

NPS Form 10-900
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Wisconsin Word Processor Format (1331D)
(Approved 3/87)

OMB No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries. Use letter quality printer in 12 pitch, using an 85 space line and a 10 space left margin. Use only archival paper (20 pound, acid free paper with a 2% alkaline reserve).

1. Name of Property

historic name El Dorado Apartments
other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 130 Forest Avenue N/A not for publication
city, town Fond du Lac N/A vicinity
state Wisconsin code WI county Fond du Lac code 039 zip code 54935

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	No. of Resources within Property	
		contributing	noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)		
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>1</u>	<u> </u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	<u> </u>	<u> </u> sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<u> </u>	<u> </u> structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u> </u>	<u> </u> objects
		<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing:
None

No. of contributing resources
previously listed in the
National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this x 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 x meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

X *[Signature]*
Signature of certifying official
State Historic Preservation Officer-Wisconsin

12/6/91
Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

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

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register.
 See continuation sheet
- determined eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain:)

Entered in the
National Register

[Signature] 1/22/92

[Signature] Signature of the Keeper Date

6. Functions or Use

Historic Functions
(enter categories from instructions)

Current Functions
(enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/multiple dwelling

DOMESTIC/multiple dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)

Materials
(enter categories from instructions)

Classical Revival	foundation	Concrete
	walls	Brick
		Stucco
	roof	Asphalt
	other	Wood

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The El Dorado Apartments is a highly intact 28-unit Classical Revival-inspired four-story brick apartment building that occupies a prominent corner lot in one of the city of Fond du Lac's oldest residential neighborhoods. The El Dorado was developed and constructed between 1921 and 1922 by the Fond du Lac-based Immel Construction Company and upon completion in September of 1922 it became the first - and until after WWII it was also the only - large scale modern apartment building in the city.¹

The older residential neighborhood that surrounds the El Dorado is located two blocks west of the downtown section of the city. Land in this vicinity is flat, it being a portion of the floodplain of the Fond du Lac River, a waterway that still flows from south to north one block east of the El Dorado and which bounds this neighborhood to the east and north. The El Dorado is a free-standing building situated on a corner lot, giving it principal facades that face east onto north-south running South Military Road and north onto east-west running Forest Avenue. Forest Avenue is one of the major thoroughfares of Fond du Lac, becoming CTH KK as it exits the western boundary of the city. Two blocks west of the El Dorado, Forest Avenue crosses the main tracks of the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad. This crossing became the location of Fond du Lac's principal railroad depot and these tracks serve as the western boundary of the neighborhood.

The construction of the El Dorado resulted in the demolition of an earlier frame dwelling located on the site. At that time, the other three corners of the Forest Avenue-Military Road intersection were also occupied by large frame dwellings as well, dwellings that were probably similar to the extant Greek Revival, Queen Anne and vernacular houses that are still found throughout the neighborhood. As the neighborhood slowly transitioned from single family occupancy to multi-family occupancy, however, and as Forest Avenue became an increasingly important automobile thoroughfare, these other houses were also demolished and their sites were reused by automobile-related businesses such as filling stations and the like.

The El Dorado is an "L"-plan building whose two unequal length wings have principal north and east-facing facades that are placed flush with the inner edges of the concrete sidewalks that parallel the streets. The inward-facing west and south elevations of these wings face a rectilinear-shaped lawn that comprises the remaining portion of the rectilinear lot that is not covered by the building. The design of the exterior of the El Dorado is dictated in part by the layout of the interior, the three upper floors being divided into three separate roughly equal-sized zones, each of which is serviced by its own stairwell. Each stairwell descends to a principle entrance located at street level and these entrances are each centered in slightly projecting full-height pavilions on the Military Road facade while the single entrance on the Forest Avenue facade is placed just to the right of that facade's single projecting pavilion. These three pavilions comprise the principal architectural features of the main facades.

¹ The 1980 population of Fond du Lac was 35,863.

