

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Charleston Hotel (1929) is a ten-story skyscraper located in the central commercial area of the city of Lake Charles approximately two blocks back from the lakeshore. There have been minor, largely cosmetic alterations which in no sense threaten the integrity of the building.

The Charleston Hotel has a rectangular plan with a central corridor on each floor which provides access to the rooms. Pretentious spaces are on the first and second floors. The lobby, a two-story space with balconies on the upper level, has elaborate tilework with heraldic devices, ogee arches, and a large tripart arch window. The hypostyle ballroom on the second floor is handsomely articulated with Corinthian pilasters and molded panels. There is also an architecturally nondescript coffee shop.

The hotel is constructed of steel and concrete. The two lower stories are faced with cement molded to resemble rusticated stone. The eight upper stories are faced in brick with two areas of ornamental cast cement set in the top story. Motifs in these areas include a Baroque pediment, pilasters, brinCADE, consoles, urns, and arches.

The aforementioned minor, largely cosmetic alterations to the hotel include:

- (1) replacing the carpet
- (2) installing fiberboard ceilings in the rooms and upper halls
- (3) redecorating the coffee shop c.1950
- (4) changing some of the ground floor windows in order to accommodate shops

Specific dates	1929
Builder/Architect	Builders W.P. Weber & H. T. McClain Architects: Joseph Finger & Livesay Williams

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)
Criteria A and C

The Charleston Hotel is locally significant (i.e., within the context of Lake Charles) in two areas:

- (1) It is of local architectural significance because it was Lake Charles' first skyscraper.
- (2) It is of local significance in the area of social/humanitarian because it played an important role in the social history of Lake Charles.

The Charleston Hotel is locally significant in the area of architecture because it was the first skyscraper in Lake Charles. Its much heralded construction represented something of a coming of age in the architectural development of the commercial downtown area. With its construction Lake Charles joined Shreveport as one of the two cities in western Louisiana which were sufficiently developed to have skyscrapers. For over 50 years the Charleston has stood towering as a visual landmark in the very center of the downtown area.

That it would be a landmark and a monumental addition to the downtown area was widely recognized at the time of its construction. The Lake Charles American Press (the city's only newspaper) put out a special edition commemorating the opening of the Charleston with a banner headline. (Excerpts are enclosed.) Numerous businesses put ads in the paper congratulating the owners of the Charleston on their achievement. Several made specific references to the fact that the Charleston was the city's first skyscraper. (Copy of one is enclosed.) The Charleston also achieved some national recognition in the building industry via an article in the Manufacturers Record (copy enclosed). Numerous articles appeared in the American Press praising the architecture and interior decoration of the Charleston. Several stated that the Lake Charles skyline had been altered. (Copies of some are enclosed.) Clearly the Charleston Hotel was a much heralded addition to the Lake

Charles cityscape.

In addition, the Charleston Hotel played an important role in the social history of Lake Charles. During its heyday the hotel was the focus of social activity in the city. The formal opening on March 4, 1929 was the most important social event of the year for Lake Charles. Over three hundred guests attended the fabulous banquet and ball. The local newspaper printed a special Charleston Hotel edition on March 2 and every business of any size in the surrounding area advertised its congratulations. For example, one such ad read: "We congratulate the Builders, the men who have spent their money to give us our first skyscraper--Charleston Hotel." The citizens of Lake Charles were indeed proud of their grand new hotel.

As the summer of 1929 approached, people began to anticipate the weekly dances on the open roof garden. The finish of the roof had been designed with both dancing and water repellency in mind. A smooth faced terra cotta tile carrying a high polish provided an excellent dancing surface, and the management could make a special canopy available when needed. Small tables and chairs around the periphery of the floor, decorative lighting, a small refreshment bar, and a special covered platform for the musicians completed the very attractive arrangements. To attend these weekly dances on the roof garden became almost a social obligation.

Specially designed rooms on the mezzanine floor with catering service easily available brought in many ladies clubs, card parties, showers, teas, and minor entertainments. The large dining room which doubled as a ballroom remained popular for many years. The ground floor coffee shop quickly became the most popular place for noon business luncheons. A part of the top floor was rearranged into several luxury apartments during the hotel's early years. Altogether, the Charleston Hotel filled a great need in Lake Charles that had once been satisfied by the now aging Majestic Hotel. Its influence on the business and social life of Lake Charles may be compared to that of the Rice Hotel in Houston and the St. Anthony in San Antonio.

In relatively small cities, buildings erected for a specific use such as a hotel, a theatre, or a church, if each is the largest or only one of its kind in town, tend to have an influence out of all proportion to that possessed by similar buildings in a large city. And so it was with the Charleston Hotel in Lake Charles.

Major Bibliographical References

Report Prepared by William G. Duhig. Copy located in Charleston Hotel National Register File, Louisiana State Historic Preservation Office, Baton Rouge.

Lake Charles American Press, Charleston Hotel Edition, March 2, 1929. Manufacturers Record, August 9, 1928.