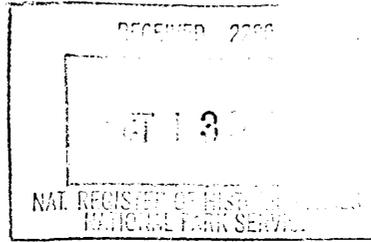


United States Department of the Interior National Park Service



National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable". For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

Historic name Hartington Hotel

Other names/site number CD07-006

2. Location

Street & number 202 North Broadway

Not for publication []

City or town Hartington

Vicinity []

State Nebraska

Code NE

County Cedar

Code 027

Zip code 68739

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this [x] nomination [] request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property [x] meets [] does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant [] nationally [] statewide [x] locally. ([] See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official [Handwritten Signature]

Date 10/6/03

Director, Nebraska State Historical Society State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property [] meets [] does not meet the National Register criteria. ([] See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

[x] entered in the National Register.

[] see continuation sheet.

[] determined eligible for the National Register.

[] see continuation sheet.

[] determined not eligible for the National Register.

[] removed from the National Register.

[] other, (explain):

[Handwritten Signature: Edson H. Beall] 11-28-03

[Handwritten Signature] Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

Hartington Hotel

Name of Property

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5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

- X Private
Public-local
Public-state
Public-federal

Category of Property (Check only one box)

- X Building(s)
District
Site
Structure
Object

Number of Resources within Property (Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Table with 2 columns: Contributing, Noncontributing. Rows for Buildings, Sites, Structures, Objects, Total.

Name of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC/hotel

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions.)

VACANT/NOT IN USE

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions.)

Commercial Style

Materials (Enter categories from instructions.)

Foundation Concrete

Walls Brick

Roof

Other

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Hartington Hotel

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "X" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- X A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
X C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
B Removed from its original location.
C A birthplace or a grave.
D A cemetery.
E A reconstructed building, object, or structure.
F A commemorative property.
G Less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCE

Period of Significance

1917-1953

Significant Dates

1917 - Construction Completed

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

P. Lewis of Omaha, Nebraska

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- Preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
Previously listed in the National Register
Previously determined eligible by the National Register
Designated a National Historic Landmark
Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Primary location for additional data:

- X State Historic Preservation Office
Other State agency
Federal agency
Local Government
University
Other
Name of repository:

Hartington Hotel

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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property Less than one

UTM References (place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet).

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
1.	14	642309	4720062	3.			
2.				4.			
				[] See continuation sheet			

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Jill Ebers/Historic Buildings Survey Coordinator
 organization State Historic Preservation Office date July 31, 2003
 street & number 1420 P Street telephone (402) 471-4773
 city or town Lincoln state Nebraska zip code 68501

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name/title Mid America Land Company, Incorporated – Tim Kuchta, Sr.
 street & number 110 North Broadway telephone 1-800-866-5263
 city or town Hartington state Nebraska zip code 68739

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determined eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, (15 USC 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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The Hartington Hotel is prominently located at the corner of State and Broadway Streets, Broadway being the main commercial thoroughfare through Hartington. The Hartington Hotel is centrally located between the railroad depot two and a half blocks to the north, and the County Courthouse, which is located one block south of the hotel. The three-story brick-veneer hotel, constructed in 1917, exhibits characteristics of the Colonial Revival style, most prominently illustrated through the formal, pedimented entries on the south and east façades. The building retains a high degree of integrity, with alterations to the first floor dining room.

The Hartington Hotel is located in Hartington, the county seat of Cedar County, located in the northeastern corner of Nebraska, south of the Missouri River and the border with South Dakota. The county is characterized by enormous expanses of undulating countryside, and in 1920 had a population of 16,225, according to the 1920 census. Although Hartington's business district consisted of about six square blocks, this was the largest community in Cedar County, and drew many county residents for shopping and business, as well as a growing traveling salesmen community. Constructed in 1917 on the site of an earlier frame hotel, the three-story Hartington Hotel was a substantial addition to a strong, if small, commercial center, and remains a visual landmark in Hartington's business district.

