depository for survey records

city, town

Columbia

United States Department of the Interior Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form





state South Carolina 29211

MAR 19 152 Type all entries—complete applicable sections Name historic Willcox's and/or common Willcox Inn, Willcox Hotel Location Colleton Avenue between Newberry street & number not for publication Street and Chesterfield Street ___ vicinity of congressional district city, town third South Carolina code 045 003 state county Aiken code 3. Classification **Ownership** Status **Present Use** Category _ district __ public _ occupied _ agriculture __ museum _X_ building(s) _X_ private x unoccupied _ commercial ___ park ____ structure educational _ both work in progress _ private residence ____ site **Public Acquisition** Accessible entertainment _ religious N/A in process _ government __ scientific ____ object $_{\mathbf{x}}$ yes: restricted N/A being considered ____ yes: unrestricted ____ industrial ___ transportation __ military _x_ other: vacant _ no Owner of Property name The South Carolina National Bank P.O. Box 940 street & number Aiken state South Carolina 29801 vicinity of city, town **Location of Legal Description** courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Registrar of Mesne Conveyance street & number Aiken County Office Complex, 828 Richland Avenue W. Aiken city, town state South Carolina 29801 Representation in Existing Surveys 6. Inventory of Historic Places in S.C. has this property been determined elegible? ____ yes _x_ no title federal _x_ state ___ county ___ local date added by 1973

South Carolina Department of Archives and History

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one	
excellent	_x_ deteriorated	unaltered	_x original si	site
good	ruins	_x_ altered	moved	date
fair	unexposed			

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Located in Aiken, South Carolina, near the Aiken County Courthouse, the building that once housed the famous Willcox Inn is a large wood frame building perched above the steep Southern Railroad cut. Reflecting the influence of both Second Empire and Colonial Revival styles, Willcox's, which was established in 1898 by Frederick Sugden Willcox, assumed its present form in 1928 when the last of several additions was made to the hostelry.

Exterior

Set on a masonry foundation, the three-story weatherboarded hotel has a partial basement and standing seam metal roof. The plan of the building is irregular in shape, consisting of a central block with asymmetrical wings. Although unified by design, the two wings and core of the hotel were built at different times during the Willcox's fifty-nine years of operation.

After acquiring the property in 1898, Frederick Willcox and his family moved into a one-and-one-half story vernacular Victorian cottage at the corner of Colleton Avenue and Chesterfield Street. Around 1900, Willcox remodeled the home, linking it to a newly constructed three-story building by a porte cochere and one-story lobby with high ceilings. A porch, which extended across the facade (scuthwest elevation) and right (southeast) elevation of the residence, was enclosed with windows for the inn's dining room; an irregular, one-story rear wing contained the kitchen; and the family's living quarters were on the second floor. Around 1970, the modified house and old lobby were torn down by Joseph Eways, who bought the hotel at a 1957 auction.

The ca. 1900 rectangular building built to house winter guests still stands, and is now the east wing of the hotel complex. In 1906, it was connected to an existing two-and-one-half-story dwelling at the corner of Colleton Avenue and Newberry Street, the present west wing, by an enclosed walkway. The walkway was replaced in 1910 by a one-story elliptical ballroom, which in turn was replaced in 1928 by the present three-story middle section.

The symmetrical facade (southwest elevation) of the 1928 Colonial Revival center of the complex is distinguished by a monumental hexastyle portico, which features Tuscan columns and lattice railing above its modillioned cornice. Flanked on either side by a hanging wrought iron lantern and two windows, the main hotel entrance with its glazed double doors and 5-pane transom, is articulated by a crossetted architrave and swan's neck pediment with urn. The casement windows of the first floor,

8. Significance

1400-1499 1500-1599 1600-1699 1700-1799 1800-1899	Areas of Significance—C archeology-prehistoric agriculture architecture art commerce communications	community planning conservation economics education engineering exploration/settleme	law literature military music	re religion science sculpture social/ humanitarian theater transportation _X_ other (specify) society/customs
Specific dates	ca. 1900 - 1928	Builder/Architect U	nknown	SOCIETY/ CUSTOMS

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Around the turn of the century, Aiken became the first South Carolina town to gain national renown as a winter resort. Finding the mild climate of the town ideal for sports, wealthy northerners became regular winter residents, calling themselves Aiken's "winter colony." At the heart of winter colony activities was Willcox's, an internationally known inn operated from 1898 to 1957 by members of the Willcox family. The building once occupied by Willcox's is regarded by Aikenites as a local landmark significant for its association with the town's heyday as a winter resort and with the many prominent individuals who sojourned there. Of Aiken's once famous resort hostelries, only Willcox's is still standing.

