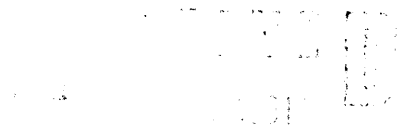


**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**



**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM**

NATIONAL  
REGISTER

**1. Name of Property**

historic name: **Arvon Block**

other name/site number:

**2. Location**

street & number: **114-116 First Avenue South**

not for publication: **n/a**  
vicinity: **n/a**

city/town: **Great Falls**

state: **Montana**

code: **MT**

county: **Cascade**

code: **013**

zip code: **59401**

**3. Classification**

Ownership of Property: **Private**

Category of Property: **Building**

Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing

Noncontributing

  1  

       building(s)

       sites

       structures

       objects

  1  

       Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: **0**

Name of related multiple property listing: **n/a**

**4. 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.

Maudie Day Signature of certifying official Date Aug. 1, 1991

MONTANA STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting or other official Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

\_\_\_ See Continuation Sheet

**5. National Park Service Certification**

I, hereby certify that this property is:

**Entered in the  
National Register**

entered in the National Register Andrew Byers 9/26/91  
\_\_\_ See Continuation Sheet

\_\_\_ determined eligible for the National Register \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ determined not eligible for the National Register \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_ See Continuation Sheet

\_\_\_ removed from the National Register \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_ See Continuation Sheet

\_\_\_ other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Keeper

for Date of Action

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## 6. Function or Use

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Historic: Commerce/Trade: specialty store  
Domestic: hotel  
Transportation

Current: Commerce/Trade: specialty store  
Vacant/Not in Use

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## 7. Description

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Architectural Classification: Late 19th and Early 20th Century American Movements:  
Commercial Style  
Other: Victorian Commercial

Materials: foundation: stone  
walls: brick, stone  
roof: asphalt

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Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Arvon Block is a two-part, Commercial style business block employing many of the characteristics associated regionally with Victorian Commercial buildings. Although the designer of this building is unknown, the building has been identified as one of the few surviving late 19th century commercial buildings in Great Falls. The Arvon Block is located within a potential historic district which was surveyed in 1984, and was identified at that time as a building of primary significance in that district.<sup>1</sup>

Located in the heart of the Great Falls downtown commercial area, the Arvon Block is set on an urban streetscape which developed east of the Missouri River in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Wide streets (80-90' wide) were laid out with strict order oriented to the cardinal directions. The commercial area projects to the east from the Missouri River and a railroad district at the river's edge. Typifying Great Falls' settlement period buildings, the Arvon Block and the buildings in the immediate vicinity are generally 2-3 stories in height, although later construction in the downtown core reached to greater heights. The buildings occupy the full width of their properties, abutting their neighbors. Common sidewalks front onto wide streets, which are landscaped with rows of deciduous trees which line the avenues.

The Arvon Block is rectangular in massing, and of masonry construction. On the north elevation, the main facade is faced with red brick, laid in a common bond. The other walls are of rubble stone construction. The original fenestration is characterized by segmentally-arched window openings; on the upper stories, these house double-hung, 1-over-1 windows. The upper stories of the building are no longer in use, the first story is occupied by small businesses.

The Arvon Block was built as a combination hotel and stable, and as such, it entails a unique spatial design. The eastern portion of the building, which housed the hotel, is arranged as three full stories with hotel rooms located on the second and third stories above a first story storefront. The western portion of the building, originally a livery stable, was designed as a two story plan above a basement, and included horse stalls on the basement level, stable and showroom on the first floor, and sleeping quarters for the stable hands and hayloft on the second story. A false parapet extends to the third story level, resulting in a continuous line across the entire cornice which visually unifies these distinct portions of the building.

