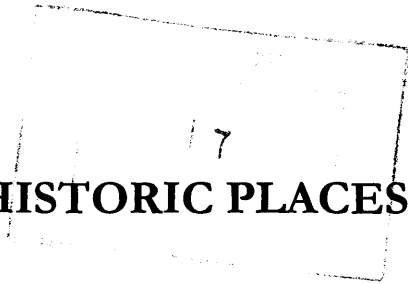


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM



1435

1. Name of Property

historic name: Baker Hotel

other name/site number:

2. Location

street & number: 4 South Main Street (Southeast corner of Main Street and Railroad Avenue)

not for publication: n/a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

city/town: Baker

state: Montana code: MT county: Fallon code: 025 zip code: 59313

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.)

Mark F. Sawnder / SHPO
Signature of certifying official/Title

November 10, 2004
Date

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):

Edson A. Ball
Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

1.5.05

5. Classification

Ownership of Property: Public - Local

Category of Property: Building

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

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u> 1 </u>	<u> 0 </u> building(s)
<u> 0 </u>	<u> 0 </u> sites
<u> 0 </u>	<u> 0 </u> structures
<u> 0 </u>	<u> 0 </u> objects
<u> 1 </u>	<u> 0 </u> TOTAL

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions:

DOMESTIC/Hotel

Current Functions:

VACANT/Not in Use

7. Description

Architectural Classification:

Other: Western Commercial

Materials:

foundation: pressed tile block
walls: brick
roof: asphalt
other:

Narrative Description

The Baker Hotel is a two-story brick commercial building that anchors the end of Baker's commercial district. Built across the street from the historic location of the town's railroad depot, the hotel occupies a prominent corner in town. Downtown Baker extends some three blocks along Main Street, and is comprised of one - two story buildings. The half dozen historic brick buildings of the settlement period during the 1910s lend the town a sense of quality and permanence. Among these are the hotel, a theater and a pillared bank.

The Baker Hotel's primary façade faces onto Main Street, while the north side runs parallel to the railroad corridor. The exterior of the two-story building is in excellent condition and remains the same as when it was first built in 1915. Constructed of common bond brown brick, the Baker Hotel is basically rectangular in form, two stories on a slightly raised stone foundation. Due to the irregular shape of the corner lot, this unique building is built at a slightly convex angle and is wider at the front than at the back. It has a string course along the bottom. Typical of many commercial buildings of this era, the building design incorporates recessed entrances and large panel glass windows with transoms on the street level, with a series of symmetrically-placed window openings toward the rear and on the second story. Window wells with daylight windows illuminate the basement level, on the first and second floors, fenestration includes double-hung 1-over-1 window units.

West Elevation / front (facing the Main Street / Commercial district)

The primary façade on the Baker Hotel faces to the west. This elevation has a polychromatic band of red and gold butt brick designed in an "x" pattern, and corbelled butt brick bands the top of most of the building. On the south elevation towards the west elevation, the brickwork is interrupted by a sign panel that still has a painted sheet metal neon sign of 1920-1950s design. There are two historic entrances on this primary façade -- one now contains modern glass with a metal commercial door, sidelight and two metal railings fixed to concrete steps. The other door is at ground level and a wooden door and wood panel infill in the opening have replaced the historic fabric. Both were used as entrances to the different businesses within the building, one the hotel and the other, the café. There are also glass block basement windows.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7

Baker Hotel
Fallon County, Montana

Page 1

North Elevation / (facing railway track and grain storage units)

On the north elevation, there are twenty-four windows regularly spaced along both floors. The twelve upper floor units are double-hung one-over-one style. The first floor has four fixed sash windows toward the west elevation, while the remaining eight are the in the same style as the upper windows. There is an exterior basement entrance with door and window at this elevation, accessed by concrete steps and a metal railing.

East Elevation / rear (facing alley)

On the east elevation, there are four double hung windows one-over-one style with a fire escape door on the second floor. A rear doorway opens from the first floor level.