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The El Dorado is of steel frame construction that is founded on a poured reinforced concrete foundation, a portion of which is visible above grade as a one-foot-tall plinth that encircles the base of the building. The basement story of the building is raised almost completely above grade and the common rooms such as the laundry and storage spaces and the utility service rooms are all located on this floor along with 2 two-bedroom and 2 one-bedroom apartments. Both of the main facades are sided in dark brown pressed brick that has a wire finish and that is laid in an American or common pattern bond except in the lowest and highest courses, both of which are laid in stretcher fashion.

The Forest Avenue facade is approximately 70-feet-long and four-stories in height and it is the shorter of the two main facades. This facade is asymmetrical in design and is seven-bays-wide, the third and fourth bays from the left (east) being placed in a slightly projecting full-height pavilion. Each bay on this facade contains a pair of flat-arched double hung windows. These paired windows are of two types. The pairs in the first, third, fourth and seventh bays each contain two rather narrow six-over-one-light wooden sash coupled windows that are separated from each other by a narrow wooden mullion and each of these pairs has a common concrete sill.² The pairs in the second, fifth and sixth bays, however, consist of larger eight-over-one-light double hung windows that have individual concrete sills and these windows are separated from each other by a wider brick-faced mullion. The only exception to this fenestration pattern is on the first floor. The main entrance on this facade is placed between the fifth and sixth bays, necessitating the placement of a pair of the smaller of these two windows on either side instead of the larger windows that would normally be placed here. The entrance consists of a flat-arched opening that contains a pair of multi-light wooden doors. This opening is then enframed by a massive concrete surround of classically inspired design. This surround consists of broad flat surfaces on either side and above the opening that are enframed with heavy molding of simple design. The name "El Dorado" done in boldly raised relief is positioned above the door opening and the surround is then surmounted by a simple architrave.

A thin concrete stringcourse is placed just above the fourth floor windows and the facade is then surmounted by a tall brick parapet. The design of this parapet is relatively simple, but it contains decorative elements that are a mixture of simplified, abstracted examples of classical motifs and other motifs that prefigure the more angular geometric shapes that are associated with the Art Deco style. The parapet walls over the two end bays of this facade are each decorated with a small semi-circular pediment that contains a highly simplified circular cartouche made of concrete. A more elaborate stepped and flattened triangular pediment decorates the parapet wall above the projecting two-bay-wide pavilion. This pediment features a

² Several of these windows are actually six-over-six light designs but their arrangement follows no obvious pattern and it is not known whether it is these or the six-over-one design that is the original.

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small, centered, lozenge-shaped concrete panel that is decorated with a concrete panel below it that is suggestive of the fabric sometimes placed below a medal. The shapes of both the triangular and semi-circular pediments are emphasized by the placement of a soldier course of brick below the parapet cap.

The only other decoration on this facade besides that which ornaments the entrance and the parapet consists of simple lozenge-shaped concrete squares that are centered on the spandrels located above each pair of first, second, and third story windows in the projecting pavilion.

The Military Road facade is the longer of the two main facades, being approximately 116-feet-long, and it too is four-stories in height. At first glance, this facade appears to have a symmetrical five-part organizational scheme, but it is actually asymmetrical in design. The facade is thirteen-bays-wide, with the third, fourth and fifth bays (reading from left to right, south to north) and the ninth, tenth, and eleventh bays being placed in two slightly projecting symmetrically disposed full-height pavilions that are the principal architectural features on this facade. The facade utilizes the same mix of six-over-six and eight-over-one-light flat-arched double hung wooden sash windows that is found on the Forest Avenue facade. For the most part these windows are also arranged in paired groups as well, although the greater length of this facade made it possible to limit the use of the smaller six-over-six windows to the two pavilions. The first, seventh, and thirteenth bays each has a single eight-over-one-light window per story, while the second, sixth, and eighth bays each contain pairs of the same windows. The windows in the twelfth bay provide light for bathrooms in the apartments inside and they are smaller as a result, consisting of flat-arched four-light side-hinged wooden sash.

