

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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received **JL 13 1983**
date entered

National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Slater Building
and/or common N/A

2. Location

street & number 216-224 Fir Street N/A not for publication
city, town La Grande N/A vicinity of Second Congressional District
state Oregon code 41 county Union code 061

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>N/A</u> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<u>N/A</u> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name William F. and Sheila K. Geddes
street & number 1804 V Avenue
city, town La Grande N/A vicinity of state Oregon 97850

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Registry of Deeds, Union County Courthouse
street & number 1100 L Avenue
city, town La Grande state Oregon 97850

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Statewide Inventory of Historic Properties has this property been determined eligible? yes no
date 1976 federal state county local
depository for survey records State Historic Preservation Office
city, town Salem state Oregon 97310

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		date <u>N/A</u>

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Historical Background

The Old Oregon Trail, or Great Emigrant Road (1843-1884), crossed the southwestern part of Grande Ronde Valley, in eastern Oregon, on its way to the Willamette Valley. Although the pioneers were impressed by the beauty of this valley and recognized its agricultural potential, its isolation was a deterrent to settlement; the first permanent settlers did not arrive until the fall of 1861. In the spring of 1862 they established a town on the Oregon Trail, at the point where it left the valley. This community was named La Grande.

In 1869, Henry Villard, pioneer Oregon railroad builder, organized Oregon Railway and Navigation Company and began to extend a line eastward from Portland along the south bank of the Columbia River. Its purpose was to intercept northern transcontinental lines then under construction. He later arranged for a link with Union Pacific, branching off at Hermiston to cross the Blue Mountains. Construction was undertaken by both companies and the rails were joined at Huntington in the fall of 1884.

When railroad construction reached the valley that summer, following the Grande Ronde River, La Grande chose to relocate at trackside. This involved a move of approximately 1.4 miles. Daniel Chaplin (1823-1888), one of the community's most progressive citizens and a major landholder, donated 105 acres of land to the railroad for marshalling yards, shops, roundhouse and the other facilities necessary to establish and maintain a division point. He and C.H. Prescott then platted the new town; this area is now known as Chaplin's Addition to the City of La Grande. Five avenues parallel the main line, which is aligned northwest-southeast; two of these, Madison and Monroe, are north of the line. Those south of it, Washington, Adams and Jefferson, became, with their associated cross streets, the new business district. Of the three, Jefferson is nearest the line; Adams was developed as the principal commercial thoroughfare. Other streets in the city are aligned with the cardinal points of the compass.

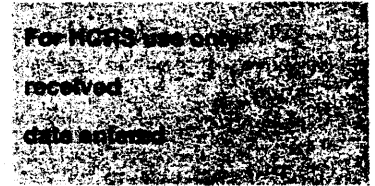
History of Site

C.H. Prescott, of Portland, acted as trustee for Chaplin and was responsible for sale of lots in the new addition. Lot 9 of Block 112 was sold by him to Thomas H. Walsh, October 25, 1885; on May 12, 1886, Walsh purchased Lot 8. On March 15, 1888, Walsh, who had also acquired Lot 7, sold the three lots to John Frawley. On September 13, 1888, Frawley, who had purchased Lot 6 as well, sold the four lots to Charles McClure. These were all thirty-foot lots. On February 19, 1889, McClure sold Lot 9 and the eastern fourteen feet of Lot 8 to Dan Marx, thus establishing a forty-four foot front for a corner building. James H. Slater purchased Lots 6 and 7 and the remaining sixteen feet of Lot 8 from McClure on March 31, 1890, and on July 3 of the same year, purchased the corner property from Marx. These four lots were thereafter known as the Slater Block. In 1891, Slater erected a two-story brick building, with Mesker Brothers metal front, on the corner formerly owned by Marx and fronting on Jefferson. Its width is fifty-four feet, depth eighty feet. The remaining thirty feet between the rear of this building and the alley was an open backyard occupied by a shed.

As noted in the biographical section (see statement of significance), James H. Slater died January 28, 1899. Under the terms set forth in his will, his wife Elizabeth was devisee during her lifetime; his son James D. Slater was named executor and trustee of the estate. Mrs. Slater died February 27, 1916. On August 17 of that year, James D.

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sold Lots 6 and 7 and the east six feet of Lot 8 to J.H. Childs, reserving additional space from Lot 8 that contained a stairwell and air shaft associated with the Slater Building. This accounts for the irregular western boundary of the site.

