

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only

received AUG 9 1984

date entered SEP 7 1984

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Hotel Retlaw

and/or common n.a.

2. Location

street & number 15 E. Division Street

n.a. not for publication

city, town Fond du Lac

n.a. vicinity of

state Wisconsin

code 55

county Fond du Lac

code 039

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> n.a.	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: vacant

4. Owner of Property

name Fond du Lac Investors, Ltd. c/o Mr. Don Staley, The Staley Companies

street & number 305 Concorde Place

city, town Burnsville

n.a. vicinity of

state MN 55337

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Fond du Lac County Courthouse

street & number 160 S. Macy Street

city, town Fond du Lac

state WI 54935

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

Wisconsin Inventory of Historic Places

title has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1984 federal state county local

depository for survey records State Historical Society of Wisconsin

city, town Madison

state WI 53706

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input 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 Hotel Retlaw, Fond du Lac's leading hotel, has been a prominent commercial and visual landmark in downtown Fond du Lac since it was built in 1922. The Retlaw is a large eight-story, 235 room building whose site occupies the whole of the south end of the block bounded by North Main, East Division and North Portland Streets. Main Street is the principal commercial thoroughfare of Fond du Lac and The Retlaw, long one of the tallest buildings in the city, visually dominates the area surrounding it which is predominantly composed of one- to three-story commercial buildings dating from the 1880's - 1940's.

The Retlaw is constructed throughout of reinforced concrete, utilizing a steel load-bearing frame with brick and tile curtain walls and tile interior partitioning walls. The original section of the building, constructed in 1922, has its principal facades on N. Main and E. Division Streets and is rectilinear in plan. The ordering of the facades is classical in composition, having a two-story base, a five-story midsection, and a one-story terminal section with a parapet above. Newspaper accounts written at the opening of the hotel refer to the building as done "in the English Style"¹ in reference to the origin of some of the decorative elements of the design. Both of the major facades use the same design vocabulary and differ only in the manner in which this vocabulary is applied to facades of greatly differing length. The base of the Main Street (west) facade has four two-story bays faced in Bedford limestone with engaged, flat pilasters separating each bay vertically. The two center bays project slightly from the rest of the facade and are part of a shallow pavilion which rises the full height of the building. The ground floor of each bay originally had a large rectilinear plate glass window lighting the principal rooms of the ground story. These windows are currently partially blocked with wood paneling. Above each window are three stone inset panels and above these, forming the second story of the building, are three triangular arched, six-over-six light windows surmounted by a heavy cornice. The second of the four ground floor bays contains the entrance door of this facade. A stainless steel canopy of later date projects out over the entrance and replaces the original steel and copper canopy. The five-story midsection of the facade, six windows across, is faced in a plain red-brown brick. The four center windows are grouped together in the center of the shallow projecting pavilion. The lintel of each of the double-hung windows is of limestone as are the surrounds which are laid in an in-and-out bond which forms continuous vertical bands rising the full height of the midsection. The terminal one-story section above is demarcated by a heavy stone beltcourse above and below the windows which are decorated in a similar manner to those in the midsection. Above this section and terminating the facade is a high brick parapet with a simple stone cap.

The Division Street (south) facade is treated in a similar manner. The two-story base of this facade has eight bays with each bay originally having a large rectilinear ground floor window with smaller rectilinear sidelights. Above each of these three window groups are four inset stone panels and above these are four triangular-arched, six-over-six light windows. The third through fifth of these bays projects outward slightly forming a shallow pavilion which rises the height of the building. The center of these three bays forms the Division Street entrance of the hotel, originally surmounted by a steel and copper canopy which has since been removed. The five-story midsection is sixteen windows wide and is treated in a manner identical to the Main

(continued)

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 type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input checked="" 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		

1922-23 (construction),¹ 1927 (addition)²

Specific dates 1926-1934 (period of **Builder/Architect** /Herbert W. Tullgren³)

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Hotel Retlaw, which is significant locally in the areas of architecture and commerce, is one of the most important commercial buildings built in Fond du Lac in the 1920's. The Hotel Retlaw was the second hotel building built by Walter Schroeder (Retlaw is Walter spelled backwards), a prominent Milwaukee hotel magnate and insurance agency executive whose Schroeder Hotel Co. chain was one of the largest such chains in Wisconsin in the 1920's. The architect of the hotel was Herbert W. Tullgren, a Milwaukee designer who was a widely known architect in Wisconsin and who acted as the principal architect for the Schroeder chain. From the day of its opening until the 1970s, the Hotel Retlaw was the only first-class hotel in Fond du Lac, continually playing a prominent part in Fond du Lac's social and commercial life.⁴