The north elevation is symmetrically arranged in a tripartite format, with vertical pilasters which enframe and define the east, central and west vertical bays. Across the ground level, this facade includes, in the east bay, a storefront and a doorway to the second story hotel; in the central bay, an office front; in the west bay, a wide stable doorway and an office front. Sandstone slab steps, now wearing away around the edges, access individual doorways. Rusticated sandstone bases support brick pilasters and iron columns.

X See Continuation Sheet

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<sup>1</sup>Page-Werner, et al., Historical and Architectural Survey of a Selected Area within the Great Falls Revitalization District, p. 4-1

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The eastern storefront features a centrally recessed entrance, framed by single iron columns. These columns support an iron I-beam which spans the storefront opening and supports the upper levels of masonry. Large storefront windows are housed in the original wooden frames, although the transoms have been infilled with plywood. Below the windows, original rectangular kick-panels, finished with vertical tongue-in-groove, trim the aprons. The doorway is bordered by narrow sidelights and a transom. The transom and the lower sidelights are now infilled with pressboard, and the door has been replaced with a hollow core, wooden unit. To the west, the entrance to the upper level hotel is marked by a pair of glass doors beneath a large, almost square transom. A segmental arch spans the doorway; doors and transom are all framed with wood.

On the western bay, the segmentally-arched stable entrance dominates the first story. The original doors have been replaced by a roll up wooden garage door. As originally designed, the flanking central and western office fronts featured a large, single, fixed 4-pane window and a paneled wooden door with paired upper lights, all placed within segmentally-arched openings. Currently, the original detailing on these office fronts is masked by vertical metal paneling added in 1969. The western office front retains the original window and door; on the central office front, however, the door has been replaced, and the large window opening has been masked and fitted with a much smaller, aluminum-framed casement unit.

On the upper stories, fenestration is characterized by segmentally-arched openings with rusticated sandstone sills, which originally housed double-hung, 1-over-1 windows. These windows are symmetrically placed between the enframing pilasters. Hotel windows on the east bay open on the second and third stories; windows above the stable open on the second story, are taller and set at a higher level than those on the hotel. Above these windows, the brick facade rises to the cornice line, forming a false parapet. A metal cornice caps the building. It is trimmed with an alternating, raised motif of paired shamrocks and paired brackets. There are large bracket units above each pilaster, which were originally finished with pyramidal caps with upright pendants. The original, hand-painted wooden sign reading "ARVON/BLOCK" in white on black, and trimmed with shamrocks at the lower corners, is affixed to the parapet, at center.

On the east elevation, the adjacent building ties into the wall on the first story. Above this, the rubblestone construction is exposed, and the wall steps down toward the rear. The bases of three chimneys remain atop the wall. Third story window openings were filled with cinder block ca. 1978. Flaking cream, black and green paint denotes early sign locations. The west wall of the Arvon Block abuts the adjacent building but projects beyond it to the rear. At the rear, the southwest corner walls are faced with red brick. Southwest window openings have brick sills, and some of the original window units remain.

On the south elevation, the west portion of the building rises to two stories, the eastern portion to three. The rubblestone wall is covered with deteriorating concrete and portions of the masonry have fallen out. The original rear stable doorway is marked by a wooden lintel; the surround has been repaired with brick and the opening infilled with concrete. The windows on this elevation have stone relieving arches and cut sandstone sills, the original window units have been removed and infilled with cinder block or boarded over. A metal fire escape apparently replaced the original rear stairway on the hotel in 1955, accessing doorways on the second and third stories.

The original interior of the building was described in a newspaper article:

The basement is divided into stalls and is the most complete livery stable in Montana. Part of the stalls are double but a larger number are single. The walls are boarded up about four feet. Above this partition is a lattice of iron bars or woven wires, so that it is impossible for the horses to hurt each other. The stone walls and all interior work are nicely calcimined. Six

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large hay chutes lead up to the second story not only to distribute hay, but for ventilation, as air currents pass through them constantly to the ventilators on the roof. There are accommodations for fifty-eight horses.

