

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 any 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 Caledonia Commercial Historic District

other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 101-205 E.Main; 101-108 S.Kingston not for publication N/A
city or town Caledonia vicinity N/A
state Minnesota code MN county Houston code 55
zip code 55921

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.)

[Signature] 6/23/94
Signature of certifying official Ian R. Stewart Date
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer
Minnesota Historical Society
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 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

- entered in the National Register Guillermo Rapsley 8/5/94
 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): _____

GR Signature of Keeper Date
of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
 public-local
 public-State
 public-Federal

Category of Property (Check only one box)

- building(s)
 district
 site
 structure
 object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>10</u>	<u>5</u> buildings
_____	_____ sites
_____	_____ structures
_____	_____ objects
<u>10</u>	<u>5</u> Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

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

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: DOMESTIC
COMMERCE/TRADE

Sub: hotel
financial institution
specialty store
department store
restaurant

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: DOMESTIC
COMMERCE/TRADE

FUNERARY

Sub: multiple dwelling
professional
specialty store
mortuary

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

LATE VICTORIAN: Queen Anne; Italianate;
Stick/Eastlake; Renaissance

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Stone
roof Other: composite
walls Brick
Stone
other

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

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- 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.

Criteria Considerations (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or a 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.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

- Architecture
- Commerce
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Period of Significance 1872-1943

Significant Dates 1879

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

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

(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 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

Name of repository: Houston County Historical Society, Caledonia, MN

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 2.1 acres

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing	
1	<u>15</u>	<u>621220</u>	<u>4932280</u>	3	<u>15</u>	<u>621410</u>	<u>4932130</u>
2	<u>15</u>	<u>621410</u>	<u>4932280</u>	4	<u>15</u>	<u>621220</u>	<u>4932130</u>
	<u>See continuation sheet.</u>						

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 Demian Hess, Historian
organization Hess, Roise and Company
street & number 405 Cedar Avenue South, Suite 200
city or town Minneapolis state MN zip code 55454
telephone (612) 338-1987
date 26 March 1993

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps Caledonia, Minn. 1980
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 the 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 the 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 Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
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Section 7 Page 1 Caledonia Commercial Historic District
Houston County, MN

DESCRIPTION

The Caledonia Commercial Historic District contains fifteen buildings (10 contributing, 5 non-contributing) lying in a cluster along Main and Kingston Streets in the heart of downtown Caledonia. With the exception of three non-contributing buildings, all of the district properties were constructed during the last quarter of the nineteenth century or the first decade of the twentieth century. Almost all are constructed of red brick, although four are built of stone. As a rule, the buildings are fairly plain, with flat facades and simple window treatments. Most ornamentation is confined to the roof lines, and appears in the form of brick or metal cornices and brick parapets. While none of the structures was built according to an academic style, the cornices, parapets and other ornamental elements recall Late Victorian styles, particularly the Queen Anne and Italianate. Many of the buildings have been altered on the ground floor, but these alterations are generally minor and reversible. Only two properties, the Kranz Building and the Belden Building, have been so modified as to have lost integrity. With close construction dates, similar design elements, and good integrity, the district possesses a strong sense of cohesion and uniformity. It should be noted, however, that the loss of historic properties between the Abbotts Block and the Schansburg and Solberg Building, as well as to the east of the Brimeyer Building, has created gaps in the Main Street streetscape. While these gaps are not serious at this time, any further loss of historic fabric could significantly decrease the sense of density which is so important to creating an historic district's sense of place. Future alterations must be reviewed carefully to determine whether they negatively affect the district's integrity.

The following summary description of each building is numbered to correspond to the map enclosed with the nomination and entitled: "Caledonia Commercial Historic District."¹

- 1. Historic Name: Abbotts Block**
Current Name: Rice Pharmacy
Address: 103 E. Main Street
Date: 1891
Eligibility: contributing

Two storefronts wide, this is a two-story brick building with Queen Anne details. On the lower floor, a central doorway

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provides access to the second floor and is flanked by shop fronts. Each front originally featured a central, recessed doorway flanked by angled side lights and large display windows. The east storefront has been boarded and the doorway moved to the far east side. The frieze for the west storefront has been covered by metal siding. On the second floor, the facade is composed of a central window, located above the central doorway, with three identical windows set to either side. The windows are tall, narrow and rectangular with stone sills and flush stone hoods. Four hounds-tooth brick courses articulate the frieze. The building is capped by a metal parapet decorated with a modillioned cornice and a central, finialed, pediment. A denticulated cornice lies below the pediment, and the tympanum bears the inscription: "Abbotts, 1891." Pedimented, knobbed posts decorated with floral bulls-eyes and set on brackets mark each corner of the roof and stand to each side of the central pediment.

