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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

24

1. Name of Property

historic name: Slayton Mercantile Co.

other name/site number: N/A

2. Location

street & number: 23 Main Street

not for publication: na
vicinity: na

city/town: Lavina

state: Montana

code: MT

county: Golden Valley

code: 37

zip code: 59046

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.

Mark F. Sauber
Signature of certifying official/Title

10/23/2000
Date

Montana State Historic Preservation Office
State or Federal agency or bureau

(See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

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 W. Beall
Signature of the Keeper

12/28/00
Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property: Private

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing
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Category of Property: Building

1 building(s)

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: n/a

___ sites

___ structures

___ objects

Name of related multiple property listing: n/a

1 TOTAL

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions: COMMERCE/TRADE: department store

Current Functions: COMMERCE/TRADE: department store

7. Description

Architectural Classification:

Other: Western Commercial

Materials:

foundation: Concrete

walls: Brick

roof: Asphalt

other: Stone

Narrative Description

The Slayton Mercantile is located at the corner of Main and First Streets in downtown Lavina, Montana. Constructed in 1910, the large brick, two-story building is a good example of turn of the 20th century Western commercial architecture. Typical of the Western commercial style of that era, the two-part building features a horizontal division between the first and second floors with large display windows and few surface details. The building consists of two rectangular masses connected by one door. The larger (front) portion of the building measures 59 ft x 46 ft, while the rear portion measures 58 ft x 30 ft, and is lower in height. Both sections of the building have flat roofs, the east side containing two interior chimneys, and the west containing four. The primary (east) elevation is constructed of hard yellow brick, while the south, north, and west elevations are red brick.

The building's primary elevation faces east on Main Street. At the street level plate glass windows flank a double entry door that is set back into an alcove. A green awning extends the length of the front facade. The second story has five, evenly-spaced double-hung sash windows. The windows feature gray stone sills. Above each window is a flat brick arch, with raised keystones and end voussoirs. These arches tie into a soldier course directly below a decorative cornice. Both the soldier course and cornice extend across the east and south elevations, wrapping around the west corners of both south bays. Painted below the second story windows and above the awning of the façade is the name of the store, "SLAYTON MERCANTILE CO.," in white block lettering with a black background.

The south elevation faces First Street, and consists of two bays. The east bay contains two, segmental-arched, single door openings at the west end of the first story. A small, fixed, arched window is located immediately east of these doors. The second story of the east bay contains five evenly-spaced double-hung windows. These windows reflect the

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same flat-arch pattern as those on the façade. Above the decorative cornice, a sign panel is painted across the parapet, featuring the name of the store in white block letters on a black background: "SLAYTON MERCANTILE CO." The west bay of the south elevation is lower in height than the east bay, and recessed. A centered, segmental-arched opening at the first story contains double doors. Two small, evenly-spaced, fixed, segmental-arched windows are located on either side on the double doors. Above each of these windows, at the second story, is a segmental-arched, double-hung window. All windows on the south elevation feature gray stone sills.

The west elevation faces the alley and contains one segmental-arched entryway on the north side. A fixed-sash window, echoing those found on the south elevation, is centered high in the first story level. Like the south elevation, the north elevation consists of two bays, and has similar fenestration. Originally, the first floor of the west bay contained three, evenly-spaced, small, arched, fixed-pane windows, which are now in-filled with brick. At the second story level, the west bay contains three, evenly-spaced, double-hung sash windows with segmental arched brick lintels and sills. Five similar window openings, only with concrete sills, are located at the second story of the east bay. These openings have been in-filled with brick as well.

On the interior, the first floor is devoted to commercial space. Upstairs the two large rooms are unchanged except for a small amount of water damage. The interior detailing in the store is very well preserved with a pressed tin ceiling, the oak rolling ladders and the original money trolleys that carried payments to the balcony office. The potbellied "frost-killer" stove is still located in its original place on the main floor. The wood shelving remains on the walls and center divider, and the antique elk head remains mounted above the entrance. The original entrance doors feature vintage brass hardware. The elevator that was installed new in 1910 remains and is still used to transport items between floors. The first room is on the second floor is finished with plastered ceiling and walls, which retain the original light green paint, and a wood floor. At one time a person could view the office area through a skylight, but this feature was removed. A sliding sheet metal door and a short wood staircase separates the two rooms. The second room features a wood floor and exposed brick walls. This room served as a harness repair shop, collapsible harness hooks remain attached to the exposed ceiling rafters.