Additional Information

Accounts of why Frederick Sugden Willcox came to Aiken in 1897 with his Swedish wife Elise vary, as do those of how his inn came into being the following year. Whether this native of Cheshire, England, who had been in America since 1891, moved to be a gentleman's gentleman as he had been in England, or to be a caterer for the old Highland Park Hotel, or to open his own catering business or an inn is unclear. However, it is apparent that Frederick Willcox's success in the hotel business, which was aided by good relations with Mrs. Thomas Hitchcock and other winter colonists, was sparked by the burning of the Highland Park Hotel on February 6, 1898. Willcox formed lasting friendships among society leaders of the East as a result of making displaced hotel guests feel at home in his rented residence at the corner of Park Avenue and Newberry Street.

Around 1900, Frederick Willcox built a small hotel in the Second Empire style on land he had purchased in April of 1898. Connected to the new building by a porte cochere and a one-story lobby, a one and one-half story cottage, which had become the family's home shortly after the property was acquired, was remodeled to incorporate the inn's dining room and kitchen in addition to the family's living quarters. Increasing demand for accomodations led to the annexation in 1906 of a two and one-half story house on adjoining property at the corner of Colleton Avenue and Newberry Street, which Willcox bought in January, 1904. The construction in 1910 of an

9. Major Bibliographical References AULIAN 13.

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treet & number	P.O. Box 850		teleph	one (803) 649-79	981
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2. Sta	te Historic F	reserva	tion Of	ficer Certi	fication
	nificance of this property w				
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which mimic the design of the doorway, are surmounted by a cornice with dentils and have a panel below each eight-light sash with two-pane transom. On the second floor, above each of the ground floor windows and doorway, are paired double-hung sash windows with plain surrounds. The five bays of the first two stories of the facade are framed by six unfluted pilasters. Fluted pilasters and a pediment containing an oculus define the three middle bays of the five-bay third floor. The paired windows of the three central bays and single windows to either side have cornices and, like the second floor windows below, are double-hung sash with six-over-six lights. Extending from the pediment to the high brick end walls of the center block, each of which incorporates two large chimneys with corbeled caps, is a paneled parapet. An octagonal cupola with bellcast tent roof crowns the center of the low-pitched gable roof.

The rear (northeast elevation) of the center section, unlike its facade, is unadorned. In the middle of the five-bay first floor are glazed double doors, to the right and left of which are two paired double-hung sash windows with nine-over-nine lights. The six-over-six light windows of the second and third floors are arranged in five pairs, those of the right two bays being separated by only a mullion. All rear windows have plain surrounds.

When the new nucleus of the hostelry was built in 1928, the ca. 1900 east wing retained it four large interior chimneys, mansard roof with concave sides, dormers with paired windows and broken pediments, and its plain window surrounds. Originally two-over-two lights, the double-hung sash windows of this wing were changed to six-over-six lights, except for seven first floor rear windows. Two small elliptical windows of the southeast end of the facade were replaced by rectangular windows identical to the other front windows. The entablature was raised on the front, southeast, and part of the rear elevations to match the entablature of the adjacent front portico.

