

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 *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 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. 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 Hotel LaBonte

Other names/site number LaBonte Inn

2. Location

Street & Number 206 Walnut Street Not for Publication

City or Town Douglas Vicinity

State Wyoming Code WY County Converse Code 009

Zip Code 82633

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 nationally statewide X locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Mary M. Hopkins 8/27/2008
Signature of certifying official Date

State or Federal Agency or Tribal government

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

Signature of commenting official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

☒ entered in the National Register

See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the

National Register

See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the

National Register

removed from the National

Register

other (explain):

Anna McEllelland

10-10-08

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

Contributing

Noncontributing

1

building(s)

sites

structures

objects

1

Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

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

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat:	Domestic	Sub:	Hotel
	Commerce		Restaurant

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat:	Domestic	Sub:	Hotel
	Domestic		Multiple Dwelling
	Commerce		Restaurant

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Late 19th and 20th Century Revivals

Neo-Classical Revival

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation	Concrete
roof	
walls	Brick
other	Terra cotta

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)
See Continuation Sheets

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Section 7 Page 1

*Hotel LaBonte, Douglas
Converse County, Wyoming*

Description

The Hotel LaBonte is a three-story brick building located at the northeast corner of North Second and Walnut streets in downtown Douglas. The hotel, which has a U-shaped form with east and west wings flanking a recessed central wing and enclosing a courtyard, has the symmetry and formality of the neo-Renaissance style and is enriched with terra cotta elements. The ground floor level has two storefronts in the west wing and the hotel dining room in the east wing. Columns, a beamed ceiling, and ornate tile floor carry the architectural stylishness of the exterior into the hotel lobby, which retains its historic character.

The Hotel LaBonte is located at the north edge of the downtown commercial district in Douglas, one-half block east of the Burlington Railroad Depot. Some of the civic buildings erected during the 1910s are further east on Walnut Street. Commercial buildings stand north and west of the hotel. The lots east and south across Walnut Street are parking lots.

Exterior

The hotel building has walls of red face brick laid in a running bond with red-tinted mortar that form the exterior of the west and south sides of the overall building, including those surrounding the central courtyard. Two-story brick piers define recessed bays in which windows are positioned and divide the upper walls. The varied widths of the piers and bays create rhythmic walls on the west side elevation of the west wing and recessed central wing façade. Rectangular brick panels are positioned as spandrels between the second and third story windows. A terra-cotta cornice band above a corbelled brick cornice and an upper terra-cotta cornice define the parapet wall that edges the flat roof. A stepped pediment marks the center of the central wing parapet. The windows in the upper stories of the Hotel LaBonte have replacement casement vinyl sash.

The east elevation, which faces the alley, and the north rear elevation have walls of common brick. The upper story windows in the east wall have segmentally-arched openings, as do the windows in the north wall. Windows set in the angled bay near the center of the north wall light the stair hall the bay encloses. Two modern fire escapes rise along the north wall to meet doors at the ends of the second and third floor corridors. Door openings in the east and north wall have been altered and added.

A storefront across the south façade of the west wing has a central recessed entrance with angled glazed walls flanking a centered pair of doors. The patterned ceramic tile used in the lobby covers the floor of the shallow recessed entrance. The original configuration of the entrance remains, with windows flanking a pair of doors and transoms above, though one door is now a window and the functional door is an aluminum-framed one. An aluminum-framed entrance assembly set flush with the exterior wall encloses the original entrance, forming a vestibule. Glass block set between corner brick piers encloses the bulkhead. The storefront is enclosed with exterior plywood that surrounds large windows. The transom area is clad with ribbed sheet metal. A cast-iron lintel with bosses supports the upper walls. An internally-lit sign reading RESTAURANT is positioned just above the second story band course. A projecting sheet-metal sign with neon tracing the letters, projecting from the south end of the west wall and facing East Walnut Street, reads HOTEL LABONTE – COFFEE SHOP – BAR. A sheet metal sign at the southwest corner of the west wing roof with neon outlining the letters reads HOTEL LABONTE.

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The second storefront in the west wing is located at the north end of the west elevation. Brick piers support the cast-iron lintel with decorative bosses and frame the central entrance. The original wood framing of the flanking shop windows remains intact. Large windows with one vertical muntin are set above a bulkhead. Glass block, some of which is painted, fills the transom areas and surrounds the front door. A doorway south of the storefront has been filled in with brick.

The ground story of the east wing façade consists of a brick wall pierced by round-arched openings in the south and west walls. A brick cornice band consisting of header and stretcher courses extends across the façade above the arches detailed with brick keystones. The center window opening is now an entrance sheltered with a round-arched door hood; the flanking openings are blocked with modern stucco. An internally-lit sign reading BAR & LOUNGE is positioned just above the ground story cornice.

A one-story dance hall structure occupies what was historically the central courtyard. The south wall is clad with exterior plywood, some of which is set on the diagonal. The entrance corridor is located at the west end of the dance hall. A flat canopy extends to cover the sidewall. A jackalope (a fictitious animal, which merges a jackrabbit and an antelope, was used as a roadside attraction by the community of Douglas) figure on the canopy is positioned above an internally-lit sign reading the LABONTE INN.

