

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section \_\_\_\_\_ Page \_\_\_\_\_

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**SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD**

**NRIS Reference Number: 08001228 Date Listed: 12/19/2008**

Oliver Building  
**Property Name**

Yellowstone  
**County**

MT  
**State**

N/A  
**Multiple Name**

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**This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.**

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of the Keeper**

12/19/2008  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date of Action**

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**Amended Items in Nomination:**

**Historic Function:**

The Historic Function is amended to delete: *Vacant*  
[Even though the building was vacant for a time during the period of significance due to the fire, the functions listed should relate directly to the property's significance.]

These clarifications were confirmed with the MT SHPO office.

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**DISTRIBUTION:**

- National Register property file
- Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)

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United States Department of the Interior  
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NAT. REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

historic name: Oliver Building

other names/site number: N/A

**2. Location**

street & number: 2702 Montana Avenue

city or town: Billings

state: Montana (MT)

code: 30 county: Yellowstone

not for publication: N/A

vicinity: N/A

code: 111

zip code: 59101

**3. State/Federal Agency/Tribal Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this x nomination      request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property x meets      does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant      nationally      statewide x locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments)

Mark F. Faundes/SNPO  
Signature of certifying official/Title

11/6/2008  
Date

State or Federal Agency or Tribal government

In my opinion, the property      meets      does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments)

Signature of commenting or other official/Title

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau or Tribal Government

**4. National Park Service Certification**

I, hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register      See continuation sheet
- determined eligible for the National Register      See continuation sheet
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain):

[Signature] Signature of Keeper      Date of Action 12/19/2008

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**5. Classification**

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property (Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Name of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)  
N/A

Number of Resources within Property (do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register:  
N/A

**6. Function of Use**

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE: specialty store, warehouse, business  
 VACANT  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: multiple dwelling  
 COMMERCE/TRADE: business  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**7. Description**

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century American movements: --  
 Chicago style  
 1930's remodel: Art Deco/Moderne

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation: concrete  
 walls: BRICK  
 roof: Wood, SYNTHETICS: Plastic  
 other: GLASS

Narrative Description

Please see continuation sheets.

**8. Statement of Significance**

Applicable National Register Criteria  
(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations  
(Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply)

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B removed from its original location
- C a birthplace or a grave
- D a cemetery
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F a commemorative property
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years

Narrative Statement of Significance  
*Please see continuation sheets.*

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

Bibliography  
*Please see continuation sheets.*

- Previous documentation on file (NPS)
- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
  - previously listed in the National Register
  - previously determined eligible by the National Register
  - designated a National Historic Landmark
  - recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
  - recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

Areas of Significance:  
(Enter categories from instructions)

- Architecture
- Commerce
- Transportation
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

Period of Significance:  
1910-1949

Significant Dates:

- 1910 - Date of Construction
- 1930 - Date of fire and remodel/reconstruction

Significant Person:

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation:

Architect/Builder:

- 1910 - unknown
- 1930 - Cohagen, Chandler C.
- 2006-2007 - High Plains Architects

Primary Location of Additional Data

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository: Western Heritage Center, Billings, Montana

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of Property: less than one

UTM References: (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1	<u>1 / 2 /</u> Zone	<u> / 6 / 9 / 4 / 1 / 0 / 5 /</u> Easting	<u>5 / 0 / 7 / 2 / 5 / 9 / 1 /</u> Northing
2	<u> / / /</u> Zone	<u> / / / / / / / / / / / / /</u> Easting	<u> / / / / / / / / / / / / /</u> Northing
3	<u> / / /</u> Zone	<u> / / / / / / / / / / / / /</u> Easting	<u> / / / / / / / / / / / / /</u> Northing
4	<u> / / /</u> Zone	<u> / / / / / / / / / / / / /</u> Easting	<u> / / / / / / / / / / / / /</u> Northing

     See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description *Please see continuation sheet.*

Boundary Justification *Please see continuation sheet.*

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title: Alison LaFever and Maisie Sulser, AIT	date: December 18, 2007
organization: High Plains Architects, P.C.	telephone: (406) 896-0250
street & number: 2720 Minnesota Avenue	zip code: 59101
city or town: Billings	state: Montana

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps: A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.  
A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources

Photographs: Representative black and white photographs of the property

Additional items: (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

**Property Owner**

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO)

name: Oliver Building Development Venture, L.P.	telephone: (406) 896-0250
street & number: P.O. Box 2203	zip code: 59103
city or town: Billings	state: Montana

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.). A federal agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number.

