

The Nester Hotel (Hotel Seneca)
529-533 Exchange Street
Geneva,
Ontario County
New York

HABS No. NY-5706

HABS
NY,
35-GEN,
12-

PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

THE NESTER HOTEL
(Hotel Seneca)

HABS No. NY-5706

Location: 529-533 Exchange Street, at the northeast corner of Franklin Street, Geneva, Ontario County, New York.

Present Owner: City of Geneva.

Present Use: The hotel and an adjacent building (the Jacobs Building, HABS No. NY-5705) were demolished in 1981 in accordance with the housing plans for the city. A new 8-story, 50-bedroom elderly and handicapped apartment building will replace the hotel and the Jacobs Building. Documentation of the hotel was prepared before the demolition.

Significance: From its opening date until the post-World War II years, The Nester Hotel, later re-named Hotel Seneca, was the most imposing building in the downtown district of the City of Geneva. During its early years the hotel was also the only first-class hotel in the city, having modern improvements in every bedroom.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1896. The grand opening date was June 5, 1896.
2. Architect: Charles F. Crandall of Rochester, New York. Crandall was a well-known Rochester architect. During his initial professional years he worked in the office of Charles Coots. In 1879 he formed a partnership with George T. Otis, who also worked for Coots. Their partnership was dissolved in 1892. Crandall had an independent office thereafter until about 1906 when he formed a partnership with John F. Strobel. Their partnership was dissolved in 1920. (Crandall's birth and death dates are not available).
3. Original and subsequent owners: Legal description of the lot upon which the structure stands is Lot 5, Block 14. The following is a list of past property owners for this structure. Source of these records is the Office of the Ontario County Clerk, Ontario County Courthouse, Canandaigua, New York.

1891 Deed, April 7, 1891, recorded in Liber 192 Deeds, Page 588.
Henry and Miranda Ramsey to Samuel K. Nester. (Lot size:
20' x 86' plus 15' and 20' frontages)

1891 Deed, June 18, 1891, recorded in Liber 199 Deeds, Page 310.
William Dove and Meyer Jacobs to Samuel K. Nester. (Additional
back land)

- 1906 Deed, January 22, 1906, recorded in Liber 257 Deeds, Page 14.
Meyer Jacobs to Samuel K. Nester. (Additional 21' on Lake Street, now Exchange Street).
- 1908 Deed, April 20, 1908, recorded in Liber 263 Deeds, Page 552.
Meyer Jacobs to Trustees of Samuel K. Nester: Minnie J. Nester, Byron M. Nester, Montgomery M. Sanford, David S. Nester and Sylvia M. Rawleigh. (Samuel K. Nester died January 10, 1908).
- 1912 Deed, June 21, 1912, recorded in Liber 283 Deeds, Page 560.
Meyer Jacobs to Trustees of Samuel K. Nester, same as above.
(Main parcel received in 1891. Later several smaller parcels secured by expansion. This was 15' x 56' on Franklin Street).
- 1913 Deed, October 13, 1913, recorded in Liber 288 Deeds, Page 176.
Samuel K. Nester hotel property to Minnie J. Nester, Byron M. Nester, Samuel K. Nester, Jr. and Sylvia Rawleigh.
- 1922 Deed, October 17, 1922, recorded in Liber 324 Deeds, Page 490.
Sylvia Rawleigh to Minnie J. Nester, Byron M. Nester, and Samuel K. Nester, Jr. Each 1/3 interest.
- 1940 Deed, January 25, 1940, recorded in Liber 403 Deeds, Page 271.
Estate of Minnie J. Nester and interest of Byron M. Nester to Samuel K. Nester, Jr.
- 1959 Deed, September 22, 1959, recorded in Liber 632 Deeds, Page 1058.
Estate of Samuel K. Nester, Jr. to Seneca Hotel Corporation.
- 1966 Deed, February 25, 1966, recorded in Liber 676 Deeds, Page 47.
Seneca Hotel Corporation to Ray Paratore.
- 1967 Deed, July 13, 1967, recorded in Liber 685 Deeds, Page 169.
Ray Paratore to Seneca Hotel Corporation.
- 1969 Deed, December 30, 1969, recorded in Liber 701 Deeds, Page 455.
Seneca Hotel Corporation to Marvin Rosen.
- 1971 Deed, January 15, 1971, recorded in Liber 708 Deeds, Page 909.
Marvin Rosen to Geneva 531 Realty, Inc. (Tax sale, June 28, 1972).
- 1974 Deed, July 23, 1974, recorded in Liber 738 Deeds, Page 1084.
Geneva 531 Realty, Inc. to City of Geneva. Tax sale deed from City Comptroller to City of Geneva.
- Prior to the 1974 Deed, there was a tax sale on the property on June 28, 1972, and Geneva 531 Realty, Inc. bought the property. Then the property was reverted to the City of Geneva. Following the two-year redemption period, the July 23, 1974 Deed was filed in the County Clerk's Office.