Architecture

The Hotel Retlaw was built in 1922-1923 (with an addition in 1927) by Walter Schroeder (1878-1967), a Milwaukee native who had inherited his father's successful insurance, mortgage loan and bond business in 1897. In 1912 Schroeder sold \$800,000 in bonds for the new Wisconsin Hotel Building in Milwaukee. However, the management of the hotel failed to make it pay and in 1914 Schroeder took over the active management of the hotel himself as trustee for the bondholders. Within a few years Schroeder had not only taken the hotel out of debt but, had made it into a prosperous enterprise as well and in the doing found that "he liked the hotel business."⁵ In the next ten years he built the Hotel Astor in Milwaukee (1918-1920, 1925), the Hotel Retlaw in Fond du Lac (1922-1923, 1927), the Hotel Northland in Green Bay (1923), the Hotel Wausau in Wausau (1923), the Hotel Loraine in Madison (1924), the Hotel Duluth, Duluth, Minnesota (1924), and the Hotel Schroeder in Milwaukee (1926-1928).

Schroeder's principal architect was Herbert W. Tullgren (1889-1944), "one of the most widely known architects in Wisconsin."⁶ Tullgren, a native of Chicago, moved to Milwaukee in 1904 with his father Martin, an architect, and his brother Minard, a builder. Tullgren practiced with his father from 1910 until the latter's death in 1922 and continued the firm until his own death in 1944, having changed the name of the firm to that of his own in 1934. Tullgren was best known as an architect of hotels and apartment buildings, having designed some fifty apartment buildings throughout the state. He became the principal architect for the Schroeder Hotels, starting with his design for the Hotel Astor in 1918. His later work for Schroeder included the Hotel Retlaw, the Hotel Northland in Green Bay and the Hotel Loraine in Madison. He also designed the Shorecrest Hotel in Milwaukee and the Manitowoc Hotel in Manitowoc for others.

The relatively unaltered exterior of the Hotel Retlaw is a fine example of the restrained neo-classical revival style which Tullgren employed as the basis for all his work for the Schroeder chain. The significance of the building is greatly strengthened by the retention of much of Tullgren's excellent neo-classical revival interiors that he devised for the principal public rooms of the hotel including the lobbies on the first floor and the Ballroom, Civic Room, and several smaller meeting

9. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation Sheet

10. Geographical Data

Acreege of nominated property less than one

Quadrangle name Fond du Lac, Wisconsin

Quadrangle scale 1:62,500

UTM References

A

1	6	3	8	4	6	1	0	4	8	4	8	1	5	0
Zone	Easting			Northing										

B

Zone	Easting			Northing										

C

Zone	Easting			Northing										

D

Zone	Easting			Northing										

E

Zone	Easting			Northing										

F

Zone	Easting			Northing										

G

Zone	Easting			Northing										

H

Zone	Easting			Northing										

Verbal boundary description and justification

The boundaries of the nominated property coincide with the outside walls of the building which are approximately W $\frac{1}{2}$ of Lots 10, 11, and 12 and all of 13 and the S 20' of Lot 14, Block 3, Van Renselaer's Addition.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state code county code

state code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Timothy F. Heggland and Katherine H. Rankin, private consultants, for

organization Fond du Lac Investors, Ltd.

date May 15, 1984

street & number 1109 Sherman Avenue

telephone (608) 256-2905

city or town Madison

state Wisconsin 53703

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state 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 *Jeff Dean*

title Director, Historic Preservation Division

date *AUG-1, 1984*

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

J. A. Moore
Keeper of the National Register

Entered in the National Register

date *9-7-84*

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

Hotel Retlaw, Fond du Lac, Fond du Lac County, Wisconsin
Continuation sheet

Item number 7

Page 1

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Street facade except that the limestone ornament is limited to the second, third, sixth, seventh, eighth, twelfth and fourteenth windows.

The newer, 1923 addition facing east on Portland Street was built at a right-angle to the original building and was originally designed with the first three floors to be used as apartments and the next five floors as hotel rooms. The manner of construction of this addition was identical to that of the original except that there was no limestone trim used other than for the window lintels. This was identical to the treatment of the north and east facades of the original building. The new addition had its own entrance facing on Portland Street and the facades of the whole addition were of red-brown brick matching the original.

The space formed by the intersection of the two wings was filled in 1927 by the erection of a flat-roofed, two-story coffee-shop addition. This addition, also designed by Tullgren, was consciously different in appearance from the earlier building, having a two-bay, two-story facade facing on Division Street. Each bay is separated by flat, limestone pilasters having an inset panel faced in red-brown brick. The first floor of each bay has three six-over-six light rectilinear windows with an inset panel below each window filled with red-brown brick laid in a basket weave bond. The window surrounds and window heads are all of dark painted wood, imitating half-timber work, and there is a large panel above each three-window group filled with half-timber work. The second floor of each bay contains one smaller rectilinear window with sidelights. The whole of the second story then terminates in a heavy stone cornice with a brick parapet above.

