

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

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RECEIVED MAY 3 1984
DATE ENTERED JUN 13 1984

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

El Cortez Hotel

AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

239 West ^{2nd} Second Street

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Reno

VICINITY OF

2

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

STATE

Nevada

CODE

32

COUNTY

Washoe

CODE

031

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

- DISTRICT
- BUILDING(S)
- STRUCTURE
- SITE
- OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

- PUBLIC
- PRIVATE
- BOTH

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

- IN PROCESS
- BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

- OCCUPIED
- UNOCCUPIED
- WORK IN PROGRESS

ACCESSIBLE

- YES: RESTRICTED
- YES: UNRESTRICTED
- NO

PRESENT USE

- AGRICULTURE
- COMMERCIAL
- EDUCATIONAL
- ENTERTAINMENT
- GOVERNMENT
- INDUSTRIAL
- MILITARY
- MUSEUM
- PARK
- PRIVATE RESIDENCE
- RELIGIOUS
- SCIENTIFIC
- TRANSPORTATION
- OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

El Cortez Hotel, Incorporated

STREET & NUMBER

239 West Second Street

CITY, TOWN

Reno

VICINITY OF

STATE

Nevada 89501

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Washoe County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

117 South Virginia Street

CITY, TOWN

Reno

STATE

Nevada 89501

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Reno Cultural Resources Survey, Phase II

DATE

1983

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

City of Reno Planning and Community Development Department

CITY, TOWN

Reno

STATE

Nevada

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 El Cortez is a seven-story, steel frame, brick faced, Art Deco hotel. It was designed by the Reno architectural firm of George A. Ferris and Son for Abe Zetoney. Architecturally, it is the most thoroughly designed hotel in Reno from the thirties and when first constructed was the tallest building in Reno. It is ornamented with extensive, low relief, foliated motif, sculptural decoration in terra cotta. It is in good condition and continues to serve as a hotel.

Site

The El Cortez is located on the northeast corner of West Second Street and Arlington Avenue. It is just five blocks west of Virginia Street, the "main street" of Reno. Both Second and Arlington are major arteries. The hotel is located in a mixed use, commercial zone, distinguished by its high density of hotels. The El Cortez takes up a large portion of its block and is built up to the sidewalk with no setback.

Exterior

This is an Art Deco styled, seven stories, brick and steel structure with some Art Moderne elements at the ground floor level. Originally square in plan, both the west and south facades were divided into five bays. Additions to the north side increased the west facade to nine bays. A two story addition was attached to the east end of the building. The building originally housed 65 guest rooms, with the services of the coffee shop, barber and beauty shop at the first floor level.

The building is divided into three horizontal sections; the two story storefront level, the intermediate guest floor level, and the roofline. The storefront and the roofline levels are highlighted with extensive, low relief, foliated motif, sculptural ornamentation in terra cotta. The intermediate level of the building is divided vertically by recessed strips of windows separated by narrow, brick pilasters. Windows are metal framed, six light casement with a multi-light surround.

The storefront level of the building has been altered. Originally, one large plate glass window with a multi-light transom pierced the west wall near the front corner of the building, and two large plate glass windows each with a multi-light transom pierced the south wall. These large openings have been covered over with smooth terra cotta tile siding and much smaller, three part, vertically divided windows. Between 1931 and 1949, this storefront level was altered as Art Moderne elements were added. This Art Moderne ornamentation includes: rounded corners, round windows, and smooth terra cotta wall finish. A 1949 photo shows that Art Moderne signage was also used for the Beauty Salon and Coffee Shop. This signage has since been removed.

Two, large, tall and narrow, single glass sheet windows flank the main entrance with its stepped frontispiece enriched with low relief, foliated motif, sculptural terra cotta ornamentation. Originally these were vertically divided multi-light windows. Foliated motif, terra cotta ornamentation enlivens the ground floor level not only above the window openings and around the main entrance, but also the stepped belt course which separates the second and third story levels. The building's low or flat roof is hidden behind a parapet wall. Rectangular terra cotta panels top the vertical brick pilasters and vertical window strips, ornamenting the roofline.

