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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

JUL 7 1994

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

INTERAGENCY RESOURCES DIVISION
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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 an 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 _____ Blooming Prairie Commercial Historic District _____

other names/site number ___ N/A _____

2. Location

street & number ___ Main St. E. between Highway Ave. and 2nd Ave. N.E. ___ ☐ not for publication N/A

city or town ___ Blooming Prairie ___ ☐ vicinity N/A

state ___ Minnesota ___ code __ MN __ county ___ Steele ___ code _ 147 _ zip code __ 55917 _

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☒ 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 ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☒ locally. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title   Ian R. Stewart   Date 6/23/94

Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

State of Federal agency and bureau   Minnesota Historical Society

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title _____ Date _____

State or Federal agency and bureau _____

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the 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.
☐ removed from the National Register.
☐ other, (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

~~Entered in the~~ National Register

Date of Action 8/5/94

Blooming Prairie Commercial Historic District

Name of Property

Steele, Minnesota

County and State

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
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
20	8	buildings
	1	sites
		structures
		objects
20	9	Total

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

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Commerce/Trade: financial institution,

specialty store

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Commerce/Trade: financial institution,

specialty store

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Late Victorian: Italianate, Queen Anne,

Romanesque

Late 19th and 20th Century Revivals:

Classical Revival

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation ___ Concrete

walls ___ Brick, Concrete,

___ Ceramic Tile

roof ___ Wood

other ___ Limestone

___ Terra Cotta

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.)

Property is: N/A

☐ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

☐ **B** removed from its original location.

☐ **C** a birthplace or 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)

Commerce

Period of Significance

1894-1932

Significant Dates

N/A

Significant Person
(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

N/A

Narrative Statement of Significance
(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography
(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:

Steele County Historical Society, Owatonna

Blooming Prairie Commercial Historic District   Steele, Minnesota
Name of Property   County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property _____ Approx. 5.2 acres _____

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

1 | 1,5 | | 4,9,5,8,2,0 | | 4,8,5,6,9,2,0 |
  Zone   Easting   Northing

2 | 1,5 | | 4,9,5,9,5,0 | | 4,8,5,6,9,2,0 |

3 | 1,5 | | 4,9,5,8,2,0 | | 4,8,5,6,7,7,0 |
  Zone   Easting   Northing

4 | 1,5 | | 4,9,6,0,6,0 | | 4,8,5,6,7,7,0 |

☐ See continuation sheet

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 _____ Susan Granger and Patricia Murphy _____

organization _____ Gemini Research _____ date _____ September 1993 _____

street & number _____ 15 E. 9th St. _____ telephone _____ (612) 589-3846 _____

city or town _____ Morris _____ state __ MN __ zip code __ 56267 __

Additional Documentation
Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location. Blooming Prairie, Minn. 1967

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 SHPO or FPO.)

name _____

street & number _____ telephone _____

city or town _____ state _____ zip code _____

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7. NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

The boundaries of the Blooming Prairie Commercial Historic District encompass most of the central business district of Blooming Prairie, a small farming community of 2,043 people in southern Steele County. Most of the 27 principal buildings in the district face Main Street, the community's main commercial thoroughfare which runs east and west through the center of town, perpendicular to the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul Railroad tracks.

The majority of the buildings in the district are two story commercial buildings of brick or hollow tile construction. Nearly all have brown, red, or salmon-colored brick facades and most are in fair or good condition. The earliest structures, including the hardware store at 411 Main St. E. and the Cooley Block at 405 Main St. E., are Italianate and Romanesque Revival in style. Most of the buildings dating from the turn of the century are Romanesque Revival, Queen Anne, and Classical Revival in influence, and some which date from the early 20th century such as Ruzek Brothers Merchandise and the Farmers and Merchants State Bank show the influence of the Prairie School in their designs.

The district contains 20 Contributing buildings, 8 Non-contributing buildings, and 1 Non-contributing site. Although many of the buildings are altered at the storefront level, a number retain original storefront elements such as cast iron enframing columns, cast iron lintels, plate glass, leaded glass transom windows, and recessed entrances. Many of the buildings are intact above the first story where their upper facades are enlivened with ornate window hoods, metal, brick, and concrete cornices and parapets, and brick and terra cotta detailing. Most of the buildings have small rear service-entrance additions.