The two pavilions on this facade are similar in design but are not identical. Both pavilions are three-bays-wide and each story's two outer bays contain a pair of coupled six-over-six windows. The first story of the center bay of each pavilion features a centered main entrance whose surround is identical to the one on the Forest Avenue facade described earlier. Unlike the Forest Avenue entrance, however, each of the two Military Road entrance surrounds is further enriched. The architrave of the left-hand surround (the fourth bay from the left) is surmounted by a pair of coupled six-light windows that are elaborately enframed with a concrete surround of classical inspiration. This window group lights the second story landing of the stairwell. Similar groups, minus the elaborate concrete surrounds, are then placed in the stories above in order to light the landings on those floors and the spandrels between these window groups are decorated with rectangular panels of brick laid in a basketweave pattern that have corners accented with square concrete tiles.

The architrave of the right-hand entrance surround (the tenth bay from the left) is surmounted by a tall panelled frieze. Two separate six-light windows are then placed just above the surround and these windows light the second story landing of

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the stairwell. Similar windows are then placed in the stories above in order to light the landings on those floors and the spandrels between these window groups are decorated with rectangular panels of brick laid in a basketweave pattern, the panels having corners accented with square concrete tiles. These panels, however, are slightly different in design than those that decorate the left-hand pavilion.

The entire Military Road facade is then surmounted by a concrete stringcourse and this, in turn, is surmounted by a tall brick parapet whose individual elements are identical in design with those used on the parapet on the Forest Avenue facade. Like the latter facade, this one is also in a highly intact state. The only alteration of importance has been the removal of the original eight-over-one-light windows in the first story of bays six, seven, and eight (the three bays located between the two pavilions). These window openings light the tenant's storage area and the original windows were replaced with glass block as a security measure, a change that will be reversed during the restoration proposed by the new owners.

The south-facing elevation of the El Dorado consists of two separate parts; the south-facing end elevation of the Military Road wing of the building and the rear south-facing elevation of the shorter Forest Avenue wing. The first part, the side elevation of the Military Road wing, is visible from the street. Consequently, it is also sided in the same dark brown brick that is used on the principal facades. This elevation is four-stories in height, three-bays-wide, and approximately 37.5-feet-long and the fourth story is topped by a concrete stringcourse which is in turn surmounted by a tall brick parapet that is unornamented save for a semi-circular pediment and concrete cartouche that is located above the right-hand bay. Each story of the two outer bays contains a single flat-arched one-over-one-light double hung window while each story of the center bay contains two smaller separate four-light windows that light bathrooms. The second part of the overall south-facing elevation consists of the south-facing rear of the Forest Avenue wing. This elevation faces onto the rear yard and it is clad in stucco and is three-bays-wide, four-stories in height, and is approximately 37.5-feet-long. The fenestration pattern is identical to that described just above, the only difference being that each of these window openings has a segmental arched head formed out of three courses of brick laid in header courses. This elevation is then topped by a plain parapet.

The west-facing elevation of the El Dorado also consists of two separate parts; the west-facing end elevation of the Forest Avenue wing of the building and the rear west-facing elevation of the longer Military Road wing. The first part, the side elevation of the Forest Avenue wing, is visible from the street. Consequently, it too is clad in the same dark brown brick that is used on the principal facades. This elevation is four stories in height, three-bays-wide, and approximately 37.5-feet-long and the fourth story is topped by a concrete stringcourse which is in turn surmounted by a tall brick parapet that is unornamented save for a semi-circular pediment and concrete cartouche that is located above the left-hand bay. The three

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bays on this elevation each contains different windows. Each floor of the left-hand bay contains a coupled pair of small six-light windows. Each story of the center bay contains a single flat-arched one-over-one-light double hung window and each story of the right-hand bay contains a coupled pair of narrower one-over-one-light windows. The second part of the overall west-facing elevation consists of the rear west-facing elevation of the Military Road wing. This elevation faces onto the rear yard and it is clad in stucco, is eight-bays-wide, four-stories in height, and is approximately 75-feet-long. Each story of the first, fourth, and sixth bay from the left contains a coupled pair of narrow one-over-one-light windows; each floor of the second, third and seventh bays contains a pair of wider one-over-one-light double hung windows; each story of the fifth bay contains a coupled pair of six-light windows and each story of the eighth bay contains a single wider double hung window. All of these windows and window groups have concrete sills and each of these window openings has a segmental arched head and a lintel formed out of three courses of brick laid in header courses. This elevation is then also topped by a plain parapet.