Interior

The entrance to the hotel lobby is through a corridor adjacent to the east wall of the west wing where the once exterior brick wall is exposed. The lobby, which occupies the entire front portion of the central wing, has a ceramic tile floor with multi-colored floral figures set in diagonal rows on a plain field and edged with a border. Three round plaster columns on mahogany pedestals support the junctures of the walnut beams that divide the lobby ceiling. A white marble counter set above marble wall panels form the registration counter. A wood-framed window assembly encloses the area above the counter. A display case with glazed doors extends from the south wall. A dog-leg staircase is open on the lower run of steps to a landing with an angled wall filled with a window; it is edged with a turned balustrade rising from a square newel post. Molded handrails top the balustrade and extend from the stairhall wall. Two small areas of the lobby have been partitioned off and a ramp extends along the east wall of the lobby to a landing outside restrooms and a door to the bar.

The original entrance to the lobby remains mostly intact as the doorway between the lobby and dance hall. Face brick forms the wide segmentally-arched opening, from which the once exterior doors and windows have been removed. The entrance vestibule has the same tile floor as the lobby. The inner door assembly between the vestibule and lobby remains intact in a square-headed opening. Windows and a tri-partite transom surround a pair of glazed doors.

The ground floor interior of the west wing is now a coffee shop and has no historic interior finishes or furnishings. No historic interior finishes or furnishings remain in the ground floor of the east wing, which is now a bar. Large square poured concrete piers in the basement support the steel beams that support the first floor. The original walk-in cold storage room and other rooms remain in the west wing of the basement.

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The second and third floors of the hotel have H-shaped corridors that are met by the stairs near the center of the east-west run of hall. An elevator installed during the late 1960s also serves this portion of the corridor. The wide central east-west corridor and narrower side halls have carpeting over wood floors. Room doors with five horizontal panels are set in openings with a molding above the door and no side framing. The rooms that originally had bathrooms retain those spaces and bathroom doors that are narrower versions of the room doors.

Integrity

A renovation of the Hotel LaBonte building that began in 1967 and another one as part of the reconstruction after a fire in 1981 introduced replacement windows, the dance hall addition, new signage, an exterior entrance in the south end of the east wing, and internal changes.

The Hotel LeBonte has excellent integrity with regards to design and workmanship. Though changes have been made to the ground story and replacement windows have been installed, the building also has good overall integrity in terms of materials. The hotel lobby has very good integrity in design, materials, and workmanship. The hotel building has excellent integrity in location, setting, feeling and association as it continues to serve its original functions as a hotel with hospitality services on the ground floor.

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)

- X 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.)

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or a 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 years.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

Community Development and
Planning

Period of Significance

1913-14

Significant Dates

1914

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Baerresen Brothers, architect

Ed Reavill, builder

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

See Continuation Sheets

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Summary Paragraph

The Hotel LaBonte is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A. The hotel, erected in 1913 and opened in January 1914, was a community project and part of the expansion and remaking of downtown Douglas during the 1910s. Local businessmen formed the Douglas Hotel Company to finance the construction of a building that the company would retain ownership of and lease. Designed by the architectural firm of the Baerensen Brothers of Denver and Cheyenne, the Hotel LaBonte is the physical expression of the prosperity and the aspirations of the residents of Douglas for a modern hotel, as well as the Douglas building boom of the period. The Hotel LaBonte, which remains in use, initially housed train passengers, local ranchers, Wyoming residents in town for the County Court session, and motorists on the Yellowstone Highway.

Historic Context: Douglas, Railroad Town to Government and Commercial Center, 1886-1930.

Douglas, an east central Wyoming city on the North Platte River, is located in close proximity to various transportation routes. Douglas is near the Oregon Trail and the southern end of the Bozeman Trail. The construction of a railroad line that paralleled the route of the Oregon Trail brought about Douglas.

The Fremont, Elkhorn and Missouri Valley Railway (FE&MV), a subsidiary of the Chicago and North Western (C&NW) Railroad, built track across central Nebraska during the 1870s. After gold was discovered in the Black Hills of South Dakota, the FE&MV constructed a line into that area. The Wyoming Central Railway was organized as a subsidiary of the FE&MV, which in turn was one of the proprietary railroad lines of the C&NW that remained identified by its local name. The FE&MV intended to construct a line west along the valley of the North Platte River. The Wyoming Central line branched off from the existing FE&MV line at Chadron, Nebraska to meet the North Platte. As the track-laying crew worked west in 1886, railroad officials decided that a town would be established near where the seasonal work would conclude. The Western Town Lot Company laid out a townsite in August 1886 and named it Douglas in honor of the Illinois statesman Stephen A. Douglas. It sold over 240 town lots soon after the track was completed in September.¹

Douglas experienced an immediate boom in population that reached 1,600 by the end of 1886. Many of the 500 people who had been living in Fetterman City, the community that remained near Fort Fetterman after it was closed in 1882, relocated to Douglas. The first buildings erected in Douglas included five brick ones. A group of citizens worked to organize a municipal government, and in September 1887 the town of Douglas was incorporated. Douglas was selected as the county seat in 1887 when Converse County was separated from Albany and Laramie Counties. The federal land office established in Douglas in 1890 upon Wyoming achieving statehood made it easier to homestead and purchase land in the county. The FE&MV provided a means to ship livestock, and a cattle and sheep industry grew up in the area surrounding Douglas. Stagecoaches carried mail and passengers from the railroad line in Douglas to the regional towns of Buffalo, Sheridan, Rock Creek, and Laramie. Cattlemen and then sheepmen settling in and near the town, along with businesses related to agriculture, rescued Douglas from a major drop in population during the late 1880s and made it a thriving small town. A small commercial district grew up near the railroad line on

¹ John D. McDermott, *Fremont, Elkhorn & Missouri Valley Railroad Passenger Depot National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form* (1993), pp. 8.4-8.6; Robert G. Rosenberg, *North Douglas Historic District National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form*, (2002), pp. 64-65.