4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: General carpenter was William Bourne of Geneva. An article in the Geneva Courier, June 9, 1897, quotes the owner, Samuel K. Nester, as saying, "Mr. Bourne was responsible for the excellent construction and stability of the building." It would indicate that he would be considered the equivalent of a modern contractor. William G. Dove was the general mason. A few sub-contractors were also involved in the construction. The building was completed and occupied in "just 131 working days."
5. Original plans and construction: In design, the 1896 Geneva Courier described the building as "Italian Renaissance to a considerable extent, and 36 by 115 feet in dimensions; five stories in height with a well lighted basement; and with fireproof walls." Oriel windows and three-sided bay windows were on the right and left sides of the front facade respectively, on all four upper floors. Between these windows were simple, single windows with iron balconies and colorful awnings. There was a roof garden with "25 round tables with iron standards and steamer chairs." A scenic view of Seneca Lake was seen right from the garden.

Interior as originally designed was boasted with frills: costly carpets, handsome furniture, modern improvements and beautiful decorations. The main floor consisted of a lobby with a circular leather couch; a dining and ball room; a ladies sitting room; and two small private dining rooms. This floor was tiled. The dining room had an interesting feature--a wall mural with nautical scenes of a lighthouse, a steamboat dock and the Seneca Lake. On each of the four additional floors there were fifteen rooms, most with adjoining baths. All of these were served by an elevator. There was a telephone in each room providing inter-room and office contact. Particularly noted was the special Bridal Suite with its deep rich carpet and seductive divans. The Geneva Courier article states, "This would not be made a popular resort in the general acceptance of the term, but is designed as a seasonable and luxurious rendezvous for the guests and the Geneva patrons."

6. Alterations and additions: In about 1906 a section of an adjoined 3-story mercantile building was bought by Samuel K. Nester, owner of the hotel. The upper two stories of this building were incorporated into the hotel and added with bay windows, which were similar in design to the windows on the original hotel. The adjoined building (to the south of the hotel; the hotel faces west) was the Jacobs Building (HABS No. NY-5705). Early City Directories indicate that the lower floor of the hotel addition continued to be used as the "Monroe Billiard and Pool" establishment until 1909. After that, the lower floor, too, was apparently incorporated into the hotel.

In 1912 both the exterior and interior sections of the hotel were completely rebuilt and remodeled. Upon its re-opening it was re-named "Hotel Seneca," and a newspaper article described the new hotel as "palatial." The entire addition adjoined to the hotel was demolished and a new, full 5-story addition was built and incorporated into the hotel. The new addition was similar in over-all design to the original hotel and similar windows were used. A grille room and a cocktail lounge were built on the ground floor of the new addition. Both rooms were decorated in Jacobean style with dark oak paneling and ceiling beams, which were strictly for decorative purposes. In the original hotel the iron balconies were removed from the single windows, and the main arched oak doors were replaced with two revolving doors. The original roof garden was also removed. Interior redecoration occurred in the ground and upper floors. Most first floor public rooms, including the lobby and the dining room, were embellished with Adamesque detailing in the form of stenciling and applied decoration. Imported wallpaper and blue carpeting were installed throughout the upper floor halls. Bedrooms were re-carpeted in dark brown Brussels and furnished with brass beds and mahogany furniture. The stairway to the upper floor was re-designed and moved north of the lobby. Carpeting was installed on this stairway. A bakery was built and a new electric-driven cream freezer and a dishwasher were installed in the kitchen.