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to range from approximately 18 hours to 36 hours depending on several factors including, but not limited to, how much documentation may already exist on the type of property being nominated and whether the property is being nominated as part of a Multiple Property Documentation Form. In most cases, it is estimated to average 36 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form to meet minimum National Register documentation requirements. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, 1849 C St., NW, Washington, DC 202

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National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET**

Name of Property: Oliver Building  
County and State: Yellowstone, Montana

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The Oliver Building is a four-story, 37,500 square-foot brick commercial building with a concrete foundation and modest brick ornamentation. It has a flat roof that is constructed of a wood structure and a thermoplastic polyolefin (TPO) membrane. The Oliver Building is located just north of and adjacent to the railroad tracks on the southwest corner of North 27<sup>th</sup> Street and Montana Avenue. Montana Avenue and North 27<sup>th</sup> Street are two of the major downtown arterials and this street corner has always been an important part of the Billings downtown business corridor and it continues to be. As a state highway and main link from the airport to Interstate 90, North 27<sup>th</sup> Street is busy with both car and pedestrian traffic in and out of the city. Montana Avenue is also busy with car and pedestrian traffic through downtown and historically has always been an important street for lodging, commerce, entertainment, and industry. The Oliver Building is located just to the west (across North 27<sup>th</sup> Street) of five early 19<sup>th</sup> century warehouse buildings that make up the Billings Townsite Historic District Boundary Increase (designated 2006). Located in an area historically occupied with warehouses and wholesalers, the Oliver Building is a solid architectural element in this industrial area. Strongly fitting into the context of the area, the heavy industrial look of the building was influenced by the Chicago Style of design that was developing at about the same time. Even today, the Oliver Building retains much of the original design intent, conveys its historic associations, and is in excellent condition. Based on its location, design, setting, materials and general condition and style, the Oliver Building maintains sound integrity as a historic property.

The Oliver Building was built in 1910 on land owned and leased by the railroad. It was one of the first buildings built along the railroad tracks in downtown Billings after the railroad began leasing the land adjacent to the tracks and making it available to commercial development. The railroad owned this land until 2001. Until this time, the land and the building were separate legal parcels owned by two separate entities. After 2001, the land and building became one parcel and were sold to a private owner. The land was then platted and given a standard legal description.

The Oliver Building is constructed of brick with a heavy timber interior frame. The two primary facades face east onto North 27<sup>th</sup> Street and north onto Montana Avenue. These elevations maintain an uninterrupted rhythm of fenestration along each side. The first floor is different from the other floors in that it has a variety of window opening types; the majority are large plate glass with transoms while the others are two sets of paired double-hung windows. The second, third, and fourth floors have an established rhythm of punched opening pairs. The second floor windows are three-over-three fixed and the third and fourth floor windows are typical one-over-one double hung. The basement exhibits a series of deep paired window openings with a single fixed glass pane and iron security grate. It is not known for sure how many of the original windows remain but it is believed that several of the second floor and basement windows are original to the 1910 construction.

Above a heavy concrete base, the body of the building consists of a light brown brick accented with dark brown brick headers and sills at all of the windows; however each floor level is unique in its ornamentation and look and consequently the building exhibits a simplified two-part vertical block composition. The large first floor display windows have dark brown brick headers and corresponding sills while the second floor has a dark brown brick sill and a dark brown brick header course. The third floor windows have a dark brown brick header and there are dark brown sill courses at both the third and fourth floors. At the fourth floor level, an enriched brick geometric-patterned band caps the windows. There is also subtle brick striping between the windows. This ornament exhibits a distinct Art Deco/Modern style that is a product of a 1930 remodel/reconstruction of the third and fourth floors. As a result of this reconstruction, both the brick on the exterior walls and the brick ornament at the fourth floor level are lighter in color than the brick throughout the rest of the two primary façades.

The rear elevation of the building facing the railroad tracks is very utilitarian in character. The wall is built with red brick, sections of which have been patched and repaired over the years resulting in a large brick wall that is varied in coloring and texture. There are two vertical rows of large double-hung windows at the second, third, and fourth floor levels. One row corresponds to the elevator shaft and includes a picture window at the elevator penthouse level; the other row corresponds to a new exit stairwell, added in 2007. This row of windows, on the far west end of the building, includes iron fire escapes on the exterior original to the 1910 construction that have been retained. There are also five smaller double-hung windows, one at the fourth floor level and two each at the third and second floor levels. These were added in 1930 to light an exit stairway that was added after a fire and now correspond to another new interior exit stairwell that was also added in 2007. The first floor level has two entries that correspond to the added interior exit stairwells. One is at the far west end that is a single door with both an operable transom and a fixed window above.