The interior of the Hotel Retlaw features several public spaces that are nearly intact from the date of construction. The main lobby is accessed by the doorway on Division Street. Although it was redecorated recently as the barroom for a short-lived restaurant, the columns with simple neo-classical moldings, the false beams on the ceiling and the original wrought iron railing on the balcony remain intact. A grand staircase was removed but will be restored in the proposed rehabilitation. North of the main lobby is a smaller elevator lobby. The painted walls are trimmed in wood molding strips in a geometric Art Deco pattern. A fancy brass letter box emblazoned with an American eagle remains between the two non-descript elevator doors of a later date. The floor of the elevator lobby is the original mosaic tile. The room across the front of the building has been altered several times and retains no significant features. The large dining room in the rear of the first floor also has been changed several times. The only interesting original features remaining in the dining room are wooden doors with glass windows etched in a frosted floral design with a large "R" in the center.

On the second floor skylights of stained glass with heraldic shields light the balcony area. A wide hall leading toward the ballroom and civic room has grouped pilasters, waist-high wainscotting with molded wood panels above and heavy molded beams, all of painted wood. A garlanded frieze and delicate beaded garlands and medallions on the ceiling are of plaster. Small chandeliers in each bay glisten with many crystal pendants in three tiers. The civic room at the southeast corner of the second floor is elegantly trimmed in simple neo-classical applied pilasters and beams. Hanging crystal

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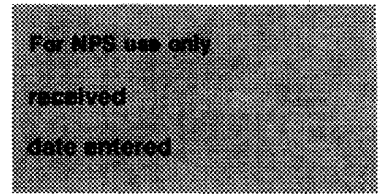
**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

Hotel Retlaw, Fond du Lac, Fond du Lac County, Wisconsin
Continuation sheet

Item number 7

Page 2



chandeliers in this room are a recent addition. Roman Ionic columns mark the entrance to the grand ballroom at the northeast corner of the second floor. The floor of the ballroom is oak. Walls are divided into panels between vertical wood moldings and doubled pilasters with garlanded Ionic capitals. Waist-high wainscotting is pierced regularly with large brass heating grills featuring delicate urn designs. A thin modillioned cornice borders the acoustical tile ceiling which hides the original decorative plaster ceiling above it. Iron wall sconces are delicately wrought in a curvilinear Art Deco design. The huge hanging ceiling chandeliers are fancifully Art Deco in design with hanging garlands of glass beads, tiers of electric candles and a glass bead dome with stained glass trim. The colorful chandeliers provide a romantic movie palace aura to the basically neo-classical room. All woodwork in the main hall and ballroom is painted in the original pastel colors with details picked out in gilt, and will be restored in the proposed rehabilitation.

The hotel rooms are exceedingly simple with painted wood trim. Each room has a bathroom. Most of the bathrooms are still decorated with the original white hexagonal tile floors, white ceramic tile wainscotting, pedestal sinks and porcelain "hot" and "cold" knobs for the tubs.

¹The Daily Commonwealth, March 2, 1923.

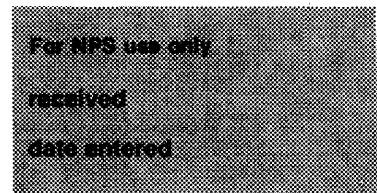
**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

Hotel Retlaw, Fond du Lac, Fond du Lac County, Wisconsin
Continuation sheet

Item number 8

Page 1



rooms on the second floor. The Hotel Retlaw was also "the first all-steel frame building" built in Fond du Lac and at 235 rooms was more than twice as large as its nearest competitor.

