PRELIMINARY INFORMATION FORM (PIF) for INDIVIDUAL PROPERTIES

DHR No. (to be completed by DHR staff) __128-6477_____

Purpose of Evaluation
Please use the following space to explain briefly why you are seeking an evaluation of this property.

To determine Colony House eligible for the National Register of Historic Places and make the state and federal historic tax credits available in the rehabilitation of the motel.

Are you interested in applying for State and/or Federal Rehabilitation Tax Credits?  Yes X No __
Are you interested in receiving more information about DHR’s easement program?  Yes __ No X

1. General Property Information
   Property name: Colony House Motor Lodge
   Property address: 3560 Franklin Road SW
   City or Town: Roanoke
   Zip code: 24014

   Name of the Independent City or County where the property is located: Roanoke City

   Category of Property (choose only one of the following):
   Building X  Site _____  Structure _____  Object _____

2. Physical Aspects
   Acreage: 2.69 acres (approximately)

   Setting (choose only one of the following):
   Urban _____ Suburban X Town _____ Village _____ Hamlet _____ Rural _____

   Briefly describe the property’s overall setting, including any notable landscape features:

   Colony House Motor Lodge is located on the east side of Franklin Road in Roanoke, Virginia, situated between the South Roanoke and Franklin-Colonial neighborhoods. The motor lodge stands on tax parcels 1100410 and 1100418 with a combined land area of approximately 2.69 acres. The three buildings and pool that comprise the property are surrounded by a steep, wooded hillside to the east and commercial properties to the west, north, and south. The motel office and pool stand between Franklin Road and the two motel buildings, which are set back from the street, amidst a large, paved parking lot. Due to the sloped topography of the site, the motel is two stories at the front and one story at the rear. Brick planters flank the motel buildings. The site features mature trees and small shrubs. A row of hedges and a wood fence along the northern property line provide screening from the adjacent commercial use. The pool is enclosed with a mixture of breeze blocks and chain-link metal fencing, all painted green. Concrete curbs and lampposts around the site are also painted green. A paved drive between the two motel buildings accesses the rear parking lot. There are two historic pylon signs, as well as a smaller sign in the form of an arrow pointing to the entrance surmounted by a neon vacancy sign.
3. Architectural Description

Architectural Style(s): Modern Movement (Googie)

If the property was designed by an architect, landscape architect, engineer, or other professional, please list here: _________________________________________________________

If the builder is known, please list here: ________________________________________

Date of construction (can be approximate): ca. 1957

Narrative Description:
In the space below, briefly describe the general characteristics of the entire property, such as its current use (and historic use if different), as well as the primary building or structure on the property (such as a house, store, mill, factory, depot, bridge, etc.). Include the architectural style, materials and method(s) of construction, physical appearance and condition (exterior and interior), and any additions, remodelings, or other alterations.

The 1957 Colony House Motor Lodge comprises a motel office with a porte-cochere, two motel buildings, and a swimming pool. The buildings reflect the Googie style of architecture, with cantilevered, folded plate roofs that create a repetitive geometric motif and demarcate the bays of each building. Buff brick walls, glass and steel curtain walls, slender steel columns, and cantilevered concrete slab walkways also serve as unifying design features of the motor lodge.

The one-story motel office is located at the front of the property. A porte-cochere extends from the south side to provide a sheltered entrance for guests arriving to check-in to the motor lodge. The office building and porte-cochere have folding plate roofs. Round, steel columns support the porte-cochere. The walls are of steel and concrete block construction faced with buff brick. The east, south, and west elevations feature metal-frame glass curtain walls. The main entrance is on the south side and contains a flush door. A drive-thru window is also on this elevation. Particleboard panels fill the bottom row of the curtain wall system beneath the drive-thru window and on the east side elevation. The east and north elevations feature secondary entrances with flush doors. The northeast corner of the building is clad with vertical-board siding. A historic pylon sign supported by a panel of buff brick and metal supports extends through the roof of the porte-cochere. The interior features a check-in area, office, and breakfast room. Interior finishes include plaster ceilings, plaster walls, exposed brick walls, and sheet vinyl and carpeted floors.

The motel buildings are located east of the motel office. Due to the sloping topography of the site, they are two stories at the front and one story at the rear. The second stories are on grade with the rear parking lot. The motel buildings are long, rectangular blocks. Building A is five bays wide while Building B is three bays wide. A four-bay addition appends the south side of Building B by way of a breezeway and the laundry room. The addition was built in 1984, on the site of the motel restaurant.

