

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service
National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. Name of Property

Historic Name: Hotel Limpia
Other name/site number: Hotel Lympia
Name of related multiple property listing: NA

2. Location

Street & number: 101 Memorial Square
City or town: Fort Davis State: Texas County: Jeff Davis
Not for publication: ☐ Vicinity: ☐

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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 at the following levels of significance:
☐ national ☐ statewide ☒ local

Applicable National Register Criteria: ☒ A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D


Signature of certifying official / Title

Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

1/8/2025
Date

Texas Historical Commission
State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government

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

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- ____ entered in the National Register
____ determined eligible for the National Register
____ determined not eligible for the National Register.
____ removed from the National Register
____ other, explain: _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Private
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - Local
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - State
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - Federal

Category of Property

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	building(s)
<input type="checkbox"/>	district
<input type="checkbox"/>	site
<input type="checkbox"/>	structure
<input type="checkbox"/>	object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing	
2	1	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
2	1	total

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

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions: Domestic/Hotel; Education/research facility

Current Functions: Domestic/Hotel

7. Description

Architectural Classification: LATE 19TH & 20TH CENTURY AMERICAN MOVEMENTS: Commercial Style

Principal Exterior Materials: STONE, STUCCO, GLASS, METAL

Narrative Description (see continuation 7-7 through 7-13)

Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	A	Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
<input type="checkbox"/>	B	Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
<input type="checkbox"/>	C	Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
<input type="checkbox"/>	D	Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations: NA

Areas of Significance: Commerce; Science (*local level of significance*)

Period of Significance: 1913-1953 (Commerce); 1956-1974 (Science)

Significant Dates: 1913, c. 1920, 1925

Significant Person (only if criterion b is marked): NA

Cultural Affiliation (only if criterion d is marked): NA

Architect/Builder: John Bauce (Stonework), G.W. Campbell and F.P. Sproul (Carpentry)

Narrative Statement of Significance (see continuation sheets 8-14 through 8-24)

9. Major Bibliographic References

Bibliography (see continuation sheet 9-25 through 9-27)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☒ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested. (#47194, NPS approved Part 1 PDIL on 12/15/2023)
- ☐ 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 – Archives of the Big Bend-Sul Ross State University Library
- ☐ Other

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): NA

Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: Less than one acre

Coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: NA

1. Latitude: 30.589155° Longitude: -103.893892°

Verbal Boundary Description: The nominated boundary is a subset of the legal parcel (Jeff Davis CAD #151770). The boundary is sketched on Map 4.

Boundary Justification: The boundary is a subset of the original parcel historically associated with the nominated building and was drawn to include the 1913 hotel with additions, annex, and associated landscape. It excludes the hotel's 1913 carbide plant, which no longer retains integrity due to significant alterations.

11. Form Prepared By

Name/title: Megan Warley McDonald, Architectural Historian
Organization: Post Oak Preservation Solutions
Street & number: 2506 Little John Lane
City or Town: Austin State: Texas Zip Code: 78704
Email: Megan@postoakpreservation.com
Telephone: 814-397-2359
Date: January 4, 2024

Additional Documentation

Maps (see continuation sheets MAP-28 through MAP-30)

Additional items (see continuation sheets FIGURE-31 through FIGURE-47)

Photographs (see continuation sheets PHOTO-48 through PHOTO-75)

Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

Photograph Log

Name of Property: Hotel Limpia
City or Vicinity: Fort Davis
County: Jeff Davis
State: Texas
Photographer: Megan Warley McDonald
Date: April 26, 2023
Location of Original Files: 2506 Little John Lane, Austin, Texas 78704

Photo 1 (TX_JeffDavisCounty_HotelLimpia_001.tif)
South elevation of original (1913) Hotel Limpia and
ca. 1920 addition at right. View north.

Photo 2 (TX_JeffDavisCounty_HotelLimpia_002.tif)
West and south elevations of Hotel Limpia. View
northeast.

Photo 3 (TX_JeffDavisCounty_HotelLimpia_003.tif)
East elevation of Hotel Limpia and ca. 1920 addition.
View northwest.

Photo 4 (TX_JeffDavisCounty_HotelLimpia_004.tif)
Rear of ca. 1920 addition. View southwest.

Photo 5 (TX_JeffDavisCounty_HotelLimpia_005.tif)
Rear (north elevation) of Hotel Limpia. View
southeast.

Photo 6 (TX_JeffDavisCounty_HotelLimpia_006.tif)
West elevation of Hotel Limpia. Recessed corner
entrance on the first floor was historically a physician's
office. View southeast.

Photo 7 (TX_JeffDavisCounty_HotelLimpia_007.tif)
East room of basement. View southeast.

Photo 8 (TX_JeffDavisCounty_HotelLimpia_008.tif)
West room of basement, including wooden freezer.
View southwest.

Photo 9 (TX_JeffDavisCounty_HotelLimpia_009.tif)
Hotel Limpia lobby. View north.

Photo 10 (TX_JeffDavisCounty_HotelLimpia_010.tif)
Hotel Limpia lobby. View south.

Photo 11 (TX_JeffDavisCounty_HotelLimpia_011.tif)
Hotel Limpia "ballroom" (formerly Jones/Fort Davis
Pharmacy). View north.

Photo 12 (TX_JeffDavisCounty_HotelLimpia_012.tif)
Hotel Limpia ballroom. View south.

Photo 13 (TX_JeffDavisCounty_HotelLimpia_013.tif)
Living room of guest room 34, historically a
physician's office. View north.

Photo 14 (TX_JeffDavisCounty_HotelLimpia_014.tif)
First floor lounge inside ca. 1920 addition to Hotel
Limpia. View northeast.

Photo 15 (TX_JeffDavisCounty_HotelLimpia_015.tif)
First floor lounge inside ca. 1920 addition to Hotel
Limpia. View southeast.

Photo 16 (TX_JeffDavisCounty_HotelLimpia_016.tif)
Enclosed patio surrounding ca. 1920 addition to Hotel
Limpia. View north.

Photo 17 (TX_JeffDavisCounty_HotelLimpia_017.tif)
Second floor corridor, including character defining
curved plaster walls. View north.

Photo 18 (TX_JeffDavisCounty_HotelLimpia_018.tif)
Second floor corridor. View south.

Photo 19 (TX_JeffDavisCounty_HotelLimpia_019.tif)
Typical second floor guest room in 1913 Hotel Limpia
building. View west.

Photo 20 (TX_JeffDavisCounty_HotelLimpia_020.tif)
Southwest corner of 1913 carbide plant, note pink
stone exterior wall. View northeast.

Photo 21 (TX_JeffDavisCounty_HotelLimpia_021.tif)
West elevation of 1913 carbide plant with 1976
restaurant addition. View southeast.

Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

Photo 22 (TX_JeffDavisCounty_HotelLimpia_022.tif)
West elevation of Hotel Limpia Annex (1925). View
northeast.

Photo 23 (TX_JeffDavisCounty_HotelLimpia_023.tif)
South elevation of Hotel Limpia Annex. View
northeast.

Photo 24 (TX_JeffDavisCounty_HotelLimpia_024.tif)
Northwest corner of Hotel Limpia Annex. View
southeast.

Photo 25 (TX_JeffDavisCounty_HotelLimpia_025.tif)
Rear (east) elevation of Hotel Limpia Annex. View
southwest.

Photo 26 (TX_JeffDavisCounty_HotelLimpia_026.tif)
Original double door entrance to Hotel Limpia Annex
guest room, room 5. View northwest.

Photo 27 (TX_JeffDavisCounty_HotelLimpia_027.tif)
Typical living room in Hotel Limpia Annex (room 12).
The wide doorway at the center of the photograph
historically featured a pair of double doors that led into
a central hallway (now occupied by a kitchen.) View
east.

Photo 28 (TX_JeffDavisCounty_HotelLimpia_028.tif)
Typical guest room in Hotel Limpia Annex (room 10).
View northwest.

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

Narrative Description

Hotel Limpia is an early 20th century hotel across from the county courthouse in Fort Davis, Jeff Davis County. It is on flat land at the foot of the Davis Mountains in West Texas. Built in 1913, the hotel is a two-story rectangular building of locally quarried pink volcanic stone with a hipped roof (not original) and a one-story stucco addition (1920) on the east elevation. In 1977, a two-story wooden porch was built on the hotel's front elevation replacing the original one-story canopy. The 1925 annex is a one-story rectangular building of stucco and wood construction sited northeast of the hotel with a non-historic hipped roof. The nominated boundary includes a non-contributing one-story laundry building (c. 2000) immediately west of Hotel Limpia. Although alterations to the hotel and annex diminish the property's integrity of design, Hotel Limpia nevertheless retains sufficient integrity overall to demonstrate its historical significance. The current property owners are rehabilitating the nominated hotel using federal historic preservation tax credits.

Setting

Hotel Limpia is in downtown Fort Davis, Jeff Davis County in West Texas, approximately 200 miles east of El Paso. The hotel is less than one mile south of the Fort Davis National Historic Site. The town of Fort Davis is at the foot of the Davis Mountains with an elevation of approximately 5,000 feet above sea level. State Street (TX-118/TX-17) serves as the main commercial thoroughfare in Fort Davis, leading to the Fort Davis National Historic Site, and serves as the northwestern boundary of the Hotel Limpia property. State Street is lined with commercial buildings, several of which date to the early twentieth century. Immediately south of Hotel Limpia is an open, paved area with a small central green space at the center. The green space is surrounded by a low stone wall and contains the Fort Davis Veterans Memorial. The Veterans Memorial and surrounding open area is known as Memorial Square. Hotel Limpia is adjacent to several historic buildings surrounding the square including the Union Trading Company building (1906), the Fort Davis Auto Company (1909), and the Fort Davis State Bank building (1913). The Jeff Davis County Courthouse (**NRHP 2002**) is in the square across the street.

Site

Hotel Limpia is on an irregular shaped lot bounded by Court Avenue to the south, Limpia Street to the east and north, and State Street (TX-118/TX-17) to the west. A non-contributing, freestanding laundry building along the west wall of the hotel was added in the 2000s. The 1925 Hotel Limpia Annex is across Limpia Street to the northeast.

There are several resources associated with Hotel Limpia that are not included in the nominated boundary: the hotel's 1913 one-story stone carbide plant with a 1976 restaurant addition to the rear of the hotel; Dumas Building west of State Street, and a non-historic pool east of the 1925 annex (contributing). Significant alterations to the carbide plant greatly diminished its integrity, and the Dumas Building and pool were acquired and built outside the period of significance. The carbide plant building was excluded from the boundary due to extensive alterations¹ that took place outside the period of significance. A modern stone telephone utility building is west of the Hotel on a separate parcel (Jeff Davis CAD #151768).

The nominated boundary is partly delineated by a low stone retaining wall (c. 1975) between the hotel courtyard and the carbide plant. Native trees shade the courtyard, and a concrete sidewalk runs the length of the west side of the property along State Street. The 1925 Hotel Limpia Annex was constructed on a hillside overlooking what was once an

¹ The carbide plant, a stone and wood frame building originally constructed to house the generating equipment that powered the hotel's interior lighting, is north of the hotel. A triangular, wood-frame addition extends from the north wall of the carbide plant to the northernmost part of the lot and is currently a coffee shop, though was originally constructed as the Sutler's Boarding House Restaurant.

Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

apple orchard to the east, but is now largely vacant land. The annex features some grassy areas surrounding the building planted with trees, areas of surface parking adjacent to the building on the west elevation, and a non-historic pool enclosed by fencing is across a gravel drive on the building's east elevation.

Hotel Limpia (1913) and Addition (1920)

Exterior

Hotel Limpia is a two-story, rectangular (82-feet by 42-feet) building constructed of load-bearing pink stone (Photos 1-6) with a one-story stucco addition (1920) on the east elevation. Originally featuring a flat roof, the current hipped roof was added in 1977. Stonework along the first floor features a coursed, rusticated, ashlar masonry with a combination of large square or rectangular stone blocks. Stonework on the second floor, however, is a mix of squared and random rubble rusticated masonry arranged in irregular patterns.

The **south (primary) elevation** faces Memorial Square. A two-story wood porch was added to this elevation in 1977, extending from beneath the hipped roof. The hotel's pink stone exterior wall is still clearly visible beneath the porch and is not completely obscured. A row of four narrow, rectangular, eight-over-four, single hung windows and a central door with transom are located on the second floor. Though windows are modern replacements, the size, shape, and placement of the original openings have been retained. The first-floor features five openings. From west to east, a large one-over-one fixed window with bulkhead beneath, a historic set of partially glazed double doors, a large one-over-one window with bulkhead beneath, a row of three one-over-one windows with wood bulkhead, and a partially glazed single door leading to the hotel lobby. Each of the windows appears to be modern replacements. With the exception of the main entrance, each of the openings has the original transom. A ca. 1920 addition is on the east side of the building and is visible from the primary elevation. The addition is a one-story, roughly rectangular concrete structure with a clipped corner housing a lounge and additional guest rooms. The addition features a wrap-around porch now enclosed with large picture windows, a projecting standing seam metal roof with exposed rafter tails, a simple concrete parapet, and large chimney.

The **west elevation** is a large expanse of pink, rusticated, coursed, rubble masonry punctuated by a row of six narrow second floor windows with rusticated stone lintels and smooth stone sills. "Hotel Limpia" is hand painted near the cornice. A narrow band of somewhat darker pink stone runs horizontally along this wall, between the first and second floors. The laundry building (non-contributing) obscures the first floor. Three one-over-one windows are located north of the laundry building on the first floor, and three small, single-pane fixed windows are located directly above it, both feature smooth stone lintels and sills.

The **north elevation** of the hotel faces the courtyard, and the original 1913 portion of the building features coursed, random and squared rubble masonry. A non-historic second story wood porch (ca. 1990s) has been appended to the rear of the original hotel, with an exterior staircase extending to the first floor. "Hotel Limpia" is hand painted just beneath the roof line. Four narrow, non-historic windows are on the second floor, as well as a second-floor exit door between the windows leading onto the porch. A small fabric awning is above the door. On the first floor, a rear entrance leading to the hotel lobby is on the eastern end of the wall, featuring a historic door with a transom above. Three one-over-one windows with masonry lintels and sills are located at the center of the first floor and appear to be historic age. The westernmost window appears to retain its historic glass. A set of double, partially glazed doors are recessed diagonally into the clipped northwestern corner of the building, with a stone pillar prominently marking the entrance and supporting the clipped building edge. Currently serving as a private entrance to hotel room 34, this entrance formerly led to the doctor's office housed in the hotel. The rear of the ca. 1920 addition is on the eastern end of this elevation, and features entrances to the enclosed patio and guest room #30 and a six-lite window to the right of

Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

the guest room door. The remains of a ca. 1977 shake shed roof with exposed rafter tails is above the entrances to the patio and room #30 on this portion of the addition.

The **eastern elevation** is largely characterized by the one-story ca. 1920 addition (Photos 3-4). A standing seam metal shed/hipped roof with exposed rafter tails extends above a row of large windows and beneath the cornice on the addition, shading an enclosed patio. The second floor of the hotel is visible above the addition, including historic hand painted lettering that reads "Limpia." "Hotel" is somewhat visible beneath a layer of paint: the word was painted over in the 1950s when the building was used to house Harvard Radio Astronomy personnel (discussed in Section 8). A row of narrow, non-original second floor windows are partially visible from street level. The northern end of the east elevation features two, one-over-one first floor windows with transoms.

Interior

The interior has a basement, a first floor containing both public spaces and guest rooms, and a second floor of guest rooms.

The **basement** of the hotel is accessed via an exterior concrete stairwell on the north (rear) elevation, adjacent to the rear first floor entrance (Photos 7-8). The basement does not extend the full footprint of the hotel, only extending beneath a portion of the rear (north) of the building. All of the basement walls consist of stacked stone. A historic wood panel door opens from the stairwell into the east room of the basement. The room primarily houses utility equipment. The first-floor joists and floorboards are exposed along the ceiling. A small wood frame window is on the north wall of the east room, which opens onto the exterior stairwell. A wood staircase is also located along the north wall, though it no longer appears to be accessible via the first floor of the hotel. A wood frame doorway leads from the east room of the basement to the west room. The west room of the basement is slightly larger than the east room and contains a large wooden freezer in the center of the room. A small wood frame window is on the north wall, which historically provided light to the basement through a light well. Because the light well is at the base of the rear porch stairs, a moveable wood covering currently encloses the light well.