The Slater Building was sold to Union Motor Company of La Grande on January 8, 1920; James Slater states in the transaction that proceeds will be used to settle claims against the estate and to honor various bequests specified by his father's will.

Union Motor Company did not prosper, and it declared bankruptcy February 13, 1923. Court action was followed by a sheriff's sale; the site was acquired by George R. Lyman and his wife, Rural Pearl Lyman. The building had been neglected after Slater sold it and Lyman renovated it extensively, converting office suites to apartments and subdividing commercial space on the ground floor. Structural changes noted elsewhere date from this period. In 1924-25, Lyman erected an adjoining brick building, thirty feet wide by sixty feet deep, between the rear of the Slater Building and the alley, fronting on Fir Street. Although a separate structure, it should be considered an addition in that its second floor communicates directly with that of the Slater Building and became an extension of the Lyman Apartments. The Lymans were assisted in the management of their property by their son-in-law, Doyle B. Zimmerman, and daughter Irma; the Zimmermans were granted an undivided half interest July 2, 1937. Mrs. Lyman died January 19, 1952 and Doyle Zimmerman died May 12, 1953. George Lyman and his daughter owned the property as a partnership until his death on April 22, 1965.

On January 10, 1972, Irma Zimmerman and Winnie L. Veal (her sister), sold the property to Carlos E. and Wilma C. Easley. Easley and his son renovated the building and it was sold to Elaine Lowden, December 2, 1974. Lowden sold it to Dean M. Harrison, March 17, 1976; Harrison in turn sold it to Herbert V. Carroll, May 3, 1978; and Carroll sold it to the present owners, William F. and Sheila K. Geddes, on February 4, 1980.

A wide variety of businesses have occupied the commercial rentals. The principal space, fronting on Jefferson Avenue, was occupied by automobile dealers for over thirty years. The Union Motor Company was followed by Southard and Shinn (Buick), 1924-25; this firm was succeeded by Gettings and Hanks, later named Gettings and Lynch and now the Lynch Motor Company (Buick, Pontiac, Cadillac), which moved to its present location on Adams Avenue in 1952. The space is currently occupied by Geddes Jewelry.

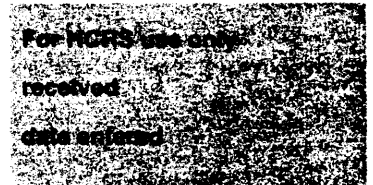
The Building

The Slater building is a rectangular two-story commercial brick building with full basement, a fifty-four-foot Mesker Brothers metal front, and a flat roof. It was extensively renovated between 1923 and 1928. All visible external changes, and all major internal structural changes, date from this period. Further renovation, undertaken between 1972 and 1976, dealt largely with code requirements, improvement and further subdivision of commercial rental spaces, and necessary maintenance and repair. Architectural and structural integrity were respected on both occasions.

Evolution of the new La Grande business district followed a familiar pattern. The

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first generation of commercial buildings utilized frame construction, with predictable results. On August 4, 1886, a disastrous fire occurred, wiping out six business blocks and destroying the O.R. & N. Depot. Those who rebuilt the city turned to less flammable material; adequate deposits of clay exist in the immediate vicinity, and the La Grande Brickyard's production increased accordingly. Basalt, ideal for foundations, is also plentiful. For Slater, who wanted a substantial and imposing edifice of relative permanence, brick and stone were the obvious choice. Fire resistance would also have been an important factor in his selection of a Mesker Brothers front, although the additional note of elegance that it provides would not have escaped him.

Architectural Style

The building is eclectic in style, with a strong Romanesque flavor. Mesker Brothers fronts were assembled from a variety of standardized interchangeable components that could be combined in many ways, but design elements utilized were for the most part either Italianate (with touches of Renaissance Revival) or Eastlake. The result is a surprisingly harmonious architectural statement.

Facade (Northeast Elevation; Jefferson Avenue)