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The other is a set of double doors with a large plate glass transom above. To either side of the double doors are two large double window openings; one is plate glass and the other is infilled with painted wood board on the bottom half and has a three-over-three window configuration on the upper half. This elevation also at one time included a loading dock; however the original was removed some time ago. Additionally, a penthouse was added in 2003 to provide roof access via one of the new exit stairways and is visible from this elevation.

In May of 1930, the building endured a fire that severely damaged the third and fourth floors. Consequently, the entire fourth floor and portions of the third floor were rebuilt. The appearance of the current third and fourth floor and their ornamentation are a product of the 1930 reconstruction; it is not known what the original upper floors looked like prior to the fire. According to the original building plans from the 1930 reconstruction, most of the third floor windows or glass panes were replaced, as were other broken glass panes at various locations throughout the building. The large plate glass in the storefronts on the Montana Avenue façade was also replaced. The elevator shaft was rebuilt, upgrading it from wood-frame to concrete. Also at that time, the main entry vestibule was moved from the northeast corner to the center of the Montana Avenue (north) façade.

The building has been through a series of occupancies, and despite vacancy in recent years the building has recently (2006-2007) undergone a historic tax credit rehabilitation. On the interior, the third and fourth floors were converted into seven, two-story loft apartments, while the basement, first and second floors were remodeled for retail/office space. The most significant and interesting aspect of the interior space is the heavy timber frame columns and beams; and while the interior spaces have been redefined, the columns and beams remain intact and exposed. The 2007 rehabilitation made very few changes to the exterior of the building. The existing black asphalt roof material had deteriorated and was replaced with a new thermoplastic polyolefin (TPO) membrane; however all of the existing roof structure was retained, including the exposed roof framing in the fourth floor interior spaces. The single pane glass was replaced on the third and fourth story windows with double pane, but the frames and sashes were retained and repaired. The same was done to the windows on the rear elevation. The original windows on both the second floor and basement level were completely retained and left intact. Interior storm windows were added at these two levels to improve energy efficiency. The single pane glass on the second floor and basement windows was retained and interior storm windows were added. Also, the single pane glass in the ground level storefronts on Montana Avenue and North 27<sup>th</sup> Street was replaced with thermal double pane glass in order to improve energy efficiency, but the frames were retained. None of the window systems were removed, nor replaced. The windows have been left intact and building's exterior character defining elements have been preserved.

Simple though it appears, the Oliver Building clearly demonstrates that a large commercial block could be expressed as a single integrated unit of great force and authority using large-scale coherent forms, graced with plain walls. With exterior masonry bearing walls and wooden columns for internal support the building is structurally conservative; however, the building's visual expression is interpreted as being distinctly American. The building in general is in excellent condition and retains a high degree of integrity. The site, setting, and overall architectural character of the Oliver Building aptly validate its significance as a historic property and render it worthy of listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

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**Statement of Significance:*****Summary***

The Oliver Building is directly associated with the early 20<sup>th</sup> century downtown Billings development boom that occurred as a result of local economic prosperity after the coming of the Northern Pacific Railroad in 1882 and subsequent railroads in 1894. Billings became the hub of rail lines extending in ten directions and as a result the area located along the railroad tracks developed with businesses dependent upon or directly related to the railroad and the transportation of goods throughout the region. Hotels, restaurants, warehouses, wholesalers and distributors were concentrated all along Montana and Minnesota Avenues parallel to the railroad. The Oliver Building served as a distribution warehouse and retail store as well as an office building from its construction through the 1950's and strongly fits into the historic context of the surrounding area. The period of significance of the Oliver Building is 1910-1949, from the time the building was built at a time of rapid growth and development in downtown Billings to the time when the city began abandoning spur lines within the downtown area as rail service slowed down and businesses dependent upon the railroad became less prevalent within the downtown core.