The **first floor** of Hotel Limpia contains a series of public spaces, in addition to several guest rooms. The primary entrance is accessed via the south elevation and leads into the lobby (Photos 9-10). The southern end of the lobby consists of an open seating area, leading to a non-original stairwell along the west wall and the check-in desk at the northern end of the room. The lobby features plaster walls, non-historic wood floors, and a beadboard ceiling. A pair of modern double doors along the west wall to the ballroom (originally the Fort Davis Pharmacy) and a wide doorway on the east wall leads to a lounge (part of the ca. 1920 addition). Two offices are located near the northwest corner of the lobby, to the left of the check-in desk. These rooms were originally part of the ballroom and doctor's office and did not historically open to the lobby. The offices are small rooms with plaster walls, pressed tin ceilings, and carpeted floors. A leaded glass transom (not original to the building) is above the doorway of the northernmost office. A doorway along the north wall of the lobby opens to a hallway. A utility room and restrooms are located along the west wall of the hallway. The hall leads to the rear entrance of the hotel, and to a perpendicular hallway that leads to a guest room that was originally the doctor's office. A historic water fountain is along the south wall of the rear hallway.

The ballroom (originally a pharmacy) is accessible via an exterior entrance on the south elevation of the building or via a set of double doors on the west wall of the lobby (Photos 11-12). The ballroom features original pressed tin ceilings and plaster walls. The wood floors are not original, though the original floor was likely also wood. A row of three narrow windows is along the top of the west wall and a wood door along the north wall leads into one of the offices. The south wall consists of a central (original) entrance flanked by two large windows. The entrance and the windows each feature an overhead transom. Two squared support posts are located near the center of the room, delineating where partitions were previously located.

Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

Guest room 34, originally designed to be a doctor's office, is in the northwest corner of the ground floor (Photo 13). The room is accessible via an exterior entrance at the northwest corner of the hotel and also an interior entrance within the rear hallway. The interior entrance consists of a five-panel wood door and overhead transom. The door opens into a small room currently used as a kitchen. A doorway with overhead transom leads from the kitchen into the living area of the guest room. The living area is the largest space in room 34 and consists of plaster walls and pressed tin ceilings and moldings. The northwest corner of the room contains a set of double exterior doors with an overhead transom. The walls in the southern section of the room are primarily clad with beadboard. A non-original drop ceiling has been constructed over this section of the room. A bathroom is in the southeast corner of the room and appears to be a historic room based on the presence of a historic overhead transom.

The ca. 1920 addition consists of a lounge, two guest rooms, and an enclosed patio or sun porch along the perimeter (Photos 14-16). The lounge can be accessed through the east wall of the lobby or through the enclosed patio. The lounge is a roughly square shaped room with plaster walls and ceilings and non-historic tile flooring. Non-historic built-in bookshelves run the length of the north wall and a stone fireplace (ca. 1977) is in the southeast corner. Double doors are located on the east wall, leading to the enclosed patio, while a single door leads onto the patio from the south wall of the room. The enclosed patio features concrete flooring. The wood ceiling is the underside of the shed roof porch awning. Exterior doors are located on both the north and south ends of the patio. The interior wall of the patio is concrete coated in stucco. The entrance to room 31 and three historic four-over-four wood double hung windows are located along this wall. (Prior to the enclosure of the patio in the 1970s, the east wall was an exterior wall open to the elements.) Guest room 31 features historic wood flooring that has been painted, plaster walls, and pressed tin ceilings. Room 30 is accessible via an interior door in the lobby or an exterior entrance on the north elevation of the ca. 1920 addition.

The **second floor** of Hotel Limpia is accessed via a non-original wooden staircase with wood banister and newel posts, located along the west wall of the lobby (Photos 17-19). Nine guest rooms are currently located on the second floor along a double loaded corridor. A newspaper article published while the hotel was under construction indicates that the second floor was planned to include 15 rooms. It is possible that some rooms were been combined to create larger rooms or to install private bathrooms.² Exterior doors are located on the north and south ends of the hallway, leading to exterior second story porches. The corridor features pressed tin ceilings, decorative egg and dart moldings, and non-historic carpeting. The majority of the corridor walls are historic plaster, though painted, vertical wood paneling covers some sections of the plaster. A character defining feature of the second floor are the ornamental curved plaster walls that remain intact. Guest room doors are five panel wood doors with overhead transoms.

Alterations

Hotel Limpia experienced several alterations during the period of significance, including the construction of a one-story addition along the east façade of the building in approximately 1920. The addition was constructed to provide additional guest rooms and a covered patio for guests. At that time, the entrance to the lobby of the hotel, originally placed at a diagonal at the southeast corner of the building, was moved slightly to the west, flush with the southern wall. A new porch awning was constructed along the first floor and wrapped around the new addition to create a covered, open-air patio. A small staircase on the second floor originally allowed guests access to a second story patio, but the stairs were removed with the construction of the new porch ca. 1920. In 1953, the Hotel Limpia experienced a fire. While accounts differ as to the exact location of the fire and the extent of the damage, historic photos taken immediately after the fire indicate that it was contained to the southern, central section of the building (the lobby and rooms immediately above it) and that several second story windows were lost. The original staircase to the second floor was also damaged at this time and subsequently replaced.

² "Work is Started on Hotel in Ft. Davis," *El Paso Herald*, February 7, 1913; According to former owner Joe Duncan, the hotel originally had communal bathrooms at the west end of the second floor.

Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

Though the hotel building served as offices and apartments for Harvard Astronomers from 1956-1977, it experienced minimal change to serve this function. Between 1977-1978, the hotel was converted back to its original use as a hotel after housing Harvard Astronomers for twenty years. At that time, a new hipped roof was constructed to replace the flat roof in hopes of preventing future water leaks and a new, two-story porch was added to the front of the building. The addition of the two-story porch had a historic precedent: the hotel was originally constructed with an open-air second story porch and second floor doorway (see Figures 5-7), though it was removed within a decade. The new roof and porch do not significantly detract from the integrity of the hotel, as the pink stone exterior wall on the primary façade is clearly visible beneath the porch and the exterior walls on the other elevations are fully visible. Carpet was installed throughout the building during the 1970s renovation, though original wood floors remained beneath in most places, except where lost or damaged by fire. Carpeting on the second-floor dates to the 1970s renovation and original wood floors may be beneath. The floors in the pharmacy (present day ballroom) were installed during the 2000s. Also, during the 1970s renovation, the covered patio on the ca. 1920 addition was enclosed with glass and a fireplace and chimney were installed at the southeast corner. A wood shake awning was appended to the addition, most of which has since been replaced with standing seam metal. On the second floor, several guest rooms were combined in order to make space for bathrooms, though most historic materials and doorways were retained. When the hotel was originally constructed, communal bathrooms were located at the end of the hallway. Paneling was added to some of the plaster walls.

A few alterations have taken place in recent years, including the construction of a one-story laundry building adjacent to the west wall of the hotel, where a carport had been located as late as 1970. The present day "Ballroom" was formerly subdivided when it was occupied by the pharmacy and the Harvard Radio Astronomy team. The subdivisions were removed at an unknown date, and the load bearing wood posts near the center of the room indicates where the subdivisions were previously located. Sometime after the 1980s, two doorways were created along the west wall of the lobby, creating staff offices in spaces that were originally part of the pharmacy and doctor's office. These doors and overhead transoms are not original to the building. The rear, two-story porch was constructed in the 1990s, and a pool was constructed near the annex in 2005.

Annex (1925)

The Hotel Limpia Annex is a large, rectangular building located northeast of the original 1913 Hotel Limpia (Photos 23-26). The one-story building is concrete construction with stucco applied to the exterior. A hipped porch awning supported by wooden posts surrounds the majority of the building, several feet beneath the original roofline. Though the awning has standing seam metal cladding, it remains in its historic placement just above the windows. A series of vents are evenly spaced above the awning. The annex originally featured a flat roof, and the present gable roof was added after the period of significance, although is clearly delineated from the historic roofline through vertical wood cladding in the gable ends. The vast majority of the building's original four-over-four double hung windows have been retained, including their historic hardware. All but one of the exterior entrances to the guest rooms feature a door, adjacent sidelight, and an overhead transom. Historically, each room featured a pair of narrow double doors and an overhead transom, although only one is extant on room 5 (Photo 27). Though the majority of the guest room doors are non-historic replacements, the transoms are original.

The **western elevation** of the annex faces Limpia Street and is characterized by alternating window and door openings. The entrances to four guest rooms are accessed on this elevation, and each doorway features a door, sidelight, and transom. Pairs of two-over-two, double-hung windows are located between each entrance, featuring non-historic shutters.

Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

The **north** end of the annex features the entrance to guest room 15, which includes the same door, sidelight, and transom combination as is present on the other elevations. A small square addition was constructed to the right of the guest room entrance and houses utility equipment. The porch awning ends just above the guest room entrance.

The **east (rear) elevation** of the annex features entrances to four guest rooms. Rooms on this elevation are raised slightly above ground and accessed by a concrete elevated porch beneath the awning. Above the awning, plywood has been applied over the exterior wall. A number of air conditioning units are located on top of the awning roof. Room 5, located near the southwest corner of the building, features the only extant original guest room entrance consisting of a pair of narrow double doors beneath a transom (Photo 26).

The **south elevation** of the building features the entrance to guest room 4, featuring the same door, sidelight, and transom combination as is present on the other elevations. A pair of four-over-four double hung windows is to the right of the entrance. Two vents are located above the porch awning, and wood board with rounded ends infill the non-historic gable end.

Interior

There are 10 guest rooms in the one-story building. Original tin ceilings, wood panel doors, plaster walls, and ornamental ceiling moldings are present throughout the guest rooms. Push button light switches remain in many of the rooms, and historic doorways and transoms are extant. Aside from the addition of kitchen spaces, the primary alteration throughout the annex is the installation of non-historic floor treatments, including carpet and vinyl plank flooring.

According to the Duncan Family, who owned the property for several decades, the annex originally contained a central hallway that was enclosed in the 1970s to add kitchens to the rooms. The hallway was originally accessed using the doorways on the north and south ends of the building (presently the entrances to rooms 4 and 15). The location of the central hallway is still discernible in the living rooms of rooms 15 and 4, which were the ends of the hallway and retain their original widths and overall appearance. In addition, rooms on the west side feature wide doorways topped with transoms that originally opened into the hallway, but now lead into a kitchen (Photo 28). Though the doors have been removed, in many instances the hinges remain. It also appears that when the hallway was enclosed, it was done so in a way that created multi-room suites where there had previously been two small private guest rooms. Fortunately, the original walls and doors of the guest rooms were retained when the hallway was enclosed, and their plan remains largely intact. Though the interior configuration of the annex was somewhat altered to add kitchens to the rooms, the bedrooms themselves are largely intact and retain a significant proportion of their original materials (Photo 29).

Alterations

On the exterior, the primary alteration to the Hotel Limpia Annex was the addition of a pitched roof prior to 1974. This alteration was undertaken to alleviate persistent water leaks and does not significantly detract from the overall integrity of the building, which still retains its overall form and materials. Furthermore, the new roofline is distinguished from the historic roofline through the use of vertical wood siding in the gable ends. Though the historic double doors that originally led to the guest rooms were replaced in the 1970s with a single door and sidelight, the entrances maintain their original openings and historic transoms. On the interior, the central hallway was enclosed in order to include kitchens in the guest rooms. Some non-historic flooring is present throughout and it is unclear if any historic flooring remains beneath it. An awning was added to the rear in order to provide cover to exterior patios as well as covered parking, likely in the 1970s.

Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

Laundry Building (non-contributing)

Built on the footprint of the 1960 carport, the present laundry building was completed in the early 2000s. It is one-story wood-frame with a flat roof. There are six-over-six lite windows and a wood panel door on the south elevation, as well as a metal door on the north elevation.

Integrity

The Hotel Limpia and Annex remain in their original **location** at 101 Memorial Square and retain their historic **setting** in the downtown commercial area of Fort Davis. The original hotel and annex retain integrity of **design** through the retention of their original size and massing, as well as the majority of their historic interior floorplans. The hotel and annex retain a remarkable number of historic **materials**; the hotel retains its character defining pink stone exterior walls, pressed tin ceilings, egg and dart moldings, plaster walls, and many historic doors and overhead transoms. Similarly, the annex retains its concrete and stucco exterior walls and most of its original windows, as well as pressed tin ceilings and moldings, plaster walls, and doors throughout the interior. Hotel Limpia retains integrity of **workmanship**, through the preserved hand-laid stonework of the exterior walls. Finally, the Hotel Limpia and Hotel Limpia Annex retain integrity of **feeling** and **association** as they continue to provide hotel guest lodging and maintain the buildings' form, massing, and interior configuration that clearly demonstrate their historic use. Though the buildings associated with the Hotel Limpia have experienced some changes as tourism waxed and waned in Fort Davis over the course of a century, the property retains integrity to convey its historical significance.

Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

Statement of Significance

Hotel Limpia, in Fort Davis, Jeff Davis County, opened in 1913 to provide overnight lodging for visitors who came to take in the West Texas scenery and enjoy the region's mild climate. In 1925, the hotel's continued popularity necessitated the construction of a freestanding annex, which more than doubled its rooming capacity. Tourism slowed by mid-century, and the hotel closed after it suffered a fire in 1953. It is nominated to the National Register of Historic Places at the local level of significance under Criterion A in the area of Commerce for the period 1913-1953 as an important lodging facility integral to success of Fort Davis's early 20th century tourism industry. From 1956-1977, the hotel building housed staff of the Harvard Radio Astronomy Station and served as both the administrative offices and library for the project. The radio astronomy station used for the Harvard project was located approximately four miles from the hotel. Significant discoveries and advancements in the field of radio astronomy merit the nomination of Hotel Limpia under Criterion A in the area of Science for the period 1956-1974, the current fifty-year point, in recognition of the building's importance as a support facility for the astronomy project.

History of Fort Davis

The Fort Davis military installation and adjacent town of Fort Davis were established in the 1850s on the former site of a Native American village, called "Painted Comanche Camp" by Anglo-American explorers.³ Located in the Davis Mountains along a natural road between El Paso and San Antonio, the site was selected for a military installation due to its mild climate, defensible location, and the abundant source of water provided by Limpia Creek.⁴

Following the addition of the territory that would later become New Mexico, Arizona, and California to the United States in 1848 and the discovery of gold in California the following year, thousands of migrants began traveling west.⁵ To avoid the mountains and snow of northern routes, many travelers opted for southern trails, like the San Antonio-El Paso Road. Numerous Native American trails intersected the San Antonio-El Paso Road and raids on traveling caravans were common. Subsequently, the U.S. military deployed six companies of the Eighth United States Infantry in 1854 to build and garrison the new post, named Fort Davis after Jefferson Davis. The fort, located on Limpia Creek, "played a significant role in the defense and development of West Texas" by the United States.⁶ Before and after the Civil War, federal troops secured the Trans-Pecos segment of the San Antonio-El Paso Road for the passage of people, goods, and mail.⁷ By 1885, Fort Davis became a major military installation with up to 400 men of the Ninth and Tenth U.S. Cavalry and the Twenty-Fourth and Twenty-Fifth U.S. Infantry. These units were composed of white officers and African American enlisted men.⁸

The town of Fort Davis initially emerged in 1854 around a stage station located southwest of the fort. After the Civil War and re-occupation of Fort Davis by a large number of federal troops encouraged the town's growth. The military "hired civilians as laborers, clerks, and laundresses," and "purchased local supplies such as building materials, hay, fresh beef, wheat, and fresh fruits and vegetables."⁹ Located at the crossroads of the San Antonio-El Paso Road and

³ Martin Donell Kohout, "Fort Davis, TX," *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed April 12, 2023, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/fort-davis-tx>.

