

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**DATA SHEET**

**FOR NPS USE ONLY**

RECEIVED **DEC 29 1977**

DATE ENTERED **MAY 22 1978**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

Virginian Hotel

AND/OR COMMON

Virginian Hotel

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER

Lots 4, 5 and 6 of Block 5

CITY, TOWN

Medicine Bow

\_\_\_ VICINITY OF

\_\_\_NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

First

STATE

Wyoming

CODE

56

COUNTY

Carbon

CODE

007

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

**CATEGORY**

- \_\_\_DISTRICT
- BUILDING(S)
- \_\_\_STRUCTURE
- \_\_\_SITE
- \_\_\_OBJECT

**OWNERSHIP**

- \_\_\_PUBLIC
- PRIVATE
- \_\_\_BOTH

**PUBLIC ACQUISITION**

- \_\_\_IN PROCESS
- \_\_\_BEING CONSIDERED

**STATUS**

- OCCUPIED
- \_\_\_UNOCCUPIED
- \_\_\_WORK IN PROGRESS

**ACCESSIBLE**

- \_\_\_YES: RESTRICTED
- YES: UNRESTRICTED
- \_\_\_NO

**PRESENT USE**

- \_\_\_AGRICULTURE
- COMMERCIAL
- \_\_\_EDUCATIONAL
- \_\_\_ENTERTAINMENT
- \_\_\_GOVERNMENT
- \_\_\_INDUSTRIAL
- \_\_\_MILITARY
- \_\_\_MUSEUM
- \_\_\_PARK
- PRIVATE RESIDENCE
- \_\_\_RELIGIOUS
- \_\_\_SCIENTIFIC
- \_\_\_TRANSPORTATION
- \_\_\_OTHER:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

The Virginian, Inc.

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Medicine Bow

\_\_\_ VICINITY OF

STATE

Wyoming 82329

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Carbon County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

Third and Pine Streets

CITY, TOWN

Rawlins

STATE

Wyoming 82301

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

Wyoming Recreation Commission Survey of Historic Sites, Markers and Monuments

DATE

1967 (revised 1973)

\_\_\_FEDERAL  STATE \_\_\_COUNTY \_\_\_LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

Wyoming Recreation Commission, 604 East 25th Street

CITY, TOWN

Cheyenne

STATE

Wyoming 82002

# 7 DESCRIPTION

## CONDITION

EXCELLENT  
 GOOD  
 FAIR

DETERIORATED  
 RUINS  
 UNEXPOSED

## CHECK ONE

UNALTERED  
 ALTERED

## CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE  
 MOVED DATE \_\_\_\_\_

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Town, as they called it, pleased me the less, the longer I saw it. But until our language stretches itself and takes in a new word of closer fit, town will have to do for the name of such a place as was Medicine Bow. I have seen and slept in many like it since. Scattered wide, they littered the frontier from the Columbia to the Rio Grande, from the Missouri to the Sierras. They lay stark, dotted over a planet of treeless dust, like soiled packs of cards. Each was similar to the next, as one old five-spot of clubs resembles another. Houses, empty bottles, and garbage, they were forever of the same shapless pattern. More forlorn they were than stale bones. They seemed to have been strewn there by the wind and to be waiting till the wind should come again and blow them away. Yet serene above their foulness swam a pure and quiet light, such as the East never sees; they might be bathing in the air of creation's first morning. Beneath sun and stars their days and nights were immaculate and wonderful.

The above quote from Owen Wister's book, The Virginian, describes the town of Medicine Bow as the book's narrator first saw it in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Today, a century later, it is still not an entirely inaccurate description of Medicine Bow and some other small Western towns like it...scattered wide, stark in appearance or perhaps surrounded by a treeless plain, and forlorn in some respects. The wind still can blow dust from the streets of Medicine Bow into eyes, ears, nose, mouth and camera lenses. Nevertheless, still a part of Medicine Bow also is the clear sky, and the fresh air that Wister described as the "air of creation's first morning."

Medicine Bow today is an eclectic mixture of the historic and contemporary. Its structures reflect both the depression that followed relocation of the thrust of interstate traffic from U. S. Highway 30 south to Interstate Highway 80, and economic growth caused by expansion of operations in coal mines to the west. On the same block as the Virginian Hotel is a hand-hewn, log barn dating back to the turn of the century. The barn faces a row of aluminum-sided motel units, and both are in the same small neighborhood as mobile homes of recent vintage. Near the mobile homes is an automobile graveyard, over which presides one of the town's two water towers.