This hotel is a three-story, rectangular-shaped, brick veneer building with a flat, tarred roof and a concrete foundation. The main (east) façade facing Broadway contains a central entrance with a Colonial Revival door surround. The door is crowned with a substantial closed pediment with decorative pilasters flanking the entrance. A fanlight window is located under the pediment, and directly over the door. The door was replaced sometime in the 1950s with a glass and aluminum door, upon which is painted in cursive script the words, "Hotel Hartington – Air Conditioned." A storefront with recessed entry, large paned glass windows, and violet prism-glass window transoms is located north of the central entrance. All other windows in the building are either eight-over-one or six-over-one double-hung windows. Windows on the first floor once had transom windows, which have since been covered over with wood. Stone belt courses embellish the exterior at various positions on the wall, beginning with a stone belt course on the east façade just above several glass block windows, which admit sunlight into the basement. Belt courses also provide the sills and lintels for the windows on the first floor of the hotel. At the tip of the pediment, a large stone panel on which is carved the words "Hartington Hotel" interrupts the belt course. On the second floor, a belt course acts as window sills as well, but each of these windows is also capped with stone lintels with keystones. The third floor is the most informal in appearance, with a belt course running along the top of the windows only, but also with modest decorative brickwork between each window.

A vertical neon sign depicting the word Hotel in vertical, and the word Hartington horizontally at the bottom embellishes the southeast corner of the building. The neon sign is both curved and angular, giving it a slight Art Deco appearance, though it is unknown when the sign was placed on the building. At the southwest corner of the building, a stairway accessible from the sidewalk leads to the basement showcase rooms, which were used by salesmen to show their wares. Pedestrians are saved from a nasty fall by a steel guardrail that borders the stairway on two sides, and a handrail that leads down the steps.

The southern elevation also has a centrally located, though less formal, entry. The southern entrance has a broken pediment and modest pilasters, but is not constructed on as large a scale as the other entrance and does not contain a fanlight window. Here again the door has been replaced with one made of glass and aluminum, and this door has been painted with the words "Hotel Hartington – Air Conditioned" in cursive script. In all other aspects, the decorative elements on the front façade are present on the south elevation. A small frame addition was constructed on the west elevation in

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1917, in order to accommodate unanticipated needs for a larger kitchen and food storage area. The addition remains today.

Upon entering the Broadway Street door, one is confronted with a door to the right that leads to the storefront to the north and marble stairs that lead to the main lobby area. The storefront has most recently been a café, but is now vacant. There is a large front room with plenty of space for café seating, and a counter for additional seating and service. The small kitchen is located in the back room, and has access to the basement. The cherry wood door leading into the café matches the rest of the woodwork found on the first floor of the hotel.

At the foot of the stairs leading to the lobby, the floor has been embellished with small decorative square tiles. The steps are constructed of gray marble, and marble is found in place of a baseboard along the steps. A twelve-light cherry wood door with a brass push-plate is located at the entrance to the lobby. The lobby is a large open space comprising roughly one fourth of the first floor. The lobby has decorative tile floors, marble baseboards, and cherry boxed columns and rafters. A solarium with two sets of French doors is located on the east side of the lobby. The solarium is a small room with many windows that originally had ample comfortable seating for the relaxation of the guests. The reception desk is located near the door that provides an entrance from State Street. The desk has glass display cases where cigars were once displayed; indeed, the R. G. Dun cigar advertisements are still in the windows. The reception desk is constructed of paneled cherry wood, and is entered through a door on the side, so it is completely enclosed. The original boxes for guest room keys and mail is still present, as well as a large clock that is mounted above the door to the reception desk area. An office for the hotel manager is found directly across from the reception desk. It is a small space with room for a desk and a cot, and has a modest bathroom. A maple phone booth is located at the door to the ballroom; it is old, but was clearly added later.

The State Street entrance is found just to the north of the manager's office. As with the Broadway entrance, upon entering the 1950s modern glass and aluminum door, the entrance to the lobby is found at the top of a short flight of marble steps. The only difference is found at the top of the steps, where two swinging French doors are installed. Each door has eight lights, four clear glass panes over four frosted glass panes. Upon entering the lobby, the reception desk is found just to the right, the main stairway is found straight ahead, and the dining room is located just to the left of the door. The dining room is a large space on the west end of the building. The cherry design elements found in the lobby are present here as well, creating a large, elegant space. An interesting feature of the dining room is a set of two roller doors, also of cherry, that are found in the doorways at the back of the room. They resemble the top of a roll-top desk, and roll into a cabinet above the doorway in the hallway that leads to the kitchens. They can be opened or closed to make the space larger or smaller, depending on the needs of those using the space.

Two sets of stairs allow for access to the upper floors of the hotel. The main staircase is found just north of the reception desk. Another set of stairs is found on the north end of the building. Each upstairs floor has twenty rooms, for a total forty rooms. The rooms are small and modest, some with private baths, some without. The hallways are wide, with attractive maple woodwork on the upstairs floors.

Overall, the integrity of the building is very good, with two exceptions. The dining room has been divided into several apartments with thin, impermanent walls that do not reach the full height of the ceiling. The walls could be easily removed with minimal damage caused to the cherry woodwork in the room. Additionally, when the air conditioning was added to the building, duct work was piped through the transoms over the individual doors and down the length of the hallways in the middle of the ceilings. Both of these integrity issues will be resolved when the building undergoes a certified rehabilitation project that will return the building to service as a hotel and reception space for the citizens of Hartington. Hartington has not had a hotel in operation since the Hartington Hotel closed in the mid-1990s

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CRITERION A: Historical Significance

Hotel Development

The early development of the hotel industry in Nebraska followed a three-stage period of growth characterized by the late 19th century inns, large early 20th century luxury hotels in the major cities, and 1920s luxury hotels in smaller communities. This pattern can be clearly identified by just a few of the many Nebraska hotels listed in the National Register of Historic Places, including the early two-story frame inns such as the Phelps Hotel in Big Springs (1885), followed by the elegant 250-room Blackstone in Omaha (1916), and finally with the smaller community hotels such as the six-story Keystone Hotel in McCook (1922).

Two new trends in early 20th century affected the development of the hotel industry in the United States. The popularity of careers in sales and commercial travel increased as the economy of the nation expanded. As this group increased in number, communities established services such as hotels and restaurants to serve them. At the same time, leisure travel throughout the country became less arduous as rail travel became less expensive and the automobile became more pervasive. Very rapidly, there was an increase in both commercial travelers and tourists, and new hotel facilities were required to service these new visitors to our towns.¹

Hotels became an attractive investment, and commercial clubs formed stockholding companies to fund the construction of an appropriately "modern" hotel. Ellsworth M. Statler constructed the first truly modern commercial hotel in Buffalo, New York in 1907-1908. Statler was the first person to incorporate all the typical hotel features of the day with services and conveniences of his own design. His innovations, many of which have become commonplace features of today's hotels, included fire doors for the protection of the stairways, keyholes located above the doorknob for ease of entry, light switches near the door to prevent fumbling in the dark, private baths, full length mirrors, circulating ice water, and complimentary daily newspapers. In addition to these comforts, he created structural and engineering innovations that became a model for modern hotel construction for the next forty years.²

Between 1908 and the onset of the Great Depression in 1929, the commercial hotel became the measure of a town's vibrancy and importance as a business center. Where governmental buildings once took pride of place as the center of civic activity, commercial hotels became the new center of community activities, often housing fraternal organizations' meetings, community dances and banquets, and other events. The most common design of these hotels consisted of a magnificent lobby space, a dining room or restaurant, a bar, and commercial storefronts on the ground floor. Talbot Hamlin described commercial hotels of this period in his pictorial history of the United States, published in 1926. He stated

A hotel is much more than a place of temporary or even permanent residence. Developing along more public lines it has become almost a civic monument, a center of communal life. There great dinners are held, balls are given, many political organizations are housed and mass meetings called. There "society", and those who ape it, drink tea, and dance. In the course of this development it has become in a very real sense a town hall, a place in which the whole people feels an instinctive if irrational ownership. It is this public character that has made necessary the great monumental lobbies, the magnificent ballrooms, the capacious restaurants.³

¹ Gerald Lattin, *Modern Hotel and Motel Management* (San Francisco: W. H. Books International, Inc., 1977), 7.

² Gerald Lattin, *The Lodging and Food Service Industry* (East Lansing, Michigan: Educational Institute of the American Hotel & Motel Association, 1989), 45.

³ Talbot Hamlin, *The American Spirit in Architecture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1926), 280.

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The Hartington Hotel, built in 1917, is an early representative of the commercial hotel movement of smaller American communities.