The motel buildings are characterized by their distinctive folded plate roofs, which define each bay. The buildings are of steel and concrete construction, with a combination of glass curtain walls and concrete-block walls faced with buff brick. The roofs and second-floor slabs of the original motel buildings cantilever out to shelter the room entrances and external corridors that span the facades. Slender steel columns provide ancillary support to the cantilevered roofs and slabs. The cantilevered roof and slab are continued in the design of the 1984 addition; however the second-story rooms of the addition are accessed from an interior double-loaded corridor rather than an external corridor.
The folded plate roofs create a defined pattern of paired rooms with mirrored entrances and glass walls separated by vertical piers of buff brick across the facades. On each floor, within each bay, central single-leaf entrances are flanked by metal-frame curtain walls on each side. The curtain walls each feature three horizontal panels which extend from floor to ceiling. The central panel contains a pane of glass with particleboard panels above and below. Through-wall air conditioning units have been installed in the bottom panel of the end bays. Each entrance contains a flush door sheltered by a louvered, wood screen door surmounted by a particle board panel. These louvered screen doors provided ventilation to the rooms while maintaining privacy for the guests. Some of the louvered screen doors have been removed and the flush doors have been replaced due to security concerns. The 1984 addition emulates the design of the original motel buildings with the same pattern of paired rooms with mirrored curtain walls separated by vertical piers of buff brick. The second story facade does not include doors because the rooms are accessed from an interior corridor. External concrete stairs are located at the ends of each original motel building and in the central bay of Building A. Metal railings with chain-link panels extend across the second story walkways on the front elevations of the buildings and along the sets of concrete stairs.

The first story of each motel building is only one room deep due to the grade of the site, while the second story features back-to-back rooms. Each bay contains two motel rooms on the first floor and four motel rooms on the second floor (two accessed on the front elevation and two accessed on the rear elevation). The room layouts in each bay are mirrored. The two original motel buildings contain approximately 67 rooms. The motel rooms are rectangular in plan, each including a bedroom at the front and a vanity area and bathroom at the rear. Building A contains two suite-style units at its north end. Interior finishes in the hotel rooms include plaster ceilings, plaster walls covered with wallpaper, and carpeted floors. The bathrooms, located adjacent to the vanity area, consists of a bathtub, sink and toilet. Bathroom finishes consist of ceramic tile floors, ceramic tile on plaster walls, and plaster ceilings.

Like the original motel buildings, the first story of the 1984 addition is only one room deep due to the grade of the site, while the second story features two rows of rooms arranged around an interior, double-loaded corridor. The rooms also have mirrored, rectangular plans. Each first-floor room opens directly into the bedroom area with a closet, bathroom, and vanity at the rear. Each second-floor room is oriented to the interior double-loaded corridor and features a bathroom, closet, and vanity at the front of the room with the bedroom area behind. Interior finishes in the addition include plaster walls and ceilings. The floors of the entrance area and bathroom are covered with sheet vinyl while the bedroom floors are covered with carpeting.

Briefly describe any outbuildings or secondary resources (such as barns, sheds, dam and mill pond, storage tanks, scales, railroad spurs, etc.), including their condition and their estimated construction dates.

A rectangular swimming pool is located towards the front of the property, directly south of the office building. The pool is enclosed with a mixture of breeze blocks and chain-link metal fencing, all painted green. The chain-link fencing along the east side stands on a brick retaining wall. The northeast corner of the enclosure features a curved brick wall that forms a bench on the pool side.

4. Property’s History and Significance

In the space below, briefly describe the history of the property, such as significant events, persons, and/or families associated with the property. Please list all sources of information used to research the history of the property. (It is not necessary to attach lengthy articles or family genealogies to this form.)