The nation's first transcontinental railroad, the Union Pacific, which breathed life into Medicine Bow in the 1870's, passes along the south edge of town, its double tracks a couple of stone throws from the Virginian. North of the railroad, and between it and the Virginian, is U. S. Highway 30, the Lincoln Highway, that was the first transcontinental automobile route across the United States. Skirting the two-lane highway on the north are Medicine Bow business establishments, both operative and defunct. In addition to this short strip of commercial activity is a small central business district located off the highway and consisting of about half a dozen buildings. Regardless of their location in the town, all businesses are within walking distance from the town's pivotal structure—the Virginian Hotel—a 3½-story, rectangular building facing south.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES

1911

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Medicine Bow, Wyoming is the setting for perhaps the greatest of all Western novels, The Virginian, written by Owen Wister. Located in the Laramie Plains, a large expanse of grazing land in the Northwestern Plains, the town grew up as a railroad shipping point for cattle, sheep and wool. Before the arrival of the Union Pacific Railroad in June, 1868, Medicine Bow was the site of a tie operation, where logs and railroad ties cut in the Medicine Bow Mountains and floated down rushing mountain currents, gathered behind a boom stretched across the Medicine Bow River. With the addition of a water tank and roundhouse, the settlement became a permanent railroad station along a great transcontinental route.

Author Wister, who crisscrossed Wyoming fifteen times in the years 1885-1902, borrowed scenes from the country around Medicine Bow for his book, which was written in 1902. The Virginian Hotel, constructed in 1911, did not play a role in that book. Surely August Grimm, who with George Plummer was responsible for building the hotel, had in mind the fame of that great American novel, but the hotel probably was not built to honor Wister or the hero of his novel. Although cowboys, as well as railroad workers needed a place to stay when they arrived in town, the hotel was built to serve a clientele from a much wider area.

In a general way, one might say that the Virginian Hotel is a product of the economic optimism prevalent in Wyoming at the turn of the century. The Spanish-American War had kindled prosperity, and the Wyoming economy reflected that prosperity. Coal production in the state more than doubled between the years 1898-1910. Some of the state's greatest mines were developed west of Medicine Bow at Carbon and later, Hanna. Agricultural prices in the state increased nearly fifty per cent between 1900 and 1910, and both cattle and sheep were important products of the Laramie Plains area. Reclamation and settlement were encouraged in the state by the passage of the Carey Act (1894) and the Newlands Act (1902). Pathfinder Dam, located 45 miles northwest of Medicine Bow, was completed in 1911, the year the Virginian Hotel was completed.

Just after the turn of the century the Union Pacific revamped its main line, and constructed a new grade through a portion of the Laramie Plains that left the towns of Rock Creek and Carbon stranded, but allowed Medicine Bow to remain on the main line. In 1909, during this flush economic period, the population of Medicine Bow consisted of 28 families, 66 single men and six single women. Despite the town's small population August Grimm—merchant, mayor, and a state legislator—and Rawlins financier, George Plummer, envisioned Medicine Bow as more than just a wide place in the road. Perhaps uppermost in their minds was the economic opportunity presented

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

See Addendum

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY Less than 1 acre

UTM REFERENCES

A	1,3	4,0,0	4,7,0	4,6,3,8	7,1,5	B					
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING	ZONE	EASTING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		
C						D					

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The site is simply that of the original hotel.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

## 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Mark Junge, Historian

ORGANIZATION

Wyoming Recreation Commission

DATE

June 2, 1977

STREET & NUMBER

604 East 25th Street

TELEPHONE

(307) 777-7695

CITY OR TOWN

Cheyenne

STATE

Wyoming 82002

## 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

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

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

*Jan L. Wilson*

TITLE

Wyoming State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE

October 27, 1977

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHITECTURE AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

DATE 5-22-78  
KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

ATTEST

*Wayne Cole*

DATE 5-12-78

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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CONTINUATION SHEET Virginian Hotel ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 2

South of the Virginian, across U. S. Highway 30, is the white frame Medicine Bow railroad depot and adjacent to the depot is a pile of logs that soon will become the reconstructed cabin that once was inhabited by Owen Wister during his stay in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. Across an unpaved street flanking the west face of the Virginian is a gasoline station, and one block down that street to the north is a store and post office. Along the same street and just north of the Virginian are three small structures, the one nearest the Virginian being a Greek revival bank building that today houses a rock shop. East of the Virginian is the former Elkhorn Bar which in 1934 was joined to the east face of the hotel. Today the one-story, brick-faced structure contains a bar, banquet room and beauty shop. The rear, or north face, of the hotel has two extensions, one being 27' x 30' in size and constructed of the same material as that used in the hotel. Attached to the west end of the north face is a cement-block addition, 27' x 47' in size. Constructed in 1957, the latter was until recently used as a living quarters for the hotel owners but now contains rental units.

