

FINAL

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instruction in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories for the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Oxford Hotel

other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number SR 56 N/A  not for publication

city or town West Baden Springs N/A  vicinity

state Indiana code IN county Orange code 117 zip code 47469

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 36CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Jon C. St D-SHPO 7.23.01  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

Indiana Department of Natural Resources  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

| I hereby certify that the property is:   | Signature of the Keeper | Date of Action |
|--|-------------------------|----------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> entered in the National Register<br><input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.              | _____                   | _____          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> determined eligible for the National Register<br><input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet. | _____                   | _____          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> determined not eligible for the National Register.  | _____                   | _____          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> removed from the National Register.   | _____                   | _____          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> other, (explain:)   | _____                   | _____          |

5. Classification

Ownership of Property  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

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

Category of Property  
(Check only one box)

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

Number of Resources within Property  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

| Contributing | Noncontributing |            |
|--------------|-----------------|------------|
| 1            | 0               | buildings  |
| 0            | 0               | sites      |
| 0            | 0               | structures |
| 0            | 0               | objects    |
| 1            | 0               | Total      |

Name of related multiple property listing  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions  
(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/hotel

Current Functions  
(Enter categories from instructions)

VACANT/NOT IN USE

7. Description

Architectural Classification  
(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19th and EARLY 20th CENTURY  
AMERICAN MOVEMENTS/Commercial  
Style

Materials  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation BRICK  
walls BRICK  
roof ASPHALT  
other WOOD  
METAL/cast iron  
GLASS

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- 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.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 year.

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

SOCIAL HISTORY  
ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1910 - 1932  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

1910 - 1911  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

N/A  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**9. Major Bibliographic References**

**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of Repository:

Orange County Government Building

Oxford Hotel  
Name of Property

Orange IN  
County and State

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** Less Than One Acre

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

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| 16      |   |    |  |        |  |         |   |  |  |   |  |  |  |
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|         |   |    |  |        |  |         |   |  |  |   |  |  |  |

See continuation sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description**

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

**Boundary Justification**

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Cynthia Brubaker

organization Preservation Development Inc. date 02-28-2001

street & number 218 North Rogers Street telephone (812) 336-2065

city or town Bloomington state Indiana zip code 47404

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets**

**Maps**

- A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs**

Representative **black and white** photographs of the property.

**Additional items**

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

**Property Owner**

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name HLEI West Baden, Inc.

street & number 340 West Michigan Street telephone (317) 639-4534

city or town Indianapolis state Indiana zip code 46202

**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. 470 *et seq.*).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 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 Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 1 Oxford Hotel, Orange County, Indiana

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### Narrative Description

#### Summary

The Oxford Hotel is located on the west side of State Road 56 (also known as Broadway and formerly Harrison Avenue) between First and Second Streets in West Baden Springs, Orange County, Indiana. The hotel was once part of a two-block row of commercial structures along the west side of then Harrison Avenue, and backing up to the expansive grounds of the National Historic Landmark West Baden Springs Hotel. Now only one other brick commercial structure remains along Broadway to the south of the Oxford Hotel, with surviving residential structures across Broadway. The large three-story brick structure, rectangular in plan, has a pitched roof behind a straight parapet along the main (east) facade and a stepped parapet on the north and south facades. A simple cast iron facade divides the ground level storefronts that are mostly boarded over, however, the building retains sufficient integrity to support its significance as a Springs Valley resort hotel from early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

#### Setting

French Lick Township, where the towns of French Lick and West Baden Springs are located, is situated on an elevated but poorly drained stretch of the Mitchell Karst Plain in Orange County, southwestern Indiana. This land if not cleared for settlement would be covered by mixed hardwoods with riparian canebrakes. Ice Age glaciers almost but never quite reached the region's surface of bare limestone bedrock. The rock, carved into caves, sinkholes and a few narrow valleys, is permeated by myriad salty springs and watercourses. Names of some of these features, such as "French Lick" and "White River," indicate both their mineral content, sought by people and animals, and the blue-white or green-white cast the minerals gave to the water.<sup>1</sup>

The towns of French Lick and West Baden Springs (formerly West Baden) are sited about one mile apart and 10 miles west of the county seat, Paoli. Both towns are built along the steep sides of a valley, averaging perhaps two-tenths of a mile wide, forming the course of French Lick Creek. Elevations in the valley average 450-500 feet. Hills rise to about 700 feet throughout much of the area, suggesting a once rather level surface of bedrock. The town of West Baden Springs stands due east across the valley from the West Baden Springs Hotel, which backs up to the valley wall on the west. The Hotel grounds, towns, and most of the region are subject to dramatic episodes of flooding. On the valley floor, running roughly north-south, both a railroad

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<sup>1</sup> Marion T. Jackson, ed., *The Natural Heritage of Indiana* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), esp. 77-78; John A. Jakle, *Salt and the Initial Settlement of the Ohio Valley* (Ph.D. thesis, Indiana University, Bloomington, 1966), 23-26.

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track and a through road connect French Lick on the south with West Baden Springs on the north. The Oxford Hotel is located between road and railroad track at the western edge of the town of West Baden Springs.