The Hartington Hotel

The Hartington Hotel was built to replace a first generation frame inn that had been lost to fire in 1916. The Grand Hotel, which stood on the current site of the Hartington Hotel, burned during the night of January 5, 1916. The January 6, 1916 *Cedar County News* indicated that "the question of a modern new hotel is already agitating the minds of the town's best boosters, and will no doubt be given considerable attention during the next few months."⁴ Although there was another hotel in town, the Mid-West Hotel was not considered a "modern commercial hotel", and the community felt that a new "modern" hotel would be a benefit to Hartington.

Within weeks of the fire, the owner of the lost Grand Hotel, John Krause, committed to the idea of opening a new hotel on the site in a letter to a local friend.⁵ Krause, an absentee owner, lived in California. In anticipation of an early construction start, the debris from the fire was cleared away in short order. Within another week, however, Krause's local business partner moved to Omaha, making management of the new hotel a challenging problem. There was further difficulty in that Krause was not interested in building as large a hotel as the community was hoping for, and there was talk of forming a hotel company in order to help fund the construction of a more convenient and imposing hotel.⁶ In the end, the decision was quickly settled in April as a proposal was received from the Bankers Realty Investment Company of Omaha, which offered to build a \$35,000 hotel if Hartington would supply the land at no cost.⁷ A committee was formed to arrange for subscriptions from the public, and a stockholders company was formed to acquire the land.

By the end of May, the committee and representatives from Bankers Realty Investment Company determined that the former site of the Grand Hotel would be most appropriate for the new hotel, and the land was purchased from John Krause. P. Lewis of Omaha inspected the site and quickly drew plans for the new building.⁸ The newspaper announced that

the plans for the new hotel show a brick building 50 feet on Broadway and 120 feet on State street, of strictly modern construction in every particular. The building will be faced with brick and have stone trimmings. There will be a small store-room on the north side, facing Broadway. The building will have 40 sleeping rooms, many of them with bath; together with a large parlor, commodious office, dining room and kitchen. The main entrance will be on Broadway, though there will be an entrance to the dining room on the State street side.⁹

By July, workers had begun excavating the basement of the hotel. It was hoped that the concrete foundation would soon be poured in order to proceed quickly with the construction of the brick walls, and in anticipation of finishing the exterior by winter. The interior could then be finished during the winter months. The foundation and concrete footings were laid during the week of August 17, and plans were to have twenty-five bricklayers on the site by the next week. Within a month, the bricklayers were dissatisfied and went on strike. Their foreman had promised them 80 cents an hour, while the company was only willing to pay 75 cents. The newspaper was mystified by men who would leave perfectly good jobs

⁴ *Cedar County News*, 6 January 1916.

⁵ *Cedar County News*, 27 January 1916.

⁶ *Cedar County News*, 6 April 1916.

⁷ *Cedar County News*, 27 April 1916.

⁸ *Cedar County News*, 18 May 1916.

⁹ *Cedar County News*, 25 May 1916.

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that ensured a wage of \$6 per day.¹⁰ Local men worked on the walls of the hotel for several days while the company negotiated with the bricklayers. The situation was quickly resolved by agreeing to pay the extra five cents per hour, and firing the foreman who originally made the deal.¹¹

In February 1917, the *Cedar County News* announced that Mr. and Mrs. Gansko would undertake local management of the hotel. The Ganskos had previously managed the Grand Hotel in Hartington, but had moved to West Point to operate a hotel. They were enticed to return and manage the new hotel once it was finished. Unfortunately, they had less time to prepare the hotel for occupancy than they anticipated. Before the Ganskos even arrived, the Hartington Hotel was forced to open its doors, as unprepared as it was for guests, due to the unexpected closure of the Mid-West Hotel, the only other hotel in Hartington. Businessmen were without lodging and could be found sleeping at the railroad depot or sitting up late in restaurants. The secretary of the commercial club apprised the North American Hotel Company, a subsidiary of the Bankers Realty Investment Company, of the situation, and a representative was dispatched to Hartington to attempt to accommodate travelers.¹² By mid March, the Ganskos arrived and were endeavoring to care for travelers as best they could, quickly setting a record number of guests at forty-one guests. This would not seem an impressive number considering the hotel had forty rooms, but by March, the interior was only half finished. People in the community had been concerned that the hotel was too large for the number of travelers who were likely to pass through Hartington. Judging from the *Cedar County News*, there was widespread surprise that the Hartington Hotel would have difficulty accommodating all who requested rooms.¹³ Indeed, the Hartington Hotel became so busy that Mr. Gansko leased the old Mid-West Hotel and operated it for a short time as a more reasonably priced "European Hotel", which meant that meals were included in the cost of a stay, to accommodate guest overflow as well as his staff.¹⁴

The Ganskos incorporated several improvements into the design of the building after they arrived. They set aside two rooms as sample rooms for the use of traveling businessmen. A stairway from the outside was constructed into the basement to allow easy access for trunks and travel cases. The basement would also soon house a billiards room and a barbershop, which was also accessible from the outside. The Ganskos also found that the kitchen as it was built was not adequate for food storage and preparation that was required. They constructed a small addition on the rear of the building to have enough capacity for these additional needs.

