

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only

received SEP 1 1983  
date entered OCT 13 1983

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

1. Name

historic Webb Brothers Block (preferred)

and/or common Sears Block

2. Location

street & number 317 East Main Ave. not for publication

city, town Bismarck vicinity of

state North Dakota code county Burleigh code

3. Classification

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

4. Owner of Property

name Burlington Northern Railroad (land) Conlin Gunville Partnership (building)

600 First Northwestern Bank Center  
street & number 175 North 27th Street 2728 Gregory Drive South  
Billings, Montana 59102

city, town Billings, Montana 59101 vicinity of state

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Burleigh County Courthouse -- Register of Deeds Office

street & number Burleigh County Courthouse

city, town Bismarck state North Dakota

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title N/A has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date federal state county local

depository for survey records

city, town state

## 7. Description

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

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Webb Block is a rectangular, two-story structure of Classical Revival inspired design, located on Main Avenue and Fourth Street in Bismarck. The exterior structural walls are brick. The window sills and heads, as well as some elevation ornamentation, are red sandstone. The north facade has an A-B-A-C-A rhythm, while the east elevation has an A-B-A rhythm. The "A" bays have squared parapets with corbelled dentils, ornate friezes and heavy projecting cornices. The east "B" bay has a gabled parapet, while the north bay once did but is now square. Both bays at one time had a central "Webb Bros" panel. These bays and the "C" bay have wreath and garland friezes extending across them. The south elevation is a simple brick wall without the stone sills, heads, or entablature embellishments. Some of the south windows have been bricked. Several entries and a freight elevator open on the ground floor of the south elevation.

Second story fenestration is one over one double-hung. On the north facade and east elevation, the center windows of each bay have decorative panels above them. The first floor east elevation has five blind bricked round-arched windows with corbelled arches above. Three windows in the "B" bay were originally blind windows; the others were closed later. The east elevation aluminum frame plate window replaced a round-arched window of original construction.

The fenestration and entry configuration on the ground floor north facade are not original. The aluminum frame plate glass windows and aluminum frame entries were installed in 1946, as was the black structural glass on the facade. The facade originally had five entries. The present east entry was originally an entry to the second story. It had single-story pilasters, capped with Ionic capitals and a small entablature on either side. Originally each "A" bay had a recessed entry with display windows on either side. There were also two such entries in the center of each half of the "B" bay. The present window and entry configuration was achieved during the 1946 remodeling.

The building's basement is currently used for storage and retail sales. The original building did not have a basement, but the 1906 addition was built with a full basement. In 1946 a small basement, about 50 X 25 feet, was excavated in the far northeast corner of the building. It had a small tunnel connecting it with the basement in the addition. The foundation around that basement was replaced at that time. In 1956 a full basement and new foundation was built for the entire original portion of the building.

The ground floor of the building is now used for retail sales. It has several small partition walls installed in 1982. A pressed metal ceiling remains intact on the first floor sales area. Mechanical and storage areas at the rear of the first floor do not have such a ceiling. The main stairway to the second floor is located against the west wall of the original building, and was rebuilt or possibly newly constructed in 1946. The entire building was gutted in 1945-46 when Sears-Roebuck & Co. leased the building and converted the interior into a single open space for retail sales.

The second story of the original building is similar to the first floor, except that there is no pressed metal ceiling. The area above the addition is currently used as office space. Partition walls, which do not extend to the ceiling, divide the space. The pressed metal ceiling remains in that area.

(See Continuation Sheet)

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Description:

Several additions have been made to the south side of the building. In 1936 a 22 X 35 foot garage was added on the west end of the south side. In 1967 a 11 X 16 foot boiler was added adjacent to it. In 1964 a large concrete block garage and service area was added to the center of the original building. The 1936 garage currently houses a work and tool area for building and business maintenance. The 1964 addition is used for storage.

The building's interior and exterior have been subject to other alterations. The interior space has primarily undergone changes in spatial division, and these alterations have obliterated all traces of the U.S. District Court courtroom which once occupied the second floor and the U.S. Post Office which once occupied parts of the first floor. The interior retains some of its historic feeling because of the pressed metal ceilings and the existing iron support posts which run through the building. The exterior has also undergone some changes. The addition of the black structural glass and the newer entry configuration to the first floor of the north facade are the most noticeable. However, even that part of the north facade retains some of its historic character because the present mullion spacing reflects the original store front design and the facade is intact above the first story.

## 8. Significance

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

**Specific dates** 1898-99 **Builder/Architect** Butler and Ryan; H. C. Rhud

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Webb Block is significant because of its architectural details, setting, and historical associations. The Classical Revival inspired structure was built in 1898-99 and a similarly designed addition was built in 1906. The massiveness and grand design convey a sense of Bismarck's importance and growing prosperity at the turn of the century, as do the nearby Northern Pacific Depot (National Register, 1977), the Patterson Hotel (National Register, 1976), and the E. G. Patterson Building (National Register, 1982). The Webb Block's exterior design and materials retain a high degree of material integrity, and the building continues to be a key structure in Bismarck's central business district.

