

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

### National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

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

#### 1. Name of Property

historic name: Fairburn Historic Commercial District

other names/site number: N/A

#### 2. Location


street & number: Main Street between First and Second N/A for publication

city or town: Fairburn N/A vicinity

state: South Dakota code: SD county: Custer code: 033 zip code: 57738

#### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  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 39 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

 - SHPO  
Signature of certifying official/Title

5-16-95  
Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

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

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

#### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

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

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

 6-30-95

Fairburn Historic Commercial District

Custer County, South Dakota

Name of Property

County and State

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

**Category of Property**  
(Check only one box)

**Number of Resources with Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

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

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

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>  5  </u>	<u>  0  </u>	buildings
<u>  0  </u>	<u>  0  </u>	sites
<u>  0  </u>	<u>  0  </u>	structures
<u>  0  </u>	<u>  0  </u>	objects
<u>  5  </u>	<u>  0  </u>	Total

**Name of related multiple property listing**

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

Rural Resources of Eastern Custer County

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

N/A

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/hotel  
 COMMERCE/business  
 SOCIAL/meeting hall

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/single dwelling  
 SOCIAL/meeting hall  
 WORK IN PROGRESS

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Late 19th and 20th Century Western U.S.  
 Other: Vernacular commercial  
 Other: False-front

**Materials**

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation: concrete, sandstone  
  
 walls: weatherboard  
  
 roof: asphalt, tin, wood shingle  
  
 other: brick, metal

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Name of Property

County and State

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or boxes for the criteria qualifying the property.)

A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history

B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past

C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Agriculture  
Architecture  
Economics  
Exploration/Settlement  
Social History

**Period of Significance**

ca. 1917-1927

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

A. owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes

B. removed from its original location

C. a birthplace or grave

D. a cemetery

E. a reconstructed building, object, or structure

F. a commemorative property

G. less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years

**Significant Dates**

1917

**Significant Person**

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Unknown

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Building 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
- Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

Fairburn Historic Commercial District

Custer County, South Dakota

Name of Property

County and State

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property:**

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.) See continuation sheet.

- 1. \_\_\_\_\_ 3. \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. \_\_\_\_\_ 4. \_\_\_\_\_

**Verbal Boundary Description**

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

**Boundary Justification**

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title: Linea Sundstrom, Ph.D.

organization: N/A

date: 12/30/94

street & number: 1320 E. Lake Bluff Blvd.

telephone: (414) 963-0288

city or town: Shorewood

state: WI

zip code: 53211

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets**

**Maps**

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

**Photographs**

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

**Additional Items**

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

**Property Owner**

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

name:

street & number:

telephone:

city or town:

state:

zip code:

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, D 20503.

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10. Geographical Data

UTM References:

1.	13	644140	4838340
2.	13	644240	4838350
3.	13	644240	4838220
4.	13	644190	4838210
5.	13	644190	4838300
6.	13	644140	4838300

Verbal Boundary Description:

The Fairburn historic commercial district comprises a portion of Main Street between Second and Third. The following lots are included in the district: Block 6 Lots 17-21, and Block 7, Lots 1-8.

Boundary Justification:

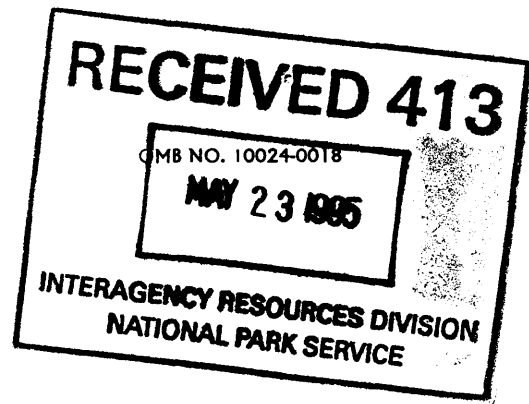
The boundary of the Fairburn historic commercial district was drawn to enclose all significant non-residential properties in the central business district. As far as possible, the boundaries are also drawn to exclude non-contributing properties and vacant lots.