South Elevation / right side (facing open space and a modern corrugated commercial building):

On the south elevation, the fenestration continues in similar patterning. On the first floor, a one-story kitchen addition extends to the south. On the upper story, there is historic signage on the brickwork and a stepped parapet towards the front of the building (west elevation). The polychromatic brickwork pattern ornamenting the front of the building appears toward the rear

Interior:

The hotel's primary entrance in the west wall opens into a lobby at the front of the building. The lobby interior is spacious at the front and north side (46ft x 60ft), which formerly comprised the foyer area and in more recent years, a café. This space served as a gathering place and the main focal point of the town for some time. Many people within the town still recall either working or enjoying time there. A corridor leads down to the back of the hotel, where ten guestrooms are located, four on the north side and six on the south side. Some of these guestrooms contained full bathrooms; others relied upon a bath down the hall. A small storage addition was added to the kitchen area midway along the south side in the 1940s.

The upstairs area is separated into twenty-four guestrooms with a central hallway. Four rooms at the front of the building face onto the main street, as well as eleven placed on the north and nine on the south side of the building. There is one stairway leading to the upper level; it is located in the center of the building on the south side. Some of the guest rooms have full bathrooms, and for those that do not, there are 4 small communal type bathrooms along the long hallway. The corridor extends the length of the building, and also holds some storage closets.

The interior is in run down condition, due to vacancy and neglect and some minimal vandalism (graffiti and broken windows). The building was heated with a steam system and all rooms still have their radiators. All guestrooms have at least a sink. The room design is the same as when it first opened. Interior finishes include historic, unornamented wood window trim, picture rails or crown molding for the ceilings, and wooden baseboard trim.

The concrete basement is 50 x 46 feet and is located beneath the front part of the building.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7

Baker Hotel
Fallon County, Montana

Page 2

Integrity

The hotel appears to be in sound structural condition, although it has suffered damage from water leakage and from vandalism. Although it is now in disrepair, from a historic standpoint the building retains a high degree of integrity. On the exterior, it has changed little. Alterations are limited to replacement of materials on the primary entry and surrounding windows; some of the historic window trim is missing. The exterior elements of polychrome brickwork, original windows, openings, painted signage are all still intact. On the interior, non-historic paneling has been added but the historic spatial divisions, wood trims, doorways, transoms, stairways and high ceilings remain unchanged. It very clearly represents the historic design and period of significance, a time when the hotel was the main visitor destination in town for railroad workers and travelers alike, following the Yellowstone Trail.

Currently, the City of Baker owns the property, and although it has been sitting vacant in excess of fifteen years, adaptive reuse for this property is a current goal.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria: A, C Areas of Significance: Commerce, Architecture, Exploration/Settlement

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): n/a Period(s) of Significance: 1916-1953

Significant Person(s): n/a Significant Dates: 1916

Cultural Affiliation: n/a Architect/Builder: Building Contractor: Jack Pratt

Narrative Statement of Significance

The Baker Hotel was completed in 1916 and is the second oldest standing brick building in the City of Baker, Montana, reflecting the period of community founding and settlement. The hotel has been a major anchor in the town's commercial core since its construction, providing lodgings and welcome to travelers to the community through most of the 20th century. A prominent building set in a small town landscape, it provides an example of the simple and popular commercial building patterns in early 20th century Montana, with its terra cotta ornament, multi-color brickwork and practical format that combined commercial first floor operations with rooms to the rear and upstairs. For the ways that the hotel represents architectural patterning and the early history in Baker, Montana, the building is highly significant on the local level and qualified to be listed in the National Register of Historic Places according to criteria A and C.

Historical Significance

Baker stands on the high plains, along the eastern edge of the state of Montana. This country was home to Plains Indians including the Sioux, Arapaho and Cheyenne, in the years before white settlement. Natural springs in the vicinity no doubt made it a prime camping and hunting area during prehistoric times. Herds of buffalo were numerous in this region and native cultures centered their lifeways around the migrations of this big game animal. In the earliest recorded observations of the region, the Shields Hunting Party of 1880 estimated seeing some 200,000 buffalo in the area. The decimation of these vast buffalo herds was swift and ruthless. Just six years later, in 1886, the last one in Fallon County was shot.