If the property is important for its architecture, engineering, landscape architecture, or other aspects of design, please include a brief explanation of this aspect.
Significance Statement

The ca. 1957 Colony House Motor Lodge at 3560 Franklin Road is an excellent example of a mid-century motor lodge in Roanoke, Virginia, that reflects the changing travel, vacation, and lodging trends in the United States during the prosperous years following World War II. The design and construction of the motel property also reflects the prevailing trends in mid-century motel architecture. Sited along a major arterial route, the motel property features an office with porte-cochere and swimming pool, as well as prominent signage at its entrance, two buildings of guestrooms accessed directly from exterior corridors, and ample parking for automobiles directly outside each motel unit. Designed in the Googie style, the Colony House Motor Lodge is a rare example in Roanoke of this popular style used nationally in mid-century motel and other roadside architecture. The simple, functional design of the rectilinear building blocks is characterized by the strong horizontal lines of the cantilevered exterior walkways and accented by the folded-plate roof system, with its dominating geometric pattern. Built by local businessmen Richard and Glover Trent, who also owned a concrete-block company, the steel-frame and concrete-slab construction with a combination of concrete block and glass curtain walls utilized recent innovations in building technologies and materials. As a rare surviving and intact example of this mid-century building type and style in Roanoke, the Colony House Motor Lodge is eligible for National Register listing under Criteria A and C with significance on the local level in the areas of Transportation and Architecture. The period of significance begins in 1957, the date of its initial construction, and ends in 1972, the 50-year mark for a building that continues to function in its original capacity and retain its architectural and historical significance into the recent past.

Historical Background

Colony House Motor Lodge was constructed ca. 1957 by brothers Richard and Glover Trent with help from local developer and philanthropist, Horace Fralin. Richard Trent owned Building Units Company, a manufacturer of steam cured building blocks and bricks, drain tile, and concrete blocks located in the Norwich neighborhood. The concrete bricks used to construct the Colony House Motor Lodge were produced at their plant. Soon after the motel opened, Building Units Company closed. Glover Trent also served as president of Graves-Humphrey’s, Inc., a Roanoke-based hardware and building material supplier. He was an active member of the Rotary Club of Roanoke, serving as president in 1957. He staffed the motel office after work each day until the night manager arrived. His and Richard Trent’s children also worked there during the summer and winter school breaks.

The motor lodge originally included a restaurant, known as Town and Ranch, which served steak and seafood to both guests and local residents. Another popular amenity provided by the motel was the outdoor pool, located at the western edge of the property. As use of the swimming pool was limited to motel guests, local families would often stay at the motel for a few days in the summer so they could take advantage of the pool. Although the restaurant burned down in the 1980s, the pool remains in good condition. A motel addition replaced the restaurant in 1984.

The Colony House occupies a prominent parcel on Franklin Road, one of the main arteries in Roanoke. Following the route of the early Carolina Road that branched off from the Great Road towards North Carolina, Franklin Road serves today as a gateway to Roanoke as it connects downtown to southwest Roanoke County and Franklin County. Although Franklin Road is currently a major commercial corridor, at the time of its construction it was on the outskirts of Roanoke City amongst wooded land and suburban neighborhoods. Colony House predates the local shopping centers of Townside Festival Shopping Center and Tanglewood Mall, as well as the junction of Interstate 581 and US 220.

The Colony House is a notable motel in Roanoke history. Many traveling salespeople stayed at the hotel when visiting Roanoke along with family and friends of residents of South Roanoke, an affluent...
neighborhood east of the motel. According to Richard Trent’s son, Mac Trent, the hotel was recognized as the “guest room of South Roanoke,” during its heyday. Musicians and athletes who came to Roanoke for events at nearby Victory Stadium were also known to stay at the Colony House, including Herman’s Hermits, Jim Brickman, Lou Rawls, Lulu Roman, and Johnny Unitas.¹

Virginia State Senator, Granger MacFarlane leased the Colony House form the Trent family and ran it for approximately 25 years. MacFarlane, who was involved with the local chapter of the Red Cross, allowed families whose homes had burned down to stay at the motel. The motel closed in 2018 when the Trent family sold the property.²

Criterion A: Transportation

As automobiles became more affordable, roads improved with interstate construction, and more employers began providing paid time off, Americans took to the road in their cars for vacations in increasing numbers during the prosperous years following World War II. In response, trends in tourism and lodging changed to accommodate the rising number of middle-class travelers. Built in 1957, Colony House Motor Lodge exemplifies the evolution of roadside motel accommodations in the mid-20th century.

