

Historic Significance and Integrity Assessment Report for Listing Adobe Apartments on the Scottsdale Historic Register

Adobe Apartments

7037-7041 E. 1st Avenue, Scottsdale, Arizona
Scottsdale Historic Register SHR –02-13
Zoning Case No. 9-ZN-2002

Background

An intensive survey of downtown Scottsdale was conducted by the City's Preservation Division staff with assistance from Arizona State University interns, local historians and architects during the period 2000-2001. The goal of the survey was to identify those properties that might be eligible for listing on the Scottsdale Historic Register. Approximately 750 properties, built for commercial use, were studied with particular emphasis on those properties that related to Scottsdale historic development as an "Arts Colony and Tourist Destination." The Scottsdale Historic Preservation Commission and the members of the Commission's Historic Register Committee periodically reviewed the research collected and conducted field studies of the survey properties. Their relative significance and integrity were analyzed and compared. As a result of this effort, approximately fourteen other individual properties and two collections of buildings were identified that merited further consideration for designation to the Scottsdale Historic Register for their association with important historic events and representation of the architectural influences that shaped Scottsdale development during the post World War II era. Adobe Apartments were among those properties that were identified as having historic significance and a high degree of integrity of location, design, materials, settings and workmanship.

Description

The Adobe Apartments complex is located on a .29 acre parcel on First Avenue in Scottsdale, Arizona and is listed under Maricopa County Assessor #130-12-052 and 130-12-053. The complex is comprised of six small adobe buildings connected by wood room additions that were once carports. It is arranged around a central garden area in a quiet business district of small retail shops and offices near Old Town and West Main Street.

The buildings are laid out in a plan used frequently for post World War II motor courts. They were constructed in 1953 as freestanding units with attached carports for the automobile that served to link the spaces between buildings. The structures are arranged around a landscaped central courtyard with a private driveway circling the rear of the buildings. The rustic design of the adobe buildings and use of desert landscaping features gives a distinctive character to the complex reminiscent of early town building.

The six original buildings are arranged in a "U" shape, and face into the courtyard. There are two structures on the east, one to the south, and three on the west end of the parcel, all accessed from the central garden area. They are simple rectilinear forms, with low-pitched gable roofs facing broadside and sheathed in asphalt shingles, and exterior walls constructed of exposed adobe bricks. Window molding and sashes are wood with concrete sills. Many have a larger fixed single pane while others are double-hung. A few window openings have been infilled. The doors are also wood, many with single or divided light glass panes. The attached carports have been enclosed with wood siding or board and batten walls that do not extend beyond the original front or rear building façades.

History

Dr. Phil Schneider moved his family to Scottsdale in the late forties after vacationing here for a number of years. Like a number of successful professionals who retired to the Valley from the Midwest, Schneider soon became active in civic affairs and real estate development. Purchasing the Winfield Scott homestead, he built the town's first drive-in restaurant, Bimbo's. With partners he developed the shopping complex that housed Scottsdale's first Goldwater's Department store. Another "first" to his credit was Scottsdale's first bowling alley. In 1953 he constructed the Adobe Apartments on First Avenue, one of the first complexes of rental units to be built in the downtown. Influenced by the pseudo-frontier architecture of the nearby downtown buildings, the structures in the complex were constructed in a vernacular ranch style using local adobe materials that were inexpensive and readily available. The simple, vernacular architecture reflects typical early town development patterns and exemplifies the widespread acceptance of western design for buildings within the downtown.

These units were initially built to satisfy a growing demand for seasonal and year-round housing near the downtown. The community had experienced steady growth in the early postwar period, growing from a population of 2,000 in 1947 to 3,500 by 1955 and had gained a nationwide reputation as a tourist destination. Downtown commerce was flourishing, with the number of businesses increasing from 70 to 260 in the short two-year period from 1952 to 1954. These larger historical patterns and trends are more fully described in a separate context statement detailing Scottsdale's development as an art's colony and tourist destination.

The Adobe Apartments are one of the few remaining examples of the accommodations built in the fifties to house the seasonal resident. Its form is illustrative of the car-influenced lodging that proliferated along America's main roadways in the postwar period to serve the motoring tourist. As none of the State's main highways came through town, Scottsdale has only limited examples of this popular building type. With the pent up demand for residential housing created by the wartime restrictions on construction, the Adobe Apartments were used almost immediately as apartments. In its continuing evolution of uses, the property now houses offices for several small businesses and the carports have been enclosed to gain additional interior space.

Significance

The Adobe Apartments are significant for their association with Scottsdale's development as a major postwar tourist destination and for its vernacular architecture, which was typical of the early postwar development and continued the practice of western styled building that distinguished the downtown buildings nearby. It is also important for its association with Dr. Paul Schneider. Schneider made many important contributions to downtown Scottsdale development in the postwar period and the Adobe Apartments are the only buildings still standing that provide testimony to this work.

The physical features of the complex continue to convey their association with both the historic and architectural themes of significance. In its original location at the western edge of the downtown business district, the arrangement and setting of the six small adobe buildings around an open garden courtyard is typical of the fifties motor court that proliferated in association with the Western expansion of tourism. The simple design of the complex also illustrates Scottsdale growth and development within the first decade after the World War II when housing for both winter visitors and local residents was in great demand. With a limited supply, housing could be modest and it would still rent. Today the buildings still express their original organization of space and physically manifest the feeling of a motor court. Though the carports linking separate buildings have been enclosed, it has been sensitively done and does not detract from this feeling.

The architecture and utilitarian nature of the Adobe Apartment buildings also embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period and method of construction in Scottsdale's downtown built environment. The physical features of the complex, particularly the simple rectilinear form of the buildings with their low-pitched gable roofs and adobe block walls are typical of the early town vernacular architecture and ranch styles, which have almost disappeared from the downtown. Adobe bricks were commonly used because the materials were cheap and could be made locally. The adobe walls, which remain exposed on the six buildings, show the original construction materials and provide physical evidence of the handmade quality that was typical of the workmanship in vernacular buildings.