

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

received

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Commercial Hotel

and/or common General Pershing Hotel

2. Location

street & number corner Long and Brady Avenues

N/A not for publication

city, town DuBois N/A vicinity of

state Pennsylvania code 42 county Clearfield code 033

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> N/A in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Anthony F. Test

street & number 402 West Mahoning Avenue

city, town Punxsutawney N/A vicinity of state PA 15767

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Clearfield County Court House

street & number 2nd and Market Streets

city, town Clearfield state PA

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title none has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date N/A N/A federal state county local

depository for survey records N/A

city, town N/A state N/A

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one	
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site	N/A
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved	date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed			

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Commercial Hotel is a 4-story masonry structure built of common brick with a veneer of buff-colored Roman brick on the two principal elevations. The Brady Avenue elevation curves slightly to conform to the right-of-way of this principal downtown DuBois thoroughfare (Photo 1). The Long Avenue facade is entirely original to the 1901 remodeling. The Brady Avenue facade has seen the only major exterior alteration, which occurred in 1937 with the replacement of two of the three storerooms with a 700-seat movie house (Photos 1 and 2). The third storeroom is still in place, although the storefront has been altered. The main entry to the hotel was originally located on Brady Avenue and was shielded by a 1-story balcony cantilevered over the sidewalk and supported by two posts at the curb (Photo 2). To the right of the main entry is a rounded one-story bay--also original to 1901--which once was a major element of the main hotel lobby, but which now is a part of the tavern which replaced the lobby. This bay is intact and retains its handsome four-panel transom band of art glass (Photo 3). Immediately above this bay and the door and storefront to its left is a modest storefront cornice of pressed metal detailed with cove moulding and an egg-and-dart motif. The upper facade of both the principal elevations are original to 1901 and are articulated by double-hung windows, 1/1 lights, set on extended sills. All windows on the Long Avenue elevation are flat-topped. Those on the Brady Avenue side employ segmental arches on the second and third stories and flat-topped arches on the fourth. Like the sills, all lintels are of rock-faced brownstone with keystones; the segmental-arched windows have plain segmental lintels and the flat-topped windows have flared lintels. The sidewalls of the two major elevations are further ornamented through the use of corbeled brickwork which provides a distinctive ornamental feature to the "skin" of the building (Photo 4). Capping the entire structure on the major elevations is a pressed-metal cornice (Photo 5) ornamented with modillions, dentil bands, and egg-and-dart moulding.

As noted above, in 1937 a 700-seat movie house replaced two storefronts on Brady Avenue. The auditorium has little architectural embellishment (Photo 6). All in all, the interior of the hotel itself exhibits a dearth of ornamentation. A small, rather plain lobby is entered through a door in the Long Avenue side. The room area on the upper floors is likewise plain, though essentially original to the 1901 reodeling.

The Commercial Hotel is located at downtown DuBois' major corner, in the heart of the city's once-prosperous central business district. It occupies the entire lot on which it is built.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1889; 1901;1937 **Builder/Architect** original unknown

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Commercial Hotel is nominated as a locally-significant historic resource which has contributed to the transportation history of the city of DuBois since the 1880s. It stands today as the only surviving hotel in the city which has served its original use continuously since the time of its construction. Of the city's five premiere hostelrys, all but the Commercial have either fallen to the wrecking ball or have been remodeled beyond recognition: the Logan was destroyed by fire, the Hotel DuBois is now a part of the local newspaper office, the Fort Worth serves as the V.F.W., and on the site of the St. Louis stand two fast food restaurants. Even though a portion of its first floor has been altered, the Commercial Hotel nonetheless retains its overall integrity of design and workmanship, and is an important part of the heritage of this north-central Pennsylvania community.

The Commercial has been a fixture in the heart of downtown DuBois for nearly a century. In 1888 much of the city was leveled by a huge fire. As the city began to rebuild, John H. Bierly, a Lock Haven, Pennsylvania, tobacco merchant, purchased this pivotal lot and began construction of a new building. The DUBOIS EXPRESS of July 27, 1888, noted that the edifice would stand two stories tall, with four storerooms on the ground floor. The EXPRESS continued, "it will be adapted for hotel purposes if it is concluded to use the upper portions in that way." Apparently such conclusions were reached, for the EXPRESS announced early in 1889 that Bierly's new building would be known as the Commercial Hotel. On March 8, 1889, its doors opened, with the local media heralding the edifice as, "without question one of the finest country hotels in the state," with its fifty-eight rooms. The first manager of the new hotel was one Joseph Bensinger.