The Abbotts Block was probably built either by Thomas Abbotts or his son, William H. Abbotts, in 1891. While Thomas Abbotts was an iron worker by trade, the building was apparently not built to house his shop but rather to be leased to other businesses. Throughout the 1890s the ground floor shops were rented to a clothing store and a millinery establishment, while the upper floor served as offices for a photographer and a fraternal order. Around 1900, the western half of the building was rented to a drugstore, and it appears to have continued to serve this purpose until the present day. The eastern half of the building was used by a bank for a large portion of the 1910s and 1920s. This section of the building is currently vacant.²

2. **Historic Name: Wagner Insurance Building**
Current Name: same
Address: 111 E. Main Street
Date: 1961
Eligibility: non-contributing

This is a one-story brick-veneered commercial building erected in 1961. Although it is a good example of 1960s commercial architecture, it was built after the district's period of significance and is non-contributing.

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- 3. Historic Name: Belden Building**
Current Name: Bubbers Jewelry
Address: 115 E. Main Street
Date: c.1876
Eligibility: non-contributing

The Belden Building is a two-story stone edifice. The first-floor storefront consists of a central entryway set between corrugated metal panels and flanked by large plate-glass display windows. The corner boards on the first floor have been covered by a corrugated metal veneer. The storefront is sheltered by a cantilevered metal awning. The second-floor facade is stuccoed and pierced by three evenly spaced tall, rectangular windows. The original corner boards are still visible on the second-floor level, and appear as fluted pilasters with capitals. The cornice has either been removed or is covered by the single sheet of siding now located in that area. Due to these alterations, the Belden Building has lost integrity, and is a non-contributing property.

J.J. Belden, a tinsmith, and his wife, Anstis (or Austis) F. Belden, purchased the lot where the Belden Building now stands in 1876. The property had belonged to Charles A. Coe, who had opened a drugstore on this site in 1874. Considering that Coe sold the property for only \$600, the stone building had probably not yet been erected. The Beldens probably constructed this building shortly after their purchase. In 1880, their son, William F. Belden, began renting the property to continue Coe's drug business. The venture prospered and William F. Belden acquired two partners, I.F. Fullerton and DeCosta Rhines. William inherited the stone building in 1903, when his mother died. In the same year, he incorporated his business as the Belden-Fullerton-Rhines Medical Company. Producing both medical and veterinary drugs, the company remained in business through the 1920s.³

- 4. Historic Name: greenhouse**
Current Name: same
Address: between 115 and 123 E. Main Street
Date: 1984
Eligibility: non-contributing

Built in 1984, this is a tubular steel frame and plastic greenhouse with a one-story wooden front. Due to its late

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construction date, the building is non-contributing.

5. **Historic Name:** Schansburg and Solberg Building
Current Name: Leighton Brothers Building
Address: 123 E. Main Street
Date: 1902
Eligibility: contributing

The Schansburg and Solberg Building is a two-story brick building with Queen Anne styling. The street-level storefront features a central doorway with a transom and sidelights flanked by display windows. An entrance leading to the second-floor stairs is set to the west of the storefront. A canvas awning shelters the lower floor, and the area above the storefront has been covered by vertical siding. The second-floor facade is pierced by three evenly spaced, rectangular windows separated by wide brick pilasters. Stone belt courses are set above and below the windows. A brick arch springs from the belt course immediately above each window. The building features brick corbelling and a metal, modillioned cornice. Finials are mounted at each end of the roofline. Buttress-like brick brackets appear to support a central cast-iron entablature which is embossed with the name "Leighton Bros." This name was apparently added in 1925, when the building was purchased by the Leighton Brothers firm.

