement, divided into four spaces conforming with the ground

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**Commercial Block
Spokane County, WA**

7. Description (continued)

floor commercial bays. Unlike its nearest neighbors, the Commercial does not extend rearward (south) to the alley, but rather terminates at roughly one-third the lots' depth, leaving a vacant area used for automobile parking. Access to the rears of the four commercial bays is provided in segmentally arched pedestrian doorways, with similarly shaped and sized window openings containing wood sash windows.

Metal fire escapes descend from the flat roofline on the rear or south side of the building to door openings at the ends of the hallways on the upper floors. Visible from this elevation is the interior light well that divides the upper levels into two symmetrical wings. Extending northward to the hallway crossing behind the rooms at the front of the building, the narrow well provides light to interior rooms facing into the hallways. The well and its flanking wings determine the building's basic "U" shape on its upper levels. When viewed on the interior floor plan, the hallways actually form a modified "U" with short hallways extending from bottom corners of the "U" to reach rooms at the very corners of the building.

It is the floorplan and arrangement of the guest rooms on the upper two levels that comprise the Commercial Building's primary character-defining feature. At least 76 rooms that may originally have been rented individually line the hallways. Doorways connecting several rooms together may be either original or modifications subsequent to construction, to allow for rental of rooms either individually or "in suite." Six two-room suites across the front of the building on both upper floors appear to be original multiple-room units. A laundry room with large sink occupies one small room on each, and may represent a modification from original use of those two rooms, which are slightly smaller than the other guest rooms.

Typical rooms measure approximately 12 feet square. Lath and plaster cover the walls and ceilings, except where it has deteriorated and fallen. Ceiling heights are about 12 feet. Some rooms contain a sink, a wardrobe or armoire, and an occasional toilet, which would have been added, as no rooms contained toilets originally. None of the rooms have baths; guests shared a common toilet and bath in each wing on both the second and third floors. Most rooms sharing wall space with hallways have window openings into the hallways. The function of the interior windows is unclear, although they may have provided extra light to the hallway when occupants of the rooms had lights on. The hallways had lights of their own, presumably gas lights, as fixtures in some rooms would indicate. Halls on the third floor received daylight through skylights in the roof of the building. Presumably the hallway windows presented some security problems, and may have been secured or covered over on the rooms' interiors in manners not now apparent. Rooms facing the front and rear of the structure had light from external windows; rooms facing

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Commercial Block
Spokane County, WA

7. Description (continued)

the interior light well between the two wings had light from that source; rooms on the sides of the Commercial abutting the Otis and Norman hotels received daylight and ventilation from four small light wells; a few interior rooms had no daylight whatsoever.

The hallways in the Commercial Block are wide -- at least 6 feet. Wainscotting reaches from the floors upwards over 3 feet. Most woodwork around doors, transoms, and hallway windows, as well as mop boards, has been retained. Balustrades have been removed from the front stairways. There are no rear stairwells in the Commercial Block. Hallways connect the Commercial with the adjacent Otis Hotel on both upper floors. The Commercial was originally heated with low-pressure steam produced in a coal-fired furnace located in the basement.

No cooking nor dining facilities have ever been installed in the building, nor have elevators or other standard features of more modern hotels. Aside from the street-level commercial bays, both the exterior and interior of the Commercial Block retain excellent integrity, clearly conveying the historic use of the building as a single room occupancy hotel dating from the turn of the century era in Spokane's central business district.

8. Statement of Significance

Summary Statement

The Commercial Block is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its association with working class housing and the rapid growth of the city of Spokane, Washington, during the period 1900-1910. The building is also significant as an excellent representative of the property type "Single Room Occupancy (SRO) Hotels" identified in the Multiple Property Listing "Single Room Occupancy Hotels in the Central Business District of Spokane, Washington, 1900-1910." Retaining both interior and exterior integrity on its upper levels, the Commercial Block meets the registration requirements for SROs established in the Multiple Property Listing. The Commercial Block appears to constitute one of the best examples of the property type in Spokane due to its high degree of retention of original floor plan and arrangement of guest rooms and common baths.