During its period of significance, the Oxford Hotel was part of a two-block row of commercial buildings that fronted on the west side of Broadway, north of West Baden Avenue, and backed up to the Monon Railroad tracks and the expansive grounds of the West Baden Springs Hotel. Now only one other commercial structure remains of this two-block stretch—a two-story brick building approximately 20 feet wide and 160 feet south of the Oxford Hotel. This building dates from before 1906, but is in poor structural condition—its north and south facades, originally party walls, are now exposed. Across Broadway from the Oxford Hotel, the town's residential neighborhood begins at the top of a concrete retaining wall. These homes are small one- and two-story residential structures—most date from before the Oxford Hotel, but with various alterations. The residential area continues north along Broadway and east of Broadway for several blocks. It meets the commercial district of West Baden Springs along First Street, and continues south for several blocks.

The Oxford Hotel is sited close to the street with only a concrete sidewalk between the building and the street curb. Gravel lots abut the building to the north and south. The grade falls away from the building on the west in grassy banks to the north and south, exposing the basement level across the west facade, and leveling out from the building's edge across a former railroad track.

### Exterior

#### General Characteristics

Brick masonry walls, wood frame windows, and a cast iron storefront are the basic elements of this building which is soundly constructed, but not overly decorative. Painted smooth brick common bond walls rise out of the ground on the north, east, and south elevations to a decorative brick cornice capped with a clay tile coping. A pitched roof slopes down to the west behind a straight parapet across the main (east) facade and stepped parapets on the north and south. The west facade is unpainted brick with concrete parged walls at the basement level. The brick on all facades is in poor condition with excess moisture damage and missing bricks and mortar. All four elevations are fenestrated with evenly spaced rectangular window openings on the upper levels. The original window sash is double-hung one-over-one wood, but many are covered up, removed, or in poor condition. The main (east) elevation has a cast iron storefront on the ground floor.

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### East Elevation

The main facade (east elevation) is distinguished by the painted cast iron storefront at the ground floor. The ground floor level is divided into 4 bays each with an "ABA" internal division: the wider "A" bays were originally all window openings; the narrower "B" bays were originally all door openings. The 4 bays are separated by wider cast iron columns; the internal divisions are separated with narrower versions of the same cast iron columns. Brick piers (the ends of the south and north walls) frame the entire ensemble (i.e.: no cast iron columns on the south side of the 1<sup>st</sup> bay or on the north side of the 4<sup>th</sup> bay). The cast iron columns have a fluted shaft with molded top and base on a smooth plinth. The smooth recessed face of the capital is adorned with a raised leaf design. The I-beam lintel of the storefront has a textured block over each of the columns and rosettes centered between each of the columns.

Three doors remain in the center of the 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> bays (from south to north). The first is a replacement wood and glass door with an aluminum storm door and faux stone surround. The second two are aluminum and glass doors, the last with a narrow transom and north side sidelight. Ground floor window openings include: a large two-light storefront window in the north section of the 1<sup>st</sup> bay; small square windows in the north section of the 2<sup>nd</sup> bay, the south and north sections of the 3<sup>rd</sup> bay, and the south section of the 4<sup>th</sup> bay. Metal vents punctuate the south sections of the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> bays. Air conditioning units poke through the wall and rest on metal brackets in the center section of the 2<sup>nd</sup> bay, the north section of the 3<sup>rd</sup> bay, and over the door in the center section of the 4<sup>th</sup> bay. A louvered grill is visible above the door in the center section of the 3<sup>rd</sup> bay. The remaining area inside the cast iron columns is covered with paneled wood sheets.

The smooth brick facade of the second and third levels is fenestrated with 10 rectangular window openings that are almost equally spaced across the facade. Each has a sill of brick headers that extend beyond the face of the wall and a flat arch lintel of rock-faced brick (or stone). The windows are covered with painted wood composition board sheets. Some of the original, one-over-one, double-hung wood sash windows remain on the interior in various states of disrepair. An internally lit, plastic box sign hangs off of the facade on a metal bar and cables between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> windows (from south to north) at the second floor level. The brick cornice is composed of corbeled brackets on the ends and a corbel table across the length of the facade. The smooth parapet continues above and recessed back from the cornice, and is capped with a clay tile coping.

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### North Elevation

The north elevation has one centered door opening on each of the second and third floors. The doors are covered with paneled wood sheets. A metal fire stair with landings at each door and half way between them, and a ladder to the roof, is attached to the side of the building. A street-light-type fixture is attached to the building to the east of the second floor door. The cornice is a continuous three-step corbeled band of brick. The smooth parapet continues above and recessed from the cornice, and is capped with a clay tile coping. The parapet steps down once on the east side of the facade and continues straight across to the rear (west). A wood platform/walkway with a handrail begins at the west side of the ground level and continues around the west elevation.

### West Elevation

The unpainted smooth brick facade of the west elevation rises from the first floor level to an unadorned cornice. The exposed basement level has a parged concrete covering that is scored to resemble large stone blocks. Eight window or door openings across the basement level are blocked in with concrete block or covered with painted composition board, and one has a wood panel door. The wood platform/walkway described above continues across the full length of the west elevation at the first floor level. The wood supporting posts continue above the level of the handrail to above the second floor level. The first, second, and third floor levels are fenestrated with rectangular window openings that are almost equally spaced across the facade: 8 on the first floor; and 11 on the second and third floors. These window openings have the same sill and lintel detail as those on the east elevation, but with smooth brick in the lintels. Some of the original, one-over-one, double-hung wood sash windows remain exposed in various states of disrepair, some are covered with or are replaced by wood composition board or painted wood paneled sheets, some are covered or replaced by vinyl storm windows, and one is bricked in. There are metal landings outside the 7<sup>th</sup> windows (from the north) on the second and third floors, connected by a ladder from the first floor level to the roof, attached to the facade. A metal gutter hangs across the top of the wall with one downspout at each end.