In 1879, the US military opened Fort Keogh at the confluence of the Tongue and Yellowstone Rivers, an important settlement that became a foundation to the town of Miles City. The troops afforded military protection to the surrounding area and enabled further inroads to permanent white settlement and development. Military and civilian freighters blazed a trail to Fort Keogh through eastern Montana, and a series of stage stops soon grew up to service the freighters and the mule teams traveling the route. The Fort Keogh Trail served as the major thoroughfare into the region, until the completion of the Northern Pacific Railroad line through the area in 1882.

It was the advent of ranching in 1880, that dramatically set the stage for permanent settlement and regional industry. That year, eastern Montana opened its doors to ranching when Scottish-English cattlemen drove 5000 head of cattle into Custer County. Captain William Harmon established the first permanent ranch in what was to become Fallon County on the east bank of O'Fallon Creek in 1882. Six years later, the Standard Cattle Company drove three to four thousand head of cattle to the area, and established the 101 Ranch. It was the heyday of open range cattle operations in Montana Territory, and other ranchers soon followed.¹

Baker had its origins as a camping site for those following the Custer Trail between Wibaux, Montana and Ekalaka, Montana, and Camp Cook, South Dakota. With year round water surrounded by plenty of grass and level ground, the Baker Prairie was a natural stopping place for travelers and cowpunchers. In 1901, work began on the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul railroad line, and in 1906, it reached Montana's eastern border. The following year, railway surveyors established a camp east of Baker on the old Ekalaka – Wibaux Trail, and soon a camp was established on the Baker Prairie for the Milwaukee's grading crews. The Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railroad completed its line in 1908.

¹ Valeria Smola, History of Baker, unpublished manuscript, Montana State College, Bozeman 1948, p. II.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8

Baker Hotel
Fallon County, Montana

Page 1

To water the railroad's steam engines, the railroad dammed the springs on the Baker Prairie, creating Baker Lake. A permanent townsite was surveyed along this small water body, and named Lorraine on the first plat. A boxcar served as the local depot and post office, and the name was changed to Baker when the first train arrived in May 1908, after the chief construction engineer for the Milwaukee Railroad.² In 1904, Fred Hasty erected the first building there, establishing the Loveridge Rooming House across from the depot for freighters and ranchers.³ The earliest businessmen in town set up shop to cater to the needs of a young town on the ranching frontier -- four saloons, a butcher shop, a drug store, the U.S. Land Office and a shearing pen and warehouse were among Baker's first businesses.

With the passage of the Enlarged Homestead Act in 1909 and the accompanying railroad promotion, hopeful settlers flocked to eastern Montana. That year a general store opened and quickly became a town anchor and social center, with a hall upstairs that accommodated dances, theater performances and church services. In 1910, the town incorporated and soon included the general store, a bank, a newspaper, hotels, a pharmacy, cigar manufacturers, equipment salesmen, claim locators, a lumber yard, a blacksmith, liveries and saloons, along with churches, a jail and police.

Baker served as a rail hub to the surrounding region, a point of shipment for wool and beef and livestock, as well as wheat. The O'Loughlin Elevator went up in 1910 and was soon followed by others. By 1914, a million bushels of wheat had shipped out of Baker by rail.⁴ Agriculture was the mainstay of life in this region and homestead claims shaped the rural landscape, as the land was fenced into ranches and farms, fields and pastures.

With the population burgeoning during the first two decades of the 20th century, the state of Montana passed legislation in 1911 to enable a process of county splitting, leading in the end to the 56 counties still in existence today. Citizens of Custer County, which occupied the southeastern portion of Montana, petitioned for county separation in 1913, and soon a contest for county seat developed between Baker and Ekalaka. Ekalaka promoted its central location, while Baker advertised its prominent position on the railroad line. Ekalaka beat Baker to become the seat of the new Fallon County by just 17 votes. However, the following year a second election was called and Baker secured the county seat, while Ekalaka became county seat for newly formed Carter County.⁵ In 1915, Baker's first courthouse was erected and the county's population numbered over 11,300.⁶

The Baker Hotel stands on a prominent corner in the commercial district of Baker, on a site that was formerly occupied by the Lloyd Hotel. The Lloyd was a two story, wood frame hotel and in 1911, Frank Grellinger was listed as the proprietor of the business.⁷ Grellinger and Mr. Hetherington, his partner, purchased the hotel property from Robert and Margaret Lloyd, placed the frame building on skids and moved it to the rear, where it became the Commercial Hotel, and later the West Side Hotel.⁸ The open corner lot was then ready for a new building.

