

1363

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

1. Name of Property

historic name: First National Bank of Geraldine
other name/site number: Farmers State Bank, Geraldine State Bank, Q Bank, Heritage Bank, Basin State Bank

2. Location

street & number: 311 Main Street not for publication: n/a
city/town: Geraldine vicinity: n/a
state: Montana code: MT county: Choteau code: 015 zip code: 59446

3. State/Federal Agency 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.)
Signature of certifying official/Title: Mark F. Summer/SHTPO Date: November 21, 2007
Montana State Historic Preservation Office
State or Federal agency or 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: _____

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 see continuation sheet
 removed from the National Register see continuation sheet
 other (explain): _____
Signature of the Keeper: Edson H. Beall Date of Action: 1-9-08

5. Classification

Ownership of Property: Private	Number of Resources within Property	
Category of Property: Building	Contributing	Noncontributing
Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> building(s)
	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> sites
	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> structures
Name of related multiple property listing: n/a	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> objects
	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> TOTAL

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions: COMMERCE/financial	Current Functions: COMMERCE/financial
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7. Description

Architectural Classification: LATE 19 TH AND EARLY 20 TH C. REVIVALS/Classical Revival/Neo-Classical Revival	Materials: foundation: CONCRETE walls: BRICK roof: ASPHALT other: WOOD, METAL
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Narrative Description

The First National Bank of Geraldine dominates a corner lot within the small Central Montana town’s Main Street commercial area. The 1915 building faces west, with the north elevation functioning as a secondary façade, and features a modern, architect-designed addition (1987) at the rear (east). The substantial, two-story, rectangular, brick-veneered Neoclassical building features a cornice below the flat roof’s parapet wall, even, tripartite fenestration patterns, and a triangular pediment above the entry door. The building rests on a concrete wall foundation. On both the west and north elevations, brick rowlock and soldier belt courses offer subtle delineation between the water table, the first and second stories, cornice, and the parapet. Several small metal vents and stovepipes perforate the asphalt roof, but are only visible from the east (rear) of the building. A hipped skylight, original to the 1915 building, provides light to the interior. Both wood-frame and metal-framed windows are present on the original portion of the building and on the addition.

West elevation: The front (west) elevation contains four large openings, two at each story. These openings are placed within a large, centered, slightly recessed panel that rises from ground level through the second belt course below the cornice. This creates the illusion of two pilasters supporting an entablature, a pattern that was repeated at the front entry. At the first story, the entry is located to the south. Originally, decorative pillars flanked the door, but in 1978 bank officials removed them to accommodate a security door. A triangular pediment projects slightly above the one-light door, bracketed by wood-trimmed blocks that are the remnants of the pillars’ capitals. These blocks protrude from the entablature above the door, and the pediment pierces a three-paneled wooden frieze above the entablature. A single, wide, wood-framed transom is centered above the pediment, with smaller fixed, one-light transoms on either side, filling the width of the entry frame. Metal-framed, two-light sidelights flank the door. A large one-light, fixed window, with a three-light transom above, fills the opening to the north side of the west elevation’s first story. This window’s sill is contiguous with the watertable’s rowlock course. Its header, and that of the entry opening, is formed by a soldier course that wraps around the west and north facades. A modern, backlit sign that reads “BASIN STATE BANK Stanford Lewistown Geraldine” fills the space between the first and second stories. Above the sign, two window openings are placed directly over the first story openings. These windows feature a single, large, fixed pane flanked by narrow one-over-one, single-hung windows. Each window features a rowlock sill, and their headers are a continuous soldier course the runs the width of the recessed area of the west elevation.

Three courses of raised common-bond brick, even with the top of the recessed area, wrap around the west and north facades. Immediately above this raised belt course, a rowlock-coursed row of brick also continues across the facades, and functions as the header to the west elevation’s recessed area. Three common-bond courses higher, another rowlock course protrudes slightly from the west and north elevations. Five common-bond courses above that, an ornate dentilled wood cornice defines the roof-wall junction across the facades. The broad cornice features dentils below a shallow boxed overhang. Above the wood cornice, the parapet wall is set off by a soldiered belt course at its base and a slightly raised rowlock course at the top.

North elevation: Six evenly-spaced openings grace the original building’s north elevation at both the first and second stories. At the first story, a narrow, one-light fixed sash window, with one-light fixed transom above, fills the westernmost opening. Its sill is continuous with the water table’s rowlock course. The next two openings to the east each contain a large one-light fixed-sash window flanked by narrow one-over-one single-hungs, and three transom lights, corresponding to the width of the window sashes. Both these window openings have rowlock sills. The windows are not as tall as the westernmost window, a recessed brick panel fills the space between the watertable and the sills. Each of the next two openings to the east are located at the top of similar recessed panels and contain three-light transoms identical to those described above. Below each opening, a recessed panel extends to the water table.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria: A, C

Areas of Significance: COMMERCE; COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT;
ARCHITECTURE