The exterior of the El Dorado, then, turns a plain face inward and a progressively more elaborate face outward onto the streets. The interior of the El Dorado is also still largely intact although well-worn in many places. When the El Dorado was built the interior was touted as a model of cleanliness and efficiency. Newspaper accounts of the opening of the building detailed the interior appointments and the description they contained is still an accurate summary of the interior.

The apartments throughout, with their highly polished terrazzo floors made up of a composition of crushed marble and cement, with their beautifully finished woodwork and softened walls, will delight the eye while their simplicity of arrangement and design will delight all lovers of good housekeeping and cozy homes.

There are 28 apartments of four and five rooms each, which rent from \$55 to \$90 a month. They are almost all identical in equipment throughout. The women tenants already in the building are enthralled by the kitchens. Each of these is equipped with a Lorain gas range with a heat regulator for the oven; a Hoosier kitchen cabinet containing sifters for flour and sugar and temperature charts for the gas range and food timers; and an ice box with cabinets above it. Plenty of shelf space in the kitchen is one of its attractive features. The kitchen is all in white enamel. There is a white enamel sink equipped with a drainboard and running cold and hot water. The cupboard has an enamelled metal top. A ventilator in each kitchen gathers up all odors and fumes from cooking and carries them off up through the roof. In the halls are chutes for dropping garbage down to incinerators in the basement.

The dining rooms are all separated from the kitchens by cabinets which may be used as china closets, sideboards to store linen, or as bookcases. On the lower floor they are in white enamel; on the upper in stained oak. Electric fixtures in the

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dining and living rooms are of a candle or cluster type and throw a soft, diffused light. There are attachments for floor lamps or vacuum cleaners and for telephones in each apartment. The bedrooms are large and there is plenty of closet room in each apartment. The rooms are all finished in Georgia pine with a stained oak finish.

Each bathroom has running hot and cold water, and a porcelain tub, built in and of the latest design. There are towel cupboards and a medicine chest on the walls of each.

The apartments are heated by hot water. Each room has a radiator and a heat regulator. The boiler room and incinerators are in the basement, which also contains a laundry for the tenants. The laundry is equipped with tubs, washboards, and an automatic dryer. A washing machine is to be provided. In the basement are lockers for each tenant.

The apartments are easy of access from the front, side, and rear of the building. Within each entrance are mail boxes and a telephone connecting with the apartments reached from each particular entrance.³

Since this was written, the original kitchen appliances in the apartments have been replaced with more modern units and a few apartments have had other items altered, but by and large, all the apartments are still largely intact and it is the intent of the new owners to restore them to a close approximation of their original appearance while modernizing and upgrading such features as appliances and utilities.

³ The Daily Commonwealth. Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. September 23, 1922, pg. 8.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: _____ nationally _____ statewide X locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B X C D

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

Areas of Significance

(enter categories from instructions)	Period of Significance	Significant Dates
<u>Architecture</u>	<u>N/A</u>	<u>1921-1922*</u>
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>

Cultural Affiliation
N/A

Significant Person
N/A

Architect/Builder
Immel Construction Company/Builder³

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

The El Dorado Apartments building is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) for its local significance under National Register (NR) criterion C. More specifically, the El Dorado is being nominated because of its associations with the NR significance area of Architecture, a theme that is also identified in the State of Wisconsin's Cultural Resource Management Plan (CRMP). Research centered on the Neoclassical Revival and the Period Revival Styles subsections of the Architectural Styles Study Unit of the CRMP.⁶ This research identified the El Dorado as an excellent, highly intact, representative example of a larger scale early twentieth century apartment building design, one whose overall design and detailing was inspired by Classical Revival style precedents. The El Dorado was built between 1921 and 1922 at a cost of \$150,000 by the Fond du Lac-based Immel Construction Company and the project was initiated and developed by the president of the firm, John W. Immel, to fill a strong local demand for rental housing. The new building was an immediate success and it quickly became a prestigious address and was viewed locally as a model of modernity.