**Carriage Room and Office**

The Carriage room and office occupy the greater part of the ground floor. The remainder being devoted to a neat harness room which is furnished with every convenience necessary. There is also a large grain bin on this floor. The bin is connected to a large feed box in the basement by a large pipe, and is so arranged that it is self-feeding. A neat sleeping room for the stablemen is also provided. The office will be fitted up in elegant shape, a fine carpet, office furniture and a telephone will be part of the equipment.

**The Apartment House**

The eastern part of the building is thirty feet by one hundred feet, has a large basement and is three stories high. The Strain Brothers and Bach, Cory and Co. use the basement as a storage room. The first story is suitable for use as a grocery house. The second and third floors are divided into suites of rooms which will be adapted into offices or spaces for lodgers. There are sixteen rooms on the second floor and twenty-four rooms on the third floor. The building is amply provided with closets and appliances for safety in case of fire.<sup>2</sup>

Currently, the stable interior still retains wooden plank flooring in the stable entrance, and remnants of the original calcimine on the walls are still in evidence over horizontal bead board. The stalls in the basement have been removed and replaced with a poured concrete floor. On the second story, the interior was arranged into small apartments, with main access leading from the hotel stairwell. Walls were framed in with post and beam construction, finished with lathe and plaster. The upper level has been largely gutted, although some old linoleum and plastering remains.

The hotel was accessed by stairwells at the front and rear, with spindled railings and turned knobs on the newel posts. The hotel interior was laid out around a narrow central hallway. This hallway is illuminated by two skylights, with balconies on the third floor overlooking these lightways. The rooms opening off this hallway have fixed 4-light windows looking into the hallway, and paneled wooden doors with transoms.

Set in a downtown streetscape predominated by historic commercial buildings, the Arvon Block continues to accurately reflect its original design. The building currently retains a tremendous amount of integrity -- alterations on the exterior are limited to the addition of metal panelling to the office fronts, and the removal of one storefront window, and upper level windows. Otherwise the historic fabric is intact, albeit in serious need of repair and stabilization.

On the interior, much integrity remains, although partition walls have been added to create modern office and store space, and the stable has been dismantled. The remainder of the interior fabric remains as original, including spatial arrangements, fabric and detailing. This is most notable in the hotel interior, where plaster walls and ceilings are deteriorating but retain the original configurations and detailing, such as interior windows, doors and woodwork.

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<sup>2</sup>Great Falls Tribune, July 27, 1890

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## 8. Statement of Significance

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Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: **Locally, Statewide**

Applicable National Register Criteria: **A, C**

Areas of Significance: **Commerce  
Architecture**

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): **n/a**

Period(s) of Significance: **1890-1918**

Significant Person(s): **n/a**

Significant Dates: **1890**

Cultural Affiliation: **n/a**

Architect/Builder: **unknown**

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State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The Arvon Block is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under criterion A as one of the last, well-preserved business buildings associated with the settlement of Great Falls as the town emerged as one of Montana's leading industrial and commercial centers. The property gains significance under criterion C, as a well-preserved, now rare example of local Victorian-era commercial architecture.

### Historical Significance

The Arvon Block was constructed in 1890 by Robert Vaughn, and named for his daughter, Arvonnia. Vaughn was a pioneer rancher in the Sun River Valley northwest of Great Falls. He settled there in 1869 and was the first to claim land in Chouteau County (later Cascade County) under the 1862 Homesteading Act. Vaughn resided there until 1890, when he sold his Sun River ranch to his friend Captain Thomas Couch of the Boston and Montana Co.<sup>3</sup> Subsequently, Vaughn moved to Great Falls and took up residence in the Vaughn Block.<sup>4</sup> (The Robert Vaughn Homestead was listed on the National Register in 1984.)

