

ARIZONA BILIMORE, BATHHOUSE
AND CABANAS
Northeast corner, 24th Street and Missouri Avenue
Phoenix
Maricopa County
Arizona

HABS No. AZ-149-A

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
ARIZONA BILTMORE, BATHHOUSE AND CABANAS

HABS No. AZ-149-A

Location:

The Arizona Biltmore
24th Street & Missouri Avenue
Phoenix, Maricopa County, Arizona

Significance:

The original bathhouse and cabanas at the Arizona Biltmore Hotel are important to recognize for three main reasons. First, they are an important amenity of the classic winter resort of the Salt River Valley. Second, they are part of William Wrigley, Jr.'s only major improvement to his beloved resort, and third, they are an important example of the work of Phoenix architect and builder, Robert T. Evans.

History:

Begun during the summer of 1928 and opened with three days of gala celebrations beginning February 23, 1929, the Arizona Biltmore Hotel is an architectural and historical treasure symbolizing the golden age of resort development in the Salt River Valley. (1) It was a time during the late 1920s through the mid-1930s when the Biltmore, along with such pioneering properties as the Ingleside Inn, San Marcos Hotel, the Wigwam, Jokake Inn, and Camelback Inn, made wintering in Arizona a household image on the North Shore of Chicago, the Main Line in Philadelphia, and Park Avenue in New York City.

Designed by Albert Chase McArthur, inspired by Frank Lloyd Wright, and developed by Warren and Charles McArthur, the Arizona Biltmore experienced significant cost overruns in its construction and furnishing that were beyond the means of most of its stockholders. Fortunately William Wrigley, Jr., the chewing gum manufacturer and owner of the Chicago Cubs, was an original stockholder in the Arizona Biltmore Corporation and was captivated by the desert and the concept of the resort.

Wrigley's initial \$50,000 investment grew to more than \$2 million as more and more capital was required to finish the project. In addition to becoming the majority stockholder of the Arizona Biltmore Corporation with 10,400 shares, Wrigley secured his investment with second and third mortgages on the hotel and a mortgage on six hundred acres of adjacent land. When the original developers defaulted on the interest and principal payment due in December of 1930, following the stock market crash of October, 1929 and the end of the big bull market, Wrigley foreclosed on the mortgage, bought out the interest of the original backers, and became the sole owner of the Arizona Biltmore during the summer of 1931. (2)

Even before Wrigley became sole owner of the Biltmore he decided to make the resort his winter home, and during the summer of 1930, he commissioned Earl T. Heitschmidt, a Los Angeles architect, to draw up plans for a twenty-three-room "winter cottage" to be built on a hill overlooking the hotel. Built by the W. A. Simpson Construction Company, La Colina Solana was, and is, a grand Mediterranean-style villa which became an overnight Phoenix landmark. (3) Completed in 1931, the construction did not please William Wrigley. There was word in the local construction industry that a large crack existed which ran down the middle of the structure. (4) When it came time for further improvements to the hotel to make it a more viable resort with a greater chance for economic success in difficult times, Wrigley looked elsewhere for a construction firm.

Sometime in early 1931 Robert T. Evans, owner of the Evans Construction Company of Scottsdale, Arizona, was invited to Chicago to be interviewed by Wrigley for the position of architect and builder on the improvements contemplated: a riding stables and swimming pool, bathhouse, and twenty cabanas. Evans, like Albert Chase McArthur, was a Chicagoan and a graduate of the Armour Institute of Technology in that city where he secured both his B. S. and M. E. degrees before going on to take his degree in architecture from the University of Freiburg, Germany. The hotel's new owner gave Evans the job, and plans for the bathhouse, swimming pool, and twenty cabanas were drawn in June, 1931. (5)

Although the Arizona Biltmore was constructed of cement blocks manufactured on the site, the bathhouse and cabanas were constructed of adobe blocks made at a large adobe pit on the Linn farm at Indian School and Hayden roads in Scottsdale. Adobe construction was the specialty of the Evans Construction Company, and many Paradise Valley and Arcadia homes, in addition to Jokake Inn, were built by Evans using blocks from his leased Scottsdale adobe pit. (6)

