

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

received JUL 22 1986  
date entered

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

1. Name

historic The Ritz Apartments

and/or common The Ritz-Ocala Apartments, The Acker-Ritz Apartments

2. Location

street & number 1205 East Silver Springs Boulevard not for publication

city, town Ocala vicinity of

state Florida code 012 county Marion code 083

3. Classification

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

4. Owner of Property

name Clas Ritz of Ocala, Inc.

street & number P. O. Box 1167

city, town Ocala vicinity of state Florida 32678

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Marion County Courthouse, Clerk of the Court

street & number Magnolia Avenue

city, town Ocala state Florida 32678

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title n/a has this property been determined eligible? yes  no

date n/a federal state county local

depository for survey records n/a

city, town state

## 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Ritz Apartments, a prominent Ocala landmark since 1925, are characterized by Mission Revival architecture. Little altered from their original exterior appearance, the four two-story buildings connected by a one-story wing are graced by arched openings, balconies with wrought iron railings, and restrained ornamentation. They were constructed of hollow clay tile covered with rough textured stucco, with segmented tiles covering some portions of the roof. The sixteen original units, somewhat modified in 1941, each had a balcony and a sun porch, a living room with fireplace, spacious dining room, kitchen, two bedrooms, a tile bath, and oak floors.

The Ritz Apartments are located on a 1.2 acre site, twelve blocks east of the center of downtown Ocala, on the north side of Silver Springs Boulevard at the corner of N. E. 12th Avenue. When the apartments were built in 1925, Silver Springs Boulevard, which is now heavily traveled and highly commercialized, was narrow, tree-lined Oklawaha Avenue. The buildings are sited at a 45° angle to the northwest corner of the lot (see site plan) and present a full front view when approached from the west. Mature trees shade the buildings. To the north is a residential neighborhood with modest older homes and large oak trees.

The Ritz Apartments consists of four, two-story buildings with a one-story connecting wing in the center. The buildings are roughly square in shape, with one-story porches extending out from the two front buildings. The overall H-shaped configuration of the arrangement provides spatial interest while retaining a feeling of symmetry and balance.

The buildings' bearing walls are of hollow clay tile, covered with cream colored, rough textured stucco. Arched openings, balconies with wrought iron railings, and tiles set into the exterior walls characterize the Mission Style architecture, an outgrowth of the typical boom era Spanish Style architecture which swept over Florida during this period. Hip-roofed towers with barrel tiles rise above the major flat roof portions of the two front buildings (photos 1 and 2). These buildings and the recessed connecting section of the complex, originally used as a community social area by the tenants, have three arched bays with a curvilinear parapet in the center of each facade. Tiled pent roofs provide some weather protection above the arched openings on either side of the main entrances to the two front buildings. (photo 1). Similar tiled pent roofs with brackets shelter the main entrances to the two rear buildings (photo 7).

A basement with arched windows (used for storage and for boilers for the original Oil-o-Matic heating system) is located beneath each building. End-wall chimneys, arched openings, and balconies add visual interest to the sides of the buildings (photo 4), while the rear facade is undistinguished except for a centered double window with fanlight on the second floor (photo 5).

# 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/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

**Specific dates** 1925 **Builder/Architect** Architect Frederick T. Uezzell

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Ritz Apartments are significant because they introduced a new architectural style to Ocala when they were built in 1925, and because they have retained their boom era Spanish style appearance virtually unchanged through the years. Designed by prominent Ocala architect, Frederick T. Uezzell for Judge Simeon Sistrunk and New York showman Bert Acker, the Ritz Apartments represent the blending of "Old South" Ocala with a more sophisticated and "modern" view of the world. They also provided a successful alternative to the single family home which, for various social and economic reasons, was not widely copied in this conservative central Florida community.

When Judge Simeon Sistrunk and Bert Acker announced on July 31, 1925, that they intended to build a sixteen-unit apartment, it was front page news in the Ocala Banner.<sup>1</sup> In 1925 Marion County, like the rest of Florida, was swept up in the euphoric optimism of the real estate boom. New subdivisions were being planted in former orange groves, there was a strongly expressed need for more housing, and the population was growing.<sup>2</sup> Building permits doubled between 1925 and 1926.<sup>3</sup> Movie stars like Thomas Meighan, in town to make a film, invested in real estate; the local swimming hole, Silver Springs, was widely advertised as a major tourist attraction.<sup>4</sup> And, when Acker and Sistrunk broke ground for their new venture, the mayor and other local dignitaries were on hand for the ceremony.<sup>5</sup>