With the emergence of the automobile in the 1920s and 1930s, Americans began traveling the country via roads rather than the railroads. This newfound freedom gave American tourists the freedom to explore areas beyond that of the railroad stations and allowed travelers to stay at locations other than the traditional downtown or resort hotels. At first, American travelers camped out along the roadways as there were no lodging options. As tourism increased, municipalities erected tourist camps that provided campsites, parking, and sanitary facilities to automobile travelers at little to no cost. In the early 1930s, a new lodging type appeared, the cabin camp (later known as the cabin court or motor court), which offered an enclave of cabins for tourists to spend the night. These courts provided a measure of security to travelers as they could lock their doors and park their cars nearby and not have to enter a public lobby. In contrast to hotels, these cabin courts were “decentralized, modern, and outside the confines of the traditional city.”³ By 1932, the American Automobile Association (AAA) estimated as many as 30,000 motor courts and other forms of roadside lodging existed to accommodate the automobile traveler.⁴

During the prosperous years following World War II, the number of roadside accommodations doubled to 60,000 between 1946 and 1956 as more Americans owned automobiles and had paid vacation time.⁵ During this period, the motor court evolved into motor inns or motels (“motor hotels”), which typically comprised one or two stories of adjoining rooms which were accessed from an exterior corridor or walkway. These buildings were surrounded by a large parking lot with spaces directly outside of guests’ rooms. Popular during the 1950s and 1960s, these motels were designed to be modern in appearance, with vertically stacked rooms enclosed by concrete, glass, and metal exteriors. During this era, “breeze blocks” became popular and were often used to provide inexpensive yet expressive ornament to the buildings. Breeze blocks are perforated concrete blocks featuring geometric designs that allow light and air to pass through while maintaining a sense of privacy for guests. Colony House features breeze blocks in the pool enclosure, which provide both privacy and visual interest from the road. The new motel building type also featured lighted signs that caught travelers’ eyes as they searched for a place to spend the night. Porte-cocheres sheltered guests as they checked into the office building, which was separate from the motel buildings. Typical amenities offered by motels included swimming pools, color televisions, air conditioning, and telephones. Motels were erected amidst expansive parking lots to ensure ample parking spaces for guests.⁶ Motels owned and operated by individual owners started declining in popularity in the 1970s as corporate America began standardizing and franchising motels, such as Holiday Inns. According to historians Jakle, Sculle and Rogers, “in 1962 only 2% of motels were franchises and by 1987 franchises accounted for 64% of the industry.”⁷
Located on a major north-south route, Roanoke benefitted from the growth of automobile tourism from its beginning in the early 1900s. In July 1909, the local newspaper reported that the *New York Herald* announced that the route through Roanoke was to be selected as part of the proposed National Highway to connect New York and Atlanta. The new highway would follow the future US Route 11, established in 1912, through the valley of Virginia and Roanoke. Although city directories listed only seven motels in the Roanoke-Salem area in 1955 including Clark’s Motel for Black patrons on US Route 220, this number would increase dramatically over the next decade. Except for the Whitehall Motor Court at 3016 Williamson Road NE, all these motels were listed several miles outside the city limits. By 1957, the number of motels listed increased to 22 with 20 of these located on US Route 11 (including twelve on Williamson Road NE) and two on US Route 220. These motels are all locally owned with the first two motels owned by national chains – Holiday Inn and Howard Johnsons Motel—first appearing in 1959. By 1960, there were 35 motels listed in Roanoke and Salem with 32 of these located on US Route 11 (including 22 on Williamson Road NE) and only one listed on US Route 220. By 1965, there were forty-one motels listed in Roanoke with 21 located on Williamson Road NE. While a definitive survey of surviving mid-century motels in Roanoke has not been conducted to date, a cursory review suggests that most of these motels are no longer extant.

**Criterion C: Architecture**

Built in 1957, the Colony House Motor Lodge is a well-preserved example of Googie architecture in Roanoke. The Googie style, an extension of the earlier Streamline Moderne style, is a type of futurist architecture influenced by the emergence of car culture and the Space Age in the late 1950s. The style was popular for roadside architecture, such as motels, diners, and gas stations. Googie designs were intended to attract passing motorists, using eye-catching characteristics like geometric shapes, hard angles, cantilevered roofs, tailfins, starbursts, and glass curtain walls.

While the architect is yet to be identified, mid-century trends in motel operations, streamlined architectural styles, and innovations in building materials and technology clearly informed the design of the Colony House Motor Lodge. Sited along a major arterial route to Roanoke, the motel complex features prominent signage and ample parking to attract automobile travelers. The simple, rectilinear forms and lack of ornamentation promoted a sense of cleanliness and efficiency. Meanwhile, the dominant geometric forms of the folded-plate, cantilevered roofs serve to advertise the motel units to passing automobiles. Using the latest innovations in building technology, the buildings are constructed of steel frame, concrete slabs with a combination of concrete-block walls and glass curtain walls.