### South Elevation

The south elevation has one centered window opening on each of the second and third floors. The sill and lintel detail is the same as on the west elevation (also the same as the east elevation, but with smooth brick in the lintels). The original, one-over-one, double-hung wood sash windows remain in these openings. A street-light-type fixture is attached to the building to the east of the second floor window. The cornice is a continuous three-step corbeled band of brick. The smooth parapet continues above and recessed back from the cornice, and is capped with a



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clay tile coping. The parapet steps down once on the east side of the facade and continues straight across to the rear (west).

### Roof

The pitched roof slopes down to the west from behind the east parapet. A roof hatch is visible on the west elevation, but the roof surface is not visible from any ground level vantage point.

### Interior

#### First Floor

The ground floor is a series of altered commercial spaces. Originally these interior spaces were divided into 4 bays that correspond to the bays of the cast iron storefront facade on the east elevation. These 4 bays are still discernible as portions of all their dividing walls are still in place for structural reasons. Each of the 4 bays are further separated by two supports that divide the space roughly into thirds from east to west and that divide the bays in two from north to south. In the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> bays (from south to north) these supports are octagonal wood posts. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> bays these supports are steel columns.

The 1<sup>st</sup> bay was the hotel office and retains its decorative hexagonal tile floor, pressed metal ceiling, and the octagonal wood posts. The hexagonal tile floor has an array of grey, red, and yellow stars about 12 inches apart on a field of white and a border in the same colors with diamonds, crosses, and hourglass shapes. The tiles are in good condition with some cracking along grout lines. The pressed metal ceiling is painted and in good condition, with a foliated pattern inside squares laid out in a grid and an elaborate border with cove mold. The stair to the upper floors and basement has been altered but remains in the southwest corner. A large addition juts in to this bay from the north to create an additional space for the room in the next bay. The south wall is exposed painted brick. The two window openings in this bay have segmental-arch tops (the exterior has flat-arch tops).

The remaining bays were most recently a bar with kitchen, storage, and toilet rooms partitioned off across the west side. The large seating area spans the length of the bays with various structural columns (as described above) located throughout. Most of the wall surfaces are covered with paneled sheets. The 3<sup>rd</sup> bay retains its pressed metal ceiling, that matches the one in the 1<sup>st</sup> bay described above, and the octagonal wood posts.

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### Upper Floors

The second and third floors are deteriorated but intact sleeping chambers, halls, and bath and toilet rooms. Thirty sleeping chambers are distributed with 7 on the east side of both floors and 8 on the west side of both floors. An open wood stair with decorative wood newel posts, handrail, and balusters is oriented in an east-west direction in the southwest corner of the building and is the sole interior stair. Both floors have a wide, double-loaded, central corridor oriented in a north-south direction with wood floors, plaster walls and ceilings, and wood frame doors with transoms along their length. The transomed doors lead off the corridor to the east and west into a series of sleeping rooms that are linked into suites by interior doors. Decorative wood trim surrounds most of the doors, transoms, and windows: doors feature vertical casing ending in a Gothic point; and window trim features bull's-eye corner blocks. Most of the wood panel doors remain. Some of the rooms have closets and some have porcelain enamel, wall-mounted sinks. One room on the west side of the hall has wall-mounted, wood kitchen cabinets above a wall-mounted sink. This room is part of a three-room suite that may have been the proprietor's quarters. The cabinets and all of the sinks date to at least the 1920s. Wallpaper in some of the rooms dates to the 1940s. Separate shower, bath, and toilet rooms are found on each floor, but are altered. The plaster is in poor condition or missing throughout, especially on the third floor ceilings. Much debris remains in the rooms and halls.

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### Narrative Statement of Significance

#### Summary

The Oxford Hotel is the single remaining example of the modest hotels that were part of pre-1930 resort towns of the Springs Valley. Under the significance area of recreation and tourism, such humble hotels represented the resort experience of working people and of travelers of modest means who could not afford to stay at the grand resort itself. Under the significance area of social history, the Oxford also served as early "affordable housing" in a housing-short boom town. The Oxford was part of a resort economy centering on the West Baden Springs Hotel, whose spa and gambling casino drew and sustained other speculative ventures until the stock market crash decimated the resort's clientele. The Oxford Hotel's period of significance, 1910-1932, begins with the Oxford's construction (circa 1910) during good times in West Baden and ends when the West Baden Springs Hotel closed for good (1932), bringing nationwide economic depression home to the local level.

Underlying all of the speculative ventures during West Baden's resort era was speculation in real property itself. While many of the town's hotel opportunities required corporate capital, the Oxford was in reach of the lone small investor seeking both equity and a livelihood from the same source. As a commercial building the Oxford was prototypal Main Street circa 1900, and the building presents essential elements of the type--a straightforward, internally adaptable floor plan of chambers that could be opened to each other or closed off; a box-shaped exterior (narrow to avoid structural complications) with nearly two-dimensional elevations, ordinary materials, and almost no custom components. Common brick, prefabricated storefronts, and simple, stock doors and windows were not only relatively cheap to purchase but also could be put in place quickly by lower-skilled workers.

#### Historical Background, Prehistory to 1910

From the earliest known human visits to the French Lick area, its abundant salt springs shaped the area's economic use.<sup>1</sup> Hunters followed the movements of both prehistoric and modern buffalo species in spring and summer as these herds, in search of salt, beat wide paths through the forest east of their prairie homes. Early European explorers used and described these remarkable "buffalo traces," sometimes 100 feet or wider, as well as licked-down wallows of salty clay up to half an acre in extent. The licks attracted not only buffalo but deer, small mammals, parakeets, and bees.