Bert Leigh Acker, a New Yorker, had come to Ocala with a traveling theatrical company around 1918. A snappy dresser and superb dancer, as well as a professional actor, he married the daughter of one of the most respected members of the Ocala community and one of its largest landowners, Judge Simeon Sistrunk. Acker and Sistrunk formed a real estate company (see Exhibit A) and in the mid-twenties, decided to take advantage of Ocala's urgent need for new housing. Sistrunk provided the funds for the construction project, but it was Acker's flair for the dramatic and the innovative which was responsible for the idea of building a modern apartment complex designed in the Mission Revival style.<sup>6</sup>

Acker was probably responsible for the name also. "Ritz" was synonymous with glamour and sophistication, qualities which Ocalans still associate with him.<sup>7</sup> In addition to the apartments, Acker also established a theater in Ocala. Originally named The Etta, it was later called the Ritz Theater.<sup>8</sup>

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation Sheet

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property less than one.

Quadrangle name Ocala East

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

### UTM References

A 

1	1	7
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 Zone 

3	9	1	3	0	0
---	---	---	---	---	---

 Easting 

3	2	2	9	0	4	6
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

 Northing

B 

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 Zone 

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

 Easting 

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

 Northing

C 

--	--	--

 Zone 

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

 Easting 

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 Northing

D 

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 Zone 

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 Easting 

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 Northing

E 

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 Zone 

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 Easting 

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 Northing

F 

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 Zone 

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 Easting 

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 Northing

G 

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 Zone 

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 Easting 

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 Northing

H 

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 Zone 

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 Easting 

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 Northing

Verbal boundary description and justification Lots 5, 15, 16, 17, and 18 of Villa Park, being a subdivision of Block 64 of Caldwell's addition to the City of Ocala, Florida, as per plat records in Plat Book B, Page 200 of the Public Records of Marion County, Florida.

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

state	code	county	code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Ms. Murray D. Laurie, Diana Primelles

organization For Bureau of Historic Preservation date June 17, 1986

street & number The Capitol telephone (904) 487-2333

city or town Tallahassee state Florida 32301

# 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 *George W. King*

title State Historic Preservation Officer date 7/15/86

### For NPS use only

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

Entered in the National Register date 8-21-86

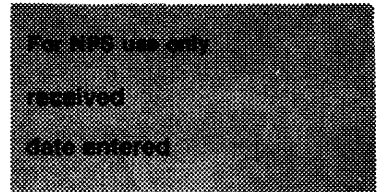
*for Melores Bryan*  
Keeper of the National Register

Attest: \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_

Chief of Registration

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The Ritz Apartments were at one time covered with vines (see old Photograph). These have been removed, revealing the original stucco surface. Aluminum awnings have replaced the original canvas awnings over the entrances and porches. The green roof tiles have been painted brown as have the square tiles set into the exterior walls as decoration. The open parking structure which extends along the north and east lines of the property is badly deteriorated and adds nothing to the appearance of the complex.

The original plan of each building floor had two identical five-room and bath apartments, advertised as having cost \$10,000 each.<sup>1</sup> Each of the sixteen units had a fireplace with brick surround, a private balcony, and a private sun porch (photos 8 and 9). The bathrooms had tile floors; oak floors were used in the other rooms. The walls are plastered. Wooden casement and six-over-one double hung windows and French doors to the balconies and sun porches admit a generous amount of air and light. Each of the kitchens had a pass-through cupboard to the adjacent dining room which has in each case been blocked up, making the kitchen darker than originally intended. In some of the apartments original lighting, kitchen and bathroom fixtures are still in place.

In 1941, three of the apartments were subdivided into six smaller units and the community room converted into two efficiency apartments in response to the demand for additional housing during World War II (see Exhibit B). The loss of the social area deprived the tenants of one of the most attractive and unusual features of the Ritz Apartments.

The grounds of the Ritz Apartments are tree-shaded, with several courtyard areas defined by low walls. Although formal landscaping has been neglected in recent years, the area surrounding the building appears to be well maintained. The lot slopes down from the street and then rises again in the rear. The son of the builder, Mr. Bert Acker, Jr., said that his father had to fill in a swamp before building on the lot.<sup>2</sup>

NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Brochure advertising Ritz-Ocala Apartments, ca. 1929.

<sup>2</sup> Bert Acker, Jr., interview with M. D. Laurie, February 24, 1986.