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7. Narrative Description

The Fairburn Historic Commercial District comprises one linear block. This is Main Street, from Second to Third. The district is surrounded by residential housing on the east, west, and south sides. About half of the houses are unoccupied. On the north, the district borders a block of noncontributing commercial buildings. The historic resources of the district comprise a store, a hotel, and an IOOF lodge hall. These buildings are two-story wood frame buildings that conform to simple western false-front style vernacular designs. These are interspersed by vacant lots. Main, like the other streets of Fairburn, is unpaved. No sidewalks are present, nor is any landscaping evident in the district. Although the town maintains a grade school and an IOOF lodge, no businesses are active there today. The historic commercial district retains the scale and flavor of a small early 20th century western town.

Fairburn is located just outside the eastern edge of the Black Hills, in eastern Custer County, South Dakota. The town lies on French Creek in the grassy eastern foothills of the heavily forested mountains of the Black Hills. Except for cottonwoods and willows lining French Creek and the few ephemeral streams in the vicinity, few trees are present near the town. The local environment is typical of the northern high plains: dry, grassy, broken prairie. Climatic conditions can be extreme, from severe droughts in summer to blizzards and prolonged cold spells in winter.

The town site of Fairburn was formally platted in 1885, with the imminent arrival of the Fremont, Elkhorn, and Missouri Valley railroad. The town had begun as combination post-office, dentist's office, and way station housed in a tent on the Sidney-Deadwood Trail in the late 1870s. When the railroad came, the town of Fair Valley or Fairburn was located about three miles east of the old stage stop. Typical of late 19th century western railroad towns, Main street was laid out roughly perpendicular to the railroad track, with the remaining streets forming a rectangular grid around Main. The town plan deviated slightly from the more common T-shape, because the tracks run at an angle to the north-south grid of the streets.

Early Fairburn conformed to the railroad town pattern described by Kenneth Hammer in his study of territorial towns:

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A center of activity was the railroad right-of-way, with its siding and depot, the livestock pens, loading facilities, and the booming grain elevators--landmarks on the prairie. Either parallel to, but more often perpendicular to, the railroad right-of-way was the community's main street....The lumber yard, blacksmith, harness, and wagon shops were often in close proximity to the railroad right-of-way. ...The livery stable was often relegated to the back region of the community. Along the main street were the hotel, newspaper office, and general and dry goods store....And every town needed a funeral parlor, pool hall, and a bank (Hammer 1969:230).

Most of the earliest buildings in Fairburn were destroyed by fire. A set of buildings constructed around 1918 to accommodate the needs of workers from the Warren-Lamb lumber company is intact in the historic district.

The appearance of Fairburn around 1919 was typical of early 20th century small western towns. Early photographs show wood-frame, clapboard-sided false front buildings fronting the board sidewalks that lined Main Street. Although buildings had originally been placed very close together, by 1919 fire and demolition had thinned them out to a few buildings per block. These were placed on rectangular lots extending perpendicular to the streets. The streets themselves were unimproved dirt lanes that were alternately rutted or muddy. Fairburn contained only two blocks of commercial buildings in its central area even during its period of greatest expansion around 1919. Main from First to Second had a closely spaced row of false-front style storefronts on the east side of the street and the Valley House hotel and a few smaller false-fronted stores on the west side of the street. The second block of Main looked in 1919 much as it does today, with the IOOF Hall, Smith's store, and the Warren-Lamb hotel dominating the block.

The Fairburn Historic Commercial District comprises a set of three buildings arranged on both sides of Main Street. On the east side of the street are two large, two-story false-front style buildings, the IOOF Hall and Smith's store. On the west side is the Warren-Lamb Hotel, a two-story gable roofed frame boarding house. All three were built between 1917 and 1918. The only noncontributing property in the district is a mobile home located south of the Smith store.