Commerce

In 1922 the city of Fond du Lac was experiencing a steady growth in population from 18,797 in 1910 to nearly 24,000 in 1924⁸ and was the center of a booming manufacturing area whose growth in the value of manufactured articles (greatly accelerated by WWI) had jumped from \$6,761,000 in 1914 to \$21,325,094 in 1923.⁹ Fond du Lac, being at the confluence of U.S. Highways 41 and 151 and State Highways 23 and 55 as well as The Chicago and Northwestern, Soo Line and Milwaukee Road railroads, proudly called itself "The Gateway to the Fox River Valley." However, this expansion in trade and population had yet to be matched by significant improvements in Fond du Lac's retail and institutional buildings and a growing need was becoming felt for more modern institutions reflecting Fond du Lac's growth and aspirations. Thus, when Schroeder made his plans for the Hotel Retlaw known in 1922 he gave form to a popular sentiment in Fond du Lac. A local businessman speaking in the Daily Commonwealth just prior to the opening of the Retlaw was probably speaking for many: "When you consider that Mr. Schroeder came here and invested over half-a-million dollars and did not ask a cent from Fond du Lac people, it is obvious that he has displayed a very fine spirit and has expressed in a big way his faith in the growth and prosperity of Fond du Lac."¹⁰ When the Retlaw was formally opened on March 2, 1923, the Daily Commonwealth devoted a special section of that day's paper to the "palatial new Retlaw" and called the occasion "...Epoch Making in City". Article after article extolled the virtues of the new building and detailed its equipment and vital statistics. An editorial in this section also pointed out the importance of the impression such a building would make on visitors to the city and also noted that the Retlaw would employ 90-115 people, which even in 1927 would have made the Hotel the fifteenth largest industry in Fond du Lac.

The creation of the Hotel Retlaw sounded the death knell for the aging Palmer House Hotel (1884-1924) which had been its predecessor as Fond du Lac's leading first-class hotel. The local owners of the Palmer House had had plans for a new eight-story building to replace the old building but the plans were dropped when it became clear the Retlaw would be built and the Palmer House was subsequently demolished in 1924. At the same time the immediate success of the Retlaw prompted Schroeder to announce a new eight-story addition to the building in April, 1923. Plans included both apartments and new hotel rooms.

From 1923 to the 1970's the Retlaw maintained its position as Fond du Lac's leading hotel. Such national figures as John F. Kennedy, Hubert Humphrey, and Eleanor Roosevelt as well as many leading Wisconsin politicians were all entertained in the Retlaw's ballroom. In 1950 Schroeder sold the Retlaw to Nick Frank who changed the name to the Retlaw Motor Inn and who later sold the building to the Lynn Family, the current owners. Plans of the Lynn Family to turn the building into apartments for the elderly fell through and although more than \$1,500,000 was spent renovating the dining rooms and kitchen, the hotel is currently vacant pending discussions with the Sheraton Hotel chain to acquire the building for hotel purposes.

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

Hotel Retlaw, Fond du Lac, Fond du Lac County, Wisconsin
Continuation sheet

Item number 8

Page 2

For NPS use only

received

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¹The Daily Commonwealth, March 2, 1923.

²Sanborn-Perris Co. Fire Insurance Map, 1927 (revised 1940, 1942).

³The Daily Commonwealth, March 2, 1923.

⁴Other hotels in Fond du Lac in 1924 according to the 1924 Fond du Lac City Directory were:

Central Hotel, 251 Forest Avenue (extant)

Commercial Hotel, 68-70 N. Main Street (demolished)

Cottage Inn, 51 N. Main Street (demolished)

Hotel Calumet, 170 Forest Avenue (extant)

Hotel Erving, 162-8 E. Main Street (demolished)

McGrath Hotel, 35 4th Street (demolished)

Northwestern Hotel, 180-182 W. Division Street (demolished)

Northwestern Hotel, 177-179 Forest Avenue (extant)

The Palmer House, Main, ne corner of Sheboygan (demolished)

Railroad Center Hotel, 177 W. 2nd Street (extant)

Star Hotel, 151 Forest Avenue (extant)

Sullivan Hotel, 58 4th Street (demolished)

Union Hotel, 221 S. Main Street (demolished)

A study of those hotels from this list shows that these were all much smaller railroad or transient hotels serving a primarily working-class clientele.

⁵Creative Wisconsin, Autumn, 1958.

⁶Obituary for Herbert W. Tullgren, Milwaukee Journal, February 23, 1944.

⁷The Daily Commonwealth, March 2, 1923.

⁸Industrial Survey of Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, Wisconsin Power and Light Co., Madison, Ca. 1927.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰The Daily Commonwealth, February 24, 1923.

9. Major Bibliographical References;

City Directories for the City of Fond du Lac, Wisconsin.

Creative Wisconsin, Autumn, 1958, pp. 32-49.

The Daily Commonwealth, February 6, 1922, February 24, 1923, March 2, 1923, April 13, 1923.

Fond du Lac Commonwealth-Reporter, June 16, 1926.

Industrial Survey of Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, Wisconsin Power and Light Co., Madison, Ca. 1927.

Interview with Wallace Resch, past manager of the Hotel Retlaw, and Katherine Rankin, February, 1984.

Milwaukee Journal, February 23, 1944.

Milwaukee Sentinel, July 19, 1967.

Sanborn-Perris Co. Fire Insurance Map, 1927 (revised 1940, 1942).