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): n/a

Period(s) of Significance: 1915-1954

Significant Person(s): n/a

Significant Dates: 1915, 1916, 1933, 1954

Cultural Affiliation: n/a

Architect/Builder: Leon M. Bolter, builder

Narrative Statement of Significance

The First National Bank of Geraldine is significant and eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A at the local level for its associations with the commercial and community development of Geraldine, Montana. Constructed in 1915, the First National Bank of Geraldine has served the community as a financial center for more than ninety years. Its predecessor, Farmers State Bank began in 1913, when the railroad first arrived at Geraldine and the town first platted. Within two years, the bank's board voted to change from a state bank to a national bank, and changed its name to the First National Bank of Geraldine. During the same period, they abandoned their small frame building on Main Street for the new brick facility at 311 Main Street. The bountiful agricultural climate stimulated a population explosion in Montana, and Geraldine, together with the bank, grew commensurately. Individuals and businesses in the area took advantage of the financial services the bank provided to succeed and develop. After 1919, the bank's conservative policies prevented its closure during the droughts, depressions, and population exodus of the early twentieth century, a time when over 90% of Montana's banks failed. This stability and confidence contributed to the community's ability to survive and recover through the mid twentieth century. Throughout its history, the bank's leadership made a strong commitment to community development and activism, in the form of scholarships for local students, participation in town events, displays, and donations. The close of the period of significance, 1954, corresponds to the end of bank executive Harold Magnusson's long tenure, when Verle Quigley took the reigns of the enterprise. Quigley continued the commitment to financial security and community involvement embraced by Magnusson and his longtime co-worker, Walter W. Carley.

The bank gains additional significance under Criterion C, as an excellent local example of the Neo-Classical Revival architectural style. Neo-Classical Revival was spawned by the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago. The Exposition's "White City," as it came to be called, was a formal grouping of classical buildings created by some of the nation's most prominent architects and was viewed by millions of Americans. It reinstalled in the nation a belief in the classical ideal, which resulted in the unprecedented production of buildings with classical details. The style was particularly popular for public and institutional buildings, as well as commercial structures, especially banks. With its wide, dentilled cornice, pediment, and evenly-spaced tripartite fenestration, the first State Bank of Geraldine is an excellent local representation of this important architectural mode.

Farmer's State Bank of Geraldine is Founded

The present town of Geraldine was laid out in the spring of 1913, but had its beginning many years earlier. This area was still open cattle and sheep range in May 1882, when a traveling correspondent from the Fort Benton River Press was making a reconnaissance of the newly establish stage line out of Fort Benton to the Judith Basin and on to Coulsen, later to become Billings. The reporter noted that Billy Winchell, the first white person to settle at the Springs, was getting logs from the Highwood Mountains for a stage station at a location to become known as Winchell Springs. Later, in March of 1884, Billy encountered trouble when a branded cowhide was found on his property near the Springs. Legend has it that the suspicious hide was from a widowed neighbor's milk cow. Billy was arrested and brought to trial but the results are unknown. We do know that Billy and wife, Dora, sold out Nov. 8, 1884 and were never heard from again. The Springs retain his name, however, as well as a street in Geraldine.¹

The Milwaukee Railroad was building a spur line from Harlowton to Great Falls with tracks arriving in Geraldine during the summer of 1913. Track layers platted the town site several months ahead of the railroad's arrival, and a fair number of buildings immediately were erected and open for business. The railroad's arrival brought an influx of homesteaders to the area, adding substantially to those came earlier. The Milwaukee had plans for Geraldine to become a division point which brought with it great expectations for the development of the town. This and the area's high rainfall average, meant Geraldine was destined to become a rich and bountiful agricultural community. The promises of bounty enticed homesteaders and businessmen alike.

Four principal stockholders, Leon M. Bolter, Peter J. Osweiler, D. A. Crichton, & B.B. Brown established Farmers State Bank in the Board Room of the Bank of Fergus County in Lewistown, asking subscription of stock in the amount of \$100 per share with a capitalization of \$20,000.² Organizational meetings were held in Lewistown until Farmers State Bank opened its doors in Geraldine,

¹ Henry L. Armstrong, *Steel: On the Road to Judith Basin and Beyond*, (Geraldine, MT: Hank's Books, 1999).

² First National Bank of Geraldine Banking Records, housed at Basin State Bank, Geraldine, MT.

9. Major Bibliographic References

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:

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: less than one

UTM References: Zone: 12 Easting: 555264 Northing: 5272163 (NAD27)

Legal Location (Township, Range & Section(s)): SE ¼ Section 1-Township 21 North Range 11 East

Verbal Boundary Description

Lot 1-2 Block 9 - Town of Geraldine

Boundary Justification

The boundary is drawn, according to legally recorded lines, to include the property historically associated with the First National Bank of Geraldine.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Henry L. Armstrong and Marcella Knedler
 organization: none date: June 18, 2007
 street & number : Box 126 telephone: (406) 737-4204
 city or town: Geraldine state: Montana zip code: 59446

Property Owner

name/title: Basin State Bank of Stanford
 street & number: 103 Central Ave telephone: (406) 566-2238
 city or town: Stanford state: Montana zip code: 59479

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The easternmost opening on the north elevation's first story contains a wood-framed entry door. Above the simple door is a horizontally-divided two-light transom.

At the second story, single, narrow, one-light, wood-frame, fixed windows are located at the west and east ends. The four evenly-spaced openings in-between each contain a one-light, fixed-sash flanked by narrow one-over-one single hungs. All these windows feature rowlock sills, and their headers are formed by the belt course of three raised courses of common-bond brick described above.

Set back from the plane of the 1915 building and sympathetic to the original design in materials and scale, the 1987 addition's north elevation also features evenly-spaced window openings and recessed panels above the water table. The addition is two stories at its west half, and a single story to the east. The first story windows are evenly spaced across the elevation. The three west windows are all fixed frame, with three large lights below three-light transoms. The two windows to the east are the same size and height as the three-light transoms to the west, but contain only two lights each. Below these east window openings, recessed panels extend to the water table. At the addition's second story, there are two large window openings, each containing unshaded windows, divided by faux mullions that divide the lights into three at the lower half and eight lights above.

