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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM

NATIONAL  
REGISTER

1. Name of Property

historic name: Florence Hotel

other name/site number: 24MO702

2. Location

street & number: 111 N. Higgins

not for publication: n/a  
vicinity: n/a

city/town: Missoula

state: Montana

code: MT

county: Missoula

code: 063

zip code: 59801

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this  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  meets  does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. (  See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Maurel Sheffy MT SHPO 5-8-92  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

Montana State Historic Preservation Office  
State or Federal agency or bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting or other official Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

Signature of the Keeper

~~Entered in the~~  
National Register Date of Action

entered in the National Register  
 see continuation sheet

Andrew Byer 6/18/92

determined eligible for the  
National Register

see continuation sheet  
 determined not eligible for the  
National Register

see continuation sheet  
 removed from the National Register

see continuation sheet  
 other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

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## 5. Classification

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**Ownership of Property:** Private

**Category of Property:** Building(s)

**Number of Resources within Property**

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>  1  </u>	<u>    </u> building(s)
<u>    </u>	<u>    </u> sites
<u>    </u>	<u>    </u> structures
<u>    </u>	<u>    </u> objects
<u>  1  </u>	<u>    </u> Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

Name of related multiple property listing: Historic Resources of Missoula, Montana

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## 6. Function or Use

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**Historic Functions:**

Domestic: hotel  
Commerce/Trade: restaurant,  
specialty store

**Current Functions:**

Commerce/Trade: restaurant,  
specialty store, business

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## 7. Description

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**Architectural Classification:**

Modern Movement: Moderne

**Materials:**

foundation: concrete  
walls: concrete, terra cotta  
roof: asphalt

**Narrative Description**

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

The Florence Hotel is an Art Moderne style hotel building constructed of reinforced concrete. Basically rectangular in massing, the main component extends seven stories above street level, with a one story wing which extends westward along Front Street. Public entrances and storefronts face Higgins Avenue and Front Street; deliveries are made via a freight entrance that opens onto a mid-block alley on the north side of the building.

The exterior of the hotel presents a design of streamlined simplicity, with a futuristic impression. Parallel modern lines and smooth-faced concrete piers dominate the facade of the building. While architectural concrete makes up the vertical members, the spandrels and horizontal members of the walls are finished with terra cotta tiles. A continuous horizontal banding of terra cotta tile wraps the south and east facades, separating the first floor retail space from the upper stories. These spandrels and the continuous band establish the strong horizontal emphasis which characterizes Art Moderne structures.

Prominent square window bays form vertical tiers up the east, west and south elevations. The window tier above the primary lobby entrance in the east elevation is enhanced by projecting glass block balconies, and by a decorative cap that rises above the parapet of the building. The predominant hard line design of the building is softened by the use of curved

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glass blocks on the southeast and northeast corners. This treatment is echoed on the corners of the ornamental balconies. The north elevation of the building, facing the alley, is devoid of the tile, glass block, and window bays that characterize the rest of the building.

The south and east elevations of the first floor contain the public entries into the main lobby, as well as the store fronts with entries and display windows. The primary entrance, centered on the east elevation, originally was flanked on either side by two recessed storefront entries. However, the southern-most entry has been moved to the corner of the building and is currently covered with an awning. Also, the first storefront north of the main entrance has been altered and closed. The south elevation contains two public entries which lead to the main lobby, and four additional entries into retail stores and/or offices.

Storefront entrances and associated display windows are divided vertically by terra cotta tiles above polished black granite bases. The granite covers the concrete piers which support the building. Non-structural carrara black glass faces the bases under the show windows' plate glass. Satin-finished aluminum and plate glass settings adorn the fronts, awning box cornices over the storefronts, and the marquees over the entrances into the hotel. The use of minimal joints and a smooth-shiny surface contributes to the storefronts' streamlined design.