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The architect for the Ritz Apartments, Frederick T. Uezzell, who had just been licensed to practice in Florida, chose the most popular architectural style of the time, one that was new to Ocala.<sup>9</sup> Introduced to the state by trendsetters like Addison Mizner in Palm Beach,<sup>10</sup> this Spanish influenced Mission Revival style with its use of barrel tile roofs, arches and balconies, and stucco walls must have seemed exotic to a town whose buildings reflected the more traditional wood and brick of the familiar southern vernacular forms which can still be seen today in Ocala's Fort King Historic District.<sup>11</sup> But this was to become one of Uezzell's favorite styles. He used it in other residential and public buildings that he designed in the area.<sup>12</sup>

Ray and Thompson, an established local firm which had also built the new high school, were the contractors.<sup>13</sup> Carl Ray figured prominently in the development of Silver Springs with another partner, W. M. "Shorty" Davidson.<sup>14</sup> M. R. Porter, who was also involved with developing the tourist attraction and real estate in its vicinity, purchased the Ritz Apartments from Acker and Sistrunk in 1927.<sup>15</sup>

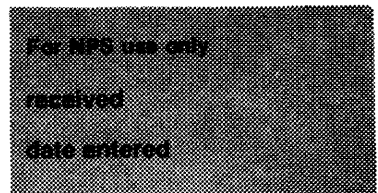
Many prominent Ocalans have lived in the Ritz Apartments; it was considered to be a "good" address, and "quality" people resided there. Some of the tenants were Charles B. Watts, newspaper editor; John Marshall Green, Attorney and Mayor of Ocala from 1946 to 1949; Rosa Melton, mother of James Melton, the singer; Colonel Tooley, glass-bottom boat concessionier at Silver Springs for many years, and Joseph Rheinaur, owner of a local department store.<sup>16</sup> Details mentioned in the 1929 brochure were appreciated by the tenants--janitorial service, a full-time caretaker, the luxury of steam heat, balconies and screened sun porches, electric refrigerators, covered parking.<sup>17</sup> Even the finest homes in Ocala lacked many of these up-to-date features in the twenties.

Another important social aspect of the Ritz Apartments was the large (20' by 40'), centrally located community room, accessible to all four buildings or from front and rear entrances. Parties, receptions, dances, and other festive events were held here, and possibly occasional performances by Mr. and Mrs. Acker, who often acted together in local theatrical productions.<sup>18</sup> In 1941 this area was converted into two smaller apartments, and three of the apartments were modified to provide six more small units (see Exhibit B).

If the real estate boom which stimulated the growth of Ocala in 1925 and 1926 had lasted, more apartments on the scale of the Ritz might have been built and more Ocala residents might have turned to this type of housing. But the growth of the city slowed as the promise of riches from real estate faded;<sup>19</sup> many who had taken an active role in the boom, including Bert Acker, left the area.<sup>20</sup>

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During the depression, Federal Work Projects and CCC camps replaced land speculation, and when better times came in the 1940's, many older structures like the Ritz Apartments were remodeled and "modernized."<sup>1</sup>

Although the Ritz was also modified in the 1940's by dividing some of the two-bedroom apartments into one-bedroom units and by converting the social hall into two apartments to provide extra housing during the 1940's when many servicemen stationed in the area and their families needed accommodations, the exterior appearance was not changed or "streamlined." It remained a respectable address and only began to decline as traffic and commercialization increased on Silver Springs Boulevard, the main road tourists take to reach the popular attraction. It serves as a readily recognizable landmark, and if restored, would once more live up to its original status as one of Ocala's "Most Beautiful Buildings."<sup>2</sup>

NOTES

1 "Mr. Bert Leigh Acker to Build an Apartment House," Ocala Banner, July 31, 1925, p. 1.

2 Eloise Robinson Ott and Louis Hickman Chazel, Ocali Country, Kingdom of the Sun: A History of Marion County, Florida (Ocala, 1966), 186-87.

3 An Industrial Survey of Ocala and Marion County, Florida, (Ocala, 1928), 26, 45. Building permits in 1925 totaled \$752,000, in 1926 they increased to \$1,331,000, but dropped to \$553,000 in 1927.

4 Ott and Chazel, Ocali Country, 187.

5 Both newspapers reported the event. "Ocala's Ritz Apartments," Ocala Evening Star, August 25, 1925, p. 1; "The Past Week Biggest in History of Ocala," Ocala Banner, August 28, 1925, p. 1.

6 Bert Acker, Jr., interview with M. D. Laurie, February 24, 1986.

7 Walter Berman (grandson of Carl Ray and former owner of property), interview with M. D. Laurie, February 19, 1986; Frances DeVore (Marion County historian), interview with M. D. Laurie, February 16, 1986.

8 "Doors of Etta Theater Will Open to Public Tonight," Ocala Evening Star, March 2, 1928, p. 1. The Etta featured a \$20,000 Wurlitzer pipe organ and other technical innovations. It opened with a gala vaudeville program and the first featured movie was Al Jolsen's "The Jazz Singer."