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<sup>1</sup>John A. Jakle, *Salt and the Initial Settlement of the Ohio Valley* (Ph.D. thesis, Indiana University, Bloomington, 1966), 13-56. The following discussion is based on Jakle's report and on Jackson, *Natural Heritage of Indiana*.

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With abundant game and inhospitable terrain, areas like French Lick were hunting grounds, not sites of settlement. Such areas may have been hunted to exhaustion by the time Native American nations, between 500 and 1500 AD, developed sedentary ways of life in other parts of the future Indiana. Eventually, the return of game to the French Lick area again brought hunters, both Iroquoian peoples and the first Europeans. French explorers, fur traders, and missionaries had arrived by the late 1600s. For the next hundred years, travelers described buffalo as incredibly numerous. As Europeans displaced Indians by force, buffalo travel routes made paths for European exploration and settlement. The French and their Indian allies were defeated by the British in 1763, the British 20 years later by the Americans. The lucrative French trading center of Vincennes, on the falls of the Wabash 50 miles west of the future French Lick Township, became the capital of the Indiana Territory in 1787. In 1800, some one-third of Indiana's European-American population of about 6,500 lived around Vincennes, and another thousand at Jeffersonville.

Although the name French Lick implies that the French were present in Orange County, the area was likely named by George Rogers Clark, camping there during his expedition of 1786-1787 to subdue Indians in the new Northwest Territory, including Indiana.<sup>2</sup> Clark may have borrowed the name from a French Lick on the Cumberland River in Tennessee. Land survey of the Indiana Territory as called for under the Land Ordinance of 1785 began circa 1805 with location of Indiana's initial survey point seven miles south of Paoli, or roughly ten miles southeast of what is now French Lick.

With Native American resistance broken after the battle of Tippecanoe (1811), European-American settlers came quickly. The future Orange County, organized 1816, was named by Quakers from Orange County, North Carolina. These settlers, along with African-Americans, were among the area's earliest. Both groups probably valued Orange County for settlement less as lucrative farm land than as "free soil," as an area safe from Indians and—in part because of

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<sup>2</sup>Excellent sources for early history are given in John W. O'Malley, *The Story of the West Baden Springs Hotel* (Master's thesis, Loyola University, Chicago, 1957), 4ff. See L. C. Helderman, "The Northwest Expedition of George Rogers Clark," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* XXV (1938), 317-334; Joseph Karol, "The French at French Lick, Fact or Fiction?" *Indiana Magazine of History*, June 1954, 139-144; "Narrative of John Heckewelder's Journey to the Wabash in 1792," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* XII, 173-174; "Military Journal of Major Ebenezer Denny, 1781-1795," *Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Memoirs* VII (Philadelphia, 1860), 299; Harlow Lindley, ed., *Indiana As Seen By Early Travelers* (Indianapolis, 1916), 521.

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travel routes based on buffalo traces—as an accessible and well traveled location. With the influx of population, Indiana gained statehood in 1816. As part of facilitating the new citizens' subsistence, the 1816 Enabling Act provided that thirty-six sections known as French Lick Township in Orange County be reserved for gathering salt. Entrepreneurs tried both surface kettle extraction and boring to deep water, but persistent effort remained disappointing, and in 1833 the land went on sale to the public at \$1.25 minimum per acre.

The closest Orange County town in those years was the nearby county seat and Quaker-founded settlement of Paoli. But in 1828, Dr. William A. Bowles, an early Paoli land speculator acting through his father Thomas, bought land in French Lick Township. Dr. Bowles's intentions for the property are not known, and his strange career was eventually to culminate in his being tried for treason and nearly hanged in 1864 as a Confederate sympathizer. Along the way, he became a state legislator and may have tried several enterprises on the French Lick property before opening a hotel near one of the springs around 1845.<sup>3</sup> When called the following year to serve as a lieutenant in the Mexican American War, Bowles leased his hotel to another of the colorful frontier characters of the day, John Lane.

John A. Lane (1811-1884), a patent medicine seller from Jefferson Valley, New York, came to Orange County in the late 1840s. He acquired the lease of the French Lick House and must have done well enough to decide, when the lease expired, to open a second hotel. Lane found a site on French Lick Creek one mile north of the French Lick settlement. He christened the future town "Mile Lick," and by about 1855 had opened his own hotel, the Mile Lick Inn. "Mile Lick" soon became West Baden, after the German spa of Wiesbaden. Bad feeling between Bowles and Lane over the lease of Bowles's hotel meant that the West Baden Inn was begun in an spirit of ill-natured competition. But it was the presence of the two hotels together, both grandly conceived, that probably created the necessary amount of activity and amenity that ultimately established the area as a resort destination.

From the 1850s through 1880s, the two hotels were favorite gathering places for county residents. The initial Monon railroad route of 1887, with especially good connections to and from Chicago and Louisville, immediately opened the French Lick and West Baden hotels to region-wide tourism.<sup>4</sup> In April of 1887, the *Paoli Republican* reported with surprise that guests

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<sup>3</sup>Richard W. Haupt, *History of the French Lick Springs Hotel* (Bloomington, Indiana: Master's thesis, Indiana University, 1953), 30-77, cited in O'Malley, 11, note 28.