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North Second Street, the eventual home of the Hotel LaBonte. Douglas grew rapidly for the second time between 1900, when it had 734 residents, and 1910, when the population was 1,512.²

The economy of the Douglas region diversified during the first decade of the twentieth century. The sheep industry, which grew at an astonishing rate during a 16-year period after 1890, first exceeded the cattle industry in Converse County in 1909. Erastus Straup brought in the first oil well for the Wyoming Oil and Development Company approximately 15 miles west of Douglas in 1905. After additional wells were developed in the Douglas oil field, the oil business became an important part of the local economy after 1910.³

Douglas remained a railroad town after the FE&MV line was constructed further west, where the town of Glenrock was established in 1887 and then on to the site of Casper in 1888. Passenger trains between Chadron and Casper ran daily after December 25, 1889; eastbound passengers could board a sleeper at Douglas and proceed to Chicago without changing cars. After 1901 the Douglas FE&MV depot served passengers on the Cheyenne & Northern Railroad, which used the FE&MV line west of Orin and provided a link to Cheyenne and later to Denver. The FE&MV was more fully consolidated with the C&NW in 1903 and was thereafter known by that name. The C&NW line was extended west from Casper to Lander in 1905. The C&NW donated land where the State Fair was held in 1905 and Douglas became the location of this annual event. The C&NW offered east and west passenger service once a day, including Sundays and received about \$90,000 receipts for freight delivered to Douglas. The switching yard in Douglas was enlarged and heavier steel rail was laid to handle the increases in freight by circa 1920.⁴

Douglas acquired an additional railroad connection during the 1910s. The Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy (Burlington) Railroad reached Douglas in 1914. At that time James J. Hill intended the Burlington to become a railroad line from the Pacific Northwest to the Gulf of Mexico. A critical link was constructed from Billings, Montana south through the Bighorn Basin and Wind River Canyon to Orin Junction east of Douglas, where it connected with the northern terminus of the Colorado and Southern Railroad line. The Burlington line paralleled that of the C&NW between Orin and to the Wind River Reservation. Douglas and Converse County then had excellent rail connections in all directions. During the 1920s, the C&NW and Burlington lines ran six passenger trains daily supplemented by locals with passenger cars. Douglas had daily passenger train service from 1888 to the mid-1960s.⁵

This additional railroad link and a location on the Yellowstone Highway contributed to the prosperity of Douglas through the 1910s and early 1920s. The Good Roads Club of Douglas, which was founded in 1910 and evolved into the Chamber of Commerce, lobbied for and promoted the Yellowstone Highway, a route that connected Denver with Yellowstone Park, and Douglas became a stopping place for motorists between the national park and Denver. The Yellowstone Highway, discussed as early as 1912 and celebrated with an official guidebook in 1916, was absorbed by the "Park to Park Highway," which eventually connected all the major national parks in the west. During the mid-1920s, the Yellowstone Highway east of the national park became US 20. Thousands of tourists drove the gravel highway during the summer months.⁶

² Writers' Program, Work Projects Administration and State of Wyoming, *Wyoming: A Guide to Its History, Highways, and People* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), pp. 284-285; Rosenberg, pp. 65-67; John LeeRoy Waller, "Economic History and Settlement of Converse County, Wyoming," *Annals of Wyoming* 6 (April, 1930), pp. 310-311.

³ Waller, pp. 292, 297; McDermott, p. 8.11.

⁴ *Douglas Budget*, December 25, 1889, p. 5; Waller, p. 304; McDermott, p. 8.12.

⁵ McDermott, 8.10; Waller, pp. 304, 306.

⁶ Sandra Shelley, *Douglas City Hall National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form* (1994), p. 8.3; Waller, p. 307.

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The appearance of downtown Douglas was altered significantly during the decade between 1910 and 1920. The arrival of the Burlington Railroad and the construction of its handsome brick depot in 1915 were important catalysts for the building boom. The growth and prosperity of the town prompted the construction of both civic buildings and more substantial commercial buildings, most of which were erected in brick and expressed the neo-renaissance style. The Exposition Building at the State Fair Grounds was built in 1913, the same year that the Hotel LaBonte was under construction. The Treasury Department completed a new Douglas Post Office in 1914 and a high school addition was funded that year. Converse County built a new courthouse in 1915 and the City of Douglas followed with a new City Hall in 1916. Private citizens also financed new buildings. The Bolln Co. and the Douglas Loan & Trust Co. erected brick commercial buildings in 1913. Jacob Jenne erected the Jenne Building in 1916 to house a bank and professional offices. The Converse County Bank constructed a new building in 1918. The Mason's completed the Ashlar Lodge in 1926 at the end of the downtown building boom. The editor of *Bill Barlow's Budget* commented in 1913 that "Prosperity stalks abroad through every street and avenue."⁷