Set back thirteen feet from the facade of the newer center block, the facade of the rectangular east wing is characterized by five irregularly spaced dormers, the placement of which does not correspond to the eleven uneven bays of the two floors below. Like its front, the southeast side of this wing is asymmetrical; it features three dormers, five second floor windows, and an entry with glazed double doors and four-pane transom between the four first floor windows. The rear of the wing is divided into two parts by a large brick exterior chimney with corbeled cap. To the right of this chimney are four dormers, below which the entablature of the roof, unlike that of the rest of the east wing,

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was left unchanged in 1928. A ground floor entrance with double four-panel doors and two-pane transom is flanked by two-over-two windows — four to the left and three to the right. On the second floor, there are nine six-over-six windows, and, on the roof is a small one-story weatherboarded structure with gable roof. Immediately to the right of the chimney, a stairway leads to the basement. To the left of the chimney are one dormer, one window on both the first and second floors, and, near the east corner of the first floor, a single leaf four-panel door with two-pane transom.

The design of the west wing, a two and one-half story residence joined to the hotel complex in 1906, was altered during the Willcox's 1928 expansion. Its gable roof was replaced by a mansard roof with concave sides and dormers to mirror that of the east wing; a porch which extended across the front and halfway across the northwest elevation was removed, and a terrace put in its place; and an entablature like that of the portico and east wing was added to the front, northwest side, and part of the rear. Among the original design features of the house that remain are three two-story polygonal bays and a one-story rear ell.

Like those of the east wing, the dormers of the west wing have a dentil course in the gap between the base molding of their broken pediments; however, only four -- three front and the one rear -- are identical to those of the east wing, which feature triangular pediments and paired windows. Two front dormers and the three of the northwest elevation are segmental-arched and contain a single window rather than a pair. The windows of the dormers and most of those in the two stories below are double-hung sash with six-over-six lights.

None of the sides of the west wing, which is set back eight feet from the facade of the center section, are symmetrical. At either end of the facade are two-story polygonal bays, on each floor of which are a central pair of six-over-six windows between two narrower four-over-four windows. The polygonal bay of the right end of the facade is separated from the front portico by a space occupied on each floor by a single window; between it and the three-sided projection of the left corner are three bays. The off-center front entrance features a single paneled door, hood, and leaded fanlight. Unlike those of the front, the two-story polygonal bay of the left corner of the northwest elevation has on each floor a single central window rather than a pair. At the right end of the northwest side is a two-bay porch with balustraded roof and low paneled wall, which shelters a window and glazed double doors. Fenestration of the rear elevation is irregular; some of the rear windows have cornices, as do the first floor windows of the front and northwest

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elevations. The mansard roof extends across only a single bay of the third story of the rear. A portion of the first floor has been covered with aluminum siding. Immediately to the left of the one-story rear ell is a stairway leading to the basement. The west wing has two interior chimneys.

Interior

The Willcox's main entrance leads into a paneled lobby, which is divided into two parts by a level change. At either end of the front lobby are large stone fireplaces, approximately ten feet wide, faced with uncoursed rubble. A row of piers near the stairs up to the back lobby supports the exposed ceiling beams. Wide doorways connect the rear lobby to the stair halls of the wings and the approximately 65 rooms meant for hotel guests and staff, of which 16 were furnished as private living rooms. Most of the hotel's rooms have private baths, but some of the approximately 39 bathrooms are shared by two rooms. Four maid's rooms have access to baths from the hall.

Interior renovations begun by Joseph Eways during the 22 years he owned the property were never finished. Plaster and lath were removed from some rooms, a stairway on one floor of the west wing was dismantled, and the floor of an east wing room was taken out. In many of the rooms of the east wing and upper floors of the center section, the plaster walls were covered with paneling or plasterboard. However, the hotel floor plan remains essentially intact, and most of its rooms retain original design details. The rooms of the east wing still have their symmetrically molded window and door trim with corner blocks, paneled ceilings, and two-pane transoms over the four-panel doors. Almost all of the east wing rooms have fireplaces with mantels of varying designs. On the second and third floors of the center section, only the chambers nearest the wings have fireplaces, some of which were concealed during the renovations. The center section rooms feature molding like the east wing and two-panel doors with transoms. West wing rooms are characterized by plain window and door surrounds, paneled ceilings, and coal-burning fireplaces.