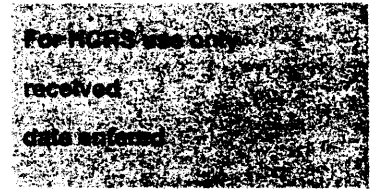
At ground level the sheet metal facade is carried by square iron columns. The intermediate columns are relatively slender and permit installation of glazed areas unusually extensive for the time; this was an important advantage conferred by the Mesker system. Access to the two commercial rentals was provided by inset entrances. The columns support a bracketed cavetto-moulded cornice, which in turn supports a course that serves as window sill and plinth. There is an uninterrupted row of eight double-hung windows separated by paired pilasters in column form; these represent dwarf columns with modified Corinthian capitals and sloping bases, set on pedestals. Each pedestal is stamped with two square, inset floral designs. The windows measure 36" wide by 96" high. Window and column lines are carried into the entablature and framed above for a paneled effect. The frieze is embellished with a row of the Eastlake medallions commonly termed rosettes, moulded string courses, and a band of square metal tiles with scrolled embossing that forms the fascia. This is surmounted by a bracketed cornice. Similar, but not identical, decorative elements are applied to the raised parapet. The two rectangular pediments have embossed arcading and are finished with bead cresting composed of halved rosettes. Corners of the parapet are accented with urn finials, also formed from galvanized sheet metal. Decorative details utilized in the facade are chiefly variations of floral and acanthus leaf designs.

Southeast Elevation (Fir Street)

The metal front and raised portion of the parapet have been carried around the corner for a distance of six feet to provide effective unification with the exposed brick sidewall. Cornice and parapet are continued the full length of this wall as well. The brick wall is laid in common bond; its surface is divided into three principal and two lesser bays, separated by pilasters. At least two of the pilasters embodied flues. One of the lesser bays provides stairwell access to the second floor. Its double door

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is provided with transom sash and topped by a segmental arch. The outside doors and transom appear to be original. The adjoining bay has a moulded segmental arch, fitted with a door and window. This originally served as a side entrance to the corner rental. Each of the three principal bays was originally occupied by an inset with segmental arch, forming a blind arcade. This feature relieved an otherwise blank wall but its real purpose was practical rather than decorative. Inset areas were evidently constructed as knockouts for later conversion to glazed openings, in the event that such modification became desirable.

These actual or implied openings all have their counterparts at second floor level. The window provided in each lesser bay is constructed as a round arch with springstones and moulded drip ledge. The upper sash is round-topped. These window openings measure 45" wide by approximately 104" high. Wider openings (approximately 12 feet) have been provided in the three principal bays. The central space utilized a round arch with springstones, keystone, and moulded drip ledge. It contains three double-hung windows, each 40" wide by approximately 104" high, separated by pilasters representing single columns. Sash and framing are wood; the pilasters are also wood and similar in form to their counterparts on the building front. Pedestal decoration is incised and does not attempt to imitate the embossed metalwork. Capitals are cast iron and do not support an architrave. The tympanum is faced with sheet metal, embossed in a shingle pattern. Window treatment in the two flanking bays is similar; however, their arches are segmental and constructed without springstones or drip ledges. Keystones, springstones and sills are dressed stone, rock-faced with margins, and are apparently basalt. All second floor windows are one-over-one. The central arch is further emphasized by a low rectangular pediment, executed in sheet metal, that repeats the raised parapet of the front. It was never provided with cresting.

Additions

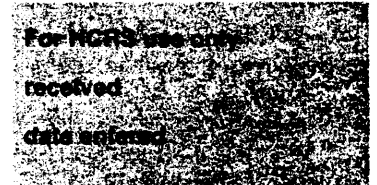
The addition is a two-story brick building with basement, measuring thirty feet wide by sixty deep, and fronting on Fir Street. It was built 1924-25 and typifies the plain undecorated commercial buildings of that period. To all appearances it is an entirely separate and unrelated structure; however, its basement communicates with that of the Slater building and its second floor forms a continuation of that level in the Slater building as well. No major structural changes have occurred in the addition. Original wooden panels below the ground floor display windows on Fir Street have been replaced by, or covered with, rough board-and-batten sections. This is a minor cosmetic change and not irreversible.

Visible External Changes

Northeast elevation (Jefferson Avenue): Intermediate supporting columns were relocated to eliminate inset ground floor entrances and to provide increased interior floor space. An opening wide enough to admit an automobile of the period, and equipped with folding doors, was installed where the western rental entrance had been. It has since been eliminated. A secondary public entrance beside it has been retained and a private

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entrance added.

Southeast elevation (Fir Street): The three blind arches were opened up; two provide both entry and window display for commercial rentals and that nearest the corner provides an added display window. The corner window in the extended metal front was converted to an entrance.

These changes do not violate the integrity of the building and were implied in both the method of brick construction and the interchangeable nature of Mesker Brothers components. The wooden awnings currently in place do not represent any structural modifications.

Associated internal reconfigurations are detailed below.