In 1882-1883, Vaughn was instrumental in assisting Paris Gibson and H.P. Rolfe in the land survey of Great Falls.<sup>5</sup> Vaughn saw the business potential in the budding townsite, and invested accordingly. The completion of the Great Northern Railway to Great Falls in 1887 catalyzed the growth of Great Falls, and the number of inhabitants grew from 3,000 in 1890 to 6,000 by 1893, to over 15,000 by 1900.<sup>6</sup> The emergence of Great Falls as a population center in Montana was mirrored in the initial phase of commercial development, and the properties north and east of the Missouri River near the proposed site of the Manitoba Depot soon comprised the heart of the Great Falls commercial district.

Vaughn invested in properties in the area, purchasing the property for the Arvon Block from the Great Falls Water Power & Townsite Company. This development company was largely controlled by James J. Hill and Paris Gibson, and was responsible in large measure for attracting industry, commerce and population to the new town of Great Falls. Vaughn's most noteworthy contributions to Great Falls' urban landscape were the Vaughn Block on Central Avenue in 1888, followed by the Arvon Block in 1890, both substantial anchors within the historic business district.

During the settlement of Montana communities, investment in substantial architecture was viewed as a sign of confidence in a town's future, and a symbol of prosperity. Indeed, as it neared completion, the Arvon Block was cited as a substantial addition to the Great Falls commercial district, and proof that "Robert Vaughn has been from the start a steadfast friend to Great Falls and that friendship has been shown in such a manner that no one can mistake his meaning. He makes no loud professions but his actions speak for

X See Continuation Sheet

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<sup>3</sup>History of Montana, Miller, p. 288-289

<sup>4</sup>Polk, R.L., Great Falls City Directories, 1890-1900

<sup>5</sup>Gibson, Paris, The Founding of Great Falls and Some of its Early Records

<sup>6</sup>Page-Werner, et al., Historical and Architectural Survey..., pp. 3-16, 3-19.

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themselves... His block on First Avenue South, which is nearly completed, will be an enduring monument to his business and faith in Great Falls."<sup>7</sup>

The Arvon Block opened in 1890, and its proximity to the St. Paul, Minneapolis and Manitoba (later the Great Northern) station just a block away undoubtedly served well the businesses located here. These included the Axtell stables, which were touted at the time as "the most complete livery stable in Montana... which will serve as a model for others throughout Montana."<sup>8</sup> The Axtell Stables' hack line met all trains, and conveyed passengers to local hotels. They also provided express, draying and general transfer services. The Arvon Block's 40 rooms served as singles and suites of lodgings or offices. Two prominent business houses, Strain Brothers, and Bach, Cory & Co. used the basement area for storage. By 1895, the Derrig Fruit Company occupied the storefront, and undoubtedly relied on the railroad for shipments of over \$76,000 worth of produce that year alone.<sup>9</sup>

Robert Vaughn sold the Arvon Block in 1906 to Thomas Couch, Edward G. Couch and John J. Hamlyn for the sum of \$1.00. Two years later, these individuals incorporated as the Couch Investment Company, a land development company whose stated object was "To acquire by purchase or otherwise own, hold, use, lease, sell, deal in, mortgage, convey or otherwise dispose of lands, town lots or real estate etc." The building was sold in 1908 to Samuel Spencer; however, Spencer defaulted on the mortgage and taxes, and the building was tied up in probate court, and vacant between 1918-1925. After Spencer's death in 1925, the building was sold to William H. and Frances P. Rooney, and proceeds went to the Montana Deaconess Hospital. In 1946, the Rooneys sold the Arvon Block to the Carl Lingwall family, the Lingwalls retained ownership until 1962 when they sold the building to Walter and Ann Anderson and Jacob and Bernice D. Vandervalk. The block sold to the present owners, Harry and Betty Cosby, in 1978.<sup>10</sup>