Surroundings

Covering an entire block of Colleton Avenue from Chesterfield Street to Newberry Street, the Willcox Hotel property is a focal point of one of Aiken's older neighborhoods. Around the hotel building, which is wedged between the Southern Railroad cut and the street, are planted a number of old cedars and live oaks. A small, wood frame structure of undetermined age behind the hotel is included within the nominated area.

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elliptical ballroom between the ca. 1900 structure and his 1906 addition was the last expansion of the inn made by Frederick Willcox.

Frederick Willcox, a thirty-second degree Mason and Knight Templar credited with being influential in the unbuilding of Aiken as a winter resort, died suddenly on July 19, 1924. After his death, his son Albert Sugden Willcox became proprietor of the inn. Albert, like his parents, was popular with the winter residents of Aiken, and Willcox's continued to thrive. In 1928, Albert enlarged the hotel. The one-story ballroom was replaced by the present three-story columned Colonial Revival core of the hotel, which contained a new and spacious entrance hall, and a mansard roof was added to the west end of the complex. After the new center section was built, the space between the old lobby and the street was used as a shop by Fortnum and Mason's, the well known English firm.

The far-reaching reputation of Willcox's was built on its atmosphere, impeccable service, and excellent cuisine. Described in 1916 as "a sort of combination of old time tavern, modern hotel, and country club," the inn was appointed with all the latest in hotel equipment and had the first bathtub connected to plumbing in Aiken. Initially catering only to single men, Willcox's soon became a mecca for many leaders of the political, business, and social life of the world and their families. Many guests returned year after year, and, during the 1920's and 30's when the winter colony was at its height, Willcox's was the scene of lavish entertaining. For one party, Albert Willcox received a \$1,000 tip from Jim Garvin, brother-in-law of Diamond Jim Brady.

The first guest of Willcox's arrived on January 5, 1898. was Mr. James Roosevelt, half-brother of President Franklin D. Over the years, the following were among those who enjoyed the hospitality of the inn: Winston Churchill; Mrs John Jacob Astor; pianist Josef Hofmann; Endicotts and Forbes from Boston; Harold Vanderbilt of America Cup fame; Michael Strange, author of detective stories and wife of John Barrymore; the British Army in India polo team; Philip Armour, head of the Armour Packing Company; Thomas Hastings, architect of the New York Public Library; James Forrestal, the first U.S. Secretary of Defense; Averill Harriman, governor of New York; Elizabeth Arden, founder and owner of the Arden racing stables and cosmetics company; diplomat Charles E. Bohlen; the Duke and Duchesser; Princess Alexis Obolensky; Pulitzer, Goulds, and Graces. Bernadotte of Sweden and his bride, an American heiress, spent their honeymoon at Willcox's. The Duke of Windsor, formerly King Edward

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VIII, sought reservations during the week of the Masters Golf Tournament, but had to be turned down as there was no room in the inn. In 1954, James F. Byrnes and Bernard Baruch conferred at the hotel prior to a banquet held there to honor Byrnes.

During the World War II years, the winter colony dwindled as travel was curtailed and since many of the sportsmen who had enjoyed the polo, golf, hunting, and court tennis of Aiken were in the armed forces. Although many of the famous returned after the war, Aiken's prime as the "Queen of Winter Resorts" had passed. The face of Aiken was irrevocably changed from a resort community to a bustling small town by the construction of the Savannah River Plant around 1950.

In November of 1957, Albert Willcox announced his intention to sell at auction the sixty-five room resort hotel and its contents. Albert, a college graduate who had spent most of his life in the hotel business, was then in his sixties and felt that he had earned the right to take life easier. In addition to being proprietor of Willcox's, which was open from November to May, he had worked in various large New York City₂₄ hotels and had managed a number of summer hotels and New England clubs.

Joseph Eways, an Oriental rug dealer native to Palestine, was the highest bidder at the December 12, 1957, public sale. During Eways's ownership of over twenty years, sporadic efforts to modify the building for other uses were initiated but never carried to completion. On December 12, 1979, the Willcox Hotel property was conveyed to South Carolina National Bank subject to the dower right of Mrs. Eways.

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FOOTNOTES

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7_{Meday.}

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 - 22"Willcox Inn Will Be Auctioned."
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