Original Internal Spatial Organization and Interior Finish; Subsequent Alterations

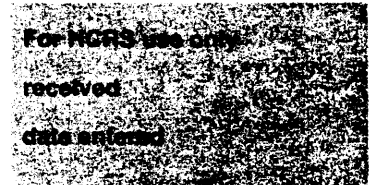
Basement (see plan): The basement is unfinished. It provides much evidence of solid construction and structural integrity. Foundations and sidewalls are basalt, as is the central main bearing wall, and provide a fine example of good rubble construction. All framing members are rough dimension lumber and appear to be locally produced pine. The exposed first-floor joists measure 2"x 6" and are spaced on 16" centers. They rest on plates; above the central main bearing wall there is a brick infill to provide more rigid support for a corresponding wall on the ground floor. Secondary supports occur midway between bearing wall and sidewall. These consist of 6"x8" beams, supported by 6"x6" posts spaced on 7'6" centers. Cross bridging also occurs at this point. Height, to the bottom edges of joists, is approximately seven feet. The concrete floor was probably laid c. 1925. There have been no major structural or other changes. Original access was from within the building; outside access, from Fir Street, was added c. 1972.

Ground floor (see plan): The ground floor was originally divided longitudinally into two commercial rentals by a massive central main bearing wall that carries the second floor. In the first renovation this floor was redesigned to provide more usable space, with all rentals having their public entrances on Fir Street. The central wall was opened up accordingly and supported where it coincides with the new transverse partitions. Its heavy construction enabled the use of adequate bracing and headers. The corner rental, as altered, includes the entire Jefferson Avenue frontage, with public entrance at the corner, on Fir Street. As first remodeled, it also took in the first two converted bays south of the corner. The second of these later (c. 1972) became a separate rental, and the adjoining rental was subdivided at about the same time. Original interior partitions and ceilings are lath-and-plaster; exterior walls are also finished with plaster. Ceilings have not been lowered and remain at their original height of 13'6". All original interior doors and trim were eliminated in the first remodel. Specimens may exist within the building, but have not been located.

Second Floor (see plan): As noted, exterior double doors providing access to the stairwell appear to be original, as does the inner transom. The vestibule ceiling has not been lowered. The inner door is a replacement. The stair is single flight and has been

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carpeted; the stringers appear to be original. The handrails are replacements. An original Eastlake newel post and short section of balustrade survive at the stairhead. The second floor was originally divided into office suites; their exact number is unknown. During the 1924-28 period these were remodeled into comfortable apartments. There are ten apartments, including those on the second floor of the addition. The ceiling was lowered from its original height of 12'6" to 9'. This is below the tops of the windows: fortunately, the windows were not altered but merely painted over to conceal the discrepancy. It is assumed that interior partitions were not relocated, but there is little remaining evidence above the false ceilings to either confirm or deny this assumption. Four skylights provided daylight illumination for the central hall and their former presence is indicated in the false ceiling, but the actual structures have been eliminated. Small translucent windows, of pebbled glass, were provided in the hallway to transmit some light to inner areas of offices or apartments. These remain but have been painted over. All doors and interior trim were replaced in the renovation. Some original wallpaper survives on one wall, above the false ceiling, as does the outline of one original doorway. From this it can be inferred that original door openings were approximately ten feet in height, with eight-foot doors and transom sash. Casings were 5-1/4" or 5-1/2" in width, in one of the standard fluted patterns. Head blocks, rather than the more common corner blocks, were used. The tops were squared. Moulded plinth blocks can be assumed. It is likely that some areas were wainscoted, but evidence does not survive. The door noted above, located at the head of the back stair, was apparently a 2'6" door. According to the Combined Book of Sash, Doors, Mouldings... (Rand McNally, 1898), only this width and the three-foot width were available as standard patterns in doors eight feet high. Office doors may well have been the wider size. It is probable that sash, doors and trim were not produced locally but were shipped in by rail. As on the ground floor, outside walls are plastered; ceilings and partitions are finished with lath and plaster. Floors are currently carpeted; the flooring is 2-1/2" tongue-and-groove maple. It is not certain whether this is original or was installed at the time of renovation. The apartments are well maintained and attractive but have never been remodeled. They retain their original ceiling light fixtures (c. 1925), and several are still equipped with movable kitchen cabinets of that period. Central heating, utilizing steam, was installed at the time of renovation; the cast-iron radiators are still in use.