The layout and design of the motel complex reflected the operations of a modern motel. The convenience of the separate office building with its porte-cochere at the entrance and motel buildings with units accessed directly from the parking lot provided a sense of autonomy and anonymity not offered by the traditional downtown hotel with its interior lobby. The cantilevered roof and concrete floor slab of the motel buildings, as well as the exterior stairs, provided common areas in an efficient manner as they created external corridors that sheltered guests and gave direct access to their unit. The lack of an interior, double-loaded corridor also allowed units oriented “back-to-back” to share a common plumbing wall. The louvered screen doors at each unit entrance offered ventilation while maintaining privacy for the guests. The expanse of glass in the curtain walls provided ample natural light to the guest rooms as well as high visibility to the registration desk and breakfast area in the office building. The prominent signage, including a “vacancy” sign, and other motel amenities—such as the swimming pool at the entrance with its breeze block enclosure and the restaurant (demolished) at the southern end of the complex—also reflected the evolution of the mid-century motel designed to attract travelers in passing automobiles.
Bibliography


Dixon, Julia Trent. Telephone Interview with author, April 27, 2022.


5. **Property Ownership** (Check as many categories as apply):

Private: X Public\Local _____ Public\State _____ Public\Federal _____

**Current Legal Owner(s) of the Property** (If the property has more than one owner, please list each below or on an additional sheet.)

name/title: Mike Farrell
organization: Farrell Properties Limited Company
street & number: 2009 Williamson Rd
city or town: Roanoke state: VA zip code: 24012
e-mail: mfarrell@gmail.com telephone: (617) 943-2346

Legal Owner’s Signature: __________________________________________ Date: ____________

• • Signature required for processing all applications. • •

In the event of corporate ownership you must provide the name and title of the appropriate contact person.

Contact person: Mike Farrell
Daytime Telephone: (617) 943-2346

**Applicant Information** (Individual completing form if other than legal owner of property)

name/title: Kate Kronau/Alison Blanton
organization: Hill Studio
street & number: 120 Campbell Avenue SW
city or town: Roanoke state: VA zip code: 24011
e-mail: kkronau@hillstudio.com/ ablanton@hillstudio.com telephone: (540) 342-5263

6. **Notification**

In some circumstances, it may be necessary for DHR to confer with or notify local officials of proposed listings of properties within their jurisdiction. In the following space, please provide the contact information for the local County Administrator, City Manager, and/or Town Manager.

name/title: Bob Cowell/ Roanoke City Manager
locality: Roanoke City
street & number: 215 Church Avenue SW, Room 364
city or town: Roanoke state: VA zip code: 24011
telephone: (540) 853-1138
2 Ibid.
3 Chester H. Liebs, Main Street to Miracle Mile, (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), p. 171-181
4 Main Street to Miracle Mile, p. 177.
5 Main Street to Miracle Mile, p. 183.
8 Fulgham, “Early Years of Motoring in Roanoke, VA,” pp8-9.
Colony House Motor Lodge
City of Roanoke, Garden City Quad
DHR ID: 128-6477

Sources: VDHR 2020, ESRI 2020, VDOT 2020, VGIN 2020
Records of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (DHR) have been gathered over many years and the representation depicted is based on the field observation date and may not reflect current ground conditions. The map is for general illustration purposes and is not intended for engineering, legal or other site-specific uses. The map may contain errors and is provided "as-is". Contact DHR for the most recent information as data is updated continually.
Virginia Dept. of Historic Resources

Virginia Cultural Resource Information System

**Legend**

**Location Map**

Colony House Motor Lodge
3560 Franklin Road
Roanoke, VA 24014

WGS84
Map Source: VCRIS

**Title: Colony House Motor Lodge**

**DISCLAIMER:** Records of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (DHR) have been gathered over many years from a variety of sources and the representation depicted is a cumulative view of field observations over time and may not reflect current ground conditions. The map is for general information purposes and is not intended for engineering, legal or other site-specific uses. Map may contain errors and is provided “as-is”. More information is available in the DHR Archives located at DHR’s Richmond office.

Notice if AE sites: Locations of archaeological sites may be sensitive the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), and the Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA) and Code of Virginia §2.2-3705.7 (10). Release of precise locations may threaten archaeological sites and historic resources.

Date: 5/4/2022
Sketch Map

Colony House Motor Lodge
3560 Franklin Road
Roanoke, VA 24014