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Commercial Block
Spokane County, WA

8. Statement of Significance (continued)

Supporting Statement

Constructed in 1906 on the south side of the 1100 block of West First Avenue, the Commercial Block was one of many so-called "single room occupancy" hotels erected in the central business district (CBD) of Spokane shortly after the turn of the century. The concept of single individuals occupying a private room was not new; first-class hotels had always met the needs of traveling business persons who could afford to pay for the space and accompanying service. SROs, on the other hand, had private rooms furnished only with a bed, sometimes with a sink and portable closet, in modest buildings offering lodging at prices affordable to the legions of working class immigrants arriving to fill the ranks of new and expanding industries. SROs represented a vast improvement in lodging for working people over the older lodging houses, many of which were notorious for their crime and filth. More like bunkhouses or barracks, lodging houses hosted guests usually in relatively large numbers per room, almost always men. Included in the armies of workers in the early twentieth century were single women, who were at risk in traditional lodging houses, and single men who sought similar comforts of privacy and security provided by a single room occupancy hotel.

The Commercial Block was one such facility. Its floor plan of single rooms arranged along wide hallways, with common baths shared by many residents per floor, represented a familiar pattern in working class lodging in Spokane during that era. Itinerant workers, home and job seekers, travelers, and transients of all sorts who could afford the luxury of single-room living took refuge, for brief or extended periods of time, in SROs in Spokane's CBD.

SRO hotels represent but one type of working class housing in Spokane's CBD. Following the Great Fire of 1889, which destroyed 32 city blocks, the city rebuilt at a remarkable pace: 500 buildings were erected within the first year after the fire. Many of those included hotels and lodging houses, built to house the sizable workforce employed in constructing the new community. Economic depression nationwide followed the panic of 1893, slowing the town's growth until about the turn of the century. Within a few years, the city experienced the greatest building boom in its history. At one point in 1909, Spokane ranked second only to Chicago in percent of increase in new construction nationwide. Corresponding with and fueling the building boom was the city's meteoric rise in population: from 36,848 in 1900 to 104,402 in 1910. Much of the increase had come in the numbers of working people, some making their homes in the city, others in transit or between jobs in town or in the surrounding area. By the end of the first decade

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**Commercial Block
Spokane County, WA**

8. Statement of Significance (continued)

of this century, working class housing represented a significant portion of the building stock of downtown Spokane.

Capitalizing on the growing market for working class housing were speculators who bought marginally profitable parcels and erected buildings designed for mixed uses, most often with commercial and retail spaces at street level and residential space in the upper floors. One such couple was Dr. Joseph E. Gandy and his wife Harriet Ross Gandy. Prominent and financially endowed as the widow of her first husband, Andrew J. Ross, one of the city's early bankers, Mrs. Gandy purchased lots 3 and 4 on which the Commercial Block now stands in 1900 and 1902, respectively. Sometime after their marriage, the Gandys decided to build on the property what were termed in the press at the time of construction as "apartments." Dr. Gandy, a former physician and state legislator, had turned to property development as his profession. He built the Gandy Block, an earlier mixed-use commercial and residential building, on Sprague Avenue. Gandy subsequently hired architect Isaac J. Galbraith to design the building for the lots. Galbraith came to Spokane by way of Pennsylvania and Montana, where he had gained attention for notable design work, including that done on the Montana State building for the Chicago World's Fair in 1893. He practiced for 12 years in Spokane, designing few structures left standing today, the Commercial Block being one of perhaps only two remaining. His subtle styling on the Commercial Block has been attributed to the influence of New York townhouse designs of the late nineteenth century by McKim, Mead, and White.

In 1906 West First Avenue was highly desirable real estate, lying between downtown and the fashionable Browne's Addition. Mixed-use buildings promised greater returns than did the structures, including frame units used for boarding, existing there before the Commercial was built. Dr. Gandy obtained a permit to connect lot 4, as well as his adjacent property, lot 5, on West First to the city water system and had installed 10-inch sewer pipes by October 1903. By 1 June 1906 the building's foundation was in place, with the pronouncement in the press that the structure would "cost about \$40,000, and will be steadily pushed to completion" (*Spokesman-Review* 1 June 1906:8:1). It is not known precisely when the building was completed. In March 1907 Gandy obtained a permit to extend one-inch "Trident" service pipes for use in the "Commercial Block." The building first appears in the 1907 *City Directory* with that title; the following year, O.F. and Ella Weimer are listed as offering "furnished rooms" in the structure. The building first appears as the "Commercial Hotel" in the 1909 *City Directory*. By 1929 the *City Directory* lists 1115 West First Avenue as both the "Commercial Hotel" and the "Commercial Apartments."

