

MAIN STREET HISTORIC DISTRICT

DESCRIPTION: The Main Street Historic District encompasses twenty-eight commercial structures located on four, one-half block sections which center on downtown Red Cloud at the intersection of U.S. Highways 281 and 136 (4th Avenue and Webster Street). Most of the buildings are nineteenth century constructions, however, some facades have been remodeled during the early twentieth century (photo #38).

Five of the structures, (11/48) comprising nearly 25% of the total facade area, are specifically associated with the life and writing of Willa Cather, while seven others, comprising 12% of the facade area, are constructions extant from Cather's childhood in Red Cloud. Most of the other structures are turn-of-the-century products or are remodelings of nineteenth century buildings, but which contribute toward a compatible sense of scale and material with the earlier structures.

Only three structures are noted which must be considered non-conforming intrusions. These include a laundromat west of the alley on 5th avenue, east of Webster, a totally remodeled nineteenth century building at the southeast corner of 4th avenue and Webster, and the diminutive storefront on the east side of Webster between 3rd and 4th avenues, presently occupied by the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation.

Sites important to the district are listed below:

- WT07-8. Jones and Goble Building- Peoples Bank; west side of Webster street between 3rd and 4th avenues; brick; rectangular; 4-bay facade; two stories; flat sloping roof; modified front facade with brick and stone trabeated openings replacing cast iron on ground floor in 1924, upper stories simplified flat arched openings, simple metal wall cornice; built in 1883 for the Post Office and office space on second--part of which was the land and farm loan office of Charles Cather; remodeled 1924.
- WT07-27 Miner Building- a significant Cather site, see individual listings.
- WT07-28. First National Bank Building west side of Webster between 3rd and 4th avenues; brick and cast-iron; rectangular; three-bay facade; two-stories; flat-sloping roof; transomed cast-iron facade at ground level, metal-arched panels set above flat-arched openings of the second level, flat brick cornice; 1884 (photo #39).
- WT07-29 Cotting and Miller building; west side of Webster between 3rd and 4th avenues; brick and cast-iron; rectangular; original seven-bay facade, presently only the north four bays are in original condition; two stories, flat-sloping roof; north store features cast-iron front, south store remodeled with brick; second level of north store with pressed-metal arched hoods over flat openings, corbelled brick lower cornice, original metal cornice removed; second level of south store remodeled with brick, simple flat-arched fenestration; central bay original, stairway to offices above, elaborate pedimented hood over upper window; 1886 (photo #40).

MAIN STREET HISTORIC DISTRICT, Continued

- WT07-30 State Bank Block, 401 N. Webster; brick; rectangular; three by six pilastered bay facade; two stories; flat-sloping roof; the one-by three-bay banking wall is raised above a basement, all other stores enter at street level; the separate store-rooms of the ground floor are demarked on the exterior by the manner in which fenestration occurs; the banking wall has high windows partially due to the height of the floor and are capped with stilted flat arches supported on iron pilasters, fenestration on the store entering from the south is capped with elaborate, broken hoods, fenestration on the east side stores is via cast-iron store fronts; second level fenestration is uniform in the use of round-arched hoods; corner entrance to bank marked with brick pilasters and pediment on consoles; corbelled brick and pressed-metal cornice, corner marked with pediment on giant consoles; 1883, (photo's #41, 42).
- WT07-31. Opera house; a significant Cather site, see individual listings.
- WT07-32. Moon Block; a significant Cather site, see individual listings.
- WT07-33 Outhwaite Building, 220 W. 4th avenue; brick; rectangular; three bay; two story; flat sloping roof; cast-iron store front, triple window above with pressed metal, stilted flat-arched hoods with broken molding; plain brick cornice; 1886.
- WT07-69. Newhouse building, east side Webster between 4th and 5th streets; brick and cast-iron; rectangular; three-bay; two stories; flat-sloping roof; cast-iron store front below, flat-arched windows above with pressed-metal hoods; pressed-metal cornice; c. 1888 (photos #42, 29).
- WT07-70. The City Pharmacy, a significant Cather site, see individual listings.
- WT07-71. northeast corner 4th avenue and Webster; brick; rectangular; two by six bays; two stories; flat-sloping roof; modern store front on west front and corner and on rear south facade; paired windows above, round arched with round-arched fanlights; simple brick cornice; c. 1900. (photos #42, 29).
- WT07-72. Farmers and Merchants Bank, a significant Cather site, see individual listings.
- WT07-115. Besse Auditorium, southwest corner Webster and 5th avenue; brick; rectangular; two stories; modernized store fronts on ground floor, original entrance remodeled; original industrial sash extant on upper floor except along north where some have been filled-in; paneled brick facade with semi-circular wall pediment on east with name carved in stone below; paneled brick parapet; 1920, (photo # 43).
- WT07-186 west side Webster street between 3rd and 4th avenues; brick; rectangular; four pilastered bays; two-story; flat sloping roof; brick facade with steel store-fronts, two paired, flat-arched windows per bay except second level entrance bay; simple corbelled brick wall cornice; c. 1920's (photo #44).