⁴ Fort Davis National Historic Site, Fort Davis, Jeff Davis County, National Register of Historic Places, Reference # 66000045.

⁵ Patricia A. Etter, *To California on the Southern Route, 1849*, (Spokane: Arthur H. Clark Company, 1998).

⁶ Douglas C. McChristian, "Fort Davis," *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed April 12, 2023, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/fort-davis-qbf15>.

⁷ Lucy Miller Jacobson and Mildred Bloys Nored, *Jeff Davis County, Texas*, (Fort Davis: 1993), 41; McChristian, *Handbook of Texas Online*.

⁸ McChristian, *Handbook of Texas Online*.

⁹ "The Second Fort Davis: 1867-1891," Fort Davis National Historic Site, National Park Service. <https://www.nps.gov/foda/learn/historyculture/historyofthesecondfortdavis.htm>

Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

Chihuahua Trail, the town also became a significant base for travelers and settlers moving through the Trans-Pecos region.¹⁰ By the mid-1880s, it was home to nearly 2,000 residents with mercantile stores, saloons, several hotels, bakery, lumberyard, and a newspaper. Citizens also benefitted from the garrison's hospital, which treated both enlisted men and civilians. Additionally, significant numbers of cattlemen moved to the region, and Fort Davis became a center of business and trade for the ranching industry.¹¹ Though Fort Davis had been selected as the county seat of Presidio County in 1871, following the construction of the Southern Pacific Railroad through Marfa, an 1885 election established Marfa as the county seat. In response, citizens petitioned the Texas Legislature to organize Jeff Davis County with Fort Davis as the county seat in 1887.¹²

When Fort Davis closed in 1891, the town experienced an initial population decline. Most local businesses went bankrupt or closed as they depended on the fort and the soldiers' patronage.¹³ Cattle ranching remained a profitable endeavor, however, with Fort Davis serving an important role as a local supply center as well as the county seat. Within a decade of the fort's closure, the town would also establish a new identity as a health resort and tourist destination.

20th Century Tourism Industry

Though the town of Fort Davis experienced a period of adjustment following the closure of the Fort, by the end of the 1890s the town began to attract wealthy summer visitors from hot and humid cities such as Houston and Galveston. The Fort Davis Commercial Club (forerunner of the Chamber of Commerce) was responsible for much of the town's advertising and promotion as a summer retreat. A number of large summer homes were constructed along Court Street, west of the courthouse, earning the nickname "Millionaire's Row." Locals began to refer to the town's summer visitors as "Summer Swallows." As early as the late 1890s, summer cottages had to be reserved months in advance.¹⁴ Many families in Fort Davis opened their homes to boarders, due to the lack of accommodations for visitors.¹⁵ Even the buildings on the old Fort Davis post were rented out, both to local ranching families during the school year and by health seekers who traveled to the area.¹⁶ Due to its high elevation and crisp mountain air Fort Davis was also promoted for its healthful climate, and people experiencing a variety of health concerns visited or moved to the area in hopes of relief from their ailments. By 1913, newspapers boasted that: "Fort Davis has long been famous as a health resort and many wonderful cures have been accomplished by coming here in time and breathing the invigorating, life-giving ozone."¹⁷

The town's first hotel, known as the Limpia Hotel but of no relationship to the present Hotel Limpia, was built east of the Fort Davis Military Installation some time prior to 1883. The red brick building was used as a hotel until at least 1891, after which it was converted to a private residence. The Stewart Hotel was constructed in 1883 by W.S. Lempert, very near the San Antonio-El Paso Road. It operated as a hotel until 1927, when it was converted to apartments.¹⁸ Though the aging Stewart Hotel (1883) was still in operation, in the early 1910s the Commercial Club cited a need for a "decent hotel."¹⁹

¹⁰ Kohout, *Handbook of Texas Online*.

¹¹ "The Second Fort Davis: 1867-1891."

¹² Jacobson and Nored; Kohout, *Handbook of Texas Online*.

¹³ Lucy Miller Jacobson and Mildred Bloys Nored, *Jeff Davis County, Texas*, (Fort Davis: 1993); Martin Donell Kohout, "Fort Davis, TX," *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed April 12, 2023, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/fort-davis-tx>.

¹⁴ Lucy Miller Jacobson and Mildred Bloys Nored, *Jeff Davis County, Texas*, (Fort Davis: 1993), 249.

¹⁵ Jeff Davis County Courthouse, Fort Davis, Jeff Davis County, National Register of Historic Places, Reference # 2000728; Lucy Miller Jacobson and Mildred Bloys Nored, *Jeff Davis County, Texas*, (Fort Davis: 1993), 178, 180.

¹⁶ Jeff Davis County Courthouse, Fort Davis, Jeff Davis County, National Register of Historic Places, Reference # 2000728

¹⁷ "Fort Davis Grows as Health Resort," *El Paso Herald*, August 26, 1913.

¹⁸ Mildred Bloys Nored and Jane Wiant, *Early Homes and Buildings of Fort Davis, Texas*, (Fort Davis, Texas: 1997), 15, 18.

¹⁹ Lucy Miller Jacobson and Mildred Bloys Nored, *Jeff Davis County, Texas*, (Fort Davis: 1993), 178; Paul H. Carlson and Bruce

Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

Though the Great Depression impacted tourism throughout the country, several developments during the 1930s would encourage future tourism in Fort Davis. Efforts had been underway to develop a state park in the Davis Mountains since the 1920s, though did not come to fruition until the 1930s. Landowners devastated by the Great Depression donated 560 acres of land for the park in Keesey Canyon along the new Davis Mountains State Park Highway. In 1933, members of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) arrived and began building the infrastructure of the park, including a five-mile scenic road, an overlook shelter, and stone picnic tables.²⁰ Within the boundaries of the park, the CCC also began construction of a sixteen-room, pueblo-style hotel called "Indian Lodge." The hotel was a work of rustic craftsmanship, featuring hand-hewn pine beams, longleaf pine floors, adobe blocks that were made onsite, and furnished with cedar furniture built by the CCC at Bastrop Park. The Indian Lodge was completed in 1938 and was a popular tourist destination for many years.²¹

In addition to the work taking place at Davis Mountains State Park during the 1930s, a nearby mountain was chosen as the future site of the McDonald Observatory. Selected because of the lack of light pollution and the average number of clear night skies, the observatory was completed in 1939. It was constructed on land donated by the family of pioneer settler and cattle rancher G.S. Locke, and the mountain was renamed Mount Locke in his honor.²² Work on the Davis Mountains State Park Highway continued during the 1930s and extended to the newly constructed McDonald Observatory. By the end of the 1930s, newspapers reported that tourism was strong in Fort Davis. During the summer of 1938, "Hotel Limpia and the tourist courts hereabout were filled most of the summer."²³ The "Mile High Club" was established in 1939 and was dedicated to "Social, Civic and Business Benefit of the Community." The organization promoted Fort Davis, frequently using the slogan "It's cool every night in Fort Davis."²⁴

In 1926, guests at the Hotel Limpia formed the Davis Mountains Tourist Club and pledged to "bring or send at least 10 Texans to the Davis Mountains next Summer." Thomas B. Love, a prominent Texas politician who spent summers in Fort Davis, was elected President of the Club.²⁵ The following year, recently elected state senator Love successfully sponsored a bill for the construction of a scenic highway through the Davis Mountains. Taking scenic drives through the Fort Davis Mountains had become a favorite tourist pastime with the popularization of automobiles, but the poor quality of roads presented a challenge to vehicles. Love's bill directed the state highway department to survey a road through the mountains near Fort Davis. In order to make the scenic road a reality, Jeff Davis County was required to provide an "adequate camp park site" and right of way.²⁶ Land for the right-of-way was acquired and work began on the road in 1932. The road was ultimately completed in 1947 and was named the Davis Mountains State Park Highway.²⁷

During the 1940s and 1950s, residents of Fort Davis advocated for the preservation of the old Fort Davis military installation, which was privately owned. Local and statewide advocacy finally gathered momentum in the late 1950s, and in 1961 Fort Davis was declared a National Historic Site. Initial stabilization and restoration of the buildings took place over a five-year period. In April of 1966, Lady Bird Johnson, First Lady of the United States, dedicated the new

A Glasrud, editors, *West Texas: A History of the Giant Side of the State*, (University of Oklahoma Press: 2014), 275.

²⁰ "Davis Mountains," Texas Parks and Wildlife.

²¹ "Indian Lodge," Texas Parks and Wildlife; "Fort Davis Texas," *El Paso Times*, November 6, 1938.

²² David S. Evans, "University of Texas at Austin McDonald Observatory," *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed April 21, 2023, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/university-of-texas-at-austin-mcdonald-observatory>.

²³ "Fort Davis Texas," *El Paso Times*, November 6, 1938.

²⁴ Lucy Miller Jacobson and Mildred Bloys Nored, *Jeff Davis County, Texas*, (Fort Davis: 1993), 243-246.

²⁵ "Tourist Club is Formed at Fort Davis," *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, October 3, 1926.

²⁶ "Jeff Davis County Must Make Move for Scenic Highway," *El Paso Herald*, September 16, 1927.

²⁷ "Davis Mountains," *The Look of Nature: Designing Texas State Parks During the Great Depression*, Texas Parks and Wildlife, <http://texascccparks.org/parks/davis-mountains/>, accessed April 21, 2023; Barry Scobee, *Fort Davis, Texas 1583-1960*, (Fort Davis, 1963), 188.

Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

historic site in front of a crowd of 7,000 people.²⁸ The opening of the Fort Davis Historic Site led to a dramatic increase in local tourism, as well as an interest in reviving other local tourist destinations. Davis Mountains State Park had entered a period of decline by the 1950s, and Skyline Drive had become impassable in some places. Significant improvements to the park began in 1965 after the successful passage of a \$400,000 appropriations bill by the state legislature, as well as a \$500,000 federal construction grant. Skyline Drive was rebuilt, Indian Lodge was enlarged, and numerous restroom, picnic, and camping facilities were built.²⁹ By the 1970s, newspaper advertisements declared that Fort Davis had “Everything for a Fun-Filled Vacation,” highlighting the Fort Davis Historic Site, Fort Davis Mountains State Park, and McDonald Observatory (Figure 15).

Astronomical Observation in the Davis Mountains

In 1926, a wealthy banker named William Johnson McDonald left approximately \$850,000 to the University of Texas at Austin to establish an astronomical observatory. Because the University of Texas did not have an astronomy department, the institution signed a 30-year agreement with the University of Chicago in 1932: the University of Texas would fund the construction of a telescope while the University of Chicago would provide astronomers to operate it. The Davis Mountains were selected as the site of the new observatory due to the region’s high proportion of clear night skies, as well as its high altitude and minimal artificial light and dust to obscure observation. The project was widely embraced by the Fort Davis community, and the land for the observatory was donated by the Locke and Fowlkes families. At the time of its completion in 1939, the original McDonald Observatory telescope (now known as the Otto Struve Telescope) was the second largest in the world.³⁰

In the mid-1950s, Harvard University received funding from the United States Air Force to establish a radio astronomy station to study the sun using radio waves. Harvard faculty looked to McDonald Observatory personnel for help identifying a location. A valley known as Cook Flat was found which would receive minimal radio interference due to the surrounding Davis Mountains, and the Harvard Radio Astronomy Station was established in 1956. Several Harvard Astronomers moved to Fort Davis, operating their in-town office out of the Hotel Limpia. Harvard operated the station in the Davis Mountains until 1982. Though the original Harvard radio antennas were dismantled, the National Radio Astronomy Observatory (NRAO) constructed a new antenna onsite that continues to make solar observations, today.

The Davis Mountains remain a center of astronomical observation in the 21st century thanks to the continued presence of McDonald Observatory. McDonald Observatory expanded over the course of the 20th century to include several new telescopes. A second telescope (today known as the Harland J. Smith Telescope) was constructed between 1966-1968 and was the third largest in the world when it was completed. A third telescope was completed in 1997, known as the Hobby-Eberly Telescope.³¹ The region maintains some of the darkest skies in the continental United States due to Dark Skies ordinances throughout West Texas, allowing for continued clear observation conditions.

Hotel Limpia

In December of 1912, local newspapers announced that construction of a “modern two story hotel” would soon be underway in Fort Davis. The project was financed by the Union Trading Company at a cost of \$20,000, and the new

²⁸ Michael Welsh, *A Special Place, A Sacred Trust: Preserving the Fort Davis Story*, (Santa Fe, New Mexico: 1996), 71-92, 142.

²⁹ Lucy Miller Jacobson and Mildred Bloys Nored, *Jeff Davis County, Texas*, (Fort Davis: 1993), 277-8.

³⁰ David S. Evans, “University of Texas at Austin McDonald Observatory,” *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed March 15, 2024, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/university-of-texas-at-austin-mcdonald-observatory>; “Milestones,” McDonald Observatory, The University of Texas at Austin, accessed March 15, 2024: <https://mcdonaldobservatory.org/about/milestones>.

³¹ David S. Evans, “University of Texas at Austin McDonald Observatory,” *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed March 15, 2024, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/university-of-texas-at-austin-mcdonald-observatory>; “Milestones,” McDonald Observatory, The University of Texas at Austin, accessed March 15, 2024: <https://mcdonaldobservatory.org/about/milestones>.

Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

hotel would be located immediately adjacent to the Union Trading Company store.³² Frequently referred to by locals as simply “The Union,” the mercantile store was the largest in Fort Davis and drew ranchers and cattlemen from all over Jeff Davis County and the surrounding region to purchase supplies. The Union Trading Company was established in 1908 by a group of stockholders who purchased the longstanding W. Keeseey and Co. general store. Whitaker Keeseey originally built his adobe store in 1874, later building stone walls around the perimeter and hauling out the interior adobe by wheelbarrow in 1906. The Union Trading Company expanded Keeseey’s general store, carrying an extensive line of goods including groceries, wagons, windmills, and coffins.³³ Other stores struggled to compete with the Union, and it served as the primary mercantile operation in the county for many years. Many customers (primarily ranchers) purchased goods on credit and paid their tab once a year after they sold their cattle in the fall.³⁴

Construction of Hotel Limpia began in early 1913. The hotel was constructed of pink hued volcanic stone from a local quarry that had also supplied stone for some of the officers' houses on the Fort Davis military installation, the Jeff Davis County Court House (1911), and the Fort Davis State Bank (1913).³⁵ The First Baptist Church of Fort Davis (111 Agave Street) also appears to have been constructed of the same material. The locally sourced pink volcanic stone seems to have been reserved for the town’s most prominent buildings, likely due to the expense of quarrying, transporting, and constructing buildings with the material. John Bauce was credited with crafting Hotel Limpia’s stonework and carpentry was completed by G.W. Campbell of Marfa and F.P. Sproul. Campbell and Bauce also built the Fort Davis State Bank across the square from Hotel Limpia. Guest rooms were located on the second floor and featured communal bathrooms with hot and cold water. The hotel was to be “well lighted,” a reference to electric lighting provided by the carbide plant at the rear of the building. The ground floor was planned to house a drug store, lobby, dining room, kitchen, and ice room. The hotel was also constructed with a large basement.³⁶ A small carbide plant was constructed simultaneously behind the hotel to provide electricity for the property (extant but non-contributing due to significant alterations after the period of significance, see Photos 20-21).

Compared to extant early 20th century hotels in West Texas, Hotel Limpia is modest in size and style. Comparative hotels are architect-designed (by the firm of Trost & Trost) and include: the Gage Hotel in Marathon (1927), additions and total renovation of the 1907 Holland Hotel in Alpine (1928), El Paisano in Marfa (1930), and Hotel El Capitan in Van Horne (1930).³⁷ While Hotel Limpia pre-dated the Trost hotels and featured a much more restrained use of ornament, it followed a similar interior arrangement consisting of a first floor lobby and dining room, with guest rooms originally concentrated on the second floor. Hotel Limpia was also similar to other early 20th century hotels in that it was the brainchild of local boosters hoping to provide a first-class hotel for their town.³⁸ Though it shares characteristics of early 20th century hotel design and was similarly instigated by local boosters, Hotel Limpia is set apart from other Far West Texas hotels by its distinctive vernacular appearance expressed through carefully crafted pink volcanic stone walls.