In 1915, the town of Baker boomed after the first natural gas discovery in Montana was made just a mile north of town, in the process of drilling a water well. The following year, the Montana Petroleum Company drilled a well near the east end

² Ibid.

³ Reichelt, Clyde "Railway's Need for Water Siding Gave Baker Its Start," *Great Falls Tribune*, June 1, 1958

⁴ Kirschten, Lorene E "History of Fallon County, Montana." p. 120.

⁵ Ibid., p. 28.

⁶ Kirschten, p. 121.

⁷ According to Fallon County Memories: 1908-1938, p. 42, Grellinger was one of the earliest merchants in Baker, and sold Moline equipment.

⁸ Baker Chamber of Commerce & Agriculture and Centennial Committee, *A History of Baker Businesses: 1909-1989*, p. 8.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8

Baker Hotel
Fallon County, Montana

Page 2

of Baker Lake to supply natural gas to the townsite. Situated on the western edge of the Williston Basin, the region was revealed to harbor vast reserves of petroleum and natural gas, and these industries have been the backbone of the regional economy ever since.

That year, the spring of 1916, the newspaper observed a local boom in construction, with builder Jack Pratt enjoying a very brisk period of business. Among the noteworthy projects were a number of new houses and the Baker Hotel.⁹ In 1916, the Baker Hotel Corporation was formed, to finance the construction of a brick, two-story hotel positioned to serve passengers and workers on the railway line. Pratt, a farmer and successful local building contractor, oversaw construction of a new hotel.¹⁰ As *The Fallonite* newspaper reported at the time “under their management the new hotel promises to become the most popular home for traveling men between Minneapolis and the Pacific Ocean.”¹¹ The hotel opened in 1917; the first manager, E.V. Trout was succeeded six years later by L.E. Baker.

The motorized travel route that developed alongside the Milwaukee line was christened the Yellowstone Trail in 1915, and it became increasingly popular as automotive traffic increased. Positioned next to the tracks, the hotel was also located along the Yellowstone Trail, which ultimately became part of US Highway 12. Not long after the hotel was completed, an argument among the shareholders caused a split in the Baker Hotel Corporation, and they reorganized as the Gate City Hotel Corporation in 1918.

Agriculture continued to dominate the economy and through World War I, demand for wheat and livestock keep prices high. With the end of the war and a turn toward drought in the weather, hard times came to the drylanders who populated the Baker region. A number of farmers left the land, while others diversified and survived. A strong hog market developed in Baker during the early 1920s, providing an alternative for struggling farm families.

During the 1920s, oil and gas continued to an important leg of the economy. The Gas Development Company began leasing in the nearby Cabin Creek area, and soon developed a network of wells in the Baker-Cabin Creek field and gas lines radiated across eastern Montana. Gas lines were laid to Glendive, Miles City, and towns in North and South Dakota.

The depression of the 1930s and extended years of drought took their toll on rural Montana. Fallon County’s population fell from 4568 in 1930 to 3660 by 1950, as people left failing farms. Baker and towns in the eastern part of the state absorbed some of this population, other people went on to bigger towns or left the state completely. From just over 1,000 residents in 1920, the Baker townsite grew to 2190 in 1950 and between 2300-2500 in the latter 20th century.