A brief description of each building in the district follows:

1. 421 Main St. E.
    United States Post Office
    Ca. 1920
    1 Contributing Building

This two story commercial building is faced in variegated brown textured brick along both the Main Street E. and Highway 218 facades. The building's polygonal, rather than rectangular, footprint is due to the unusual corner lot configuration where U.S. Highway 218 intersects with Main Street E. at an angle. The main facade is topped by a low stepped triangular parapet. Two story brick piers divide the bays on the main facade. The evenly-spaced rectangular window openings have brick sills and lintels and 1/1 sash. A flat canopy is suspended over the main entrance. The building has been altered at the storefront level with brick and vertical wood infill and new windows and doors. The building housed

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the Blooming Prairie Post Office from the 1920s through the 1940s.

2.   415 Main St. E.
        Masonic Hall
        Ca. 1920
        1 Contributing Building

The Masonic Hall is a large two story building with a design influenced by the Egyptian
Revival style. It is faced with cream-colored textured brick, with smoothly dressed limestone
sills and a stone course above the five rectangular second story window openings. The
building has an elaborate stepped and triangular parapet with diamond-shaped tile edging. At
the center of the parapet is a carved stone Masonic emblem which is reminiscent of Egyptian
and Art Deco motifs. The emblem has a middle roundel inscribed with a Mason's tool and a
"G" which is flanked by snakes and wings. Blind rounded arches above the windows and
rectangular panels with basketweave brickwork enliven the facade. The second story window
openings have been filled with new window sash and glass block. The two storefronts were
altered circa 1960 and circa 1975 with fluted metal and vertical wood. The building has
housed the Masonic Lodge and two commercial storefronts since its completion circa 1920.

3.   Ca. 413 Main St. E.
        First National Bank
        1893
        1 Contributing Building

This small one story Romanesque Revival bank has a red pressed brick facade. On the right
side is a narrow semicircular door opening accented by five header courses of voussoir brick.
To the left is a wide plate glass window with three sections of open wood grating in the
semicircular arch. Buff-colored stone is used as a window sill, at the springing line of both
openings, as keystone for the window, and as quoins at both sides of the facade. The quoins
are slightly pitted from modern siding which was recently removed. The cornice consists of
simple corbeled brick and large corbeled corners.

4.   411 Main St. E.
        Hardware Store
        Ca. 1894
        1 Contributing Building

This elaborate Italianate style two story commercial building has a red pressed brick main
facade and cream-colored common brick side walls. The first floor storefront is unusually
intact with cast iron enframing parts and plate glass display windows flanking a recessed

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entrance with a double leaf door and transom. Above the storefront transom windows is a
metal cornice with dentils and brackets. The second story has four tall, narrow segmental
arched window openings which are topped by pressed metal bracketed pedimented window
hoods with leafy scrolls. Above the second story windows is a pressed metal cornice with
medallions. At the roofline is a parapet wall with decorative brickwork in a blind arcade and
corbel motif. The parapet wall was originally topped by a triangular pediment which has
been removed. The building housed a hardware store from at least 1910-1927.

5.   405 Main St. E.
        Cooley Block
        1896
        1 Contributing Building

One of the largest buildings in the historic district, the Romanesque Revival style Cooley
Block (also known as the Cooley-Hughes Block and the Opera House) is a two story
structure faced with smooth red brick. The building has large rectangular window openings
along the north and west facades which were originally filled with double hung sash.
Rockfaced buff-colored limestone trim forms continuous stone sills and lintels on the north
facade and individual lintels and sills along the west facade. The building has blind brick
arcades and other parapet detailing similar to that on the adjacent building at 411 Main St.
E., suggesting they may have been designed by the same builder. Historic photos indicate
that the parapet wall was originally topped by triangular pediments on the northern and
western facades. Glass block has been installed in the rectangular second story window
openings and the storefronts have been altered with new window openings and permastone.
The Cooley Block housed a variety of retail businesses, the Farmers and Merchants State
Bank, professional offices, and Blooming Prairie's only auditorium.

6.   345 Main St. E.
        First National Bank of Blooming Prairie (now American Bank)
        1915
        1 Contributing Building

The First National Bank is a large, two story, 48' x 90' bank with a formal Classical Revival
design. The principal (northern) facade is largely symmetrical with a central entrance
enframed by two polished granite columns that rest on stone piers. The columns support an
elaborate gray limestone entablature. The building is faced with textured brown brick with
cut stone detailing. A heavy cornice is adorned with medallions and dentils and topped by a
brick parapet wall that is edged in cut limestone. The northern and eastern facades have
evenly spaced second story rectangular window openings with brick surrounds and 1/1 sash.
The rear facade has segmental arched 2/2 sash. The brickwork above the cornice has been
altered and the bank has two rear additions. In addition to the First National Bank, the

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building housed the Alliance Cash Company, the "Blooming Prairie Times" newspaper office, professional offices, and a community room.