The Oliver Building still conveys much of the original design intent and retains its integrity as both a historically and architecturally significant property. It is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria A and C. It is significant under criterion A for its strong association with the commercial and transportation history of Billings during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is significant under criterion C for its industrial architecture style that is representative of the Chicago style of architecture that was developing in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and was brought to Montana with the railroad. This style became popular amongst the warehouses and other commercial buildings that were built along the railroad in downtown Billings.

***Historic Context***

The city of Billings was founded in 1882 when the Northern Pacific Railroad determined the route of its new transcontinental railroad west through the Yellowstone Valley. The location of Billings was determined by two sections of land that the railroad had acquired from the government that was twice the size of other land sections along the route. This presented an opportunity to not only establish a large city and regional railroad hub, but also for the railroad to profit considerably from the sale of the land to settlers and land developers.<sup>1</sup> A group of investors linked to the Northern Pacific Railroad Company formed the Minnesota and Montana Land Improvement Company, obtained land from the railroad, and platted the townsite of Billings in March of 1882. The townsite, named for former Northern Pacific Railroad president and M&MLI investor Frederick Billings, flanked the railroad right-of-way with Montana Avenue to the north of the tracks, and Minnesota Avenue to the south, with streets for businesses and homes projecting out on a rectilinear grid. These two streets, named for the parent land company responsible for their development, formed the commercial center of the new community.<sup>2</sup>

The railroad town grew quickly into a bustling commercial center as merchants, bankers, and entrepreneurs rushed to set up business and land seeking homesteaders flooded into the valley. Much of the early building development consisted of quickly constructed rough-hewn log structures and even tents, which were replaced with more substantial wood-frame and log buildings, and later masonry structures, as the city grew. The seemingly overnight development of the city of Billings from a small railroad town garnered the nickname the Magic City, which is still used today.

In 1894, the Burlington Northern (CB&Q) Railroad arrived in Billings, followed by the Great Northern Railroad in 1909. The rail-based economy exploded and Billings became the center of regional rail transportation at the junction of three major rail lines with connections to Chicago, Seattle, Denver, and Omaha. Also in 1909, Congress passed the Enlarged Homestead Act, doubling the size of farm land a homesteader could lay claim to and launching a land rush in the west. In the years that followed, 30,000-40,000 people

<sup>1</sup> Chere Jiusto, "Tales Spun Along the Tracks: A History of Downtown Billings," *Downtown Billings Historic and Architectural Survey*, Fall-Winter 1998, p.3.

<sup>2</sup> Jiusto, p.2.

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moved onto the agricultural frontiers of Eastern Montana. The population of Billings tripled from 3,221 residents in 1900 to 10,031 in 1910, ranking Billings the 6<sup>th</sup> fastest growing community in the nation in the 1910 census.<sup>3</sup>

Billings quickly became the economic hub for an enormous region and a burgeoning agricultural economy. The railroad played a huge part in the transport of agricultural goods throughout the region and therefore much of the economy of Eastern Montana and Northern Wyoming revolved around the Billings market. Accordingly, the business district developing along the railroad tracks flourished as Billings boomed.

In 1906, the freight yards and central transfer point shared by the Northern Pacific, Burlington Northern and Great Northern railroads were moved to neighboring Laurel, Montana due to lack of space in the railyards within the bustling downtown Billings business district. This led to the opening of several tracts of land within the railroad right-of-way to commercial leasing. The rapidly growing population and booming economy ushered in by the success of the railroad led to the establishment of new agricultural manufacturing and goods distributing industries along Montana and Minnesota Avenues. In the years that followed, several warehouses and large scale commercial buildings were constructed along the tracks in the heart of the bustling commercial district. The Oliver Building was one of the first buildings to be constructed after the railroad land was made available. It was soon followed by others along Montana Avenue such as the Selvidge-Babcock Building in 1914, the Stone-Ordean-Wells Warehouse in 1915, and the George L. Tracy Building in 1919. Downtown Billings was transformed during this "modern" era of development as smaller log and wood-frame buildings were rapidly replaced with new, larger stone and masonry buildings that reflected the prosperity of Billings in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Having established itself as a regional hub of commerce, Billings attracted large-scale wholesalers and other corporate investors who were eager to establish branches within the growing market. These national wholesalers, such as Ryan Grocery Co. and Firestone Tire and Rubber Co., as well as other local warehouses, occupied the modern warehouse buildings developing along the tracks and shipped by rail everything from large scale manufactured goods to automobiles and groceries. They provided much needed supplies such as hardware and farm equipment to the vast community of regional farmers.<sup>4</sup>