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**Commercial Block
Spokane County, WA**

8. Statement of Significance (continued)

Census records from 1910 reveal that both men and women, most unmarried young people with working class occupations (and some skilled in trades and even a few professionals), were tenants in the Commercial. By 1929 the Commercial housed 34 residents, exactly half of them women, all living alone with the exception of two women who shared one unit (of perhaps two or more connected rooms). It can be presumed that the Commercial, like other SROs, were then serving as affordable housing for widowed, divorced or separated women, since 12 of the 17 names were preceded by "Mrs." Most guests stayed a year or less, keeping the rooms almost continuously occupied through the 1940s. As the property declined, the vacancy rate increased until the rooms were no longer used for lodging sometime in the early 1980s.

The building's street-level bays housed a variety of retail and service-industry enterprises of the years: the Palace Market in 1908; the Crescent Furniture and a cafe in 1910; Bradley Heiser Plumbing Company in 1918; Skeeter's Lunch in 1931; Mitchell's Hamburger in the mid 1930s; the Pantry in the late 1930s; Neff's Agate Shop in the 1940s; the Beauty Box in the late 1950s; Reid Barber College in the 1960s; and so on. Commercial use of some of the building's street-level bays continues to the present day.

Many other single room occupancy hotels were constructed in the CBD during the first decade of the twentieth century. Within two years of the Commercial's completion, the Norman Hotel was built (1908) adjacent to and west of the Commercial. By 1911 the Atlantic (or Willard, now the Otis) Hotel had been built on the east side. Erection of the Jefferson Hotel in 1909 completed the block of single room occupancies on that (the south) side of West First. Other SROs built on that street during that time period included: Congress (or Herald), 904 W. First; Melrose (1907), 919 W. First; New Madison (1904) (subsequently remodeled), 1021-31; Darby (1909), 1022; Parsons (1908-1909) (subsequently remodeled and no longer an SRO) southwest corner West First and Madison; and others. Of the remaining SRO hotels in Spokane, the Commercial Block is one of the best examples of the property type, clearly conveying its original use as a single room occupancy hotel built during the first decade of this century.

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Commercial Block
Spokane County, WA

9. Major Bibliographic References

Census Records, City of Spokane, 1910. On microfilm, Spokane Public Library, Spokane.

Compau, Nancy. Historian, Northwest Room, Spokane Public Library. Interviews with Craig Holstine, Spokane, February through April 1993.

Fahey, John. *The Inland Empire: The Unfolding Years, 1879-1929*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1986.

Historic Landmarks Survey: A Report and Site Inventory of Spokane's Historic Resources. Spokane: City Plan Commission, 1979.

Historic Property Inventory. Spokane City/County Historic Preservation Office, Spokane Regional Council, Spokane.

Hyslop, Robert. *Spokane's Building Blocks*. Spokane: Standard Blueprint Company, 1983.

Permit File for 1111-1119 West First Avenue. Building Services Department, City of Spokane.

Polk, R.L. *City Directories*. Spokane. Various issues.

Property Assessment Worksheets for the Commercial Block. Spokane County Assessor's Office, County Courthouse, Spokane.

Reynolds, Sally R. The Commercial Block Spokane Register of Historic Places Nomination. Spokane City/County Preservation Office, Spokane Regional Council, Spokane, 1992.

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps. Spokane Public Library, Spokane, 1910 (updated through 1928) and 1952.

Spokane Spokesman-Review. 1 June 1906:8:1.

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Commercial Block
Spokane County, WA

10. Geographical Data

Verbal Boundary Description

Railroad Addition; Lots 3 and 4, Block 19

Boundary Justification

The legal boundaries include the building itself. There are no elements contributing to the property's significance outside the stated boundaries.

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**Commercial Block
Spokane County, WA**

LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS

Photographer: Sally Reynolds

Dates of Photos: 1992

Location of Original Negatives: Historic Preservation Office, Spokane Regional Council

1. Commercial Block primary facade on West First Avenue, view to the north.
2. Commercial Block (right center) and West First Avenue; view to the east.
3. Commercial Block (left center) and West First Avenue; view to the west.
4. Front entrance (closed) and commercial bays on Commercial Block; view to the southeast.
5. Commercial Block, rear elevation; view to the south.
6. Hallway in the Commercial Block.
7. Typical room in Commercial Block showing doors connecting adjacent rooms and sink in adjoining rooms.