

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.

1. Name of Property

historic name Penn Alto Hotel

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number Corner 12th Street and 13th Avenue

N/A not for publication

city, town Altoona

N/A vicinity

state Pennsylvania code PA county Blair

code 013 zip code 16603

3. Classification

Ownership of Property

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>1</u>	_____ buildings
_____	_____ sites
_____	_____ structures
_____	_____ objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing:

- N/A

Number 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 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. See continuation sheet.

Signature of certifying official _____

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:) _____

Signature of the Keeper _____

Date of Action _____

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Domestic/hotel

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Domestic/hotel

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)

Renaissance

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Limestone

walls Brick

roof Asphalt

other

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Penn Alto Hotel occupies a prominent site at the corner of 12th Street and 13th Avenue adjacent to the downtown commercial district of Altoona and within a border or transition zone from the downtown commercial area to the south and a residential area of large homes to the north. Altoona City Hall is directly across 12th Street to the west.

The Hotel covers a ground area of 115' x 133', and has nine stories and basement. The first and second floors are taken up with the public spaces, and seven upper floors contain 308 hotel rooms.

The Hotel is the product of two phases, the main structure erected in 1921 and the upper seven stories of the last wing erected in 1928 completing the structure as originally designed using the same materials used in the first phase. The addition is not apparent and the overall integrity is unimpaired.

The entire structure is built of reinforced concrete with Bedford stone, a gray-tan limestone quarried locally, and tapestry brick, with hollow tile and gypsum partitions. The exterior is designed in Italian Renaissance style, the first two stories being of Bedford stone while the upper stories are of tapestry brick with Bedford stone trimmings. The 13th Avenue (south) facade is made up of eight bays of approximately sixteen feet each, while the 12th Street (west) facade contains seven. The building's organization is defined by the departure from the typical fenestration of two side by side rectangular wood frame double hung windows per bay per floor to the massive and ornate fixed glazing one per bay two story high arched windows which identify two story interior spaces of the main level. The theme of the first two floors is maintained in upper floors excepting the change in color and texture in the transition from Bedford stone to tapestry brick at the third floor level and the crowning effect of the substitution of arched windows at the top floor just beneath the massive cornice.

The ground floor (see Figure 1) consists of the main lobby two stories in height with a mezzanine extending around three sides; main dining room; coffee room; main kitchen; bake shop; general refrigerators; service and freight entrance. Two stories at the corner of 12th Street and 13th Avenue take up the balance of the ground floor area. Two wide entrances, one from each street, lead through the wide promenades to the hotel office and business lobby. From the promenades, one enters the main lobby lounge, 50' x 50'. The promenade and lobby are in the Italian Renaissance style with antique brown mahogany wainscot beneath plastered walls with ornamental cornices. The columns of the main lobby are a black and gold marble with antique bronze caps. The main frieze and the panels on the main pilasters of the lobby are hand decorated. Three high arched windows face the street.

See continuation sheet

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**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Penn Alto Hotel

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The two high-speed elevators are located off the promenade and between the two entrances, within full view of the hotel office desk.

The Roberdeau Room (main dining room) with its three high arched windows facing the street, adjoins the 12th Street entrance. The Roberdeau crest or shield, set in the panel over the main entrance door to the dining room, shows the insignia used by the ancestors of Roberdeau, the Revolutionary War hero and the name given Fort Roberdeau. This room is currently unused.

The Coffee Room, known as the Alleghany Room, is located off the promenade. The room is finished in hand wrought effect walls. The wood work is antique walnut. This room is currently leased by the Blair County Library as a Media Center.

At the end of the promenade, and opposite the 12th Street entrance, is the spiral marble staircase leading to the mezzanine promenade and lounge. This promenade and lounge extends around three sides of the lobby and affords a splendid view of the lobby (see Figure 2).

From this wide promenade and lounge, one enters the Logan Room, or the main ball and banquet room, 42' x 90'. This room is in the Italian Renaissance style with gray-ivory paneled walls with antique gold decorative lines. Around the arched windows and doors, the trim is done with hand decorated panels with classic decorated figures at intervals. The frieze of this room is also hand decorated. Over the three entrance doors are decorative panels.

The assembly room, or private dining room, known as the Oneida Room, is located off the promenade and is 22' x 40'.

The main kitchen and serving rooms are located on the first floor, between the main dining room and coffee room, with direct service by stairway and service elevator to the banquet service room and second floor.

Seven floors above the mezzanine level contain the 308 hotel rooms. From the elevators, one enters the elevator lobbies on each floor (see Figure 3). The room corridors have paneled wainscot with painted walls above to the cove cornice.

Each floor has a linen room and store room for that floor.

Although originally papered with special designs of Birge papers most of the rooms now have painted walls with the retention of the original base, chair-rail and cove cornice moldings.