The original Webb Block and its 1906 addition were built for Alexander McKenzie, long-time political "boss" of North Dakota and northern Dakota Territory. McKenzie served as the Burleigh County sheriff in the late 1870's and 1880's, but his association with the Northern Pacific Railroad and eastern capitalists gave him influence far beyond that of a county official. He is credited with masterminding the relocation of the Dakota territorial capital from Yankton to Bismarck in 1883. McKenzie lived his later years in a St. Paul, Minnesota, hotel suite, but he influenced North Dakota politics well into the early 1900's. True to his St. Paul connections, McKenzie contracted Butler and Ryan of St. Paul to build the 100 X 90 foot Webb Block on lands owned by the Northern Pacific in the heart of Bismarck's business district. In 1906 he contracted H. C. Rhud to build the 50 X 90 foot addition to the west for \$12,195.00. This addition and the Hare Block adjacent to it contain the original building's basic architectural style. A block to the west of the Hare Block was also to have had similar architectural detailing, but was never built.

The Webb Brothers Department Store occupied the east 75 feet of the building from 1899 to 1906. After 1906 this store occupied the east 100 feet of the building. The Webb funeral parlor probably occupied the east 25 feet of the addition until after 1906. After 1913 the funeral parlor occupied the entire first floor of the addition. William H. Webb, one of the founding brothers, was active in local governmental affairs, as a county commissioner from 1904 to 1910, chairman of the commission in 1907 and 1908, and as Bismarck's mayor from 1905 to 1907.

Several government offices have been associated with the Webb Block. The United States Post Office occupied the west 25 feet of the original building's ground floor from 1899 to 1906. In 1906 the post office was moved to the west 25 feet of the addition, where it remained until 1913. The United States District Court courtroom occupied the west 50 feet of the original building's second floor from 1899 to 1913. The second floor housed the offices of police magistrate John F. Fort, city attorney F. H. Register, and the area offices of the United States Surveyor General between at least 1908 and 1910. Other second floor offices were occupied by attorneys, real estate agents, insurance agents and others.

(See Continuation Sheet)

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation Sheet

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property .48 Acres

Quadrangle name Bismarck, ND

Quadrangle scale 7.5 Minutes

### UTM References

A 1 4 3 6 3 7 0 0 5 1 8 4 8 5 0  
Zone Easting Northing

B Zone Easting Northing

C Zone Easting Northing

D Zone Easting Northing

E Zone Easting Northing

F Zone Easting Northing

G Zone Easting Northing

H Zone Easting Northing

Verbal boundary description and justification Lots 1-6, Block 8 of the Original Plat of Edwinton (Bismarck), and a tract of land 150 feet east to west and 50 feet north to south, directly south of and adjoining Lots 1-6, Block 8 of the Original Plat of Edwinton (Bismarck). The (See Continuation Sheet)

### List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state code county code

state code county code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Sabin Peterson and Kurt P. Schweigert

organization Cultural Research & Management date June 6, 1983

street & number Box 2154 telephone (701) 258-1215

city or town Bismarck state ND 58502

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

\_\_\_ national  state  local

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

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title North Dakota State Historic Preservation Officer date July 25, 1983

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

*Beth Crovace*  
Keeper of the National Register

date 10/13/83

Attest:  
Chief of Registration

date

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Webb Brothers Department Store and funeral parlor vacated the building in 1945, as did the professional offices on the second floor. That year Sears-Roebuck & Co. began leasing the building from Webb Realty Company. Sears renovated the building and opened its store in September, 1946. Sears occupied the entire Webb Block and addition until 1977. Since then the building has been occupied by retail businesses, and is presently occupied by a furniture store.

The Webb Block is clearly significant in the history of Bismarck's commercial, political and governmental history. The building also is a substantial architectural contribution to the downtown business district; its ornate Classical Revival detail contrasts visually with Mission Revival, Sullivanesque, and High Victorian structures in the immediate area. The Webb Block retains a high degree of integrity of original design and is one of very few buildings in the central business district to clearly reflect its turn-of-the-century origins.

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Major Bibliographical References

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- 1972 History of the City of Bismarck, North Dakota: The First 100 Years 1872-1972. Bismarck Centennial Association, North Dakota.

1945 Bismarck Tribune; November 30, page 1; December 24, page 1.

1946 Bismarck Tribune; September 12, page 8.

1977 Bismarck Tribune, December 16,

1898 Bismarck Weekly Tribune, October 14, page 8; October 25, page 12; October 28, page 12; November 4, page 8; December 2, page 12; December 23, page 8.

1899 Bismarck Weekly Tribune, January 23, page 8; January 12, page 8; January 27, page 8; March 3, page 8.

1906 Bismarck Weekly Tribune, July 20, page 11; July 27, page 7; September 14, page 11; September 21, page 11; November 16, page 11; December 7, page 7; December 28, page 12.

1952 Fargo Forum, November 13.

Hennessy, W. B.

1917 History of North Dakota. Bismarck Tribune Company, North Dakota.

1941-1982 Burleigh County Auditor's Office, Assessment Records.

n.d. Burleigh County Register of Deeds Office. Records for Lots 1-6, Block 8, Original Plat of Edwinton (Bismarck).

n.d. City of Bismarck Building Inspector. Building permits for 315-325 Main Avenue.

Robinson, Elwyn B.

1966 History of North Dakota, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, Nebraska.

Sanborn Map and Publishing Company

Maps of Bismarck: September 1899; November 1904; January 1908; November 1912; February 1927.

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Major Bibliographical References

Telephone directories of Bismarck. Various dates and publishers, as on file at the State Historical Society of North Dakota.

Bjorklund, Elmer

1980 Personal Communication with Elmer Bjorklund, former manager of Sears & Roebuck Co. store in 1948, May 30, 1983.

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Verbal boundary description and justification:

combined tracts are on the Burlington Northern Railroad right of way south of Main Avenue and west of Fourth Street in Bismarck, North Dakota, and contain a total of 21,000 square feet for .48 acres.