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The Charles B. Smith store is a large, two-story rectangular wood-frame building with an imposing rectangular false front extending across the entire front of the building. A wide, hip-roofed wooden canopy with asphalt shingles extends out from the entrance, forming a covered driveway. This canopy appears to have been constructed to facilitate protected access to gas pumps at the front of the building. A one-story full-length shed roofed addition is present to the south of the main building. This apparently was constructed soon after the main building was completed. The addition also has a rectangular false-front, but it extends only to the top of the roof of the addition. The entire building is clad in shiplap siding. The roof of the main building is covered by corrugated sheet metal on the north side and asphalt shingles on the south. The addition roof is corrugated metal. Both portions of the building have rectangular, double-hung windows arranged symmetrically along the front and sides of the building. The front of the main building, under the canopy has paired doors at the center, with large display windows on each side. The front of the addition has a wooden rolling garage door with a single doorway to the south. The store was built as a hardware store, with a garage/gas station added soon after its construction.

The plain but balanced design of this building is typical of early 20th century western commercial structures. The canopy and commercial garage addition represent an adaptation of the false-front commercial style to the automobile age. The quick acceptance of automobiles in Fairburn is evident in a 1919 photograph of Fairburn (ECCHS 1970). This shows perhaps two dozen automobiles on Main Street, with no horse-drawn vehicles in sight. The building retains a high degree of historic integrity, having changed little from its original appearance. This building is currently used for storage. A wood-frame privy behind the main building dates to ca. 1918 and is considered a contributing resource.

The Odd Fellows (IOOF) hall is somewhat similar in appearance to Smith's store. It too, is a large, rectangular, two-story building with a false front extending across the facade of the building. It has regularly spaced banks of rectangular double-hung windows along both sides, with an external staircase and doorway at the rear of the building. The front and rear originally had two windows on the second story and two single doorways on the lower story; however, some of these were later sided over. Two other doors are present on the south side of the building.



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Like the Smith Store, the Odd Fellows hall is devoid of external ornamentation. One of the most interesting features of the building is a series of six (originally seven) long posts used to buttress the south side of the building. According to local informants, these posts were put up in the late 1930s or early 1940s and (with one exception) have remained in place since. The butt end of each pole has a concrete footing, while the top of each rests against a horizontal board nailed to the siding. The support poles are placed alternatively between the first and second stories and just below the roof line.

Although the interior of the building was not accessible to survey personnel, it apparently has large, open meeting rooms on both levels. The building is still in use as a lodge hall and community building. It retains its historic integrity. The main modification to the building--the addition of supports on the south side--is historic and did not change the general appearance of the building. Two small wood-frame buildings--a coal shed and a three-hole privy--placed behind the main building are considered contributing resources.

The Warren-Lamb Hotel was constructed in 1917 to provide housing for workers at the Warren-Lamb Lumber Company. The building is a large, rectangular, two-story structure, with a gabled roof and inset front porch in the northeast corner. Banks of regularly spaced rectangular windows on the first and second stories, front and sides, are the only exterior detail. The building is clad with shiplap siding and is roofed with wood shingles. Two historic shed-roofed additions are present at the rear (west end) of the building. The interior of the building is divided into a kitchen and dining room/office on the north side with bedrooms on the south side and upstairs. There are large bathrooms with built-in linen storage on both levels. The individual rooms are rather small, rectangular spaces that would have accommodated simple furnishings, probably a bed, dresser, and chair. Each room has a transom door facing a narrow hallway. A single double-hung window provides light to each room, with additional windows in the bathrooms and at the end of the upstairs hallway. Below each of the upstairs windows is an iron ring. When the hotel was in use, ropes were attached to these rings to provide fire-escapes from the rooms. The interior of the building, like the exterior, is rather plain; however, well-crafted pine woodwork and built-in storage units provide some detail. Its simple design and materials reflect its utilitarian function as worker housing.