³² “New Hotel for Ft. Davis,” *Alpine Avalanche*, December 26, 1912, 1; *The Houston Post*, March 6, 1913.

³³ Mildred Bloys Nored and Jane Wiant, *Early Homes and Buildings of Fort Davis, Texas*, (Fort Davis, Texas: 1997), 4. Lucy Miller Jacobson and Mildred Bloys Nored, *Jeff Davis County, Texas*, (Fort Davis: 1993), 169, 173.

³⁴ Jeff Davis County Courthouse, Fort Davis, Jeff Davis County, National Register of Historic Places, Reference # 2000728; Lucy Miller Jacobson and Mildred Bloys Nored, *Jeff Davis County, Texas*, (Fort Davis: 1993), 174.

³⁵ “Historic Hotel at Fort Davis Due Revamping,” *Odessa American*, January 8, 1956; Jeff Davis County Courthouse, Fort Davis, Jeff Davis County, National Register of Historic Places, Reference # 2000728; “Geologic Resources in a Cultural Context,” NPS Geodiversity Atlas—Fort Davis National Historic Site, Texas, National Park Service, accessed March 15, 2024, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/nps-geodiversity-atlas-fort-davis-national-historic-site-texas.htm>.

³⁶ “Work is Started on Hotel in Ft. Davis,” *El Paso Herald*, February 7, 1913.

³⁷ Gage Hotel, Marathon, Brewster County, National Register of Historic Places, Reference # 100005910; El Paisano Hotel, Presidio County, National Register of Historic Places, Reference # 78002973; Holland Hotel (*draft*), Alpine, Brewster County, National Register of Historic Places.

³⁸ John A. Jakle and Keith A. Sculle, *America’s Main Street Hotels: Transiency and Community in the Early Auto Age*, (University of Tennessee Press: 2009), 50-51.

Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

The hotel was completed in early August 1913 and christened “Hotel Lympia.” While newspaper articles employed both the “Lympia” and “Limpia,” spellings, an early photograph depicts the spelling “Lympia” on exterior hotel signage (Figure 7). While the reasons for the alternative spelling of Limpia are not documented, it is possible that the Union Trading Company hoped to distinguish the new hotel from the former Hotel Limpia, which had closed in the 1890s. By the late 1920s, it appears to have shifted to the “Limpia” spelling: an early photograph of the Hotel Limpia Annex (constructed in 1925) clearly reads “Limpia.” (Figure 8). Perhaps to eliminate confusion over the shift in spelling, a new exterior sign was creatively painted in such a way that the word could be interpreted as both “Limpia” or “Lympia” (Figure 9).

Just a month after opening, local newspapers highlighted the large number of visitors to Fort Davis and stated that Hotel Limpia was “being taxed to capacity to take care of the arrivals.” A 1915 article reported a similar scenario: “for the past five years it has been difficult to accommodate the large number of visitors, notwithstanding that in 1913 another big stone resort hotel [Hotel Limpia] was built.”³⁹ As Fort Davis was not accessible via railroad and automobiles were still gaining in popularity and affordability, many travelers to Fort Davis took the “Daily Stage” from Marfa, directly to the hotel.⁴⁰ Summer guests typically stayed for several months, departing in September as temperatures dipped in their home cities.⁴¹ By 1917, Hotel Limpia was “open permanently with beds and meals at all times” indicating that before the hotel operated on a seasonal basis. Newspapers also pointed to the growing popularity of “automobiling” in Fort Davis, advertising the hotel as a place “for auto parties to get ‘eats.’”⁴²

In addition to guest lodging, the hotel featured a kitchen and dining room patronized by guests and locals.⁴³ A pharmacy operated out of the corner commercial space for 40 years. Much more than a business, however, the pharmacy, “was the visiting spot alike for hotel guests and townspeople. It was redolent with gossip, brags, news, and get-acquainted friendliness...”⁴⁴ During the 1920s, Jones Pharmacy catered to both locals and visitors, advertising “Complete Tourist’s Supplies” and included a popular soda fountain. At one time the pharmacy also sold apple cider made from locally grown apples.⁴⁵ The Jones pharmacy was owned by a dental surgeon, Hudnel M. Jones, who likely also utilized the northwest corner commercial space for his dental practice.⁴⁶ In 1930, Dr. Calvin Ely Eaton purchased the pharmacy and renamed it the Fort Davis Pharmacy. A physician, Dr. Eaton, opened a doctor’s office in the hotel’s second commercial space at the northwest corner of the building. During the 1930s and 1940s, Dr. Eaton was the only physician in town.⁴⁷

Though several families were hired to run the new hotel in its early years, by 1921 Walter S. and Pearl Miller took over the management of Hotel Limpia. Walter Miller was a principal shareholder of the Union Trading Company and managed both the mercantile concern’s stock as well as hotel guests from the adjacent Union building.⁴⁸ In 1923, Miller advertised the hotel as the “Best Summer and Winter Resort in Texas” and highlighted the close proximity of

³⁹ “Fort Davis Filled with Many Visitors,” *El Paso Herald*, September 2, 1913; “Fort Davis Seeks Interurban Line,” *Galveston Daily News*, April 18, 1915, 31.

⁴⁰ “Hotel Lympia,” *Galveston Daily News*, June 24, 1917, 13.

⁴¹ “Mrs. Walliford,” *Galveston Daily News*, September 14, 1914, 29.

⁴² *Alpine Avalanche*, March 22, 1917, 3.

⁴³ The dining room was located in the space currently occupied by the hotel check-in desk.

⁴⁴ “Fort Davis’ Old Limpia Hotel Being Resurrected,” *San Angelo Standard*, January 11, 1956

⁴⁵ “Jones Pharmacy,” *San Angelo Evening Standard*, May 22, 1923, 4; “Fort Davis’ Gathering Place Undergoes Location Change,” *San Angelo Standard Times*, May 5, 1950; “Apple Cider,” *Alpine Avalanche*, September 27, 1929, 3.

⁴⁶ Dr. Hudnel Jones at Fort Davis Dies,” *Alpine Avalanche*, January 9, 1942.

⁴⁷ “Fort Davis Doctor Honored at Banquet,” *El Paso Herald*, April 1, 1948, 38; “Eaton Serves Jeff Davis County as only Physician,” *San Angelo Standard-Times*, April 1, 1948, 15; “Ft. Davis Citizens Honor Dr. Eaton,” *Alpine Avalanche*, April 2, 1948, 1.

⁴⁸ Lucy Miller Jacobson and Mildred Bloys Nored, *Jeff Davis County, Texas*, (Fort Davis: 1993), 174, 180.

Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

local apple orchards.⁴⁹ By 1925, newspapers described the hotel as being “over-crowded each summer.” In response to continued demand for tourist lodging, a new hotel annex was built, completed in time for the 1925 summer tourist season. Just two years later, W.S. Miller renovated the Hotel Limpia Annex to add running water to each room as well as “shower baths.” Miller told newspapers that “the public is demanding rooms with running water almost altogether.”⁵⁰

The clientele at the Hotel Limpia varied with the seasons and over time. Fort Davis was an important source of supplies for cattlemen and ranchers in the region. “Ranchmen with their families would make long drives with wagons and teams to lay in a cargo of supplies at the old Union store... The ranchmen would spend the night at the shining hotel, spend the next day loading their wagons with articles ranging from calico to horseshoes and bacon to paint. Then another night at the hotel and home the third day.”⁵¹ As the seat of Jeff Davis County, people reported to the courthouse in Fort Davis for jury duty or to witness in court cases (most often, cattle stealing cases). In the pre-automobile age, the long journey via horse or wagon often necessitated an overnight stay at the Hotel Limpia.⁵² As automobiles became more affordable, the hotel saw a decline in patronage from ranchers and visitors to the courthouse. With the increased speed afforded by vehicles, ranchmen could drive their trucks to Fort Davis for supplies and return home within the same day. As a result, the clientele of the hotel shifted primarily to wealthy tourists from Texas’ cities and towns, who sought out Fort Davis’ cool climate during the hot summer months.⁵³

Hotel Limpia continued to be popular with tourists during the 1930s. During the construction of McDonald Observatory and the Fort Davis State Park, some of the workers and supervisors of the projects stayed at the hotel.⁵⁴ Though a number of tourist courts were established in the vicinity of Fort Davis during the late 1920s and 1930s, including the Fort Davis Tourist Camp, Camp Jefferson Davis, Stone Village, and Halliburton’s Camp, Hotel Limpia retained a steady business.⁵⁵ A 1936 advertisement for the hotel depicted photos of both the original 1913 hotel and 1925 annex, boasting “36 rooms—26 Rooms with Bath” and “Meals Served.”⁵⁶ The Miller family managed the property until Walter’s death in 1936.⁵⁷ The Union Trading Company retained ownership of the hotel until 1940, when the Union business ceased operation.

That year, the original hotel building and the Union Trading Company Store were sold to Ben F. Morriss, while Miller’s widow, Pearl, retained ownership of the Hotel Limpia Annex. Miller operated the annex as a summer hotel for several years.⁵⁸ Morriss sold the hotel in 1946 to J.M. Reynolds, who had been hired to reconstruct the Fort Davis military post as a tourist resort.⁵⁹ Reynolds quickly renovated the hotel and listed it for sale six months later for \$27,500. The hotel was advertised as an “Excellent Investment” and touted Fort Davis as the “fastest developing vacation center in [the] Southwest.”⁶⁰ Pearl Miller sold the Hotel Limpia Annex to a Mr. and Mrs. Sid C. Bouchette in 1946.⁶¹

⁴⁹ “Hotel Limpia,” *San Angelo Evening Standard*, May 22, 1923, 4.

⁵⁰ “Hotel Limpia, Ft. Davis, Puts on Improvement Program,” *Alpine Avalanche*, April 16, 1925, 2; “Improving Limpia Annex,” *Alpine Avalanche*, December 16, 1927, 6.

⁵¹ “Fort Davis’ Old Limpia Hotel Being Resurrected,” *San Angelo Standard*, January 11, 1956.

⁵² “Fort Davis’ Old Limpia Hotel Being Resurrected,” *San Angelo Standard*, January 11, 1956.

⁵³ “Fort Davis’ Old Limpia Hotel Being Resurrected,” *San Angelo Standard*, January 11, 1956.

⁵⁴ “Three Charley Joneses,” *Alpine Avalanche*, November 24, 1933, 2.

⁵⁵ Lucy Miller Jacobson and Mildred Bloys Nored, *Jeff Davis County, Texas*, (Fort Davis: 1993), 252.

⁵⁶ “Hotel Limpia,” *Pecos Enterprise*, July 31, 1936, 140.

⁵⁷ Lucy Miller Jacobson and Mildred Bloys Nored, *Jeff Davis County, Texas*, (Fort Davis: 1993), 174, 180.

⁵⁸ Frontier Store That Looks Like Fort Gets New Owner,” *El Paso Herald*, April 3, 1940; “Annex Changes Ownership,” *Alpine Avalanche*, June 28, 1946, 8.

⁵⁹ “Houston Man Buys Fort Davis Hotel,” *El Paso Herald Post*, June 18, 1946.

⁶⁰ “For Sale,” *Pampa Daily News*, January 22, 1947.

⁶¹ “Annex Changes Ownership,” *Alpine Avalanche*, June 28, 1946, 8.

Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

Ben and Althea Taylor purchased the main hotel during the late 1940s.⁶² The Hotel Limpia Dining Room was open to the public for lunch and dinner on weekdays, as well as a “special” Sunday dinner.⁶³ In 1950, the pharmacy that had operated from the Hotel Limpia since at least the 1920s moved to a new building around the corner.⁶⁴ In August of 1953, a fire “of unknown origin” damaged the first floor interior of the building. The Taylors had just closed the hotel for the fall and winter season the day prior. Newspaper accounts of the fire varied widely in their description of the damages, but the fire was largely contained to the central section of the building, including the lobby and guest rooms immediately above it. The Marfa Fire Department was credited with saving two-thirds of the hotel by making the 22-mile trip to help. Following the fire, the Taylors sold the hotel to F.M. Miller, who then sold it to J.C. Duncan, Jr. in late 1955.⁶⁵

In 1956, Duncan hired local contractor R.D. McCready to repair the roof and broken windows and to repair the interior.⁶⁶ Duncan intentionally retained the drugstore space, recognizing its historic function as a gathering place: “I am going to leave that old drugstore space intact...It recalls old days, old friendships, exciting events, to many people.”⁶⁷ At the time that Duncan purchased Hotel Limpia, tourism had waned significantly in Fort Davis. Air conditioning was becoming increasingly commonplace, and the “Summer Swallows” who had flocked to Fort Davis for years no longer needed to escape the heat of their hometowns. In addition, air conditioned, modern motels had become increasingly popular in the postwar years, drawing many tourists away from older hotels. These factors, coupled with an exciting new development in Fort Davis, led Duncan to prepare the old hotel for a compatible new use.

Harvard Radio Astronomy Station

As J.C. Duncan Jr. began repairing the fire-damaged Hotel Limpia, plans for the construction of the Harvard Radio Astronomy Station just outside of Fort Davis generated a great deal of local excitement. In a 1955 letter to the Fort Davis Chamber of Commerce, Donald H. Menzel of Harvard University wrote:

We have under construction what is probably the world’s most powerful telescope for observation of the sun by means of its radio emissions. The instrument is nearing completion, and we shall shortly have to make a decision concerning a site...Preliminary tests made by our radio astronomers at Fort Davis indicate the vicinity would be very satisfactory for such an installation.⁶⁸

The purpose of the planned Radio Astronomy Station was to study solar activity using radio waves, with funding provided by the United States Air Force. With assistance from staff at the McDonald Observatory, members of the Harvard team had identified Cook Flat, a valley located four miles from Fort Davis, as an ideal location for their solar radio observatory. Because the valley was sheltered by the surrounding Davis Mountains, the area received minimal radio interference. In addition, the lack of televisions in the area (due to poor reception in the Davis Mountains) further

⁶² “Fort Davis’ Old Limpia Hotel Being Resurrected,” *San Angelo Standard*, January 11, 1956;

⁶³ “Hotel Limpia Dining Room,” *Alpine Avalanche*, June 3, 1949, 3.

⁶⁴ “Fort Davis’ Gathering Place Undergoes Location Change,” *San Angelo Standard*, May 5, 1950.

⁶⁵ “Fort Davis’ Old Limpia Hotel Being Resurrected,” *San Angelo Standard*, January 11, 1956; “Fort Davis Hotel Damaged by Blaze,” *Lubbock Morning Avalanche*, August 31, 1953, 21.

⁶⁶ “Historic Hotel at Fort Davis Due Revamping,” *Odessa American*, January 8, 1956.

⁶⁷ “Historic Hotel at Fort Davis Due Revamping,” *Odessa American*, January 8, 1956.

⁶⁸ “Harvard Eyes Fort Davis as Site for Observatory,” *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, October 13, 1955;

Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

minimized potential interference.⁶⁹ Proximity to the nearby McDonald Observatory's technical library was also a benefit of the site.

