

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only  
received NOV 28 1984  
date entered DEC 27 1984

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

1. Name

historic Hotel Clovis

and/or common Same

2. Location

street & number 210 Main Street \_\_\_\_\_ not for publication

city, town Clovis \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity of

state New Mexico code 35 county Curry code 009

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" 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 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	NA in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	NA being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<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: hotel

4. Owner of Property

name John D. Howard and Robert J. Doner

street & number c/o Jack Bilt Inc., 3300 W. Olive Avenue

city, town Burbank \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity of state California 91503

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Curry County Courthouse

street & number 7th and Main

city, town Clovis \_\_\_\_\_ state New Mexico 88101

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

SR # 1109  
title State Register of Cultural Properties has this property been determined eligible? \_\_\_\_\_ yes  no

date October 17, 1984 \_\_\_\_\_ federal  state \_\_\_\_\_ county \_\_\_\_\_ local

depository for survey records Historic Preservation Division, 228 E. Palace Ave.

city, town Santa Fe \_\_\_\_\_ state NM

## 7. Description

**Condition**

excellent

good

fair

deteriorated

ruins

unexposed

**Check one**

unaltered

altered

**Check one**

original site

moved

date \_\_\_\_\_

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

Located in the central business district amid one- to three-story buildings, the Hotel Clovis is composed of a nine-story guest room tower surrounded by lower service areas (ills. 1-3). Its reinforced concrete frame is sheathed with brick curtain walls--a textured buff brick on the street facades (south and west) and a common red brick on the rear and alley sides (north and east). The first floor (ills. 1-3) is sheathed with grey terrazzo to a height of five feet topped by cast stone which rises another ten feet. There, a decorative geometric cap (ill. 4) forms a continuous sill for the second story windows. Casement windows, fixed windows and single doors, all with transoms, punctuate the first floor. On the south and west sides entryhoods with geometric wrought iron brackets mark the recessed entrances to the lobby. Three-over-two double-hung wood windows are used above the first floor (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/
<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**      1931                                      **Builder/Architect**    H. W. Underhill/Robert Merrell

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)**

Built in 1931, at the height of the Depression, the Hotel Clovis reflects the rapid growth which the city had experienced since its founding in 1906 and the optimism of the city's boosters and of the Southern National Hotel Company of Galveston, Texas. Seen as a symbol of Clovis' position as a marketing center for eastern New Mexico and western Texas, it was christened "The Skyscraper of the Plains" and quickly developed as a commercial and social center for the region. Although provincial by big-city standards, it ranks among the two or three most important Art Deco or Modernistic buildings erected in New Mexico. Its Indian ornamental motifs add an appropriate Plains Southwestern inflection (see continuation sheets).

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property less than 1

Quadrangle name Clovis

Quadrangle scale 1:62500

### UTM References

A 

1	13	6	6	14	1	11	10	3	18	0	17	7	15	10
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 original (1931) boundary for the property: lots 14-17 of block 63 of the Original Town.

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

state NA code county code

state code county code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title David Kammer; Chris Wilson, Contract Architectural Historian

organization for St. Hist. Pres. Division date 10-1-84

street & number 219 Cornell, SE telephone 505-266-0931

city or town Albuquerque state New Mexico 87106

# 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 *Phyllis W. Rubin*

title State Historic Preservation Officer date 11-2-84

For NPS use only

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

Entered in the National Register

date 12-27-84

for *Shelores Byers*  
Keeper of the National Register

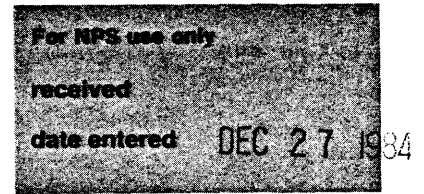
Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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

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



**Continuation sheet**      **Description**      **Item number**      **7**      **Page**      **1**

---

Vertical piers articulate the street facades. Their bases and caps are ornamented with cast stone relief panels of geometric floral designs (ills. 4,5). The relief lintels atop the ninth floor windows extend into a course of stretchers laid vertically and form a continuous lintel (ills. 2,5). Cast stone figureheads cap the piers (ills. 5,6).

The building's two original Otis elevators face across the lobby toward the west entrance (ill. 7). The structural concrete piers which cut through the lobby are embellished with geometric capitals. Copper chandeliers with arrow ornamentation and cut-out thunderbirds, and a brass mailbox with a nine-story chute remain as they were when the hotel opened. A simple geometric Indian design borders the tile work of the main stairs. On the second floor, behind the main tower, is a ballroom which opens through french doors to a terrace with a cast stone railing (ills. 2,8). The original chairs, arrow chandeliers and incised redwood beams and corbels remain.

In 1976 the lobby was altered to include a bar, restaurant and restrooms. On the east side of the building is the original fire escape. In 1981 a similar fire escape was added to the west facade to comply with new fire codes.