The interior of the hotel contained 141 rooms when it opened in 1941. Wide entrance arcades allowed access from either Higgins Avenue or Front Street into the hotel's ornate lobby. A large fireplace, with a facing of travertine and verde antique marble, a mantel made of architectural bronze, and the flue paneled in California redwood, served as the focal point of the lobby. (This fireplace remains in place, although "hidden" by furnishings associated with the lounge that now occupies the original lobby.) The lobby's floor is divided into 18" x 18" square fields of green and gold terrazzo, divided by heavy bronze strips.

The lobby's base boards, arcades, and columns are finished with verde antique marble. All of the walls displayed wainscoting of rose and tan travertine marble, and a raised trim with a geometric pattern edges the ceiling. Formerly, California redwood trim surrounded large glass block windows on the south side of the lobby and lined the mezzanine floor and beams on the ceiling. Art Moderne fixtures lined the walls and hung from the ceiling.

The staircase and elevators leading to the basement and upper floors, also display ornamentation. Monolithic terrazzo stairs of a golden cream color feature railings of architectural bronze with mahogany hand rails, and lead from the first floor down to the basement, and up to the second floor. Satin-finished architectural bronze also covers the elevator doors and mail box trim.

The hotel's fashionable interior and modern technological features attracted many guests. Guest rooms throughout the hotel played on a variety of color schemes, with each room containing matching carpeting and draperies. Either Eighteenth Century mahogany furniture or natural walnut furniture occupied the rooms. Perhaps most important to the guests, all rooms in the hotel included the modern feature of air conditioning. It stood as the only hotel in the Northwest with a central air-conditioning system in the early 1940s.

The architect designed the Florence Hotel to accommodate two additional stories for future space. In addition, it was designed to endure earthquakes, vibrations, sound, expansion, and contraction. Specific features that add to the building's stability include reinforced concrete stairways and shafts, as well as floor slab suspension.

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When the Florence Hotel was designed, plans were laid to add an interior multi-level parking garage, no doubt in response to the boom in automotive transportation in Montana and the United States during the 1930s and 1940s. Indicated on the original plans but not illustrated, the garage apparently was designed and added to the west side of the building about a year later. The garage included a total of five parking levels, only two of which were above-ground. The lower three levels and the uppermost level are no longer in use. The parking garage retained the Art Moderne style of architecture, and the continuous terra cotta banding which wraps the primary facades was extended to visually tie the garage into the original design. The facade also exhibited a flat concrete surface, except for the two garage doors.

The Florence Hotel currently retains a high degree of its historic integrity. With the exceptions in the appearance of the storefronts noted above, the exterior of the building retains its original configuration. However, between 1975 and 1989, the upper floors, which formerly contained guest rooms, were remodeled to include office space. Transforming the top five floors into office space involved gutting each floor, with the exception of several bathrooms. On the first floor, however, a majority of the Art Moderne elements were either retained or reconstructed during remodeling. The primary change involved the use of gypsum board to enclose the majority of the area once included in the lobby. It is this new space that is currently occupied by the lounge. Although this area is enclosed, the original interior columns remain in place, and this modification can be considered a reversible one. Art Moderne characteristics adorning the present lobby include a geometric design on the ceiling, travertine wainscoting, light fixtures, a terrazzo floor, and the architectural bronze and mahogany hand rails along the stairs.

The second floor exhibits its original construction and decoration, except for a portion of the open lobby which has been enclosed with glass and aluminum walls to divide the floor into office space. This also can be considered a reversible alteration.

Other alterations include replacement of the windows on the third, sixth, and seventh floors. However, these also are double-paned aluminum-framed windows, specifically chosen to match the Art Moderne style, and do not conflict with the building's original character. Two stuccoed panels have replaced original terra cotta banding on the south facade of the garage.

Missoula's downtown currently consists of predominantly two- to four-story commercial and public buildings of brick, stone, and concrete construction. This skyline is variated by the seven-story Florence building, the nine-story Smead-Simons Building (Wilma Theatre), and the six-story Montana Bank Building. Modern commercial development and open parking lots intrude upon the historic character of the downtown district.