The arrival of the Harvard Radio Astronomy Station was greeted with great enthusiasm by the Fort Davis community, which looked forward to becoming the "observatory capital of the world."⁷⁰ One Harvard Astronomer remembered that "Many local people were most helpful and hospitable, especially in the early years of the project..."⁷¹ The community had previously embraced the construction of the McDonald Observatory on Mount Locke during the 1930s. To provide the necessary land for the Harvard Station, the Sproul family, who owned a large portion of Cook Flat, leased a one-acre site to Harvard for \$1 a year.⁷² To meet the team's need for in-town office space and housing, J.C. Duncan Jr. leased the entire Hotel Limpia building to the astronomers. The first floor was used for office space, a small library, and a photographic dark room, and apartments for the researchers were located on the second floor.⁷³

A large dish-shaped radio antenna twenty-eight feet in diameter was installed on the Cook Flat site in 1956 and constantly tracked the sun across the sky. The radio waves were focused into a radio receiver called a "dynamic spectrum analyzer" which recorded the intensity of solar radio noise on photographic film.⁷⁴ The film was then developed in the dark room at the Station office in the Hotel Limpia building. Once the film was developed, the data allowed the Harvard team to monitor solar activity and record information about solar flares.⁷⁵

The Harvard Radio Astronomy Station operated under the leadership of Dr. Alan Maxwell, a physicist who was well respected in the field of radio astronomy.⁷⁶ Many of the Harvard personnel who moved to Fort Davis were promising young scientists who had recently arrived in the United States from countries around the world. In addition, local students from Fort Davis High School and Sul Ross State College were hired as laboratory assistants, providing them with the opportunity to work alongside Harvard scientists without leaving Texas.⁷⁷ Local Fort Davis residents, Carol Giles and Ann Capri, were hired to work in the office quartered at Hotel Limpia. Giles was the office secretary and Capri was a "photographer-librarian."⁷⁸

Observations at the Harvard Radio Astronomy Station led to new discoveries and advancements in the field of radio astronomy. In 1958, Maxwell and Govind Swarup discovered a new type of solar burst, which they called a "U burst."⁷⁹ Maxwell's ongoing research at the station between 1956 and 1982 helped to establish a link between solar

⁶⁹ "Harvard Eyes Fort Davis as Site for Observatory," *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, October 13, 1955.

⁷⁰ "Fort Davis Area May Get Mighty Harvard Telescope," *San Angelo Standard*, October 13, 1955.

⁷¹ Journal of Astronomical History and Heritage, March 2010, Vol 13 No. 1, 17-18.

<https://www.narit.or.th/files/JAHH/2010JAHHvol13/JAHHvol13no1Complete.pdf>.

⁷² Journal of Astronomical History and Heritage, March 2010, Vol 13 No. 1, 17-18.

<https://www.narit.or.th/files/JAHH/2010JAHHvol13/JAHHvol13no1Complete.pdf>; "Radio Telescope Plans Hit Snag," *El Paso Herald Post*, November 4, 1955.

⁷³ Lucy Miller Jacobson and Mildred Bloys Nored, *Jeff Davis County, Texas*, (Fort Davis: 1993), 347; Journal of Astronomical History and Heritage, March 2010, Vol 13 No. 1, 17-18.

<https://www.narit.or.th/files/JAHH/2010JAHHvol13/JAHHvol13no1Complete.pdf>; "Looking for fall, in all the right places," *Austin American Statesman*, October 6, 1981.

⁷⁴ "Radio Telescope Plans Hit Snag," *El Paso Herald Post*, November 4, 1955.

⁷⁵ Donald W. Olson, "Harvard Radio Astronomy Station," *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed April 18, 2023,

<https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/harvard-radio-astronomy-station>.

⁷⁶ "Alan Maxwell (1926-2021), Bulletin of the AAS, <https://baas.aas.org/pub/2022i029/release/2>.

⁷⁷ Journal of Astronomical History and Heritage, March 2010, Vol 13 No. 1, 17-18.

<https://www.narit.or.th/files/JAHH/2010JAHHvol13/JAHHvol13no1Complete.pdf>.

⁷⁸ "Radio Telescope at Ft. Davis to Contact Stars," *El Paso Herald Post*, February 9, 1961.

⁷⁹ "A Tribute to Professor Govind Swarup, FRS: The Father of Indian Radio Astronomy," *Journal of Astronomical History and Heritage*, 22(1), 3-44, 2019. <https://adsabs.harvard.edu/full/2019JAHH...22...03O>

Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

flares and geophysical phenomena.⁸⁰ Following their experiences at the Fort Davis station, many of the scientists who worked at the Harvard Radio Astronomy Station went on to become experts in the field of radio astronomy. Govind Swarup went on to build India's first radio telescope, became the founding director of the National Center for Radio Astrophysics in India, and is widely regarded as "the Father of Indian Radio Astronomy."⁸¹ Joseph Taylor, who worked at the station as a Harvard graduate student from 1968-9, would go on to receive the Nobel Prize for his work in 1993.⁸²

The Harvard Radio Astronomy Station remained in Fort Davis from 1956-1982. In 1962, a second antenna, eighty-five feet in diameter, was installed. In addition to monitoring solar flares, the new antenna surveyed radio sources in the Milky Way, and observed "quasars, radio galaxies, and other extragalactic sources."⁸³ Beginning in 1972, the second antenna was used in the Very Long Baseline Interferometry (VLBI) program, in which it simultaneously observed objects at the same time as other antennas in California and West Virginia. In December 1982, the Harvard Radio Astronomy Station ceased performing solar observations, and was renamed "George R. Agassiz Station of the Harvard College Observatory." The station continued to be used in the VLBI program until October 1991. The station was then taken over by the National Radio Astronomy Observatory (NRAO) which constructed a new antenna to function as a part of the Very Long Baseline Array (VLBA) program. The original 1956 antenna was dismantled in 1987 and taken to British Columbia where it was used in Canadian radio astronomy programs. The second Harvard antenna was dismantled in 1991.⁸⁴ Though not affiliated with Harvard University, the VLBA antenna continues the study of radio astronomy in Fort Davis.

Hotel Limpia served as both the administrative offices and library for Harvard personnel, as well as their residence. All of the solar data that was received at the station was recorded on 35 mm film, which was then processed in the dark room at the Hotel Limpia in order for the astronomers to analyze the captured data.⁸⁵ Though the interior partitions have since been removed, the dark room was located in a section of what was historically occupied by the Fort Davis pharmacy, and is presently the ballroom.

Following the creation of the Fort Davis National Historic Site in 1961, Fort Davis experienced a resurgence in local tourism. In response, J.C. Duncan made plans for the future of the Hotel Limpia property. In 1973, Duncan converted the old carbide plant at the rear of the Hotel Limpia building into Sutler's Store, a gift shop named for the store originally located on the Fort Davis military installation. The carbide plant had cycled through several uses following the arrival of city electricity to Fort Davis, including a chicken coop, a laundry, and a hair salon.⁸⁶ In 1974, he extended the building to the east to create a "solarium" where plants and additional gifts were sold. The same year, Duncan created a landscaped courtyard between the Hotel and the carbide plant, planting a number of sycamore trees that shade the patio. In addition, he purchased the Hotel Limpia Annex, whose ownership had been separated from the property since 1940. Duncan rented the annex rooms as apartments for several years.⁸⁷ In 1976, Duncan designed an unusual, triangular shaped addition to the carbide plant on the narrow northern end of the Hotel Limpia parcel and hired his friend Alvin Jarratt, to build it. He opened a restaurant on the first floor of the building, calling it "Sutler's

⁸⁰ "Alan Maxwell (1926-2021), Bulletin of the AAS, <https://baas.aas.org/pub/2022i029/release/2>.

⁸¹ "Alan Maxwell (1926-2021), Bulletin of the AAS, <https://baas.aas.org/pub/2022i029/release/2>; "A Tribute to Professor Govind Swarup, FRS: The Father of Indian Radio Astronomy," Journal of Astronomical History and Heritage, 22(1), 3-44, 2019. <https://adsabs.harvard.edu/full/2019JAHH...22...03O>

⁸² Journal of Astronomical History and Heritage, March 2010, Vol 13 No. 1, 17-18.

<https://www.narit.or.th/files/JAHH/2010JAHHvol13/JAHHvol13no1Complete.pdf>.

⁸³ Olson, "Harvard Radio Astronomy Station."

⁸⁴ Olson, "Harvard Radio Astronomy Station;" Journal of Astronomical History and Heritage, March 2010, Vol 13 No. 1, 17-18.

⁸⁵ The solar data captured by the Harvard Radio Astronomy Station is now preserved at the archives of the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

⁸⁶ "Fort Davis Bank Catches Visitor's Eye," *El Paso Herald Post*, October 23, 1974; Personal correspondence with Joe Duncan.

⁸⁷ Personal Correspondence with Joe Duncan.

Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

Boarding House Restaurant.”⁸⁸ He also opened a bar on the second floor, though it had to be operated as a private club due to Jeff Davis County’s “dry” status.

Hotel Limpia, 1977-Present

Harvard personnel vacated the offices and apartments of the Hotel Limpia in 1977, though they would continue to operate the station in Fort Davis until 1982.⁸⁹ Following the departure of the Harvard Astronomers, J.C. Duncan Jr. renovated the hotel with plans to reopen it as a hotel once again. Thanks, in part, to the building’s creative reuse during a period when tourism to Fort Davis was in decline, the building survived to see a resurgence in tourism beginning in the 1970s. In 1978, the Hotel Limpia reopened to guests after 25 years.⁹⁰

Conclusion

Hotel Limpia is significant at the local level under Criterion A for Commerce as a business established in 1913 to provide lodging for a diverse clientele. Initially, guests consisted of ranchers and cattlemen who traveled to Fort Davis to purchase supplies and conduct business as well as county residents reporting to the Jeff Davis County Courthouse for jury duty or court cases. The town’s temperate climate and the boosterism of local businessmen led the community to become a summer resort destination prior to the advent of air-conditioning. The hotel was also a community gathering place thanks to the presence of a pharmacy and doctor’s office on the ground floor. Hotel Limpia is also significant at the local level under Criterion A for Science, as the building served as the in-town administrative office and apartments for Harvard Radio Astronomy Station personnel from 1956-1977. When the Harvard team vacated the building, which coincided with a resurgence in local tourism, the building returned to its original use as a hotel. The period of significance for the Hotel Limpia is 1913-1953 for Commerce, encapsulating its construction and operation as a hotel through 1953. An additional period of significance extends from 1956 to 1974, during which time the hotel served as the offices and residence of Harvard Radio Astronomy Station personnel.

⁸⁸ *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, March 22, 1981; Personal correspondence with Joe Duncan.

⁸⁹ Correspondence with Joe Duncan; Liz Carmac, *Historic Hotels of Texas: A Traveler’s Guide*; *Journal of Astronomical History and Heritage*, March 2010, Vol 13 No. 1 <https://www.narit.or.th/files/JAHH/2010JAHHvol13/JAHHvol13no1Complete.pdf>, p 18.

⁹⁰ “Looking for Fall, in All the right places,” *Austin American Statesman*, October 6, 1981.

Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

Bibliography

- “Alan Maxwell (1926-2021), Bulletin of the AAS. Accessed September 6, 2023.
<https://baas.aas.org/pub/2022i029/release/2>.
- Askins, Alice. “Lighting at Rose Hill,” Historic Geneva. Accessed September 6, 2023.
<https://historicgeneva.org/communication-and-technology/lighting-at-rose-hill/>;
- Blair, Anthony. “Carbide once lit the way,” *The Mountain Eagle*, May 28, 2014. Accessed September 6, 2023.
<https://www.themountaineagle.com/articles/carbide-once-lit-the-way/>
- Carlson Paul H. and Bruce A Glasrud, eds. *West Texas: A History of the Giant Side of the State*. University of Oklahoma Press, 2014.
- Carmac, Liz. *Historic Hotels of Texas: A Traveler’s Guide*. Texas A&M, 2007.
- Duncan, Lanna Tweedy, *The Hotel Limpia Cookbook: A Collection of Favorite Recipes*. Fort Davis, 1998.
- Etter, Patricia A. *To California on the Southern Route, 1849*. Spokane: Arthur H. Clark Company, 1998.
- Francell, Lawrence John. *Images of America: Fort Davis*. Arcadia Publishing, 2011.
- Hotel Limpia. Texas Historical Marker. Fort Davis, Jeff Davis County. Atlas #5243010479.
- Jacobson, Lucy Miller and Mildred Bloys Nored, *Jeff Davis County, Texas*. Fort Davis: 1993.
- Jakle, John A. and Keith A. Sculle. *America’s Main Street Hotels: Transiency and Community in the Early Auto Age*. University of Tennessee Press: 2009.
- Journal of Astronomical History and Heritage, March 2010, Vol 13 No. 1, 17-18.
<https://www.narit.or.th/files/JAHH/2010JAHHvol13/JAHHvol13no1Complete.pdf>.
- Kibbell, Bill. “Gas Lighting-Beyond the City.” Old House Web. Accessed September 6, 2023,
<https://www.oldhouseweb.com/blog/gas-lighting-beyond-the-city/>.
- The Look of Nature: Designing Texas State Parks During the Great Depression*. Texas Parks and Wildlife. Accessed April 21, 2023. <http://texascccparcs.org/parks/davis-mountains/>.
- Nored, Mildred Bloys and Jane Wiant, *Early Homes and Buildings of Fort Davis, Texas*. Fort Davis, Texas: 1997.
- The Sacramento Peak Observatory 1947-1963. Office of Aerospace Research, US Air Force,
<https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/trecms/pdf/AD0276063.pdf>.
- Sandoval-Strausz, A.K. *Hotel: An American History*. New Haven, Yale University Press: 2008.
- Scobee, Barry. *Fort Davis, Texas 1583-1960*, Fort Davis, 1963.
- “A Tribute to Professor Govind Swarup, FRS.: The Father of Indian Radio Astronomy,” Journal of Astronomical History and Heritage, 22(1), 3-44, 2019. <https://adsabs.harvard.edu/full/2019JAHH...22...03O>

Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

Welsh, Michael. *A Special Place, A Sacred Trust: Preserving the Fort Davis Story*, Santa Fe, New Mexico, 1996.

Handbook of Texas Online, Texas State Historical Association

-----Evans, David S. "University of Texas at Austin McDonald Observatory." *Handbook of Texas Online*. Accessed April 21, 2023. <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/university-of-texas-at-austin-mcdonald-observatory>.

-----McChristian, Douglas C. "Fort Davis," *Handbook of Texas Online*. Accessed April 12, 2023, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/fort-davis-qbf15>.

-----Kohout, Martin Donell, "Fort Davis, TX," *Handbook of Texas Online*. Accessed April 12, 2023, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/fort-davis-tx>.

-----Olson, Donald W. "Harvard Radio Astronomy Station," *Handbook of Texas Online*. Accessed April 18, 2023, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/harvard-radio-astronomy-station>.

Newspapers

Alpine Avalanche

- Alpine Avalanche, March 22, 1917, 3.
- "Annex Changes Ownership," June 28, 1946, 8.
- "Apple Cider," September 27, 1929, 3.
- "Dr. Hudnel Jones at Fort Davis Dies," January 9, 1942.
- "Ft. Davis Citizens Honor Dr. Eaton," April 2, 1948, 1.
- "Hotel Limpia at Ft. Davis is Bought by Reynolds, Houston," June 21, 1946, 1.
- "Hotel Limpia, Ft. Davis, Puts on Improvement Program," April 16, 1925, 2.
- "Hotel Limpia Dining Room," June 3, 1949, 3.
- "Improving Limpia Annex," December 16, 1927, 6.
- "New Hotel for Ft. Davis," December 26, 1912, 1.
- "Three Charley Joneses," November 24, 1933, 2.

El Paso Herald

- "Fort Davis Grows as Health Resort," August 26, 1913.
- "Fort Davis, Once Home of Pioneers, Now Plans Western Movie Colony," October 24, 1929.
- "Fort Davis Doctor Honored at Banquet," April 1, 1948, 38.
- "Fort Davis Filled with Many Visitors," September 2, 1913.
- "Frontier Store That Looks Like Fort Gets New Owner," April 3, 1940.
- "Jeff Davis County Must Make Move for Scenic Highway," September 16, 1927.
- "Work is Started on Hotel in Ft. Davis," February 7, 1913.

El Paso Herald Post

- "Fort Davis Bank Catches Visitor's Eye," October 23, 1974.
- "Houston Man Buys Fort Davis Hotel," June 18, 1946.
- "Old Fort Davis Military Post Sold to Pioneer Ranch Owner, June 6, 1945, 7.
- "Radio Telescope at Ft. Davis to Contact Stars," February 9, 1961.
- "Radio Telescope Plans Hit Snag," November 4, 1955.

Fort Worth Star Telegram

- Fort Worth Star Telegram, March 22, 1981.
- "Harvard Eyes Fort Davis as Site for Observatory," October 13, 1955.

Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

-----"Tourist Club is Formed at Fort Davis," October 3, 1926.

Galveston Daily News

-----"Fort Davis Seeks Interurban Line," April 18, 1915, 31.

-----"Hotel Lympia," June 24, 1917, 13.

-----"Mrs. Walliford," September 14, 1914, 29.

San Angelo Standard

-----"Eaton Serves Jeff Davis County as only Physician," April 1, 1948, 15.

-----"Fort Davis Area May Get Mighty Harvard Telescope," October 13, 1955.

-----"Fort Davis' Gathering Place Undergoes Location Change," May 5, 1950.

-----"Fort Davis' Old Limpia Hotel Being Resurrected," January 11, 1956.

-----"Hotel Limpia," May 22, 1923, 4.

-----"Jones Pharmacy," May 22, 1923, 4.

Other

-----"For Sale," January 22, 1947.

-----"Fort Davis Hotel Damaged by Blaze," *Lubbock Morning Avalanche*, August 31, 1953, 21.

-----"Fort Davis Texas," *El Paso Times*, November 6, 1938.

-----"Historic Hotel at Fort Davis Due Revamping," *Odessa American*, January 8, 1956.

-----"Hotel Limpia," *Pecos Enterprise*, July 31, 1936, 140.

-----"Looking for fall, in all the right places," *Austin American Statesman*, October 6, 1981.

-----*Midland Reporter Telegram*, November 22, 1977, 1.

-----"Past Unfolded by Workmen Tearing Down Old Building," *Marfa Big Bend Sentinel*, December 28, 1961, 11.

-----*The Houston Post*, March 6, 1913.

Archives of the Big Bend, Sul Ross State University, Brian Wildenthal Memorial Library

-----Hotel Limpia Vertical File

National Register of Historic Places

-----Jeff Davis County Courthouse, Fort Davis, Jeff Davis County, Reference # 2000728

-----Fort Davis National Historic Site, Fort Davis, Jeff Davis County, Reference # 66000045

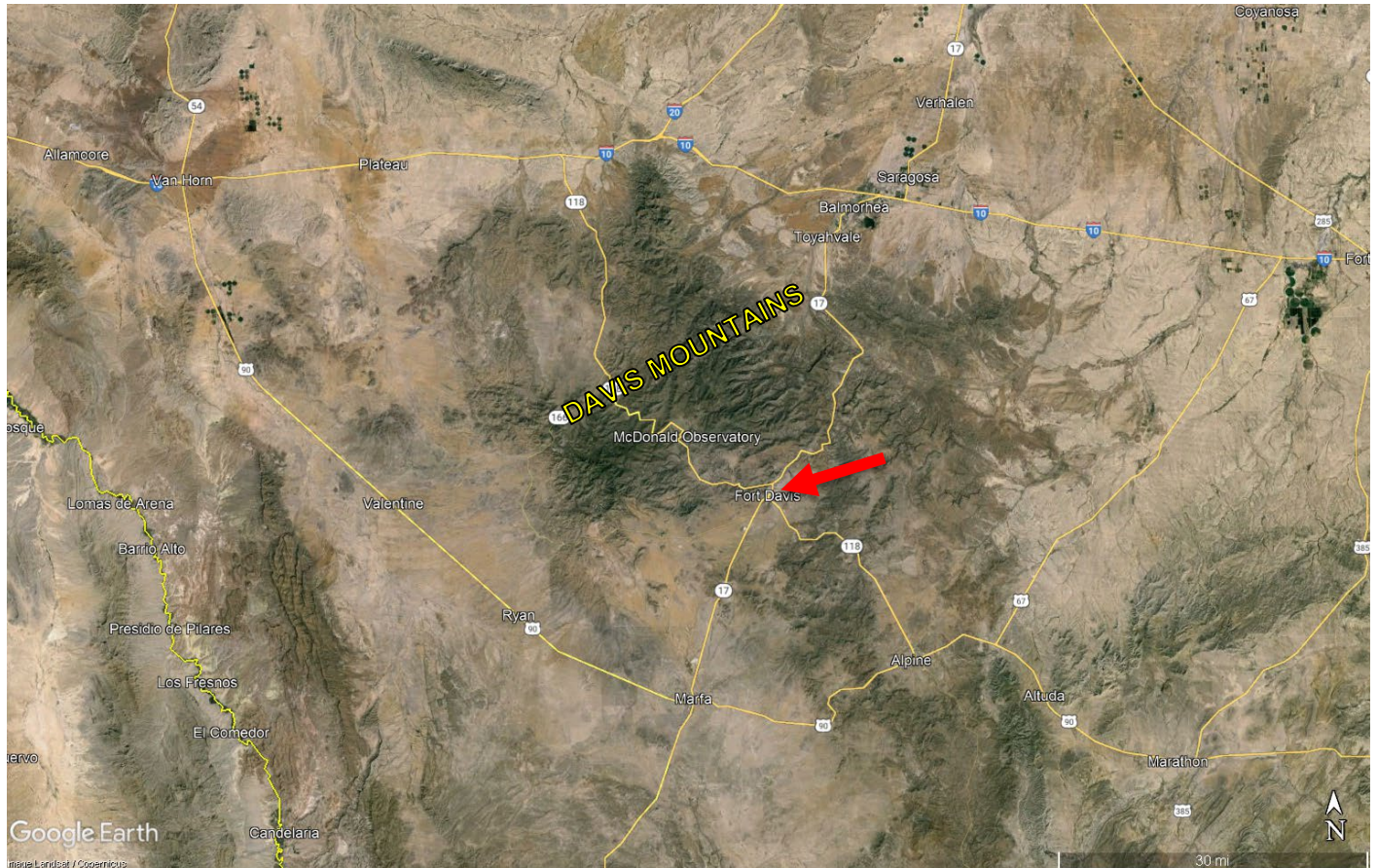
Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

Maps

Map 1: Jeff Davis County, Texas

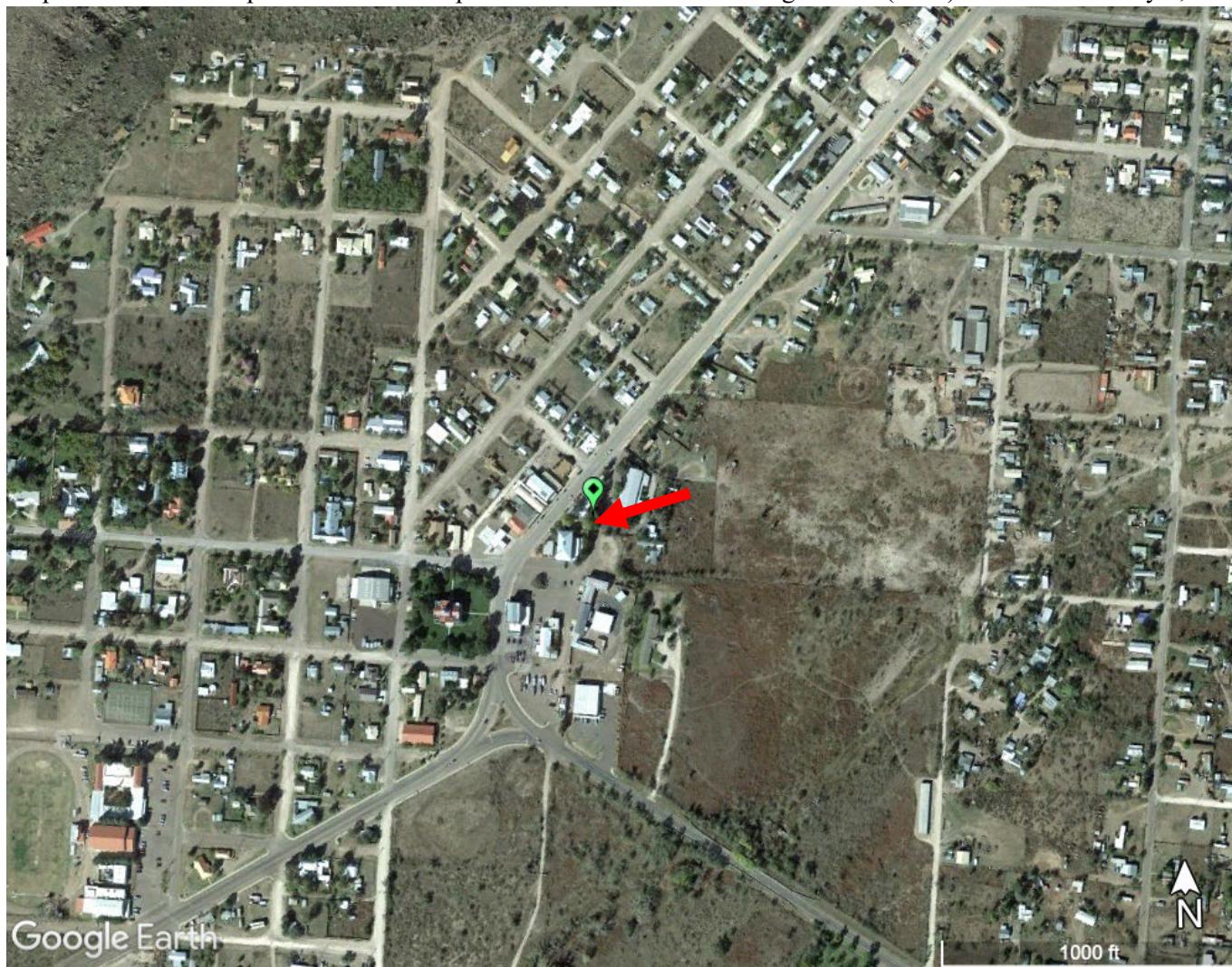


Map 2: Fort Davis is at the eastern base of the Davis Mountains. Source: Google (accessed 2/28/24).



Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

Map 3: The red arrow points to Hotel Limpia in Fort Davis. Source: Google Earth (2023). Accessed January 4, 2024.



Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

Map 4: Fort Davis, Hotel Limpia 30.589155° -103.893892°. Source: Google Earth. Accessed January 4, 2024.



Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

Figures

Figure 1: 1954 aerial image of Hotel Limpia property. 1913 Hotel indicated by red arrow, 1925 Annex indicated by purple arrow. Source: USGS Earth Explorer.



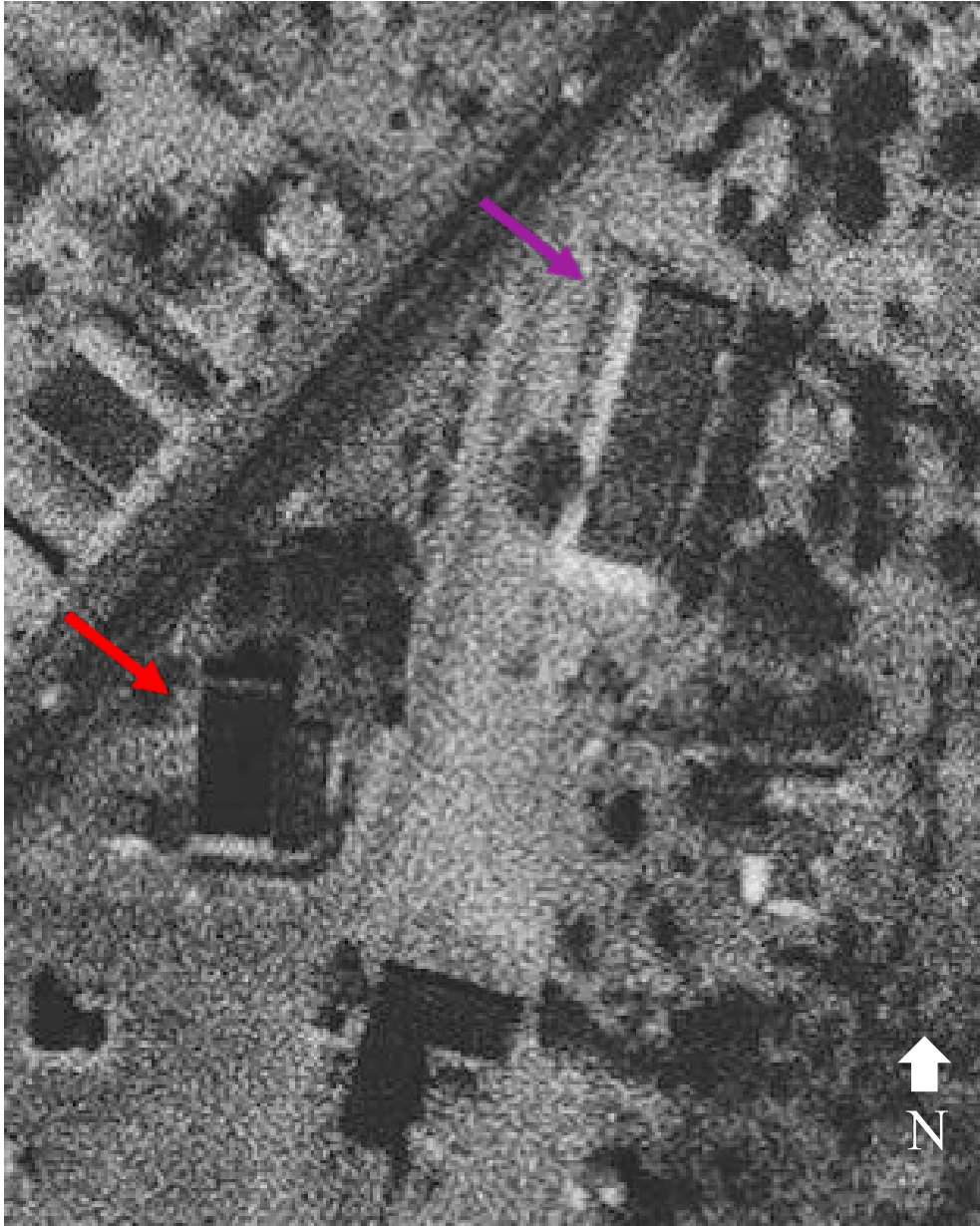
Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

Figure 2: 1969 aerial photograph showing Hotel Limpia Property. 1913 Hotel indicated by red arrow, 1925 Annex indicated by blue arrow. Source: USGS Earth Explorer.



Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

Figure 3: 1971 Aerial image. 1913 Hotel indicated by red arrow, 1925 Annex indicated by purple arrow. Source: USGS Earth Explorer.



Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

Figure 4: Hotel Limpia under construction in the background (1913). Union Trading Company is at right. Source: Source: Fort Davis Historical Society.



Figure 5: Front façade of Hotel Limpia shortly after construction (1913). The small wooden building at left was owned by the Pecos and Rio Grande Telephone Company, which housed telephone equipment and living quarters for the operator (no longer extant). The building was acquired by Southwestern Bell Telephone Company in 1928, which owns the modern, stone building located on the same footprint, today. Source: Fort Davis Historical Society.

