

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

For NPS use only

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

received

date entered

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

1. Name

historic West Baden Springs Hotel

and or common

2. Location

street & number off Ind. 56 _____ not for publication

city, town West Baden Springs _____ vicinity of

state Indiana code county Orange code

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 checked="" 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	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<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
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: vacant

4. Owner of Property

name Eugene MacDonald

street & number c/o West Baden Springs Hotel, Box 338

city, town West Baden Springs _____ vicinity of state Indiana 47567

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Register of Deeds, Orange County

street & number Court House Square

city, town Paoli _____ state Indiana

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Historic American Buildings Survey has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1962 federal state county local

depository for survey records Library of Congress

city, town Washington _____ state DC 20240

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

Summary

The West Baden Springs Hotel rests on rolling land in the middle of extensive forested areas in a region long famous for its mineral springs.¹ In its heyday, during the first three decades of the 20th century, the complex included the 708-room main hotel building, built in 1901-02; a number of smaller structures; and various recreational facilities. The main hotel is a 6-story brick and concrete structure, 16-sided on the exterior, with a vast covered circular "Pompeian Court," or atrium, rising the full height of the building on the interior. A huge steel and glass dome, 195 feet in diameter and 130 feet high, covers the circular court. Elliptical in configuration, the dome is supported by 24 steel ribs connected to a circular plate drum at the crown and tied together at the bottom by circular plate girders that rest only atop the hotel's outer walls at the circumference of the enclosed space. The ribs are supported on giant steel shoes provided with rollers to allow for metallic expansion and contraction. Around the court are two concentric rings of rooms with a corridor between them on each floor.

Alterations

The building's original arrangement and detailing have been somewhat altered. In 1917-19, much decorative work was added to the formerly somewhat austere inner court. The great brick columns were covered with canvas and painted. The lower walls were faced with marble and a magnificent marble mosaic tile floor and a large glazed ceramic fireplace facing were installed. In the 1930s, when a Jesuit seminary began to occupy the building, the Jesuits found the nominally "Moorish" architecture offensive and took down Byzantine-style towers from the main building and removed the scalloped top edge of its exterior brick wall. They also altered somewhat the arrangements of the rooms, making cells and prayer rooms of some of them, and converted the grand lobby into a chapel, closing it off from the atrium.²

Further interior alterations were made by Northwood Institute in the 1960s in converting the building for college use. These included removing the individual hotel room bathrooms on the upper floors and providing group facilities.³

Still joined to the main building on the north is a square structure which originally housed a dining room below and a ballroom/exhibition hall above; the Jesuits divided the latter into classrooms. Also to the north, beyond the dining room, is a large kitchen area and to the side a boiler room and the former garage and staff quarters, later used as an academic building by the seminary and the institute.

Other Features

The hotel's red and white brick was painted early in its history. A large veranda was constructed late in the 1910s. An extension of the veranda, no longer standing, connected the building via a covered walkway to a series of buildings across the

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below				
prehistoric	archeology-prehistoric	community planning	landscape architecture	religion	
1400-1499	archeology-historic	conservation	law	science	
1500-1599	agriculture	economics	literature	sculpture	
1600-1699	architecture	education	military	social	
1700-1799	art	X engineering	music	humanitarian	
1800-1899	commerce	exploration settlement	philosophy	theater	
X 1900-	communications	industry	politics government	transportation	
		invention		X other (specify) Recreation	
Specific dates	1901-02 -- 1932	Builder Architect	Harrison Albright	(resort hotel)	

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Summary

The West Baden Springs Hotel, the focus of the community that dubbed itself the "Wiesbaden" (West Baden) or "Carlsbad" of America because of its mineral water springs, is a dramatic witness to an opulent social era, when Americans "took the waters" to restore health and enjoy a variety of recreational activities.¹

From its proximity to gambling casinos the West Baden Springs Hotel emerged as the Midwest's answer to Monte Carlo. The resort's exceptional recreational facilities likewise attracted sportsmen, notably practice teams of major league baseball. Through one of its owners, it also had ties to circus history. Finally, in itself, the hotel is a major feat of engineering, featuring an immense covered dome that was the largest in the world when built.

This steel and glass dome covering the inner atrium, of 200 feet in diameter, was an engineering tour de force. It was advertised by its owners and in engineering journals of the time. Its great size, and the desire of its builders to make it the biggest in the world, made it a climactic achievement in a great era of experimentation in the use of metal and glass in the last half of the 19th century. This tradition includes works like the 1851 Crystal Palace at London's World's Fair and the great railroad train sheds and domes of ever-increasing size which culminated in 1893 with William LeBaron Jenney's Horticultural Hall dome at Chicago's World's Columbian Exposition, the outer diameter of which was 187 feet. Although later outstripped in size by other types of domes, including reinforced and geodesic structures, the West Baden Springs Hotel dome may still be the largest of its type in the world.