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9 Florida State Board of Architects, Records. Uezzell was licensed on June 13, 1925 (#421), and practiced in Ocala until his death in 1933. Records indicate that he came to Florida from Philadelphia. He was associated with the architectural firm of George McKay in Ocala until he established his own practice. See ad in Ocala Evening Star, June 21, 1924.

10 Donald W. Curl, Mizner's Florida: American Resort Architecture (Cambridge, Mass., 1984).

11 Withalacoochee Regional Planning Council, Historical and Architectural Survey of Marion County, Florida, (Ocala, 1981), 22-23.

12 "Frederick Uezzell Busy Designing Modern Structures for Ocala and Surrounding Territory," Ocala Evening Star, October 1, 1925. Uezzell also designed a smaller apartment house and a number of other larger and small Ocala residences in the Spanish style. In 1929 he designed a 1500-seat convention hall, to be built of "wood and stucco." Ocala Banner, January 11, 1929, p. 1. See also "Ocala's Building Boom Covering Big Territory," Ocala Banner, October 16, 1925, p. 1.

13 "The Past Week Biggest in History of Ocala," Ocala Banner, August 28, 1925, p. 1.

14 Ott and Chazel, Ocali Country, 186.

15 Ibid., 189-90. Marion County Courthouse, Clerk of the Court, Deed Book 206, p. 320.

16 Mrs. Laurie Davis (former tenant), interview with M. D. Laurie, February 26, 1986; Mrs. Margie Karow, interview with M. D. Laurie, February 17, 1986; Bernard Watts (former tenant and editor of the Ocala Star Banner), interview with M. D. Laurie, February 19, 1986; Walter Berman, interview with M. D. Laurie, February 19, 1986.

17 Brochure for Ritz-Ocala Apartments, ca. 1929. This brochure also extolls the economical aspects of apartment living, and the "freedom from the continuous grind for the woman."

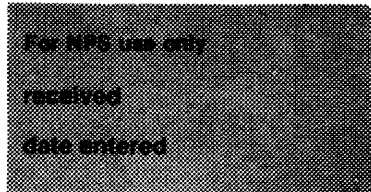
18 Social Notes, Ocala Evening Star, December 13, 1927; December 18, 1928.

19 Ott and Chazel, Ocali-Country, 190-91.



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20 Bert Acker, Jr., interview with M. D. Laurie, February 24, 1986. Bert Acker, Sr., moved to Dade County some time in the 1930's and became active in the Republican Party. He ran for Congress several times and was the Republican candidate for Governor in 1944 and 1948. His obituary indicates that he was known for his showman's style and for the jaunty angle of his trademark straw hat. No evidence has been found which indicates that Acker was active politically when he lived in Ocala. See obituary in Miami Herald, March 8, 1960, p. 8C; Social Note, Ocala Banner, February 31, 1930, p. 7.

21 Ott and Chazel, Ocali Country, 191, 201.

22 Brochure, Ritz-Ocala Apartments, ca. 1929.

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Marion County Chamber of Commerce, 1928.

Ott, Eloise Robinson and Louis Hickman Chazel. Ocali Country, Kingdom  
of the Sun: A History of Marion County, Florida. Ocala: Marion  
Publishers, Inc., 1966.

Ritz Ocala Brochure, ca. 1929.

Withalacoochee Regional Planning Council. Historical and Architectural  
Survey of Marion County, Florida. Ocala: WRPC, 1981.

Newspapers

Miami Herald, March 8, 1960.

Ocala Banner, July 31, August 28, and October 16, 1925; January 11,  
1929; February 31, 1930.

Ocala Evening Star, June 21, 1924; August 25, and October 1, 1925;  
December 13, 1927; December 18, 1928.

Public Records

Florida Board of Architects, Records, Tallahassee.

Marion County Courthouse, Office of the Clerk of Courts, Deed Book 206,  
p. 320.

Interviews

Acker, Bert, Jr., by M. D. Laurie. Interview by phone, February 24,  
1986.

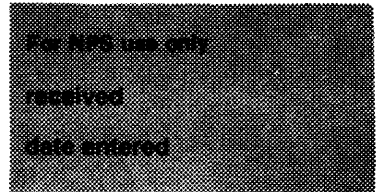
Berman, Walter, by M. D. Laurie. Interview by phone, February 19, 1986.

Davis, Mrs. Laurie, by M. D. Laurie. Interview by phone, February 26,  
1986.

DeVore, Mrs. Frances, by M. D. Laurie. Interview by phone, February 16,  
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Karow, Mrs. Margie, by M. D. Laurie. Interview by phone, February 17, 1986.

Watts, Bernard, by M. D. Laurie. Interview by phone, February 19, 1986.