C.H. Schansburg, Severt J. Solberg and John Solberg purchased this lot and a wood frame building from Daniel Hainz in 1898. The partners operated a meat market and grocery, and erected a brick building in 1902 to better house their business. Severt, apparently the last living partner, died without a will in 1913 and the building passed to his son, Helmer Solberg, who also operated it as a meat market. In 1925, Michael Leighton and Joseph P. Leighton purchased the building for a grocery.⁴

6. **Historic Name:** Zimmerhagl Building
Current Name: Torgerson Paint and Floor Covering
Address: 131 E. Main Street
Date: 1906
Eligibility: contributing

The Zimmerhagl Building is a two-story brick edifice with Queen Anne elements. Although originally built as a double storefront, the ground floor is currently used as a single shop featuring a central doorway flanked by 1/1 sidelights and large plate-glass

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display windows. A shingled awning shelters the ground floor. The second floor is separated from the first by a line of brick molding. Above this molding, the facade is pierced by four evenly spaced, tall, narrow, rectangular windows with stone sills and lintels. A modillioned cast-iron cornice with rosettes hides the building's low-pitched gable roof. The cornice features a central pediment with the date "1906" in the tympanum. The name "A. Zimmerhagl" is written in the cornice just below the pediment.

Anton Zimmerhagl constructed this double storefront building in 1906, locating his barbershop in the western half and renting the eastern section. Born in Austria in 1858, Zimmerhagl emigrated to the United States with his mother in 1872, first settling in LaCrosse, Wisconsin. After apprenticing as a barber, Zimmerhagl moved to Caledonia in 1876 to open his own shop. He remained in business until his death in 1929. The Zimmerhagl Building is currently used by a paint and floor covering company.⁵

7. **Historic Name:** Spafford Williams House
Current Name: vacant
Address: 137 E. Main Street
Date: c.1890
Eligibility: contributing

A two-story building with Stick/Eastlake Style elements, the Williams House features a low-pitched gable roof and a centered gable on the front facade. The lower floor is sheltered by a porch awning supported on wooden brackets. Due to alterations, the street-level facade displays an asymmetrical arrangement of doors and windows. Recently, several of the window openings have been boarded and two have been infilled with industrial glass block. The location of the window openings on the second floor has not been altered. On this level, three windows are grouped to either side of a central window. All the fenestration is tall, narrow, and rectangular with stone sills and lintels. A small, 1/1, rectangular window is located in the centered gable which also features decorative fretwork. The hotel's overhanging eaves are supported by wooden modillions. A two-story, gable-roofed, wooden addition is attached to the north side of the building and runs northward for approximately 60 feet along Marshall Street. The addition appears to have been constructed shortly after the hotel was built to house a kitchen and dining room.

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This was originally the site of a wooden hotel building known as the Barnes House. Spafford Williams acquired the hotel in 1874 and continued to operate it under its original name until at least 1882.⁶ In 1904, a promotional tract observed that the Barnes House had been "replaced a few years ago by a fine brick hotel now known as the Williams House."⁷ Insurance maps indicate that the current brick hotel was standing by 1894, suggesting that it was built c.1890. The property remained in use as a hotel until the 1980s, when it fell vacant.

- 8. Historic Name: Koob Building**
Current Name: McCormick Funeral Home
Address: 203/205 E. Main Street
Date: 1872
Eligibility: contributing

The Koob Building is a three-story, stone, Italianate building. The original ground-floor storefront has been infilled with stone, and is currently composed of a central doorway flanked by small, rectangular, single-pane windows. The second-floor facade is pierced by four evenly spaced segmental-arched window openings with stone sills. The third floor features four window openings with stone stills and semi-circular arches with keystones. The window openings vary in height from the second to the third floors, the upper openings being slightly shorter. On both of these floors, the two central openings have been boarded with vertical planking. The outer window openings have also been infilled with planking to allow the installation of smaller, 1/1, double hung sashes. The building does not have a cornice, and no historic photographs are available to indicate whether one was ever installed.

Nicholas Koob purchased this lot at the northeast corner of Main and Marshall in 1867. Koob retired his mortgage for the property in 1871, and the following year he constructed a stone building. A dry goods dealer, Koob located his shop in the ground floor and used the upper floors as a residence. The building currently serves as a mortuary.⁸

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9. **Historic Name: commercial building**
Current Name: commercial building
Address: 138 E. Main Street
Date: 1969
Eligibility: non-contributing

This is a one-story commercial building with a shallow-pitch gable roof, brick-veneered front, and vertical corrugated-metal siding. Built in 1969, the property is currently used as a day care center. Due to its late construction date, the building is non-contributing.