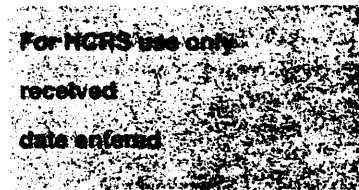
Condition and Projected Restoration

The Slater Building is solidly constructed and is being maintained. It is generally in very good condition and is an excellent example of valid adaptive preservation. Needed restoration is relatively minor.

The brick wall on Fir Street has unfortunately been painted. This coating could be removed, but should not be removed by sandblasting.

The metalwork is largely intact but a few pieces have become detached and lost. These include two pediment brackets, two pediment finials and several embossed tiles. Two of the four urn finials are no longer in place, but one of them has been found in the attic. Restoration would include replacement of missing components where possible and

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reproduction where practical, strengthening of any loosened areas, and repainting according to the original colors and color scheme.

Wooden trim is in good condition and would require only scraping and repainting. Double doors that provide access to the stairwell should be rebuilt and restored.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400–1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500–1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600–1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

Specific dates 1891 **Builder/Architect** John Lyman Slater

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Slater Building, built for James H. Slater at the northwest corner of Jefferson Avenue and Fir Street in La Grande, the County seat of Union County, Oregon, was completed and occupied in 1891. It is a two-story business block of locally-manufactured brick on a basement and foundation of native basalt. Its ground plan, not including an annex of 1925, measures 54x80 feet. The Slater Building meets National Register criterion "c" because it displays a rare, intact, prefabricated front of cast iron and galvanized sheet metal with raised decoration in a profusion of stylized motifs in the Eastlake tradition, including paterae and square rosettes. While the Italianate metal front is confined to the 50-foot frontage on Jefferson Avenue, the sheet metal cornice extends the length of the Fir Street elevation. But for the loss of urn finials from the parapet and minor rearrangement of ground story columns when the shop fronts were remodeled in the 1920s, the front is remarkably well preserved. It is the only intact all-metal building front remaining in La Grande. Moreover, it is a documented example of work produced by the Mesker Brothers firm in St. Louis during the peak of the manufacturer's operations, 1885-1910. The Slater Building front has been identified as a version of design No. 1019 in the Mesker Brothers catalog of the period. To date, only one other documented example of a Mesker Brothers front in Oregon has been individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places, and that is the Kienlen and Harbeck Building (1900) in Grants Pass, Josephine County. Construction of the building has been attributed to John Lyman Slater (1867-1940), one of five sons of the building proprietor, who pursued a career as a contractor and designer.

All major changes to the building date from a relatively sensitive renovation undertaken at the direction of a subsequent owner, George Lyman. Between 1923 and 1928, the two ground story commercial spaces were subdivided, blind arches in the Fir Street facade were opened, and office suites in the upper story were converted to apartments. In 1924-1925, Lyman added a 30x60 foot, two-story, brick building to the rear with minor frontage on Fir Street. The upper story of the addition was an annex to the Lyman Apartments. The subsidiary building is included in the nomination.

The Slater Building also meets National Register criterion "b" for its association with James H. Slater (1826-1899), proprietor, who arrived in Oregon after the Gold Rush, taught school and read law in Corvallis, was admitted to the bar, and served in the Territorial and State Legislatures before being drawn to eastern Oregon by gold excitement in the 1860s. In 1866, Slater settled in La Grande, where he became district attorney (1866) and was elected to serve in the U.S. House of Representatives (1870) and the United States Senate (1878). Slater and two of his five sons maintained legal offices in the upper story of the Slater Building. After the elder Slater's departure from La Grande in 1896, one of the sons continued in the firm's office in the Slater Building to 1914. The building's connection with the Slater family did not cease altogether until Slater's heirs sold the building in 1920.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Gaston, Joseph. Centennial History of Oregon. Chicago, S.J. Clarke, 1912. Vol. 2.
History of Oregon. Chicago, Pioneer Historical Publishing Comapny, 1922. Vol. 3.
 (See continuation sheet)

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property less than one _____
 Quadrangle name La Grande, Oregon Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A	<u>111</u>	<u>411451410</u>	<u>51011971510</u>	B	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
C	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	D	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
E	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	F	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
G	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	H	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>

Verbal boundary description and justification Beginning at the Northeast corner of Lot 9, Block 112, CHAPLIN'S ADDITION, of La Grande, Union County, Oregon; thence Northwesterly along the Northeast sideline of Lots 9 and 8 of said block a distance of 54 feet; thence at right angles Southwesterly parallel with the West side of Lot 8 (see