Since the acquisition of the hotel by its current owners in 1972, smoke detectors, lighted exit signage, battery powered emergency lighting and fire extinguishers (to supplement the existing standpipes with hose) have been added.

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)

Period of Significance

Significant Dates

Architecture
Commerce

1921-1939

1921

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Stevens, H. L. Co. / Stevens,
H. L. Co.

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

The Penn Alto Hotel is a fine, intact example of the large hotels developed primarily to serve the large number of passengers traveling the Pennsylvania Railroad main line in central and western Pennsylvania. It is also significant as the largest non-industrial construction project of the early twentieth century in the City of Altoona. The Penn Alto was part of a trend in the development of large hotels to serve rail passengers characterized by such others as the General Green Hotel in Greensburg, Westmoreland County, the Dimeling Hotel in Clearfield County, the Penn Harris in Harrisburg and the William Penn in Pittsburgh.

As of 1916 the downtown area and the main rail station of Altoona were served primarily by two small hotels, the Blair House of approximately 60 rooms and the Anderson of 28 rooms. In response to the ever growing numbers of rail passengers stopping in Altoona, the Penn Alto was developed on a largeness of scale and richness of detail characterized by the grand hotels of New York and Philadelphia and unique to Altoona.

Financing for the project was provided by the sale of a one million dollar stock issue entirely within the community.

The initial and main phase of the Hotel (200 rooms and the public spaces) formally opened on September 7, 1921, and proved an immediate success. The first two years of operation justified the addition of the upper seven floors of the east wing (108 rooms) which formally opened in October of 1928.

In addition to the Hotel's significance as the major supplier of accommodations for rail travelers it became a major social center of the community serving as a meeting place for most of the area's civic and social organizations. A few examples are United Fund, Red Cross, Boy Scouts of America, Kiwanis and Rotary.

The Hotel's growth and prosperity paralleled that of rail travel and Altoona until reaching its peak financial year in 1944. The post World War II growing popularity of the automobile versus rail travel lead to decline in the economic vitality of the Penn Alto.

See continuation sheet

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Penn Alto Hotel

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The main lobby lounge was partitioned in 1973 to permit its being separately leased to a commercial tenant.

All these changes have been carefully accomplished and have had little effect on the integrity of the building.

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**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Penn Alto Hotel

Section number 7 Page 3

The main lobby lounge was partitioned in 1973 to permit its being separately leased to a commercial tenant.

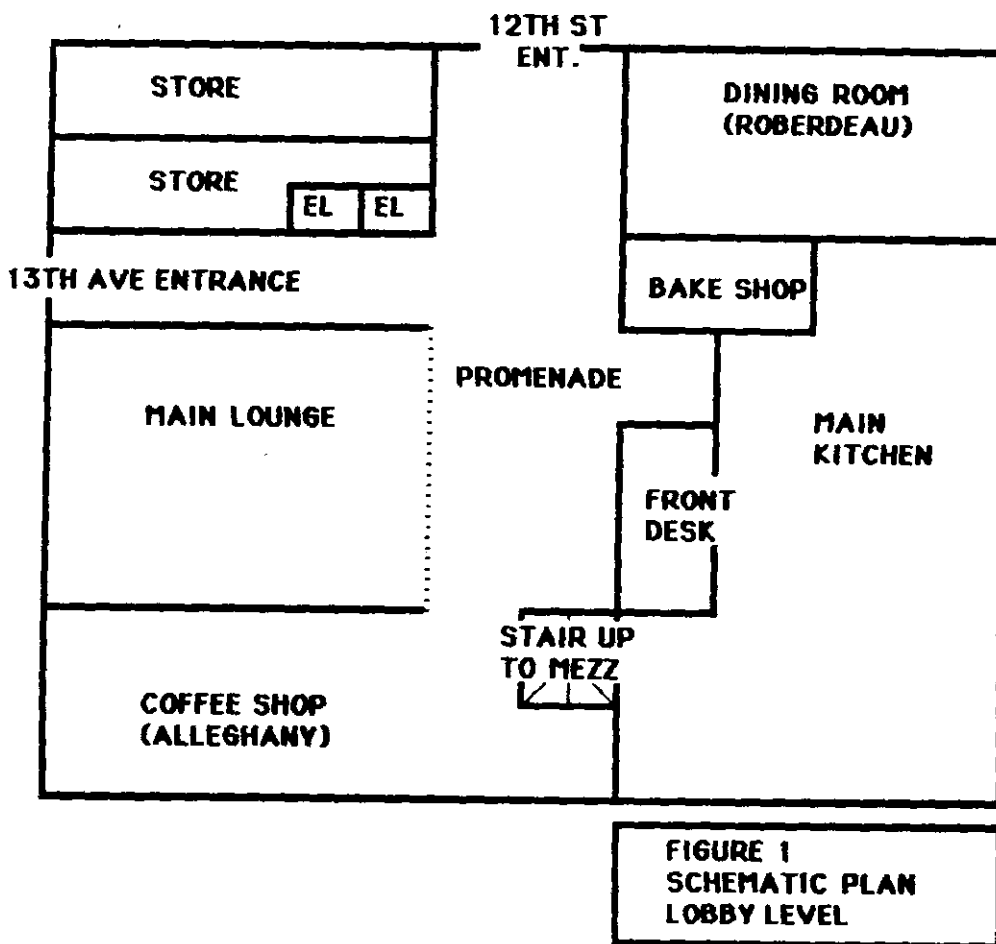
All these changes have been carefully accomplished and have had little effect on the integrity of the building.

