

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)
DOMESTIC/Hotel

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)
COMMERCE/TRADE/Specialty Store

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)

Italianate

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Stone

walls Brick

Stone

roof Composition

other _____

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Grand Hotel is a three-story Italianate style brick building located in the center of New Ulm's late nineteenth century business district. The hotel is joined on the left sidewall to a one-story building, and the streetscape is dominated by Victorian period commercial blocks.

As originally constructed in 1876, this building was two stories high and called the Union Hotel. In 1899, new owners added a third story and changed the name to the Grand Hotel. At the same time the heating, plumbing, and lighting fixtures were upgraded, and a brick addition was extended from the rear. The building has had few exterior changes since then.

The facade is divided into three unequal sized bays by pilasters, with the center bay narrower than the other two. Fenestration is different on each level. The first floor consists of a transomed central entrance with sidelights flanked by rusticated brick pilasters and large, paired plate glass storefront windows. All five of the first floor openings are set in semicircular brick arches; each window has a decorative cartouche as a keystone, and in the center of the arched doorway is a carved lions head. The formal balance of the Italianate style (which was popular in Minnesota during the latter half of the nineteenth century) is accentuated by rusticated brick quoins. The window to the immediate right of the door was originally an entrance; it was altered at an unknown date to conform with the remaining windows. A corbel table provides a horizontal division between the first and second floors.

The second story consists of six identical 4/4 double hung windows featuring stone sills and raised brick Gothic arches with keystones. The two center windows are paired. The remnant of a cornice is visible just above the keystones. Italianate detailing can be seen in the embellished window moldings at each floor, but particularly on the first two levels where the openings are tall and rather narrow.

The top floor fenestration is similar to the one below except the windows are 1/1 sash and have nearly flat brick arches with keystones. A row of corbeled brick in the form of dentils surmounts these windows, and there is a large round window centered in the facade. Additional corbeled bricks serve as an elaborate terminus to the building. The gable roof has a slight pitch and each wall has a parapet.

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The west sidewall is pierced on the third floor by five double hung windows, two of which are 1/1 sash. The east elevation features eight double hung windows on the first floor, seven on the second story, and six on the third level; all of these openings have stone sills and segmental brick arches.

Attached to the rear of the building is the 1899 one-story brick addition with a shed roof. It has two doors, one 4/4 double hung window, and another opening which has been partially enclosed with brick. The second and third floors of the back wall have several 1/1 and 4/4 double hung windows.

Although the Grand Hotel was sandblasted in 1970, it retains very good historic integrity because the building's original materials and architectural details are intact and clearly visible. In 1987 the building was painted, tuckpointed, and a new roof and sprinkler system was installed. An interior decoration business and art gallery occupy the ground floor, where the original pressed metal ceiling and exposed brick walls are visible. The second floor was modernized in 1987 and is used by a radio station. The third floor is vacant.

8. Statement of Significance

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

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Commerce

Period of Significance

1876-1939

Significant Dates

1876

1899

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Unknown

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

Considered in the context of "Early Agriculture and River Settlement, 1840s to 1870s," the Grand Hotel is significant in American history because of its association with the development of New Ulm's business district, which played a central role in the economic growth of the southern Minnesota River Valley in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is also architecturally noteworthy as a good example of an Italianate style building used for commercial purposes.

Immediately after treaties were signed with the Dakota Indians at Mendota and Traverse des Sioux in 1851, the Minnesota River Valley in the southern part of Minnesota Territory was opened for settlement. In 1854 the first large group of settlers from the Chicago Land Society arrived in Brown County. Organized by German immigrants in Chicago who sought to establish their own Midwestern colony, the settlers platted the New Ulm townsite in 1855. Within a year they were joined by the Turner Germans from the Cincinatti Settlement Society, and together they created the German Land Association of Minnesota. Founded as a trading and agricultural center, New Ulm was unlike many other villages in the area because it was not platted by or for the railroad; instead, its development relied on Minnesota River steamboats from the 1850s until the early 1870s.

As a reflection of the city's ethnic homogeneity, New Ulm's 1860 population of 635 persons contained only two residents of non-Germanic heritage. Among those in the majority was Phillip Gross, who came to New Ulm by way of Milwaukee in 1856. In the same year Gross began a hostelry in a two-story wood frame building called the Minnesota Haus, which became the Union Hotel in 1860. This was the only business in the community which provided room and board for visitors. The hotel soon became a focal point of activity in New Ulm, including serving as a hospital during the U.S.-Dakota Conflict of 1862 when over 185 of the city's buildings were burned.

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Commercial activity in New Ulm increased after the Conflict largely because of an influx of settlers who took advantage of land offered through the Homestead Act. This period marked the beginning of development of the area into a producer, exporter, and processor of agricultural products. When the Winona and St. Peter (later the Chicago and Northwestern) Railroad entered the county in 1872, New Ulm became a regionally important center for processing and marketing grain. Business flourished for the Union Hotel, which served travelers until 5 July 1875 when it was destroyed by fire. Gross was undaunted, however, and he immediately built a new two-story brick hotel that he operated until retiring in 1885; his son-in-law then managed the property for a short time.

Two other hotels had been constructed in the center of New Ulm by 1884. Perhaps because of this competition, in 1899 the new owner of the Union Hotel added a third floor, upgraded the interior, and changed the name of the building to the Grand Hotel. The expanded hostelry contained about thirty sleeping rooms, an office, a new kitchen to the rear, and a large dining room which occupied one-half of the first floor. With a refurbished interior and additional space for boarders, the Grand continued to play an important role in community life into the twentieth century.

Architecturally, the Grand Hotel is the finest largely unaltered example of mid-Victorian period commercial design in New Ulm and the surrounding area. Elements of the Italianate style are evident in the symmetrical, formal balance of the facade, the tall, narrow round arched windows with pronounced moldings, and the decorative quoins. Other commercial buildings of larger size with greater detailing remain in New Ulm, but the majority were constructed at least ten years later and have had their street level facades drastically altered. No other building in the city's commercial district has retained such a high degree of historic architectural integrity. Only the Constans Hotel in Faribault County was built at an earlier date (1868 and 1896, NRHP) than the Grand Hotel, although its design has been compromised somewhat by later alterations. New Ulm's primary hotel compares favorably with others in the area including the Slade Hotel in Nobles County (1891), and the Hotel Broz (1898) and Union Hotel (ca.1888) in LeSueur County, all of which are listed in the National Register.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Blegen, Theodore C. Minnesota: A History of the State. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1963.
Iverson, Noel. Germania, U.S.A. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1966.
Neill, Reverend Edward D. History of the Minnesota Valley. Minneapolis: North Star Publishing Co., 1882.
New Ulm Review 20 September 1951.
Vertical file located at the New Ulm County Historical Society about the Grand Hotel, New Ulm, MN.

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 # _____

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Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository:

Brown County Historical Society

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of property Less than one

UTM References

A

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Zone Easting Northing

B

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Zone Easting Northing

C

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D

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Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property occupies Lot 12 of Block 63, North of Center Street, of the Original Townsite of New Ulm, Minnesota.

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Boundary Justification

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

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11. Form Prepared By

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