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Hotel Served Basques, African Americans

ROYAL HOTEL SERVED BASQUES AND

AFRICAN AMERICANS

Miriam B. Murphy

History Blazer, October 1996

Built in 1914 at 2522 Wall Avenue, Ogden, the Royal Hotel has filled a unique role in the city's history. A modest three-story masonry building, the hotel originally provided housing for blue collar railroad workers and travelers. Shops, cafes, and offices filled the front spaces of the street floor, and modestly priced hotel rooms on the second and third floors accommodated the needs of local working men and minorities. The original owners were John H. Maitia and John Etcheverry. In 1935 Sam Maruri, a hotel tenant, acquired the Royal. He and his family, immigrants from Spain, catered to fellow Basques who worked for the sheep industry locally. For many years both the wool clip and lambs were shipped by wool buyers and meat packing houses from Ogden by rail.

After the Royal's construction in 1914 the area around Union Station became a center of commerce, entertainment, and lodging into the 1960s. Several other hotels were constructed around the same time, including the Healy and New Brigham hotels on Wall Avenue and the Marion, Windsor, and Helena hotels on 25th Street.

Directly behind the Royal Hotel a comparably sized brick structure was built sometime between 1920 and 1930. Its main purpose was for the playing of jai-alai, a very fast court game for two to four players who use a long basket strapped to the wrist to propel a ball against a wall. The Basque immigrants no doubt saw this game as an important part of their heritage. This building is the only known structure in the state built especially for jai-alai and one of few that embodies the culture of the state's small Basque population. In the early 1940s large trucks took over the transportation of sheep, bypassing the Union Station area, and the hotel's association with Basques came to an end.

On May 5, 1943, the Royal Hotel was sold to Leager V. Davis, an Ogden woman originally from Louisiana. She and her husband, Alonzo, wanted a place to accommodate members of the local African American community, primarily the porters and waiters working for the railroads. At that time there were few places where they could stay in Ogden because of segregation and the lack of equal housing opportunities. Other than the Porters and Waiters Club, the Royal was the only hotel designated for the black community. During World War II a basement room in the hotel served as an office for African American MPs.

Leager Davis was very active in Ogden's black community. During her ownership of the Royal she served on the Board of Directors of the YWCA and the Comprehensive Health Planning Commission and as head of the governor's Anti-Discrimination Board.

She was also active in the Ogden Chapter of the NAACP, the United Fund, the League of Women Voters, and the Democratic Women's Club. The Royal Hotel hosted the meetings of many of these community organizations. The NAACP named an achievement award in Davis's honor. She died in 1973.

The Royal Hotel was recently rehabilitated by Kier Corporation, and the jail building now serves as a parking area for apartment tenants. The Royal is part of the Lower 25th Street Historic District and is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

Source: Nomination Form, Lower 25th Street Historic District, National Register files, Preservation Office, Utah Division of State History.