A variety of businesses occupied the building during the early 20th century. The hotel operated as the Power City Rooms through the 1930s. By the early 1940s, it became the Travellers Hotel, a name it retained through 1970 when it was closed. Small businesses characterized the occupancy of the ground floor beneath the hotel. These included John Wallace Soft Drinks in the late 1920s, Cascade Labor Offices during the 1930s, and Lingwalls Radio Service and Second Hand Store during the 1940s and early 1950s. In the former Axtell Stables, A.N. Eaton Metal Products was located during the late 1920s, followed by the Northwest Feed Co. during the 1930s and early 1940s. By the 1950s, Lingwalls Second Hand Store expanded into this space.<sup>11</sup>

#### Architectural Significance

The Arvon Block is a very good example of the Commercial architecture which characterized the founding years of Great Falls history and dominated the increasingly urban landscape of many of Montana's emerging towns and cities during the late 1800s. This Victorian Commercial body of architecture was characterized by two-part commercial blocks, 1-3 stories in height with masonry facades, most commonly of local red brick. These buildings

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<sup>7</sup>Great Falls Tribune, July 27, 1890

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Unknown source, 1895 newspaper clipping featuring Arvon Block, in SHPO files

<sup>10</sup>Abstract of Title

<sup>11</sup>R.L. Polk, Great Falls City Directories

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derived much of their interest from Italian Renaissance-inspired detailing, with arched head fenestration and metal, prefabricated cornices featuring brackets and other decorative motifs. The storefronts often are arranged with alternating recessed entrances and planar surfaces, producing an undulating rhythm. The Arvon Block embodies these characteristics, and today is one of the last such late 19th century buildings surviving in Great Falls.

Currently, the Arvon Block very accurately represents that original design, on both the interior and exterior, and conveys a very strong sense of its historic associations with Great Falls' first decade of business development. A grand old survivor of a by-gone era, the Arvon Block is a physical reminder of days before the advent of the automobile, when horse-drawn vehicles transported passengers and goods throughout the heart of the city, and downtown boarding hotels provided lodgings for the many residents who lived and worked within the town's commercial district.



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## 9. References

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- Helms, Candi, "Great Falls Northside Residential Historic District," National Register nomination, 1990.
- Leeson, Michael History of Montana, 1739-1885, Warner, Beers & Company, Chicago, 1885, p. 1029.
- Miller, Joaquin, History of Montana, Lewis Publishing Company, Chicago, 1894, vol. 1, p. 288.

X See Continuation Sheet

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 # \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository:

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## 10. Geographical Data

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Acreage of Property: 1 acre

UTM References:	Zone	Easting	Northing
	12	477100	5261000

Verbal Boundary Description:

The Arvon Block is located in the northwest  $\frac{1}{4}$ , southwest  $\frac{1}{4}$ , northwest  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Section 12, T20N, R3W. The Arvon Block is located on the E $\frac{1}{2}$  Lot 4, and Lot 5, Block 368, Great Falls, Montana.

Boundary Justification:

The boundaries encompass the property historically associated with this building.

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## 11. Form Prepared By

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Name/Title: Chere Jiusto

Organization: Montana State Historic Preservation Office

Date: March 1991

Street & Number: 225 N. Roberts

Telephone: (406)444-7715

City or Town: Helena

State: Montana Zip: 59620

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North Montana Abstract Company, "Abstract of Title, E 1/2 Lot 4 & All Lot 5, Block 368, Great Falls, 1978.  
Page-Werner & Partners, Historical Research Associates, James R. McDonald, "Historical and Architectural Survey of a Selected Area within the Great Falls Revitalization Report," prepared for Cascade County Historical Society, Great Falls, Montana, 1984.  
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Polk, R.L. and Co., Directory of Great Falls including Cascade County, Butte, Montana, 1895, 1911, 1913-1950.  
Sanders, Helen F., A History of Montana, Lewis Publishing Company, Chicago, 1913, p. 956.  
Vaughn, Robert, Then and Now: or Thirty-Six years in the Rockies, Tribune Printing Co., Minneapolis, 1900.