History

The first hotel in the West Baden Springs vicinity was built in 1845. The Mile Lick Hotel, soon renamed the West Baden Springs Hotel, was constructed in 1855. Receiving its great impetus when the Louisville, New Albany and Chicago completed rail service through the town with the Monon Line, the first building, as expanded, served until it burned to the ground in 1901.

The present building was constructed in 1901-02 for the owner of the old hotel, Lee W. Sinclair, a banker from nearby Salem, Ind. Sinclair dreamed of building a vast domed structure but was turned down by a number of architects who thought the project impossible. He finally engaged Harrison Albright, a young architect

9. Major Bibliographical References

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 80

Quadrangle name French Lick, Ind.

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM References

A

1	6	5	3	3	0	0	0	4	2	6	8	3	2	0
Zone		Easting						Northing						

B

1	6	5	3	3	5	5	0	4	2	6	8	9	2	0
Zone		Easting						Northing						

C

1	6	5	3	3	5	5	0	4	2	6	8	3	2	0
Zone		Easting						Northing						

D

1	6	5	3	3	0	0	0	4	2	6	8	9	2	0
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 northeast and southeast quarter-quarter sections of the northwest quarter-section of Section 34, Range 2 North, French Lick Township.

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

state code county code

state code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title James H. Charleton, Historian

organization History Division, National Park Service date June 1985

street & number 1100 L Street, NW telephone (202) 343-8165

city or town Washington state DC 20013-7127

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

title date

For NPS use only

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

date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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Title: Historic American Engineering Record
Date: 1973 Federal
Depository for survey records: Library of Congress
City: Washington State: DC 20240

Title: National Register of Historic Places
Date: 1974 Federal
Depository for survey records: National Park Service
City: Washington State: DC 20013-7127

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street housing a hospital and an opera house. Beyond these structures were a formal garden, spring houses, and a giant 2-story covered structure with a horse track on the first floor, a bicycle track on the second, and a full-size open baseball field in the center.

To the south of the building, around the formal rectangular garden, are several brick pavilion buildings of Greek Revival design. A temple of "Apollo," a pavilion which contained bowling alleys and billiard tables; and the "Temple of Hygeia," another spring building later used as a chapel, remain. These structures replaced earlier frame ones in the late 1910s. Spring Building Number 7, a brick building with elaborate glazed ceramic decoration on the interior and leaded glass windows, has been removed and the access stairway to the spring area in the rotunda of the building has been filled in with concrete. The Jesuits capped this and the other springs during their stay.

The opera house and hospital, the bicycle-horse track building, a Catholic church, and smaller outlying structures have also been demolished; the baseball diamond and portions of the golf course remain. A stable still stands but is in poor condition.

Footnotes

1

The description that follows is an edited version of that appearing in the National Register of Historic Places nomination (1974).

2

Janice Turner, "A Stately Pleasure Dome" (West Baden, Ind.: Northwood Institute, 1980), pp. 22-24.

3

Gregory S. Gatsos, "Biography of a Hotel" (1970).

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from Charleston, West Virginia, to design the building and an engineer, Oliver J. Westcott, to plan the dome. (Because Sinclair feared being burned out again, he specified that a minimum of wood be used in construction: the hotel's foundations were stone, its floors concrete, and its plaster lath of heavy steel mesh.) To the astonishment of skeptics, the structure did not collapse. Indeed, it still remains structurally sound.

Sinclair's hotel, which featured a music room, a theater, and a stock exchange, was an attraction in itself, but the resort's other amenities made it even more enticing. In addition to the spring houses, these included: a separate opera house; a double-decked covered bicycle track that was the largest in the country, built in an oval a third of a mile around, and so large that a full-sized baseball field was in its center*; a "natatorium" surrounded by three floors of bath facilities; a miniature Catholic cathedral on the hill to the west of the hotel; a golf course, bridle paths, and nature walks; and a trolley, at the door, to nearby French Lick.²

The building's architecture is not as much an example of any particular style as an Olympian combination of several styles. Some of the outbuildings' styles, however, can be traced to mineral water health spas in Baden and Wiesbaden, Germany. In fact, the building known as Spring Seven had several entrances, over one of which is the name Sprudel Seben, German for "Spring Seven." The mineral water bottled by the hotel was called Sprudel Water after the Sprudel Wasser of Wiesbaden.