<sup>4</sup>The Monon was formed in 1883 through one of many railroad mergers of the period. "Monon," formerly

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were already arriving; in June, that many visitors were first-timers; and by the end of the month that both major hotels planned to build large additions at the end of the season. This step was the beginning of an economic success, based on resort tourism combined with gambling and land speculation, that created and carried two small towns from 1887 until the Great Depression. The railroad's arrival created the necessary condition for this success. But relatively stable prosperity lasting 45 years was still a remarkable achievement for a resort located in a remote rural area without spectacular natural attractions.

"Taking the waters" was the official reason-for-being of many resorts nationwide, from Saratoga Springs to Yellowstone. Their model was European spas or "baths" such as Bath, England, and Wiesbaden, Germany. Effective medical treatments were still few in the late 1800s, and hotelkeepers could plausibly claim—as former patent medicine seller John Lane no doubt did back in the 1840s and 1850s—that water of a certain chemical composition was curative when drunk or used in mud baths. Visitors could combine "the waters" with an array of amenities: elaborate food and service, genteel contact with nature, the milder sports, local sightseeing, stage entertainment, and, above all, gambling. The resort setting, combining gambling's element of fast living with gentility and fashionability, formed an important ingredient in the development of middle class society. Some vacationers may have come to get away from the constraints of home; many probably came to see and be seen, learn from one another's manners and dress, and make social contacts.

To the vacationer, the resort hotel appeared to be a self-contained world, set apart in its own extensive grounds. Not only were guests waited on hand and foot, but also the source of many goods and services was on site—a casino, a cigar stand, a doctor on call. Even the West Baden National Bank was located inside the hotel.<sup>5</sup> For the resort to function, however, a small army of attendants and behind-the-scenes providers had to be sustained and kept in motion. The resort's many lower-paid hotel employees, as well as workers in the town, had to live somewhere. The resort hotel constantly needed special supplies—from cigars to cutlery, from packs of playing cards to bath towels to replacement rain gutters—which were sold by commercial travelers passing through town.

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Bradford, is a town in White County through which both parent companies' routes passed.

<sup>5</sup>Lee Sinclair and other parties interested in the Inn organized this bank. It opened in 1902 and quickly began providing dividends to its investors. The bank remained in the hotel until 1917. See O'Malley, West Baden Springs Hotel, 55, note 21.

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The resort experience of these working people, and of travelers of modest means who could not afford to stay at the resort hotel, was represented by humbler hotels, of which only the Oxford still stands. The Oxford was part of an economic dynamic in which the West Baden resort and gambling casino drew and sustained other speculative ventures. Underlying all of them was speculation in real property itself. The plat of "the newly laid off town of 'West Baden'" was recorded on July 23, 1888. The plat was attested by the present and former partners in the West Baden hotel company—George W. Campbell, Elvit (or Elvet) B. Rhodes, Lee W. Sinclair, James Braden, Lydia Braden, John T. Stout, and Amos Stout. Like French Lick, West Baden was oriented both economically and geographically to two poles—the railroad right-of-way, which connected the town to the rest of the world, and the town's resort hotel, which provided the town's economic engine.

The original town consisted of 36 lots, all but one lying north of West Baden Avenue (leading to the West Baden Springs Hotel) and east of the railroad track along north-south-running Harrison Avenue (now called Broadway; part of State Road 56) and Main Street. Pencil on the plat map some years after it was drawn in 1888 are the names of lot owners. The notation "hotel" on one lot, and "cottage" on lots where hotel-worker housing was already planned, suggests an intention to capitalize on the West Baden hotel's railroad-induced boom. All or part of lot 36, the future location of the Oxford Hotel in the original town of West Baden, was traded 17 times, or almost once a year, between the town's founding and the year the hotel was built.

Lot 36, abutting a much smaller lot on its south edge, was leftover land at the west edge of town—an irregular, 780-foot parcel only deep enough for one row of buildings. The parcel was made up of the narrow space between Harrison Avenue and the railroad right-of-way and extended approximately three blocks between First and Fourth streets. In 1889, town founder James Braden and unnamed associates sold most of the lot to another town founder, George W. Campbell, and his associates. Elvet Rhodes, yet another founder, sold Campbell the rest of the lot soon after. Campbell had sold off the lot in five tracts by 1899. The southern tracts, along with lot 35 to the south of them and the parcels across the street, became the heart of a roughly two-block downtown entertainment and retail district that materialized very early in West Baden's history. One establishment, on the east side of the street, was a modest restaurant, bar, and gambling room owned by Charles Edward "Ed" Ballard, soon to become the town's leading

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mover and shaker based on his profits from gambling and real estate speculation.<sup>6</sup> Smaller hotels began to be built by the late 1890s, and five are shown on the Sanborn map of 1906, when West Baden and French Lick had a combined population of 1,200. The streets were not yet paved, but each town sported a water main, street lights, and a public school. The very small Park Hotel was in place across West Baden Avenue from the passenger depot. Four other hotels were arrayed along the east side of Harrison Avenue in the two blocks north of the depot: the Ritter, Perrin (later Homestead), Sutton (later Terrace), and Barton (demolished by 1913).

The Lindley, a named boardinghouse, was located catercornered east of the Sutton on Main Street at Second. Other boardinghouses are not labeled but doubtless were present. With cheaper rates and the offer of a "Water Privilege Ticket,"<sup>7</sup> these hotels and boardinghouses would have broadened the base of tourism and also provided accommodation for a variety of travelers and long-term guests. African-Americans, whether visitors or employes, would not have been able to use the springs and--with the exception of one dormitory on the grounds of the French Lick Springs Hotel--had to find accommodation in one of a few African-American-owned houses that took in a small number of boarders.<sup>8</sup> The number of hotels continued to increase, however, and would come to include two that were owned by African-Americans.