Hotels and rooming houses were an important component of the commercial economy of Douglas, which was a transportation, local government, ranching, and shipping center. Ranchers visiting town for a few days needed accommodations and court sessions at the Converse County Courthouse were busy times in Douglas. The property known both as the Valley House and later as the Davis Hotel, located on the south side of Center Street next to the FE&MV rail line, was opened for business in December 1886. The hotel was a T-shaped two-story building; the front wing, with a row of dormers extending from the roof, had a wrap-around porch. The Davis Hotel advertised its modern premises and free sample room for the use of traveling salesmen and stockmen. This hostelry served as the C&NW "eating house" where employees and passengers were likely to have meals. This property was located where the proposed Burlington tracks were to run and consequently it was divided into two portions that were moved to new locations in Douglas. The Converse Hotel was the successor to a hotel operation that opened for business on North Second Street in 1888. The owners moved the original wood hotel building to the back of the lot in 1905 and erected a two-story brick building. The hotel served the area's herders and cowboys in its heyday, between 1905 and 1916.⁸

The Hotel LaBonte was built in 1913 and opened in January 1914. The Goodwin House was in business at that time, and Mrs. Ford, Mrs. Howard, and Mrs. Smith offered furnished rooms. John Henry built the Antler Hotel in 1918 on North Third Street, just around the corner from the Hotel LaBonte. This building resembled a residence in Chicago that Henry admired and offered a home-like atmosphere to travelers. The Antler Hotel remained in business through the 1970s.⁹

The design and materials used for hotels in the towns and cities of Wyoming changed during the early twentieth century. In general, hotels became larger, more formal and permanent in feeling, and increasingly distinct in appearance from large dwellings. The use of fire-resistant materials, including concrete and brick, also became common, as did the provision of modern services, such as in-room bathrooms, telephones, and steam heat. The Hotel Wolf in Saratoga erected in 1898 and the contemporary Valley House in Douglas were both relatively small buildings characterized by open front porches and dormers extending from gabled roofs. The Hotel Higgins, erected in 1916-

⁷ "\$175,000, Exclusive of the Burlington, Being Expended in Douglas," 26 June, 1913, *Bill Barlow's Budget*; Jeffrey Derks, *Historic Downtown Douglas, A Walking Tour*.

⁸ Peg Layton Leonard, *West of Yesteryear, Profiles of Early Wyoming People and Places* (Boulder, CO: Johnson Publishing Co., 1976), pp. 98, 101-103; Douglas, Wyoming Sanborn Map, 1903; *Wyoming State Business Directory* (Denver: Gazeteer Publishing Co., 1906-07), p. 199.

⁹ "Antler Hotel - Modeled After a Chicago Home," *Douglas Budget*, 21 Sept 1972; Douglas, Wyoming Sanborn Map, 1920.

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1917 in Glenrock at the beginning of the development of the Big Muddy oil field, has a plan similar to that of the Hotel LaBonte, but is a wood-framed and clad building.¹⁰

A Modern Hotel for Douglas

The imminent arrival of the Burlington Railroad and the loss of the Valley House prompted the construction of the Hotel LaBonte. Douglas needed a replacement hotel and seven men met in early January in the office of E. T. (Edward T.) David to consider the challenge and ended up pledging \$12,500 worth of stock at that initial meeting. The Douglas Hotel Company was incorporated in February 1913 to ensure that the community would have a first class hotel. The company raised \$25,000 through the sale of shares in order to build the hotel, which it would lease to an operator. The company planned to erect a three-story hotel with at least 50 rooms costing at least \$50,000. Within the month, all \$25,000 worth of bonds were subscribed.¹¹

After living and ranching in the vicinity since the mid-1880s, David moved to Douglas in 1907. He acquired the established Florence Hardware Co. at that time. David was president of the Douglas Library Association, which was responsible for securing the Carnegie Library in Douglas. David, who was mayor of Douglas at the time the Douglas Hotel Company formed, served as the agent of the new company. He provided the corner lot opposite the Florence Hardware Co. lumber yard as a site for the hotel, as part of his investment. This location was only a half a block from the new Burlington depot and at the edge of the residential area north of the downtown, as well as close to David's business.¹²

The other four incorporators were Douglas ranchers and businessmen. George H. Cross was a well-known stockgrower who settled in the area during the late 1870s, owned the well-known Braehead Ranch, and served as State Senator. Alva C. Rice was involved in family businesses, the Rice Lumber and Hardware and later the Yellowstone Garage, one of the earliest automobile dealerships in Converse County. Otto H. Bolln was the proprietor of the Bolln Grocery and Dry Goods stores. George Smith, who had settled in the area in 1888 and operated a cigar and confectionary store and later a saloon, was the fifth incorporator of the company.¹³

The Douglas Hotel Company engaged the architectural firm of the Baerresen Brothers, which had offices in Cheyenne and Denver, to provide plans for the hotel. This firm had just designed the Citizens National Bank in Cheyenne and had an excellent reputation. Edward Reavill's construction firm was at work on the new building by April 1913. Twenty-five tons of steel beams formed the trusses that supported the second floor above the open spaces of the lobby, dining room, and other public spaces. The local Douglas pressed brick plant supplied the brick for the hotel. When Eugene W. Shubert was announced as the lessee of the hotel, in October 1913, the names The Antelope and The Yellowstone were under consideration for the hotel; both the arrangement with Shubert and the potential names for the hotel were short-lived.¹⁴

¹⁰ Mark Junge, *Hotel Wolf National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form* (1974), p.2; Jack and Margaret Doll and Michael Gorman *Hotel Higgins National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form* (1983), p. 2.