Evans also constructed the Biltmore riding stables that summer utilizing a more traditional southwest pueblo-style design for

the two-story structure which included a bunkhouse for the stablehands and cowboys and eighty stalls for horses belonging to hotel guests and hotel mounts which were owned by the stable managers. (7) This Evans-designed structure no longer exists. In addition Evans had to create an underground utility vault running the entire length of the hotel's main building to link the stables and swimming pool complex with the hotel's main boilers, water lines, and electric plant. This modification required the reinforcements of the main building's slender columns to withstand the jackhammering of the concrete floor to create the utility tunnel. In addition, the Evans Company had to completely rewire the hotel, because the added electrical requirements of the swimming pool complex overloaded the original electrical circuits. Between one and two hundred men worked on the project during the summer of 1931 to bring it in on schedule, and it was completed by October 25, 1931, just one week ahead of the hotel's official opening. (8)

William Wrigley, Jr. was well pleased with the new amenities for his resort and paid the Evans Company promptly for its work. Just three months later on January 26, 1932, William Wrigley, Jr., passed away in his sleep at his hilltop home overlooking the Biltmore. He was seventy years old. Wrigley's son Philip took over the management of his father's companies, and although he did not love the Biltmore as his father had, he maintained his father's high standards of hotel management until the property was sold in 1973. (9)

In addition to being made of adobe and featuring the distinctive "Biltmore block tiles," the bathhouse also featured colorful glazed clay tiles manufactured at Willima Wrigley's tile plant on Catalina Island, California. The tiles utilized in the construction of the swimming pool also came from this same plant. (10)

After its construction the swimming pool complex became a popular Biltmore site for swimming competitions, fashion shows, business meetings, and games. (11) So popular was the pool facility at this "Jewel in the Desert" that in 1940 twenty additional cabanas were added that mirrored in every respect the original twenty. Construction was carried out by the McGinty Construction Company, and a large sand beach with palm trees and a meandering lagoon was installed between the two rows of cabanas. (12) Today that configuration has been replaced with a grass lawn and a large circular swimming pool and fountain.

Endnotes

1. Arizona Republic, 9 June 1928, 1:6; Candice St. Jacques Miles, Arizona Biltmore (Santa Barbara, CA: Sequoia Communications, 1985), 16-17.
2. Miles, Arizona Biltmore, 10, 16, 21, 22; Arizona Republic, 21 Jan. 1931, 2:1; 30 June 1931, 1:2-3, 4:2-3.
3. Arizona Republic, 17 June 1930, 1:3; Miles, Arizona Biltmore, 22.
4. Denver Evans, telephone conversation with author, 27 Mar. 1991.
5. Ibid., 21 Mar. 1991; Gertrude Bryan Leeper and Maude Morris House, eds., Who's Who in Arizona (Phoenix: Arizona Survey Publishing Co., 1938), 143.
6. Miles, Arizona Biltmore, 12; Evans telephone conversations 21 Mar. and 27 Mar. 1991.
7. Arizona Republic, 28 Aug. 1931, 7:4; 1 Nov. 1931, 3:1:2-4; Miles, Arizona Biltmore, 30-31.
8. Evans telephone conversation, 21 Mar. 1991. Denver Evans indicated that perhaps two hundred men worked on the Biltmore project, while an Arizona Republic article for August 28, 1931 indicated more than one hundred workers were rushing the project; therefore the compromise in the text.
9. Ibid., 21 Mar. 1991; Miles, Arizona Biltmore, 22.
10. "The Arizona Biltmore's New Swimming Pool," Adobe (Seventh Issue, 1931):6.
11. Miles, Arizona Biltmore, 27.
12. "Arizona Biltmore Hotel Starts unusual Expansion Program," Arizona Republic, 13 Oct. 1940, 2:6:1. The author of this newspaper article is mistaken in the number of new cabanas built. A careful review of photographs of the new construction reveals twenty new cabanas.