7.   341 Main St. E.
       White's Pharmacy
       Ca. 1965
       1 Non-contributing Building

White's Pharmacy is a small, undistinguished one story concrete block commercial building built circa 1965.

8.   327 Main St. E.
       Faltejsek-Kubicek Hardware (now Blooming Prairie Our Own Hardware)
       Ca. 1895
       1 Contributing Building

This two story building is an example of the influence of the Queen Anne style on commercial design. The building was apparently built in two stages and accommodated two first floor storefronts and apartments on the upper floor. Brick piers define the corners of the main facade. The eastern half of the building retains a cast iron storefront which has been filled with panelling and new windows and doors. The western half of the building retains a large round arched entrance with a keystone and a recessed doorway. The second story of both halves has tall, narrow segmental arched window openings with rockfaced buff-colored limestone continuous sills and 2/2 and 1/1 sash. Above the windows the parapet wall is enlivened with a corbelled brick cornice and rectangular panels of decorative brickwork. The rear facade has segmental arched window openings. The eastern storefront housed the hardware store of partners Frank Faltejsek and Frank Kubicek circa 1911 and 1960. The western storefront housed a saloon and pool hall for many decades.

9.   321 Main St. E.
       Saloon (now B to Z Trustworthy Hardware)
       Ca. 1905
       1 Contributing Building

This two story commercial building features elaborate and sophisticated Classical Revival detailing. The facade is faced with brown pressed brick laid with mortar of the same color. Buff-colored limestone was used for belt courses, window sills, a storefront cornice, keystones, and other trim. Wonderfully ornate, closely-spaced second story windows have delicate rounded arched fanlights with keystones above paired rectangular 1/1 sash. Brick is laid to resemble stone quoins or cornerblocks at the corners of the main facade. At the top of the building is a parapet wall with an open balustrade. The cast iron and plate glass

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storefront has thin engaged columns at the corners of the display windows and a recessed entrance. East of the storefront is a panelled wooden door, topped by a transom, which leads to the second floor. The side and rear walls have segmental arched window openings. This building housed a saloon from at least 1910-1917.

10.   Ca. 315 Main St. E.
     Prairie Egg Company
     Ca. 1915
     1 Contributing Building

The Prairie Egg Company is located at the southern edge of the lot with no Main Street access, although it is visible from Main Street across the small vacant lot between buildings #9 and #11. The Prairie Egg Company is a circa 1915, gambrel-roofed produce warehouse which was constructed of rockfaced concrete block. It has stepped parapet walls, small rectangular and square window openings, and ventilators on the standing seam metal roof. An old painted sign on the southern facade reads "Prairie Egg Company, Meyer Klempf, prop." The building served as a feed business and produce warehouse through at least 1948. The building is now connected to the adjacent Harriet's Dres-Wel and Ressler Lanes, which was built on the northern part of the lot in 1946.

11.   313 Main St. E.
     Harriet's Dres-Wel and Ressler Lanes Cafe
     1946
     1 Non-contributing Building

Harriet's Dres-Wel and Ressler Lanes is a one story, flat roofed, concrete block commercial building which was constructed in 1946. The main facade is faced with red pressed brick. It is attached to the Prairie Egg Company, a concrete block circa 1915 produce warehouse located just to the south.

12.   Ca. 305 Main St. E.
     Treat Building (now Mapleton Agency and Shaw Barber Shop)
     Ca. 1932
     1 Contributing Building

This intact two story commercial building has a variegated textured brown and yellow brick facade with unpainted red hollow tile side walls. The brickwork on the facade is enlivened by basketweave, vertical stretchers, and diagonal patterning in inset panels. At the outer edges of the main facade are simple rectangular doors topped by transoms. Two large rectangular plate glass windows provide light for the two storefronts. The second story has two pair of rectangular window openings with 1/1 sash. The building housed professional

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and business offices and was originally owned by a barber.

13.   301 Main St. E.
       C. Lund and Son Blacksmith
       Ca. 1915
       1 Non-contributing Building

The Lund Blacksmith Shop is a two story concrete block building which occupies a corner
lot. Its gabled roof is concealed behind a curvilinear parapet wall which forms a false front.
The main facade has a garage door opening and a single leaf door with transom. The side
wall has evenly spaced rectangular window openings with double hung sash. The building
has been covered with stucco and permastone and new windows and garage doors have been
installed. The main storefront housed a cobbler and blacksmith through at least 1948 and a
small shop in the rear of the building on the west side housed a machine shop in 1917 and
1927 and a dry cleaner in 1948. Christ Lund was a blacksmith in Blooming Prairie
beginning at least as early as 1910.