South elevation: A historic, wood frame, neighboring building shields the unfenestrated south elevation of the original 1915 brick veneer bank. The 1987's addition's south elevation is exposed, revealing an unfenestrated concrete block wall.

East elevation: The 1987 addition's parapet wall wraps around the northeast corner of the roof several feet, but does not continue across the east elevation. Access through the east elevation of the building is limited to a centered, metal pedestrian door at the first story. The second story's east elevation features large, metal, louvered vents at the south and north sides.

Interior: On the interior, the bank retains original finishes and fixtures. Through the west (front) entry door, a small vestibule leads to the front third of the building, which functions as the public space and employees work area. A stepped, oak partition wall divides this room from west to east. The partition wall is solid below, and narrow, vertical, squared brass bars fill the openings across the upper third. The teller cage service windows are located in the canted portions of the wall, where it steps out into the public space. A side-hinged brass gate protects each of the windows, where customers can rest against a small, bracketed, marble counter. A heavy boxed cornice tops the partition wall across its length. The south half of the room functions as the customer service and waiting area, and features a pressed-dust porcelain floor composed of small hexagonal white tiles, highlighted with black tiles and a Greek fretwork border. The north side of the room contains a small meeting room, the teller's working area, and the original vault. The windows across the north elevation flood the room with light. Wide trims anchor the space with rich oak. The east interior wall of the room features seven, one-light transom lights. A pedestrian door at the south side of this wall leads to a lunch room, offices, storage spaces, rest rooms and a stairwell to the second story and to basement storage. The lunch room and small hallway that leads to the north elevation door boast much of the same oak trimwork as the front room. The rooms and hallway in the east half (1987 addition) of the first floor display more modern, but compatible finishes. In 1987, four-foot oak wainscoting was installed across the interior walls throughout the first floor. Though not original, the wainscoting is compatible with the space. The second story is replete with oak window trim and wainscoting, with a large conference room at the west end, storage spaces across the north side, and a bathroom. The furnace room fills the addition's second story space at the east end.

Integrity: Both the exterior and interior of the First National Bank of Geraldine retain a high degree of integrity. The building's integrity of location, setting, feeling and association are intact. The building's design was compromised in 1987, when bank officials constructed a large addition at the rear. This addition, though it nearly doubles the square footage of the building, is very sensitive to the original building's form, massing, materials, and fenestration patterns. Though clearly modern, the sympathetic addition is smaller in height and width than the original portion, is not visible from the front of the bank, and does not mask or overwhelm the Neo-Classical Revival features of the 1915 section. The 1987 renovations also included replacing the wood-frame windows with metal-framed windows in a style similar to the originals. At the north elevation's second story and throughout the east elevation, the new tripled windows feature a one-light fixed sash at center, instead of the original double-hung design. The only other change to the exterior involves the installation of a security door at the front entrance, and though not historic in appearance or materials, the entry retains the tripartite form with a centered door flanked by sidelights capped with the pediment.

The interior features a few modern finishes, but these changes, such as carpeting, are limited to the non-public areas of the building and the addition area. The Neo-Classical Revival elements, including mosaic flooring and wide oak woodwork are prominent original features that contribute to the bank's integrity of design, workmanship, materials, feeling, and association.

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October 2, 1913, locating in a two-room frame building on Main Street.³ The stockholders were part of a national trend in bank expansion. Banking historian Henry C. Klassen explains:

As established markets such as commerce, manufacturing, transportation and communications, agriculture, and mining developed in the nation, the demand for credit soared. Between 1896 and 1913 loans at all commercial banks in the United States rose from \$3,741 million to \$12,280 million, and in the same years the number of American commercial banks more than doubled, from 11,474 to 26,664.⁴

Locally, the most pleasing feature of the business was the announcement that Farmers State Bank would advance funds to farmers who had grain on hand, thus enabling them to hold the grain until such time as the railroad and elevator infrastructure in Geraldine was able to handle it. Without the advances, farmers in need of cash would have had to haul the grain to Fort Benton to sell it.⁵ In many cases, homesteaders relied on local banks to further their dreams of success. Quoting fellow historian Geoffrey Jones, Klassen further explains:

"banks can perform several functions in an economy: they act as intermediaries between savers and investors; they supply part or all of the circulating means of payment; and they may supply initiative and enterprise." This observation provides guidance for examining growing banking industries in other economies and in other periods, particularly in Montana's rural economy at the turn of the century.⁶

Real estate was often the only collateral the homesteaders could offer, and as a state bank, the Farmers State Bank was permitted to lend on that basis. National Banks were not permitted to do so in Montana until after 1915.

The bank was immediately successful, and Bank President Leon M. Bolter announced less than three months after opening:

We are working on plans to erect a modern brick bank and office building at Geraldine to cost from \$12,000 to \$15,000. The work will start in the spring just as soon as successful bank operations will warrant. We are much pleased with the good volume of business which our Geraldine bank enjoys already.⁷

The First National Bank of Geraldine Opens its Doors

Construction of the new brick building was in full swing by mid-1914. Lewistown bricks were used throughout with laborers working by July 24, 1914. Costs for transporting supplies from Milwaukee Depot to the construction site, a distance of just one block, were as follows:

4 carloads of brick totaling 45,500 brick at \$1.25 per thousand	\$ 56.87
Lumber from Rogers & Tempelton – 17,439 ft.	8.71
50 barrels of lime at 5 cents per barrel	2.50
537 sacks cement	10.75
500 lath	1.00
4200 lbs. of steel at \$.50 per 2000 lbs	1.50
17 window frames and a bundle of wood states	1.50

Total \$ 82.38

Other expenditures for the construction of the bank were to Lewistown Brick & Tile for \$1510, plastering by B. H. Opegard for \$184, heating plant for \$162, terrazzo tile floor contract for \$144, Crescent Electric Co. for \$180, vault doors \$181, and to the Derniger Boiler Co. for \$813.⁸

³ Geraldine History Committee *Spokes, Spurs & Cockleburs* (Fort Benton, Montana: River Press Publishing Company, 1976). In early 1913, D.A. Crichton hauled lumber from Geyser through the Highwood Mountains for the original bank building. Crichton became a Cashier at the bank.