The sheer size of the Virginian sets it apart from all other buildings in the town of Medicine Bow. The contrast between it and adjacent structures is not only obvious, but anomalous for a town the size of Medicine Bow (Pop. 455). However, its massive size is not its sole redeeming architectural characteristic. The building is a freely adapted example of Renaissance Revival architecture in the Italian style. Boldness and simplicity of outline, and the symmetry of exterior lines are Renaissance characteristics that are evident in the Virginian. Its basic outline, exclusive of additions, is that of a rectangle composed of rectangular, textured, concrete blocks. The beige-painted blocks, containing sand drawn from the Medicine Bow River, were fashioned at the building site. The symmetry of exterior building lines is demonstrated by its fenestration. Window openings are all rectangular, and with few exceptions are generally positioned in line with each other both vertically and horizontally. The Virginian's skyline is a distinctive characteristic of the building and conforms to Renaissance style with its wide, projecting cornices that cast deep shadows and lend horizontality to the building. Two roofs, one partially capping the third story, and one that covers the attic story or stepped-back fourth level, are Renaissance in their horizontality. Both are shallow-sloping, hipped and, like Renaissance structures, are covered with tiles, although of a metal fabric. One concrete block chimney penetrates the north side of the lower roof.

Sparing use of detail, and concentration on elemental characteristics, is obvious. The building contains very little exterior decoration: there are no pilasters, no capitals, and there is no scrollwork. A row of dentils below the cornice offers minimal relief, and smooth-faced quoins, sills and lintels serve to provide some

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CONTINUATION SHEET Virginian Hotel ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 3

contrast to the textured blocks. Three drainspouts, one on the front and two on the rear face, and fire escapes attached to the east and west faces of the hotel, are necessities.

The Virginian does not, however, adhere strictly to the Renaissance style. Renaissance building plans contained special regard for symmetry produced by a similarity of parts on either side of the central axial lines. But the fenestration of the right and left sides of the Virginian's main face, although consistent in its general adherence to vertical and horizontal lines, upon examination displays a slight imbalance of individual parts. The size and design of openings on the right side of the building's face do not mirror, exactly, size and design on the left. Also, windows of the second and third stories are double hung, one-over-one, while those of the main level are fixed pane—originally fitted with plate glass—one-light openings capped by transoms. East face and attic-story windows also demonstrate a departure from overall building symmetry. Rectangular lintels contribute to a uniform appearance but Renaissance style calls for openings spanned by semi-circular arches.

Certain changes made over the years also detract significantly from the basic design of the Virginian. Compromising the building's original design are the attachments to the north and east faces. The main, double-door entrance is today locked and no longer used, while a window on the east side of the main face has been adapted to provide a single-door main entrance. An attempt to provide a Western type of rustication has been made by covering cement sidewalks along the building's west and south faces with wooden planks. Fronting this boardwalk are log pole and wagon wheel hitching posts used for vehicle parking abutments, and parked on the boardwalk are a freight wagon and railroad baggage cart.

The interior of the main floor of the Virginian contains, from east to west: a saloon replete with photographs, animal heads and various and assorted bric-a-brac; a kitchen, and a cafe dining area that seats approximately 40 people; and an Owen Wister Dining Room with seating for approximately 30 people. The latter is papered with white, maroon and gold medallion wallpaper, and furnished with velvet draperies, shag carpeting, oak and mahogany dining tables and chairs, upholstered chairs, a sideboard and china closet, chandeliers, and other decorations including a photograph protrait of Owen Wister. The 12 foot high ceilings throughout the first floor are supported by steel poles and large beams and, except in the bar area, are covered with pressed tin.

The hotel second and third floors contain a total of 33 rooms, 16 on the second and 17 on the third. All rooms have plastered and/or papered walls and ceilings, are

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carpeted, and are heated by steam radiators. The second floor contains two clusters of rooms, one on the east and one on the west end and are named, respectively, the Owen Wister Suite and the Judge Garth Suite. These suites, and four other rooms on the second and third floors, contain separate bathroom facilities, although patrons on each floor have access to one and one-half bathrooms located adjacent the stairwell. Room furniture is assorted and includes some antique pieces such as hardwood dressers and chairs, brass beds and hardwood closets.