14.   302 Main St. E.
       Betlach Meat Market (now Pizza Cellar)
       Ca. 1895
       1 Contributing Building

The Betlach Meat Market is a two story, Commercial Queen Anne style building which
stands on a corner lot. It has a textured red brick facade, brick corbelling at the cornice
level, and tall, segmental arched window openings on the second story which originally had
1/1 sash and are now filled with glass block. There are brick window hoods above the
second story windows which are now obscured by awnings. The first story storefront has
been altered with vertical wood and new windows. The side wall is constructed of medium
brown brick. At the rear is a large two story brick and hollow tile addition which was built
in 1948. The building housed the Betlach Meat Market (later known as the Betlach Food
Company) through at least 1948.

15.   304 Main St. E.
       Waubett Fancy Groceries
       Ca. 1895
       1 Contributing Building

This two story commercial building is faced in salmon-colored pressed brick. The second
story has four tall, narrow rectangular window openings with double hung windows with
rockfaced buff-colored limestone sills and lintels and 1/1 sash. At the top of the building is
a corbelled brick cornice. The storefront, which has been filled with brick and new

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windows, retains the fluted narrow, rectangular cast iron enframing columns which originally supported plate glass display windows, transoms, and a central recessed entrance. The flat cast iron storefront lintel has been covered with a shingled pent eave. This building housed Waubett Fancy Groceries circa 1895, a dry goods store in 1910, and a furniture store and undertaker from at least 1917 through 1927.

16.   308 Main St. E.
      Grocery store (now Morton Plumbing)
      Ca. 1895
      1 Contributing Building

Like many of the two story commercial buildings of its vintage in the district, this salmon-colored pressed brick building has tall, narrow rectangular second story windows with rockfaced buff-colored limestone sills and lintels and 1/1 sash. The original cast iron storefront is largely intact with thin piers flanking the recessed central entrance and a flat cast iron storefront lintel adorned with rosettes. The building originally had a corbelled brick cornice which has been altered. This building housed a grocery store from at least 1910-1917 and a restaurant in 1948. It is now the home of Morton Plumbing, one of Blooming Prairie's oldest businesses.

17.   Ca. 314 Main St. E.
      Ruzek Brothers Merchandise and E. O. Keenan Billiard Parlor
        (now Olde Things and Lucille's Blossum Shop)
      Ca. 1915
      1 Contributing Building

Ruzek Brothers is a one story commercial building faced in dark red textured brick and enlivened with cream-colored terra cotta detailing, particularly at the parapet level. The large medallion at the center of the stepped parapet and other inset terra cotta detailing is characteristic of Prairie School commercial designs of the 1910s and 1920s. The building has two storefronts with adjacent entrances which are recessed at the center of the main facade. The storefronts have been altered with vertical wood and a metal canopy. The building housed a general store, saloon, and billiards hall in 1917.

18.   322 Main St. E.
      Restaurant and Rooming House (now Floor Tech)
      Ca. 1915
      1 Contributing Building

This two story commercial structure is faced in textured brown brick which has been altered at the cornice level with an inset panel of orange brick. The second story has three,

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widely-spaced rectangular window openings which have been reduced in size with vertical wood infill but which retain brick sills. The storefront has been altered with vertical wood and new plate glass. In 1910 the building housed a restaurant and a rooming house. The building was used as a rooming house at least through 1927.

19. Ca. 326 Main St. E.
    Feeney Building (now Braaton's Courtroom)
    1895
    1 Contributing Building

This two story Italianate-influenced commercial building is faced in smooth red brick with buff-colored rockfaced limestone sills. At the top of the main facade is a carved stone panel reading "T. F. 1895" which is surrounded by elaborate brick patterning within a central stepped parapet. There are brick jack arches over the three tall, narrow segmental arched second story windows which have 1/1 sash. The storefront has been altered with vertical wood and permastone. This building was constructed for Thomas Feeney, one of Blooming Prairie's earliest settlers who owned a general store in 1871. In the early 20th century this building housed Renchin's Saloon which was owned by A. M. Renchin and A. J. Renchin. Between 1938 and 1968 it housed Renchin Gamble, later Renchin Hardware.