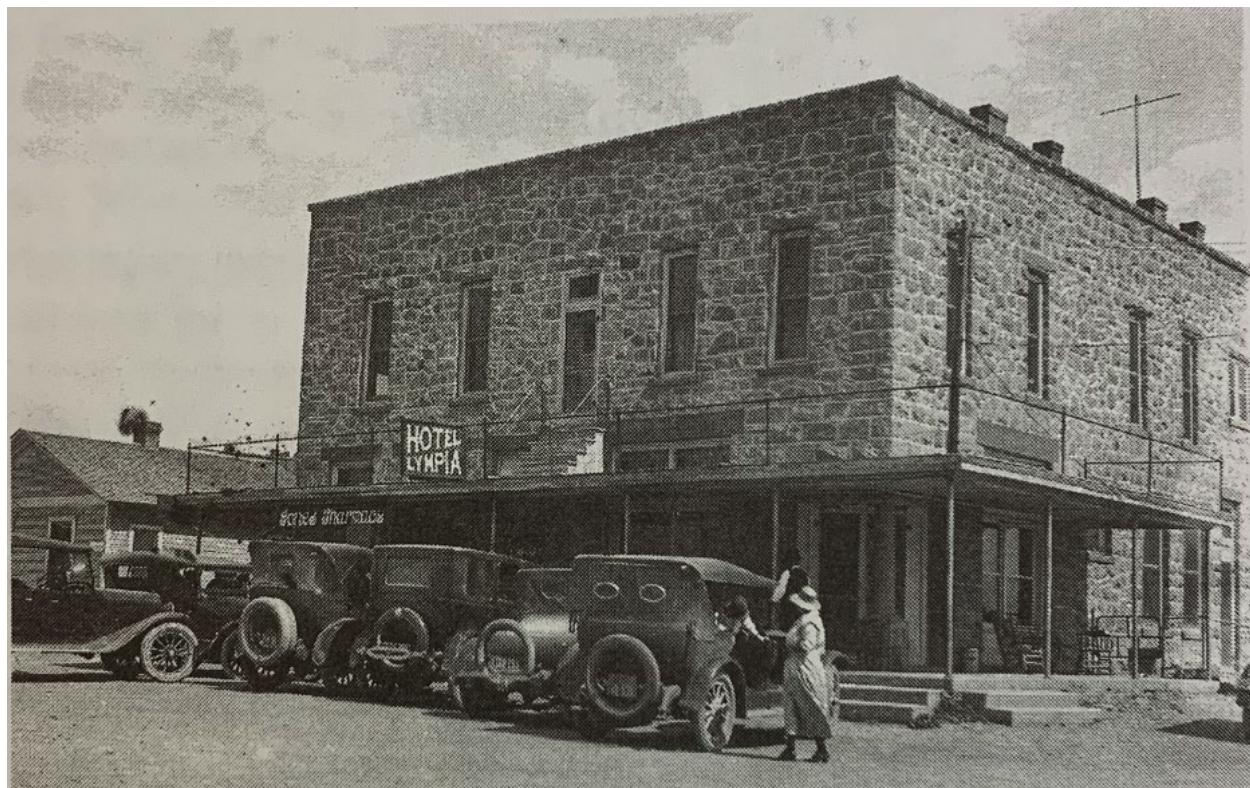


Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

Figure 6: East façade of Hotel Limpia shortly after construction (1913). Courtesy of Hotel Limpia. Note the presence of a partial balcony/second story porch on the front elevation.



Figure 7: Undated early photograph of Hotel Limpia. Note spelling of “Lympia” on the sign. Jones Pharmacy is on the first floor. Source: Lanna Tweedy Duncan, *The Hotel Limpia Cookbook: A Collection of Favorite Recipes*, (Fort Davis, 1998).



Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

Figure 8: Circa 1925 photo of the Hotel Limpia Annex. Courtesy of Hotel Limpia.

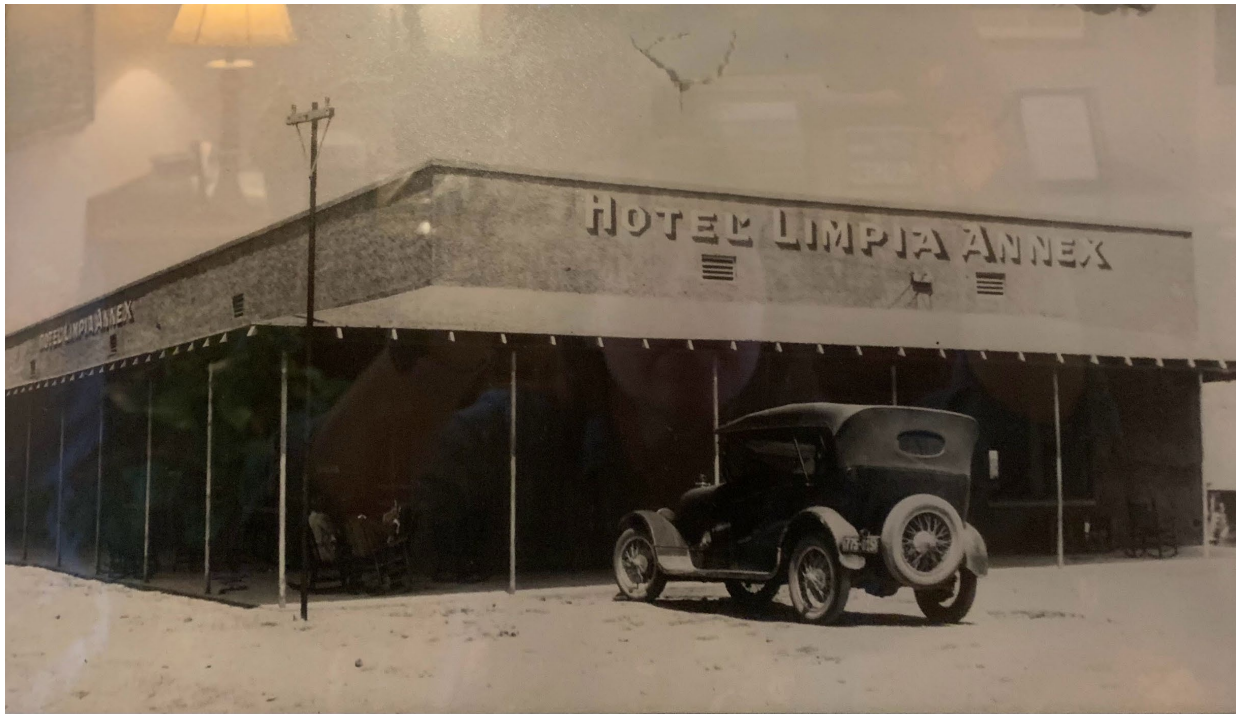


Figure 9: Undated (ca. 1930 or later) photograph depicting Hotel Limpia after the construction of east addition and new porch. Note how sign could be interpreted as either "Limpia" or "Lympia." The Ft. Davis Pharmacy occupied the left, front section of the hotel. Courtesy of Joe Duncan.



Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

Figure 10. 1930s advertisement for Fort Davis, prominently featuring the newly completed McDonald Observatory. The slogan “Air Conditioned by Nature” referenced Fort Davis’ mild climate, which drew many tourists to the area during the hot summer months. Visitors from Houston and Galveston who spent summers in Fort Davis were nicknamed “Summer Swallows” by locals. Source: Fort Davis Historical Society.



Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas


Figure 11. 1936 advertisement depicting hotel and annex. Source: Pecos Enterprise, July 31, 1936, 140.

HOTEL LIMPIA

Fort Davis, Texas
ONE MILE HIGH

The Highest Altitude of Any Hotel in Texas
Rest - Recreation - Health - Pleasant Surroundings

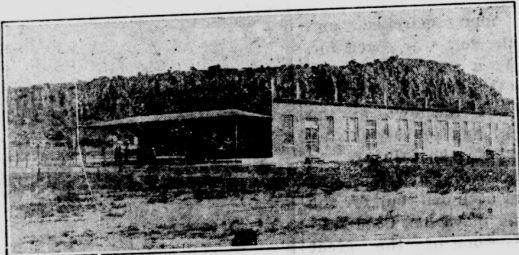
All Outside Rooms
36 Rooms — 26 Rooms with Bath



.....
Left—
Hotel
Limpia
.....

Best Summer and Winter Climate in the State of Texas
Rates Always Reasonable — Open All the Year

.....
Right—
Hotel
Limpia
Annex
.....



W. S. MILLER, Proprietor

Meals Served American Plan
Outing Weather the Year Round

THE CLIMATE is perfect. This mile high city has a climate the year round that is envied by almost all Texas. The winters are mild, sunny and delightful. The summers are cool and gloriously relaxing.

A HEARTY WELCOME you'll find when you come to Fort Davis, from the finest folks on earth. West is as the West will always be, and you'll find no better place.

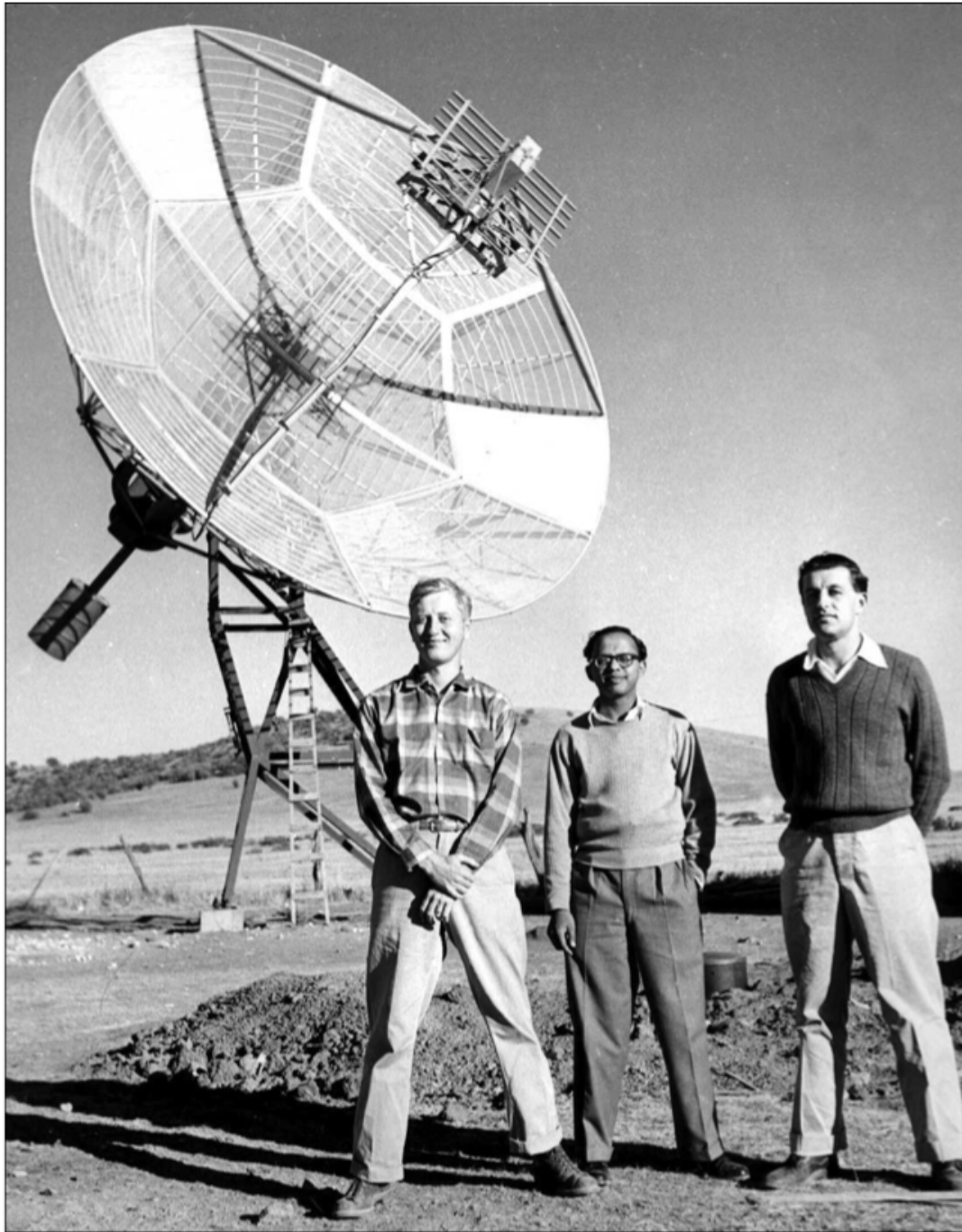
Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

Figure 12. Photograph taken shortly after the 1953 lobby fire. Photograph by Marlin Krebs, courtesy of Joe Duncan.



Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

Figure 13. Harvard Radio Astronomy Station scientists standing in front of radio antenna: (L to R): Sam Goldstein, Govind Swarup, and Alan Maxwell. Source: *Journal of Astronomical History and Heritage*, March 2010, Vol 13 No. 1, 17-18.



Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas


Figure 14. Ca. 1970 photograph of Hotel Limpia while occupied by Harvard Astronomers. Note how the “Hotel” signs have been painted over. Courtesy of Joe Duncan.



Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

Figure 15. 1975 advertisement for Fort Davis. The Fort Davis National Historic Site had been extensively restored during the 1960s. Source: San Angelo Standard Times, May 11, 1975

EVERYTHING FOR A FUN-FILLED VACATION



Come to Mountain Cool


FORT DAVIS

in the DAVIS MOUNTAINS
of West Texas

•

DAVIS
MOUNTAIN
STATE
PARK

•



•

CAMP
AND
PICNIC
SITES

•

FORT DAVIS NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

Old Fort Davis, established in 1854, is said to be the best preserved of the post-Civil War military outposts. It was an important Army post between San Antonio and El Paso . . . an oasis for weary travelers. Recent restoration has increased the enjoyment of its unusual and colorful history.

● VISIT WORLD FAMOUS
McDONALD OBSERVATORY

● DRIVE THE SCENIC LOOP

● FINE ACCOMMODATIONS ● GOOD FOOD ● PICNIC SUPPLIES ● INFORMATION

— We Extend a Cordial Welcome to Ft. Davis —

**NEW STONE VILLAGE MOTEL
AND STONE VILLAGE GROCERY**
Deluxe Rooms • Kitchens • Mr. & Mrs. Pat B. Watts

UNION MERCANTILE
Ranch & Building Supplies

FORT DAVIS STATE BANK
Member F.D.I.C.

WAGON STEAK HOUSE

FORT DAVIS FEED & RANCH SUPPLY

FORT DAVIS DRUG
Old Fashioned Fountain Drinks
Souvenirs • Sundries

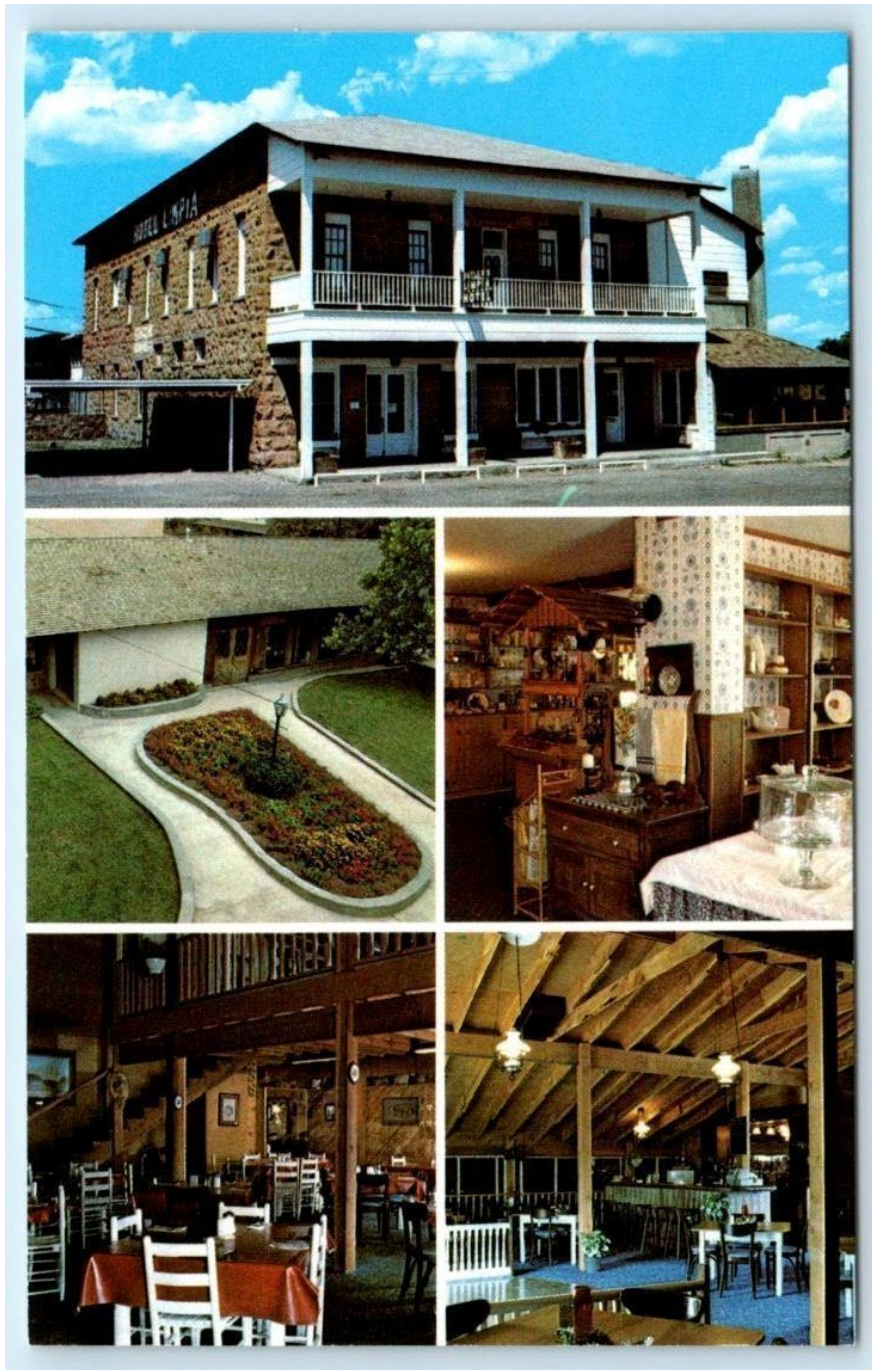
SUTLER'S STORE
Handcrafted Gifts • Solarium

SUSIE'S FASHIONS
Sportswear & Needlecraft

SLEEPING LION CENTER
Curtains • Rare Books

Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

Figure 16. Circa 1978 postcard depicting Hotel Limpia after 1977-8 renovation.