MAIN STREET HISTORIC DISTRICT, Continued

- WT07-187. west side Webster street between 3rd and 4th avenues; brick; rectangular; two bays (stores); two stories; flat-sloping roof; steel store fronts with transoms on ground floor; paired, flat-arched windows on second with simple brick surround; modest corbelled-brick wall cornice; remodeling of earlier building c. 1920's (photo #44).
- WT07-188. southwest corner of Webster and 4th avenue; essentially a duplicate of site #187; remodeling of earlier building c. 1920's (photo #44).
- WT07-189. east side Webster street between 4th and 5th avenues; brick; rectangular; three pilastered bays; one story; flat roof; remodeled brick and steel store front; paneled brick parapet wall above; c. 1920's.

Seven other properties extant in the district are compatible to the overall environment of the district. These are indicated as such on the map. The three non-conforming intrusions, an insignificant percentage of the total, were mentioned at the beginning of this discussion and are located on the following parcels of land: Original Town; Block 4, east 52½ feet lots 1-2; Block 31, lot 18, and lots 22-23.

8. SIGNIFICANCE: The village business center was described in many of Cather's writings, both as it was when the Cather family first moved to Red Cloud and as it was dramatically transformed during her childhood years there. Lucy Gayheart contains scenes drawn from downtown Red Cloud as does My Ántonia. Her short story, "Two Friends" takes place in the business district.

O Pioneers! begins with a scene on Main Street, much like it was when the family first arrived in town:

" . . .The main street was a deeply rutted road, now frozen hard, which ran from the squat red railway station. . .to the lumber yard. . .On either side of this road straggled two uneven rows of wooden buildings; the general merchandise stores, the two banks, the drug store, the feed store, the saloon, the post-office. The board sidewalks were gray with trampled snow, but at two o'clock in the afternoon the shopkeepers, having come back from dinner, were keeping well behind their frosty windows. The children were all in school, and there was nobody abroad in the streets but a few rough-looking country-men in course overcoats, with their long caps pulled down to their noses. Some of them had brought their wives to town, and now and then a red or a plaid shawl flashed out of one store into the shelter of another. At the hitch-bars along the street a few heavy work-horses, harnessed to farm wagons, shivered under their blankets." (O Pioneers!, pg. 3-4).

Cather's use of the downtown area in My Ántonia reflects more of Red Cloud's appearance shortly before she left for the University:

"Black Hawk, the new world in which we had come to live, was a clean, well-planted little prairie town, with white fences and good green yards about the dwellings, wide, dusty streets, and shapely little trees growing along the wooden sidewalks. In the centre of the town there were two rows of new brick 'store' buildings, a brick school-house, the court-house, and four white churches." (My Ántonia, pg. 145.)

WILLA CATHER THEMATIC GROUP:

MAIN STREET HISTORIC DISTRICT, Continued

Several of the buildings in the district are architecturally significant as individual entities while the district as a whole is significant as a collection. The Farmer's and Merchant's Bank, one of Nebraska's finest French Chateausque products, has been mentioned earlier (See WT07-72). Others which are significant products of late nineteenth century commercial architecture include the old First National Bank Building (site #28, photo # 39), the north half of the Cotting and Miller Building (site #29, photo # 40), the notable State Bank Block, an early multi-functional building with considerable architectural variation as a result (site #30, photo #41), the multi-stored Moon Block (site#32, photo # 26), and the smaller Newhouse and City Pharmacy Buildings (site #'s 69, 70; photo # 29).

The district exemplifies a significant grouping of late nineteenth and early twentieth century commercial architecture. Most important are the buildings along the west side of Webster from the southern to the northern boundaries of the district and the grouping at the northeast corner of Webster and 4th avenue. While considerable stylistic variety exists, the groupings tend toward Renaissance Revival in composition with the detailing, on the nineteenth century buildings, being predominately High Victorian Italianate. As a whole, the district represents one of the best preserved of such groupings in the State of Nebraska.

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA:

- Acreage: 8 acres (approx.)
- UTM Coordinates: A 14/E540940/N4437630
- B 14/E541060/N4437630
- C 14/E541060/N443740
- D 14/E540940/N4437400

Verbal Boundary Description: The Main Street Historic District comprises properties beginning at the south end of the alley (block #25) with the boundary line continuing north approximately 700' across fourth avenue, north through alley (block #5), then turning east approximately 340', then turning south at the alley (east of block #4) approximately 700' across fourth avenue into the alley (block #3), ending at Third avenue, and finally turning west for approximately 340'.

SEWARD STREET HISTORIC DISTRICT

62-4933

7. DESCRIPTION: The Seward Street Historic District is a well preserved section of Red Cloud including most of the finest homes built in the village during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This residential district, like others included in this thematic group, was identified as an area through the Cather literature and defined by the scatter of significant Cather sites and Cather-era sites on the map.

The district distinguishes itself from the other two residential districts primarily in the size of the houses and the architectural pretention assumed in their construction. While in many cases these features are not entirely marked, in others the differences are readily apparent.