The most notable 1912 addition in the hotel is the open atrium. It is located on the second floor and is designed to provide light and air for the guest rooms. Despite the presence of the atrium, it is not visible from the front.

Also, during the 1912 reconstruction, in the rear yard, a separate two-story power plant with two automatic electric generators was built to supply power for steam heat, hot water, electric lights, refrigeration and vacuum cleaning system. It was demolished in 1974 due to poor condition.

In the 1920s a sixth floor was added to the hotel--without windows. A 1940s photo included in the HABS photo documentation shows the addition.

- B. Historical Context: During their prime years the Nester Hotel and, after 1912, the Hotel Seneca, served as the hub of the City's social, civic and business life. During World War II, the hotel enjoyed a boom time. The Sampson Naval Training Station and the Seneca Ordnance Depot were nearby and the hotel hosted many visitors and dignitaries. Peace brought a letdown, but there was a smaller boom for the hotel when the Air Force took over the Sampson area for a short time.

Then there was rapid decline for the hotel. Times had changed; people were traveling by automobile; motels were more convenient; golf courses and clubhouses were attractive; and newer dining areas were opened.

Ownership changed hands several times. In recent years the hotel deteriorated and city officials declared the hotel a gross health and fire safety hazard.

For many years the hotel was the regular meeting place for the Rotary Club, the Kiwanis Club, Zonta Club, Lions Club and the University Club. Classes and fraternities of Hobart and William Smith Colleges and high school classes and alumni groups staged festive banquets at the hotel. It was the center for many wedding receptions and anniversary parties. The hotel hosted the annual campaign headquarters and dinners of the Geneva Community Chest. In the late 1950s, the southern part of the main lobby was set aside to house the Geneva Chamber of Commerce.

Many political and governmental leaders were guests at various times, including New York State Governors Alfred E. Smith and Franklin D. Roosevelt. Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt visited the hotel on several occasions. Prominent guests of Hobart and William Smith Colleges, the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station, and major businesses were all housed at the hotel, as were visiting performers at the Geneva Opera House, such as the well known actor Robert Drouet.

A three-story brick and frame white house once stood on the site of the hotel. At one time the house was a dining saloon and billiard establishment.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The structure is a typical late 19th century hotel building with expansive windows.
2. Condition of fabric: At this writing, only the walls and the front facade are in stable condition. The interior is totally deteriorated and vandalized.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The 1896 hotel was five stories high and measured 36' x 115'. The hotel was later extended to the north by 21' through acquisition of a section of a mercantile building. A new addition in the 1912 re-construction of the hotel increased the dimensions to 57' x 120'. Additional dimensions gained from the 1920s addition are not known.
2. Foundations: Cut stone block.
3. Walls: Brick. Basically buff in color though painted red at one time and later white.

4. Structural system, framing: Floors and ceilings are of wood joist construction. There are some iron or steel columns and some steel beams. The building would be classified as Type 4 construction in Table B-202-2 of the Building Code.
 5. Canopy: A canopy has always sheltered the main entrance. It is said that it has been replaced several times.
 6. Chimney: The 1912 power plant contained a tall brick chimney.
 7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The main entrance has revolving doors with metal frames. The grille room door was of oak wood and later replaced with a metal door.

There is a wooden service door on the rear of the building. On the south side, facing Franklin Street, is a heavy wood door at the entrance to the old barber shop in the basement. All doors leading to the fire escapes are wooden with upper glass panels.
 - b. Windows: Bay windows are on the front elevation only. The ones on the southern corner are round oriels with curved glass. These were large enough to be extensions of the rooms and to be furnished for lounging purposes. A corbel on the first floor supports these windows. The others are regular bay windows of decorative nature.

The plain, rectangular windows on all elevations are double-hung, single light, wood sash.