⁴ Henry C. Klassen, "Banking and Rural Development in Montana, 1890-1913," *Montana Business Quarterly*, September 22, 1996, available online at: <http://www.allbusiness.com/finance/596719-1.html>, p. 1.

⁵ Lucille Carlson in *Spokes, Spurs, and Cockleburs*.

⁶ Klassen, p. 3.

⁷ "Editor Gets a Nice Letter from Banker," *Geraldine Review*, December 26, 1913, p. 1.

⁸ Bank Records.

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The building received electricity by November 18, 1914 with the safe and vault installed by December 1, 1914. A complete record of vault maintenance is located between the outside & inside vault doors dating from 1913 to present. The new brick building was declared open for business December 11, 1915:

The Farmers State Bank is now in its elegant new home, having transferred to its new place of business this week, where they are welcoming new and old patrons.

The evolution of this institution is typical of the growth of our town and community. Starting in a small frame building, 14 x 20, a year ago, with the cashier performing the duties from janitor up and ample time to skirmish around the community for business, it is now housed in a \$12,000 two-story brick, handsomely fitted up and conveniently arranged for just such an institution. You will find Cashier Kelly at the desk, Assistant Cashier Phelan at the window and Bookkeeper Magnusson over the ledger, and each as busy as the proverbial bee.

The first floor is devoted entirely to the business of the bank. It is conveniently arranged, with handsome fixtures, tiled floor and beamed ceiling, built-in concrete vault, etc. The upstairs is fitted up for office rooms. The whole is furnace-heated, electric lighted, and sewer connection will be made in a few days, upon completion of the system.

It is not doubted that this institution will continue to grow in popular favor and become one of the strong financial institutions of the state.⁹

Sewer became available and was hooked up February 5, 1915. Signs were on windows February 27, 1915. Longtime employee Verle H. Quigley later described the interior: "Fittings & furniture in the bank are polished, solid oak. The Teller and Cashier partition are the same material as are mopboards and stairway steps. Desks [now removed] are also of oak including a roll-top which sparkles."¹⁰

The building was not the only change in store for Farmers State Bank during the mid-1910s. The Board voted to change from a state bank to a national bank on October 27, 1914, and it became the First National Bank of Geraldine in 1915. It was associated with the First National Banks of Geraldine and Roy in Montana, and Bovey and Keewatin in Minnesota. It was also a correspondent bank with the First National Bank of Great Falls. Banking historian Klassen explains that a national bank charter, while encountering more federal regulation, had advantages over state banks: "National banks' high standards of supervision made them attractive, assuring depositors of the soundness of these institutions. Relatively high capitalization also helped create confidence in national banks' stability. Moreover, national banks could issue bank notes which served as currency."¹¹ That stability and security would serve the First National Bank of Geraldine through the difficult years to come.

Geraldine reached its zenith in 1915, with the local newspaper reporting 80 businesses open, covering the whole spectrum of services for those times. A *Geraldine Review* advertisement that year stated that Dr. G. B. Tenbrook, Physician & Surgeon, was located in an office over the First National Bank. At the same time a dentist, Dr. M. Reid, also located on the second floor for a number of years. By 1922, Dr. E. Burke, Physician & Surgeon also had an office there.

During this time, Walter W. Carley came to the bank's employ. Carley was born June 13, 1876, in Long Lake, Minnesota. He entered the banking business in that state in 1900, coming to Geraldine to serve as cashier of the First National Bank in 1915. Carley summed up his many years at the Bank with this quote: "We have pioneered with the homesteader and his successor who learned how to adapt himself to a strange soil and climate. As he progressed and succeeded, so has been our progress."¹²

Hard Times

During the late 1910s, the fortunes of homesteaders and farmers in Montana began to turn. Widespread drought began in 1917. In 1919, eastern Montana homesteaders faced humidity that averaged four percent, massive grasshopper infestations, and prairie fires. The effect was devastating. Homesteaders enticed by boosterism about the fertile lands of Montana saw their investments literally blown away by the dry wind. Historian Joseph Kinsey Howard described the continuing disaster:

⁹ "Farmers State now in Elegant New Home," *Geraldine Review*, December 11, 1914. According to Verle H. Quigley, Leon M. Bolter built three banks located in Geraldine, Winifred and Grass Range, all with identical architectural plans. Of the three, only the Geraldine bank remains.

¹⁰ Henry Armstrong, *Personal Recollection of conversation with Verle H. Quigley*.

¹¹ Klassen, p. 3.

¹² "First National Bank of Geraldine," *Your Banks...Historical Sketches of Montana Banks and Bankers* (Helena, MT: Helena Branch of the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, 1946) p. 46.