The Florence occupies the entire southwest half of the block at the corner of Higgins and Front. Adjacent buildings reflect all phases of downtown development. The Missoula Mercantile and less prominent one- and two-story structures lining the east and west sides of the block were built between 1880 and 1920 during a period of sustained local growth generated by the arrival of the Northern Pacific and the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Railroad. While they retain the spatial relations typical of the historic period, the majority of the facades have been extensively remodeled. The Art Deco Hammond Arcade and the Art Moderne Florence reflect the limited commercial development of the 1930s and 1940s. The First Interstate Bank dates to the modern period.

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## 8. Statement of Significance

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Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: Locally, Statewide

Applicable National Register Criteria: A, C

Areas of Significance: Architecture  
Commerce

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): n/a

Period(s) of Significance: 1941-1942

Significant Person(s): n/a

Significant Dates: 1941

Cultural Affiliation: n/a

Architect/Builder: G.A. Pehrson, architect  
Alloway and George, contractors

### Narrative Statement of Significance

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

The Florence Hotel is an influential building associated with mid-20th century commercial development in Missoula's downtown business district, and is significant in a local context under criterion A. For its architectural qualities it gains statewide significance under criterion C, as a leading example of Art Moderne architecture, and as an example of the work of architect G.A. Pehrson.

### Historical Significance

Although the Missoula downtown area was platted as early as 1866, Missoula commercial development did not begin in earnest until the 1883 arrival of the Northern Pacific Railroad. Missoula, division headquarters for the Railway, became the distribution center for the five adjoining valleys and, between 1880-1920, increased in population from 300 to 12,000. Although the majority of historic commercial buildings in Missoula date to this period of development, limited commercial development continued through the 1940s despite the financial constraints associated with the Depression and WWII.

The northwest corner of Front Street and Higgins Avenue has historically marked the southern boundary of a central commercial district defined by the railroad right of way to the north, Pattee Street to the east, and Woody Street to the west. The current Florence Hotel building represents the third in a series of large hotels which have occupied the site. The first Florence Hotel, constructed in 1888, burned in 1913. A second hotel was constructed at the same location after the 1913 fire and gained recognition for being the largest Montana hotel west of Butte and Helena. This hotel, which contained one hundred and six guest rooms, was totally destroyed by a fire in October of 1936.

Upon the destruction of the hotel in 1936, the Missoula Mercantile Company, presided over by Walter H. McLeod, responded to the community's urgent need for a new hotel. McLeod and several other influential downtown businessmen, banded together to secure financing and to promote construction. These men justified the need for a new hotel with a host of economic concerns. First, situated within the only intermountain corridor between Glacier National Park and Utah, the city of Missoula accommodated many travelers. Second, two transcontinental mainline railroads, serving five fertile valleys, passed through Missoula. Third, five highways, including two interstate highways, passed nearby Missoula.<sup>1</sup> Fourth, facts gathered and published by the Northwestern Hotel Association in 1939 showed that the hotel business had increased 7% over the past year and was expected to expand in the future.<sup>2</sup>

See continuation sheets

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<sup>1</sup>McLeod Collection, Box 77, File 4.

<sup>2</sup>McLeod Collection, Box 78, File 1.

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The architectural firm of Hugill and Blatherwick received the first commission to design the Florence Hotel in 1937.<sup>3</sup> After completion of the plans in 1938, the Mercantile Company stalled construction for lack of sufficient funds to pay the approximate total of \$775,000 for the lot and building.<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, the Mercantile Company needed to wait for the high craftsmen's wages to decrease.<sup>5</sup> To make up for the funding shortage, the Mercantile Company and the Chamber of Commerce appealed to local citizens to contribute to the construction costs of the hotel. The appeal for money played upon the fact that the hotel would raise city real estate values, increase the money circulation, and enlarge and enliven the downtown business community.<sup>6</sup> Upon the eventual completion of the hotel in 1941, the Mercantile Company owned 67% and community shareholders owned the rest of the building.<sup>7</sup>