10. **Historic Name: Kranz Building**
Current Name: Caledonia Bakery
Address: 124 E. Main Street
Date: 1875
Eligibility: non-contributing

The Kranz Building has been substantially remodelled several times. Currently, it is a two-story stone building with no distinguishable stylistic elements. The first-floor storefront has been covered with vertical planking, into which is set a central doorway and flanking display windows. The second floor is stuccoed and features a square, single-pane central window. The outlines of two narrow windows are still visible on each side of the central fenestration. Due to these alterations, the building has lost integrity and is non-contributing.

John Kranz constructed the building in 1875 to serve as an inn and boarding residence, called the Northwestern House.⁹ Its appearance at that time is not known. The First National Bank purchased the building about 1900, and continued to use it until the late 1920s or early 1930s. Historic photographs of the building while it was a bank show that it sported many Classical Revival elements, including a massive pedimented and modillioned cornice and, on the second floor, an enclosed and pedimented balcony flanked by windows with pedimented hoods.

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- 11. Historic Name: Brimeyer Building**
Current Name: barbershop
Address: 118 E. Main Street
Date: 1891
Eligibility: contributing

This is a two-story Queen Anne style stone building with a brick front. The first-floor storefront features a central doorway flanked by plate-glass display windows. To the east of the storefront, a doorway provides access to the second floor. The second-floor facade is pierced by four tall, narrow, segmental-arched window openings grouped in pairs. A metal cornice ornaments the roof line and features modillions and a central pedimented parapet. Finials are located at each end of the cornice and central parapet. The pediment features a denticulated cornice embossed with decorations and the date "1891."

Pierre (or Peter) Brimeyer purchased this lot late in 1890, constructing the current building the following year. Deed restrictions required the building to be constructed of brick or stone, have a depth of seventy feet, and stand eight feet from the south line of Main Street. Brimeyer was a tinsmith by trade, and he used the building both as a residence and a shop. His wife also operated a millinery parlor in the same building. Brimeyer's daughters, Theresa and Luisa, inherited the property in 1914 and continued to operate their mother's millinery shop until the 1950s. The ground floor of the building is currently used as a barbershop while the upper floor is subdivided for apartments.¹⁰

- 12. Historic Name: Sprague Bank**
Current Name: office space
Address: 108/110 E. Main Street; 101 S. Kingston Street
Date: 1902
Eligibility: contributing

The Sprague Bank is a massive, two-story, brick commercial building with ornamental detailing recalling the Renaissance Revival style preferred for large, monumental and institutional buildings. For visual effect, the building relies more on its size and siting than its detailing, being little more than a brick cube with a large denticulated brick cornice. The Main Street facade is symmetrically arranged around a central,

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slightly projecting pavilion. On the ground floor, the pavilion is pierced by a recessed entrance and flanked by large display windows. On the second floor, the pavilion features a projecting bay window flanked by arched windows with arched stone lintels. To each side of the pavilion, the facade is pierced by three windows with stone lintels and sills. Above the cornice, the pavilion is crowned by a low parapet with stone cartouches inscribed with the construction date of 1902. As on Main Street, the Kingston Street facade features a slightly projecting pavilion. An arched entry pierces the pavilion on the ground floor and is highlighted by a dramatic arched stone lintel springing from brick pilasters. Display windows with stone lintels and sills originally pierced the facade to either side of the pavilion, two being located to the south and three to the north. These have since been remodelled, some being infilled to form smaller windows, and others being converted to doorways. On the second floor, two windows with arcaded stone lintels are located in the pavilion directly above the entrance. Six windows pierce the second-floor facade to the north of the pavilion and four to the south. All are tall, narrow and rectangular with stone sills and lintels. The upper portions of these windows have been filled with brick to allow the installation of shorter windows with 1/1 lights.

Ara David Sprague, in partnership with J.C. Easton of Chatfield, opened the first bank in Caledonia on this site in 1875. Sprague first came to Caledonia in 1854 to enter the general merchandise business, having already made a successful living as a patent medicine salesman in the Chicago area. The bank proved to be a success, and Sprague soon purchased his partner's interest. In 1889, the old bank building was destroyed by fire. Sprague moved the business temporarily into the Lommen Block across Kingston while a new building was planned and built. Although worn and difficult to read, date stones set in the central parapet of the north facade indicate that the building was completed in 1902; however, the banking operation apparently did not move into its new quarters until 1904. After Ara D. Sprague died in 1909, his sons took over management of the bank and it remained a family institution until 1969. In 1979, the board of directors finally decided to build a new bank building further south on Kingston Street, judging the old property to be obsolete. The historic Sprague Bank Building has been subdivided and is currently rented for office space.¹¹