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/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1931, 1940

BUILDER/ARCHITECT George Ferris and Son

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Summary

The El Cortez Hotel is significant primarily as an excellent example of the Art Deco in Reno. It is one of three remaining major buildings in Reno designed in the Art Deco style. The El Cortez is also significant as a major work of the architectural firm of George A. Ferris and Son.

Architectural Significance

Built in 1931, with later additions between 1931 and 1940, the El Cortez is significant locally as an example of the Art Deco style. It is one of only three remaining large or multi-level Art Deco buildings in Reno; the other two are the U. S. Post Office (1933-34) and the Mapes Hotel (1947). With the foliated motif and stylized terra cotta decoration at base and parapet, stepped frontispiece with framing volutes, and overall vertical emphasis, it is an excellent example of its type. Despite the storefront having been remodelled, most of the exterior of the building appears as when it was built. Later Art Moderne elements added to the storefront level are architecturally and esthetically compatible.

Associative Significance

The El Cortez was designed by the prominent, Reno based architectural firm of George A. Ferris and Son. George A. Ferris served Nevada as an architect for over thirty years. He was born in Philadelphia in 1859 and educated at Swarthmore College. He came west in 1879 and settled in Reno in 1906 where he opened his architectural office. Among the noteworthy buildings he designed are: a school in Benecia, California; four schools in Reno; Mount Rose, McKinley Park, Orvis Ring, and Mary S. Doten; the Governor's Mansion in Carson City, and the Rialto Theater in Reno.

In 1928 George Ferris and his son, Lehman A. Ferris, formed a partnership. Lehman, born in 1893, studied electrical engineering at the University of Nevada at Reno and graduated in 1915. After graduation he held jobs as a mine engineer, draftsman, specifications writer, and superintendant of construction. Lehman worked for prominent Nevada architect, Frederic J. DeLongchamps in 1919 as a specifications writer before going to work for his father. George Ferris and Son designed a number of buildings throughout Nevada including: the Oddfellows Building, Reno (1928) the Cladianos Building, Reno; the Nevada State Building, Reno (designed in collaboration with DeLongchamps in 1926); and schools in Las Vegas, Austin and Elko, Nevada. This partnership dissolved in 1932.

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George Ferris went to work as the State Architect for the Federal Housing Authority and Lehman Ferris became the City of Reno building inspector but continued the practice of architecture part time. Later he was in an architectural practice with Graham Erskine.

Lehman Ferris was an influential architect in Reno. He was instrumental in getting the Uniform Building Code adopted in Reno. He was the chairman of the first State Architectural Registration Board in 1947 and was issued architectural license number one in the State of Nevada. He was one of the first architects in Nevada to specialize in steel frame construction.

Abe Zetooney, the owner of the El Cortez, was a real estate investor. When he built the El Cortez, gambling was again legal and a six-week residency requirement for divorce went into effect. Zetooney was able to rent rooms for \$6.00 a night rather than the prevailing \$2.50.

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MAJOR
BIBLIOGRAPHICAL

CONTINUATION SHEET REFERENCES ITEM NUMBER 9 PAGE 1

"El Cortez Will Expand". Nevada State Journal. May 4, 1940

Ferris, Lehman A. "Monk" (1893-). Architect. Life of a Busy Man: Recollections of My Work as an Architect, Building Inspector, and Civic Leader. Oral History, 1970.

"Heart Attack is Fatal to George Ferris". Nevada State Journal. August 18, 1948.

Notable Nevadans" Snap-shots of Sagebrushers Who Are Doing Things. Reno, Nevada, June, 1910.

EL CORTEZ HOTEL
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CONTINUATION SHEET GEOGRAPHICAL DATA ITEM NUMBER 10 PAGE 1

Legal Description: Beginning at northeast corner of West Second Street and Arlington Avenue then northerly along east line of North Arlington Avenue 110 feet then easterly 60 feet then northerly and parallel with east line of North Arlington Avenue 50 feet then easterly and parallel to West Second Street 30 feet then southerly and parallel with east line of North Arlington Avenue 160 feet to north line of West Second Street then westerly along north line of West Second Street 90 feet to point of beginning.