The Hartington Hotel formally opened for business on 29 May 1917 with a reception, to which the entire community was invited. As if to reinforce the assertion that commercial hotels of the 1910s and 1920s had become important civic centers, the *Cedar County News* reported that over one thousand people attended the reception and enjoyed the hospitality of the North American Hotel Company. "The crowd indicated that they would... make the new hotel a community headquarters."¹⁵ The Ganskos invited everyone back for a dance, which would be held each Saturday evening, and indicated his wish that the hotel dining room become a traditional stop for local families for their Sunday dinner. He also wished to attract the interest of many auto parties that were beginning to tour Cedar County during the fine summer weather.¹⁶

¹⁰ *Cedar County News*, 14 September 1916.

¹¹ *Cedar County News*, 21 September 1916.

¹² *Cedar County News*, 22 February 1917.

¹³ *Cedar County News*, 15 March 1917.

¹⁴ *Cedar County News*, 26 April 1917.

¹⁵ *Cedar County News*, 31 May 1917.

¹⁶ *Cedar County News*, 7 June 1917.

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The North American Hotel Company

The Hartington Hotel played a role in the origin of a new hotel investment company, a subsidiary of the Bankers Realty Investment Company. The Bankers Realty Investment Company (BRIC) formed in 1912 and "had at its inception... an exponent of modern building science... as a manifestation of western enterprise."¹⁷ Modeling the company after larger, successful eastern firms, BRIC brought together the many aspects of construction into one large corporation, thereby embodying the ideals of efficiency and thrift into a company maxim.

*Ordinarily, ten professions and forty-six trades are required in carrying out a building enterprise of any magnitude. And, ordinarily, these numerous factors work independently of each other, to the detriment of efficient and satisfactory results. The Bankers Realty Investment Company has welded together everything incident to the construction of any building, from a simple home to a huge business structure.*¹⁸

BRIC's staff was comprised of architects, construction engineers, purchasing agents, estimating experts, building superintendents, trained mechanics and laborers. Its financial department would arrange an inflow of capital for clients whose finances did not allow for the construction of buildings of a sufficient scale. It also maintained an insurance division that provided insurance for the buildings they had completed. "It succeeds in greatly reducing the cost of construction – by eliminating losses due to unscientific planning, by cutting out unnecessary expenditures covering the profits of the old contractor-subcontractor system, and by keeping within the limit of cost guaranteed the building client at the outset of the work."¹⁹

The BRIC had already built the Blackstone Hotel in Omaha in 1916, and had apparently found the operation of hotels profitable. A deed was filed at the Cedar County Clerk in September 1916 that transferred ownership of the Hartington Hotel from the Hartington Hotel Company to the new "North American Hotel Company." Due to the fact that the monetary consideration quoted in the deed was only one dollar, it seems certain that this deed was filed to facilitate a change in name, and not a change in ownership. The company was "active in hotel building and management," according to the *Norfolk Daily News*, and had plans for new hotels in Sioux City, Kearney, Scottsbluff, and Hampton, Iowa. The Norfolk Hotel and the Yancey Hotel in Grand Island were already under construction. The *Cedar County News* reported in February that hotelmen from across Nebraska had been angling to lease the Hartington Hotel from the North American Hotel Company, but the company refused, choosing to operate the hotel itself, along with the several other hotels that were planned.²⁰

The prospect of being a host city to a franchised hotel chain made an excellent selling point for communities that sold subscriptions to fund the purchase of land for their new commercial hotels. As stated in the *Grand Island Independent* in 1917, when the company was boosting for local support for the Hotel Yancey, hotel promotion by another member of the chain of hotels could only promote travel to other towns with partner hotels.