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13. **Historic Name:** 1877 Lommen Building
Current Name: DeWitz Block
Address: 102 S. Kingston Street
Date: 1877
Eligibility: contributing
14. **Historic Name:** 1883 Lommen Building
Current Name: DeWitz Block
Address: 106 S. Kingston Street
Date: 1883
Eligibility: contributing
15. **Historic Name:** 1900 Lommen Building
Current Name: DeWitz Block
Address: 108 S. Kingston Street
Date: 1900
Eligibility: contributing

The Lommen Block consists of three attached brick buildings, all constructed by John P. Lommen in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The buildings have been counted individually because they were constructed at different times, were rented separately, and differ in appearance.

The 1877 Building is a simple brick property with Queen Anne detailing. Its single storefront contains a central recessed entry with a transom and angled side lights, flanked by plate-glass display windows with multiple-pane transoms. The second-floor facade is pierced by three evenly spaced, segmental-arched window openings with stone sills. The building is surmounted by a brick parapet which features a central brick pediment and four evenly spaced, buttress-like brick brackets capped by stone finials. Recessed panels are set in the parapet between the brackets and are currently filled with concrete.

The 1883 Building stands two stories in height and has more ornamentation than the earlier Lommen Building, featuring Italianate and Queen Anne details. The structure follows the same general design as the first, being a single storefront in width with a central recessed entry flanked by sidelights and display windows. A second doorway, providing access to the second floor, is located between the 1883 building and the 1877 building. A window with a semicircular arch is set above this doorway on the second floor. Over the storefront, the second-

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floor facade is pierced by four tall, narrow window openings with stone sills and semi-circular arches. The two central windows are paired beneath a large brick arch. The building features a pedimented brick parapet with finials and brackets identical to those on the 1877 building. The tympanum of the pediment carries the date "1883."

The 1900 Building is a simple, two-story, commercial brick building with little ornamentation. Its facade projects beyond the surface of the earlier buildings, to which it is attached by means of a canted north corner. The building features two storefronts separated by a slender brick pillar. Each storefront consists of a doorway to the north and a plate-glass display window to the south. The southernmost storefront includes a second doorway located to the north of the main entry, which provides access to the second floor. Three tall, narrow, rectangular windows are grouped above each storefront on the second floor. Stone belt courses run directly above and below the windows, and the resulting difference in color and texture recalls the Queen Anne style. A stone plaque is set above the second-floor windows of the northernmost storefront, and bears the name "J.P. Lommen." A date stone is set at the same level just to the north of this plaque, in the canted corner of the building. The shops are surmounted by a brick cornice and low parapet.

John P. Lommen opened a general merchandise store with a partner at the southwest corner of Kingston and Main in 1877. Lommen added buildings to the south side of his shop in 1883 and 1900, renting the space to other merchants. Theodore H. DeWitz purchased the entire Lommen Block in 1924. DeWitz had been a merchant in Caledonia since 1896, first as a harness maker, and then as a shoe seller. He continued to sell shoes in the new building, in addition to groceries and men's clothing. His son, Harold DeWitz, maintained the business until 1975. Harold then sold the block to his son, Thomas DeWitz, who sold shoes as well as auto parts until the 1980s.¹²

Notes

1. Information on each building was drawn from material on file at the Houston County Historical Society, located in Caledonia, Minnesota. The following Sanborn Insurance Maps also provided

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information: 1894 (sheet 2); 1900 (sheet 2); 1909 (sheet 2); June 1915 (sheet 5); 1926 (sheet 2). Additional sources will be noted in the description of each building as appropriate.

2. Charles S. Bryant, History of Houston County (Minneapolis: Minnesota History Company, 1882), 362; Georgina Lommen, The Past is Our Heritage: Caledonia Centennial (LaCrosse, Wisconsin: LaCrosse Printing Co., 1954), 19; Houston County Historical Society, Houston County History (Dallas: Taylor Publishing Co., 1982), 57.

3. Refer to the following deeds in the County Recorder's Office, Houston County Courthouse, Caledonia, Minnesota (documents hereafter identified solely by book and page number): Book 19, 80; Book 60, 326-327; Bryant, History of Houston County, 363, 366; 50th Anniversary Historical Souvenir of Houston County (Caledonia, Minnesota: P.J. Theisen, printer, 28 September 1904); Lommen, The Past is Our Heritage, 20.