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries continuation sheet)

state	<u>N/A</u>	code	county	<u>N/A</u>	code
state	<u>N/A</u>	code	county	<u>N/A</u>	code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title John W. Evans, Director of Libraries
 organization Eastern Oregon State College date December 14, 1982
 street & number 8th Street and K Avenue telephone (503) 963-1523
 city or town La Grande state Oregon 97850

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

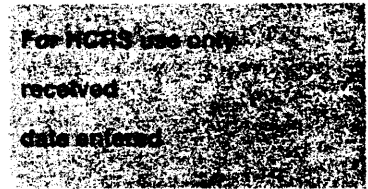
State Historic Preservation Officer signature ✓ 

title Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer date June 28, 1983

For NPS use only
 I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register
 entered in the National Register date 8/11/83
 Keeper of the National Register
 Attest: _____ date _____
 Chief of Registration

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James H. Slater

James Harvey Slater was born in Sangamon County, Illinois, in 1826 and lived there until he was twenty-three. He received a common school education. According to one member of a local pioneer family, now deceased, Slater knew Abraham Lincoln; although this has not been confirmed, he was undoubtedly aware of the country lawyer and his example may have influenced his later decision to enter the legal profession. In 1849 he abandoned his plan to enter college and joined the Gold Rush instead. After a year in California he moved to Oregon and settled near Corvallis, in Benton County. He taught in the public schools there for two years, studied law, and was appointed Clerk of the U.S. District Court in 1853. In 1854 he was admitted to the bar, and during the same year married Elizabeth E. Grey. From 1855 to 1858 he served as postmaster of Corvallis.

Slater began an active political career in 1857, when he was elected to the Oregon Territorial Legislature. He was re-elected in 1858 and at the same time elected to the first Oregon State Legislature. From 1859 to 1861 he published a newspaper, the Weekly Union, in Corvallis.

In 1862, Slater joined another gold rush, this time to eastern Oregon. He practiced law at Auburn in Baker County and was involved in mining there during 1863; he then practiced law briefly in Walla Walla, and returned to Auburn in 1864. In 1866 he moved to La Grande and established his law practice there.

Slater's active interest in politics continued. In 1866 he was elected district attorney and in 1870 he was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. In 1878 he was elected to the U.S. Senate.

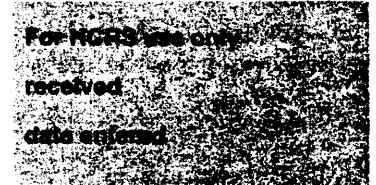
In 1890 Slater acquired four lots on Jefferson Avenue and on two of them, at the corner of Fir Street, he erected an imposing brick building of two stories with metal facade. It was completed in 1891. The actual construction was undertaken by John Lyman Slater, one of his five sons, a building contractor, who was responsible for several other important La Grande buildings. Bricks used in construction were hand-made locally at the La Grande Brickyard; the facade, ordered from Mesker Brothers, St. Louis, was shipped by rail. The ground floor of the building was designed for two commercial rentals; the second floor was made up of office suites, with an entrance and stairwell at 216 Fir Street. Two of Slater's sons, James D. Slater and Robert Jay Slater, had also entered the legal profession. Upon completion of the building they joined him to establish the new firm of James H. Slater and Sons, Attorneys. John L. Slater also had an office on the second floor.

In 1896, Robert left the firm and moved to Athena, where he established his own practice. He moved from there to Pendleton in 1899 and was a successful attorney in that city for the rest of his active life.

James H. Slater died January 28, 1899, and the practice was continued by his son James, who maintained an office at the same address until 1914. By 1912 the location had become undesirable; this part of Jefferson Avenue was largely occupied by wholesalers, distributors, and warehouses. The West-Jacobson Building, at the corner of Adams Avenue and Elm Street, was under construction in 1913 and offered a more appropriate address.

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Slater moved there as soon as it was ready for occupancy.

James D. Slater

James D. Slater was born in Corvallis, Oregon, October 18, 1856. He moved with his parents to La Grande in 1866, and attended the local public school. His obituary states that he also attended the University of Oregon, but there is no supporting evidence in the archives of that institution. He entered Washington and Lee University in 1883, matriculating in the law school September 20. Slater took the junior and senior law courses in one year, maintained excellent grades in both, and received the L.L.B. degree July 25, 1884. He was admitted to the Oregon Bar later in the same year.

In addition to a successful law practice, Slater's long and active career included service as a scout, with the Oregon Militia, during the Bannock War in 1878; work as a special counsel for the Federal Government during World War I; and public service in La Grande as mayor, city attorney and municipal judge. He died May 25, 1939.