EXP. 12/31/84

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service****National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only	
received	
date entered	DEC 27 1984

Continuation sheet

Significance

Item number 8

Page 2

Founded in 1906 and designated a divisional headquarters of the Santa Fe Railroad in 1909, Clovis grew rapidly to a population of 8,000 by 1930. With the area's strong agricultural and ranching base and the many railroad jobs, local construction continued into the Great Depression, prompting many to argue that a growing Clovis needed a large, first-class hotel to meet the demands of livestock buyers, salesmen, cross-country railroad passengers and the railroad workers who laid over at the end of their runs. Thus in 1931, the Southern National Hotel Corporation of Galveston, which operated a chain of seven hotels in Texas, Alabama and Virginia, made plans to expand into New Mexico. The nine-story, 114-room Hotel Clovis was completed by October of that year at a cost of \$300,000. The scale of the project suggests the high expectations that both the investors and citizens had for the city, an outlook expressed in Clovis' nicknames during the period, "The Magic City of the Plains" and "The Gateway to New Mexico". Southern National president, Judge Franklin Canaday echoed these booster sentiments when he stated, "We expect Hotel Clovis to become as closely identified with the city and its progress as its name indicates." Concrete grain elevators began to appear in the 1950's to rival the height of the hotel (ill. 6), but it has continued as the city's leading landmark, "The Skyscraper of the Plains".

From its opening October 20, 1931, the hotel was the center of the city's social and commercial life. Regional conventions, from the three-state gathering of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen in 1932 to the State V.F.W. in 1983, convened here. During its heyday in the thirties and forties, a house band played nightly and visiting entertainers ranged from the big bands of Louis Armstrong, Glen Miller, Tommy Dorsey and Gene Krupa to the swing and country bands of Bob Wills, Hank Thompson and Hank Williams. Formal dances in the ballroom were regarded as the most prestigious social events in this region of the high plains. Many local women remember, as young girls, dancing atop their "daddy's" cowboy boots. Others recall the night that Jeff Goode, scion of a local ranching family, rode his horse through the lobby, up the stairs to the ballroom, shot out the lights and then "whipped" the man dancing with his wife. Besides operating a coffee shop, barber and beauty shops during those early years, the hotel housed the Chamber of Commerce offices, the city's first radio station, KICA, the 69 Cattle Company offices, the state license bureau's regional office, a tailor shop and bus station. Military personnel were billeted here starting in 1942 while the U.S. Army hurried to complete Cannon Army Air Base.

In his design for the hotel, architect Robert Merrill, who had recently studied at the Ecole de Beaux Arts in Paris, brought to Clovis what Marcus Whiffin has called the Modernistic style and

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

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

For NPS use only	
received	
date entered	DEC 27 1984

Continuation sheet

Significance

Item number

8

Page

3

others refer to as Art Deco. Although sparsely ornamented by Modernistic standards, the Hotel Clovis nevertheless reflects contemporary architectural trends with its vertical piers and geometric reliefs. At the same time, by placing cast stone Indian busts atop the piers and supplying interior features such as the arrow chandeliers, ballroom beams and corbels with "Indian color accents" and the leather-backed Spanish Colonial Revival chairs, Merrill evoked a sense of the Plains Southwest as well. The Clovis Evening News wrote:

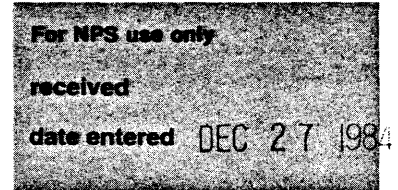
"Incorporated are designs, decorations and symbols of Indian origin, done in beautifully contrasting colors analogous to Indian Art. The building lines, typical of the modern style, are very uniform and occur on all sides of the building."

To local eyes, the building was at once Modern and Regional. Merrill also used massing, surface materials and fenestration to differentiate the building's functions: the first-floor service areas are emphasized by terrazzo and cast stone, the ballroom is set off as a two-story mass to the rear, and the guest room tower is a compact rectangle with repeated domestic windows. Merrill subsequently settled in the area and is best remembered for his design of the Spanish Colonial Revival Marshall Junior High School and buildings at Eastern New Mexico University in Portales.

In recent decades, the Hotel Clovis has fallen on hard times. Sold in 1965 and then again in 1976 and 1979 to out-of-state investors, the hotel fell into disrepair, was found to be in violation of updated fire codes, and then finally in 1981 lost its contract with the Santa Fe Railroad to provide lodging for its employees. In 1983, a longtime local ranching family, Charles and Florence Jones, leased the hotel. They had hoped to use preservation tax credits to refurbish the building and restore it to its earlier position of prominence in the community, but the recent untimely death of Mrs. Jones has disrupted these plans.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form



Continuation sheet

Bibliography

Item number 9

Page 4

"Clovis' First Skyscraper Is Distinctive." Clovis Evening News Journal, October 10, 1931, p. 1.

Johnson, Florence. Personal Interview with Chris Wilson.  
May 3-4, 1984.

McAlavy, Don, and Harold Kilmer. Curry County, New Mexico.  
Dallas: Taylor Publishing Co., 1978.

----- . High Plains History of East-Central New Mexico. n.c.:  
High Plains Historical Press, 1980.

Sanborn Map Company. Sanborn Insurance Maps of Clovis, New Mexico. 1909, 1912, 1929, 1951, 1962.