

Building the Val Verde Hotel

by Spenser Wilson
and Jack McKee

The Val Verde Hotel in Socorro, New Mexico, was a nationally known stopping place during its hey-day in the 1920's and '30's. The Val Verde was note-worthy for several reasons; the location, the time period, and the architect.

Socorro is centrally located in New Mexico on the main north-south line of the Atcheson, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad, from Albuquerque to El Paso, Texas, and on the branch line to Magdalena. Magdalena was an important mining and ranching area which attracted a great deal of attention, while milling operations in the Socorro area also created the need for good hotels. Both towns at one time supported several hotels and rooming houses. The Val Verde was built by a group from Missouri in 1919 to provide first-class accommodations. It was built on the site of the earlier Windsor Hotel which had burned.

The Val Verde is also important because it was a bridge between the period when railroads were the primary means of travel and the coming of the automobile. Road travel became important by the 1920's as both state and federal programs improved main roads into highways. The family car and commercial trucking began the process of replacing the railroad in American life. The Val Verde, however, continued to attract travellers and remained busy well into the 1960's before the modern motel competition forced its closing.

The Val Verde is also important for its architecture and the architect. The building was designed by the famous architectural firm of Trost & Trost of El Paso, Texas. Henry C. Trost was well known for a series of commercial buildings and houses in the southwest. The Franciscan and El Fidel hotels of Albuquerque were among the best known, as well as the Val Verde. (Trost is subject of a recent study by Lloyd C. and June-Marie F. Englebrecht, entitled *Henry C. Trost: Architect of the Southwest*, published by the El Paso Public Library Association.) Trost designed the Val Verde in the popular California mission style and the hotel opened for business June 19, 1919. The hotel was built in a U-shape around a courtyard, with single-story wings on the west and east sides of the courtyard, and a three-story base of the U on the north containing the reception and lounge area—complete with fireplace. The second and third stories were rooms. The east wing contained living quarters for the owner-manager, the dining room and kitchen, and office or store rental—at one time a barber shop. The west wing was rooms and another commercial area on the tip of the wing. When completed the courtyard was landscaped with trees, flowerbeds, grass and a fountain. This very important and imposing structure is now listed in the National Register of Historic Places



fig. 1 early stage of construction with west wing on the left.

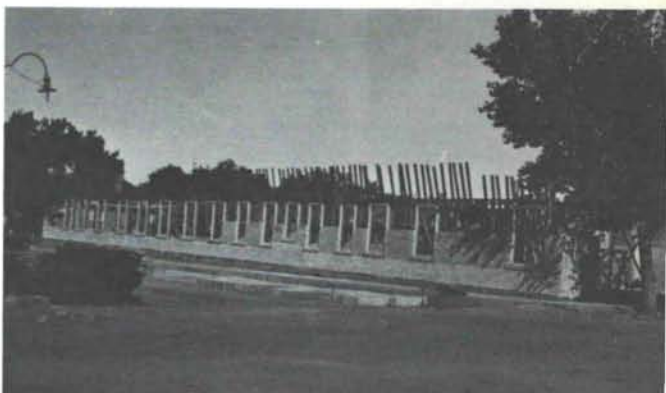


fig. 2 west wing in progress



fig. 3 west wing again nearing the top.



fig. 4 east wing and central portion



fig. 5 east wing with roof and beginning the second story in the center. Note heavy construction vehicle on the right.



fig. 9 north wall of center portion

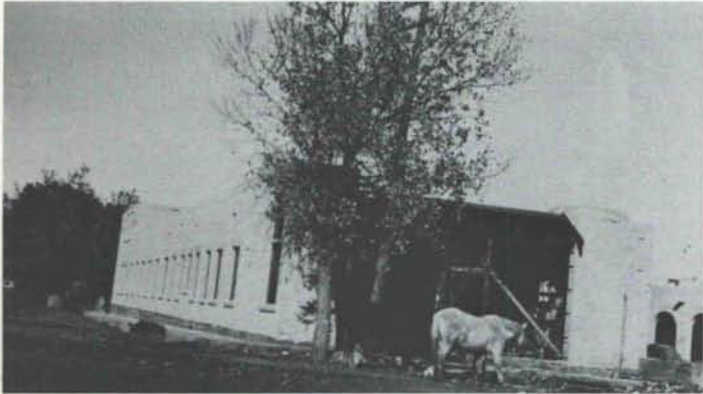


fig. 6 west wing and visitor

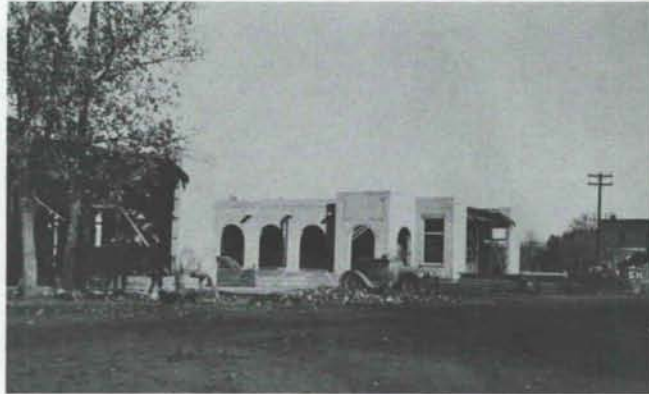


fig. 10 the front of each wing



fig. 7 view of west wing from north-west corner



fig. 11 the courtyard



fig. 8 east side



fig. 12 nearing completion



fig. 13 a room in the Val Verde. Postcard—John P. Conran Collection.

and by the New Mexico Cultural Properties Review Committee.

Documentation for the Val Verde is quite complete, which is in contrast with so many historic buildings. The original architectural drawings have survived as well as the hotel register. More recently a group of photographs of construction of the building have come to light. A total of fourteen negatives turned up in a private collection in Socorro and, with the permission of the owner, twelve are reproduced here, the other

two are too blurred to print. Trost may have taken them himself to record the construction. He certainly supervised the work and, according to the number of entries in the register, he returned on several occasions to Socorro after the opening.

The Val Verde is no longer a hotel. The building is being developed by a private investor as professional offices and small shops. At the moment there are hopes for a restaurant in the original dining and kitchen area.

S.W. & J. McK.



fig. 14 (Fully completed hotel)

Collection—Socorro County Historical Society Inc. The Val Verde is a significant reminder of travel accommodations of another day and another time.

SUMMER VENTILATION

1. Open low windows and doors on colder sides of building.
2. Open clerestory windows to exhaust hot air.
3. Overhangs protect windows from direct sun.
4. Shade greenhouse; open low and high windows for proper air flow.
5. Use shaded decks for summer play and evening meals.

WINTER HEATING

1. Low sun penetrates brick floor and wall of greenhouse and living area.
2. Interior heat tube draws hot air from clerestory; exhausts at bottom through adjustable vent.
3. Door from cold room remains closed to function as cold air trap.
4. Centrally located woodburning stove radiates heat to brick hearth and wall.
5. Sun penetrates clerestory for additional heat and balanced light.
6. Windows and sliding glass doors are covered at night with insulated curtains and/or exterior shutters.
7. Porch roof protects entrance deck.



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