The Warren-Lamb building was used as hotel until about 1938. From 1938 to 1953 it was used as a rooming house for rural students attending high school in Fairburn and as the town post-office. The present owner

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is restoring the building so that it can again be used as a hotel by rockhounds visiting the Fairburn agate beds. The building retains much of its historic integrity. With the exception of the two historic shed-roofed additions on the west end, the hotel has changed very little since it was built. The work in progress adds to the historic integrity of the building by restoring its original appearance.

Overall, the historic commercial district of Fairburn retains much of its early 20th century appearance. Although the Warren-Lamb lumber operations of 1917-1934 provided the economic impetus to the construction of the three buildings on Main, the town was able to continue its use of the structures well after the lumber company moved out. The simple design of the buildings, the unpaved streets, and general lack of landscaping reflect the working-class roots of Fairburn.

Table 1 lists the contributing properties within the Fairburn historic commercial district. The only non-contributing resource is a mobile home in Lot 7 of Block 3. This structure is less than 50 years old and does not relate to the historic contexts of the multiple-property nomination.

PROPERTY	ADDRESS	LEGAL DESCRIPTION	OWNER	DATE BUILT
Warren Lamb Hotel	Main at Second	Blk 6, Lots 20-21	John and Sue Ring	1917
Charles B. Smith Store	Main at Second	Blk 7, Lots 1-2	Fred and Jonilee Weibert	ca. 1918
Fairburn IOOF Hall	Main Street	Blk 7, Lot 7	IOOF Hall #235	1918

Table 1. Contributing properties, Fairburn Historic Commercial District.

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8. Statement of Significance

The Fairburn Historic Commercial District is significant in the areas of exploration/settlement, economics, agriculture and industry, social history, and architecture under criteria A and C. The district relates to the historic context "Permanent Rural and Urban Pioneer Settlement: Urban Development/Commercial Structures" as defined in the South Dakota State Plan for Historic and Architectural Resources (SDHPC 1989). The district is associated with a series of economic transformations, beginning with the initial non-native settlement of the area and ending with the demise of the town as an economic center after the Warren-Lamb lumber company ceased operations in the area and retail transactions increasingly moved to the larger town of Rapid City. The period of significance, 1917-1927, refers to the dates the buildings in the district were constructed and to the main period of economic prosperity of the Fairburn commercial district. The architecture of the district is typical of small western towns in the early 20th century. It reflects the main period of town-building, from 1917-1925 associated with enterprises tied to the final period of homesteading and the rapid growth of Rapid City. The set of buildings included in the district date to the establishment of Warren-Lamb's narrow gauge rail line from Custer State Park to Fairburn. This line was used to haul logs cut in Custer State Park to the company's lumber mill in Rapid City. The simple but well-crafted false-front style buildings are typical of turn of the century western towns and reflect an emphasis on utilitarian functions. The look and feel of an early 20th century western town are preserved in Fairburn's historic commercial district. The district retains a high degree of historic integrity despite the presence of one noncontributing resource.

Historical Background

Fairburn is located just outside the eastern edge of the Black Hills in eastern Custer County, South Dakota. It is surrounded by the dry, grassy high plains country of western South Dakota. To the west lie the Black Hills. Fairburn owes its existence to a series of events. These events were associated with various attempts to turn the natural resources of the area into profit. The story of Fairburn is thus closely tied to local and national economic trends. The events that most directly shaped Fairburn were the discovery of gold in the Black Hills in 1874, the closing of the southern ranges to Texas cattle drovers in

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the 1880s, the passage of various forms of homestead legislation in the late 19th century, and the opening of federal and state lands in the Black Hills for lumbering early in the 20th century.

The Black Hills gold rush of the mid-1870s brought the first non-native settlement to the Fairburn area. Like the rest of eastern Custer County, the Fairburn area lay east of the gold strikes, which were concentrated in the central Black Hills. The eastern portion of the county did, however, serve as a transportation corridor. A stop on the Sidney-Deadwood stage line, known as the French Creek Changing Station, consisted of several buildings constructed in 1876 just west of the present site of Fairburn.