### The Oxford Hotel and its Site

During one of the many trades of lot 36, the tract on which the Oxford would be built was acquired by Adam and Mary M. Burton and held for 10 years without development. In 1909, the Burtons sold this tract for \$2000 to Stephen Cronin, a West Baden hotel cook, and his wife Annie. The Burtons sold Cronin another tract of lot 36 the following year, and Cronin apparently used the second tract to build the brick "Stephen Cronin Building," which is no longer standing. At about the same time, in 1910 or 1911, the Cronins built the Oxford.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Transfers of lot 36: deeds of 9 December 1889, 7 April 1893, 17 August 1893, 18 July 1894, 19 January 1895, 10 November 1897, and 13 December 1897. The Oxford Hotel has the distinction of being one of the few properties in the valley never owned by Mr. Ballard.

<sup>7</sup>Camilla Deiber for HLF, Nomination of Homestead Hotel (1913) to the NRHP, submitted 20 August 1997.

<sup>8</sup>Manuscript enumeration records for the town of West Baden (U. S. Bureau of the Census, 1910).

<sup>9</sup>Which hotel employed Cronin is not known. In the deed books, Cronin's wife is named as Annie in 1909 and Helen in 1910. Based on a census enumeration manuscript of 21 April 1910, "Helen" is an error. Deeds to the Cronins are dated 30 September 1909 and 10 February 1910; available tax duplicate books for dating hotel, 1909



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The Oxford, as the most modest of three remaining historic hotels in West Baden Springs, forms one end of a stepped progression in size and elaborateness. The other two are the mid-sized Homestead (1913) and the almost sui generis West Baden Springs. Structural similarities of the Homestead main building and the Oxford, constructed only three years apart, are greater than their differences. Both are fundamentally rectangular, brick, "Main Street" commercial buildings organized structurally and decoratively into ground-floor bays. Both are topped on upper floors by sleeping chambers, signaled on the exterior by rows of windows. But the Homestead Hotel is a large, relatively self-contained complex whose main building is architecturally "styled" with Classical Revival references belonging to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Homestead's stepped-down lobby roof line, distinctively elaborated south facade, and pendant Craftsman-style solarium building set back from the street make the whole appear imposing from the sidewalk while imparting a spacious resort feeling "right on Main Street"—or, in this case, Harrison Avenue.

By contrast, the smaller Oxford Hotel is an all-purpose, vernacular commercial building. Its unusual feature of a shallow front-to-back dimension allowed it to be placed at the narrow, otherwise unusable end of a very long commercial lot squeezed between railroad tracks and street. Fitting the hotel to the lot may also have led to designing upper floors with the lengthwise, north-south axis of a central hallway between two rows of rooms. A north-end fire escape and the need for end windows providing natural light to the hallways would have prevented the Oxford from forming part of a joined-wall commercial row. Yet the Oxford seems to have been styled as part of a row—a building intended to receive aesthetic support from contiguous buildings.

Economically, the Homestead represents the more ambitious, up-to-date architectural solution and greater return for greater investment made possible by a large, corporate entrepreneur's involvement. The Homestead's ownership structure was similar to that of the West Baden resort. The Homestead was built by several cousins of Ed Ballard, no doubt with Ballard's backing, and his investment company later took over the property. The Oxford was one of only a few hotels in town—and is the only one remaining—that did not serve as an ongoing object of speculation, but was built and owned by a lone proprietor as his or her livelihood.

The small, three-story, brick Oxford Hotel appeared for the first time on the Sanborn map in 1913 in its position on the west side of Harrison, opposite the freight depot with its back wall toward the railroad track. Going north from the Oxford along the strip between Harrison and the railroad track at this date were two small dwellings followed by a livery stable, a lodge hall, and

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and 1912. The Cronin Building is part of the tract description in a 1915 deed referenced below.

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the jail. The Oxford, and the Sutton (later Terrace) across the street, marked the northern limit of the downtown, beyond which a residential area stretched north and east. Besides the West Baden Springs resort and these two hotels, at least six other hotels and various boarding houses were operating. Other hotels included the large, newly completed Homestead, just south of the Ritter, the Colonial at the south end of town in a newer subdivision, and two hotels owned by African-Americans. The Waddy (formerly Savoy) stood opposite the Colonial north of Sinclair Avenue. Rice's, south of the Oxford on another tract of lot 36, occupied the second and third floors above the three-bay storefront that was part of a block-long, contiguous commercial strip.

In 1913, this strip and the ground floor of the Homestead Hotel across the street housed restaurants, barber shops, drugstores, and saloons, with gambling halls on the west side of the street only. There was also a movie theater with an undertaking parlor upstairs, a general store, and a post office. Only one of these buildings, its party walls now exposed, still stands. In contrast to the joined-wall hotels and other commercial buildings to its south, the Oxford was somewhat isolated. Of its four ground-floor commercial spaces or bays, two were occupied by the hotel's office and restaurant and two, which were vacant, were intended as rentals.