¹¹ "Working for a New Hotel," 30 January 1913; "New Hotel Bonds Placed," 20 February 1913, *Bill Barlow's Budget*.

¹² Jeffrey Derks, *Historic Residences of Douglas, A Walking Tour*; "Working for a New Hotel."

¹³ "New Hotel Bonds Placed," "Working for a New Hotel; *Men of Wyoming*, (Denver: C. S. Peterson, 1915), p. 61; Derks, *Historic Downtown Douglas*; Leonard, pp. x and 118.

¹⁴ "Working on New Hotel," 13 March 1913; "E.W. Shubert Lessee of the New Hotel," 16 October 1913; "Our New Hotel," 3 April 1913, *Bill Barlow's Budget*.

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By November 1913 H. O. Emery secured a ten-year lease for the hotel. Emery had been the proprietor of the Emery Hotel in Thermopolis that he erected in 1907 and sold in 1911. Emery was responsible for outfitting the Douglas building and spent \$15,000 on furnishings. He acquired furniture from the Denver Dry Goods Company and bar fixtures and billiard tables from the Brunswick-Balke Company. By the time the hotel was opened for business on January 26, 1914, it was the Hotel LaBonte. The name refers to the LaBonte pony express and stage station on the Overland Trail, which was located southeast of Douglas and named after a hunter of a French father and mother from Kentucky who was raised in Mississippi.¹⁵

The main entrance to the Hotel LaBonte was through a central courtyard and a projecting entrance. A pediment similar to the one centered on the main roof parapet, from which a flagpole rose, capped the brick entrance. The walls flanking the entrance were treated as storefronts with large glazed areas to light the lobby. Trees were planted in the tree lawn between the street and concrete sidewalk.¹⁶



Source: Wyoming State Archives, Neg # 13818

Hotel LaBonte shortly after construction.

The lobby, located in the recessed central wing, featured walnut woodwork, a marble registration counter, and a patterned tile floor. Leather-covered lounge chairs and writing desks were part of the lobby furnishings and big game trophies were displayed. Public restrooms were off the lobby. A ladies' parlor with comfortable furniture and a toilet was located on the north side of the second floor. The dining room and kitchen occupied the east wing of the ground floor; an archway connected the lobby and the dining room. The Hotel La Bonte operated with a European plan, so the dining room, which seated 74 persons, functioned as a restaurant open to guests and the public. A Grill Room was located at the north end of the dining room. A combination bar and billiards room, dominated by an impressive bar back, and a barber shop occupied the west wing. The Hawkeye Cleaning Company, a dry cleaners, rented the

¹⁵ "The LaBonte to be Open January 1," 20 November 1913, *Bill Barlow's Budget*; "Thermopolis Landmark Makes Way for New," *Northern Wyoming Daily News*, 6 May 1964; Maurine Carley, "Oregon Trail Trek No. Two," *Annals of Wyoming* (28: 1), p. 54.

¹⁶ Douglas, Wyoming Sanborn Map, 1920, "Hotel LaBonte, Douglas, Wyoming," 26 February 1914, *Bill Barlow's Budget*, undated historic photograph, Wyoming State Archives.

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storefront at the north end of the west wing facing North Second Street from 1914 to 1918. Stripped awnings sheltered the windows of the west wing during the early years of the hotel's operation.¹⁷

The rooms in the Hotel LaBonte had all the modern technology and safety features of the era, as well as luxurious furnishings. Electric lights, steam heat, and hot and cold running water were available throughout the hotel and telephones were placed in each of the 54 guest rooms. Twelve of the larger rooms had full bathrooms; the rest had sinks. The rooms were furnished with brass bedsteads, heavy rugs, and leather-covered mahogany and oak furniture. A pair of fire escapes was attached to the north side of the building at the north ends of the side corridors.¹⁸

The Douglas Hotel Company's ownership of the hotel made it as much a community project as a private business. The newspaper editor wrote of the new hotel as an important community asset and a testament to its supporters' faith in the future of Douglas. Not surprisingly, the construction project ran over the estimates and reportedly cost \$70,000. A list of 24 "Hotel LaBonte Boosters" was printed in the *Budget* in late January as part of a plea for additional Douglas residents to purchase stock to cover the additional costs. Upon its opening, the *Budget* editor considered the hotel to be a "standing ad for Douglas" that would soon be as well known as the Plains Hotel in Cheyenne and as the best hotel on the main line of the Chicago & North Western railway west of Omaha. He also urged the townspeople to frequent the hotel and local businessmen to gather there to plan for the continued improvement of Douglas. The city's entry in the 1916 *Official Route Book of the Yellowstone Highway Association in Wyoming and Colorado* boasted that tourists would find in Douglas a "hotel that would be a credit to a city of 25,000." The Hotel LaBonte advertisement pointed out that it was one day's drive from Cheyenne and offered rooms for \$1.00 a day.¹⁹