Although the Black Hills gold rush had cooled by 1880, the influx of settlers into the newly opened Black Hills continued. In 1885, the Fremont, Elkhorn, and Missouri Valley Railroad, a subsidiary of the Chicago and North Western reached the Black Hills by skirting the south side of the Great Sioux Reservation. This spelled the end for the stage lines, but ensured Fairburn's continued existence. The tracks followed the old trail along the east side of the Black Hills. The town of Fairburn was platted early in 1886 by Western Town Lots just west of the old stage station. The railroad that passed through Fairburn brought emigrants and breed stock to the Black Hills country and was a shipping point for cattle and sheep from the great open ranges of western Dakota.

By 1880 big cattle outfits had filled the Black Hills and West River country with Texas cattle. The lush open ranges of the northern plains, growing beef markets in Chicago and the eastern cities, the demands of the burgeoning Black Hills and East River populations, and government contracts for beef annuities on the northern Indian reservations ensured astonishing profits for the cattle drovers during this period. Although Fairburn was never as large a shipping point as Buffalo Gap, but nevertheless enjoyed a substantial trade from its stockyards. At the same time that Texas cattle were being shipped out, rail shipments of eastern cattle breeds were brought into the area to improve the local beef and dairy herds. Horse-breeding also developed as an important local industry during this period.

Things began to quiet down by the early 1890s. The big "die-out" in the winter of 1886-87 had reduced the northern cattle herds by as much as 75% and an influx of homesteaders threatened the continued existence of the open range. Cattle droving no longer represented easy money. The need for extensive capital investment in land, fences, and grazing leases put an end to the beef bonanza. Cattle raising became a localized industry. The big outfits abandoned the area to the mid-sized ranchers who had operated alongside them during the cattle boom period

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and to the homesteaders who would attempt to forge farms from the open range. Would-be farmers who had taken claims in the area as the cattlemen moved out encountered bad years between 1889 and 1894. Severe droughts in those two years, combined with the economic panic of 1893, led to extensive crop loss and eventual bankruptcy of many of the homesteaders. Defeated by drought, poor soil, and economic uncertainty, many of the early homesteaders abandoned their claims. Those who stayed began a process of diversifying into cattle raising and acquiring the larger land holdings that could support viable ranching operations.

Fairburn's main period of growth came after the turn of the century. At that time, western South Dakota was one of the last frontiers still open to homesteading. Between 1905 and 1915, Fairburn began to expand as more people moved into the area. Town-builders in this period were attempting to establish stable, prosperous communities that would promote the agrarian ideal of the renewed homestead movement. Community activities such as dances, public dinners, baseball games, women's basketball, the "Fairburn Club Band," a men's German band, Odd Fellows, and Rebekahs, helped solidify the growing town. A dry-farming movement was promoted by universities, railroads, and government agencies. According to the proponents of "Scientific Soil Culture," would-be farmers could overcome the drought problem by adapting new methods and crops.

Severe drought in 1910 and 1911 dashed the hopes of the new farm movement. Eastern Custer County was hard hit by the drought, but was able to maintain its air of optimism. The cattle ranchers were able not only to survive the drought, but to benefit from it by acquiring title to the abandoned homesteads through payment of back taxes or outright purchase.

Meanwhile, Rapid City had grown steadily as a regional trade center. The Warren-Lamb lumber company sought to expand its Black Hills operations to meet the demands of the burgeoning city. Fairburn became the main shipping point for this expanded lumbering enterprise. These two factors ensured the continued existence of Fairburn, but as cow town and lumber shipping depot, not farming village. The three buildings included in the Fairburn historic commercial district all date to the Warren-Lamb boom period. Smith's hardware store was frequented both by area ranchers and by Warren-Lamb employees. The hotel was built to provide accommodations for unmarried Warren-Lamb workers. The IOOF hall was used both for lodge activities and for community events such as concerts and basketball games. This houses the oldest continuously operating Odd Fellows organization in South Dakota. In addition to these, the Warren-Lamb lumber company built a roundhouse and a

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blacksmith shop, neither of which is still standing. A large hardware store (The C.B. Smith store), a creamery, three general stores, a feed store, two pool halls, and butcher shop were also built ~~at~~ during the 1910s. Two rooms were added to the Fairburn school and a high school was started (Linde 1984:40).