Automobiles and the decline of passenger trains through the area in the 1950s caused the hotel trade to suffer. A succession of owners included Frank Becker in 1947, Forge Severson and Virgil Abbot in 1952, Bob Kochel in 1954 and Willet Owens in 1957. In 1960, then owner Willet Owens traded the hotel for a ranch just outside of town, deeding the property to Ruth Saye. It sold again in 1969 to the Nicks family who then operated the establishment into the 1980s, a period during which it served mainly as a café and meeting place, although it did still have rooms for guests.¹²

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ “Many Plan on New Houses,” *The Fallonite*, March 2, 1916

¹¹ “Work Under Way on the Baker Hotel”, *The Fallonite*, March 23, 1916.

¹² Baker Chamber of Commerce & Agriculture and Centennial Committee, *A History of Baker Businesses: 1909-1989*, p. 8.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8

Baker Hotel
Fallon County, Montana

Page 3

Architectural Significance

The builder of the Baker Hotel was a local man by the name of Jack Pratt. A contractor and builder, Pratt built many area houses, buildings and the local sidewalk system. He was noted in the newspapers of the day as a leading contractor in the community. The Pratt name is still commonplace in the town.

The architecture and design of the hotel are testament to his craft and to his awareness of architectural trends of the time. While the building does not fit a formal style definition, it suggests influences of the Craftsman period in its lines and a classical sense of balance in its fenestration. Pratt's design for the hotel was typical of second generation, popular style commercial buildings in Montana and the West. In fact it is one of several 2-3 story, hard brick buildings that were built in the town during the founding era, and along with the bank and the theater is among the most prominent of its buildings.

The design typifies popular western commercial architecture of the early 20th century, in scale, materials and design. Its two-story format, with commercial space and storefronts along the ground level, and lodgings upstairs is a common pattern. Original room divisions including the lobby, café and ladies parlor on the upstairs level are all still extant yielding a clear understanding of function and original design. And the pressed brick, tile foundation blocks, terra cotta ornament, and multi-color geometric brickwork are typical of the simple design patterns used to dress up commercial construction during this era. The fact that the building remains in good structural condition despite recent neglect and some 90 years of history, also testifies to his craftsmanship.

* * *

Built during the town's first decade, when dryland farmers prospered and local oil strikes promised a bright future, the Baker Hotel has long been an anchor in Baker's commercial district. Sited at the head of Main Street across from the rail lines, the elevators and the warehouse zone, the hotel reflected the town's link to the railroads and agriculture. From its construction in 1916 until the time it was vacated, the Baker Hotel was a focal point for the entire community, a place for visiting friends and businessmen, its café a gathering spot where people kept touch with the pulse of the town. Most older people still living in the community recall the hotel from either working there in their younger years or meeting with people there in the heyday of the 1940s and 1950s. It has been a cornerstone of the community for its entire lifetime.

Baker Hotel
Name of Property

Fallon County, Montana
County and State

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: Montana Preservation Alliance

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: less than one

UTM References: Zone: 13 **Easting:** 555799 **Northing:** 5135056

Legal Location (Township, Range & Section(s)): SW ¼ SE ¼ SW ¼ of Section 12, Township 7 North, Range 59 East

Verbal Boundary Description

Baker Original Townsite, Block 3, Lots 16-17

Boundary Justification

These are the lots upon which the hotel has stood since its construction in 1916.

11. Form Prepared By

date: May 2004

name/title: Mark Campbell	with Pete Brown,	& Chere Justo
organization: Southeast Montana Area Revitalization Team	Architectural Specialist, SHPO	MT Preservation Alliance
street & number: 107 South Main Street/ PO Box 53	PO Box 201202	516 N. Park St, Suite A
city or town: Baker state: MT zip code: 59313	Helena, MT 59620	Helena, MT 59601
telephone: 406-778-2020	406-444-7718	406-457-2822

Property Owner

name/title: City of Baker	telephone: 406-778-2692
street & number: 12 West Fallon/ PO Box 1512	zip code: 59313
city or town: Baker state: MT	

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 9

Baker Hotel
Fallon County, Montana

Page 1

Bibliography

Baker County Seat Club. "Baker, Montana for County Seat." pamphlet, on file at Montana Historical Society, Helena: 1913.

Baker Montana Diamond Jubilee. Fallon County Memories. self published, Baker, Montana, 1983.