4. Book 65, 181; Book 104, 70; Book 109, 440; construction date provided by Estelle Zimmerman, Personal Interview, 10 May 1993.

5. "Anton Zimmerhagl Passes Away Quietly at his Home Monday," Caledonia Journal, 20 November 1929, 1:1.

6. Bryant, History of Houston County, 364, 375.

7. 50th Anniversary Historical Souvenir, n.p.

8. Book 2, 319-320; Book 7, 628-629; Lommen, The Past is Our Heritage, 12; Bryant, History of Houston County, 363.

9. Date is based on a date stone located on the east facade; also see deed in Book 16, 230-231. Additional information provided by Henry Blexrud (grandson of John Kranz), Personal Interview, 2 March 1993.

10. Book 44, 283; Book 57, 490; Lommen, The Past is Our Heritage, 23; Henry Blexrud, Personal Interview, 2 March 1993.

11. Bryant, History of Houston County, 372-373; Houston County Historical Society, Houston County History, 432.

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12. Bryant, History of Houston County, 369; 50th Anniversary
Historical Souvenir, n.p.; Houston County Historical Society,
Houston County History, 118-119.

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SIGNIFICANCE

The Caledonia Commercial Historic District is significant under National Register Criterion C, as a good architectural example of a late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century commercial center. While the buildings do not embody a strict academic style, they share a similar design vocabulary of masonry construction, as well as Late Victorian motifs intended to express the town's permanence and prosperity. This type of construction was commonly used for commercial buildings in small towns throughout Minnesota. The similarity of the district's buildings in terms of materials, design, and scale creates a strong sense of visual cohesion and unity. The Caledonia Commercial Historic District is also significant under National Register Criterion A, being associated with the following statewide historic contexts: Early Agriculture and River Settlement, and Agricultural Development and Railroad Construction. Under these contexts, the district served as the main commercial center for Houston County farmers. The period of significance, 1872 to 1943, begins with the construction of the Koob Building, the district's oldest standing property, and ends with the customary "50-year-limit."

Southeastern Minnesota, which includes Houston County, first opened to Euro-American settlement in 1851, following treaties with the Dakota Indians at Travers des Sioux and Mendota. In 1853, a merchant named Samuel McPhail established a cabin and general supply store at the center of Houston County, on the route of a major county road leading from Brownsville, on the Mississippi River, to the interior farmlands. The next year he platted the village of Caledonia around his small store.¹

Centrally located on a major transportation artery, the village quickly became an important commercial center. Farmers travelled to Caledonia to purchase supplies, farm implements and other specialty items, while travellers heading either inland or toward the Mississippi River found the village to be a convenient stopping place. Much of this overland traffic was made up of farmers hauling wheat over the county road to such major river ports as Brownsville, Winona, and Red Wing. By 1858, Caledonia's population had risen to approximately 200, and it boasted a commercial district containing three dry goods stores, two grocery stores, and three hotels. The village incorporated in

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1870 to facilitate its growth, and it eventually became the county seat.

The 1870s were a time of change for many interior villages as railroads increased in number and spread inland. New commercial centers appeared along the right of ways, pulling trade away from older settlements located on waterways and roads. Aware of the opportunity and danger the railroads presented, Caledonia residents, led by Ara D. Sprague, the area's most successful merchant and largest land owner, worked hard to have a line constructed to the village. In 1879, the Caledonia and Mississippi Railroad built a narrow-gauge track from Reno to Caledonia, eventually reaching Preston, in Fillmore County. The railroad laid standard-gauge tracks in 1901.

While the coming of the railroad does not appear to have fundamentally changed Caledonia's business composition or appearance, it ensured the community's continued prosperity and growth. Caledonia remained an important commercial center for the surrounding agricultural area, with a bank, numerous hotels for travellers, and retail stores offering everything from patent medicines to farm equipment. By 1880, Caledonia's population had risen to 894, and by 1900 it totalled 1,175.²

Caledonia's business district centered on Main Street, between two cross streets named Marshall and Kingston. While Main Street remained the main commercial strip, Kingston also gradually gained importance. By 1915, both Main and Kingston were major thoroughfares, containing most of Caledonia's businesses.