Warren-Lamb's lumber operations were based in Custer State Park. Narrow gauge rail lines were constructed into the rugged country of the park. These lines ran to Fairburn and then to Rapid City via the company's own narrow gauge lines. The tracks leading to the Bear Gulch area in Custer State Park passed over a mountain with a grade of 34 percent on one side and 26 percent on the other. This required both skill and innovation on the part of the brakemen and engineers. Loaded cars were used as counterweights for each other in making this grade (Linde 1984:41). At the height of its Fairburn operations, the company reportedly imported 50 men from Sweden to cut logs (Linde 1984:42). Certainly, Warren-Lamb was the principal employer in the Fairburn area in the decade from 1917-1927 and was responsible for the town's main period of growth.

The pioneer ranchers of eastern Custer County had been in the area for two, three, or four decades by then. They formed the nucleus of the town, providing most of its retail business and community leadership. Prominent among these in the Fairburn area were Fuhrmanns, Edgertons, Gorsuchs, Sopers, Rasmussens, Youngs, Smiths, Westovers, and Downens.

The rise of the automobile and tractor spelled the demise of most of the local horse-breeding industry, but cattle raising continued to be profitable. Rural population shrank as machinery replaced people on farms and ranches. Better transportation allowed people to shop and seek medical services in the larger towns of Rapid City and Hot Springs.

As transportation improved, Fairburn dwindled. The construction of a state highway through Hot Springs and Custer State Park diverted traffic away from Fairburn. When the road running along the east side of the Black Hills was finally improved from a nearly impassable strip of gravel to a paved highway, it went around, not through the town. The North Western stopped shipping cattle from Fairburn about 1953. These events, along with the severe economic depression experienced throughout the state in the late 1920s and throughout the 1930s, caused the rapid near-abandonment of Fairburn's commercial district. While the IOOF lodge and grade school continue in use today, by 1960 most of the town's businesses were closed for good. Today, the town is little more than a post office, country school, and occasional gathering place for local ranchers. Traffic picks up a bit in the summer as rockhounds come

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through town on their way to the famous Fairburn agate beds east of town.

Significance

The Fairburn Historic Commercial District is significant under Criterion A in the area of exploration and settlement, as a frontier town. Its layout illustrates the quick platting and development of western towns as railroads entered new areas. The removal of the original town to a site selected by the railroad and its T-shaped layout were typical of railroad towns. Developers worked with railroads to locate towns at regular intervals along the tracks. The T-town template could be applied easily and quickly. Since Fairburn already existed as a post office and way station, it was simply reshaped to fit the needs of the railroad and renamed from French Creek Changing Station to Fair Valley or Fairburn. Like other railroad towns, Fairburn was platted just in advance of the railroad and grew to a substantial size almost instantly. Unfortunately, no buildings remain from the early railroad era, having been moved to other locations or destroyed by fire. The three buildings included in the district, however, were built in a style typical of late 19th century western boom towns. They also reflect the importance of the railroad and the need for inexpensive but impressive buildings in the new frontier towns.

The district is also significant under Criterion A in the areas of agriculture and industry. The town was a substantial cattle shipping depot during the big cattle era. It retained its importance as a cattle shipping point into the mid-20th century. The Smith store, Warren-Lamb hotel, and IOOF lodge catered to ranchers as well as town-dwellers. The lumber industry, in the form of the Warren-Lamb company, shaped the historic district more than any other force. The three buildings included in the district were all built during the boom period associated with Warren-Lamb's logging operations in Custer State Park. The Warren-Lamb Hotel, in particular, provides an excellent example of a company rooming house, with its well crafted but plain design. The hotel reflects the company's desire to provide practical, comfortable housing for its workers.