It will also be seen how easy it will be for each Hotel Manager to direct traveling men from one hotel to another of the chain, especially after having pleased him with the excellent service of the hotel which he is leaving. Thus the hotel manager in one of the Company's hotels in an Iowa town will be able to explain that Grand Island has a hotel operating on the same high plane as the one he is leaving - he also will be able to tell him about Grand Island's

¹⁷ Edward Morearty, *Omaha Memories* (Omaha: Swartz, 1917), 241.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 242.

¹⁹ *Ibid*.

²⁰ *Cedar County News*, 8 February 1917.

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*excellent railroad facilities, about its surrounding Trade Territory and give valuable information regarding existing business conditions...*²¹

The North American Hotel Company began developing this system of hotels in the central west in 1917. The idea of operating a chain of hotels, conducted with similar eyes to quality and service, was a relatively new one.²² The *Cedar County News* stated that

*it marks the beginning of a new era of hotel operation and management in the Middle West: an era of better, more efficient and modern hotel building and service for this section of the country... The North American Hotel Co., which is officered and capitalized by Middle West men and Middle West money is to own and operate all of these buildings on the chain plan, and in doing so, it is merely following the footsteps of other well tested business enterprises, which have demonstrated the economy and efficiency of centralized management and standardized methods.*²³

Few hotel chains existed at all before the turn of the century, and was a fairly rare concept in Nebraska, with the exception of one company that could be considered the North American Hotel Company's competition: the Nebraska Hotel Company, which started in Lincoln. The town that hosted their most intense rivalry was in Scottsbluff, where the Nebraska Hotel Company had secured a gift of land and \$5000 in cash to begin construction of a new hotel. The North American Hotel Company, not to be outdone, proceeded to initiate construction of its own hotel, the Bluffs, regardless of the lack of local financial support.

Before the Norfolk Hotel, the Hotel Yancey, and the Bluffs hotel in Scottsbluff could be completed, World War I intervened and the North American Hotel Company encountered serious financial difficulties that prevented the completion of the projects.²⁴ In addition to cash flow problems, the company was forced to cease construction for a period during the war to ensure that building materials were in ample supply for the war. Although the North American Hotel Company filed bankruptcy in 1921 and dissolved soon after, it is interesting to note that the Hotel Yancey and the Norfolk Hotel were later completed by other parties, and were both listed in the National Register of Historic Places, the first in 1984 and the latter in 1988. The Blackstone Hotel in Omaha, an early North American Hotel Company hotel, was listed on the National Register in 1985. The company minimally has a history of initiating building projects of high caliber, regardless of the fact that half of the hotels were never completed by the company itself.

The Hartington Hotel is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under criterion A for its historical significance. It is an excellent example of a small rural community's commercial hotel, but is even more significant for what it represented, an object of civic pride. A lively economy requires an attractive and imposing hotel for visiting businessmen to patronize, and even a slightly lagging local economy could be bolstered by a new commercial hotel that would draw businessmen into the community. The Hartington Hotel is a physical reminder of the boosterism and community value that was placed on a property that was intended to symbolize the vibrancy of the community's business center. The hotel's period of significance dates from the completion of its construction in 1917 to 1953.

²¹ *Grand Island Independent*, 28 February 1917.

²² Donald E. Lundberg, *The Hotel and Restaurant Business* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1989), 44.

²³ *Cedar County News*, 24 May 1917.

²⁴ Dana L. Pratt, *National Register of Historic Places Nomination for the Norfolk Hotel*, 24 August 1988.

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CRITERION C: Architectural Significance

The Hartington Hotel is significant for its architectural merit, as well as its historical significance. Although the building has a few relatively minor integrity problems with the interior, the exterior of the hotel looks much like it did when it was built 86 years ago. The building exemplifies the ideals of the standard commercial hotel of the 1910s, if in a rather simplified manner. While the interior is elegant, it exhibits a more subdued elegance than other hotels of the period, as a result of its location in a small town in an extremely rural county. At the same time, the important spaces that typified the property type are present, from the spacious lobby to the elegant dining room, the private bathrooms in some of the guest rooms to the services in the basement. Despite some alterations, which will be eliminated during the certified rehabilitation, the Hartington Hotel remains an excellent example of a small town commercial hotel.

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Verbal Boundary Description:

Original Lots 1 and 2, Block 29, Original Plat of the City of Hartington, Cedar County, Nebraska.

Boundary Justification:

The boundaries for the Hotel Hartington include all of the land historically associated with the property.