The businesses of Caledonia's commercial district were originally housed in frame buildings. Owners began to replace these with brick and stone construction in the 1870s. Masonry conveyed a sense of permanence and prosperity. It was also fireproof, a critical concern in Caledonia, where firefighting was hindered by an extremely low water table. Fortunately, although water was scarce, masonry building materials were plentiful. Several limestone quarries lay near the village, as well as extensive claybeds suitable for brick manufacturing. Main and Kingston, as the primary business streets, received the highest concentration of masonry buildings.

The area covered under this nomination contains the heart of

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Caledonia's historic commercial district, running along Main Street and including an attached block lying south of Main on Kingston. All of the buildings were built between 1872 and 1906. Most are two stories in height, the lower floors having been planned as shops while the upper floors were used for offices or residences. The Abbotts Block (1891) on the corner of Main and Kingston is typical, the ground floor originally having been divided between a drug and a clothing store, and the upper level having been used by a fraternal lodge and a photographer.

Most of the commercial buildings in the district followed a consistent design vocabulary. The buildings featured flat facades with central ground floor entries flanked by display windows, and, on the second floor, tall, narrow fenestration, often capped by stone lintels. Ornamentation was usually concentrated at the roof line, in the form of metal or brick parapets and cornices. While none of the buildings was designed according to a true academic style, the cornices and parapets incorporate details recalling Late Victorian styles. Queen Anne design elements were especially popular, as evidenced by the Abbotts, Zimmerhagl and Brimeyer Buildings, which feature stepped or pedimented parapets, often surmounted by finials.

The most architecturally assertive building within the district is the Sprague Bank, constructed in 1902 on the site of an earlier bank which had burned in 1889. The main bank for the region, the building conveys a sense of its importance, permanence, and dependability not so much through its architectural detailing as by its sheer mass and siting. A massive two-story cube, filling nearly half a block on both Main and Kingston, the bank serves as a visual anchor for Caledonia's business center. Architectural detailing further emphasizes the bank's importance. The main treatment consists of arched entries and windows centered in each facade which are highlighted by stone hoods. The use of the arch, coupled with the building's mass, calls to mind the Romanesque style which conveys a sense of weight and permanence. On the Main Street facade, the builder also added a central parapet decorated with cartouches. The device has a Beaux Arts quality, which was favored for institutions and monumental structures.

Caledonia's commercial district continued to prosper throughout the 1900s, fueled, undoubtedly, by the village's steady growth in

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population. Caledonia contained 1,372 residents in 1910, and 1,570 in 1920. By 1940, the population had reached nearly 2,000, and this figure rose to 2,563 by 1960. By 1970, the population had stabilized at approximately 2,600.

The appearance of the business district along Kingston Street underwent substantial changes following World War II, when many older buildings were heavily altered or replaced. Main Street, by contrast, remained relatively unchanged. Shopkeepers often remodelled the street-level facades of their buildings to install new entryways and display windows, but this work was generally minor and reversible.

The overall preservation of Main Street's historic building stock was largely due to the remarkable longevity of area businesses. Shops remained in operation for decades, often being passed from one family member to the next. John P. Lommen, for example, opened a general merchandise store with a partner at the southwest corner of Kingston and Main in 1877. Currently known as the Lommen Block, Lommen made additions in 1883 and 1900. Lommen remained in business until 1924, when he retired and sold the building to Theodore H. DeWitz. DeWitz had been a merchant in Caledonia since 1896, first as a harness maker, and then as a shoe seller. He established a shoe store in Lommen's building, and expanded his business to include groceries and men's clothing. His son, Harold DeWitz, continued the business until 1975. At that time, he sold the block to his son, Thomas DeWitz, who continued to sell shoes as well as auto parts until the 1980s.

Change came to Main Street, finally, in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Merchants who had been in business since the mid-1900s began to retire and could not find anyone willing to use their old buildings. Main Street was no longer a popular retail area, for consumers increasingly looked to shopping centers located on the outskirts of town or to larger cities, such as nearby LaCrosse, Wisconsin. Several frame buildings located on Main were demolished during these years and other buildings, such as the Williams House, fell vacant. Reflecting the changes, the Sprague Bank left its central location on Main in 1979, moving into a more modern building on Kingston.