The Fairburn historic commercial district is also significant under Criterion A in the area of economics. The present appearance of the district evokes a turn of the century frontier boom town, with rows of simple storefronts lining Main Street. A closer look reveals both vacant lots and abandoned buildings that signal the slow retreat of

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businesses and capital from the town. The economic importance of the railroad is clear in the reshaping of the town with its nucleus at the junction of Main street and the railroad tracks one block north of the historic district. The continued use of the IOOF Hall and the grade school contrasts with the closure of nearly all of the businesses in the district. This provides a striking visual illustration of the transformation of the community from a commercial center to a ranching center with a primarily social, rather than economic, function.

The district is significant under Criterion A in the area of social history, as well. Most of the standing buildings were constructed around 1918, when the Warren-Lamb lumber company based its logging operations in Fairburn. The Warren-Lamb personnel seemed to have been easily incorporated into the extant social structure of the community. A room was added to the school to accommodate the increased number of students and new businesses sprang up to serve the growing population of the town. The newcomers quickly became part of the fabric of the community by joining fraternal lodges, churches, sports teams, bands, and other social organizations. The IOOF hall stands as a vivid symbol of this process, as it was (and is) used to house a variety of community activities in addition to the lodge meetings.

Under Criterion C, in the area of architecture, the district provides excellent examples of late 19th and early 20th century vernacular commercial styles. Although the buildings were constructed around 1918, they conform to an earlier version of the western false-front commercial style. This style is especially well represented by the IOOF hall and Smith's store. These rather stark buildings form an interesting contrast to the somewhat earlier false-front style buildings in the Buffalo Gap historic commercial district, which exhibit much more ornamentation in such details as the shape of the front, the use of roof brackets, and ornamental hardware on doors. The Warren-Lamb hotel provides a well preserved example of an early 20th century company boarding house, with a utilitarian design that reflects its working-class function.

The more spartan appearance of Fairburn reflects its historical circumstances. For the most part, Fairburn was a noncompetitor in the jostling for economic investment following the coming of rail transportation to the area. By the time the tracks reached Fairburn, most investors had already set their sights on the larger towns of Rapid City and Buffalo Gap. The handful of commercial buildings that sprang up south of the new depot were either destroyed by fire or moved to other locations. Fairburn's real boom would come later, and as a company town, not frontier depot. This is the Fairburn represented by the three



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buildings included in the historic commercial district. The earlier period of town building is reflected in the T-shaped street plan, long, narrow commercial lots, and regular street grid typical of early railroad towns in the American west. The lack of landscaping and the native trees regularly spaced along the streets also typify western frontier towns.

Although the archaeological potential of the district has not been formally evaluated, the presence of vacant lots and old foundations strongly suggests the presence of intact archaeological deposits relating to the early settlement of the town. Expected types of archaeological remains within the district include privies, trash middens, and the remains of commercial buildings and community meeting places.

Overall, the Fairburn historic commercial district provides a relatively undisturbed early 20th century western streetscape. Both standing structures and vacant lots tell the story of the rise and fall of this frontier town, as it struggled to find a lasting economic niche.