By 1920 the Hotel LaBonte had acquired a two-story building on North Third Street, just north of Walnut Street, that was operated as the Hotel LaBonte Annex. A garage and automobile repair shop located across Walnut Street was available to hotel guests. A series of proprietors operated the Hotel LaBonte and it was in continuous use for over eighty years. William Delahoyde followed Emery and ran the LaBonte from 1927 until 1936, and then again in 1941 and 1942. R. H. McCormick and Son managed the hotel during the late 1930s. The Hotel La Bonte was "justly famous for its fine accommodations and friendly atmosphere" at that time. During the 1930s travelers could also stay at the Blue Moon tourist camp with five cabins, one of the eight Friendship Camp Cottages, or the White Lilly Main Street Cottages. Mrs. Leroy Ball was the proprietor in 1950, by which time neon signs had been installed on the roof and Walnut Street façade of the Hotel LaBonte.²⁰

Harry and Rachel Johnston acquired the property in 1968 and renovated the hotel. This project converted the third floor of the hotel into ten apartments and included the installation of an elevator. The ground floor of the east wing was converted into a bar. The back bar from the west wing bar was donated to the Wyoming Pioneer Museum on the State Fair grounds in Douglas. The building was extensively damaged by fire in 1981, though it was rebuilt immediately. Leonard and John Miller, the next owners of the hotel, erected the dance hall in the courtyard. The Johnston family once again owns and operates the hotel.

¹⁷ "The LaBonte to be Open January 1," "Card Table Awaits Players' Return," *Casper Star-Tribune*, 30 March 1975; Leonard, pp. 126-127.

¹⁸ "The LaBonte to be Open January 1," Douglas, Wyoming Sanborn Map, 1920.

¹⁹ "New Hotel LaBonte," 29 January 1914; "Hotel LaBonte Boosters," 29 January, 1914; "Hotel LaBonte, Douglas, Wyoming," 26 February 1914, *Bill Barlow's Budget*; Yellowstone Highway Association, *Official Route Book of the Yellowstone Highway Association in Wyoming and Colorado* (Cody, WY: Gus Holm's, 1916), pp. 52-55.

²⁰ Douglas, Wyoming Sanborn Map, 1920, Marmor, p. 6; Photograph on Hotel LaBonte Dinner menu; Lawrence W. Hall *Douglas, Wyoming Accommodations* (Typescript, WPA Subject File 1401.S-500.) p. 1-2; Doris Garst, *Wyoming Cities, Douglas, Converse County*. (Typescript, WPA Subject File 1401, S-700), p. 6.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet-Additional Documentation**

Section 8 Page 10

*Hotel LaBonte, Douglas
Converse County, Wyoming*

Historical Significance – Criterion A

The Hotel LaBonte is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A in the area of Community Development and Planning. The construction of the Hotel LaBonte in 1913 represents the maturation and modernization of Douglas as a commercial, transportation, and local governmental center in Converse County. The Hotel LaBonte, one of the largest of the new buildings erected in Douglas between 1913 and 1916, was the result of the resolve of a group of prominent Douglas citizens that the city would have a modern hotel. The Hotel LaBonte, financed by the wealth of the local cattle and sheep operations and related businesses, was a local project as much as a commercial venture. The hotel served businessmen associated with the local agricultural and energy operations and county residents, as well as travelers to the State Fair and was on one of the major routes to Yellowstone Park, contributing to the city's tourism industry.

The size, materials, and architectural expression of the Hotel LaBonte are consistent with the construction that took place in Douglas circa 1915 and are the physical expression of the prosperity and aspirations for modernity, as well as the Douglas building boom of the time. Architects from Denver designed the more important projects of this era, and the Douglas Hotel Company engaged the Baerresen Brothers to provide plans for the hotel. The hotel design emphasizes the size and massing of the building and approaches the physical presence of a civic building. The neo-Classical form and detailing is consistent with the design preferences of the era and the civic and commercial buildings erected in Douglas. Despite the changes made to the ground floor level, the Hotel LaBonte still represents the increase in size and formality between the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century hotels erected in small Wyoming cities.

The Douglas Hotel Company construction project indicates that community leaders, both businessmen and politicians, worked in various ways to remake and expand downtown Douglas during the 1910s. The Douglas Hotel Company incorporators selected a site visible from the Burlington Railroad depot at the northern edge of the downtown. The Carnegie Library and Post Office were nearby on Walnut Street. These buildings made Walnut Street an important extension of the downtown commercial and civic core of Douglas. The location of the hotel was close enough to Center Street and the route of the Yellowstone Highway that the neon sign on its roof was visible to motorists, attracting many and allowing the hotel to bolster the tourism industry in Douglas.

9. Major Bibliographical References

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

See Continuation Sheet

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: Wyoming State Archives

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than 1

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	13	468492	4734368	3	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
2	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	4	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

☐ See continuation sheet.