Periodically the front windows were decked out with colorful awnings.
 8. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: The roof is flat with a build-up, graveled covering.
 - b. Cornice: The cornice on the front facade is denticulated.
 - c. Balustrade: On top of the roof is a low metal balustrade.
- C. Description of Interior:
1. Floor plans:
 - a. First floor: In the front (west) original part of the hotel is the lobby. Registration desk, coat room and private dining room are located on the southern side of the lobby. The stairway, elevator lobby and two private dining rooms

are located on the northern side of the lobby. Between these sides is the corridor which leads to the rear public dining room. In the 1912 addition the front section is the grille room and the rear section is the kitchen. Beyond the kitchen is the small store room. See Supplemental Material, Sources of Information section for a sketched floor plan.

b. Upper floors: All upper floors have similar plans. There are approximately 15 rooms to each floor. Some of the rooms have adjoining baths. The 1912 open atrium is on the second floor only. See Supplemental Material, Sources of Information section for a sketched floor plan.

2. Stairway: The main stairway is open and encircles the elevator lobby. It has a wooden wainscoting with a height of four feet and its treads are covered with carpeting. There was a bronze balustrade on the first landing.

Another stairway is in the 1912 addition, on the northwest side of the kitchen.

3. Flooring: Although some first floor rooms have tiled flooring, the basic flooring material throughout the hotel is hardwood.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls are wood frame with lathe and plaster finish. Some rooms are wallpapered. The ceilings are painted.

5. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: The doorways are all wood framed with wood doors. The guest room doors are of light wood panel construction with transom openings.

b. Windows: All windows have wooden enframements. Every room has at least one window.

6. Decorative features and trim: Frescoed plaster designs are prominent in the lobby and the ceiling and walls of the corridor leading to the dining room. In the main (public) dining room are two Ionic columns with elaborate scrolls and ornate capitals. In the small, private dining rooms, large garlanded medallions decorate the wall panels. The guest rooms have moldings around the ceilings and wide, wooden baseboards. In the ceiling corners of many rooms are fan-shaped plaster frescoes. In some rooms, vertical wall moldings are used to highlight the wallpaper.

7. Hardware: Most of the hardware was brass, all of which was stolen in the vandalism process.

8. Mechanical equipment:

- a. Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: A steam boiler supplied all cast-iron radiators. The original brick boiler was in the basement. This was replaced by cast-iron sectional steam boilers in the 1912 power plant. There are two 100 horsepower boilers of the "Dutchover" type, in which the boiler is set back of the arch and an air chamber is used for heating the fresh air before it passes onto the fire.

The only basic air conditioning is via opened windows. In later years air conditioning units were installed in the lobby, dining room, and cocktail lounge-grille room.

There is cross ventilation on the ground main floor and all guest rooms have at least one window.

Each of the 42 bathrooms are connected to ventilators.

- b. Lighting: Incandescent fixtures. During the 1912 reconstruction beautiful crystal chandeliers were installed in the dining areas. The grille room had a brass or bronze chandelier. Indirect lighting was supplied by decorative sconces. Each guest room has a central ceiling light and one outlet. In the bathroom are wall fixtures near the mirror and an electrical outlet.
- c. Plumbing: Plumbing originally was a composite of lead and iron pipe. In later years, considerable copper was utilized, all of which has disappeared due to thefts.

9. Notable original furniture: All that is left is a paneled dark oak bar in the cocktail lounge. There, too, is a unique large, straight high-backed leather upholstered bench.

Harmoniously colorful upholstered chairs were used in the lobby, while delicate colored chairs gave charm to the dining areas. The brass beds and mahogany furniture of the guest rooms were lovely in their unadorned simplicity.

- D. General setting and orientation: The front of the hotel is flush with the set back line of the neighboring mercantile stores. It abuts the Jacobs store on the north and, on the south, borders directly on Franklin Street.

Prepared by: Helen P. Maney
City Liaison for the Hotel
Seneca Project
Geneva, New York
1980

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Early Views: Historical photographs of the hotel are at the Geneva Historical Society and Museum, 543 South Main Street, Geneva, New York 14456. Photocopies of these photographs are included in the HABS documentation.

B. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Property records. Office of the County Clerk, Ontario County Courthouse, Canandaigua, New York.

Information on site, building dimensions, taxes, etc. Assessor's Office, Geneva City Hall, Geneva, New York.

Architectural Information, Engineering Department, Geneva City Hall, Geneva, New York.

Reports of construction and fire and safety hazards of Hotel Seneca, Office of the Fire Department, Geneva City Hall, Geneva, New York.