Integrity

The Slayton Mercantile has stood for 90 years, and has excellent historic integrity. It still retains most all of the original exterior design features including original masonry, fenestration, doorways and historic signage. Through the years the building has sustained a few minor exterior alterations including the removal of the original wood siding below the storefront windows and replacement with foam and masonite, and the removal of small fixed pane windows. The original entry alcove was enclosed with a wood and glass vestibule, and a screen door. On the south elevation, a modern sheet metal door was installed in front of the original wooden door, and a metal door was placed in front of the original wood sliding door located on the west elevation. Basement windows on the west elevation were filled in with brick, however the brick window wells are still in place. On the north elevation, five second-story windows and three first-story windows were in-filled with brick.

The interior retains a high degree of integrity. The store features the original pressed tin ceiling, rolling oak ladders, money trolley, wood flooring, wood shelving, potbellied "frost-killer" stove, brass fixtures, original paint and elevator. Several modifications included the reuse of historic material. The stairs leading to the second floor were relocated from the front of the store to the rear and the original checkout counter was moved from the north wall to the southeast wall

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near the front. Other changes include the removal of a short wall and original shelving located in the northeast corner near the front of the store, and shelves along the south wall were removed to accommodate a cooler. The original balcony office was altered. Stairs were added to access the basement from inside the building. A public restroom was added in the rear of the store. An island was added near the front for a soda fountain machine.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria: A, B, C

Areas of Significance: Commerce, Settlement
Development and Architecture

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): N/A

Period(s) of Significance: 1910-1950

Significant Person(s): Daniel Webster Slayton

Significant Dates: 1910

Cultural Affiliation: n/a

Architect/Builder: Mr. Crow

Narrative Statement of Significance

The Slayton Mercantile has stood in the heart of Lavina for 90 years, a center of community and a reflection of the entrepreneurial spirit of its original owner, Daniel W. Slayton. One of the first settlers in the area and an early figure in the business community, Slayton left an indelible imprint on the history of this small town. Active in business, finance, agriculture and politics, he was a distinguished citizen who helped establish the young community, while shaping its future. The Mercantile was a prominent business in Lavina, then as now, providing for the needs of the town residents and surrounding farm and ranch community. The building's imposing architecture reflects its central role in the community, while providing an unspoiled example of an early 20th century Western commercial building. For these reasons of local significance, the Slayton Mercantile is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, under to criteria A, B and C.

Daniel Webster Slayton was born in Concoton, Steuben County, New York, November 6, 1862. He grew up in New York and Fairfax County, VA. In 1884 at the age of 22, Mr. Slayton traveled to Montana to join his brother Dalon in White Sulphur Springs. Daniel found himself in Livingston, Montana, without transportation to White Sulphur Springs until the following week. Instead of waiting he walked the 75 miles in two days. Mr. Slayton began working on the Catlin Ranch, five miles from White Sulphur Springs. The Slayton brothers soon settled near Lavina the in 1885. Daniel located a homestead 12 miles north of Lavina on Currant Creek, and began raising sheep.¹

During the fall of 1887, Mr. Slayton wrote to his fiancée asking her to join him in Billings, Montana. On November 8, 1887, Daniel W. Slayton and Miss Lizzie Ellis were married in Billings. The couple returned to the log cabin built on Currant Creek. The couple had five children: Lydia, Daniel Ellis, John Albert, Ernest Gardner and Ruth. In 1896, Daniel built a cement blockhouse, known as the "White House," down stream from the original log cabin.²

By 1897, he had become a successful sheep rancher and businessman with 5500 sheep and 2000 lambs. Sheep shearing sheds were built and 30 to 40 thousand sheep were brought to Slayton to be sheared at shearing time. In 1902, Mr. Slayton acquired the Trask Ranch, and a two-story frame wing was added to the original log cabin and was then covered with board siding.³