Description:

The pool complex consists of two rows of cabanas and a bathhouse symmetrically arranged to form a central pool courtyard. The courtyard has a westerly orientation toward the main hotel building. The pool buildings focus on the centrally-located rectangular pool, which is flanked by pergolas. The bathhouse blocks have been extended to the west

with additional cabanas to enclose a second pool.

The bathhouse and cabanas are constructed of adobe with a scored plaster finish in imitation of the concrete-block construction of the original hotel. Roofs are flat with parapets, and the floors are concrete slab-on-grade. Windows are steel casement type, each consisting of one single row of vertically-stacked lights. Ornamental patterns executed in the surface of the plaster and in cast concrete blocks were used in the construction of the exterior walls, also in imitation of the highly-textured "textile block" designs found in the architecture of the main building.

The buildings, designed by Phoenix architect and contractor Robert Evans, are built after the pattern of Frank Lloyd Wright's so-called "Pre-Columbian" phase. The design of the pool complex attempts to integrate its adobe construction technology with the appearance of Wright's textile-block construction techniques, which were adapted by Biltmore architect Albert Chase MacArthur in designing the main hotel. Identifying stylistic features include buttressed building corners, tall, thin windows, and the central facade composition which "zig-zags" both in plan and at the stepped parapet.

The bathhouse was originally laid out with a men's wing and a ladies' wing opening off from either side of a central lobby and lounge. Interior features included dressing rooms, rest rooms, plunge rooms, rub rooms, hot rooms, and showers for both sexes. Plunges and showers had ceramic tile finishes: olive and yellow for the men, blue and yellow for the ladies. The lobby was provided with green patterned ceramic tile wainscotting and terracotta floor tiles painted with simple, pencilled patterns. This treatment was extended into the first floor lounge, over which occurred another lounge at the second floor. Atop the roof were originally private sunning rooms which were served by restrooms accessed from the roof.

Alterations to the bathhouse have been many, although primarily limited to the interior and to exterior additions. An exercise room has been added to the south end, executed in stacked-bond concrete block. The design somewhat integrates with the original, although poorly. At the north end, a tennis shop was added, constructed of concrete textile block like that of the of the main hotel. To the rear, extending the lobby/lounge section at the center of the building, is a kitchen addition. At the left and right sides of the main entrance, canopies now cover serving bars appended to the exterior wall and obscure part of the facade.

On the interior, little remains of the original character of the bathhouse. The lobby is more or less intact with the exception of an infilled balcony which once overlooked from the

lounge at the second floor. The first floor lounge has been converted into a full restaurant kitchen and is filled with food preparation equipment. The space of the second floor lounge is intact, but has been converted to use as an exercise salon.

The old "men's wing" is now the women's side of the building. No original interior features appear to remain of the dressing rooms or the plunge. The shower/hot room/rub room has been retiled with modern materials, although the basic layout remains the same. The former "women's wing" retains more integrity and exhibits some original features. In particular, the restroom and the shower areas appear to have been altered very little, still exhibiting their original tile. But on the women's side, as on the men's, the plunge and the dressing rooms have been removed.

The sunrooms on the roof have been completely removed and the roof is no longer used. The restrooms entered from the rooftop are now used for storage and are generally unremarkable.

The cabanas were built in alternating blocks of two large, then two small units. A typical small unit consists of two dressing rooms, each with its own closet, sharing a single central bathroom equipped with a shower, water closet, and lavatory. The design of the restroom is interesting in that the shower is separated from the remainder of the bathroom only by a curtain, the entirety of the bathroom's floor and walls being tiled. Ceilings in all interior rooms are boards supported by wood beams, all exposed and painted. The large units are identical to the small units except that a sitting room is appended to the front side, connecting the dressing rooms. Large cabanas are additionally provided with shade canopies extending from the outside wall toward the pool.

The cabanas are generally unaltered and in excellent condition. The canopies, originally canvas, have been replaced with modern, compatible metal awnings. Additional cabanas have been built of concrete block, extending each original row of cabanas from ten units to about 24.