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In the spring of 1920, however, it rained...but the rain stopped and the wind came. These winds were the first "dusters" the northern plains farmer had ever seen. Day after day he watched, first incredulous, then despairing, as the gale whipped his fields into the sky...The ruined homesteaders gathered in little groups in the towns to compare notes...the fourth dry year, and now the wind! Nothing like it had happened before...But the stockmen grinned wryly, knowing it had happened before and would happen again...¹³

By the early 1920s, over 11,000 Montana farms "blew away," leaving more than 40,000 people in eastern and central Montana destitute. Some farmers turned to the towns for alternate employment; others moved on to more fertile locales out of state. Compounding the natural disasters were the strains on the national economy following World War I, and the resultant constriction of extractive industries in Montana, such as logging and mining. This combination of factors resulted in a keen economic depression that brought "upon the State and its banking structure an almost complete breakdown."¹⁴

During the period 1919-25...twenty thousand mortgages were foreclosed, and half of Montana's farmers lost their land. The average value of farmlands fell by 50 percent. During the flush times prior to 1918, Montana had become heavily overstocked with banks, and many of them had been reckless in their lending policies. Now the overextended banks fell like dominoes. Between 1920 and 1926, 214 of Montana's commercial banks - over one-half the state's total - failed, carrying thousands of family savings accounts with them.¹⁵

For the First National Bank of Geraldine, bank competition had arrived in town February 26, 1916, when the Montana Bank announced it would build a brick building nearby. The Montana Bank stockholders were comprised principally of wealthy stockmen of the area. The competition was short lived, however. Montana Bank opened October 2, 1916 and closed about 1925, a victim of the banking crisis of the 1920s. The First National Bank fared better.

First National Bank of Geraldine was one of only three banks to survive closing in Chouteau County. Thirteen failed. Some of those were, First National of Highwood, Benton State, Carter State, First National of Big Sandy and Loma State. According to banking records, after 1919, First National began writing off uncollectible loans with the number increasing throughout the 1930s. Although these loans were not large, the practice continued over a long period tapering off in 1940. Locally, the poor financial condition prevailed despite a mild oil boom in the early 1920s, when much leasing and drilling activity were taking place in the surrounding area. A number of wells were put down in the Geraldine area but none became producers.

During the historic period, the First National Bank closed its doors only when President Franklin D. Roosevelt declared a bank holiday on March 5, 1933. The president's order closed all banks in the country and permitted their reopening only after their solvency was verified by government inspectors. According to Geraldine resident Lena Magnuson, two men, Walter W. Carley and Harold Magnuson held the bank together through many difficult years and were very proud when they were one of the first in the US to be notified to reopen.¹⁶ A 1930s advertisement emphasized the stability of the bank to its patrons:

Very Important to You: We are a member of the Federal Reserve Bank which means STRENGTH and SECURITY. We have grown up with the country and have made every effort to assist in its development by making THIS BANK A STRONG, SECURE, AND HEALTHY INSTITUTION.¹⁷

Carley was active for many years in community affairs of Geraldine. He served several terms as mayor and also treasurer of the town. Carley was an officer of the Methodist Church and a Past Worthy Patron of Tressa Chapter #107 Order of Eastern Star and a Charter Member. He was also a Charter Member as well as a fifty-year member of Pilgrims' Lodge #102 AF & AM. He was an avid baseball fan supporting the local team at every opportunity. Mr. Carley moved to Great Falls after he retired, living there until his death in 1970 at age 94.

¹³ Joseph Kinsey Howard, *Montana: High Wide and Handsome*, (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press/Bison Books, 2001), p. 202.

¹⁴ Clarence W. Groth, *Montana Banking History 1864-1954*, Helena Branch of the Federal Reserve Bank, (Helena Montana: Montana Historical Society, June 1955) pp. 42-3.

¹⁵ Michael Malone, Richard B. Roeder, and William L. Lang, *Montana: A History of Two Centuries*, rev. ed. (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1991), p. 283.

¹⁶ Geraldine History Committee *Spokes, Spurs & Cockleburrs*, Fort Benton, Montana: River Press Publishing Company, 1976.

¹⁷ Advertisement in the *Geraldine Review*, undated copy, "First National Bank of Geraldine National Register File," Montana State Historic Preservation Office, Helena.

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Similarly, Harold Magnuson came to Geraldine in 1914 having grown up on a northern Minnesota farm. Harold was employed as bookkeeper for the First National Bank for 46 years. He served as town clerk for 30 years, as well as 30 years on the school board. He was a long time secretary of Pilgrim Lodge no. 102. Harold also kept books for some of the towns other businesses.

Both men, and the First National Bank institution, provided not only financial stability, but also a deep commitment to the development of the town and its people. For example, the bank sponsored farm improvements, such as in May 1922, when the Bank offered \$50 to first person to build a pit silo. Walter W. Carley's commitment to children and education was clear when, for a time, he gave a small scholarship to a rural school student on entering Geraldine High School.

Despite the bank's involvement in the Geraldine community, it was still vulnerable to local thievery, especially during the desperate years of Great Depression. Robbery was a threat realized on March 29, 1939. That afternoon, the city marshal, E. C. Fuller, arrived on Main Street across from the bank to arrest 19 year-old Eddie Cox for stealing a car. Cox wielded tear gas and a revolver, and fired both at the unarmed Fuller. A local businessman, Mr. Preshinger, quickly gave the Marshall his rifle. Fuller fired several times, and hit the gun-wielding Cox in the neck while he tried to drive away. Later, it was revealed that Cox had stolen various items in Lewistown, and was planning to rob the First National Bank.¹⁸ Henry Armstrong remembers;

the writer along with the two other schoolboys, Jim Knedler and Forrest Wethern (deceased) were loitering on the sidewalk in front of the Co-op Store, across the street from the shooting and became eye witnesses. The robber's bullets were hitting the concrete block building next to where we were standing. We soon disappeared until things quieted. I was subpoenaed to be present at the inquest that night. Quite scary for a twelve year old. Two other persons still live who are close by, Earlene and Betty Duvall were boarding with Andy and Mrs. Ness while attending elementary school in Geraldine. Betty in the third grade and Earlene in first were on their way home from school but had stopped at the Co-op Store, which the Ness' managed. When the shooting started, Andy made the girls lay on the floor behind the counter, encouraging them stay put with an offer of a penny sucker. It worked, as candy was quite a rare things for them during those 1939 days. Earlene said she wanted to see what was going on so bad. As I remember it, one of the events leading up to the shooting was a visit to the bank by the would-be robber, in order to case it out. He brought with him a coin collection on the pretense of finding out its value.¹⁹