The town of Lavina was established in 1883 with one log structure featuring a combination dwelling, hotel, storeroom and post office. In 1885 the log structure housed several residents and a branch store of T.C. Power and Co., also in 1885 the first bridge crossing the Musselshell River was constructed.⁴ In 1907, the Milwaukee Railroad and depot were constructed east of the original Lavina townsite. The railroad attracted other businesses to new Lavina and in 1908 the

1 "Death Claims Dan Slayton Montana Pioneer," *Roundup Record*, September 9, 1927; Albie Gordon, et.al., *Dawn in the Golden Valley*, 1971, p. 142.

2 *Dawn in the Golden Valley*, pp. 142-143.

3 *Ibid.* p. 143.

4 Perley Milton Silloway, *Silloway's History of Central Montana: A Review of the Development of Montana's Inland Empire*,

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Adams Hotel and the original Slayton Mercantile were constructed. In 1909, Dan Slayton established the first Bank of Lavina and a sheep shearing plant. Within a few years Lavina became a thriving economic center with the addition of the Radford Hotel, stock yard, meat market, livery, lumber yard, cafes, harness shop, two grain elevators, flour mill, real estate sales, telephone, blacksmith, tailor shop, green house, churches, school and Slayton Wool Warehouse.⁵

On June 9, 1910 the original wood frame Slayton Mercantile burned to the ground. Slayton and Belcher suffered a \$60,000.00 loss, only one third of which was covered by insurance. The construction of the new store was contracted to a Mr. Crow of Billings, Montana for \$15,000.00. The bricks for the outside walls of the new building were purchased from F.W. Handel of Musselshell; the inside layer of bricks was fired in a kiln near the Musselshell River. The new building was completed two months after the fire on August 4, 1910: "Since the magnificent new building of the Slayton Mercantile Co., has been completed, Lavina seems to have taken a new lease on life."⁶

The new building housed the post office and Mr. Slayton was appointed Postmaster in 1910. The store offered a variety of goods and services during its years in operation. Slayton Mercantile supplied the needs of homesteaders, farmers, and ranchers of the area. The mercantile offered groceries, school supplies, kitchen cabinets and a harness shop. In 1916, Slayton Mercantile Co. began selling Ford cars and a year later sold farm implements and Titan Tractors. Slayton Mercantile expanded, opening stores in the booming homestead towns of Emory, Montana in 1912, and in 1916, a third store in Cushman, Montana. In 1917, Herb Belcher sold his interest in the store to Daniel W. Slayton. Mr. Slayton held the controlling interest in Slayton Mercantile until his death in 1927.⁷

Daniel Slayton was an influential citizen in the emerging town of Lavina, Montana and a prominent member of the business community. In 1897, he was elected a county commissioner of Fergus County. In 1910, he was elected to represent Fergus County in the State Legislature. It was this legislative session that was instrumental in bringing about the formation of Musselshell County. Mr. Slayton was elected twice to the State Senate in newly established Musselshell County beginning 1916. In May of 1920 he entered the race for Governor as a Republican candidate, but was defeated during the primaries.⁸

In 1914, a town was named for Daniel Slayton. "Slayton, the new town at the junction of the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul and the Billings and Northern, now has a three story depot with a power elevator for transferring freight and baggage from one road to another. Three telegraph operators will be employed at the depot and it will be possible at all

Lewiston, Montana, Fergus County Democrat, Inc., 1935?, p. 49.

⁵ *Dawn in the Golden Valley*, pp. 136, 143-144.

⁶ "Lavina has \$60,000 Fire," *Roundup Record*, June 10, 1910; "Contract Let," *Roundup Record*, July 1, 1910; "New Slayton Mercantile," *Roundup Record*, August 10, 1910; "Lavina Doings," *Roundup Record*, November 11, 1910.