The warehouses and wholesalers along Montana and Minnesota Avenues continued to thrive throughout the homestead era and into the 1940's as the regional impact of the market continued to grow. Billings became second to only Butte amongst Montana and Wyoming cities as a distribution center, serving an area comprising 20 counties including hundreds of grocery, auto, and farm equipment outlets across Montana and Wyoming. This success is largely attributed to the vast network of railroads and highways radiating from the city in all directions.<sup>5</sup>

However, by the end of World War II, overland trucking and air transport made the once dominant rail freight market in the central business district somewhat obsolete. With the increase of auto traffic on congested downtown streets, shipments from downtown warehouses became more problematic and as the city grew, construction beyond the downtown commercial district became more attractive. New warehouses were built on the outskirts of town and many of the old downtown warehouses were abandoned in favor of modern single level facilities and ample space. Finally, in 1949 the City of Billings began authorizing the abandonment of spur lines, common carrier branch lines to outlying areas, through downtown.<sup>6</sup> The railroad era that had spurred rapid growth and development in the downtown business district and led to long term economic prosperity had ended.

The 1950's brought more change to the buildings along Montana and Minnesota Avenues as passenger train travel and other rail related commerce continued to decline, inflicting economic hardship in a once thriving area. Fires and modern development took out a number of brick warehouses and storefronts in the railway corridor and many historic buildings fell into disuse and neglect over the

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<sup>3</sup> Jiusto, p.19.

<sup>4</sup>Kooistra-Manning, Ann. *Billings Townsite Historic District (Boundary Increase I)* National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form. United States Dept. of the Interior, April 21, 2006, p.11.

<sup>5</sup> Kooistra-Manning, p.11.

<sup>6</sup> Kooistra-Manning, p.11.

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next decades. Because the Oliver Building remains a lasting example of the rail centered economy that made Billings the center of commerce and transportation that it is today, it is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A.

***Oliver Building History***

The Oliver Building was erected by the Oliver Plow works in 1910 at a cost of \$35,000. Its construction was concurrent with the dramatic early 20<sup>th</sup> century downtown development boom in Billings. It was one of the first of several large scale, "modern" commercial buildings built along the railway corridor on Montana Avenue after tracts of land within the railroad right-of-way were opened to commercial leasing.

Upon its completion in 1912, the Oliver Building provided much needed commercial, retail, and warehouse space which served the emerging wholesale and distributing industries along the railroad tracks as a result of the booming agricultural economy and Billings' emergence as a transportation and rail shipping hub. The building was first listed in the 1912 Polk Directory as "Oliver Chilled Plow Works, H B Sill Mngr." The Oliver Chilled Plow Works distributed farm tractors and most likely Hart-Parr and Oliver chilled plows to farmers across Eastern Montana and Wyoming.<sup>7</sup> In 1918 the building was sold to the Babcock-Selvidge interests and several years later it was purchased by the Hardware Building Corporation, a subsidiary of the Billings Hardware Co., and served as additional warehouse space for the Billings Hardware Building and store, located one block west on the southwest corner of N 28<sup>th</sup> Street and Montana Avenue.<sup>8</sup> By 1929, the address was known as the Oliver Building and had under its listing a variety of both local and national wholesale distributors such as Firestone Tire and Rubber Co. of California, Baker Transfer and Storage Co., and Finch Van Slyck and McConville Wholesale Dry Goods.

During the 1920's, the Oliver Building was a landmark along the Glacier-to-Gulf Motorway. The Glacier-to-Gulf Motorway was a series of roads and highways from Glacier National Park to Galveston, Texas that were designated by an association of businesses to promote their local communities. Landmarks on this route were noted in guidebooks that the association published and distributed. Many of the landmarks were stenciled with the highway name in order to identify the route for drivers. The Oliver Building has a "Glacier-to-Gulf" sign on the northeast corner of the building that may be the only one that still exists in the area.<sup>9</sup>

On May 11, 1930, the building was damaged by a fire, resulting in a loss of over \$100,000. According to the Billings Gazette, the fire started in the basement and was drawn up through the elevator shaft at the rear of the building to the third and fourth floors, which were being used to store furniture and mattresses for the Billings Hardware Co.<sup>10</sup> As a result of the damages, the fourth floor and portions of the third floor were rebuilt, as well as the elevator shaft, following the fire. Also, the entrance vestibule was moved from the NE corner of the building to the center of the north façade and windows were added to the rear elevation facing the railroad.<sup>11</sup> The building remodel was designed by Billings architecture firm McIver and Cohagen. Chandler C. Cohagen was one of the most prominent architects in not only Billings but across the region.