Dissatisfaction with Hugill and Blatherwick's hotel plans prompted the Mercantile Company to look for a new architect.<sup>8</sup> G. A. Pehrson, a Spokane architect, had worked previously for a Chicago architectural firm and supervised the construction of the Davenport Hotel in Spokane, Washington. Under the recommendation of Louis M. Davenport, president of the Davenport Hotel, the Mercantile Company commissioned Pehrson to design the new Florence Hotel in 1939. By April of 1940, the Spokane architect had completed the plans and one month later, the Mercantile Company hired the firm of Alloway and George to construct the hotel.<sup>9</sup>

In terms of the community, the hotel provided employment for over 100 people. During World War II, the hotel even employed Italian prisoners of war held at Fort Missoula.<sup>10</sup> Besides employment, Missoula residents used the hotel for a gathering place. Most of the important community functions took place at the Florence Hotel. Missoulians took pride in the fact that they had contributed financially to the construction of the elegant hotel.

### Architectural Significance

The third generation Florence was a "new and modern hotel to fit in with the other leading hotels of the Northwest." The local newspaper noted approvingly that the appearance of Higgins Avenue was "radically altered by the structure." Designed to be one of the great modern hosteleries in the Northwest, the 1941 construction of the Florence reflected both Missoula's continued importance as a Northwest supply center and the increasing importance of the tourist industry to Missoula's economy.

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<sup>3</sup>McLeod Collection, Box 77.

<sup>4</sup>McLeod Collection, Box 77, File 14.

<sup>5</sup>McLeod Collection, Box 77, File 11.

<sup>6</sup>*Missoulian*, June 16, 1941.

<sup>7</sup>Bell, Mary, Oral History Interview, 1979.

<sup>8</sup>McLeod Collection, Box 77, File 11.

<sup>9</sup>*Missoulian*, June 16, 1941.

<sup>10</sup>Bell, Mary, Oral History Interview, 1979.

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After construction was completed in June of 1941, the new \$600,000 building looked noticeably different from the rest of Missoula's downtown buildings, which consisted mainly of brick buildings designed in Victorian commercial styles.<sup>11</sup> The hotel's strong horizontal lines, reinforced concrete structural soundness, and large use of windows strongly tie the building to its modern counterparts constructed across the country. Additionally, the parallel straight line motifs, flat-faced concrete and metal exterior, terra cotta accents, and streamlined and futuristic elements highlight the Art Moderne style.

The masterful and unique design in the Art Moderne style contrasts with that of surrounding downtown Missoula buildings. The Art Moderne style, popularly used in the design of commercial buildings between the years of 1930 and 1945, has been described as the earliest United States architectural style able to detach itself from the revivalist tradition. This style is best known from examples found in large eastern cities, such as New York. Thus the presence of the Art Moderne Florence building in Missoula, Montana is representative of the spread of architectural styles through various regions of the country. The Florence is also representative of a country-wide trend of the 1930s and 1940s to establish modern hotels in communities of fewer than 25,000 people.<sup>12</sup>

Because the 1930s and 1940s were a time of limited development, Missoula's downtown contains few examples of modern architecture. The Missoula laundry (1928), the Hammond Arcade (1933-1934), and the east side of the Palace Hotel (1941) demonstrate Art Deco detailing. Art Moderne structures in addition to the Florence are limited to Zip Auto Service (1937). Statewide examples include the Greyhound Station in Great Falls, Club Moderne in Anaconda, a body of Works Progress Administration (WPA) development, and a myriad of remodeled storefronts.

Architect G.A. Pehrson began his architectural career in Chicago before moving to Spokane to supervise construction of the Davenport Hotel. He later designed two additions to this historic building. His body of work includes numerous Art Moderne residences in the Spokane area, designed during his thirty years with the noted Spokane architecture firm of Cutter and Malmgram. To date, the Florence Hotel is the only example of his work identified in Montana.

Between 1975 and 1989, the hotel's owner John Hayden, converted the areas formerly occupied by guest rooms into office space; however, the exterior of the building was primarily left intact. In 1990, six partners in the law firm of Worden, Thane and Haines (Florence Associates) bought the Florence. Besides attracting tenants into the building, returning the Florence to its original "first-class" classification remains a high priority for the partners.<sup>13</sup> Today, the hotel stands as a significant example of the Art Moderne style of architecture and a focal point of civic pride.