The El Dorado is also significant architecturally as a unique property type in Fond du Lac. When it was built, the city of Fond du Lac was just recovering from a post-WWI economic slump and was about to enter a major boom period which lasted until the mid-1920s. This period saw the construction of the city's first high-rise hotel (the Hotel Retlaw), its first high-rise commercial office building (the Commercial National Bank building), hundreds of new dwellings and the creation or expansion of numerous local industrial enterprises. All of this activity created a boosterish set of local expectations for the future of the city and the construction of the El Dorado was seen as an early piece of evidence that Fond du Lac was entering an important new phase of its history. These expectations were only partly realized

⁴ The Daily Commonwealth. Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. September 23, 1922, pg. 8.
⁵ Ibid. October 14, 1921, pg. 1.
⁶ Wyatt, Barbara (Ed.). Cultural Resource Management Plan, Vol. 2. State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin, 1986. (Architecture), pgs. 2-18 & 2-23.

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before the onset of the Depression, however, and the need in the area for quality rental housing was not sufficient to justify the construction of more buildings of this type. Consequently, the El Dorado was for many years Fond du Lac's only prestigious apartment building and it also is the only sizable apartment building in Fond du Lac that dates from the years prior to the end of WWII. This significance is enhanced by the building's high degree of integrity and its generally very good condition.

Historic Context

A good overview of the history of the city of Fond du Lac and its architecture is included in the recently written Intensive Survey Report of that city.⁷ Consequently, the history that follows is concerned primarily with the city of Fond du Lac in the early 1920s and with the development of the El Dorado Apartments.

The city of Fond du Lac is the county seat of Fond du Lac County and it is located at the southern end of Lake Winnebago, at the head of the Fox River Valley in southeastern Wisconsin, 63 miles northwest of the city of Milwaukee and 148 miles northwest of Chicago. This location placed it at the confluence of numerous road, rail and waterway connections and by the early 1920s the city was proudly calling itself "The Gateway to the Fox River Valley."

It [Fond du Lac] is favored with transportation facilities not surpassed by any other city of its size in the United States. It has communication by water through Lake Winnebago down the Fox river and thence into Green Bay, connecting it with the whole chain of [Great] Lakes. It is on the Chicago and Northwestern; the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul; and the Mississippi, St. Paul, and Sault St. Marie [Soo Line] Railways ... It is also connected with Oshkosh, Neenah, Menasha, Appleton and Green Bay by electric interurban railway.⁸

Fond du Lac was also located at the junction of US Highways 41 and 151 and State Highways 23 and 55 as well, and the number and interconnected nature of these transportation routes created conditions that favored the growth of manufacturing establishments in the Fond du Lac area.

Between 1910 and 1924, Fond du Lac experienced a steady growth in population from 18,797 to nearly 24,000. This growth was directly linked to the growth of area manufacturing establishments, the value of whose manufactured articles (greatly accelerated by WWI) had jumped from \$6,761,000 in 1914 to \$21,325,094 in 1923.⁹ By 1924 the city had 70 factories, the largest of which was the Rueping Tannery.

⁷ Sundberg-Carlson & Associates. Intensive Survey Report: Architectural and Historical Survey Project. Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, 1991 (draft).

⁸ Wright's Fond du Lac City and County Directory. Wright Directory Company, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1924.

⁹ Industrial Survey of Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. Wisconsin Power and Light Company, Madison, Wisconsin, Ca. 1927.

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Other establishments included those that manufactured such diverse products as refrigerators, shoes, furniture, plows, wagons, awnings and tents, shirts and overalls, typewriters, cheese vats, cigars, brooms, fur coats, gasoline engines, caskets, paper boxes, church furniture, boats, paint and creamery supplies.