The hotel played a significant role in American social history. Guests came first for the mineral waters available there and for the hotel's many recreational amenities, but were also attracted by the gambling and gaming in the area, especially during the 1920s. It was a perennial vacation address for the great and near-great, during the first three decades of the 20th century. The name of "Diamond Jim" Brady appeared on the guest register many times. General John J. Pershing, the Studebaker family, Mayor "Big Bill" Thompson of Chicago, New York Governor and Presidential candidate Alfred E. Smith, the humorist George Ade, and Eva ("I don't care") Tanguay were also guests, some of them coming year after year. The song "On the Banks of the Wabash" was written by Paul Dresser during a vacation at the hotel, and it was first played here. Boxers John L. Sullivan and Thomas J. Sharkey were also regular patrons. An infamous visitor was Al Capone, who came year after year in the 1920s--with his bodyguards.³

* Bicyclists pedaled on the upper floor; horseback riders paraded on the lower level. The following major league baseball teams used the field for spring practice at various times: St. Louis Browns, Pittsburgh Pirates, Philadelphia Phillies, Chicago Cubs, Cincinnati Reds, and St. Louis Cardinals. (Gregory S. Gatsos, "Biography of a Hotel" [1970].) (Unpaginated)

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Sinclair continued to run the hotel until his death in 1916. His daughter and son-in-law then took over its management. They conducted an extensive renovation (sketched in the Description section of this nomination), elements of which occurred both before and after the hotel's brief service as an Army hospital in 1918-19.⁴

In 1922, the hotel was sold to Edward ("Ed") Ballard, a "local boy" who had become highly successful in the gambling casino and circus businesses. He ran casinos in Miami Beach, Fla., Hot Springs, Ark., Saratoga, N.Y., and Mackinac Island, Mich., as well as in West Baden Springs. He had also moved the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus to the West Baden Springs vicinity in 1915. Ballard was a great showman who used the hotel's "Big Dome" as a "big top" at times; he had, in fact, entertained the soldiers with circus performances there during the hotel's hospital service.⁵ Under Ballard, the hotel thrived until the Great Depression, although, like other Northern resorts, it began to lose trade to Florida and other distant resort locations that were becoming readily accessible by private automobile.

Ballard had -- with wisdom or luck (or both) -- liquidated his circus interests days before the stock market crash in 1929. He had not sold the hotel, however, and, out of loyalty to his home town, struggled to keep it open. Finally, in the spring of 1932, he closed its doors.

Ballard considered selling the hotel but found that the prime would-be purchasers were gambling interests of an unsavory variety. When he despaired of selling, he cast about for an organization that might use the structure for religious or educational purposes. Thus it was that in 1934, Ballard, although not himself a Catholic, donated the hotel to the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) for use as a seminary.⁶ During its 30 years in that role, the hotel underwent modifications that subdued its flamboyant decoration. (The principal changes are listed under Description.)⁷

In 1964, the seminary moved to new quarters near Chicago, and the Jesuits advertised the property for sale. In 1966, the Northwood Institute, a private collegiate school of business management, acquired the building.⁸ It served as one of the institute's campuses until 1983.

Eugene MacDonald, an experienced hotel owner who is a native of the area, purchased the hotel in late 1983, and plans to restore and reopen it.⁹ MacDonald's efforts, if successful, would return the hotel to the character and appearance of its glamorous early 20th-century past.

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Footnotes

1

This sketch, except where noted, is a revision of the corresponding section of the National Register of Historic Places nomination form, supplemented by additional data from Janice Turner, "A Stately Pleasure Dome" (West Baden, Ind.: Northwood Institute, 1980), passim.

2

Ibid., p. 9.

3

Ibid., p. 11.

4

Ibid., p. 13.

5

Charles E. Ballard, The Ballards in Indiana (Peru, Ind.: The C.E. Ballard Literary Trust, 1984), pp. 58-60.

6

Ibid., pp. 60-62.

7

Turner, op. cit., pp. 22, 24.

8

Ibid., pp. 26-30.

9

"Valley native buys Northwood campus," The Times-Mail (Bedford, Ind.), Thursday, October 6, 1983, p. 1; "West Baden hotel revived," The Call Leader, Tuesday, October 18, 1983, p. 6.