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<sup>11</sup>Missoulian, June 17, 1941.

<sup>12</sup>McLeod Collection, Box 79, File 7.

<sup>13</sup>Missoulian, June 16, 1991.

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## 9. Major Bibliographic References

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### Bibliography

See continuation sheet for Section 9

#### 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 of Additional Data:

- State Historic Preservation Office  
 Other State agency  
 Federal agency  
 Local government  
 University  
 Other -- Specify Repository:

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## 10. Geographical Data

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Acreage of Property: Less than one acre

UTM References:                      Zone      Easting    Northing  
    A            12            271800    5194900

#### Verbal Boundary Description

The Florence Hotel is located in the NW $\frac{1}{4}$ , NW $\frac{1}{4}$ , SW $\frac{1}{4}$  of Section 22, T13N, R19W. The legal description of the property is as follows: A tract of land situated partly in Block 3 of Original Townsite of Missoula, Montana, and partly in Block 27, C.P. Higgins Addition, Missoula County, Montana, which said tract is particularly described as follows: Beginning at the Southeasterly corner of the building now occupied by the Florence Hotel, which corner bears N 33° 34' 15" W, a distance of 60.06 feet from the center of the manhole at Front Street and Higgins Avenue; Thence N 19° 49' 25" E, along the building line, for a distance of 164.38 feet, this being along the West boundary line of Higgins Avenue; Thence N 70° 38' 55" W, along the building line on the Southerly side of an alley for a distance of 116.25 feet to a building corner; Thence along said building line projected N 70° 38' 55" W, a distance of 59.79 feet; Thence S 36° 08' 25" W, a distance of 4.76 feet to the Northwesterly corner of the building; Thence S 36° 08' 25" W, along the building line a distance of 122.31 feet to the Southwesterly corner of the building, said corner bearing N 62° 18' 30" E, a distance of 166.17 feet from the center of the manhole at Front Street and Ryman Street; Thence S 52° 08' 40" E, along the building line and the North side of West Front Street, a distance of 29.87 feet to an angle point on this building line; Thence S 60° 21' 20" E, a distance of 186.05 feet to the Southeast corner of said building, and the Point of Beginning, Missoula County, Montana.

#### Boundary Justification

The boundary includes the entire city lot that has historically been associated with the building.

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## 11. Form Prepared By

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name/title: Beth Butterfield, Research Assistant  
organization: Historical Research Associates, Inc.      date: August 15, 1991  
street & number: P.O. Box 7086      telephone: 406/721-1958  
city or town: Missoula      state: MT      zip code: 59807-7086

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## Property Owner

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name/title: Carol Williams, Florence Associates  
street & number: 111 N. Higgins      telephone: 406/721-3400  
city or town: Missoula      state: MT      zip code: 59802



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Bell, Mary K., 1979, Interview with Susan J. Buchel, December 5. Oral History - K. Ross Toole Archives, University of Montana, Missoula.

*Missoulian*, "Description of Buildings is Given By Architect: All Details Recounted," June 16, 1941.

\_\_\_\_\_, "Furnishing of Outstanding Suite is Luxurious and the in the Best of Taste, While Comfort is Assured," June 16, 1941.

\_\_\_\_\_, "Florence Hotel Story's Told By Will Cave," June 16, 1941.

\_\_\_\_\_, "Community has Large Share in New Building," June 16, 1941.

\_\_\_\_\_, "New Hotel Florence Dedicated; 400 at Opening Banquet," June 17, 1941.

\_\_\_\_\_, "Florence: A grand Old Building Takes Back Its Name," June 16, 1991.

Popeliers, John, S. Allen Chambers, and Nancy B. Schwartz, *What Style Is It?* The Preservation Press, National Trust for Historic Preservation, Washington, D.C., 1977.

Rifkind, Carole, *A Field Guide to American Architecture*. New American Library, New York, 1980.

University of Montana, Missoula, McLeod Collection, Box 77, Files 4, 11, 14; Box 78, File 1; Box 79, File 7.