This expansion in population and trade had not yet been matched by significant improvements in the size and quality of Fond du Lac's retail, residential, and institutional buildings, though, and by the beginning of the 1920s the need for larger, more modern buildings that reflected the city's needs and aspirations was becoming acute. These needs were just beginning to be addressed following the end of WWI, but a short-lived nationwide financial panic early in 1920 put many building plans on hold. Even so, some projects in the city managed to get underway. One of the largest was the enlargement of the Forest Avenue Hotel, which was located adjacent to the Chicago and Northwestern depot at 170 Forest Avenue, one block west of the future El Dorado Apartments. The Forest Avenue hotel was a railroad hotel and this project, which was completed in 1922, resulted in the remodeling and expansion of this building into one of the city's better hotels under a new name, the Hotel Calumet.¹⁰

Shortly thereafter, the pace of local construction picked up and the locally based Immel Construction Company was awarded a contract to build a new high school for the city for \$145,468 and to add a major addition onto the existing Fond du Lac Vocational School at a cost of \$39,842.¹¹ These announcements were followed a few months later by the news that the Immel Construction Company was planning to develop and construct a new \$100,000 thirty flat apartment building on Forest Avenue. The announcement was front page news in the local newspaper and the article quoted John W. Immel, the president of the Immel Construction Company, as saying that "The erection of Fond du Lac's first apartment building will be a material factor in solving the unemployment problems in Fond du Lac this winter. The project will furnish a busy winter for employees of the company."¹² The article then went on to state that the project was already completely planned and construction was scheduled to start about November 1 and was expected to furnish work for about 50 men throughout the winter. It further noted that the property chosen for the apartment building was the site of the former Pettibone family homestead, which was situated on the southwest corner of Forest Avenue and Union (now Military Road) Street.

Not long after construction began, the Immel Company decided to hold a contest to find a suitable name for the new apartment building.¹³ The contest was advertised

¹⁰ Cartwright, Carol Lowry. Hotel Calumet National Register Nomination form. December 21, 1989. On file with the State Historic Preservation Office, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin.

¹¹ Daily Commonwealth. Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. March 16, 1921 and May 26, 1921.

¹² Ibid. October 14, 1921, pg. 1.

¹³ Ibid. January 13, 1922, pg. 5.

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in the local newspaper and was open only to grade school and high school students. Important factors that were to determine the winner were to be "the length of the name, attractiveness, appropriateness and any unusual character that it might possess." The winning entry was revealed in the paper two weeks later and was suggested by George Svenson, a high school student living at 430 Forest Avenue. Svenson proposed the name "El Dorado" and received for his suggestion the sum of fifteen dollars, with runners-up winning lesser prizes for such names as "Forest Manor" and the "Leone Apartments."¹⁴

By March the foundation of the new building had been poured and by September the building was nearly finished. An item in the paper announcing the impending formal opening of the building noted that "So acute is the housing shortage in Fond du Lac that three families from other cities have already occupied apartments in the new El Dorado apartment building, moving in before completion."¹⁵ Another item earlier in the month had also noted that 103 new houses had been built in Fond du Lac in 1922 and termed the city's growth in that year "amazing."¹⁶ The grand opening of the El Dorado was hosted by John W. Immel, the building's owner and contractor, and by his construction manager, H.W. Mabie, with both men giving tours of the building. The local newspaper devoted an entire page to the story and noted that "The building has been completely cleaned up and made ready for occupancy. The hot water boilers for the kitchens and bathrooms are kept going all the time. The heating plant has been fired up. About fifty per cent of the apartments have been rented and others have been spoken for."¹⁷ By the end of the next month the building was completely rented and full occupancy was the rule for the next several decades.

The majority of the tenants of the new building were married couples. The men were predominantly employed in white collar occupations and many were managers of local businesses and institutions. A brief sampling from the 1924 Wright City Directory for Fond du Lac, the first to be published after the building opened, listed among others: Edward J. Stone, the manager of the Eastern Wisconsin Trucking Co.; Arthur D. Partlan, the manager of the local branch of the National Cash Register Co.; and Francis L. McAleavy, the director of the Fond du Lac Vocational School. Salesmen were especially well represented in the tenant roster as were linotype operators at the newspaper, railroad engineers, real estate dealers etc., and this mix of highly skilled craftsmen, white collar workers, and managers lasted until well after WWII.

The El Dorado opened in 1922, a year that saw a real boom taking place in local construction, and a number of projects that were to become central to Fond du Lac's future identity were begun in that year. Chief among these was the \$600,000 eight-story Hotel Retlaw (13 Division Street, 1922-23, NRHP - 09-07-84) constructed by the

¹⁴ Daily Commonwealth. Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, January 25, 1922, pg. 5.