Bensinger was destined to become one of the key players in the long history of the Commercial Hotel. At the request of John DuBois, the city's founder, Bensinger had come to town in 1886 at the age of 37 to manage the Hotel DuBois. He stayed but a single year and left for Pittsburgh, where he remained until 1889. Returning to DuBois, he managed Bierly's Commercial Hotel for an additional seven years. Between 1896 and 1901 Bensinger again worked in hotel management in Pittsburgh, but in April of 1901 he came back to DuBois and purchased the Commercial. He immediately began to enlarge the structure, adding two stories, encasing the entire structure in the Roman brick veneer, and adding the Colonial Revival detailing which exists to this day. He increased the number of rooms to about 100, advertising in POLK'S CITY DIRECTORY that his hotel boasted "all modern conveniences."

While it is possible that the city's other hotels may have been more grand

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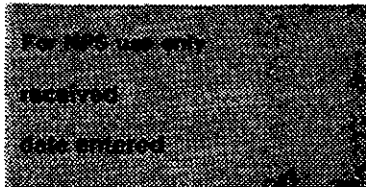
COMMERCIAL HOTEL

DuBois, Pennsylvania

Continuation sheet

Item number

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than Bensinger's Commercial, this hostelry did fill an important void for the travelling public. Its name alone suggested a catering to the middle class and to the salesmen of the day, and one newspaper reported that "the boys on the road all like him (Bensinger)," and that he had fitted up "the most commodious parlors in DuBois" which were always available as sample rooms. The Commercial was the site of the organization of the United Commercial Travellers in DuBois in May of 1902, and was the reflection of Bensinger's capable management for nearly twenty years. During this time, Bensinger was active in the formation of the Knights of Fidelity, a fraternal organization for hotelmen. Recognized as one of Pennsylvania's leading hostellers, he was also one of the organizers of the Pennsylvania Hotel Men's Association, a trade organization which he served several times as president.

Historically, the Commercial Hotel occupies a conspicuous place in one of the greatest growth periods in the city's history. The early twentieth century saw tremendous industrial and commercial expansion in DuBois, including the establishment of major factories such as the Rochester and Pittsburgh Coal and Iron Co., manufacturers of pig iron, and the DuBois Textile Manufacturing Co., which made shirts. In 1901 alone, at the same time Bensinger was remodeling his hotel, more than 500 new homes were built in DuBois. Railroads were laid out in every direction until by 1912 nineteen passenger trains arrived each day. Bensinger's horse-drawn busses met every one of them.

In 1918 Bensinger retired and sold the hotel to a partnership. The new manager was Bensinger's nephew, Charles B. Hammer, who took over just after the advent of Prohibition. The dry years of the 1920s were too much for Hammer, and he filed for bankruptcy after about ten years of management. One of the owners, Joseph S. Reitz, was appointed receiver, and within a year had bought out his partners, becoming sole owner. The first few years of Reitz' ownership were far from smooth, as the Depression was in its fury. In 1937, however, Reitz struck a deal with John H. Harris, general manager of the vast Harris Amusement Enterprises. A major remodeling of the northern portion of the building, including the removal of a portion of the building at the rear, enabled Harris to construct a 700-seat movie house, 42'x132', which was named the Harris-DuBois opening on October 27, 1937. A local architect, Russell C. Howard, collaborated with one Victor A. Rigault in the design of the theater, and B.C. Skinner, a local man, had the general contract. This was the fourth movie house in DuBois, but with the demise of the Elk's theater and the older Avenue and Carlton Theaters, this house, known most recently as the DuBois Playhouse, is the last remaining movie house in the city.

In recent times, downtown DuBois has suffered greatly from the wholesale

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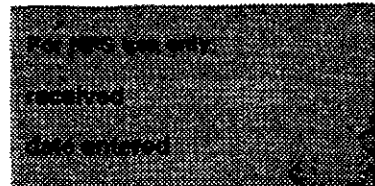
**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

COMMERCIAL HOTEL
DuBois, Pennsylvania

Continuation sheet

Item number

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demolition of historic buildings as well as from rampant insensitive remodelings. With its minimally altered exterior, including its completely intact 1901 upper facade, the Commercial Hotel stands as an important link with downtown DuBois' more prosperous past.

9. Major Bibliographical References

King, S.A. A Chronological History of the Pershing Hotel, unpublished MS, 1985, in possession of property owner
DuBois Express, July 27, 1888, January 11, 1889, February 15, 1889, March 8, 1889, and April 3, 1901