At the time of the fire, the Billings Hardware Co., Firestone Tire and Rubber Co., and Baker Transfer and Storage occupied the building as well as several residential tenants. A number of apartments were located on the third floor of the Montana Avenue front of the building. However, after the remodel, it appears that these apartments were replaced with additional office space. While the Polk's Directory lists the building as vacant in 1930 while the renovations were completed, after the extensive building remodel, the Connelly Machinery Co. occupied the building from 1932-1937. In 1937, the Billings Hardware Co. bought the building and the Polk Directory listed the building as such. The directory also showed the WPA (Works Projects Administration) as occupying office space in the building in 1937.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Kralovec, Stephanie, *Billings Historic District Inventory*, 2005.

<sup>8</sup> "Oliver Building Erected at Cost of Over \$35,000," *Billings Gazette*, May 12, 1930, p.1.

<sup>9</sup> Kralovec.

<sup>10</sup> "Oliver Building Wrecked by Flames, \$100,000 Damage Caused by Blaze on Upper Floors," *Billings Gazette*, May 12, 1930, p.1.

<sup>11</sup> "Reconstruction of the Oliver Building" (Building Plans), McIver and Cohagen Architects, June 6, 1930.

<sup>12</sup> Kralovec.

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Between 1958 and 1996, M&L Realty owned the building. They were closely associated with the Colborn School Supply Company for the purpose of owning real estate occupied by the company. Soon after occupying the building, Colborn opened a retail store in the ground floor of the building in order to serve the general public and keep them out of the school supply distribution warehouse.

The building fell into slight disrepair and sat vacant for several years before the current owner bought the building and did an extensive historic tax credit rehabilitation between 2006-2007. The rehabilitation project was completed by High Plains Architects of Billings. The building now includes loft-style residential apartment units on the third and fourth floors, and retail and commercial office space in the basement, and on the ground and second floor levels.

***Architectural Context***

Due to its rapid growth and development as a result of the railroad, Billings was quickly transformed from a collection of roughly built wooden structures to more substantial brick and stone buildings at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This change followed community efforts to establish more permanency and style in the business district and a vision of long-term growth and development. Most of the buildings of this era were designed and built by local architects and contractors and therefore represent vernacular styles. Buildings built before 1910 tended to be more ornamental in design; however after 1910, commercial architecture became more basic and functional in its design, with relatively modest brickwork patterning as ornament.<sup>13</sup>

The Oliver Building's style typifies this architectural movement. While the building is an excellent example of the commercial architectural trends developing along the railroad tracks in Billings, it is also a strong example of a western commercial building style that was influenced by Chicago architectural styles and trends. The Chicago style refers to a commercial building form that developed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, primarily in response to new technology that permitted greater physical height, larger expanses of open floor space, and larger window openings that provided more natural light and ventilation. The style was most popular in Chicago after the 1871 fire. The Chicago style is distinguished by metal skeleton framing in cast iron or steel, exterior masonry cladding, large, regularly spaced divided rectangular windows, and limited exterior ornament. While the Oliver Building does not employ all the major elements of the Chicago style, the overall character of the Chicago style is embodied in the Oliver Building's simple commercial design. The Oliver Building's style is a product of the popularity of the Chicago style trend at the time and the building materials most available in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Billings.

The Oliver Building is highly cohesive with the historic architectural character of the surrounding buildings. It is bordered to the east side of North 27<sup>th</sup> Street by the Billings Townsite Historic District, which is also significant for its associations with the early commercial development of Billings. Many of the buildings in this district share the Western commercial architectural style, industrial character, and integrity of the Oliver Building. The architectural significance and integrity of the Oliver Building render it eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C.

***Chandler C. Cohagen***

Chandler Carroll Cohagen (24 April 1889-9 December 1985) was the architect responsible for the 1930 remodel to the Oliver Building. He was born in Sioux City, Iowa and moved to Billings with his family in 1907 after graduating high school. He attended the University of Michigan's architecture program and as a student in 1914, along with fellow classmate Leo M Bauer, founded the Alpha Rho Chi national architectural fraternity that continues today. Shortly after graduation in 1915, Cohagen returned to Billings and opened the architectural office of McIver, Cohagen and Marshall, partnering with University of Michigan classmate Angus Vaughn McIver of Great Falls. From 1920-1936, McIver and Cohagen were partners in a firm based in Great Falls and Billings. In 1936 Cohagen began an independent practice, which he operated for the remainder of his career.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Kooistra-Manning, p.12.