20. 330 Main St. E.
    Bakery (now A Touch of Charm)
    Ca. 1920
    1 Contributing Building and 1 Non-contributing Building

This small one story commercial building is faced with textured brick that has been painted white. It has a simple brick cornice above three rectangular panels of decorative brickwork. Across the top of the storefront is a large transom window comprised of small square leaded glass panes which have been painted white. Two free standing columns flank the recessed entrance, and above and just outside of the recessed entrance is an intact pressed metal ceiling. A non-contributing circa 1970 garage is located behind this building. The building housed a bakery in 1927.

21. 334 Main St. E.
    Dry Goods and Clothing Store (now Blooming Prairie Liquors)
    Ca. 1915
    1 Contributing Building

This two story commercial building is faced with medium brown textured brick, with light brown common brick side walls. The parapet is stepped and is mirrored by a brick belt course which steps over the three second story rectangular window openings. The windows

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have brick sills and there is a simple brick storefront cornice. The storefront has been
altered with vertical wood and the second story windows have been partially filled with
wood. The building housed a dry goods and clothing store in 1917.

22.   340 Main St. E.
       Dry Goods Store (now J and H Liquors)
       Ca. 1909
       1 Non-contributing Building

This two story reddish-brown brick building retains a rockfaced buff-colored limestone belt
course at the second story sill level. The second story window openings have been reduced
in size and the storefront has been altered with stone aggregate panels. This building housed
a dry goods store from a least 1910-1917.

23.   344 Main St. E.
       Bloomin' Bakery
       Ca. 1955
       1 Non-contributing Building

This small two story commercial building has a light brown textured brick facade with brick
belt courses which add a horizontal emphasis to the design.

24.   348 Main St. E.
       Farmers and Merchants State Bank (now Hometown Insurance)
       1916
       1 Contributing Building

The Farmers and Merchants State Bank is a tall, narrow two story bank building which
occupies a corner lot. The bank is Classical Revival in style and is faced in variegated
brown brick with geometric detailing characteristic of its period. The brick detailing is quite
elaborate, particularly at the parapet level, and recalls the terra cotta detailing of the small
town Prairie School banks of Purcell and Elmslie, Louis Sullivan, and others. The building
has 1/1 sash set within rectangular openings with brick surrounds. The entrance has been
altered with smooth dark gray granite panels which are topped by buff-colored limestone
walls, all set within a large cut stone rectangular opening. The words "Farmers and
Merchants State Bank" are painted on the common brick-faced western and northern facades.
The Farmers and Merchants State Bank occupied this building from 1916-1980.

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25.   108 3rd Ave. N.E.
        Rex Theatre (now Blooming Prairie Clinic and People's Natural Gas)
        1915
        1 Non-contributing Building

The Rex Theatre is a 400-seat movie theatre which opened in October of 1915. This one
story brick and hollow tile building has been covered with stucco and its window and door
openings have been filled with wood and corrugated metal. A simple stepped brick surround
is still visible above the main entrance. Films were shown at the Rex until April of 1955.

26.   Ca. 122 3rd Ave. N.E.
        Commercial Building
        Ca. 1920
        1 Contributing Building

This one story reddish-brown textured brick building has hollow tile side and rear walls.
The simple main facade has a large rectangular storefront window and a simple doorway
with a transom.

27.   112 Hwy 218 S.
        Filling station (now Jessie's Boot Store)
        Ca. 1920
        1 Non-contributing Building

This small one story structure is located just south of the building at 421 Main St. E. (#1
above). It has been altered significantly with concrete block exterior walls, new windows
and a new roofline.

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8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Blooming Prairie Commercial Historic District is eligible for the National Register under Criterion A, significance to the broad patterns of our history, in the area of Commerce. The district is significant as a uniform collection of small, late 19th and early 20th century commercial buildings which comprise most of the historic portion of Blooming Prairie's commercial district. The buildings are strongly associated with Blooming Prairie's historic role as an agricultural trade center on the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul Railroad line. In addition to representing Blooming Prairie's economic history, the buildings collectively serve as an unusually intact late 19th and early 20th century central business district in a small midwestern farming community. The district is significant within the statewide historic context entitled "Railroads and Agricultural Development 1870-1940."