¹⁵ Ibid. September 21, 1922, pg. 5.

¹⁶ Ibid. September 1, 1922.

¹⁷ Ibid. September 23, 1922, pg. 8.

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the Schroeder Hotel chain in Milwaukee, the new \$400,000 seven-story Commercial National Bank building at 102 South Main Street (extant), and the new \$150-400,000 Retlaw Theater building located on North Main Street (extant). All of these projects, the El Dorado included, were on a larger scale than anything Fond du Lac had known before and they were thus seen locally as proof that the city was destined to grow and that it would become a major community in the state. The future, however, was a long time in coming and when it did it had a different shape than the one envisioned in the 1920s. The Hotel Retlaw and the Commercial National Bank are still the two tallest buildings in Fond du Lac and the El Dorado was destined to be the only apartment building of its size and style ever built in Fond du Lac.

The El Dorado continued to enjoy a reputation as a prestigious address until well into the post WWII years, but gradually, as the neighborhood around it changed, the type of tenants attracted to the by now somewhat deteriorated building changed as well. The building went through a succession of new owners who performed basic maintenance and who, fortunately, did little to alter it, but the building was clearly in a downward spiral until its recent purchase by its present owner. Many of the houses and other buildings in the neighborhood that surround the El Dorado were altered as a result of being turned into multi-family dwellings, but a number have been recently restored to their original appearance. A major force in this restoration activity has been the Madison, Wisconsin-based Alexander Company, the present owner of the El Dorado. This firm has recently restored the nearby Hotel Calumet (170 Forest Avenue - NRHP Interim listing, 04-19-90) and the adjacent Chicago and Northwestern Railroad Depot building (182 Forest Avenue - NRHP, 08-10-90), and these projects, along with the proposed restoration of the El Dorado Apartments, are helping to revitalize the neighborhood.

Architecture

The El Dorado was developed and constructed by the Fond du Lac-based Immel Construction Company, which, in 1922, was headed by its founder, John W. Immel. Immel was born on a farm in the Town of Empire, in Fond du Lac County, on July 2, 1872, and he was the eighth of eleven children. He attended the neighboring schools until the age of thirteen, after which he worked on his parent's farm for two years before learning the mason's and carpenter's trades. After he had gained a working knowledge of these trades he began to build houses and barns in the area with his brother, Henry J. Immel (1869-?). When he died in Madison, Wisconsin in 1953, Immel's obituary contained a good summing up of the career of a man who left an enduring mark on Fond du Lac and on Wisconsin.

In 1898 he came to Fond du Lac and in 1909, with his brother Henry, organized the Immel Construction company, which continued in business until 1932, when the Immel-Mabie company was organized. Since 1944 the company has been known as the Immel Construction company.

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Mr. Immel was one of the foremost construction contractors in Wisconsin, building many churches, schools, hotels, municipal and state buildings, hospitals, theaters, and homes, not only in Wisconsin but in a territory extending as far east as New York and Pennsylvania and as far west as Montana.

It was the Immel company which built the Wisconsin General hospital (extant), where the pioneer contractor died. The company built stores for the J.C. Penny company from coast to coast and took an outstanding part in the building development of Fond du Lac. Among its local projects were Senior High School, Hotel Retlaw and theater, Giddings and Lewis Machine Tool company, Fred Rueping Leather Company, Tobin Tool and Die company and others.

Mr. Immel, too, was interested in residential development of Fond du Lac. He planned and developed the Sunset Circle section in the southwest part of the city and shortly before his death had announced plans for East Division Street court, located north of Division street and east of Park Avenue.

In Milwaukee the Immel company was the contractor for the Eagles club and at the present time is engaged in constructing a large new hospital in Antigo.