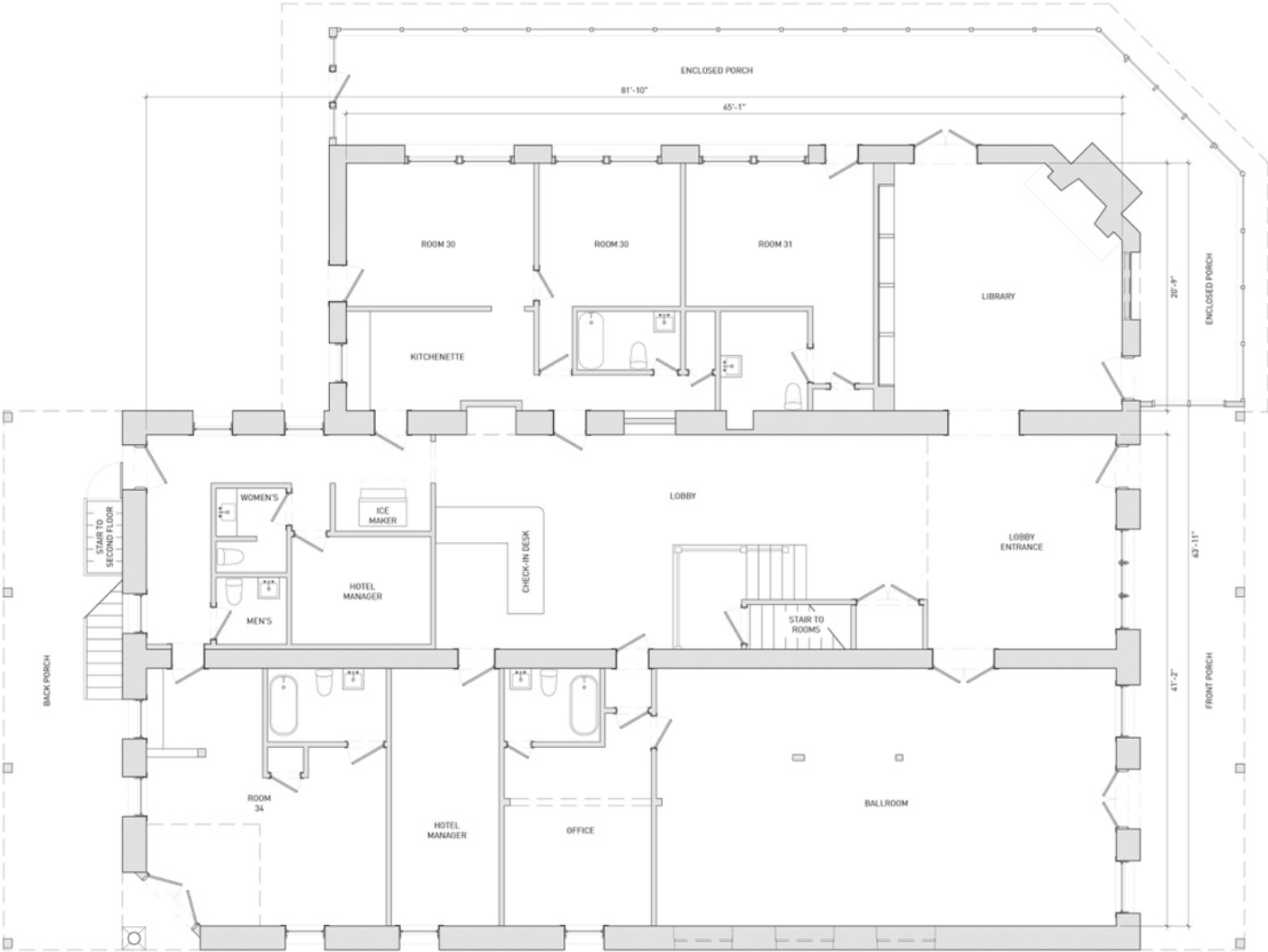
Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

Figure 17. Ca. 1981 view of the Hotel Limpia lobby and non-original stairs to the second floor. Source: Texas Highways Magazine, July 1981.



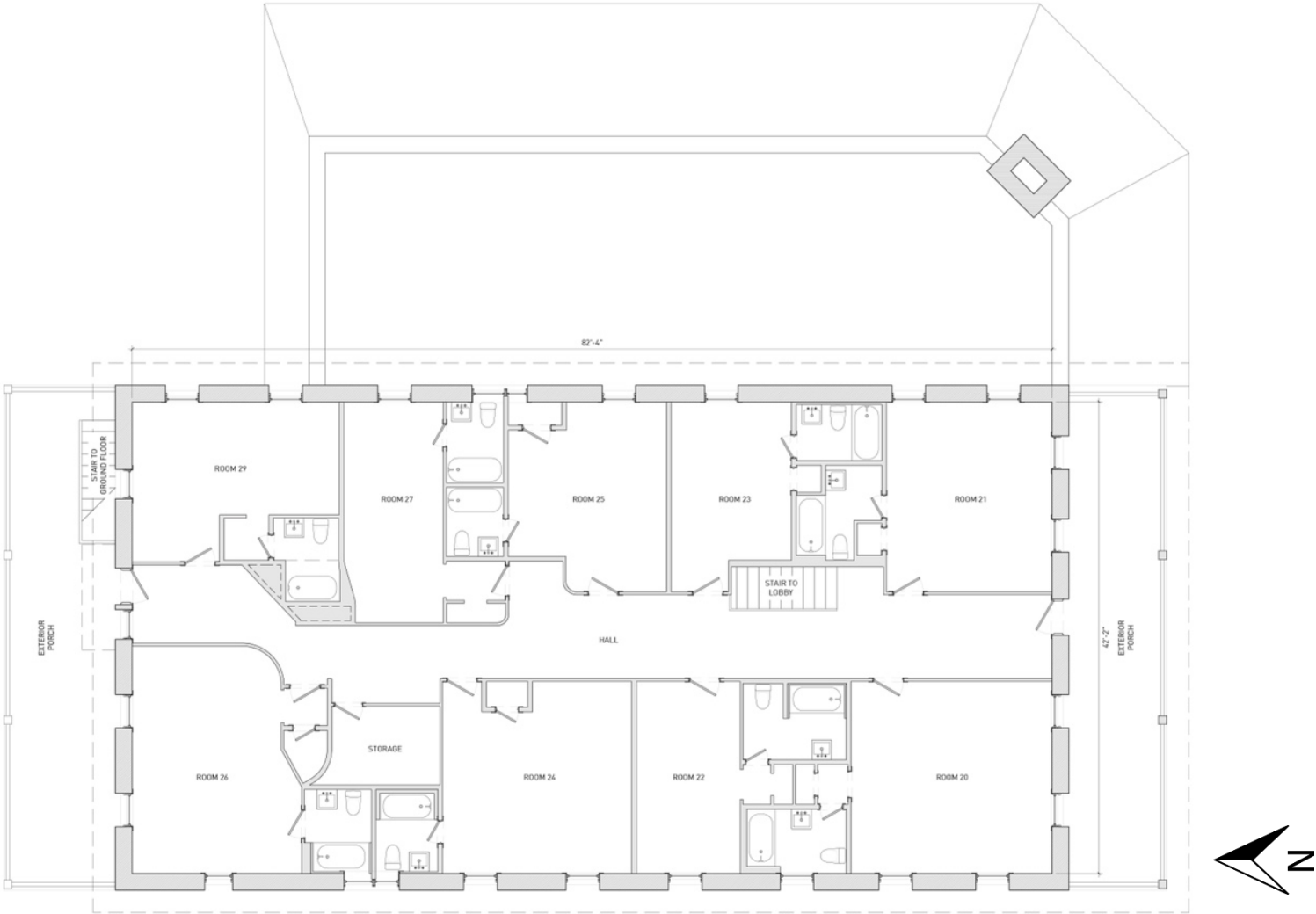
Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

Figure 18. Hotel Limpia first floor as-built plans.



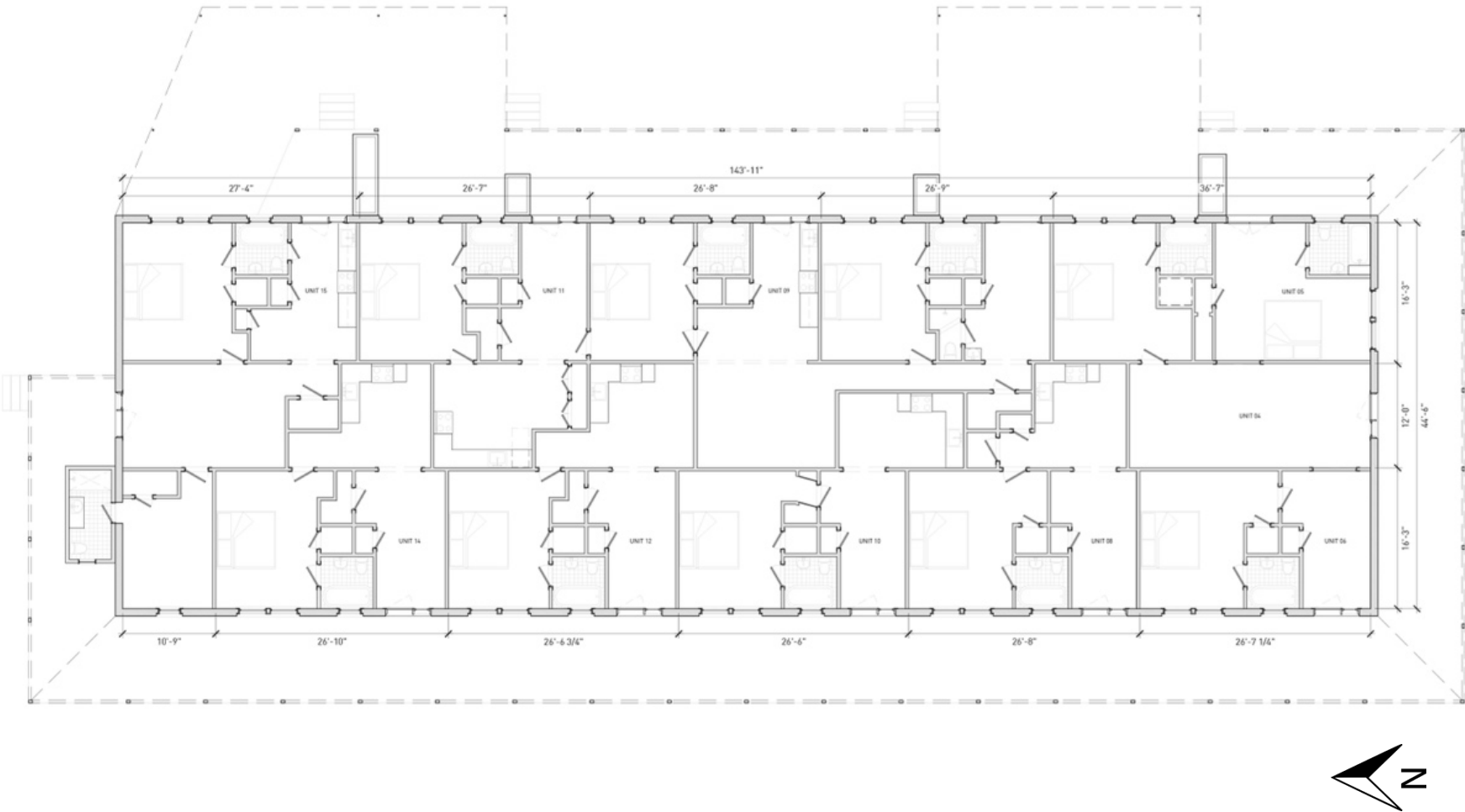
Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

Figure 19. Hotel Limpia second floor as-built plans.



Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

Figure 20. Hotel Limpia Annex as-built plans.



Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

Photograph Log

Name of Property: Hotel Limpia
City or Vicinity: Fort Davis
County: Jeff Davis
State: Texas
Photographer: Megan Warley McDonald
Date: April 26, 2023
Location of Original Files: 2506 Little John Lane, Austin, Texas, 78704

Photo 1: South elevation of original (1913) Hotel Limpia and ca. 1920 addition at right. View north.



Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

Photo 2: West and south elevations of Hotel Limpia. View northeast.



Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

Photo 3: East elevation of Hotel Limpia and ca. 1920 addition. View northwest.



Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

Photo 4: Rear of ca. 1920 addition. View southwest.



Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

Photo 5: Rear (north elevation) of Hotel Limpia. View southeast.



Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

Photo 6: West elevation of Hotel Limpia. Recessed corner entrance on the first floor was historically a physician's office. View southeast.



Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

Photo 7: East room of basement. View southeast.



Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

Photo 8: West room of basement, including wooden freezer. View southwest.



Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

Photo 9: Hotel Limpia lobby. View north.



Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

Photo 10: Hotel Limpia lobby. View south.



Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

Photo 11: Hotel Limpia “ballroom” (formerly Jones/Fort Davis Pharmacy). View north.



Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

Photo 12: Hotel Limpia ballroom. View south.



Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

Photo 13: Living room of guest room 34, historically a physician's office. View north.



Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

Photo 14: First floor lounge inside ca. 1920 addition to Hotel Limpia. View northeast.



Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

Photo 15: First floor lounge inside ca. 1920 addition to Hotel Limpia. View southeast.



Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

Photo 16: Enclosed patio surrounding ca. 1920 addition to Hotel Limpia. View north.



Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

Photo 17: Second floor corridor, including character defining curved plaster walls. View north.



Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

Photo 18. Second floor corridor. View south.



Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

Photo 19. Typical second floor guest room in 1913 Hotel Limpia building. View west.



Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

Photo 20. Southwest corner of 1913 carbide plant, note pink stone exterior wall. View northeast. It is excluded from the nominated boundary due to extensive alterations and an addition.



Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

Photo 21. West elevation of 1913 carbide plant with 1976 restaurant addition. View southeast. It is excluded from the nominated boundary due to extensive alterations and an addition.



Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

Photo 22. West elevation of Hotel Limpia Annex (1925). View northeast.



Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

Photo 23. South elevation of Hotel Limpia Annex. View northeast.



Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

Photo 24. Northwest corner of Hotel Limpia Annex. View southeast.



Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

Photo 25. Rear (east) elevation of Hotel Limpia Annex. View southwest.



Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

Photo 26. Original double door entrance to Hotel Limpia Annex guest room, room 5. View northwest.



Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

Photo 27. Typical living room in Hotel Limpia Annex (room 12). The wide doorway at the center of the photograph historically featured a pair of double doors that led into a central hallway (now occupied by a kitchen.) View east.



Hotel Limpia, Jeff Davis County, Texas

Photo 28. Typical guest room in Hotel Limpia Annex (room 10). View northwest.