John Lyman Slater

John L. Slater was born in La Grande, Oregon, June 8, 1867. He attended the La Grande public school and Blue Mountain University, a Methodist institution in La Grande that was in operation from 1874 to 1886. He later specialized in draftsmanship and prepared for architecture and a career as building contractor. Beginning as a carpenter, he was one of the workers who rebuilt Ellensburg, Washington following a disastrous fire that occurred in the late 1880s. In 1891 he built the Slater Building in La Grande and opened an office there. He built several other La Grande buildings, including the Courthouse (1904), the La Grande National Bank, the Stewart Building, and Riveria School. In 1899 he built a picturesque log hotel at Meacham. During World War I, he worked for the U.S. Government at Standifer shipyards in Vancouver, constructing cottages and a hotel for the workers. He moved to Portland in 1928, continuing as a builder in that city until his retirement in the late 1930s, and died there March 9, 1940.

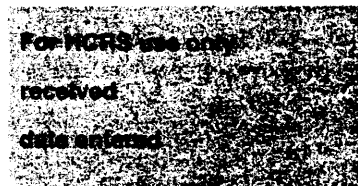
La Grande directories for the period, with one exception, list Slater as a building contractor. The city directory of 1912 lists him as an architect, but available records do not indicate that he received an equivalent degree. It is probable that some of the buildings he constructed were his own designs.

Mesker Brothers*

The firm of Mesker Brothers was established in St. Louis, as Mesker & Brother, by Bernard Theodore and Frank Mesker in 1879. Their father, John Bernard Mesker, was a German immigrant (1835) who had established a successful stove and sheet metal business that included galvanized architectural ironwork. Both learned the family trade from their father.

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The Meskers received their first important commission in 1880, providing sheet metal work for the St. Louis Art Museum, and in 1884 did the architectural metal for the St. Louis Exposition Building. During the same year they issued their first catalog and began the manufacture of complete store fronts. These were first featured in their 1885 catalog. The venture in mail-order marketing proved successful and catalogs were widely distributed thereafter, particularly throughout the western states.

Mesker fronts included approximately thirty-five standardized Renaissance Revival and Eastlake design elements that could be combined in a variety of ways. The components were almost entirely made up of galvanized sheet steel, bolted together over a wooden core, and only a few of the details (e.g., plinths and capitals) were cast iron. The construction system was covered by a patent secured October 4, 1887.

Mesker Brothers stressed the following advantages possessed by their product over the traditional cast iron: greater strength and durability, with no tendency to breakage; lighter weight, insuring lower freight rates and ease of assembly; fireproof materials; and lower initial cost. The customer could order any of several standard fronts pictured in the catalog, in a width appropriate to the site; if there were unusual requirements, the firm would design a front to comply with them.

Slater chose a design very similar to No. 1019 (Mesker Brothers Catalog, page 7: see Appendix). The illustrated example is thirty feet wide and priced (c. 1898) at \$415.00. It is estimated that the cost of Slater's front, at fifty-four feet, would not have exceeded \$750.00. According to company statistics, twenty-one Mesker fronts were erected in Oregon between 1885 and 1896, at an average cost of \$429.68; installation contracts averaged \$227.02.

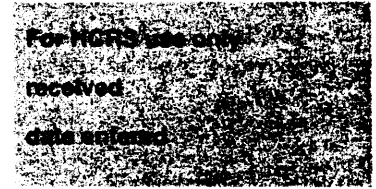
Production of Mesker fronts was highest during the 1885-1910 period and then declined. It had apparently ceased by 1917, when Mesker Brothers converted their facilities for production of military supplies under wartime contracts.

The firm remained in family ownership until recently and still exists (1982) as Mesker Industries, Incorporated.

*This brief essay on Mesker Brothers is based, in its entirety, upon information and illustrations provided by Arthur A. Hart, Director, Idaho State Historical Society. His encouragement and assistance are gratefully acknowledged.

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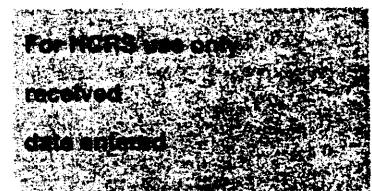
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History Company, 1889. Vol. 2.