Blooming Prairie was established along the tracks of the Minnesota Central Railroad (later the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul) which was built through Steele County in 1867. The first structures to be built at the future townsite were a cluster of sleeping shacks erected in 1867 by the Minnesota Central. These structures were occupied by members of the section crew which built the Minnesota Central as it advanced southward from the town of Owatonna (located about 15 miles to the north). The railroad company also built a woodframe depot which was the first permanent building at the townsite. The existence of the depot attracted the second frame building, the home and boarding hotel of a blacksmith who moved his business to the site from a nearby farm. The first store was a tent erected near the railroad depot in 1867. Next, a small commercial warehouse was built near the depot to receive grain; it also served as the first post office (Iacovino 1992, 3-4). The townships surrounding Blooming Prairie were initially settled by Yankee American, English, and Irish pioneers, many of whom had arrived after the U.S. Government-Dakota Conflict of 1862. Farmers in the area grew wheat and other small grains, and later raised dairy cattle, hay, corn, and soybeans.

For virtually all of its existence, Blooming Prairie has been "a one-industry town" with a trade center economy centered around agriculture (Iacovino 1992, 14). Farm trade centers like Blooming Prairie served agriculture in several major ways--by receiving and exporting the grain and produce grown by surrounding farmers, by importing and supplying groceries, hardware, lumber, and services to farmers, and by serving as social, cultural, and political centers for farm families. In addition, farmers belonged to Blooming Prairie churches, their children attended Blooming Prairie High School, and farmers began to retire into Blooming Prairie as early as the 1890s.

Trade centers such as Blooming Prairie were typical in the Midwest where, according to geographer John C. Hudson, "almost all the towns on the plains were founded for the single purpose of serving the trade brought by a surrounding agricultural population. Their reason

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for being was commerce, which superordinated all other aspects of town life. . . . Towns were spaced interdependently so as to organize the trade of the hinterlands more efficiently" (Hudson 1985, 6). The establishment of these small agricultural trade centers along a network of railroad lines "is the dominant settlement pattern in a broad region beginning with the Grand Prairie of Illinois on the east, stretching northwest to the Canadian prairies, south through Texas, and west to the Rocky Mountain front" (Hudson 1985, 5).

A large number of agricultural trade centers were founded by fiercely-competing railroad companies, or by persons affiliated with railroads. Each railroad company sought to maximize freight traffic along its lines by establishing grain collection and supply distribution points at carefully planned intervals along the tracks. Hudson states that "railroad companies engaged in townsite activity whenever and wherever they built new lines" (Hudson 1985, 71). In addition to receiving income from shipping fees, many railroads were operated by officials were also financially involved in grain buying, flour milling, manufacturing, and wholesaling in markets created by the small towns linked by railroads (Hudson 1985, 10). Hudson explains that the "wealth accumulated by merchants and manufacturers in the large cities because of this economic role was, in turn, invested in the construction of more railroad lines" (Hudson 1985, 10). He argues that agricultural trade centers like Blooming Prairie were "not independent of one another; rather, they were interdependent components of plans formulated by the largest corporations of the day for extracting value from dependent, colonial hinterlands" (Hudson 1985, 6). (Hudson also points out that land grant railroads also received income from the sale of lots in the towns which they platted on their lands, but that the sale of lots was not a primary goal of townsite establishment since companies often suffered net losses in townsites where all available lots did not sell (Hudson 1985, 70-85).)

Blooming Prairie was platted in July of 1870 by Selah Chamberlain and George E. Skinner, both of whom had financial relationships with the Minnesota Central. Chamberlain was a Vermont-born railroad contractor who built railroads in Minnesota and four other states and "aided in the consolidation of the lines composing the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul railway system" (Upham 1912, 115). New York-born Skinner was commissioner of lands for three railway companies in southern Minnesota (Upham 1912, 708). Interestingly, both Chamberlain and Skinner were from New England, which is consistent with Hudson's finding that many of the persons who platted new agricultural trade centers were from New England or the upper Middle West (Hudson 1985, 10).

Blooming Prairie's plat was also typical of a trackside agricultural trade center. The original townsite has 360-square-foot blocks, 170-foot-deep lots, and 20-foot alleys, similar to most Midwestern trade centers. Blocks were divided into twelve 60-foot-wide lots. In most railroad towns, the commercial lots were one-half the width of residential lots. Although Blooming Prairie's commercial lots measure the same 60 feet as its residential lots, most

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businesses bought only one-half of a lot, thus making Blooming Prairie's commercial configuration typical of the pattern for most trade centers. Hudson explains that in most trade center townsites narrow [commercial] lots, which sold at two or three times the price of residential lots, gave the impression of activity to a business district before there was any. Long, narrow lots on Main Street also guaranteed that the first buildings would assume a uniform size and shape, which, in turn, favored the presence of many small, independent merchants (Hudson 1985, 87).