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

See Continuation Sheet.

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

See Continuation Sheet

11. Form Prepared By

Name/title	<u>Betsy H. Bradley, Ph.D.</u>	Date	<u>July 15, 2008</u>
Organization	<u>Wyoming SHPO</u>	Telephone	<u>307 777-8594</u>
Street & number	<u>2301 Central Avenue</u>	State	<u>WY</u>
City or town	<u>Cheyenne</u>	Zip code	<u>82002</u>

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet-Additional Documentation

Section 9 Page 11

*Hotel LaBonte, Douglas
Converse County, Wyoming*

Major Bibliographic References

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_____. *Historic Residences of Douglas, a Waking Tour*. Historic Douglas Preservation Commission.

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Hall, Lawrence W. *Douglas, Wyoming Accommodations*. Typescript, WPA Subject File 1401, Wyoming State Archives.

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Waller, John LeeRoy. "Economic History and Settlement of Converse County," *Annals of Wyoming* 6 (April 1930), pp. 291-319.

Writers' Program, Work Projects Administration and State of Wyoming. *Wyoming: A Guide to Its History, Highways, and People*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1941.

Wyoming State Business Directory. Denver: Gazeteer Publishing Co., 1906, 1916, 1930.

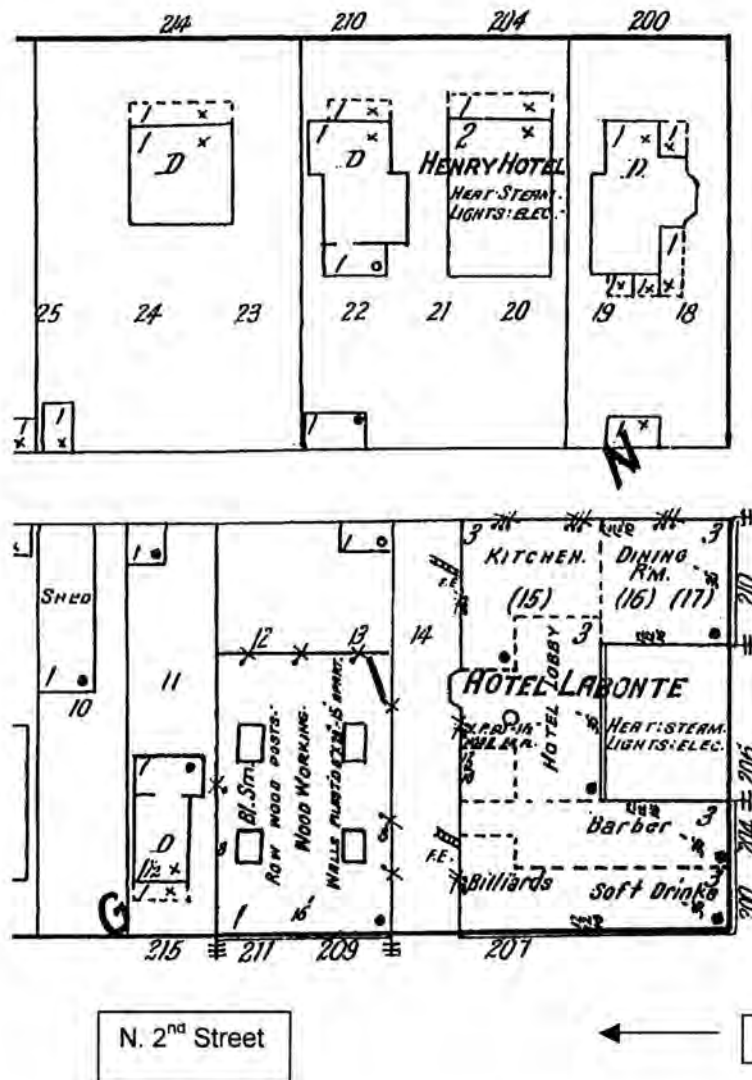
Yellowstone Highway Association. *Official Route Book of the Yellowstone Highway Association in Wyoming and Colorado*. Cody, WY: Gus Holm's, 1916.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet-Additional Documentation

Section 10 Page 12

Hotel LaBonte, Douglas
Converse County, Wyoming



Hotel LaBonte Site Plan

Source: Sanborn Map Company, Douglas, WY, 1920
Approximate scale: 1 1/4 inch = 100 feet

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of this property is Lots 15, 16, and 17 in Block 5, Original Plat of Douglas, Wyoming.

Boundary Justification

The boundary encompasses all of the property historically associated with the Hotel LaBonte.

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 the SHPO or FPO.)

Name	Mr. H. R. Johnston		
Organization	The LaBonte Corporation	Telephone	307 358-3198
Street & number	PO Box 18		
City or town	Douglas	State	WY Zip code 82633

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.). A federal agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number.