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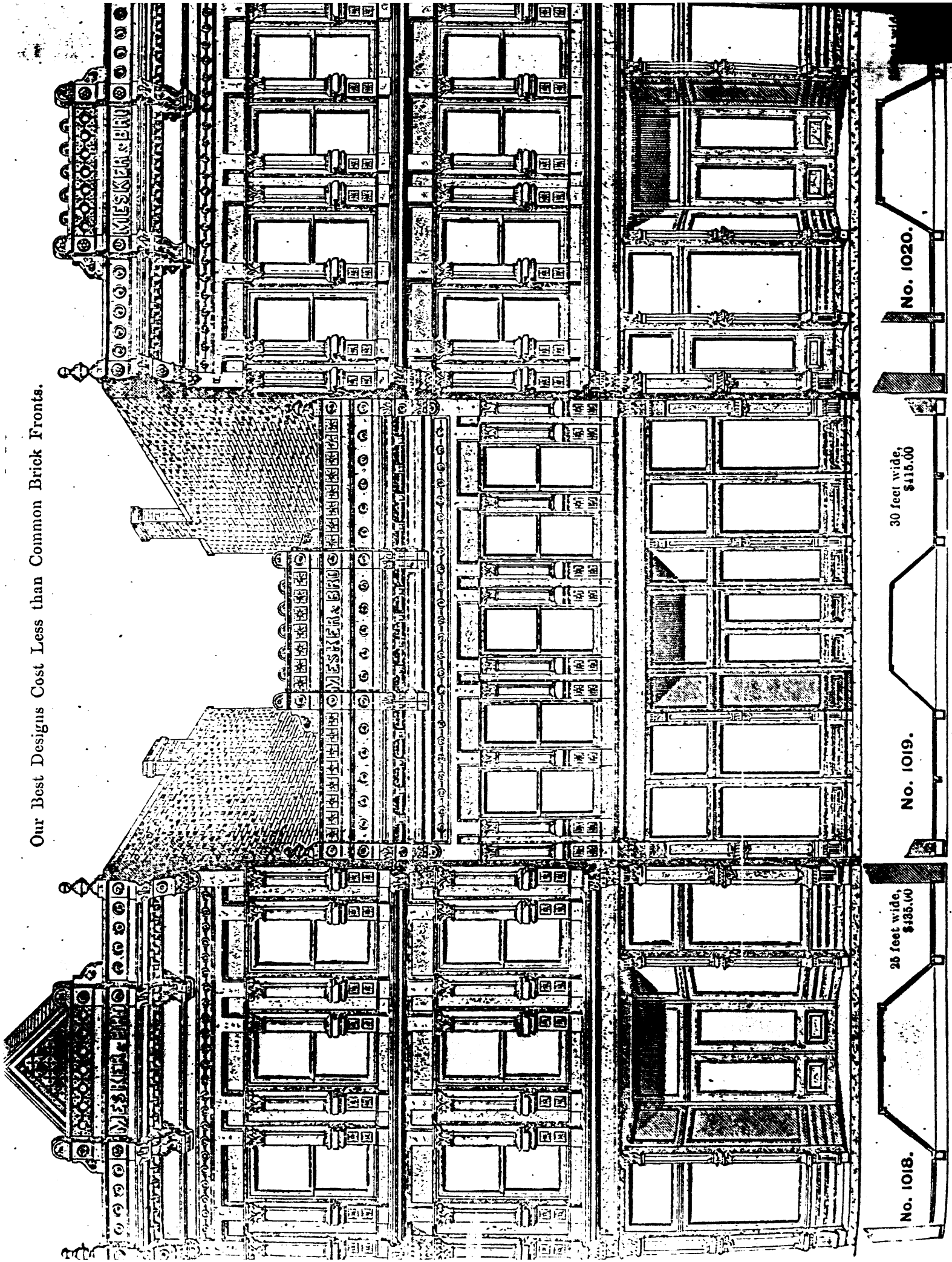
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Geographical Date: Verbal Boundary Description (continued)

in said block a distance of 44 feet; thence at right angles Northwesterly 6 feet; thence at right angles Southwesterly parallel with the West line of said Lot 8 a distance of 66 feet to the North sideline of the alley in said block; thence Southwesterly along the Southwest sideline of said Lots 8 and 9 a distance of 60 feet to the Southeast corner of Lot 9 of said block; thence Northeasterly along the East sideline of Lot 9 a distance of 110 feet to the place of beginning.

Our Best Designs Cost Less than Common Brick Fronts.



No. 1018.

26 feet wide,
\$135.00

No. 1019.

30 feet wide,
\$115.00

No. 1020.