Baker Chamber of Commerce & Agriculture and Centennial Committee. A History of Baker Businesses: 1909-1989.

Busch, Larry "Baker, Montana." *The Mondakonian*.

Fallon County Clerk & Recorder. Commercial and Industrial Improvements and Land Records. Baker Original Townsite, Block 3, Lots 16-17.

"Many Plan on New Houses." *The Fallonite*. March 2, 1916.

Reichelt, Clyde "Railway's Need for Water Siding Gave Baker Its Start," *Great Falls Tribune*, June 1, 1958.

Smola, Valeria History of Baker, unpublished manuscript, Montana State College, Bozeman 1948.

"Work Under Way on the Baker Hotel." *The Fallonite*. March 23, 1916

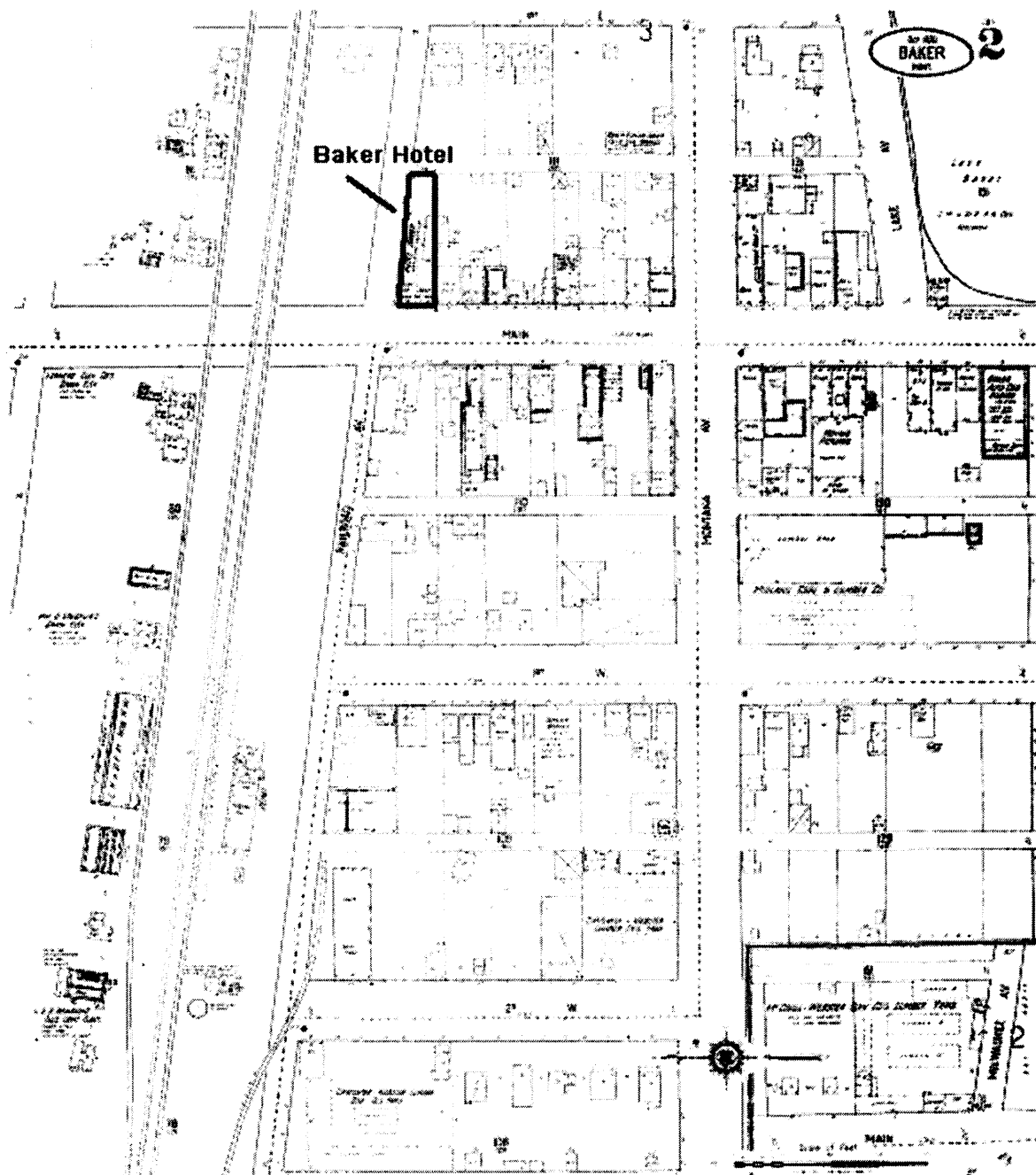
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 10