A postcard of the hotel dated 1915 suggests that the enterprise was at its most hopeful during these years. At the time, West Baden's sidewalks were probably of board construction and the streets unpaved, but the open space south of the hotel appeared to be planted in lawn. The hotel's then-unpainted brick front elevation was smartened with a simple, one-story, columned porch—column design is indistinguishable—sheltering the office. The porch roof formed a balcony spanning a door and two windows on the second floor. The balcony had a metal pipe railing. Above the door and window tops was a furled cloth awning that could be extended, supported at its front corners by metal rods standing on end. Projecting from the center of the porch roof, perpendicular to the street, was a substantial hanging sign reading "Hotel Oxford." In spite of the tight-budget construction apparent on the hotel's exterior, the Cronins' aspirations are suggested by the presence of a grand sleeping room or suite with a door onto the balcony, and interior touches such as the florid pressed-metal ceiling and the unusual rug-pattern, multi-colored tile floor.

Two years after the postcard was sent, in a transaction that seems to have developed over several years, the Cronins sold the hotel to another couple, John and Ellen Bartlett. The Bartletts had lived in Chicago before moving to West Baden. The Cronins lived in West Baden, then moved to Chicago. Both moves took place in or near the year the hotel was purchased, 1917. The Oxford

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was the last of three adjoining properties the Bartletts purchased. The other two properties were another building (now demolished) south of the Oxford Hotel, and an undeveloped tract between this building and the Oxford. The nature of the relationship between Cronins and Bartletts is unknown. Judging by their parents' diverse places of origin, none of the four was closely related to any other, and it is not obvious why the Bartletts were able to acquire the Oxford for a quitclaim of one dollar—a nominal price that could reflect any number of situations from a barter to a gambling debt.<sup>10</sup>

John Bartlett was an Englishman, born about 1870, who came to the United States at the age of 14 or 15 and was to become an American citizen in 1919, two years after buying the Oxford Hotel. Ellen Bartlett was born in Kentucky circa 1883 and her parents (unnamed in the census) both came from Indiana. In the census of 1920, John is listed as having no occupation, Ellen as "hotel manager." When John died or departed between 1927 and 1931, Ellen continued to own and run the hotel until, aged about 60, she sold it in 1943.<sup>11</sup>

At the time the Bartletts decided to invest in West Baden and for some years afterward, the town and its sister town of French Lick flourished. The Monon Line operated up to twelve trains daily between Chicago and Louisville, Indianapolis-French Lick trains jointly with the Pennsylvania Railroad, and through sleeping cars from such distant points as New York. On Kentucky Derby weekend, extra trains ran on the French Lick branch nearly with streetcar frequency. For some years an electric car line had also been running between the two towns every half-hour. Setbacks such as legal obstacles to gambling, and the commandeering of the West Baden Springs Hotel for a military hospital during World War I, had passed by. Ed Ballard, who owned the West Baden Springs Hotel completely by about 1922, and several other hotels as well, also controlled enormously profitable local gambling—including public casinos in Brown's Hotel (French Lick) and the Colonial Hotel—and a great deal of real property. In 1918, Ballard even purchased several small circuses, which established winter quarters at the south end of West Baden. The circuses became part of a lively 1920s atmosphere to which baseball teams in training and Midwestern café society—noted boxers, underworld figures, and politicians—also contributed.

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<sup>10</sup>Deeds to the Bartletts dated 7 August 1915 and 8 March 1917. The 1915 deed is for the tract adjacent to the Oxford on the south, purchased from Adam Burton presumably in anticipation of buying the hotel from the Cronins. This deed measures off the land from a brick building "now owned by the said John Bartlett, and formerly known as the Stephen Cronin Building."

<sup>11</sup>Census enumeration manuscripts for West Baden town, 17 January 1920. Deed of 24 March 1943.

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West Baden's population, as estimated by the Sanborn Map Company, ballooned from 1,600 in 1913 to 2,800 in 1925.

After the early growth period of West Baden hotels from 1895 to 1910, significant changes were the Homestead Hotel's completion in 1913 and the addition of hotel accommodations for African-Americans around the same time. Ten years later, a national hotel directory listed the size of several West Baden hotels: Colonial, 50 rooms; Sutton (Terrace), 90 rooms; Homestead, 125 rooms. (The West Baden resort claimed a whopping 708 rooms, bigger even than the French Lick resort at 450 rooms.) Daily price of a room with meals was \$2-\$3 (\$1 less without meals), and about double that at the West Baden and French Lick resorts.<sup>12</sup>

In this scheme of things the 30-room Oxford, in its location, design, and construction, was a typical "railroad hotel"—not a choice vacation destination but a utilitarian overnight stopping place with a dining room. Small-town hotels for travelers by rail flourished between the 1870s and World War I. A demanding market of middle-class automobile tourists had only begun to develop; armies of traveling salesmen still hawked their wares in every whistle-stop town and were compelled to spend the night in one or another of them.<sup>13</sup> The Oxford must have benefitted by the town's growth, and like any small hotel it must have made ends meet by catering to as many different needs as possible. However, by 1920 the Oxford was probably not meeting some of these needs as well as some of the town's other hotels.

When the Oxford was built in 1910 its lack of amenities may already have pointed to its obsolescence as a commercial hotel. For retail rental of its ground-floor spaces, the Oxford's location north of the most foot-trafficked downtown blocks was problematic. Though the dining room may have catered local banquets, the Oxford had no large public room comparable to the solarium-ballroom at the Homestead. Nor does the Oxford seem to have offered hot-springs features like mud baths as the Homestead and many other hotels did. Because of its location in a resort town that was crowded in season, the Oxford no doubt entertained vacationers of modest means and those who could not find room at more luxurious hotels. These vacationers along with less prosperous commercial travelers would have furnished most of the Oxford's transient guests in its early years. By 1920, however, the Oxford had found a niche in housing seasonal

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<sup>12</sup>Howard Johnston, compiler, *Hotel Book, 1923*, Second Edition (Baltimore: American Travel and Hotel Directory Co., 1923), 29, 27.

<sup>13</sup>Warren James Belasco, *Americans on the Road* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1979), 44-59.

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and other long-term guests.

"New residences are going up all the time in the Valley," ran an article in the weekly *Springs Valley Herald* of January 16, 1913, "yet it is a difficult matter to rent a house here as they are usually spoken for weeks ahead." The census enumeration of 1920 suggests that more than half the Oxford's possible total of guest rooms were occupied by residents, not transients. Not counting the Bartletts, who also lived in their hotel, seventeen white "roomers" of various occupations—thirteen men, three women, and a baby boy—were enumerated as residents. Five of the roomers worked for the circus—as wardrobe mistress, seamstress, blacksmith, steward, and "ticket man." Two residents described themselves as lumber dealers; others were laborers, including a hotel porter and an 18-year-old "kitchen girl" who may have been Oxford employes. Only three of the roomers were born out of state—one each from Louisiana, Mississippi (these two worked for the circus), and New York state.<sup>14</sup>

Operating in part as a residential hotel seems to have worked. At the time that Ellen Bartlett apparently inherited the Oxford from her husband, the hotel was valued at \$3,300 for land and \$4,400 for improvements. The entry in the French Lick Township deed transfer book of 1927-1931 is not dated, and it is unclear how many tracts the Bartletts still owned. But a valuation of \$7,700 suggests that the Oxford was holding its own as a business and a property.

Only at the next transfer, Ellen's sale of the property in 1943, did the price drop: \$3,600 total, of which \$1,500 was for land and \$2,100 for improvements. This drastic loss of value likely reflects the devastation that the Great Depression brought to French Lick and West Baden. Within hours after the 1929 stock market crash was announced, guests began leaving the resort. After preliminary closings and unsuccessful seasons from Fall 1929 through Spring 1932, Ed Ballard's hotel discharged its last employes on June 30, 1932.<sup>15</sup> The final closing of the hotel in 1932 marked the bitter end of the resort economy, and the end of the Oxford's historically

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<sup>14</sup>Hotels were not named on the 1920 West Baden census manuscript, except for the West Baden Springs and Homestead hotels. But census enumerators noted each dwelling unit and its occupants separately, allowing hotels and rooming houses to be identified as those with large numbers of unrelated occupants. A resident owner or manager like John or Ellen Bartlett was usually listed as "proprietor-hotel" or "manager-hotel," similarly for "boarding house" or "rooming house."

<sup>15</sup>Deed of 24 March 1943, Ellen Bartlett to William Timmins. Closing of West Baden Springs Hotel from interviews of Glenn Marlette and Laff Prow, West Baden Springs Hotel employees, by O'Malley, West Baden Springs Hotel; 89-92 for effects of the crash.

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significant period as a part of that economy.

With few outside sources of revenue, West Baden like many other American towns probably survived the Depression by population shrinkage combined with the process known as "taking in each other's washing." Resort and other workers left in search of jobs; Ed Ballard and many other investors divested themselves of their holdings. Little is known about how Ellen Bartlett kept the Oxford Hotel running during this decade. One local informant stated that by 1940 or earlier a "Ma Bartl," probably Ellen Bartlett, was known as a "madam" or procuress. It is likely that the hotel continued to survive mainly on long-term guests of whatever occupation, and that its reputation declined. As mentioned above, in 1943 the hotel passed from Bartlett to William A. Timmins, stated by a local informant to be Bartlett's lover. A few years later, Timmins transferred the remaining property to Pauline Leonard for one dollar. Around 1950, Leonard's husband Richard Lane would create a scandal by getting shot at the hotel in the course of an affair with a married woman.<sup>16</sup>

No apparent renovation of the hotel took place after about 1950. It continued to operate through the 1950s, when it may have been called the Harrison and its main floor contained a liquor store, restaurant, and novelty store. Eventually the building became a bar known as the Jubil, and then it fell vacant. In 2000, it was purchased from Donald and Annette Wolfington by HLF I West Baden, Incorporated, an entity of the Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana dedicated to restoring West Baden's grand resort hotel and remaining elements of the town's historic landscape.

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<sup>16</sup>This and following anecdotal material from Cynthia Brubaker interview of Mary Jean Bateman, who graduated from West Baden Springs High School in 1944 and is still a town resident. West Baden, 29 November 2000 .

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### Verbal Boundary Description

A part of lot number thirty-six (36) in the town of West Baden Springs in the County of Orange, and State of Indiana bounded as follows, to-wit: beginning at a point one hundred ninety-seven (197) feet north of the southeast corner of aforesaid lot running thence in a northerly direction on the east line of said lot to the north corner of the Oxford Hotel building, thence west along the north face of the building to the west line of said lot, thence in a southerly direction along said line to a point intersected by a line running west from the point of beginning, thence east to the place of beginning.

### Boundary Justification

This boundary description includes the Oxford Hotel building and matches the parcel that was originally sold to the builder of the hotel. The south, east, and north boundaries match the south, east, and north faces of the building. The west boundary matches the former right-of-way of the Chicago, Indianapolis, and Louisville Railway, which is also the west line of Lot 36.