Historical material on the hotel. Geneva Historical Society and Museum, 543 South Main Street, Geneva, New York 14456.

Dudley, Williard H. and Cobb, Allen L. A Report on Fire and Safety Hazards, Hotel Seneca, Geneva, New York. Filed with City Health Department, City Hall, Geneva, New York, 1972.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Geneva Chamber of Commerce. Geneva on Seneca Lake. Geneva, New York: W. F. Humphrey Press, 1902, p. 88.

Monroe, Joel B. Geneva, A Century and a Quarter of History. Geneva, New York, 1902, pp. 198-200.

Newspaper articles:

"Time Takes its Toll on Downtown Hotel." Finger Lakes Times, Geneva, New York (December 8, 1977), p. 6.

"Developer Unveils Plans for Housing Complex." Finger Lakes Times, Geneva, New York (April 24, 1979).

Doran, Dr. Robert E. "Time to Say Goodbye to The Hotel Seneca." Finger Lakes Times, Geneva, New York (December 4, 1979).

Newspaper articles on the hotel. Geneva Advertiser Gazette, Geneva, New York, June 20, 1912; September 12, 1912; September 19, 1912; September 26, 1912. They are at the Geneva Historical Society and Museum, 543 South Main Street, Geneva, New York 14456.

Article on the hotel's 1896 opening from The Geneva Courier, June 9, 1896. The original copy is in possession of Mrs. Doris Nester Pace, widow of Harold Nester.

"Palatial Seneca Hotel to Open This Evening." The Geneva Times, Geneva, New York (September 9, 1912).

"Another Chapter Begins for Hotel Seneca." The Geneva Times, Geneva, New York. (February 28, 1966). Includes quotes from The Geneva Courier, June 9, 1896.