Baker Hotel
Fallon County, Montana

Page 1



Sanborn Map for Baker Montana, 1920 (sheet 2)

Baker Hotel is clearly marked at the southeast corner of Main Street and Railroad Avenue.
This prominent location was convenient to the railroad and Main Street commercial enterprises.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

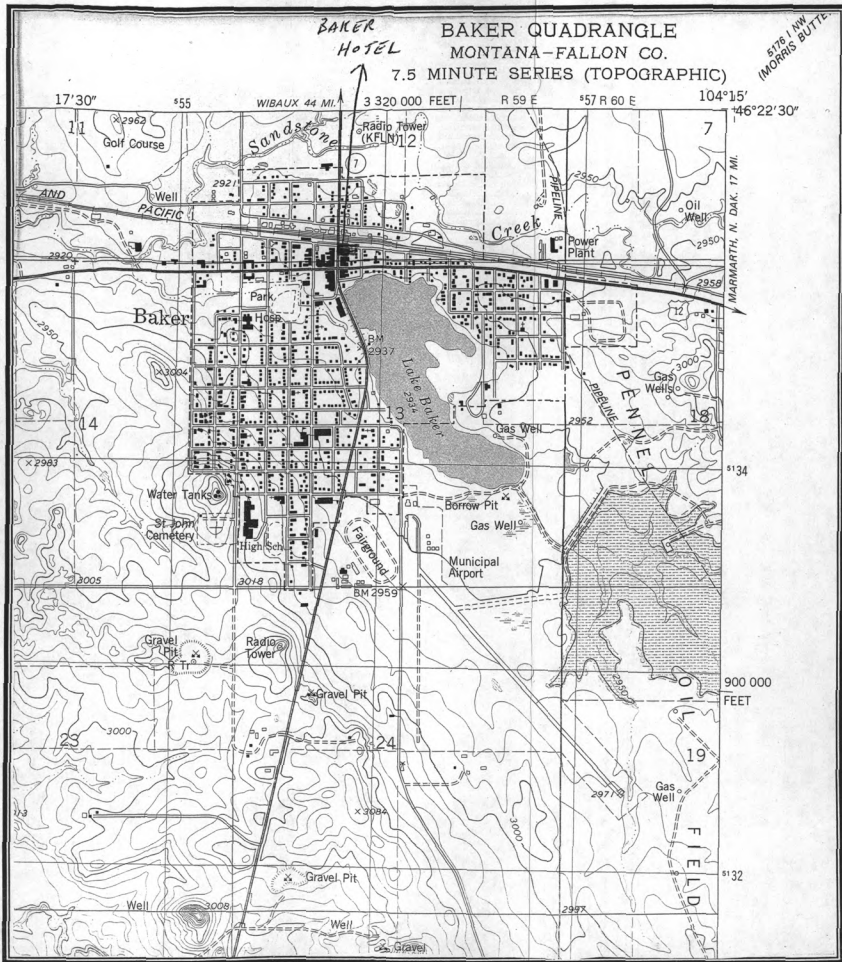
Historic Photograph

Baker Hotel
Fallon County, Montana

Page 1



Baker, Montana c. 1916. Railroad depot in foreground, and newly constructed Baker Hotel to the right. Montana Historical Society, PAC83-33



Baker Hotel

4 South Main Street, Baker, Fallon County, MT

UTMs (NAD 27): Zone 13, E 555799; N 5135056

SW ¼ SE ¼ SW ¼ of Section 12, Township 7 North, Range 59 East

BAKER QUADRANGLE