Grain buying in Blooming Prairie began as early as 1867 and 1868 when four separate buyers established businesses to receive grain and ship it out on the Minnesota Central. Blooming Prairie drew trade from a 20-mile radius as the grain trade flourished in the 1870s when nearly a half a million bushels where shipped out annually (Iacovino 1992, 5). A flour mill was established in 1875 and a butter factory was built in the 1880s to buy milk and cream and make butter. In 1892 the butter factory was acquired by a newly-established farmers' cooperative creamery which operated from 1892 until 1967 (Iacovino 1992, 5-6). A farmers' cooperative elevator was established in 1905.

An 1893 list of Blooming Prairie's businesses (published at about the time that the oldest buildings in the historic district were constructed) shows that farmers could sell to a creamery, flour mill, elevator company with two elevators, and stockyards. They could buy heavy equipment from two lumberyards, four machinery and implement dealers, a horse sales barn, a harness shop, and a wagon maker. Supplies and groceries could be obtained from three general stores, two hardware stores, one drug store, one jewelry store, two meat markets, one shoe shop, and one furniture store. Various services could be purchased from two blacksmiths, one bank, one livery, one veterinarian, two physicians, two tailors, one photographer, one printer, one telegraph office, one undertaker, one dray line, one hotel, one restaurant, and the post office (Iacovino 1992, 8; the list was published in the "Blooming Prairie Times" and has some obvious omissions--saloons, for example, are not listed).

A similar list of local businesses in 1917 (during the the decade that approximately one-third of the buildings in the historic district were erected) shows an increase in listings with an additional bank, another newspaper, another blacksmith, two more physicians, two dentists, a feed stable, another dray line, another undertaker, two real estate agents, another general store, a 5-10 cent store, an opera house, three more restaurants, a millinery shop, three painting and paper hanging businesses, another furniture store, another drug store, a cigar factory, an additional harness shop, four barber shops, an attorney, three automobile garages, and two pool rooms. Listed in 1893 but missing from the 1917 tally are a jewelry store, a shoe shop, a veterinarian, and one tailor (Iacovino 1992, 11).

The buildings in the Blooming Prairie Commercial Historic District represent much of the diversity suggested by the above lists. The district includes general stores, banks, saloons,

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hardware stores, meat markets, a blacksmith shop, a bakery, and an opera house. (In fact, the only types of businesses not represented in the historic district are large facilities such as lumberyards and implement dealers which were located closer to the railroad tracks, and Blooming Prairie's succession of five hotels, none of which have survived.) While the buildings in the district range in date from 1894 to 1960, the majority were built during two distinct periods in the village's economic history--the community's recovery from the Panic of 1893 (a time when the population of the village more than doubled, rising from 308 to 855), and the years 1910-1920, a rare decade of prosperity for many of rural Minnesota's small farming trade centers. Interestingly, the size of Blooming Prairies's commercial district--encompassing both sides of the 300 and 400 blocks of Main Street--changed very little between the initial settlement of the town in the 1860s and the early 1930s when the newest of the contributing buildings in the commercial district were constructed. This is consistent with Hudson's findings that competition from surrounding trade centers on the railroad network often limited the market area of an individual trade center and, in turn, the size of its economy (Hudson 1985, 112).

In many agricultural trade centers, the first merchants were businessmen from New England or the Upper Midwest, usually with previous business experience (Hudson 1985, 104-105). The surnames of many of Blooming Prairie's earliest merchants--Hartley, Hawley, Ellington, Brown, Douglas, and Jones, for example--suggest Yankee backgrounds. Typical were the members of the Thomas S. Morton family which operated various blacksmith and hardware businesses in Blooming Prairie beginning in 1871. Morton Plumbing, still in operation at 308 Main St. E., is the successor of one of the Morton family enterprises (Severson 1980, 70). A trade center's earliest businessmen were often joined by entrepreneurs with little or no experience who came to new farming communities to start ventures. Hudson explains that "railroad townsites were virtually tailor-made for [this] purpose: capital requirements were small, and experimentation was encouraged by the lack of existing competitors" (Hudson 1985, 106). Many new merchants amassed starting capital by forming partnerships--Blooming Prairie's commercial district contains many such examples. Hudson explains that trade centers also attracted established merchants, usually from nearby towns, "who moved a small stock of goods to a new townsite and opened a branch business. Some later sold the branches to local merchants or, if trade prospects were especially good, relocated their headquarters to the new town" (Hudson 1985, 106). Several of the retail stores in Blooming Prairie were started as branches of stores in larger towns such as Owatonna and Albert Lea. The Alliance Cash Company, for example, began as a branch store of the Gage, Holland, and Hayden Company of Albert Lea (Iacovino 1992, 7). By 1891 Alliance Cash was owned by a group of local investors and had become one of Blooming Prairie's largest general stores. It was located from 1915-1918 in the First National Bank building at 345 Main St. E.