The fourth floor contains eleven rooms which are currently being cleaned and painted by members of the Shiloh Artists Guild and collectively will serve as an art gallery. Each room is plastered, trimmed in pine, and furnished with at least one window and electricity, although water and heat are not provided. The basement of the Virginian, containing the gas-fired furnace, is used mainly as a storage area.

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CONTINUATION SHEET Virginian Hotel ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 2

by the rumored transcontinental automobile route which rumor indicated would parallel the Union Pacific Railroad. Two years before that auto road—the Lincoln Highway—became a reality, the Virginian Hotel was in operation.

The grand opening of the Virginian occurred on Saturday, September 30, 1911, and was a two-day affair that drew the flattery of several local news reporters, including one from the Saratoga Sun. The Sun reporter described the Virginian as being second only to the Plains Hotel in Cheyenne, and opened his article with the following words:

GRAND OPENING OF THE "VIRGINIAN"

On September 30th, 1911, the busy little town of Medicine Bow, made historic by Owen Wister, again stepped into the lime-light when the new hotel called "The Virginian" and built upon the site of the old "Elkhorn Hotel" opened its hospitable doors to the public.

All day Saturday, the 30th, in spite of inclement weather, automobiles, the U. P. trains and all sorts of conveyances from a prairie-schooner to a saddle horse brot the guests from all points of the compass to the grand opening. Verily all roads led to Medicine Bow, and when the Laramie Orchestra of six pieces began to coax forth the alluring notes of a waltz at 8 p.m. about one hundred couples were present to trip the "light fantastic" in the great dining room where the ball was held.

August Grimm apparently spared no expense for the occasion, declared the Sun, and "has persevered thru overwhelming difficulties to the culmination of his dream hotel." Following the dancing, the doors of the banquet room were opened and guests were invited to dine in style on main dishes of trout, boiled tongue, sage chicken, spring lamb, roast duck, and beef filet. These and side dishes were washed down with Mumm's Extra Dry and coffee, followed by cigars and cigarettes. Mrs. Grimm then christened the hotel by cutting an immense cake banked with flowers and bearing the name, "Virginian." On Sunday, festivities continued in the form of foot racing, horse racing, a bucking contest, a prize fight and a baseball game.

The Virginian did not become the nucleus of a great Western metropolis. Medicine Bow remained a railroad shipping point, a rural commercial center, and a stopping place along the highway for interstate travelers or those traveling the highways in the Casper-Rawlins-Laramie triangle. Medicine Bow contained 455 people according to the 1970 census, which was just prior to completion of a stretch of the four-lane Interstate Highway 80, from Laramie to Rawlins. What economic support may have been lost to Medicine Bow by the diversion of traffic south from U. S. 30, however,

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possibly was gained by the expansion of the coal industry west of town at Hanna. The figures of a recent, private survey of Medicine Bow show that in the past three years the population of Medicine Bow has increased 150 per cent.

In this most recent period of economic expansion, the Virginian remains a viable enterprise, as part of a motel-hotel-bar-restaurant combination. Marvin Cronberg and Dick Mowry are the present owners of the business. Cronberg is the son of Ted Cronberg, who served as Mayor of Medicine Bow for 23 years, and is the grandson of Christian Cronberg who owned the Virginian Hotel in the 1920's, sometime following the Grimm-Plummer proprietorship. The present owners purchased the Virginian in August, 1976 from John and June Hunt and Eileen Scott, who were responsible for major rehabilitation work on the hotel.

The significance of the Virginian Hotel rests upon its architecture and its history. One of its chief architectural distinctions is its size, in relation to other buildings in the town of Medicine Bow that are predominately one story in height. It is possibly the largest Wyoming hotel for a town the size of Medicine Bow. Another distinction is its design, that of Renaissance architecture in the Italian style. Further research should be done before the architecture of the hotel is evaluated by comparison with other Wyoming buildings of the same general size and function, but it is apparent that its design was the result of careful, rather than haphazard, planning. The historical significance of the Virginian relates to a combination of age and function. For a total of sixty-six years the hotel has served travelers in Southern Wyoming, and for many of those years it offered conveniences that other small town hotels could not provide: electric lights, steam heat, hot and cold water, and telephone and telegraph facilities. Thus, the Virginian stands as not only a physical landmark, but also a commercial landmark in the town of Medicine Bow as well as along U. S. Highway 30. Its significance is not dependent upon Owen Wister and The Virginian, although an emphasis upon Wister and the theme of his book is prominent throughout the building. Although it is named after an important figure in Western literature, and although it relates to an economy in which the livestock industry is historically prominent, the Virginian Hotel should be enrolled in the National Register on the basis of its architecture, its role in local history, and its role in the history of American transportation routes.

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