C. Supplemental Material: See page 11.

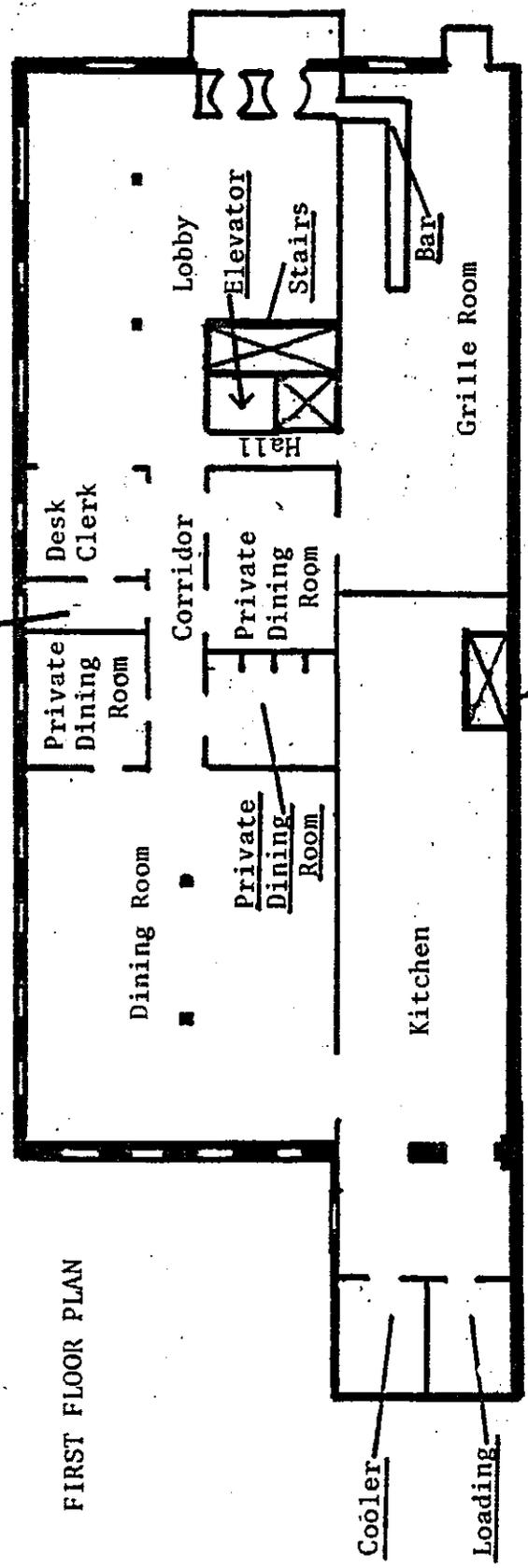


FRANKLIN STREET

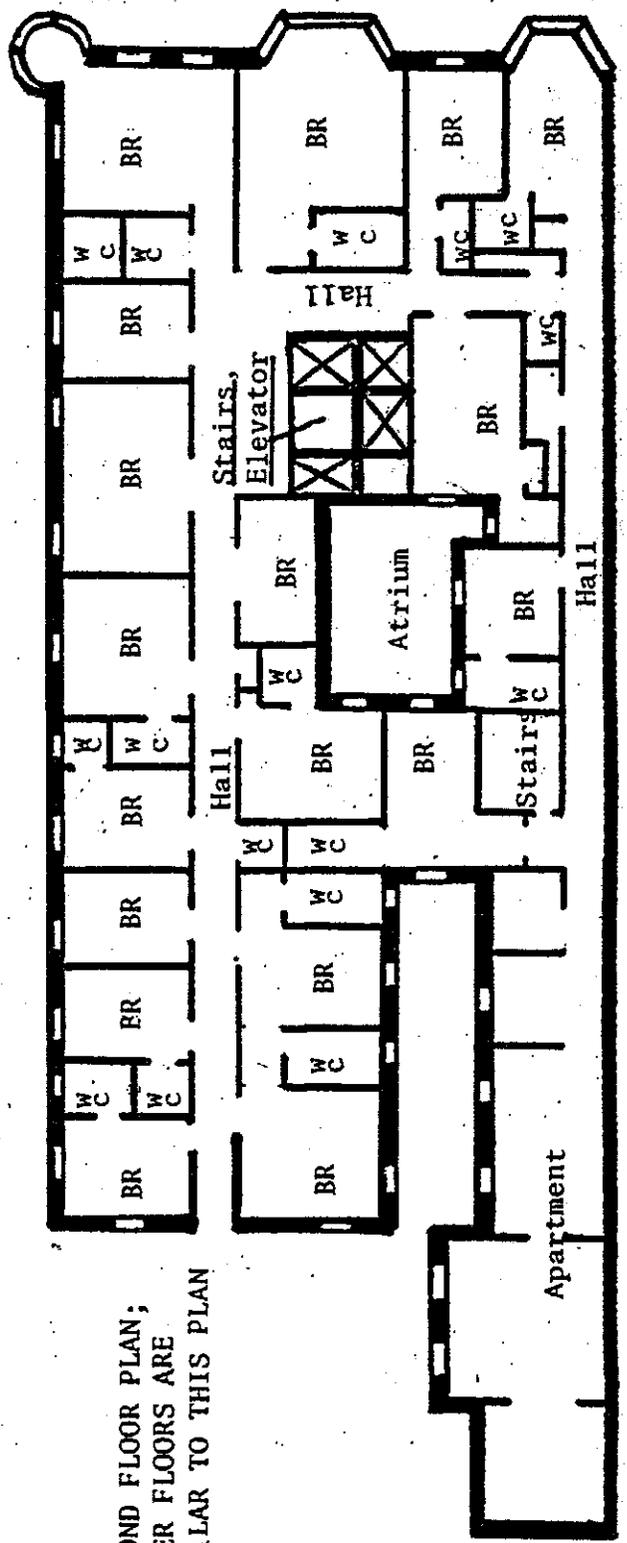
EXCHANGE STREET

EXCHANGE STREET

FIRST FLOOR PLAN



SECOND FLOOR PLAN;
OTHER FLOORS ARE
SIMILAR TO THIS PLAN



PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The recording project of the hotel was the result of a Memorandum of Agreement between the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation in compliance with Executive Order 11593 as a mitigative effort in the redevelopment plan for the City of Geneva. The written documentation was prepared in 1980 by Helen P. Maney, City Liaison for the Hotel Seneca Project. Susan McCown, a HABS historian in the Washington, D.C. office, edited the documentation in the winter of 1982, for transmittal to the Library of Congress. John A. Burns, AIA, was the HABS project co-ordinator.