<sup>14</sup> Denslow, William, *Famous Free Masons from A-J Part One*, Kessinger Publishing, 2004.

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Throughout his long and extensive career, he became not only one of the most influential architects in Billings, but also throughout Montana and Wyoming, designing several significant buildings. He was also well known for his involvement in both local and national groups and other community service. He served as president of the YMCA and Billings Chamber of Commerce, DeMolay executive officer for Montana, grand master of Montana Masons, and acting president of the board of trustees for Rocky Mountain College. He was also awarded membership in the Institut International des Arts et des Lettres in Geneva Switzerland and a certificate as a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects.<sup>15</sup>

Although schools were known to be one of Cohagen's specialties, he also designed a range of other commercial, public and institutional buildings as well as residences and churches. Some of his most notable commissions include: Orchard School (Billings, 1918), Billings Deaconess Hospital (1918), the Big Horn Creamery Building (Hardin, MT, 1919), Rosebud Deaconess Hospital (Forsyth, MT, 1919) Park County High School (Powell, WY, 1919), Cody High School (Cody, WY, 1921), Highlands Golf Club (Billings, 1930), Wyoming Trust Company (Thermopolis, WY, 1933), the Toole County Courthouse (Shelby, MT, 1934), Sidney High School (Sidney, MT, 1934), the Lincoln High School remodel (Billings, 1935), YMCA remodel (Billings, 1937), Fromberg High School (Fromberg, MT, 1939), Billings City Hall (along with J.G. Link, 1920, 1939-40), Eastern Montana College girls dormitory (Billings, 1941), Eastern Montana College Science Building (Billings, 1948), Yellowstone County Courthouse (Billings, 1955-56), and the Masonic Lodges of Broadus (1945), Wolf Point (1958), and Roundup, MT (1963). Perhaps most notable of his works, and one of Cohagen's greatest personal honors was designing the "new" governor's mansion in Helena (1959).<sup>16</sup>

**Conclusion**

The Oliver Building is highly significant for its association with the downtown Billings development boom that occurred as a result of the arrival of the railroad and its strong relationship with the growing agricultural community and related business interests. It retains its integrity as a historically significant property as its site context and architectural character have been well preserved. Both the 1930 and the 2006-2007 remodels were done in keeping with the original design intent and with sensitivity to the historic and architectural character of the building and can be considered as contributing to the integrity of the building.

Further, the Oliver Building represents a similar historical and architectural significance to the Billings Original Townsite National Register Historic District, which it borders. Yet due to the key time period in which it was built in 1910, as well as its well-preserved architectural character, it stands out as a particularly significant contribution to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century warehouses and other commercial buildings along the Montana and Minnesota Avenue railroad corridor. For these reasons, the Oliver Building is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria A and C.

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<sup>15</sup> Bragg, Addison, "Man of 1,000 Schools," *Billings Gazette*, September 15, 1968.

<sup>16</sup> Kooistra-Manning . p. 13.

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***Verbal Boundary Description:***

The Oliver Building is located in Lot 1 in Block 1 of Malia Subdivision, Yellowstone County Montana according to the official plat thereof on file and of record in the office of the Clerk and Recorder of said County, under Document No. 3117728. It is located in SWNWNE of Section 3, T1S R16E.