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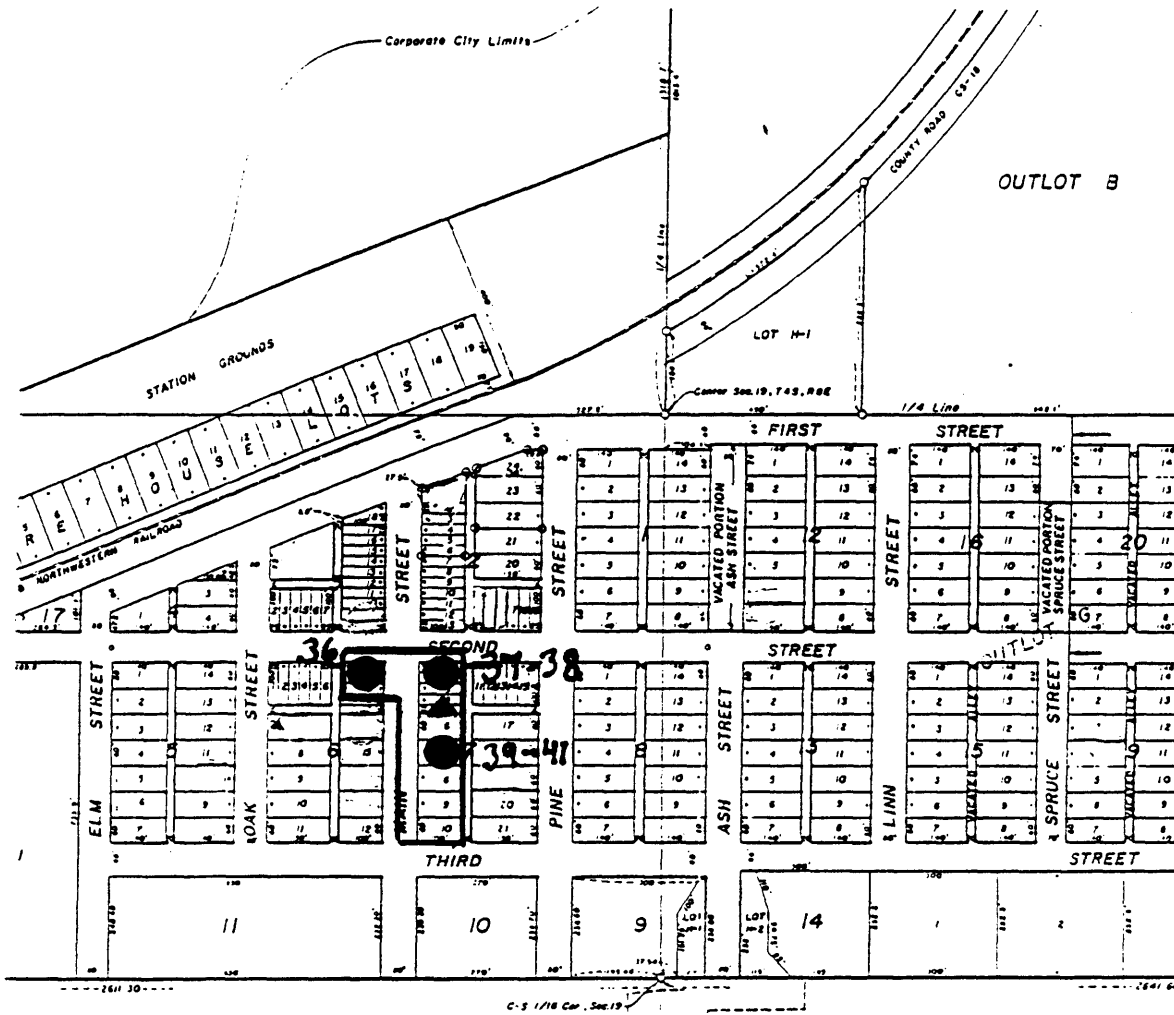
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Sketch Map of Fairburn Historic Commercial District



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**SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD**

NRIS Reference Number: 95000772

Date Listed: 06/30/95

Property Name: Fairburn Historic Commercial District  
County: Custer State: South Dakota

Rural Resources of Eastern Custer County MPS

Multiple Name

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

  
Signature of the Keeper

June 30, 1995  
Date of Action

=====  
Amended Items in Nomination:

Section 10. Geographical Data  
Acreage is approximately one acre.

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Melissa Dirr, National Register coordinator for the South Dakota, State Historic Preservation Office was notified of this amendment on June 30, 1995.

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**DISTRIBUTION:**

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