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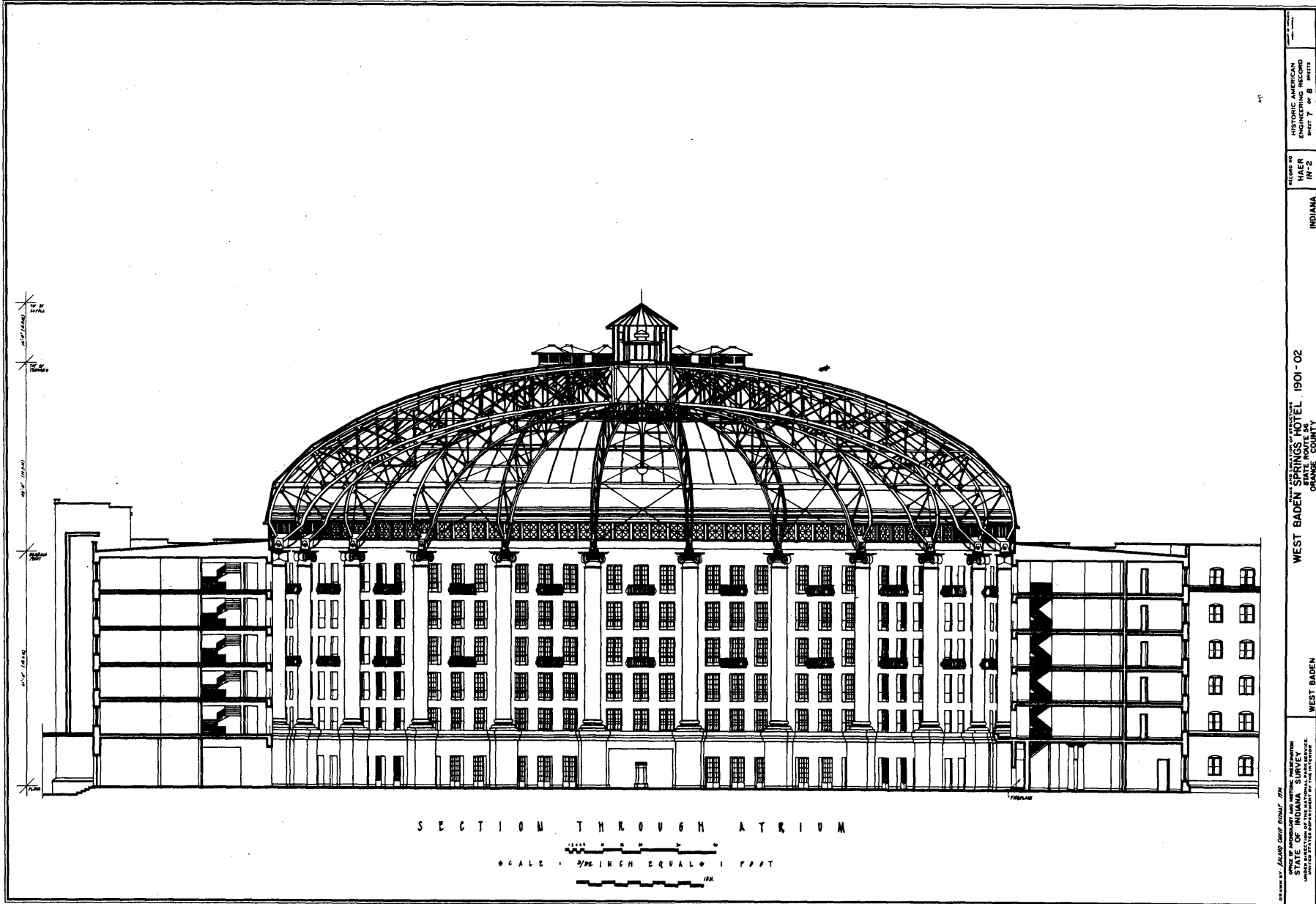
Turner, Janice. "A Stately Pleasure Dome." W. Baden, Ind.: Northwood Institute, 1980. (Pamphlet)

"Valley native buys Northwood campus," The Times-Mail (Bedford, Ind.), Thursday, October 6, 1983, p. 1.

"West Baden hotel revived," The Call Leader, Tuesday, October 18, 1983, p. 6.

TWIN LINE

95 (957)



SECTION THROUGH ATRIUM

SCALE 1/32 INCH EQUALS 1 FOOT

1/32 INCH EQUALS 1 FOOT

WEST BADEN SPRINGS HOTEL 1901-02
INDIANA
ORANGE COUNTY

HISTORIC AMERICAN
ENGINEERING RECORD
SHEET 7 OF 8 SHEETS

RECORD NO.
HAER
IN-2

INDIANA

WEST BADEN

DESIGNED BY: LAWRENCE BRIDGES SKIDMORE, OWINGS & MERRILL ARCHITECTS
STATE OF INDIANA SURVEY
COMMISSIONED BY THE STATE OF INDIANA
AND THE STATE OF INDIANA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS