

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 instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any 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 from the instructions.

## 1. Name of Property

Historic name: El Rancho Hotel and Casino

Other names/site number: N/A

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

## 2. Location

Street & number: 1629 Lake Avenue

City or town: Wells State: Nevada County: Elko

Not For Publication: ☐ Vicinity: ☐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 X nomination    request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets    does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

   national    statewide X local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

X A    B    C    D

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

State Historic Preservation Officer

Signature of certifying official/Title:

Nevada State Historic Preservation Office

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

Date

Signature of commenting official:

Date

Title :

State or Federal agency/bureau  
or Tribal Government

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#### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this 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:) \_\_\_\_\_

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Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

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#### 5. Classification

##### Ownership of Property

- Private: ☐  
Public – Local ☒  
Public – State ☐  
Public – Federal ☐

##### Category of Property

- Building(s) ☒  
District ☐  
Site ☐  
Structure ☐  
Object ☐

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**Number of Resources within Property**

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

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

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**6. Function or Use**  
**Historic Functions**

                                      
DOMESTIC: Hotel  
COMMERCIAL/TRADE: Restaurant  
                                      
                                      
                                    

**Current Functions**

                                      
WORK IN PROGRESS

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## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

Late 19<sup>th</sup> and Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century American Movements: Commercial Style

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### Materials:

Principal exterior materials of the property:

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Brick

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Concrete

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## NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

### Summary Paragraph

The 1949 El Rancho Hotel is a two-story brick commercial building in downtown Wells, Nevada. The building has a row of storefronts on the first floor and double-hung windows on the second floor. Decorative elements include brick belt courses, concrete panels between windows, a neon sign at storefront level, and a large two-sided neon sign on the roof. Change in ownership and natural disasters from the late 1980s to the 2010s resulted in alterations to the building, including reconfiguration of the entrance and some storefronts. However, the building retains its original character, massing, neon signs, configuration, first floor circulation patterns, and furnishings, including those within the bar and the Ranch Room restaurant.

### Overview and Setting

Wells, Nevada is located in the northeast region of the state, in Elko County. The town is situated along the junction of Interstate 80 and US Route 93, approximately 50 miles east of Elko. Wells has approximately 6.9 square miles of total land area and its diagonal street grid is oriented to the southeast. The El Rancho Hotel is a part of Wells' downtown commercial area located along Seventh and Sixth Streets, near the Union Pacific Railroad tracks that run northeast of, and

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parallel to, Seventh Street a block and a half from the hotel. Sixth Street is the main thoroughfare through downtown and is the Interstate 80 business loop. The downtown landscape is predominately open and paved, with pedestrian sidewalks and streets designed for two-way traffic with parallel parking.

The hotel is located at 1629 Lake Avenue on a 0.129-acre lot at the corner of Lake Avenue and Sixth Street. The front, southeast elevation faces Lake Avenue and Wells' Heritage Park across the street. An alleyway runs along its northeast side elevation, separating the hotel from a vacant lot to the northeast. Several simple domestic structures are located on a lot along the northwest (rear) elevation, and the abandoned, one-story Trail 40 Café building immediately abuts the hotel's southwest side elevation.

## Exterior

The El Rancho Hotel is a two-part commercial block building with 11,126 square feet of interior space between its two floors and an additional 5,625 square feet in the basement.<sup>1</sup> The entire building has two and three wythe exterior brick veneer walls extending to the roofline, with a concrete wall foundation and steel supports in the basement.<sup>2</sup> The flat asphalt composition roof sits below the brick parapet wall with a concrete cap. After structural damage from a 6.0 magnitude earthquake in 2008, reinforcements were added, with the brick veneer tied to the interior structural walls to stabilize all four exterior elevations.

The first floor of the front elevation consists of three bays, with the southern bay being larger and containing two small storefronts of unequal width. The center bay includes two large storefront windows flanking the central main entrance, which has a non-historic metal door with two sidelights. The northern bay includes three large rectangular storefront windows with identical features. The southern bay contains two small, asymmetrical storefronts—the southernmost with a metal door and one large rectangular window and the adjacent storefront with one storefront window and a metal door flanked by two narrow vertical windows. Above each storefront window and entrance in the center and north bays are three divided transom windows. The southern bay is topped with the original overhead metal awning with white metal lettering reading "El Rancho Hotel Bar & Casino." Additionally, a strip of damaged light bulbs runs along the top part of the awning, above and behind the white metal sign as well as over the northern bay. All bays feature paneled storefront bulkheads and simple wood pilasters that separate the storefront windows.

The current fixed, single plate bay windows and the configuration of the bays are not original to the design of the El Rancho. Historically, the center and the north bay were identical widths, each with a recessed entrance flanked by two large storefront windows. The southernmost bay

<sup>1</sup> Parcel Details for 002542007, accessed May 20, 2020,  
<http://elkonv.devnetwedge.com/parcel/view/002542007/2020>

<sup>2</sup> *Preliminary Report - Damage and Recommendations PE Project 8037*. Wells, NV: Palmer Engineering Structural Engineers. 2008.

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was wider, with a recessed double door entry to the casino and a separate single door entry to the barbershop. These two entry doors were adjacent to one other and flanked by two larger storefront windows (See Photo 0045). The “El Rancho Hotel Bar and Casino” sign above the awning was left in its original location above the southern bay. Alterations over the last 30 years have converted the storefronts to their current appearance.

The second story exterior features plain red brick in a running bond with soldier belts running above and below the row of windows. The fenestration is asymmetrical, with three evenly spaced single-hung windows separated by three original decorative concrete aggregate panels located above the southernmost bay. Above the center bay, one single-hung window, a boarded window opening, and one narrow vertical window are separated by two concrete aggregate panels. Finally, above the northernmost bay, two concrete aggregate panels flank a narrow vertical window, and one single-hung window is located at the north end of the façade. Additionally, in the brick wall above each concrete panel is a single tan concrete decorative inset that matches the decorative square elements of the concrete panels.

Due to the damage sustained from the 2008 earthquake, brick restoration was undertaken in 2019 to repair damage to the second-floor exterior wall and to the parapet wall, including the concrete cap. This required the stabilization of the exterior brick veneer wall with ties to an interior wood-framed reinforced wall, built from the basement up to the roofline. The parapet wall is reinforced with ties to an interior concrete block wythe built above the roofline.<sup>3</sup>

The northeast elevation in particular suffered substantial damage from the 2008 earthquake, requiring brick restoration to the second story wall and to the brick parapet wall. Because the limited number of salvaged original bricks were predominately used to repair the façade on the southeast elevation, the northeast elevation was repaired with new matching bricks above the top soldier line. Below the top soldier line, the northeast elevation has five standard single-hung windows and two narrow single-hung windows on the second floor, underscored by a soldier line running beneath them. A fire escape door with a metal fire escape landing and ladder is mounted on the west end of the second floor, between the kitchen exhaust vent and the westernmost window. The first floor of the northeast elevation consists of a narrow ventilation window on the east side of the wall, followed by a central exit door from the café space, several utility meters directly west of the exit door, an industrial kitchen exhaust, and finally a door from the kitchen space on the west end of the wall.

The southwest elevation only has two single-hung windows on the second floor and the northwest rear elevation has three single-hung windows on the north end and three boarded windows on the south end bounded by a top and bottom soldier line. These elevations are largely obscured by other private structures that abut the hotel building. It is important to note that the single-hung windows appear to be post-1980s based on their construction. There are two types of contemporary windows: a standard size that was intended for living spaces, and a narrow size

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<sup>3</sup> Ruiz, Mariana and Supp, Jolene. Email Correspondence with Jolene Supp. Email. March 26, 2019.

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window that was intended for bathroom spaces. In comparison, historic photographs show that the original windows in the property consisted of casement windows, both narrow and double casements, throughout the second story (See Photo 0040).

A prominent feature of the building is the neon sign on the southeast corner of the roof. It is comprised of two panels, one facing east and the other facing west, slightly angled toward the south. This was most likely designed to increase its visibility to eastbound traffic on the highway. The sign, created by the renowned Utah-based Young Electric Sign Company (YESCo) reads "El Rancho Hotel" in large cursive and block font and "Cafe Bar Casino" in a smaller block font, similar to the sign above the metal awning on the façade. The most impressive feature of the sign is the design of a horse carrying two riders. When the sign is lit, the neon animation shows the horse bucking. It is reported by local residents that the sign is relit on an annual basis and that it is still functional.<sup>4</sup> Although the sign has weathered, historic photos reveal that the neon sign has not changed much since it was added to the building in 1949 (See Photo 0045).

### **Interior Description Summary**

The El Rancho's rectangular massing accommodates a predominately open first floor plan, accessible from three contemporary doors on Lake Avenue. The second-floor apartment units are accessible via an interior stairway along the southwest elevation, while the basement is accessible via two stairways; one directly opposite the second-floor stairway, just east of the bar, and the other on the southwest wall, in the north corner of the kitchen. The original second floor hotel rooms have been modified to accommodate two apartment units, while the first floor has been relatively untouched.

### **First Story Interior**

The first floor largely retains its original floor plan, including the barbershop, main bar, gaming room, Ranch Room restaurant, restrooms, and café. The gaming room is located on the southern part of the building, and it is the first room guests encounter upon walking through the old casino entry. It is a large open space with an original hardwood-back bar that runs along the southwest wall. The bar measures approximately 315" (26.25') long and extends 94" (~7.83') into the room from the southwest wall. It consists of a bar top and a bar back, which meet at the far west end of the bar in a curved L-shape form. The bar back consists of three mirrored, stepped bays with curved wood moldings accenting the overhead lightning. Glass cabinets with three shelves, also topped with a curved wood molding accenting the overhead lighting to showcase liquors, flank the three mirrored bays. The base of the bar back is a wood structure with built in cabinets and shelves, and a center-stepped countertop for displaying liquors, glasses, and the cash register (See photo 0043). The wood bar top sits above a wood-base structure with wood siding. An icebox, refrigerator, and tap dispensary are tucked into the base structure of the bar, facing the bartender. The bar top and bar seating follow a curved L-shaped form, connecting to the west

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<sup>4</sup> Reinheimer, Missy and Eriksen, Mike. Personal Communications with Mike Eriksen. Personal, June 15, 2017.

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end of the bar. A decorative curved wood molding accents the armrest of the bar top, extending approximately 10" away from the base to accommodate contemporary bar stools. The bar top stands 44" high while the bar back measures 94.5" at its highest point. The bar back, bar top, and base structures are all original furnishings of the El Rancho Hotel, as depicted in historic photographs (See photo 0041).

The gaming room retains its original wood flooring, as indicated by its geometric design featuring a large central rectangle made from thin strips of flooring. The ceiling tiles are painted mauve with a green border, divided into an eastern, middle, and western area by massive support beams. Several ceiling tiles are failing in the center area of the room, while the ceiling joists have been exposed on the east side, near the front entrance of the gaming room. Historic photos prove that these ceiling tiles are original to the building but were painted at a later time (See photo 0044). The crown moldings are all original, albeit of simple design. Stained wood wainscoting runs along the perimeter of most of the room. The separate men's and women's bathrooms are to the rear of the gaming room and bar, on the southwest corner of the building. Nida Quilici, descendant of original building owner Leo Quilici, remembered that the rear of the gaming room had an area where people could dance, although there was never a separate dance floor installed.<sup>5</sup> A 1988 mural of Leo Quilici is located on the south wall of the main gaming room just to the east of the main bar. The mural, modeled after an early photograph of Quilici, depicts the owner in a standing pose with his left hand in his trouser pocket, modeling an elegant brown suit topped with a hat.<sup>6</sup>

An open space adjacent to the main gaming room, in the east area of the building facing Lake Avenue, represents the room where the original barbershop was located. A 1988 mural depicting four men with a barber's pole marks the area's historic role as a barbershop. The names "Waldo Jones," "Jim West," "Bill Dedman," and "Jesse Sharp" are painted beneath their respective portraits. This area was originally enclosed with two perpendicular walls and had its own entrance door adjacent to the Casino entry (See photo 0042).

The north side of the gaming room reveals two separate cased entrances, one to the Ranch Room dining area on the west and one to the café on the east. The café faces Lake Avenue and lies in the northeast area of the building. Large glass panel windows run along Lake Avenue and illuminate the space. The non-historic laminate and tile floors have been removed, exposing the original wood floor, as have the dropped ceiling tiles exposing the ceiling joists. A door located on the northeast wall of the café leading out to the alleyway has been blocked by the reinforced wall that has been added to the entire northeast wall.

A serving counter sits at the rear of the café's west corner and remains in excellent condition. A "pass-through" service window, complete with a miniature green awning, is situated at the cafe's south wall adjacent to the counter, servicing the gaming room.

<sup>5</sup> Reinheimer, Missy, and Quilici, Nida. Personal Communication with Nida Quilici. Personal. June 15, 2017.

<sup>6</sup> 20170613\_104113 (*Historic Photograph of Leo Quilici*). n.d. Photograph.



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The hotel's kitchen lies in the northwest corner of the first floor, now opened to the adjacent café space. A stairway leading down to the basement is located along the northwest wall of the kitchen. Across from the stairs on the northwest wall leading to the alleyway is a pair of double doors, currently blocked by the reinforced wall built along the northeast wall. On the south wall of the kitchen is a standard size door frame that originally led to the Ranch Room dining area.

The Ranch Room restaurant in the western part of the first floor is the most elaborate room in the building and retains much of its historic integrity. The ceiling and walls are surfaced with dark, varnished log paneling to imitate a log cabin. Some of the logs serve as structural beams, while others are purely decorative. Two wagon wheel light fixtures hang from the ceiling with three modern-day electric lamps suspended from the felloes, a temporary addition until the fixtures are restored to their original condition. Seven small electrical light sconces are located on the walls throughout the room: two on the east wall flanking the chimney, two on the north wall flanking the awning, two on the west wall above the curved booths, and one on the south wall over the piano. A faux fireplace sits on the eastern wall with electrical outlets placed in the firebox. Original leather, diamond-tufted booths and commercial dining furniture are still intact in this room and the wood floors appear to be historic. A door once existed on the room's north wall beneath the log awning leading to the kitchen but has since been sealed and is no longer functional.

The primary modification to note on the first floor is the enclosure of the three front entrances. Historic photos provide evidence of three recessed storefront entryways along the front elevation (See photo 0045). Another notable alteration is the sealing of a door between the El Rancho and the Old Trail 40 Café, the building that abuts the southwest wall of the El Rancho. This two-way entry point has been drywalled off but remains visible from the interior of either building. Additionally, the enclosed barbershop space has been opened and is now a part of the main gaming room (See photo 0042).

## Second Story Interior

The second floor is accessible via a stairwell on the southwest wall of the gaming room and features the same stained wooden wainscoting that is found along the perimeter of the main gaming room downstairs. Although the U-shaped footprint of the second story retains most of the original hotel room spaces, there have been several alterations to the original circulation. The southwest rooms were adjoined into a 4-bedroom, 3-bath apartment with a kitchen during the ownership of Charles Cobb sometime in the late 1980s or early 1990s. Gene and Margaret Kaplan adjoined the northern rooms into a 9-bedroom, 3-bath apartment with a kitchen in the early 2000s. Of the four original rooms on the front (southeast) elevation, two of the bedrooms share one bathroom along the south wall, one bedroom retained its original bathroom, and the central room was completely removed to allow access to a balcony that was located atop a non-historic front portico that was later removed. The section of wall where the non-historic portico was located is now reinforced with a framed wall tied to the brick wythe.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Reinheimer, Missy, and Kaplan, Margaret. Email Correspondence with Margaret Kaplan. Email. August 6, 2017.

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Charles Cobb's apartment, located in the southwestern area of the building, bears the most non-historic modification, including ceiling modifications, a kitchen created in the 1980s, and the adjoined southern rooms that comprise the apartment living space itself. The 1980s kitchen in the southeast area of the apartment has been removed, leaving the black and white checkerboard tile flooring. The walls have been stripped of the drywall to reinforce the brick wythe, and a white-top serving counter has been removed. The dropped acoustic ceilings panels covering the original ceiling have been removed to patch the water damage to the ceiling from the 2008 earthquake.

The Kaplans' apartment located on the north side of the building, bore the brunt of the damage from the 2008 earthquake and from the subsequent exposure to the elements over the past several years. Each room displays varying levels of damage, either from the earthquake, the elements, or wildlife that have found their way into the structure after the failure of the roof. The most apparent damage has been caused by rain, which has led to the damage of the drywall and the paint on the ceiling and on several of the walls. In 2019, the roof was repaired to prevent any additional moisture and natural elements into the rooms and a reinforced wall was added to the northeast elevation to reinforce the brick wythe. Other modifications include the removal of non-historic partition walls and the repair of the ceiling trusses along the north and east area of the apartment.<sup>8</sup>

Overall, there are twelve bathrooms located on the second floor, all in their original locations with varying degree of alternations to their circulation. The Kaplans upgraded the plumbing and electricity in the 2000s but they kept most of the fixtures, bathtubs, sinks, medicine cabinets, and vanities.<sup>9</sup> The floors and walls in the bathrooms are surfaced with colored ceramic tiles in pastel shades of yellow, blue, green, or pink, most likely original to the building.

## Basement

The basement is accessible from two stairways on the first floor, one on the southwest wall just east of the bar and the other on the northwest wall of the kitchen. The building's structural materials are visible in the basement, including the board-formed concrete wall foundation, the overheard floor joist construction, and the steel structural reinforcements. The basement also features the original boiler and brick coal furnace from 1949. The stairway at the south end of the basement is of wood construction, with open wood steps, wide wood stringers, and metal railing. The stair opening is supported by wood posts. The staircase in the north end of the basement is of concrete construction. It also has a simple metal railing. The basement formerly had non-historic partition walls that created storage rooms, a mechanical room, and walk-in freezers. Those walls were removed during the current rehabilitation project and as of the writing of this nomination, the basement is one large open space. Future plans for the basement include reintroducing partition walls to demarcate various secondary spaces.

<sup>8</sup> Ruiz, Mariana and Supp, Jolene. Email Correspondence with Jolene Supp. Email. May 20, 2020.

<sup>9</sup> Reinheimer, Missy, and Kaplan, Margaret. Personal Communication with Margaret Kaplan. Personal. June 15,

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## Integrity

Over the last 30 years, the El Rancho has undergone several alterations to its façade and interior spaces. The most prominent alterations include the modification of the three recessed storefronts, the renovations to the casino floor including the enclosure of the entrance on the southwest wall to the Old Trail 40 Café, and the removal of the two walls enclosing the barbershop. Upstairs, a 4-bedroom, 3-bath apartment in the southwest area of the hotel was adjoined in the early 1990s during Charles Cobb's ownership, as well as the adjoining 9-bedroom, 3-bath apartment in the northern area of the hotel during Gene and Margaret Kaplan's ownership in the 2000s. Additionally, the stairwell and hot tub deck on the roof, and the front portico and balcony, were installed in the 1980s and 1990s but have since been removed. In 2019, the brick veneer wall sections that were damaged in the 2008 earthquake were reinforced and reconstructed using a mix of original and in-kind bricks.

Despite these alterations, the El Rancho retains a strong degree of integrity in its design and workmanship as the first hotel in Wells to incorporate structural steel construction and electricity as a two-part commercial block building. Its strong integrity of location is recognized due to it being one of the few surviving historic commercial buildings in downtown Wells following a disastrous 6.0 magnitude earthquake in February 2008. The building's core materials comprised of a concrete wall foundation, steel frame structural reinforcement, and brick veneer walls remain in place since its original construction in 1949, adding to its integrity of materials. Additionally, the hotel's geographic tie to Wells' historic downtown district, the Union Pacific Railroad, and the Victory Highway allows the building to retain integrity of association and setting to its historic period as a valuable example of Wells' commercial development.

The combination of the undisturbed massing, original first floor circulation, original bar and Ranch Room furnishings, historic neon sign, and its original location and setting contribute to the El Rancho's strong integrity of feeling as a relic of tourism and entertainment for rural Nevada during the mid-twentieth century.

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## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

- ☒ 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

- ☐ 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 old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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**Areas of Significance**

ENTERTAINMENT & RECREATION  
COMMERCE

**Period of Significance**

1949-1977

**Significant Dates**

1949

**Significant Person**

*(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)*

**Cultural Affiliation**

**Architect/Builder**

WHITE & ALTER CONSTRUCTION CO.

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## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

### Summary Paragraph

The El Rancho Hotel is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places at the local level under Criterion A in the area of Entertainment/Recreation and Commerce for its role as a prominent social and commercial venue in downtown Wells in the mid-twentieth century. Wells served as a regional hub for nearby mining and ranching operations throughout the Ruby and Snake Mountains on the upper reaches of the Humboldt River watershed. Paired with post-war tourist traffic from U.S. Highways 93 and 40 (The Victory Highway), Wells' economy demanded overnight accommodations that met the tastes of mid-twentieth century American travelers. In response, in 1949, Leo Quilici constructed the El Rancho, which became one of the most recognizable establishments in Elko County during the mid-twentieth century as a gambling hall, dance club, bar and restaurant, and hotel for travelers and locals alike. The building's period of significance of 1949-1977 reflects the property's continual role as a community anchor until it was sold by the Quilici family.

### HISTORY OF WELLS, NEVADA

The community of Wells began in September 1869 as a single boxcar, set up by the Central Pacific Railroad to serve as a passenger and freight station. A wagon route leading to Wells had already been established by 1845 as part of the overland trail to California and Oregon, between Bishop Creek and what was known then as Humboldt Wells. The name "Humboldt" was given to the area and its river by American explorer John C. Fremont, who had arrived in the area in 1845. Prior to Fremont's arrival, the northeastern Nevada river was known by numerous other names, including Mary's River.<sup>10</sup> The Humboldt name became solidified by 1848 when Fremont labeled it as the Humboldt River in his maps.

The site of the Central Pacific Railroad boxcar was located one mile west of the present-day City of Wells. Its position at the head of the Humboldt River, with its many natural springs, meadows, and wells, was a convenient rest stop for emigrants making the journey westward. Humboldt Wells watered and rejuvenated hundreds of westbound emigrants and their livestock throughout the 1840s and 1850s.<sup>11</sup>

During construction of the Transcontinental Railroad, the Central Pacific Railroad designated Humboldt Wells as a helper station, which allowed supplies to be sent closer to the larger stations that were under construction. As operations grew, so did the need to accommodate this growth, and operations consequently moved to the present site of Wells, Nevada.

Humboldt Wells experienced tremendous growth in its formative years. The success of the T-

<sup>10</sup> Greenshaw, Charles. "Elko and Emigrant Roots." *Overland Journal* 14, no. 2 (1996), 6.

<sup>11</sup> Hulse, James W. *A Great Basin Mosaic: Cultures of Rural Nevada*. Reno, NV: University of Nevada Press, 2017, 29.

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Cup Mine near Egan Canyon, 85 miles south of the city, and the establishment of Cherry Creek just to the south, profited Humboldt Wells considerably. These important mining locales brought a steady stream of traffic north into Humboldt Wells.<sup>12</sup> The stagecoach moved away from making sporadic intermittent stops, and by November 1871, it ran service to Humboldt Wells three times per week, returning on alternate days.<sup>13</sup> Humboldt Wells became the stop off for Clover and Steptoe Valleys and other places southward.<sup>14</sup> Nevada historian Shawn Hall adds that by this time, "Wells became the main shipping point for mines at Spruce Mountain, Victoria, Dolly Varden, and Cherry Creek, as well as for farmers and ranchers in Starr, Ruby, and Clover Valleys. Stage and freight roads emanated from Wells during the 1870s."<sup>15</sup>

By 1873, the population of Wells was around 300, not including the substantial Chinese population and the American Indian population of *Newe* (Western Shoshone) who called the region home. In that same year, the Elko County Commissioners voted to officially change the name of the town, shortening it to "Wells." One year prior, the townspeople of Wells had already built a one-room schoolhouse, which soon expanded to two rooms. Indicative of the importance of the railroad, school children were called to classes by a locomotive bell.<sup>16</sup> As the town did not yet have a church, church services were also held inside the school. Like most of Nevada's mining and railroad communities, Chinese immigrants were a significant population in Wells. The Chinese were among the town's earliest residents as the Central Pacific Railroad imported most of its employees from the southern regions of China. The Chinatown district, located east of town near the roundhouse, has since been demolished and is currently the site of a c. 1995 firehouse. When the transcontinental railroad was completed, many Chinese railroad workers made Wells their permanent home.<sup>17</sup> Signs of the Chinese presence in Wells are still evident. Chinese artifacts related to former buildings on Front Street, or Seventh Street are still discovered.<sup>18</sup>

Like other small towns that depended heavily on the mines and railroads for survival, Wells experienced several booms and declines in both economic activity and population throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The railroads and the nearby agricultural producers who relied on the town for transporting their goods continued to keep Wells afloat. In the early twentieth century, entrepreneurs opened new businesses in Wells including newspapers, banks, the first church, the first high school, and a movie theater.

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<sup>12</sup> Petterson, Edna, Louise A Ulph, and Victoria Goodwin. *Nevada's Northeast Frontier*. Reno, NV: University of Nevada Press, 1991, 578.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

<sup>15</sup> Hall, Shawn. *Connecting the West: Historic Railroad Stops & Stage Connections in Elko County, Nevada*. Reno, NV: University of Nevada Press, 2002, 42.

<sup>16</sup> Hickson, Howard. "Wells, Nevada: A Pictorial History." *Northeast Nevada Historical Society Quarterly* 86, no. 1 (1986), 3.

<sup>17</sup> "Wells - Transcontinental Town." *Wells Herald*. 2004.

<sup>18</sup> "Have You Seen Front Street?" Rep. *Have You Seen Front Street?* Wells, NV: Wells Society for Preservation of Western Heritage & Wells Chamber of Commerce, 2004.

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Wells' status as a regional agricultural hub and its subsequent growth and prominence resulted in its incorporation in 1927, as well as the arrival of the first rural electrification system in Nevada.<sup>19</sup> University of Nevada graduate Harry H. Cazier built a new hydroelectric plant at his Trout Creek Ranch, and nearby Starr Valley residents consequently built a power line that ran to Deeth and Wells.<sup>20</sup> Cazier created the Wells Power Company, which eventually became the Wells Rural Electrification Company.

With the advent of diesel locomotives in the 1950s, helper stations such as Wells that provided coal and water refueling were no longer necessary.<sup>21</sup> Fortunately, Wells had diversified its local economy and no longer needed to rely upon the railroads to sustain its activity.<sup>22</sup> The rise of automobiles, public highways, and automobile tourism provided a new impetus for downtown development in the twentieth century.<sup>23</sup>

### **THE VICTORY HIGHWAY / U.S. 40 AND COMMERCE IN WELLS**

The Victory Highway, a cross-country highway developed in the 1920s, was another important travel corridor that brought many travelers into Wells and helped shift its economy from a regional agricultural hub into a spot offering travel accommodations. Constructed as a memorial to the men and women who served the United States during World War I, the Victory Highway was to be the shortest route between New York and San Francisco. Nevada newspaper editor and columnist Warren Monroe wrote that a chapter of the Victory Highway Association formed in Elko in the 1920s, and representatives from most of the communities along the route participated in that early group.<sup>24</sup> Much of the Association's budget targeted tourism, bolstering the region to encourage travel into northern Nevada. Publications such as *Concrete Highway Magazine* boasted that the portion of the road passing through Nevada was "one of the most interesting sections traversed by the Victory Highway."<sup>25</sup> In addition to being a memorial, the construction of the highway vastly improved driving conditions for motorists across the western region of the country.<sup>26</sup>

The establishment of the Victory Highway began an era of fierce competition with the other highways and the associations who represented these routes throughout the state. The main competitor of the Victory Highway Association was the Lincoln Highway Association, which was established in 1913. The Lincoln Highway also traversed Nevada, but in the center of the state through Ely, Eureka,

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<sup>19</sup> Hall, *Connecting the West*, 5

<sup>20</sup> Petterson et al, *Nevada's Northeast Frontier*, 584.

<sup>21</sup> Hall, *Connecting the West*, 47.

<sup>22</sup> Hall, *Connecting the West*, 49.

<sup>23</sup> Hall, *Connecting the West*, 47.

<sup>24</sup> Monroe, Warren. "Nevada's Editors: An Inside Look." *Nevada State Journal*, March 27, 1976, 13C

<sup>25</sup> "Touring the New Victory Highway." *Concrete Highway Magazine* 8, no. 4 (April 1924), 94.

<sup>26</sup> West, H. G. "The Victory Highway- A Transcontinental Memorial." *The Highway Magazine* XV, no. 7. August 1924, 10.



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and Austin instead of through Wells, Elko, and Winnemucca like the Victory Highway did. Competition also arose between the communities, who vied for the tourists who traveled along these distinct routes. Monroe writes, "... As the highway improved, the association turned its attention to promotion of travel, entering upon a period of intense competition between competing routes for this highly desirable tourist travel."<sup>27</sup>

The highway associations spent thousands of dollars during the 1930s to attract tourists along their routes. Members of the Communities along each route took part in efforts to draw more people to their respective towns and cities, through the creation of fueling stations, motor courts, restaurants, and hotels.

For Wells, the Victory Highway spurred a boom, one that shifted the axis of economic activity away from the railroad onto Sixth Street, the main thoroughfare of the Victory Highway. The highway brought scores of motorists and tourists into Wells' historic downtown area. In the late 1930s, the Victory Highway became U.S. Highway 40, or "The Fabulous Forty," making it part of the great superhighway network of the day.<sup>28</sup> Travel along the highway remained popular in later years as well, including during the boom period of American leisure travel that occurred after World War II. Long-time Wells resident and former owner/resident of the El Rancho Hotel, Peg Kaplan, explains:

"Post-war, all of a sudden you could get gasoline again. And you could get cars again, and cars were starting to become very popular... People were buying cars and people were taking cross-country trips, and in those days... You had to stop frequently. And one of the reasons Wells was doing so well was because it had gas stations."<sup>29</sup>

As automobiles grew ever more plentiful and popular during that period, families could more easily journey across the nation, spurring the development of fueling stations, hotels, motels, and other recreational venues along the travel routes. Patterson adds that the presence of Highway 40 and Highway 93 contributed to Wells' ongoing importance as a crossroads community, contributing to the development and success of the El Rancho Hotel.<sup>30</sup>

## **THE EL RANCHO AND DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL ESTABLISHMENTS IN WELLS**

The Great Depression brought hardship to American cities, and Wells was no exception. Despite the economic depression that lasted from 1929-1939, the businesses on Seventh Street still retained clientele who sought a break from their labor-intensive work weeks. When gambling was legalized in March of 1931, that provided another form of escape and communal entertainment. "Grim as the Depression was, Saturday night was still time for a drink and to take

<sup>27</sup> Monroe, "Nevada's Editors," 13C

<sup>28</sup> "Wells Visitor and Relocation Guide." *Dahl Publication and Design, Inc.* 2015, 18.

<sup>29</sup> Reinheimer, Missy, and Kaplan, Margaret. Personal Communication with Margaret Kaplan. Personal. June 15, 2017

<sup>30</sup> Patterson et al, *Nevada's Northeast Frontier*, 589.

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a chance at the gaming tables as cowboys, railroad men, and miners gathered in Front Street bars.”<sup>31</sup>

Residents in Wells attribute much of the city’s endurance through the highs and lows of World War II and postwar eras to its businesses – businesses whose function did not pivot around the mines or the railroads, but to the traveling masses. Saloons, hotels, restaurants, and bars still catered to the hard-working miners and ranchers in the region, but also to adventurous motorists, who flocked to Wells on the weekends for entertainment. Visitors were drawn to the social and commercial establishments in Wells from Elko, Carlin, Wendover, Deeth, Clover Valley, and Starr Valley.<sup>32</sup> Additionally, the military training grounds located just 58 miles east in the town of Wendover on the Utah-Nevada Stateline, brought military personal and family relatives to Wells, both as visiting travelers and as residents.<sup>33</sup>

Several different establishments were updated or constructed to meet the demand of the economic growth in Wells. The first of these social establishments was the Bullshead Saloon located on Seventh Street. The Bullshead was the first business in Wells, which opened on Christmas Eve 1869.<sup>34</sup> Throughout World War II, the Bullshead attracted people from the entire region and from all local professions. “Saturday was dance night and dances were packed. Hay hands, ranch hands, gandy dancers... Saturday night the town would fill up.”<sup>35</sup>

Edna Patterson points out that, “After World War II, many old buildings were replaced or renovated to meet demands of a growing summer population and facilities were provided to accommodate a summer and winter tourist trade,” thus catering to a robust tourism industry. In this period, new businesses including restaurants and hotels opened in Wells as well as a new post office and a park.<sup>36</sup>

Leo Quilici owned several of Wells' commercial establishments by the 1940s, including the Bullshead Saloon. Quilici had experience in creating lavish entertainment venues in Wells. He capitalized on the ballroom dance craze of the 1930s and 1940s, transforming the Bullshead Saloon into the city's most popular dance venue. Leo Quilici became one of the most prominent and well-loved citizens in Wells' history. He was an Italian immigrant and WWI veteran whose uncle’s ranch supplied the United States Army with horses until the end of World War I.

Although the Bullshead Saloon was a great success, Quilici was well-aware of its limitations. The 1869 structure was aging, and parts of the building fell into disrepair. Quilici wanted Wells

<sup>31</sup> Kaplan, Gene and Peg Kaplan. “The Story of The El Rancho Wells, Nevada with Observations and Comments Regarding Leo Quilici and other members of the Quilici Family: Ranchers, Bronco Busters, Merchants, Casino Operators, Saloon Keepers on Nevada's Northeastern Frontier.” Wells, Nevada. 2001.

<sup>32</sup> Reinheimer, Missy and Supp, Jolene. Email Correspondence with Jolene Supp. Email. September 26, 2017.

<sup>33</sup> Kaplan, Gene, and Peg Kaplan . “A Gaming History of Wells, Nevada.” Publication. *A Gaming History of Wells, Nevada*. Casino Chip and Token News, 2004, 53.

<sup>34</sup> Hall, *Connecting The West*, 41.

<sup>35</sup> Kaplan, “The Story of the El Rancho,” 8.

<sup>36</sup> Patterson et al, *Nevada's Northeast Frontier*, 589.

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to have a modern structure with modern styling. He purchased vacant land on Lake Avenue to be the future site of the El Rancho Hotel in 1948. A residence and post office that belonged to long time Wells resident and postmaster Emanuel Bollschweiler (1880-1964) stood upon the site years earlier. Members of the Supp family recall that the post office burned down and that the land lay vacant until Leo Quilici purchased it.<sup>37</sup> Sanborn Maps from March 1943 depict a Post Office on the northeast corner of Lake Ave and Sixth Street.<sup>38</sup>

Over the winter of 1948-1949, Leo Quilici began construction on the El Rancho Hotel. As an attempt to showcase the region's greatness, Quilici spared no expense. The *Wells Progress* published an article in July 1949 that stated he spent approximately \$200,000.00 to see the project to fruition.<sup>39</sup> Notably, the El Rancho was the first hotel in Wells to incorporate structural steel construction and electricity as a two-part commercial block building.

Quilici hired an architect out of Twin Falls, Idaho (whose name is no longer known), and the White and Alter Construction company from Elko was contracted to build the El Rancho.<sup>40</sup> A February 25, 1949 article in the *Wells Progress* announced the name "El Rancho" for Wells' newest building. Kaplan describes the significance of the name:

"The El Rancho name had previously characterized a fictional hotel in the movie *Citizen [Kane]* and also designated one of the first hotels on the 'Strip' in Las Vegas. With its proximity to the Idaho and Utah borders it may be Leo Quilici envisioned a boom for Wells such as Las Vegas was to enjoy, and if the people came, Leo's El Rancho would stand ready."<sup>41</sup>

Although Wells was already an important stop in eastern Nevada and had other well-known establishments in its downtown district, including the Bullshead Saloon, the San Marin Hotel, the Crystal Hotel, and the Allen Hotel, the El Rancho Hotel's modern construction, electric lighting, and lavish interiors made it a popular attraction to visitors along the Victory Highway as it was located along the main thoroughfare of the Victory highway.<sup>42</sup>

The El Rancho Hotel became an economic and social anchor for downtown Wells beginning with its highly anticipated grand opening. Grand openings for hotels were frequently major social events, with the El Rancho's intended to showcase the new hotel and gaming palace. The *Wells Progress* ran a front-page article touting the event on July 8, 1949:

"One of the most auspicious events of its kind to ever occur in Wells is scheduled for tomorrow evening when the official grand opening of the new El Rancho hotel will be

<sup>37</sup> Reinheimer, Missy and Supp, Jolene. Phone Interview with Jolene Supp. Phone. August 31, 2017

<sup>38</sup> "Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Wells, Elko County, Nevada ..." Sanborn Maps Wells, Elko Co., NV. Accessed May 21, 2020. [https://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn05301\\_002/](https://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn05301_002/).

<sup>39</sup> "Gala Opening El Rancho Scheduled Tomorrow Evening." *Wells Progress*. July 8, 1949, 1.

<sup>40</sup> Mariana Ruiz contacted the Idaho SHPO on May 19, 2020 but could not track down an architect for the El Rancho. Additional research is required.

<sup>41</sup> Kaplan, "The Story of the El Rancho," 9.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid

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held. This building was just recently completed... and gives the traveling public the most up to date hotel accommodations imaginable... Mr. Quilici and his son, Joe... have made extensive preparations to entertain the large crowd that is expected to attend the gala opening night. Music for dancing in the beautiful cocktail lounge will be provided and a buffet style supper will be served... The building has modern fluorescent lighting and scientifically designed bar and cases. Furniture and fittings are of the finest and it represents today one of the most modern business sites in the community.”<sup>43</sup>

The celebration was a success, as reported in the following issue of the *Wells Progress* on 15 July 1949:

“The grand opening of Wells' new hotel, the El Rancho, last Saturday evening turned out to be a swell affair. Crowds of people from all over the county came to this city for the event and were well entertained. Many who had not before viewed this fine new hotel building were amazed at its ornateness... Wells should feel proud to have such a fine building.”<sup>44</sup>

Kaplan states that the El Rancho opening was a regional event that seemed to herald future prosperity.<sup>45</sup> In an interview with Quilici's daughter, Lena, she explains that her father “built the El Rancho so the town would grow and because he was proud of Wells.”<sup>46</sup>

Clientele of the El Rancho could look to a variety of options to suit their entertainment needs. A full gaming room offered games such as dice, 21 and other card games, roulette, slots, and ping pong. Nida Quilici describes:

"We had entertainment lined up... with deals... and they would send entertainers in. Maybe they were there a week, and maybe they'd be there a couple of weeks... Mainly it was an entertainment outfit. They used to send people in... Sometimes there was a lady that came in and played the piano and sang, and another time a guy with a guitar or violin... Usually they were there for a week, but mainly on Saturday and Sunday, Friday nights they'd come in.”<sup>47</sup>

Visitors could choose between the full restaurant, sometimes called the Ranch Room, or the classic café overlooking Lake Avenue. The Ranch Room, fitted out with log-paneled walls for an authentic old log cabin feel, was the prime place for banquets and large parties. The room was fitted with two wagon wheel chandeliers, which owner Quilici found in the nearby O'Neil Basin just north of Wells.<sup>48</sup> Business was consistently brisk during the deer hunting season, for which Nida recalls holding large spaghetti feeds in the Ranch Room.<sup>49</sup> The hardwood mirrored bar

<sup>43</sup> "Gala Opening El Rancho Scheduled Tomorrow Evening." *Wells Progress*. July 8, 1949, 1.

<sup>44</sup> "El Rancho Barbershop Now Open." *Wells Progress*. July 15, 1949.

<sup>45</sup> Kaplan, "The Story of the El Rancho," 12.

<sup>46</sup> Kaplan, "The Story of the El Rancho," 14.

<sup>47</sup> Reinheimer, Missy, and Quilici, Nida. Personal Communication with Nida Quilici. Personal. June 15, 2017

<sup>48</sup> Kaplan, "The Story of the El Rancho," 12.

<sup>49</sup> Reinheimer, Missy, and Quilici, Nida. Personal Communication with Nida Quilici. Personal. June 15, 2017

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became a noteworthy aspect of the building. Gene and Peg Kaplan explain the importance of the bar as a reminder "of the elegance Nevada saloon keepers provided for imbibers" and describe it as a rare example "of period bar furnishings that still remain in the casino for which they were crafted."<sup>50</sup> Similar to many downtown hotels, other businesses shared floor space in the building, including a barber shop adjacent to the gaming room. Residents recall Waldo Jones, cordially referred to by the locals as "Jonesy," as the main barber there.<sup>51</sup> A mural depicting the likenesses of Jonesy and three of his patrons, Jim West, Bill Dedman, and Jesse Sharp, still adorns the barber shop wall as a testimonial to this important social aspect of the El Rancho.

It was well-known that the weekends were the busiest times at the El Rancho. Tables could be pushed back to make space on the spacious gaming room floor for live musicians and dancing. The variety of social diversions offered by the El Rancho were appealing and extremely popular with locals and tourists alike. Live entertainment consistently served as a major component of the social experience at the El Rancho.

The rural landscape of northeast Nevada attracted many national celebrities and entertainers who sought respite in the relatively remote communities of White Pine and Elko counties. Many Wells residents provided oral history accounts of a noteworthy performance by Lawrence Welk, a popular mid-century American musician, at the El Rancho. Several Wells residents came together on a cold, snowy night to assist Mr. Welk when he was stranded there on the way to a performance in Idaho. In gratitude to the citizens who so generously helped him, Mr. Welk returned to Wells for a special performance at a champagne happy hour at the El Rancho, and then did another show at the local high school.<sup>52</sup> Residents recall other celebrities coming through the El Rancho, although memories differ. Some claim that Jimmy Stewart and Bing Crosby may have come through, as they were both residents of the nearby Winecup Ranch. Actor Joel McCrea, who resided in Ruby Valley, was another famous personage well-known to locals.<sup>53</sup> Nida Quilici relates that there were some Nevada State Governors that came through the El Rancho, namely Grant Sawyer and Mike O'Callaghan.<sup>54</sup> Although the stories of celebrity guests are difficult to confirm and incline toward folklore, the presence of these well-known individuals is common throughout the collective memory of Wells, and the relationship between the area and personalities such as Stewart and Crosby is well-documented.

Throughout the 1950s, the El Rancho remained popular with railroad workers ("gandy dancers"), ranchers, cowboys, miners, and tourists. Many of these individuals visited town for groceries and entertainment at the El Rancho.

The hotel's large neon sign encouraged tourists and locals alike to seek out entertainment and recreation. The sign was crafted by the Young Electric Sign Company (YESCO) of Salt Lake

<sup>50</sup> Kaplan, "The Story of the El Rancho," 8.

<sup>51</sup> Reinheimer, Missy, and Eriksen, Mike. Personal Communications with Mike Eriksen. Personal, June 15, 2017.

<sup>52</sup> Kaplan, "The Story of the El Rancho," 13.

<sup>53</sup> Reinheimer, Missy, Nida Qualici, Margaret Kaplan, and Mike Eriksen, "Personal Communication with Missy Reinheimer," 2017

<sup>54</sup> Reinheimer, Missy, and Quilici, Nida. Personal Communication with Nida Quilici. Personal. June 15, 2017



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City, Utah. YESCO had already achieved renown by producing many iconic neon signs for resorts in the Fremont Street's "Glitter Gulch" area in Las Vegas, including for the Golden Nugget, Pioneer Club, and Eldorado Club. The neon sign for the El Rancho features two riders on a bucking horse in motion. Nida Quilici related that Leo intended for the sign to resemble his son, Joe, and herself.<sup>55</sup> The sign still stands atop the building. Local resident Mike Eriksen recalls the sign being lit up in recent years, in full working condition.<sup>56</sup>

The El Rancho remained in the hands of the Quilici family until Leo Quilici sold it to Art Yan in 1977 for \$65,000.00. Yan maintained the property as a successful eatery until 1987, when it was sold to Charles Cobb (a.k.a. Chuck Corbe).<sup>57</sup> Corbe relocated to Hawaii at some point in the 1990s, during which time the property fell vacant. Gene and Margaret (a.k.a. Peg) Kaplan purchased it from Chuck Corbe in 1999. They owned it and resided there, undertaking several necessary repairs and improvements to it until the earthquake forced them out in 2008. The El Rancho was then gifted by the Kaplans to the City of Wells in August 2017.

## **2008 EARTHQUAKE**

At 6:16 AM PST (14:16 UTC) on 21 February 2008, a 6.0 magnitude earthquake struck Wells. In an extensive report released by the Nevada Bureau of Mines & Geology in 2011, dePolo and La Pointe describe the rarity of this geologic event. Although Nevada is a seismically active state, the February 2008 earthquake was "the largest event in Nevada within the last 42 years, the largest earthquake to occur in the Basin and Range Province in the last 15 years, and the largest earthquake to occur in the conterminous United States in 2008."<sup>58</sup> The epicenter was approximately 6 miles (9 km) northeast of Wells, and residents describe the shaking as having continued for over 40 seconds.<sup>59</sup>

The earthquake affected the city profoundly. It caused minor damage to over 40 commercial and government buildings, roughly half the non-residential buildings in Wells, and major damage to 17 buildings.<sup>60</sup> The structures located on Front Street (also known as Seventh Street) took the brunt of the damage, and by 2014, most of the old structures on Front Street had been demolished due to lack of financing for repairs. The *Wells Progress* reported the following:

"Six years after the earthquake many of the Front Street lots with destroyed buildings had been sold and the new owners, TOG, LLC worked with the City and the State of Nevada to gain permission to reopen the old dumpsite for the use of disposing of the rubble from removal of these buildings. Last week, with that permission construction equipment

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid

<sup>56</sup> Reinheimer, Missy, and Eriksen, Mike. Personal Communications with Mike Eriksen. Personal, June 15, 2017.

<sup>57</sup> Kaplan, "The Story of the El Rancho," 15.

<sup>58</sup> dePolo, Craig, and Daphne D. La Pointe. "The 21 February 2008 Mw 6.0 Wells, Nevada Earthquake." Rep. *The 21 February 2008 Mw 6.0 Wells, Nevada Earthquake*. Wells, NV: Nevada Bureau of Mines and Geology, 2011, 7.

<sup>59</sup> Reinheimer, Missy, and Kaplan, Margaret. Personal Communication with Margaret Kaplan. Personal. June 15, 2017

<sup>60</sup> dePolo & LaPointe, "The 21 February 2008," 15.

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demolished the remaining walls leveling all to the ground and then hauled the rubble to the dumps. The dumpsite will be covered and closed."<sup>61</sup>

The El Rancho was one of the historic structures that suffered heavy damage, yet remarkably, did not face the wrecking ball as its Front Street counterparts did. The bulk of the damage was restricted to the second floor. The Nevada Bureau of Mines and Geology conducted an investigation of the earthquake damage and published their findings in a Special Publication (No. 36) in 2011. The report described the damage to the El Rancho Hotel:

"Damage... included falling of crowning bond beams, delamination and failure of parapets, falling out of the upper parts of three walls, cracking and out of place sections of brick walls and corners, slumping of part of the roof where the support from a failed wall was gone, severe interior cracking, and contend damage and disruption."<sup>62</sup>

Residents feel that the El Rancho would not have survived the earthquake had it not been for the building's steel beam construction. Leo Quilici is credited for his modernistic vision for the El Rancho, with particular regard to the steel beam construction that kept the building intact, whereas the Front Street structures without unreinforced masonry ultimately failed. That form of unreinforced masonry construction had become a general construction practice after 1890, when commercial structures switched from wood frame construction to brick construction after fires destroyed many frame buildings in town.<sup>63</sup>

## **CONCLUSION**

The El Rancho Hotel is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A in the area of Entertainment/Recreation and Commerce for its role as a prominent social and commercial venue in downtown Wells in the mid-twentieth century. Its construction along the main thoroughfare of Interstate 80 drew not only locals to dine and gamble, but also traveling tourists with overnight accommodations. With its modern design and furnishing, the El Rancho also attracted local politicians and celebrities to dine and entertain guests, becoming one of the most recognizable establishments in Elko County during the mid-twentieth century as a gambling hall, dance club, bar, restaurant, and hotel. The El Rancho continued to draw a steady stream of customers through its doors into the 1970s, contributing to the building's period of significance from 1949-1977 as a community anchor and formal stop along the Victory Highway well into the post-war era.

<sup>61</sup> Woodbury, Beth. "New Era for Historic District." *Wells Progress*. May 9, 2014

<sup>62</sup> dePolo & LaPointe, "The 21 February 2008," 283.

<sup>63</sup> "City of Wells Historic Properties Survey." Rep. *City of Wells Historic Properties Survey*. Carson City, NV Design Concepts West, 1984.

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**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 # \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

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

Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** B17937 (Nevada SHPO)

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## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of Property** 0.129

### Latitude/Longitude Coordinates (decimal degrees)

1.	41.112246°	-114.964685°
2.	41.112091°	-114.964500°
3.	41.111943°	-114.964700°
4.	41.112095°	-114.964889°



### Verbal Boundary Description

The El Rancho Hotel is located on the corner of Lake Avenue and Sixth Street. The property includes the Northeasterly one-half of lots numbered Thirty (30), Thirty-one (31) and Thirty-two (32) in Block lettered "D," as the same are laid down and delineated on the Official Plat of said City of Wells (formerly Town of Wells), on file in the Office of the said County Recorder of said County of Elko, State of Nevada. Resource boundaries include all land commonly associated with the town lot identified as Wells, Nevada APN 002-542-007.

### Boundary Justification

Resource boundaries include all land commonly associated with the town lot identified as Wells, Nevada APN 002-542-007, the lot upon which the historic building was constructed and currently sits.

El Rancho Hotel and Casino  
Name of Property

Elko County, Nevada  
County and State

## 11. Form Prepared By

Missy Reinheimer & Mariana Ruiz, Nevada Preservation Foundation  
(with assistance from the Nevada SHPO)  
330 West Washington Avenue, Ste. 106  
Las Vegas, NV 89106  
info@nevadapreservation.org  
(800) 881-5824

November 3, 2023

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El Rancho Hotel and Casino

Name of Property

Elko County, Nevada

County and State

## Photo Log

Name of Property: El Rancho Hotel  
City or Vicinity: Wells, Nevada  
County: Elko County  
State: Nevada  
Name of Photographer: Gayla Rockwell  
Date of Photographs: September 2, 2020  
Location of Original Digital Files: 330 West Washington Avenue, Las Vegas NV 89106

NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0001

Front elevation (east) of the El Rancho Hotel

NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0002

North elevation of the El Rancho Hotel

NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0003

Front elevation (east) detail of the original sign and awning

NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0004

Interior view of the café and serving counter, facing north

NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0005

Interior view of the café and adjacent kitchen space, facing west

NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0006

Interior view of the café serving counter, facing west

NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0007

Interior view of the café and serving counter, facing south

NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0008

Interior view of the bar and casino area, facing southwest

NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0009

Interior view of the Ranch Room, facing north

NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0010

Interior view of the Ranch Room, facing northeast

NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0011

Interior view of the bar and casino area, facing south

El Rancho Hotel and Casino

Name of Property

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NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0012

Interior of the first floor restroom

NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0013

Interior view of the casino and barbershop space, facing northwest

NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0014

Interior view of the casino space facing west

NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0015

Interior view of the south stairway leading up to the second floor

NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0016

Interior view of the Charles Cobb Apartment, facing west

NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0017

Interior view of the Charles Cobb Apartment, facing southwest

NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0018

Alternative view of the Charles Cobb Apartment, facing southwest

NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0019

Interior view of the Charles Cobb Apartment, facing south

NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0020

Interior view of the Charles Cobb Apartment, facing southeast

NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0021

Interior view of the Charles Cobb Apartment, facing south

NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0022

Interior view of the Charles Cobb Apartment

NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0023

Interior view of the Charles Cobb Apartment

NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0024

Interior view of 2nd floor bathroom

NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0025

Interior view of hallway in Charles Cobb Apartment, southwest

El Rancho Hotel and Casino

Name of Property

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NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0026

Interior view of Charles Cobb apartment bathroom

NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0027

Interior view of Charles Cobb apartment, facing east

NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0028

Interior view of 2<sup>nd</sup> floor bathroom

NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0028

Interior view of 2<sup>nd</sup> floor bathroom

NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0029

Interior view of Charles Cobb apartment, facing east

NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0030

Interior view of Kaplan Apartment, facing northwest

NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0031

Alternative view of Kaplan Apartment, facing north

NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0032

Hallway view of Kaplan Apartment, facing west

NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0033

Hallway view of Kaplan Apartment, facing east

NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0034

View of the Kaplan Apartment, northwest

NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0035

View of the Kaplan Apartment, northwest

NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0036

View of the Kaplan Apartment, facing east

NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0037

Interior view of restroom in Kaplan Apartment

NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0038

Interior view of restroom in Kaplan



El Rancho Hotel and Casino

Name of Property

Elko County, Nevada

County and State

ApartmentNV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0039

Interior view of restroom in Kaplan Apartment

NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0040

Historic Photo of the front façade of the El Rancho, ca. 1982. Note the step in at the front entrance. Photo by Randy Eriksen.

NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0041

Historic Photo, ca. 1950s of the hardwood bar along the south wall. Photo courtesy of Nida Quilici

NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0042

Historic photo, ca. 1950s of the gaming room, facing southeast. Photo courtesy of Nida Quilici

NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0043

Historic photo, ca. 1950s of the gaming room facing southwest. Photo courtesy of the Nida Quilici

NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0044

Historic photo, ca. 1950s of the gaming room with slot machines, facing southeast. Photo courtesy of Nida Quilici.

NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0045

Historic postcard of the El Rancho front elevation, circa 1960s, courtesy of the Elko Museum.

**Note:** Roof access was not available due to the removal of the non-original stairway and landing platform. Roof repairs were not documented.

### **Additional Photographs**

Name of Photographer: Michael Yunkin

Date of Photographs: August 18, 2017

Location of Original Digital Files: 330 West Washington Avenue, Las Vegas NV 89106

The following depict the basement and historic neon sign, as documented in 2017

NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0046

Basement view of the stairway on the south end of the building, facing southwest

NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0047

Basement view of the stairway on the north end of the building, facing northwest

El Rancho Hotel and Casino

Name of Property

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NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0048

Basement view facing northwest

NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0049

View of original mechanical equipment

NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0050

Basement view, facing northwest. Note original steel reinforced construction

NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0051

Basement view, facing northwest. Note original steel reinforced and concrete construction

NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0052

View of the neon sign from the roof, facing northeast

NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0053

View of the neon sign from the roof, facing southeast

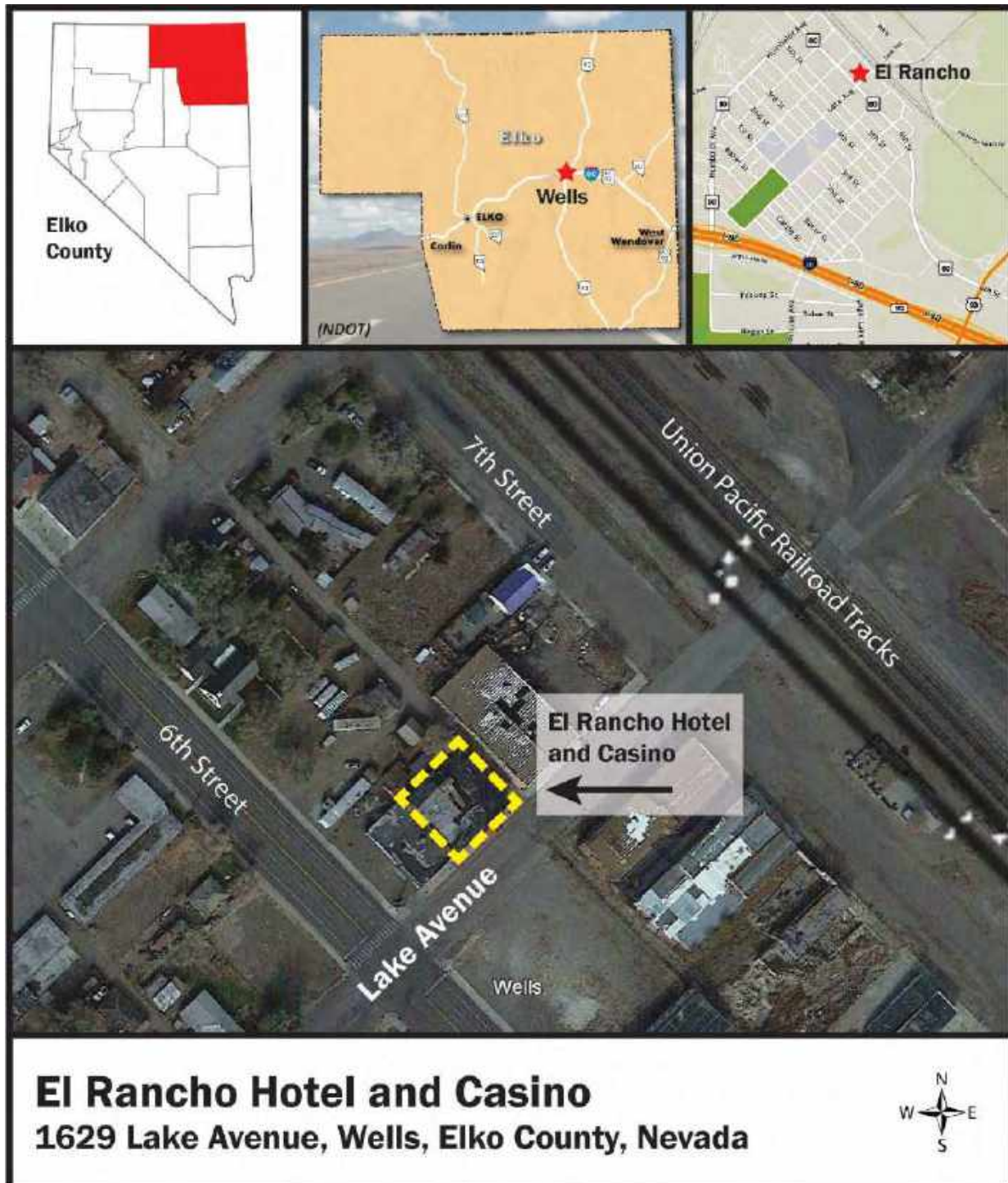
**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to 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.

El Rancho Hotel and Casino  
Name of Property

Elko County, Nevada  
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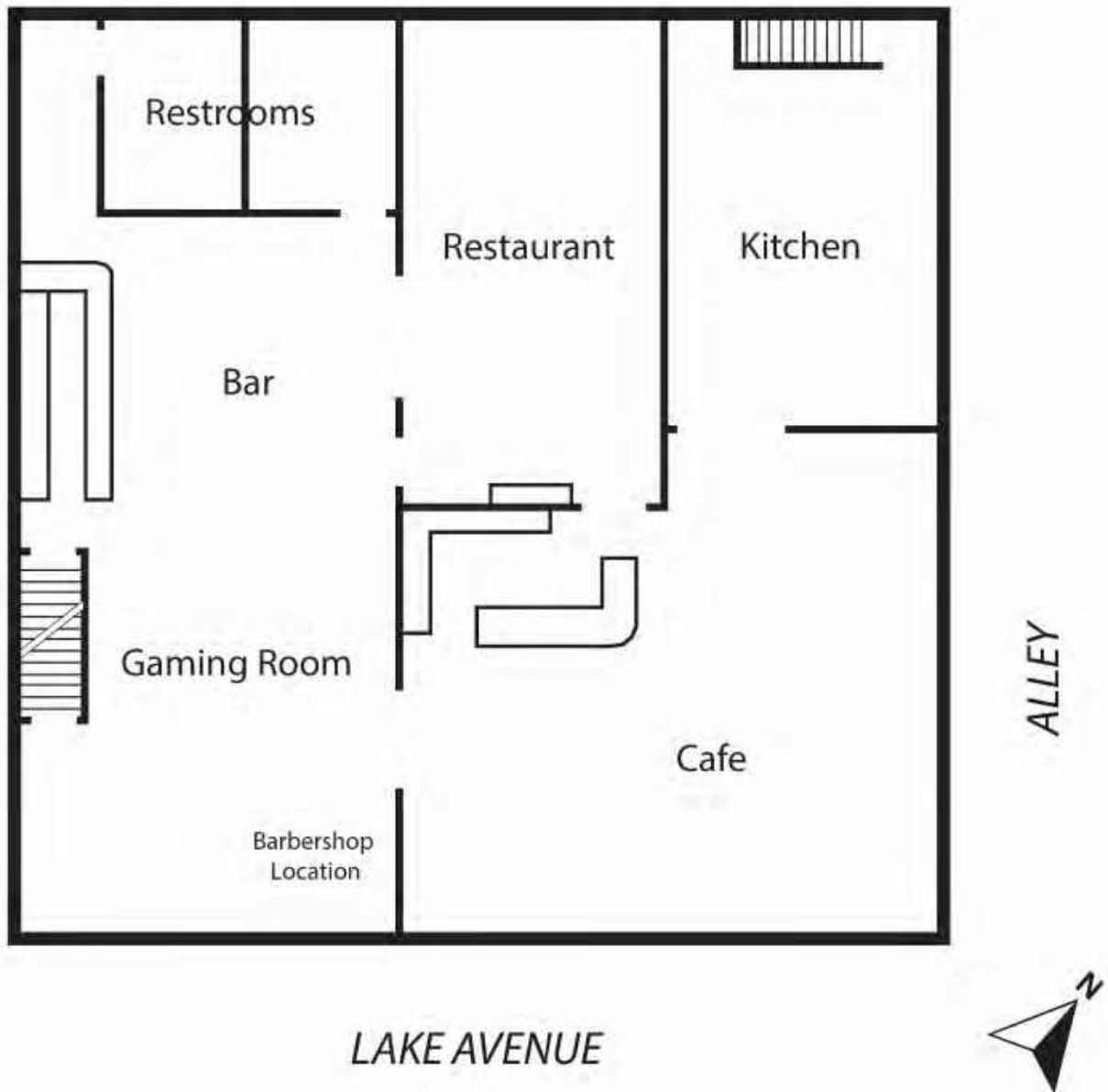
## MAP AND FLOOR PLANS



## Location Map

El Rancho Hotel and Casino  
Name of Property

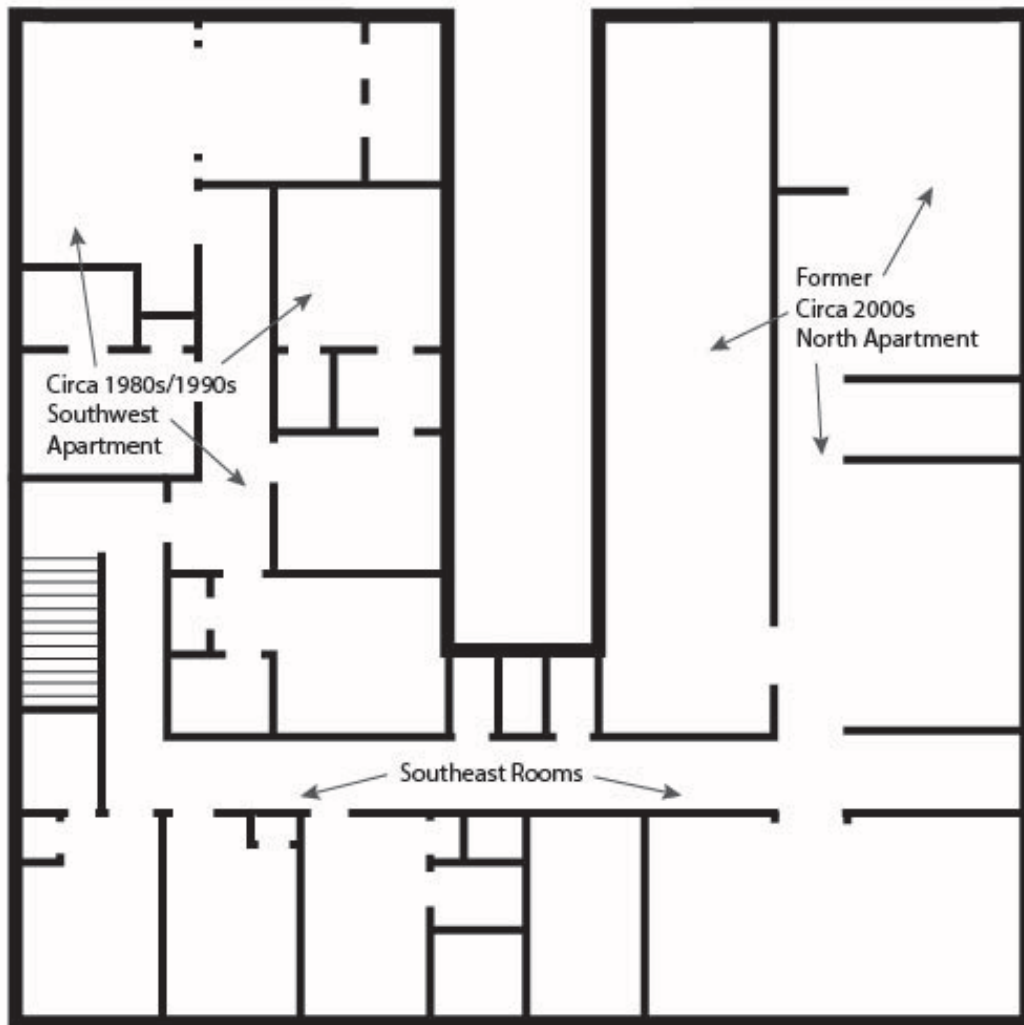
Elko County, Nevada  
County and State



## First Floor Plan

El Rancho Hotel and Casino  
Name of Property

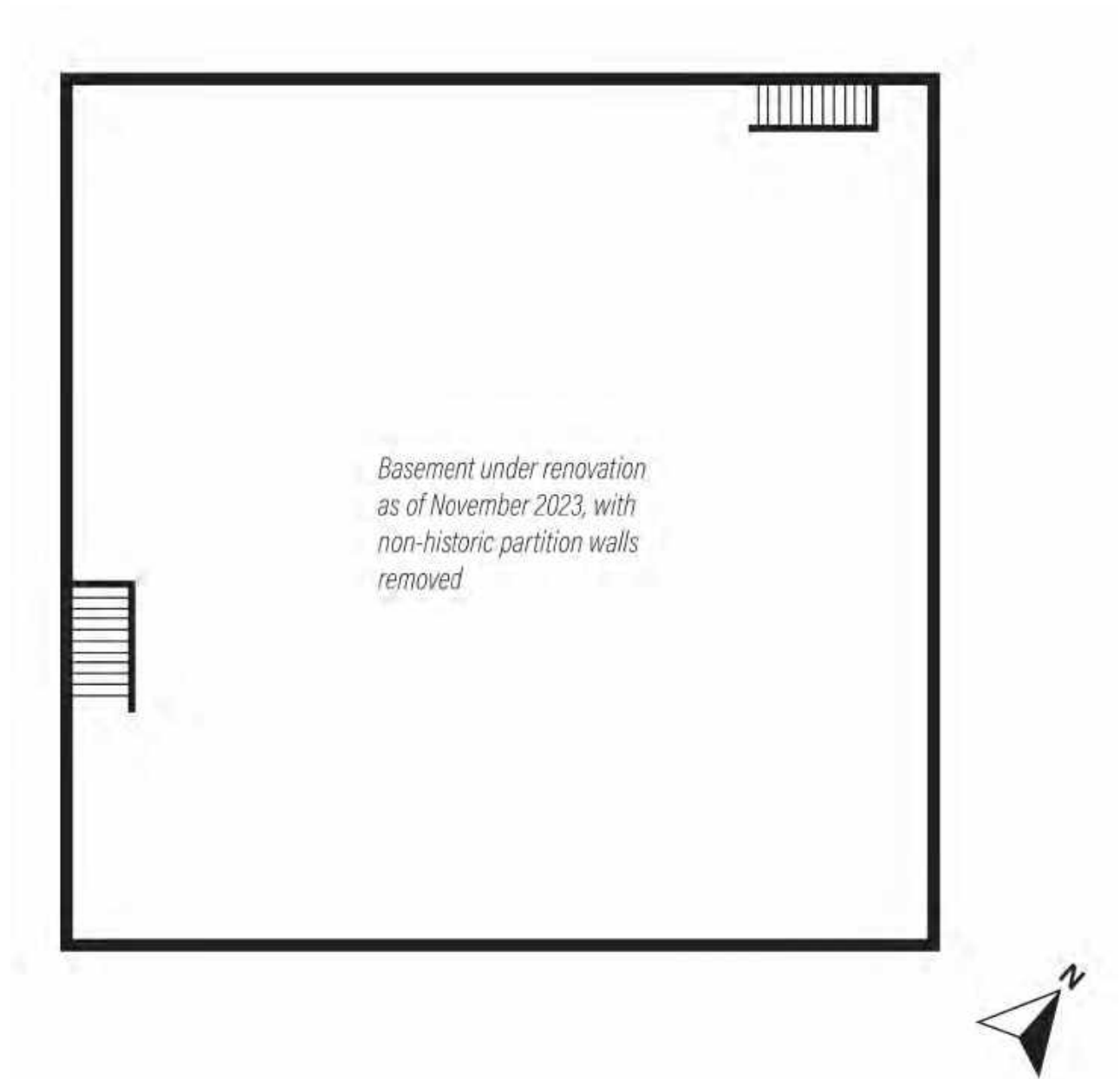
Elko County, Nevada  
County and State



**Second Floor Plan**

El Rancho Hotel and Casino  
Name of Property

Elko County, Nevada  
County and State



**Basement Plan**

El Rancho Hotel and Casino  
Name of Property

Elko County, Nevada  
County and State

## PHOTOGRAPHS



NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0001  
Front elevation (east) of the El Rancho Hotel



El Rancho Hotel and Casino  
Name of Property

Elko County, Nevada  
County and State



NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0002  
North elevation of the El Rancho Hotel



El Rancho Hotel and Casino  
Name of Property

Elko County, Nevada  
County and State



NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0003  
Front elevation (east) detail of the original sign and awning

El Rancho Hotel and Casino  
Name of Property

Elko County, Nevada  
County and State



NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0004  
Interior view of the café and serving counter, facing north

El Rancho Hotel and Casino  
Name of Property

Elko County, Nevada  
County and State



NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0005  
Interior view of the café and adjacent kitchen space, facing west



El Rancho Hotel and Casino  
Name of Property

Elko County, Nevada  
County and State



NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0006  
Interior view of the café serving counter, facing west

El Rancho Hotel and Casino  
Name of Property

Elko County, Nevada  
County and State



NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0007  
Interior view of the café and serving counter, facing south

El Rancho Hotel and Casino  
Name of Property

Elko County, Nevada  
County and State



NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0008  
Interior view of the bar and casino area, facing southwest



El Rancho Hotel and Casino  
Name of Property

Elko County, Nevada  
County and State



NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0009  
Interior view of the Ranch Room, facing north

El Rancho Hotel and Casino  
Name of Property

Elko County, Nevada  
County and State



NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0010  
Interior view of the Ranch Room, facing northeast



El Rancho Hotel and Casino  
Name of Property

Elko County, Nevada  
County and State



NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0011  
Interior view of the bar and casino area, facing south

El Rancho Hotel and Casino  
Name of Property

Elko County, Nevada  
County and State



NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0012  
Interior of the first floor restroom

El Rancho Hotel and Casino  
Name of Property

Elko County, Nevada  
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NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0013  
Interior view of the casino and barbershop space, facing northwest

El Rancho Hotel and Casino  
Name of Property

Elko County, Nevada  
County and State



NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0014  
Interior view of the casino space facing west



El Rancho Hotel and Casino  
Name of Property

Elko County, Nevada  
County and State



NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0015  
Interior view of the south stairway leading up to the second floor

El Rancho Hotel and Casino  
Name of Property

Elko County, Nevada  
County and State



NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0016  
Interior view of the Charles Cobb Apartment, facing west

El Rancho Hotel and Casino  
Name of Property

Elko County, Nevada  
County and State



NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0017  
Interior view of the Charles Cobb Apartment, facing southwest

El Rancho Hotel and Casino  
Name of Property

Elko County, Nevada  
County and State



NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0018  
Alternative view of the Charles Cobb Apartment, facing southwest



El Rancho Hotel and Casino  
Name of Property

Elko County, Nevada  
County and State



NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0019  
Interior view of the Charles Cobb Apartment, facing south

El Rancho Hotel and Casino  
Name of Property

Elko County, Nevada  
County and State



NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0020  
Interior view of the Charles Cobb Apartment, facing southeast

El Rancho Hotel and Casino  
Name of Property

Elko County, Nevada  
County and State



NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0021  
Interior view of the Charles Cobb Apartment, facing south

El Rancho Hotel and Casino  
Name of Property

Elko County, Nevada  
County and State



NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0022  
Interior view of the Charles Cobb Apartment

El Rancho Hotel and Casino  
Name of Property

Elko County, Nevada  
County and State



NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0023  
Interior view of the Charles Cobb Apartment



El Rancho Hotel and Casino  
Name of Property

Elko County, Nevada  
County and State



NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0024  
Interior view of 2nd floor bathroom

El Rancho Hotel and Casino  
Name of Property

Elko County, Nevada  
County and State



NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0025  
Interior view of hallway in Charles Cobb Apartment, southwest

El Rancho Hotel and Casino  
Name of Property

Elko County, Nevada  
County and State



NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0026  
Interior view of Charles Cobb apartment bathroom



El Rancho Hotel and Casino  
Name of Property

Elko County, Nevada  
County and State



NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0027  
Interior view of Charles Cobb apartment, facing east

El Rancho Hotel and Casino  
Name of Property

Elko County, Nevada  
County and State



NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0028  
Interior view of 2<sup>nd</sup> floor bathroom

El Rancho Hotel and Casino  
Name of Property

Elko County, Nevada  
County and State



NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0029  
Interior view of Charles Cobb apartment, facing east

El Rancho Hotel and Casino  
Name of Property

Elko County, Nevada  
County and State



NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0030  
Interior view of Kaplan Apartment, facing northwest



El Rancho Hotel and Casino  
Name of Property

Elko County, Nevada  
County and State



NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0031  
Alternative view of Kaplan Apartment, facing north

El Rancho Hotel and Casino  
Name of Property

Elko County, Nevada  
County and State



NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0032  
Hallway view of Kaplan Apartment, facing west

El Rancho Hotel and Casino  
Name of Property

Elko County, Nevada  
County and State



NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0033  
Hallway view of Kaplan Apartment, facing east

El Rancho Hotel and Casino  
Name of Property

Elko County, Nevada  
County and State



NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0034  
View of the Kaplan Apartment, northwest



El Rancho Hotel and Casino  
Name of Property

Elko County, Nevada  
County and State



NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0035  
View of the Kaplan Apartment, northwest

El Rancho Hotel and Casino  
Name of Property

Elko County, Nevada  
County and State



NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0036  
View of the Kaplan Apartment, facing east

El Rancho Hotel and Casino  
Name of Property

Elko County, Nevada  
County and State



NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0037  
Interior view of restroom in Kaplan Apartment

El Rancho Hotel and Casino  
Name of Property

Elko County, Nevada  
County and State



NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0038  
Interior view of restroom in Kaplan Apartment

El Rancho Hotel and Casino  
Name of Property

Elko County, Nevada  
County and State



NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0039  
Interior view of restroom in Kaplan Apartment



El Rancho Hotel and Casino  
Name of Property

Elko County, Nevada  
County and State



NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0040

Historic Photo of the front façade of the El Rancho, ca. 1982. Note the recessed front entrance.  
Photo by Randy Eriksen.



El Rancho Hotel and Casino  
Name of Property

Elko County, Nevada  
County and State



NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0041

Historic Photo, ca. 1950s of the hardwood bar along the south wall. Photo courtesy of Nida Quilici

El Rancho Hotel and Casino  
Name of Property

Elko County, Nevada  
County and State



NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0042

Historic photo, ca. 1950s of the gaming room, facing southeast. Photo courtesy of Nida Quilici

El Rancho Hotel and Casino  
Name of Property

Elko County, Nevada  
County and State



NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0043

Historic photo, ca. 1950s of the gaming room facing southwest. Photo courtesy of the Nida Quilici

El Rancho Hotel and Casino  
Name of Property

Elko County, Nevada  
County and State



NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0044

Historic photo, ca. 1950s of the gaming room with slot machines, facing southeast. Photo courtesy of Nida Quilici.



El Rancho Hotel and Casino  
Name of Property

Elko County, Nevada  
County and State



NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0045

Historic postcard of the El Rancho front elevation, circa 1960s, courtesy of the Elko Museum.

El Rancho Hotel and Casino  
Name of Property

Elko County, Nevada  
County and State

**Note:** Roof access was not available due to the removal of the non-original stairway and landing platform. Roof repairs were not documented.

Additional Photographs

Name of Photographer: Michael Yunkin  
Date of Photographs: August 18, 2017  
Location of Original Digital Files: 330 West Washington Avenue, Las Vegas NV 89106

The following depict the basement and historic neon sign as documented in 2017



NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0046  
2017 basement view of the stairway on the south end of the building, facing southwest



El Rancho Hotel and Casino  
Name of Property

Elko County, Nevada  
County and State



NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0047

2017 basement view of the stairway on the north end of the building, facing northwest

El Rancho Hotel and Casino  
Name of Property

Elko County, Nevada  
County and State



NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0048  
2017 basement view facing northwest

El Rancho Hotel and Casino  
Name of Property

Elko County, Nevada  
County and State



NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0049  
2017 view of original mechanical equipment



El Rancho Hotel and Casino  
Name of Property

Elko County, Nevada  
County and State



NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0050  
2017 basement view of the stairway, facing west. Note original steel reinforced construction

El Rancho Hotel and Casino  
Name of Property

Elko County, Nevada  
County and State



NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0051  
2017 basement view of the stairway, facing northwest. Note original steel reinforced and concrete construction

El Rancho Hotel and Casino  
Name of Property

Elko County, Nevada  
County and State



NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0052  
View of the neon sign from the roof, facing northeast



El Rancho Hotel and Casino  
Name of Property

Elko County, Nevada  
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NV\_Elko County\_El Rancho Hotel\_0053  
View of the neon sign from the roof, facing southeast