

Parcel #: 11-116-01
Acreage: Less than one acre.
Location: 17 South Virginia Street
City: Reno State: Nevada County: Washoe

Current Owner: Overland Inc.
Address: P.O. Box 2149, Reno, Nevada 89505

Data Prepared by: Pat Lawrence-Dietz Date: 06/13/83
Rainshadow Associates
Address: P.O. Box 352, Carson City, Nevada 89702

Property Information

Original Use: Hotel and apartments
Present Use: Hotel and casino
Condition: Good
Architect: Frederic J. DeLongchamps; DeLongchamps/Frank W. Green
Builder: Unknown
Construction/Modification Dates: 1926-7, 1931, 1950-1
Building Type: Commercial, Hotel

Physical Description

The Riverside Hotel is a large and imposing six-storied, red brick, Period Revival structure with terra cotta decoration in the Gothic Style. Its siting in the heart of downtown Reno at the intersection of Virginia Street and the Truckee River gives it special significance. The original portion of the building was T-shaped. A major casino/restaurant/theater wing was added to the west side in 1950.

The original building faces Virginia Street. The tall storefront level is somewhat altered: a marquee covers a large portion of the first floor exterior; door and window openings have been altered. The east facade is divided by a slightly projecting central pavilion. Two five-story, terra cotta clad, slanted bays flank the central bay of the pavilion. The building is divided horizontally into three parts: ground floor (storefront), intermediate, and roofline.

Windows at the second through fifth story level are double-hung, one-over-one, paired and triple in arrangements. Brick spandrels with inlaid zigzag patterns separate the windows in the facade bays. The windows at the sixth story level are most elaborate with decorated terra cotta surrounds consisting of Gothic arched heads with terra cotta quoins and a continuous terra cotta sill. Above the sixth story windows is a projecting terra cotta cornice with a floriated paneled frieze. The building is crowned by a stepped, brick parapet topped with a terra cotta course and inset with terra cotta decorative panels. Above the central pavilion is a terra cotta pediment ornamented with Gothic tracery.

Alterations to the building have occurred primarily at the ground floor level. Originally, the facade was divided into nine bays with a central arched entry bay and eight storefront bays, each with large plate-glass windows and a multi-light transom. Today, most of the windows have been bricked over. The central entrance has been altered. A large marquee wraps around the building at the mezzanine level. Other alterations include a large sign attached to the north wall of the building and another attached to the roof. The majority of the exterior is intact.

Statement of Significance (Criteria B, C)

The Riverside Hotel is significant as an intact example of the late Gothic Revival style designed by notable Nevada architect, Frederic J. DeLongchamps. The building, which was commissioned by prominent financial and political figure George Wingfield, is also significant for its historical association with the Reno divorce industry.

DeLongchamps, who practiced from 1907 to 1965, is primarily remembered for his monumental, Classical Revival style designs for public structures. In the late 1920's and 1930's, DeLongchamps' residential designs reflected then current trends in "picturesque" suburban designs. However, the Riverside Hotel marks a rare departure from the formal, Neoclassical designs the architect favored for major public and commercial buildings. Please see the nomination cover form for a more detailed discussion of DeLongchamps' work.

From 1859 until the turn-of-the-century, there were relatively few divorces in the State. However, Nevada's early liberalization of divorce residency requirements attracted a significant temporary population during the first four decades of the 20th century. In November 1928, Max Stern of the Pittsburgh Press estimated that divorce seeking visitors to Reno spent over \$5 million a year. In 1931, 4,800 divorce decrees were sought in northern Nevada.

The hotel was originally built as apartments and hotel rooms to be used by prospective divorcees. Situated next to the courthouse, the hotel was built by Wingfield in 1926, who in the same year pushed a bill through the legislature to reduce the residency requirement for a divorce from six months to three months.

George Wingfield invested the money he made in mining in Nevada back into Nevada. A native of Fort Smith, Arkansas, Wingfield moved to Nevada via Oregon in 1896 and in 1901 joined the rush to the State's newest boomtown, Tonopah. In Tonopah, he became Vice-President of the Tonopah Banking Corporation.

When Goldfield began to flower as a mining district after 1903, Wingfield was one of the first financial entrepreneurs to heavily invest in the area. In conjunction with his partner Nixon, Wingfield absorbed dozens of smaller mining operations and by 1906, they formed the Goldfield Consolidated Mine Company. The Goldfield mines became some of the richest in the world and the profits realized by Wingfield and Nixon were tremendous. In a span of a few years, these two men became powerful figures in Nevada's financial and political circles.

The Goldfield boom ended with the panic of 1907, and in 1908 Wingfield moved to Reno where he invested in livestock, hotels, real estate, and a chain of 12 banks. He built the Reno National Bank in 1915 as part of this chain. Throughout his prominent years, Wingfield played a very strong and active role in Republican political affairs. On the death of Senator George Nixon in 1912, Wingfield not only acquired Nixon's extensive banking interests, but was also offered an appointment to complete the Senatorial term. He refused this offer as he did the push in 1926 to have him run for Governor of the State. He appeared much happier to stay in the political background acting as a power broker. He held one public office, that of Regent of the University of Nevada in 1928.

Following the 1929 crash, Wingfield made every effort to support and bolster the troubled, local cattle industry. By October of 1932, he had overextended the limits

of his banking chain, a "banking holiday" was declared and the banks closed. Wingfield was forced into bankruptcy in 1935, recovered in subsequent years, and enjoyed financial, political, and social affluence until his death in 1959.

Bibliography

DeLongchamps, Frederic J., Riverside Hotel Specifications, 1931. DeLongchamps Special Collection, Special Collections, University of Nevada-Reno.

Elliott, Russell R., History of Nevada, University of Nebraska Press, 1973, Lincoln, Nebraska.

Hamrick, James and Ana Beth Koval, George Wingfield House National Register Nomination, Reno, Nevada, April 2, 1982.

Nylen, Robert A., "Reno's Premier Architect," Heritage Herald, May/June 1983, pp.4-5.

Official Bicentennial Book, Ed. Stanley W. Paher, "Dude Ranches in Nevada." (State of Nevada, 1976), pp. 118-119.

Legal Description: Beginning at the intersection of south line Lot 2 Riverview survey and west line South Virginia Street, then southerly 6 feet, then westerly and parallel to Lot 2, 263 feet, then westerly on same line 8.68 feet to east line of South Sierra Street, then north 15 51' 25" west 133.74 feet, then north 68 14' 05" east 126.566 feet, then north 73 47' 35" east 108.23 feet, then north 16 12' 25" west 6 feet, then north 73 47' 35" east 18.67 feet, then south 28 47' 35" west 8.49 feet, then north 73 47' 35" east 24 feet, then south 16 12' 25" east 140 feet to point of beginning.

Location of Legal Description: Washoe County Courthouse, 117 S. Virginia St., Reno, NV 89501.

Representation in Existing Surveys: Reno Cultural Resources Survey, 1983, Local survey deposited at the Division of Historic Preservation & Archeology, Carson City, NV

UTM References: Zone 11, E258850 N 4278455.