

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only  
received OCT 2 1984  
date entered NOV 1 1984

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

1. Name

historic Alexander Hotel

and/or common N/A

2. Location

street & number 535 Central Avenue N/A not for publication

city, town St. Petersburg N/A vicinity of

state Florida code 012 county Pinellas code 103

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 type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
	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 Alexander Restoration, LTD

street & number 200 1st Avenue, Suite #200

city, town St. Petersburg N/A vicinity of state Florida

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Pinellas County Courthouse

street & number 315 Court Street

city, town Clearwater state Florida

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

City of St. Petersburg Historical  
title Building Survey

has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1977  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records St. Petersburg City Hall

city, town St. Petersburg state Florida

# 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" 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 Alexander Hotel at 535 Central Avenue in downtown St. Petersburg, Florida is a 4-story buff colored brick and concrete structure occupying an 80' x 100' site between 5th and 6th streets. Having a modified H-plan, the hotel has 75 guest rooms, each with its own bath, on the three upper floors. The ground floor is divided into four main sections: a hotel lobby and three store units. The most distinctive feature of the building is the three-tiered veranda on each of the two main wings of the hotel overlooking Central Avenue. Marked by a strong Classical Revival influence and decorated with intricate bas-relief details, these verandas or galleries provide a striking contrast to the plain treatment of the brickwork and cubic volume of the structure behind them. A refined "classicism" also distinguishes the entranceway to the hotel lobby, with rusticated pilasters framing arches which carry a broken pediment.

The main (south) street facade consists basically of nine bays--though the original scheme was upset somewhat with the addition of another doorway when the former cafeteria on the west was divided into two store units. Decorative architectural detail has been restricted to the Central Avenue facade since the building lies in the center of the block and the side elevations are only partly visible because of a 1-story masonry building adjoining the hotel on the east and a 2-story building adjoining it on the west. A narrow alley runs past the rear of the hotel through the center of the block to the west.

The three upper stories are divided into three major sections: the two "wings" or pavilions which flank the light well or "inner court." The central "recessed" section is divided into five bays containing 9/1 double hung wood sash windows. These vary in size, the center windows being the widest, the windows flanking these the narrowest, and the outermost windows of average proportions. Another element unifying the three sections is the 5-bay pergola on the second story. The facade walls of the wings have been divided into four bays with two inner 9/1 windows flanked by doorways leading onto the verandas on each floor. The verandas themselves are divided into three bays separated by paired Tuscan columns. The hotel has a flat built-up roof, but the parapet and tall cornice on the facade also serves the interest of visual and stylistic unity.

The main entrance to the hotel is marked by a "classical" frontispiece consisting of an arched doorway flanked by arched windows of equal height. Each of the arches contains a fanlight. Four rusticated pilasters support an entablature topped by a broken pediment with an urn finial in the center. The shop units are simply treated, but are tied to the center of the facade by the entablature supported by four modillions which separates the ground floor from those above. The rather narrow cornice at the top of the entablature is decorated with an anthemion motif.

The Tuscan columns of the pergola on the second floor are made of cast concrete, as are the lintels. The front of the lintel nearest the street has been decorated with an interlace pattern, as have the lintels supported by the paired Tuscan columns on the verandas on the second and third stories. The columns on the verandas are superimposed on one another, and each pair supports an impost block as well as the lintel or cornice above it. At the front corners of the verandas are colossal piers which anchor the verandas on all three upper stories. On the inner surface of each pier, on each of the verandas, is a shallow pilaster of Tuscan order. The columns of the uppermost veranda, along with the piers, support a tall cornice with a wide soffit and brackets separated by bas-relief bull's eyes and lozenges. Each of the verandas is floored with red tile and has a cast or wrought iron railing whose playful intricacy is reminiscent of Art Nouveau.

(See Continuation Sheet)

# 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 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		

**Specific dates** 1919 **Builder/Architect** A. Neel Reid (Atlanta)  
B. A.H. Carson (St. Petersburg)

## Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Alexander Hotel, erected in 1919, is significant as one of the first "modern" hotels built in St. Petersburg during the Florida real estate and tourist boom following World War I and for having been designed by Neel Reid, one of the best exponents of eclectic and revival architecture in the South during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Notable for its novel and lively use of classical forms on its three-tiered gallery on the street facade, this modest sized hotel heralded St. Petersburg's transition from a small village to one of the most important resort communities on Florida's Gulf coast and has remained one of the best preserved landmarks in downtown St. Petersburg linking the city with one of its dynamic periods in the past. This building satisfies Criterion B for its association with Neel Reid and Criterion C for its design and details.

St. Petersburg is located on the west coast of Central Florida in Pinellas County, a narrow peninsula separating the Gulf of Mexico from Tampa Bay. The downtown overlooks the bay and is connected to the City of Tampa to the east and Sarasota and Bradenton to the south by bridges across the bay. The 1980 census lists the population of the city as 216,232 and the Tampa Bay area as 1,012,594.

Although the Spanish knew of the existence of the Pinellas peninsula as early as the sixteenth century, extensive settlement came only in the late 19th century. A decade after Florida was ceded to the United States by Spain in 1821 only a few itinerant fishermen appear to have taken up residence, and even by 1845, when Florida became a state, few attempts had been made at homesteading.<sup>1</sup> The first post office was founded at Clearwater in 1859 but the coming of the Civil War was a setback for the region, and at the war's end in 1865 only one settler was living on the lower peninsula--one man in an area of some 80 square miles.<sup>2</sup>

The beginning of St. Petersburg came in 1875 when "General" John Constantine Williams (the title was honorary) purchased 1,700 acres of land in what is now St. Petersburg. Williams settled in Tampa--itself no more than a village at the time--and began to develop plans for constructing a railroad between Sanford, Florida, and the tip of the Pinellas peninsula. His railroad was never constructed, but a settlement was established overlooking Tampa Bay, and Williams eventually moved there in 1891.<sup>3</sup> The building of the railroad, however, was left to the man who was to give St. Petersburg its name, Peter A. Demens.

Demens was born Piotr Alexewitch Dementief in Russia but changed his name upon coming to America in 1880. Arriving in Florida, he organized a lumber company under the name of Demens, McCain & Cotter and built a sawmill at Longwood, about 10 miles south of Sanford. Demens bought out his partners in 1883, and after exhausting the timber supply around Longwood decided to get into the railroad business.<sup>4</sup> In 1885 he acquired the charter for the Orange Belt Railroad and set about constructing a narrow guage line between Sanford and the as yet unnamed community on the Pinellas peninsula. Despite constant financial setbacks, the line was completed and the first locomotive steamed into the newly named St. Petersburg on April 30, 1888.<sup>5</sup> The railroad, however, failed to make money and on August 12, 1893 was taken over by the Sanford and St. Petersburg Railroad Company owned

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

(See Continuation Sheet)

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property Less than 1

Quadrangle name St. Petersburg

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

### UTM References

A 

1	7	3	3	8	2	9	0	3	0	7	2	7	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

All of lots 15 and 16 in block 28, Revised platt of St. Petersburg. These lots contain all significant features associated with the property on which the Alexander Hotel is located.

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

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Carl Shiver/Larry S. Paarlberg, Historic Sites Specialist

organization Florida Division of Archives date September 18, 1984

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

city or town Tallahassee state Florida

# 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. Percy*

title George W. Percy, State Historic Preservation Officer date 9/25/84

### For NPS use only

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

*f. Alton Byers*  
Keeper of the National Register

Entered in the  
National Register

date 11-1-84

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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The interior of the hotel has few distinctive features except in the lobby where one finds a high and intricately decorated cornice between the wall and ceiling and along two beams supported by square piers. All but a portion of this detail was masked by a suspended ceiling at the writing of this nomination, but this element will be restored during renovation of the building. Another decorative element found in the lobby--and a curious one considering the "classicism" of the rest of the stylistic program--is the Tudor arched mantelpiece found on the west wall of the lobby. The large double doorway which originally led from the lobby to the cafeteria also features a high entablature with a strongly projecting cornice. The stairs from the lobby to the second floor have molded wood railings and spindle balusters.

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by Henry Bradley Plant who had completed the line linking Tampa with Jacksonville in 1883. In 1897 the line was changed from narrow to standard gauge.<sup>6</sup>

The citizens of St. Petersburg voted to incorporate as a town on February 29, 1892, and in 1903 the charter was amended to make it a city.<sup>7</sup> Growth after the beginning of the new century was rapid. The population stood at 273 in 1890, but by 1910 it had grown to 4,100.<sup>8</sup> The big boost, however, came with the end of World War I when the attraction of "tropical" Florida began to work its spell on northern tourists. The railroad made St. Petersburg perhaps the most readily accessible resort on the west coast of Florida and had the advantage of not only a mild winter climate but also the double attraction of Tampa Bay and the nearby Gulf beaches. The demand for hotel facilities quickly outstripped local capacity, and the few hotels available in downtown St. Petersburg in 1919 were, for the most part, little more than rooming houses lacking modern facilities, such as private baths, central heating, telephones, elevators, or restaurants.<sup>9</sup>

One person determined to take advantage of the growing demand for better accommodations was Robert Ely, the owner of Bob's Cafeteria, reported by the St. Petersburg Times to be the first cafeteria style restaurant in the city. Robert Lee Ely was born in Chattanooga, Tennessee, on July 4, 1880 and had worked for the Southern Express Company before coming to St. Petersburg in 1915.<sup>10</sup> In order to finance his hotel scheme, he enlisted the backing of Jacob F. Alexander, a lumberman from Forest City, North Carolina, who had begun wintering in St. Petersburg in 1911. Jacob Alexander, along with his brother Abel, had acquired lumbering interests across the Southeast with sawmills in North Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama. Both men were active in politics, with Jacob serving in the House of Representative in his native North Carolina from 1898 to 1900 and in the senate from 1915 to 1917.<sup>11</sup> Abel served in the Georgia senate from 1931 to 1933 and spent the last years of his life in Columbus, Georgia, where he died in 1940.<sup>12</sup> Shortly after coming to St. Petersburg Jacob Alexander began to acquire property in the area and about 1922 established a permanent home in the city.<sup>13</sup> Not only did he put up the money for the construction of the Alexander Hotel--which he then turned over to Ely on a ten year lease--he also founded the Alexander National Bank in St. Petersburg in 1924. Jacob Alexander died in 1925 and the bank bearing his name was absorbed by the First National Bank of St. Petersburg in 1927.<sup>14</sup>

On April 18, 1919 Jacob Alexander acquired lots 15 and 16 of block 28 in downtown St. Petersburg on which to build his new hotel.<sup>15</sup> To design the structure he acquired the services of Atlanta architect Neel Reid, who was to design the Alexander National Bank for him five years later.<sup>16</sup> Reid was born in Alabama in 1885 but moved with his family to Macon, Georgia, in 1903. After graduating from high school he was apprenticed to Atlanta architect Willis F. Denny. From 1905-1906 he attended Columbia University's School of Architecture in New York and afterwards spent a short period in Paris at the Ecole de Beaux-Arts. Reid returned to New York late in 1907 where he worked as a draftsman in the architectural offices of Dane and Murphy. In 1909 he returned to Atlanta where he would spend the rest of his career and opened an office with Hal Hentz, whom he had met while working for Denny, and Godfrey L. Norrman, a Swedish-born architect with an established practice in Atlanta. After Norrman's death the firm was joined by Rudolph Adler and operated under the name of Hentz, Reid and Adler until Reid's death in 1926.<sup>17</sup> Although the bulk of Reid's important work is found in Georgia, particularly in the environs of Atlanta, he designed buildings in other states as well, some of them as distant from his home base as Oregon and Massachusetts. Florida was particularly well represented with at least 19 structures being designed between 1912 and 1926, five of them in St. Petersburg of which only the Alexander Hotel and the Alexander National Bank building remain.<sup>18</sup>

(See Continuation Sheet)

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Construction of the hotel began in May of 1919. The building permit listed the Alexander Hotel Company as the owner of the property and Neel Reid as the architect. A local architect, William Shull, was hired to supervise the work and H.H. Carson was awarded the building contract.<sup>19</sup> The four-story, 75 room structure was completed in December, 1919, but did not open its doors for a full season until November of the following year. The St. Petersburg Times listed J.F. Alexander as owner of the hotel, Robert Ely as proprietor, and Robert Carroll, former manager of a hotel at Pass-A-Grille, Florida as manager.<sup>20</sup>

The physical and economic impact of the Alexander Hotel was short-lived. The population of St. Petersburg which stood at just over 14,000 in 1920 swelled to over 50,000 by 1925.<sup>21</sup> Within seven years of the opening of the Alexander, 10 big new hotels opened in St. Petersburg and on the nearby beaches, among them the nearby Vinoy Park and Princess Martha (originally Mason) hotels which between them offered nearly 500 rooms.<sup>22</sup> Still the Alexander Hotel survived, eventually becoming a residential hotel but only closing its doors in the spring of 1984.

Like most commercial structures constructed during the period and for decades later, the stylistic features of the Alexander Hotel are limited to its major facade on Central Avenue. It is the tendency toward formal symmetry and careful attention to detail found in the work of Neel Reid and his partners in the firm of Hentz, Reid & Adler that was to survive well after Reid's death. A love of dramatic entranceways, rusticated ashlar, loggias, and richly decorated cornices and friezes are repeated again and again in Reid's major surviving works. The three-tired galleries on the two major wings of the hotel--united on the second story by a pergola--are what makes the structure unique in downtown St. Petersburg. It is true that the much older Detroit Hotel, also on Central Avenue, has a long gallery on the second story overlooking the street, but that much-altered vernacular structure cannot compare with the imaginatively conceived frontispiece on what is otherwise--on its exterior--a rather plain masonry structure.

Reid took his love of detail into the lobby and cafeteria where we find richly decorated cornices and friezes, unfortunately hidden in places by a dropped ceiling which will be removed in restoration. The lobby also features a fireplace with a Tudor arch mantelpiece. The building is currently undergoing a rehabilitation program. The ground floor will continue to serve as retail space while the upper floors will serve as office space instead of hotel rooms.

FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Grismer. The Story of St. Petersburg, 18-19.

<sup>2</sup> ibid., 31.

<sup>3</sup> Dunn. Yesterday's St. Petersburg, 18.

<sup>4</sup> Grismer, 60.

<sup>5</sup> Dunn, 18.

<sup>6</sup> ibid., 20.

<sup>7</sup> Grismer, 88, 108.

<sup>8</sup> Covington. The Story of Southwestern Florida, Vol. I, 212.

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<sup>9</sup> St. Petersburg Times. January 2, 1921; as of this date the only hotel other than the Alexander to advertise private baths for every room was the Butler Arms on 3rd Street.

<sup>10</sup> Straub. History of Pinellas County, 284-285.

<sup>11</sup> The Book of Florida, 585; National Cyclopedia of American Biography, Vol. XXXIV, 377.

<sup>12</sup> National Cyclopedia of American Biography, 377.

<sup>13</sup> Polk's St. Petersburg City Directory, 1924.

<sup>14</sup> National Cyclopedia; Straub, 137.

<sup>15</sup> Pinellas County Deed Records, Book 60, Page 459.

<sup>16</sup> City of St. Petersburg, Building Permit #2718; Grady. The Architecture of Neel Reid, 190.

<sup>17</sup> Grady. The Architecture of Neel Reid, x-xxii; Withey. Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (biographies on Neel Reid and Rudolph Adler).

<sup>18</sup> Grady, 189-199.

<sup>19</sup> St. Petersburg Times. May 31, 1919.

<sup>20</sup> St. Petersburg Times. October 31, 1920.

<sup>21</sup> Covington, 212.

<sup>22</sup> Dunn, 31.



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Page 1

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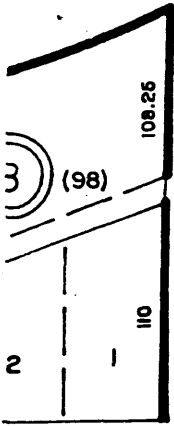
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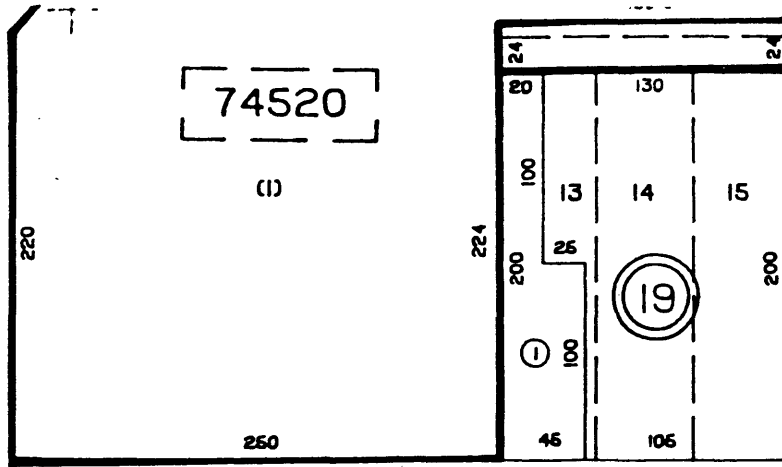
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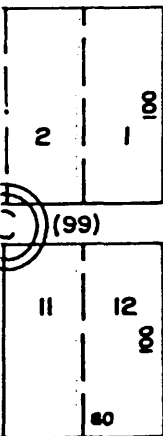
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STREET



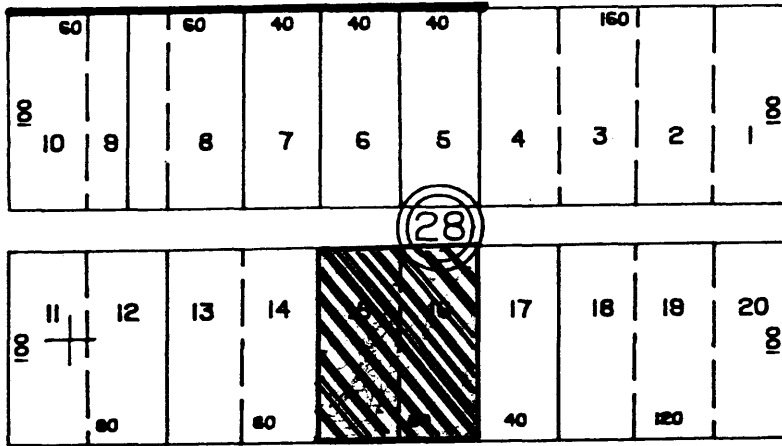
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FIRST AVE.



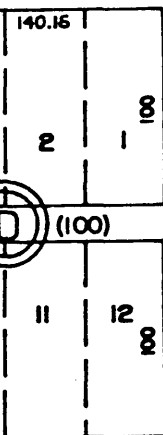
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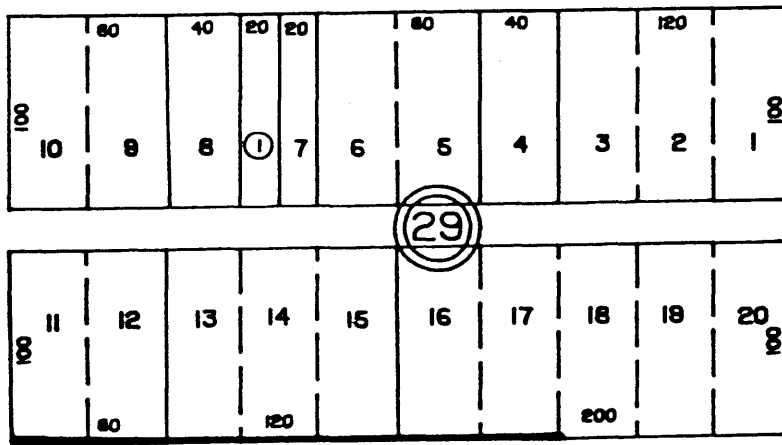
5TH

CENTRAL AVE.

HOTEL



STREET S  
6TH



STREET S  
5TH

NUE

500

3000