***Boundary Justification:***

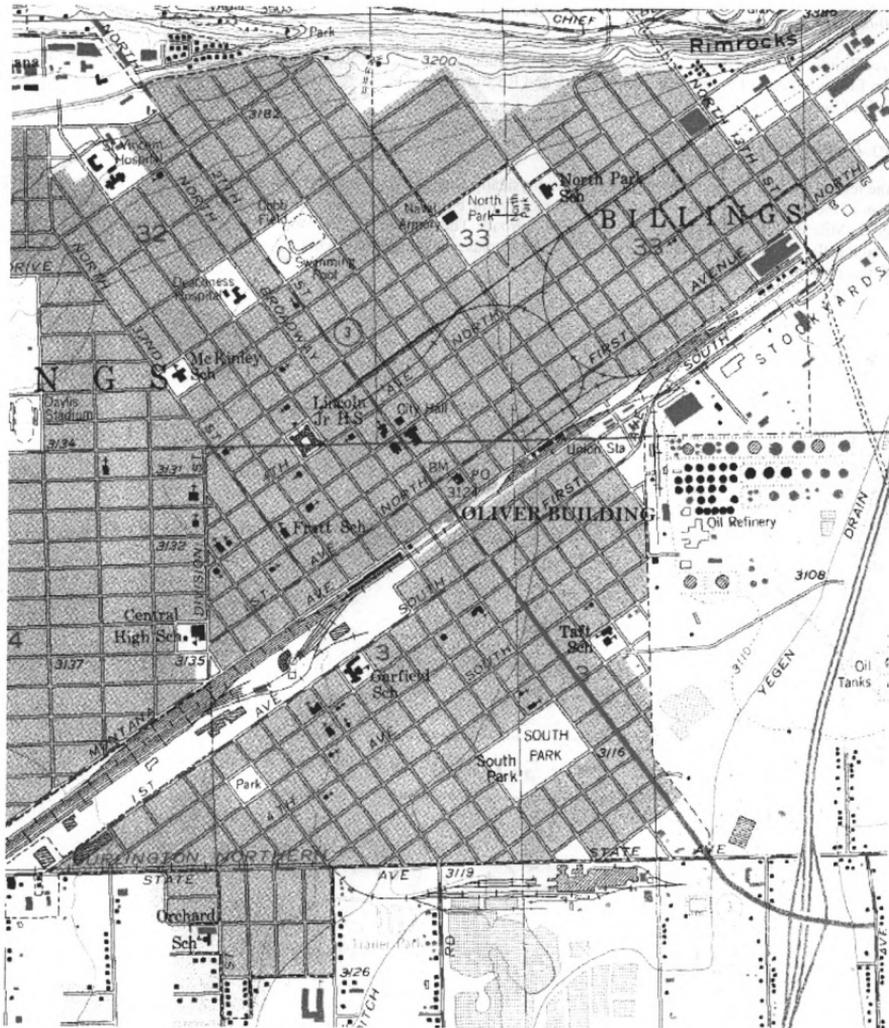
This is the legal boundary of the property that has not physically changed since the building was built in 1910. However, the legal description of the property has been changed. Until recently, the building was located on railroad leased ground, which is legally described by Mile Posts and Survey Stations along the railroad. The railroad sold the land in c. 2001 and at that time the land was platted and legally described by more standard metes and bounds. The property has not changed size or locations since 1910, however the legal description has been changed.

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Name of Property: Oliver Building  
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Section Number: Photographs Page: 11



Photographer: Alison LaFever

High Plains Architects

Billings, MT

Oliver #1

Date: 12-4-2007

View to: Southwest

Location of Negatives: N/A, Digital Photographs

Disk on file at MT SHPO

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Name of Property: Oliver Building  
County and State: Yellowstone, Montana

Section Number: Photographs Page: 12



Photographer: Alison LaFever  
High Plains Architects  
Billings, MT  
Oliver #2  
Date: 12-4-2007  
View to: South  
Location of Negatives: N/A, Digital Photographs  
Disk on file at MT SHPO

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Photographer: Alison LaFever  
High Plains Architects  
Billings, MT  
Oliver #3  
Date: 12-4-2007  
View to: West  
Location of Negatives: N/A, Digital Photographs  
Disk on file at MT SHPO

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Name of Property: Oliver Building  
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Photographer: Alison LaFever

High Plains Architects

Billings, MT

Oliver #4

Date: 11-27-2007

View to: Northwest

Location of Negatives: N/A, Digital Photographs

Disk on file at MT SHPO

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Photographer: Alison LaFever  
High Plains Architects  
Billings, MT  
Oliver #5  
Date: 11-27-2007  
View to: South  
Location of Negatives: N/A, Digital Photographs  
Disk on file at MT SHPO

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Name of Property: Oliver Building  
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Photographer: Alison LaFever

High Plains Architects

Billings, MT

Oliver #6

Date: 11-27-2007

View to: South

Location of Negatives: N/A, Digital Photographs

Disk on file at MT SHPO

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Photographer: Alison LaFever  
High Plains Architects  
Billings, MT  
Oliver #7

Date: 12-4-2007

View to: South

Location of Negatives: N/A, Digital Photographs  
Disk on file at MT SHPO