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Penn Alto Hotel

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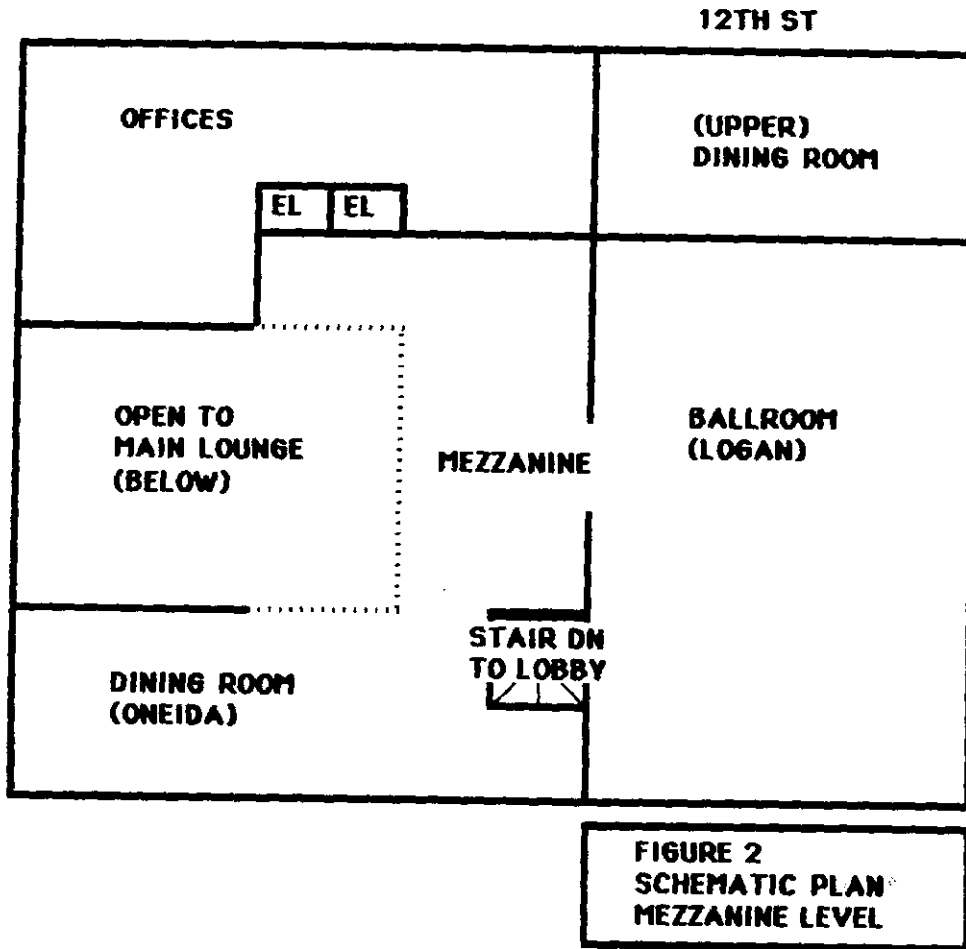


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Continuation Sheet**

Penn Alto Hotel

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The Penn Alto is architecturally significant as the largest and most complex non-industrial development of Altoona c. 1900-1930 rivaled only by the Mellon and Altoona Trust (Mid-State) Bank buildings in style and richness of detail, but unrivaled in largeness of scale.

The developers of the Hotel, seeking speed and economy, retained the H. L. Stevens Co. of New York and Chicago for design and construction. An integrated system of construction had been developed by the Stevens Co. for the construction of hospitals during World War I. The concept involved placing the responsibility for all major functions - design, construction, equipment and decorating under the supervision of one organization thereby allowing certain tasks ordinarily done sequentially to be done concurrently with resultant savings in time and money (similar to a system referred to in the industry as "Fast-Tracking" today). The construction of the Penn Alto was the first use of this system by the Stevens Company in a civilian construction project.