Despite the plots of nefarious characters, together, Magnusson and Carley saw the bank, and the town of Geraldine, through the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s. Until their retirement in 1954 and 1955, the institution remained the conservative, stable financial and community center it had been through its previous forty years.

After World War II – the Bank and its Continued Commitment to Community

The Bank must be considered ultra conservative from its inception and during the first 80 years of existence there is little doubt due to these policies it was a survivor. One example, after WWII the Bank avoided making automobile loans when there was much demand for funds to purchase wheels after four years of war when no new automobiles were produced. Their hesitance to enter this field during a booming time, most certainly cost them much lost revenue but still the Bank remained stable.

Some of the policies employed by the First National Bank of Geraldine are exemplified in their advertisements in the local newspaper such as "Careful, Conservative Banking", "Banks Bearing Big Burden", "Banks doing great service", "Few people appreciate the help that well managed banks have given in the restoration of business conditions", "We are members of Federal Reserve which means strength", "Strength – Security – Service", "We have made every effort in the development of this Bank to be Strong, Secure & Healthy Institution", and "1st National Town Booster from the start."²⁰

V. H. Quigley, on taking over as president and chief executive officer of the First National in 1954 was quoted, "We have a good town with good people, good schools and churches. We have a town that is going to survive. We are going to have to help it do so with our bank."

Verle H. Quigley had banking experience dating back to 1910, when he was employed by the First National Bank of Stanford. Later

¹⁸ "Outlaw with Stolen car Resists Arrest, Is Shot and Killed, armed with Tear Gas Gun and Revolver Bandit Attempts to Shoot Marshall E.C. Fuller," *The Geraldine Review*, March 29, 1939.

¹⁹ Henry Armstrong recollection, July 2007.

²⁰ *Geraldine Review*.

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he kept a note pad on his desk as a remembrance of those days in Stanford. It was a scene painted by C. M. Russell near Stanford called "The First Furrow." Verle was known to do some of his bank business out of his hind pocket when a borrower was short on collateral. No one knows if he was ever repaid for all of those personal loans.²¹ Verle also oversaw the operation of the Geraldine Co-op Store for 50 years as bookkeeper, manager, director and officer.

Verle kept this thoughtful and poignant poem on his desk and gave a copy to many young people over the years. It was written by Dale Wimbrow in 1934, in answer to the question by a young man "Why should I be honest?"

THE GUY IN THE GLASS

When you get all you want and struggle for pelf
and the world makes you king for a day,
Then go to the mirror and look at yourself
and see what that man has to say.
For it isn't your mother, your father or wife
whose judgment upon you must pass,
but the man, whose verdict counts most in your life
is the one staring back from the glass.
He's the fellow to please
never mind the rest.
For he's with you right to the end,
and you've passed your most difficult test
if the man in the glass is your friend.
You may be like Jack Horner and "chisel" a plum,
and think you're a wonder guy,
But the man in the glass says you're only a bum
If you can't look him straight in the eye.
You can fool the whole world,
down the highway of years,
and take pats on the back as you pass,
But your final reward will be heartache and tears
If you've cheated the man in the glass.

Above and beyond the Bank's usual financial scope, which was very important to the development this area, there was a commitment to community development. It was the Bank's contributions to the many community projects, with emphasis on youth groups and individuals, which was a factor in promoting and building the town. The following is some of the support given to events of that nature:

- The Bank housed and made available space for researching the bound copies of *The Geraldine Review*, making free photocopies for patrons as well.
- Pete Magnuson, bank cashier and a professional photographer, took, developed and printed 270, 5 x 7 photos of customers that came into the bank prior to the 1964 Centennial Celebration in Geraldine. These photos were displayed in the Bank during the observance and for several years thereafter. It was then gifted by the Bank of Masonic Lodge, where the photo gallery is now on permanent display.
- Over many years, the Bank carried hail, fire, auto and health insurance as a service to local residents.
- During WWI the Bank, as a public servant, helped float Liberty Bonds.
- Glenda Tonne, a former bank employee, stated that Verle H. Quigley made sure she was paid by the Bank for time spent on EMT and ambulance calls, as well as for meals.

²¹ On personal note, I was always amused when Verle cashed a check for me and I received a fresh new ten dollar bill. He never failed to wrinkle it a bit to make sure there were not two bills stuck together. Henry L. Armstrong.