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to range from approximately 18 hours to 36 hours depending on several factors including, but not limited to, how much documentation may already exist on the type of property being nominated and whether the property is being nominated as part of a Multiple Property Documentation Form. In most cases, it is estimated to average 36 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form to meet minimum National Register documentation requirements. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, 1849 C St., NW, Washington, DC 20240.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY Hotel LaBonte
NAME:

MULTIPLE
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: WYOMING, Converse

DATE RECEIVED: 9/03/08 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 9/22/08
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 10/07/08 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 10/17/08
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 08001003

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N
REQUEST: Y SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: N NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

___ACCEPT ___RETURN ___REJECT ___DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

Opened in 1914, the Hotel La Bonte
is significantly associated with efforts
in the 1910s to remake Douglas, ^{image} as a fashionable
center for ^{county} government, regional commerce,
and recreational travel (due to location
on the Yellowstone Highway)

RECOM./CRITERIA Accept A

REVIEWER J. McClelland

TELEPHONE _____

DISCIPLINE _____

DATE 10/10/08

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N N see attached SLR Y/N N

If a nomination is returned to the nominating authority, the
nomination is no longer under consideration by the NPS.

Hotel reflects the boom
economy of
the
period.
Despite
street eleva-
tion modifications, hotel
overall reflects strong
location,
integrity of association,
materials, design, & workmanship

Recommendation: SLR Return

Action: SLR Return None

Documentation Issues-Discussion Sheet

State Name: WY County Name Converse

Resource Name Hotel LaBonte

Reference No. 1003

Multiple Name _____

Solution: _____

PS Problem: - photos are not numbered. I numbered them 1-8
- integrity issues (though not going for Crit. C)
Integrity issues are limited to stone foundations, loss of central courtyard and chimney replacement. Overall Building is intact, and it clearly conveys its association w. early 20th century con-
developments. Interior is outstanding!
LMS

Resolution: _____

SLR: Yes No

Database Change: _____

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

DOUGLAS QUADRANGLE
WYOMING-CONVERSE CO.
7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)



Maped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey
as part of the Department of the Interior program
for the development of the Missouri River Basin
Control by USGS and USC&GS

Topography from aerial photographs by multiplex methods
Aerial photographs taken September 1948. Field check 1949

Polyconic projection. 1927 North American datum
10,000-foot grid based on Wyoming coordinate system,
east zone

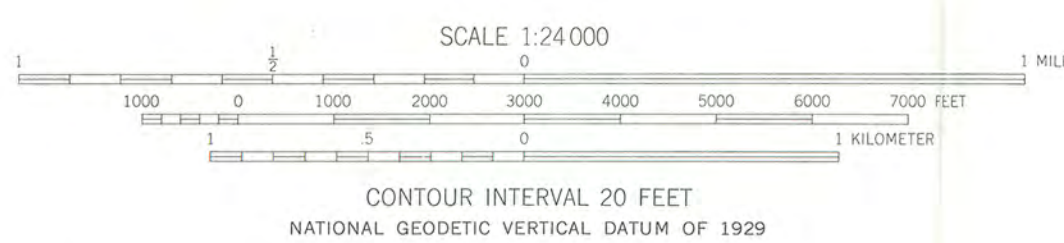
Red tint indicates area in which only
landmark buildings are shown

1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks,
zone 13, shown in blue

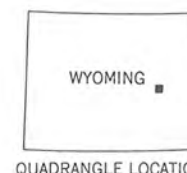
Revisions shown in purple compiled from aerial photographs
taken 1974. This information not field checked

There may be private inholdings within the boundaries of the
National or State reservations shown on this map

UTM GRID AND 1974 MAGNETIC NORTH
DECLINATION AT CENTER OF SHEET



THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS
FOR SALE BY U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, DENVER, COLORADO 80225, OR RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST



QUADRANGLE LOCATION

To place on the predicted North American Datum 1983
move the projection lines 7 meters north and
48 meters east as shown by dashed corner ticks

ROAD CLASSIFICATION
Primary highway, all weather, hard surface
Secondary highway, all weather, hard surface
Light-duty road, all weather, improved surface
Unimproved road, fair or dry weather
Interstate Route
U.S. Route
State Route

DOUGLAS, WYO.
N4245-W10522.5/7.5

1949
PHOTOREVISED 1974
DMA 4989 IV SW-SERIES V874

Hotel LaBonte
Douglas, Converse County
UTM Reference Point:
13 468452 E/4734308 N

ARTS. PARKS. HISTORY.

Wyoming State Parks & Cultural Resources

State Historic Preservation Office
Barrett Building, 3rd Floor
2301 Central Avenue
Cheyenne, WY 82002
Phone: (307) 777-7697
Fax: (307) 777-6421
<http://wyoshpo.state.wy.us>



28 August 2008

Janet Matthews
Keeper of the National Register of Historic Places
National Park Service
1201 Eye St., NW
8th Floor (MS 2280)
Washington, DC 20005

Re: Submission of the Grant Street Grocery and Market, the Hotel LaBonte, the
Gillette Post Office, and Platte County Court House Nominations

Dear Ms. Matthews:

The Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office is submitting the Grant Street Grocery and Market, the Hotel LaBonte, the Gillette Post Office, and Platte County Court House nominations for your review, which the State Review Board accepted and Mary Hopkins, the Wyoming Interim State Historic Preservation Officer, signed.

Please contact me at 307-777-7828 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Kara Hahn

National Register Program Coordinator
Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office
2301 Central Avenue
Cheyenne, WY 82002
307-777-7828



Dave Freudenthal, Governor
Milward Simpson, Director