In addition to occupying the presidency of the Immel Construction company, Mr. Immel in 1911 organized the Vulcan Manufacturing company (manufacturers of structural steel and associated products) and remained its president until 1933. He also was affiliated with other business enterprises at various times. He served as president of the Master Builders and was president of the Wisconsin chapter of the association of General Contractors.¹⁸

At the time that Immel was beginning the development of the El Dorado, his firm had just completed the construction of a new \$800,000 hospital in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin and was engaged in the construction of a dormitory and engine house for that institution. The firm was also engaged in the construction of an institute for the feeble-minded in Union Grove, Wisconsin costing \$400,000, was completing the Kenosha theater, and was about to begin construction of the Hotel Retlaw and the Retlaw theater in Fond du Lac.¹⁹ Thus, the firm was well-equipped to tackle the construction of the El Dorado and Immel was literally building on the strength of his organization when he decided to fill the strong local need for rental housing by developing this new apartment building.

The designer of the El Dorado is unknown, but the building type itself was a common one in the larger cities of the period and Immel could have found many examples to borrow from in Milwaukee and in the various architectural publications of the day.

¹⁸ Commonwealth Reporter. Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. September 14, 1953, pg. 3. Obituary of John W. Immel.

¹⁹ Daily Commonwealth. Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, March 11, 1922, pg. 11.

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Examples of this type of 2-5 story apartment building are most typically found on the main thoroughfares in suburbs of the same period that abut older, more established downtown neighborhoods. The design of such buildings run the gamut of stylistic interpretation, some of them being beautifully detailed examples of Period Revival styles, while many others are little more than Astylistic Utilitarian vernacular form designs that have only a minimal amount of period detailing. The design of the El Dorado falls in between these extremes. The Classical Revival detailing of its entrance doors, the use of multi-light wooden sash windows and the use of dark brown brick as an exterior wall cladding are all elements that were common in the domestic architecture of the day and they all served to reinforce a home-like imagery of the El Dorado that was undoubtedly important in attracting tenants for whom apartment life was still something of a novelty. The most important selling points of the building, however, judging from the articles that were written about it, were cleanliness, convenience, and ease of maintenance, all of which were tied into the perception of this type of building as being one associated with larger cities.

The new building will contain from 25 to 30 apartments and will be modern in every respect. It will be three stories in height, concrete and steel with tapestry brick for the exterior walls. The structure will be fireproof throughout. It will have janitor service, a garbage disposal plant and every other convenience to be found in the big city apartment buildings.²⁰

The floorplans of the El Dorado were also designed to accentuate a home-like feeling. Dividing each floor into three separate self-contained zones served to shorten hallways, thus avoiding the hotel-like feeling sometimes associated with large apartment buildings. The same device also maximized the amount of rentable space as well and provided owners with a maximum number of units.

The resulting design was typical of buildings of this type and period and it appears to have fulfilled its intended purpose well. The El Dorado was also, according to Immel, "the first apartment building in the city" and it is significant as such. All the other so-called apartment buildings in Fond du Lac that were listed as such in the city directories of the 1920s were multi-flat buildings that were either altered single family dwellings or two-to-six unit buildings. The El Dorado is Fond du Lac's only example of the larger, more modern type of apartment building that is commonly associated with the term and as such represents a unique property type in the city. It is also of local significance as one of several buildings that for a time embodied the hopes and aspirations of the city.

Archeological Potential

It is known that there was once an earlier frame construction dwelling on this site, but the present building completely covers the footprint of this now demolished building and it is doubtful that any historic remains survived the construction of the new building.

²⁰ Daily Commonwealth. Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, October 14, 1921, pg. 1.

9. Major Bibliographical References

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Previous documentation on file (NPS): X See continuation sheet

- 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: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property Less than one acre

UTM References

A	<u> 1/6 </u>	<u> 3/8/3/1/5/0 </u>	<u> 4/8/4/7/9/2/0 </u>	B	<u> / </u>	<u> / / / / / </u>	<u> / / / / / </u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
C	<u> / </u>	<u> / / / / / </u>	<u> / / / / / </u>	D	<u> / </u>	<u> / / / / / </u>	<u> / / / / / </u>

 See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The legal description of the boundaries of the El Dorado is: Slocum's Addition, Block 1, all Lots 11 and 12, except for the W 56.67 feet of each; and the N 20 feet of Lot 13, except for the W 56.67 feet.

 See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundaries encompass all the land historically associated with the El Dorado Apartments.

 See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

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