⁷ "Cushman Store," *Ryegate Weekly Reporter*, December 16, 1915; "Branch Store established at Emory," *Roundup Recorder*, May 24, 1912; "News Notes from Lavina 'The White City,'" *Roundup Recorder*, March 3, 1916; "Lavina - 'The White City,'" *Roundup Record*, April 19, 1918; Advertisement, Slayton Mercantile Co., *Roundup Record*, December 11, 1908.

⁸ "Death Claims Dan Slayton Montana Pioneer," *Roundup Record*, September 9, 1927; "Senator D. W. Slayton Announces His Candidacy for Governor," *The Lavina Independent*, May 14, 1920; "Senator Slayton Enters the Arena," *Montana Record-Herald*, May, 1920; "The Winners in Musselshell County," *Roundup Record*, November 10, 1916; "Asbridge defeats Slayton for Senator by about 170 Votes," *Roundup Record*, November 8, 1912.

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times for passengers to obtain information regarding trains.”⁹

Mr. Slayton served the community in a number of ways during his lifetime. He was a leader in numerous organizations including: President of the Musselshell County Division Club, President of the Bank of Lavina, Director of the Citizens State Bank in Roundup, President of the Lavina Commercial Club, President of Mutual Telephone Company of Lavina, Director of the Citizens Loan and Insurance Company of Roundup, and President of the Lavina Cemetery Association. In addition, Mr. Slayton was a successful rancher and maintained a prosperous sheep shearing operation for many years.¹⁰

In 1956, Mr. and Mrs. Jim Cocayne operated the store as Lavina Country Store, retailing groceries and hardware. In 1998, the store was purchased by George and Charlotte Ainslie and now operates under the original name of Slayton Mercantile Co. As of 1997, Slayton Mercantile is one of the last businesses remaining in Lavina, Montana.

⁹ *Hedges Herald*, March 24, 1914.

¹⁰ “Division Club Elects Officers,” *Roundup Record*, February 18, 1910; Advertisement, Bank of Lavina, *Roundup Record*, April 21, 1911; “D.W. Slayton Elected Director of the Citizen’s State Bank of Roundup,” *Roundup Record*, February 2, 1911; Advertisement, Citizen’s State Bank, *Roundup Record*, April 7, 1911; “Lavina Doings,” March 17, 1911, June 8, 1917; July 20, 1917; May 31 1918; “Death Claims Dan Slayton Montana Pioneer,” *Roundup Record*, September 9, 1927; *Dawn in the Golden Valley*, p. 182

Slayton Mercantile

Name of Property

Golden Valley 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:

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: Less than 1

UTM References:	Zone	Easting	Northing
	12	658805	5128842

Legal Location (Township, Range & Section(s)): NE4SE4SW4 of Section 2, Township 6 North, Range 22 East

Verbal Boundary Description

The Slayton Mercantile Company is located in the NE1/4 of the SE1/4 of the SW1/4 of Section 2, T6N, R22E, and includes the south twenty-three feet of Lot 12 and all of Lot 13, Block 4, of the Lavina Original Townsite.

Boundary Justification

The boundary is drawn, based on legally recorded boundary lines, to include the land surrounding the building that has been historically associated with the building and conveys the property's historic setting.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Paige Hoskinson, Intern

organization: SHPO

street & number: P.O. Box 201202

city or town: Helena state: MT

date: 4/26/2000

telephone: (406) 444-7715

zip code: 59601

Property Owner

name/title: George and Charlotte Ainslie

street & number: 202 First Ave. East

city or town: Lavina state: MT

telephone: (406) 636-2391

zip code: 59046

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Bibliographic Sources

Books:

Gordon, Albie, Lehfeltd, Margaret, and Morsanny, Mary. *Dawn in the Golden Valley*, (Publisher unknown), 1971.

Silloway, Perley Milton. *Silloway's History of Central Montana: A Review of the Development of Montana's Inland Empire* (Lewiston, Montana: Fergus County Democrat, Inc.), 1935.

Newspapers:

The Roundup Recorder, 1908-1928.

Montana Record-Herald, May 1920.

Billings Gazette, April 2, 1932.

Lavina Independent, May 14, 1920.