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- An exhibit case was originally built into the south portion of the main entrance for the purpose of displaying samples of prize-winning grain. It has had children, youth, adults and others showing crafts, awards or displays of interest from that early period of the present time.
- Contributions were made to local organizations at the end of each year from the profits during the tenure of Verle H. Quigley. Verle also gave glass and silver bowls to local churches as well as to the young ladies employed at the Bank, many of which are still treasured by the recipients.
- In 1995 the Quigley family established a memorial scholarship in memory of Verle H. Quigley. The following is a quote by his granddaughter Kari Quigley Melton, President of the Bank in 1998, "The scholarship criteria came from my Grandfather – through the years. He always said there should be a scholarship for students who didn't have the top grades, or have a stellar talent they were recognized for, but who were average or above average with clean lives and good work ethics-those who worked diligently and steadily toward their goals and just needed a little help for college finances. In his own way, he provided this "Scholarship" himself through the years, because he helped many kids who met these criteria with little loans or gifts to further their education. He was intent on balancing things out for "the little guy" whenever he could so that opportunity and choice was available to anyone who could show initiative and determination. Public attention and admiration of individuals did not impress him – he noticed quiet focus and hard work, and if he learned that someone with those qualities had a dream, he often contributed to making that dream become a reality. V. H. preferred to contribute discreetly and privately – he never would have established a scholarship in his lifetime, because he was sensitive to the danger and pitfalls of putting himself or the bank in a spotlight." The scholarship was given for the first time 10 years after his death.
- In the fall of 1993, the Bank offered a free Homecoming Day BBQ first called Customer Appreciation Day to several hundred people of the community continuing until 2002. At that time Heritage Bank was joined by several other local businesses in sponsoring this affair.

Verle Quigley and his dedicated staff continued this tradition through the second half of the twentieth century, until his retirement in 1993. The First National Bank of Geraldine received approval to become Geraldine State Bank in July 1993. Fort Benton then became the main Bank and Geraldine's location, a branch bank. At this time the Bank became known as Q Bank. The relocation was approved by the Federal Reserve October 16, 1995 and by the State agency February 29, 1996. (Kari Melton) Q Bank was closed by the FDIC, August 7, 1998, for a few days. Heritage State Bank purchased Q Bank, both at the Geraldine and Fort Benton locations. The last closure occurred when Heritage Bank pulled the Geraldine operation back to Fort Benton leaving the building vacant on October 31, 2006. Subsequently, Basin State Bank of Stanford purchased the building and reopened for business, a full banking institution on January 8, 2007.

Architectural Significance

The builders of the First National Bank of Geraldine understood that substantial masonry construction furthered an impression of stability and permanence. Brick and stone construction is inherently more expensive than log or frame buildings, and requires laborers skilled in their craft. Like other banks in growing towns throughout Montana and the west, the brick buildings on Main Street invited railroad passengers to patronize their business and consider staying in the community.

The architecture of the First National Bank of Geraldine performed a variety of functions. It was a symbol of the prosperity and confidence in the future of the town, as well as an advertisement of the stability and financial assets of the institution. The sturdy brick facade and Classical details went far in furthering that cause. Architectural historian Christopher Nelson explains:

A successful bank was supposed to represent certain characteristics, such as dignity, solidity, and security, and avoid the appearance of others, such as extravagance, waste, and instability. The most immediate way of achieving such ends was the bank building itself. In fact, not only was the building often the bank's largest monetary asset, it was also its most important advertising tool...And no where was this truer than in the West, where banking institutions lacked even an indigenous tradition to legitimize their existence.²²

²² Christopher Nelson, "Bank Architecture in the West," *Journal of the West* Vol. XXIII, No. 2 (April 1984), p. 77.

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In 1893 when the World's Columbian Exposition was held in Chicago, the theme of the fair was the Classical World. The buildings at the exposition were constructed to reflect the theme. Americans became familiar with the style through photographs and news stories written about the Exposition. Just as previous architectural styles had achieved popularity after public exposure, this was the case with the Neo-Classical Revival style also. Soon the style was appearing across the country, in commercial, institutional and residential structures.

Neo-Classical Revival represented an appearance of strength and stability. A building constructed in the style was usually the most imposing and impressive structure on the block. It became the traditional design of choice for banks, museums, government buildings and institutions of learning. The First National Bank of Geraldine's raised belt courses, tripartite windows, dentilled cornice, even fenestration, recessed two-story central panel on the façade, and pedimented entry are all hallmarks of this important style. For these reasons, the building is eligible for listing in the National Register under Criterion C.

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Kari Quigley Melton – President and Director – Q Bank.

Leonard Stone – Builder.

Eric Anderson – Bank Director.

Verle Q Quigley – Cashier & President – First National Bank.

Personal Recollections – Henry L. Armstrong & Marcella Knedler.

Many of former employees contributed much helpful information to this history.

Present employees of Basin State Bank were especially helpful in every way possible giving of their time as well as digging up historical material to aid the project.

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Aerial view of Geraldine, with Bank highlighted, July 2005.