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property less than one acre

Quadrangle name DuBois, Pennsylvania

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A

1	7	6	8	7	8	8	0	4	15	5	11	0	10	1
Zone		Easting					Northing							

B

Zone		Easting					Northing							

C

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D

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H

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Verbal boundary description and justification Beginning at the NW corner of Brady and Long Avenues, then ca. 90' NE along Brady Avenue to a point; then SE ca. 130' to an alley; then SW ca. 90' to Long Avenue; then NW ca. 130' to the place of beginning. Containing only that land upon which the nominated property sits.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A code N/A county N/A state N/A code N/A

state N/A code N/A county N/A state N/A code N/A

11. Form Prepared By

name/title David L. Taylor, Preservation Consultant

organization N/A

date 13 June, 1985

street & number 296 Jefferson Street

telephone 814-849-3287

city or town Brookville

state PA 15825

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title Dr. Larry E. Tise, State Historic Preservation Officer

date

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date

Keeper of the National Register

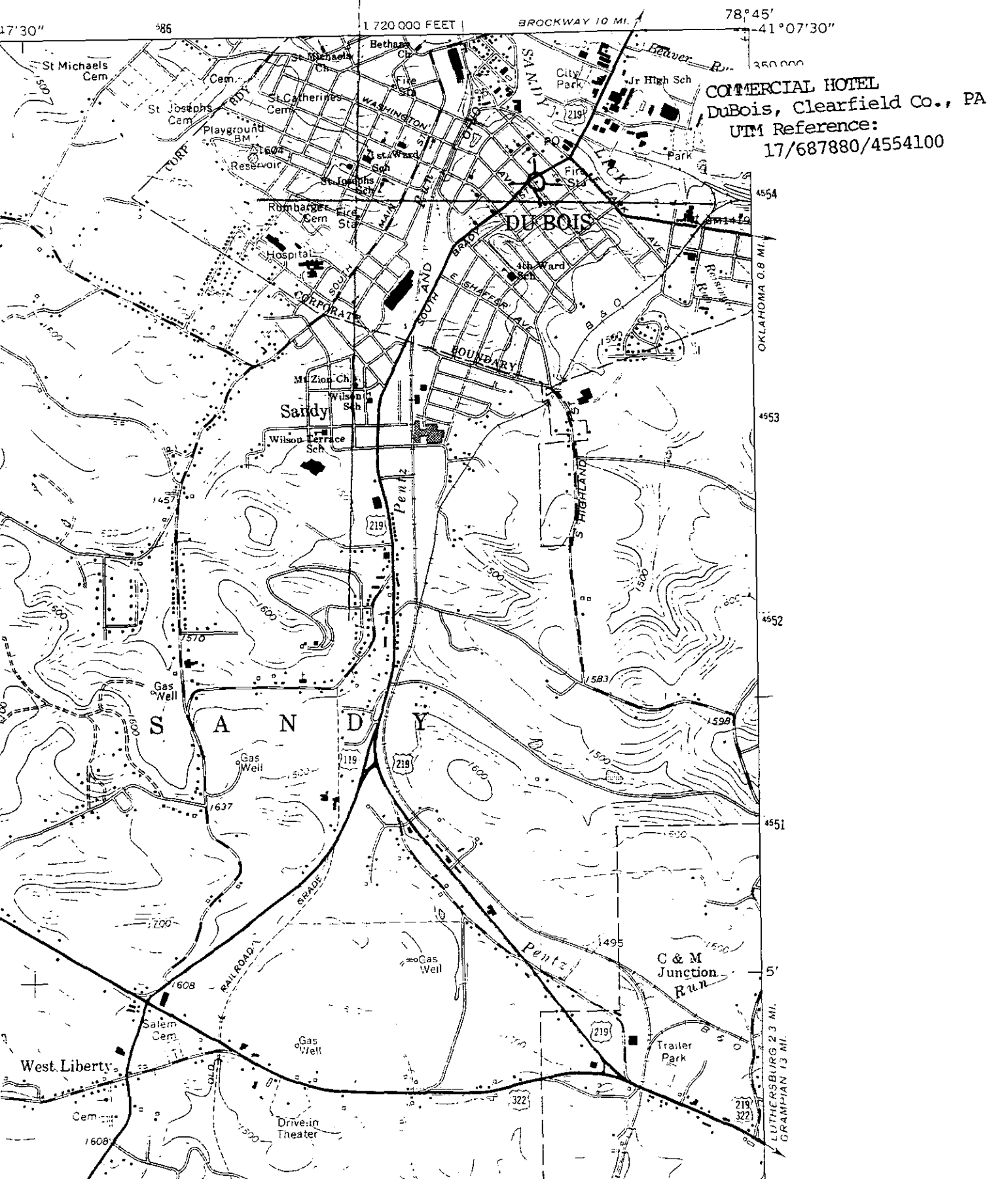
Attest:

Chief of Registration

date

DU BOIS QUADRANGLE
PENNSYLVANIA
7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)

5708 II NW
(SABULA)



COMMERCIAL HOTEL
DuBois, Clearfield Co., PA
UTM Reference:
17/687880/4554100

LUTHERSBURG 2.3 MI.
GRAMPIAN 1.3 MI.