Despite its decline, Main Street still contains most of its

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historic building stock. The boundaries of the Caledonia Commercial Historic District have been drawn to include these properties, as well as the Lommen Block on Kingston. Well preserved, the district exemplifies the type of commercial architecture which flourished in small towns throughout Minnesota during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The buildings are simple in form, having flat facades, plain storefronts, and evenly spaced upper-floor fenestration. The builders relied on ornament to give the properties character, adding decorative hoods and lintels to the windows, corbels to the cornices, and brick and metal parapets highlighted with modillions, corbelling, tympanums and finials. The ornamentation generally recalls a range of Late Victorian styles, particularly the Queen Anne. The consistent use of this design vocabulary distinguishes and unites the district buildings, and recalls the era at the turn of the century when Caledonia served as the main commercial center for its surrounding area.

Notes

1. The following historical information is drawn from these sources: Charles S. Bryant, History of Houston County (Minneapolis: Minnesota Historical Company, 1882); The Advantages and Resources of Houston County, Minnesota (Hokah, Minnesota: Reynolds and Wertz, publishers, 1858); Georgina Lommen, The Past is Our Heritage: Caledonia Centennial (LaCrosse, Wisconsin: LaCrosse Printing Co., July 1954); Houston County Historical Society, Houston County History (Dallas: Taylor Publishing Company, 1982).

2. Population data here and below were provided by information on file at the State Historic Preservation Office, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, Minnesota.

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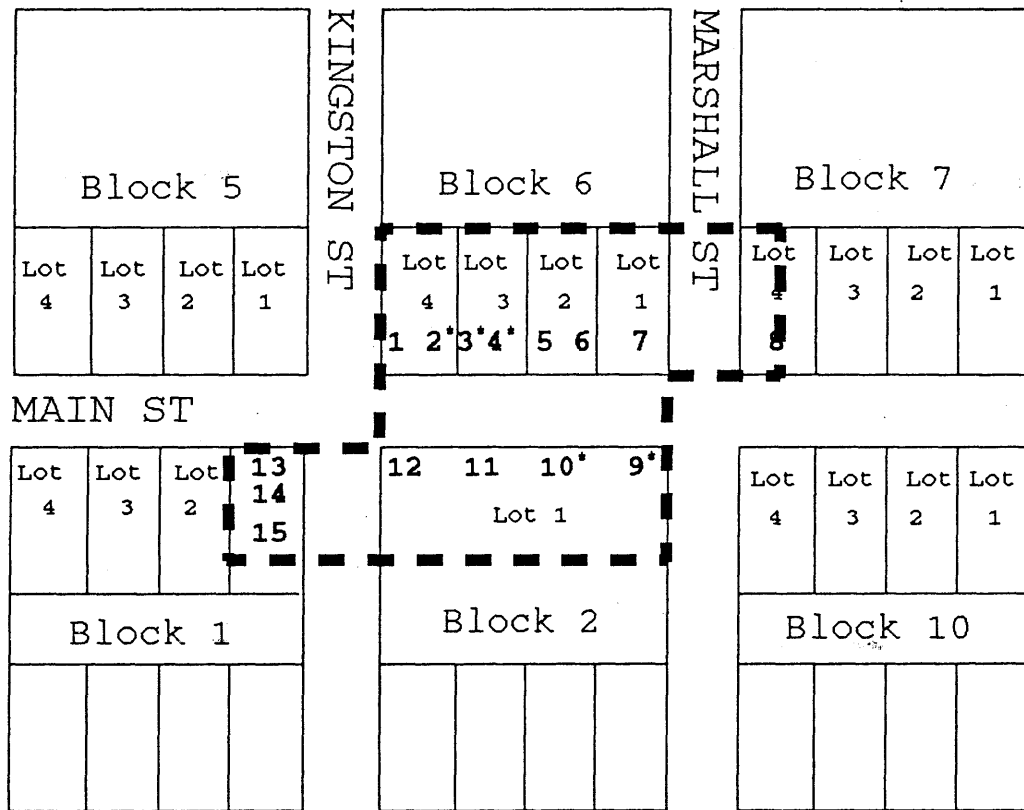
VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION:

The boundary of the Caledonia Commercial Historic District is shown as the dashed line on the accompanying map entitled, "Caledonia Commercial Historic District, 1993."

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION:

The boundary encloses all extant historic buildings standing in a well-defined cluster on Main Street. These buildings have served as Caledonia's main business center since the late nineteenth century, and represent a unique and well-defined period of the town's history and architecture.

Caledonia Commercial Historic District
Houston County, Minnesota
Verbal Boundary Description, 1993



= 150 ft
 District Boundary
 Numbers in bold indicate properties
 Asterisks indicate non-contributing properties