Sources:

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Tropic Shore and Cabanas Are Installed." Arizona Republic
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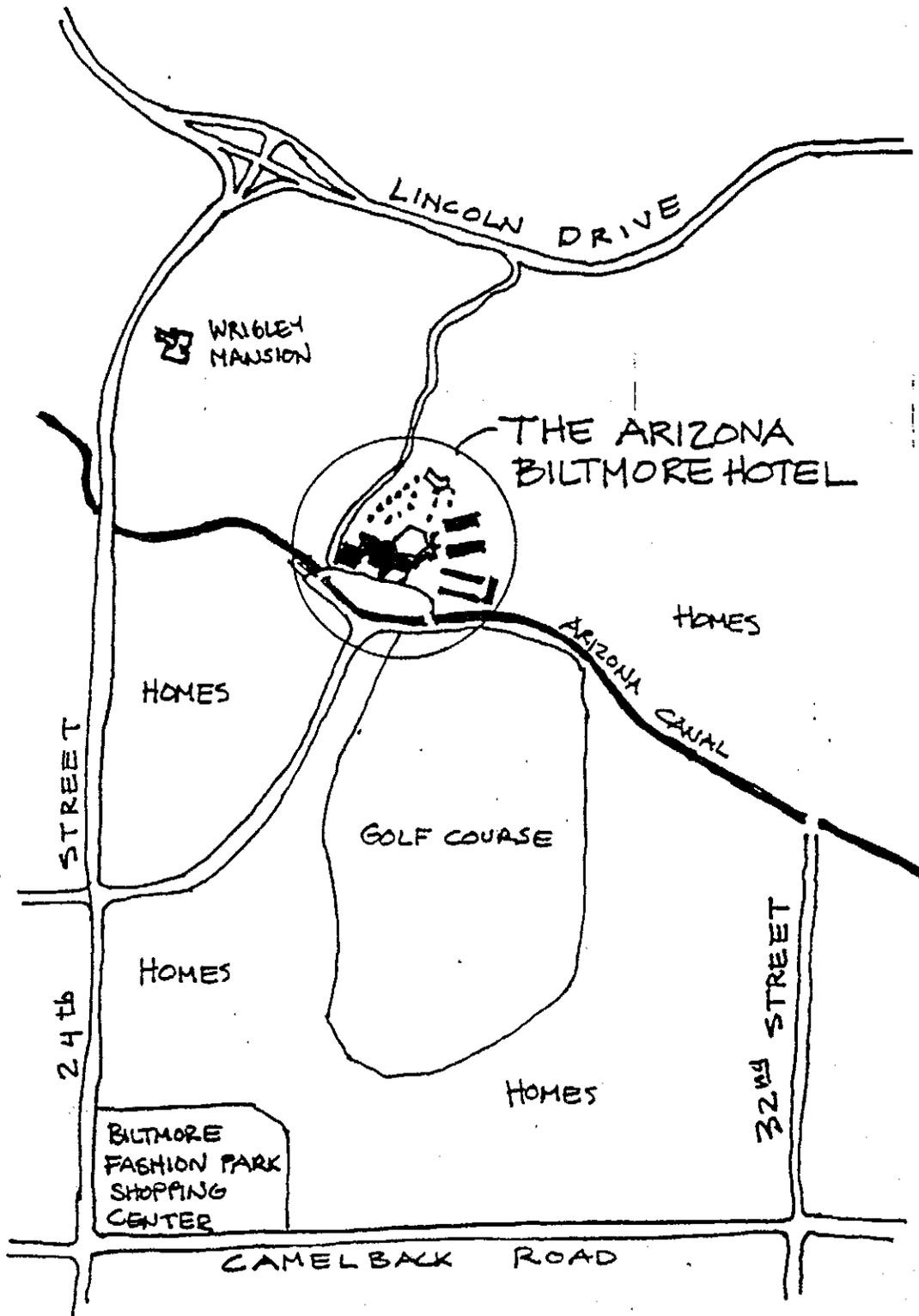
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Historian:

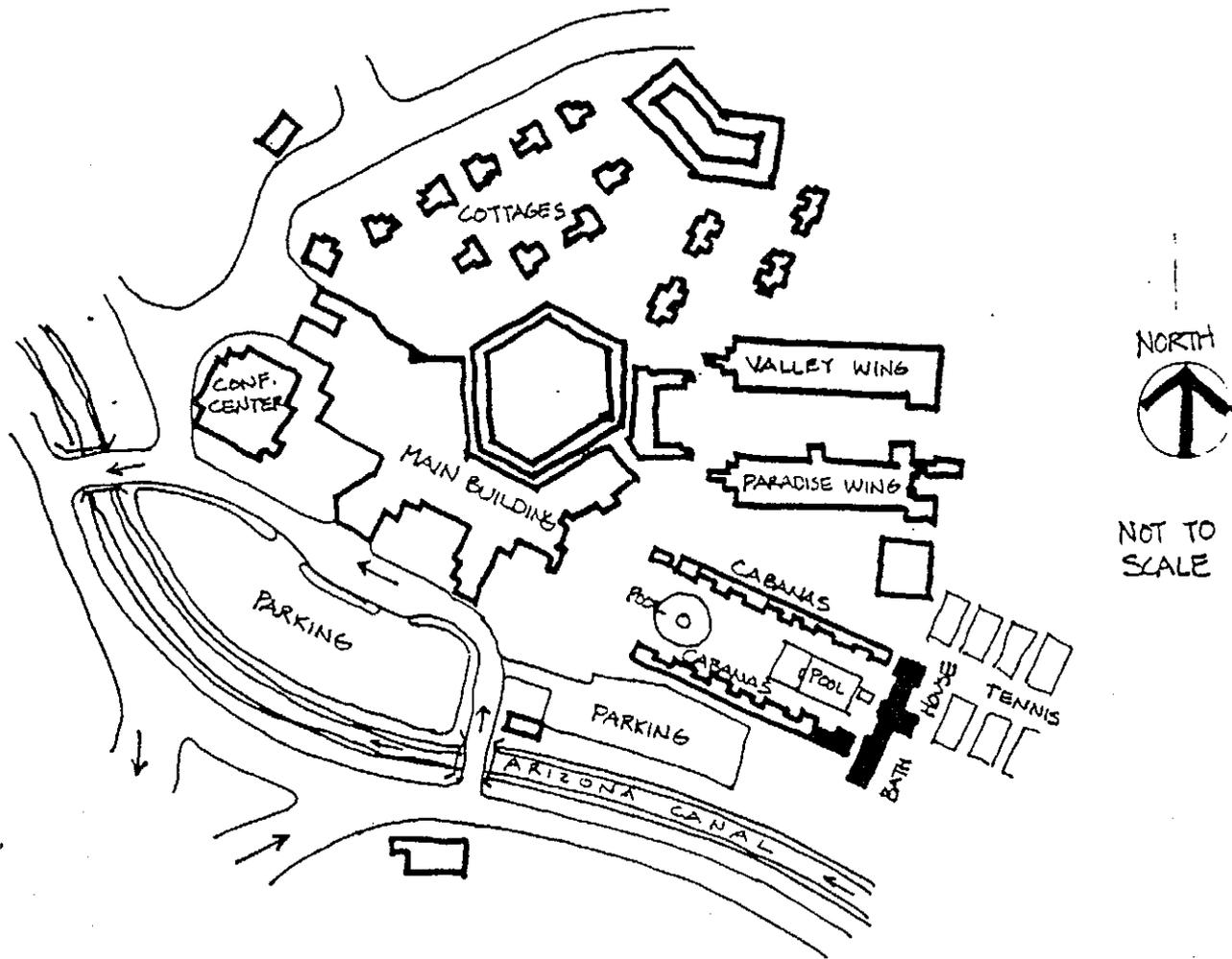
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VICINITY MAP





ARIZONA BILTMORE HOTEL COMPLEX