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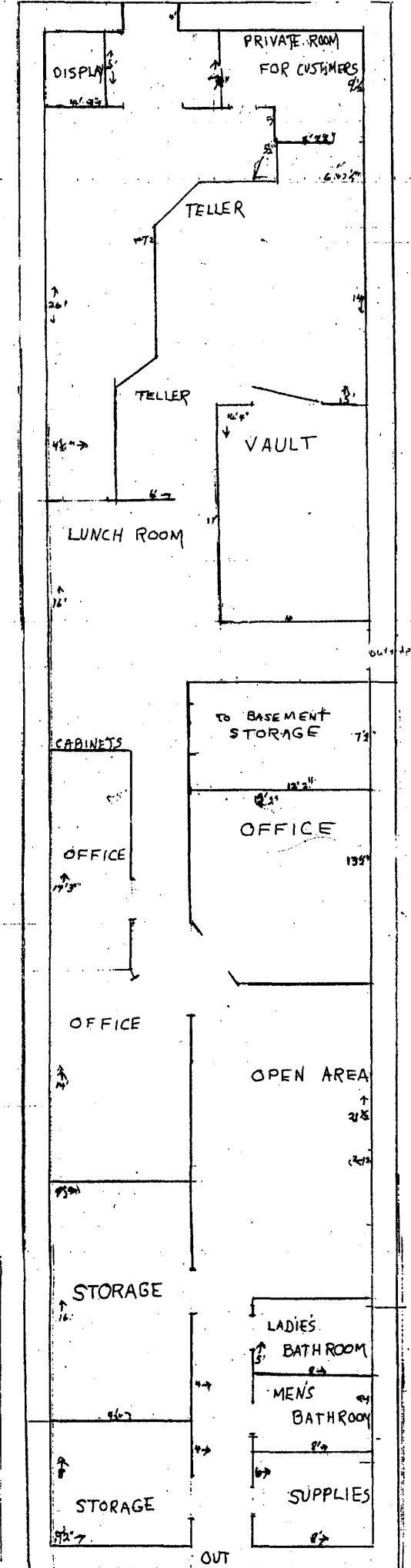
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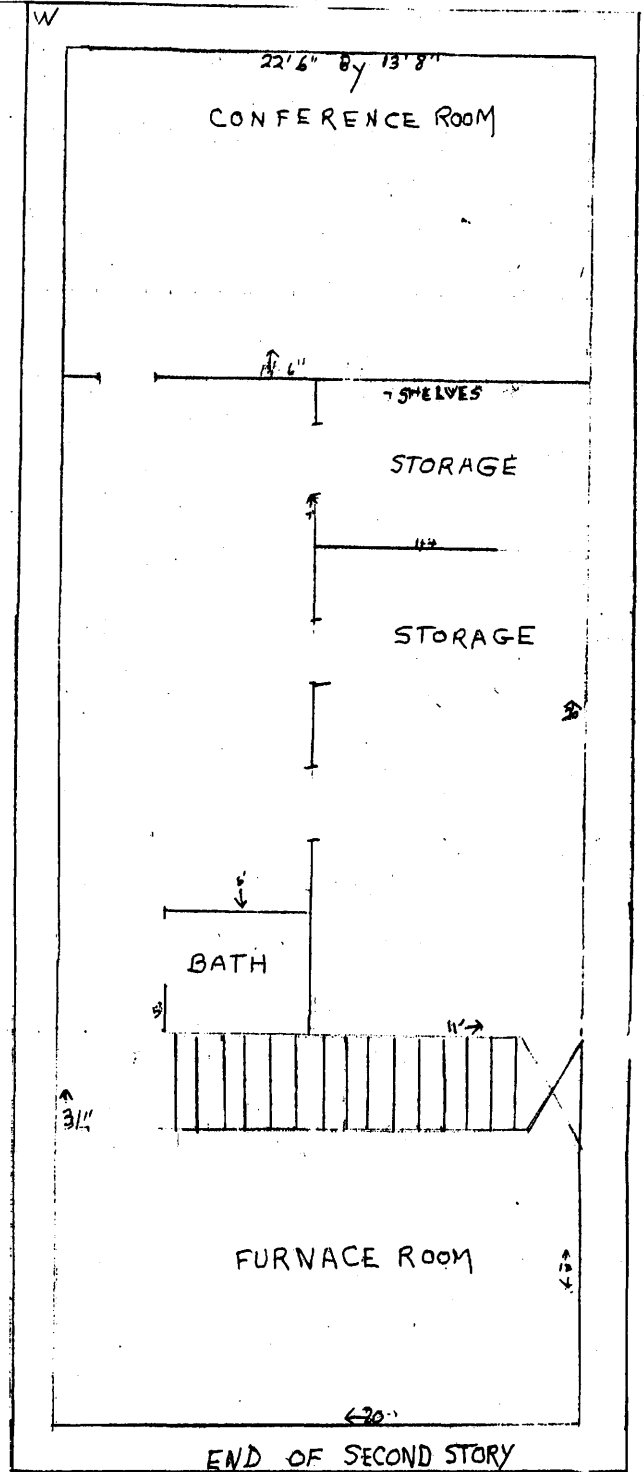
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The First National Bank of Geraldine



First Story Floorplan

The First National Bank of Geraldine



Second Story Floorplan

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Farmer's State Bank, predecessor to the First National Bank of Geraldine, in 1913.



Geraldine's Main Street, 1914. Note the First National Bank of Geraldine under construction at left. View to south.

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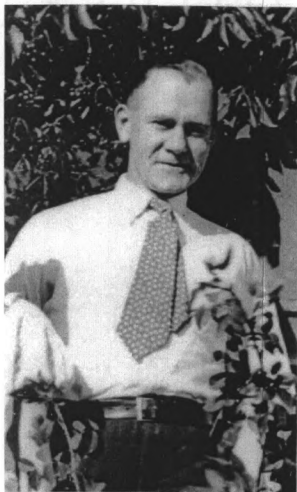
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First National Bank of Geraldine, c. 1919.



Harold Magnusson, worked for the bank from 1914-1954.

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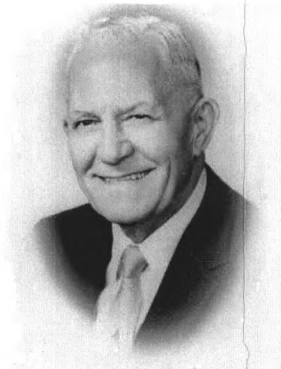
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Walter Carley, began his 40 year career with the bank in 1915.



Verle H. Quigley, became president of the bank in 1954.

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Verle Q. Quigley, began as a cashier in 1952, was Chairman of the Board 1985-1998.