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Penn Alto Hotel

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Verbal boundary description and justification:

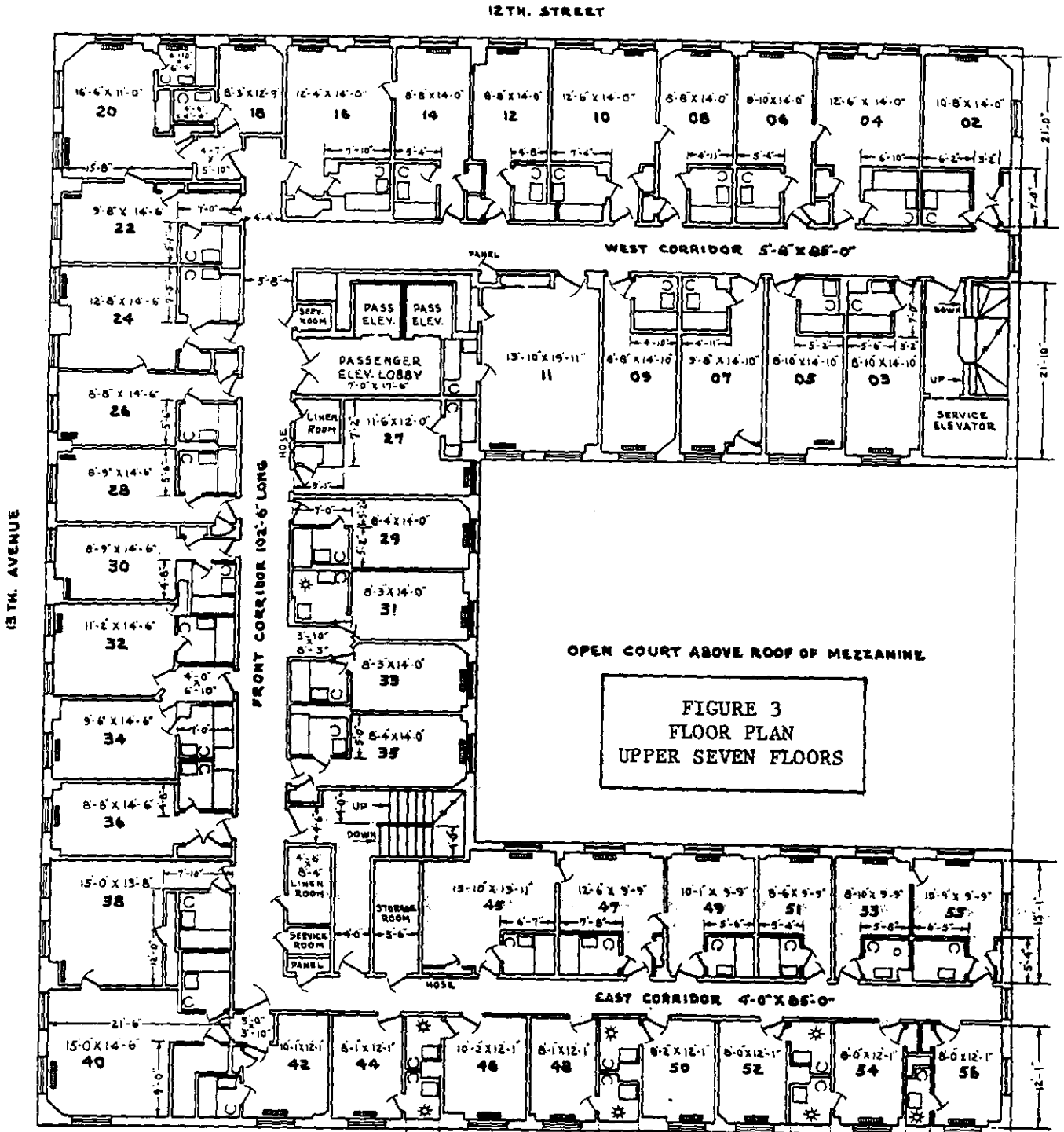
LEGAL DESCRIPTION: ALL THOSE CERTAIN lots or pieces of ground situate, lying and being in the City of Altoona, County of Blair and Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, fronting one hundred forty-four (144) feet, eight and one-half (8-1/2") inches, on the Northwest side of Thirteenth (13th) Avenue, and extending back along the Northwest side of Twelfth (12th) Street, a distance of one hundred twenty (120) feet to an alley, and being Lots Nos. Sixteen (16) Fifteen (15) and the Southwest forty-four (44) feet, eight and one-half (8-1/2") inches of Lot No. Fourteen (14) in Block "DD", according to the Wright Plan of said City.

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Penn Alto Hotel

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LAYOUT OF ONE FLOOR - 44 GUEST ROOMS - PENN-ALTO HOTEL-ALTOONA PA.

Penn Alto Hotel
Blair County

Altoona Quad
Zone 17
E-720 065
N-4488180