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Small businesses in the district were owned both by the community's Yankee American and Irish settlers and by immigrants from Norway and Eastern Europe who began to move into Steele County in the 1880s. For example, the Betlach Meat Market at 302 Main St. E. was built in 1892 for Barney Betlach, a Czech immigrant. This meat market operated in the same building until at least 1950. Ruzek Brother's Merchandise at circa 314 Main St. E. was also built by Czech immigrants--the members of the Frank and Joseph Ruzek families who moved to Blooming Prairie before the turn of the century.

The historic district includes both of Blooming Prairie's two banks--buildings which were built directly across the street from one another, one year apart, in 1915 and 1916. The First National Bank of Blooming Prairie, located in a 1915 building, traced its roots to a predecessor bank established in 1875. The Farmers and Merchants State Bank, located in a 1916 building, was founded in 1904. Both bank's previous buildings are also standing in the district--the First National Bank was located in the building at circa 413 Main St. E. from about 1903-1915, and the Farmers and Merchants State Bank was located in the Cooley Block at 405 Main St. E. from 1905-1916.

Virtually all of Blooming Prairie's professionals had offices in buildings standing in the district. For example, Dr. Benedik Melby, who practiced in Blooming Prairie for 54 years from 1905-1959 had offices in the Treat Building. Other physicians had offices in the Cooley Block and in the First National Bank at 345 Main St. E., and dentists practiced in the Cooley Block, in the Treat Building, and in the Farmers and Merchants State Bank building (Severson 1980, 61-66).

In addition to being associated with Blooming Prairie's primary economic activity, the buildings in the historic district also served as an important social and political focal point for the community. The central business district was the first area of town to receive public improvements when oil street lamps were installed, streets were graded, and plank sidewalks were built (Curtiss-Wedge 1910, 996). The portion of Main Street located within the historic district was also a principal public gathering place for members of the community who assembled there for parades, political rallies, street fairs, and public celebrations.

Social and political gatherings were held in many of the buildings. Located in the basement of the First National Bank (built in 1915) was a public room which was conceived by bank president Samuel A. Rask to be a community center for farmers and their families who came into Blooming Prairie "in droves" on Saturday afternoons to buy fresh groceries and supplies, staying in town for several hours (Severson 1980, 113). The room was both an informal gathering place and a meeting room for organized groups. The bank sponsored free musical, lecture, and comedy programs there on Saturday nights, and the room was used by various farmers' organizations and other business and fraternal clubs. (One local historian notes that Blooming Prairie was a popular and central location for farmers' organizations to

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meet because it is located at the corner of four counties--Dodge, Freeborn, Mower, and Steele (Severson 1980, 243).) The bank's community room was described in the "Wisconsin Farmer" as follows:

The walls are hung with a profusion of pictures of prize-winning animals of all kinds. An electric clock is always announcing the current time; an electric fan relieves the heat and aids in keeping the air in motion when necessary; a telephone hangs in a convenient place for the free use of the public; a bulletin board has the latest publications from the agricultural schools or other important announcements that would be of interest to the public and especially to the farmers (Severson 1980, 257).

Later known as the Commercial Club Room, it served as an unofficial community center until 1936 when the Blooming Prairie Community Building was built (Severson 1980, 81 257).

Other buildings which provided public entertainment and served as social gathering places are concentrated in the historic district. Prominent among them is the Cooley Block at 405 Main St. E. where basketball games, stage performances, church bazaars, and public dances were held in what for many years was the only auditorium in the town (Iacovino 1992, 70). Beginning in 1896, in the era before moving pictures, lantern slide productions were shown there. In 1910 E. W. Cooley and Fern Thurston began showing films in the Cooley Block in what they called the Electric Theater. The Rex Theatre, also located in the district at 108 3rd Ave. N.E., began showing silent films in its new building in October of 1915 and "talking pictures" in 1929.

Communications in Blooming Prairie were also centered in the buildings in the historic district. The Steele County Telephone Company (organized in 1900, later the Intercounty Telephone Company) had offices and switchboards in various buildings including in the Betlach Food Market building (from 1914-circa 1928) and in the former First National Bank building at 413 Main St. E. (from 1928-circa 1946). The "Blooming Prairie Times", the town's principal newspaper, was published in the the rear of the First National Bank building from 1915-1934. One of the first radios heard in Blooming Prairie was purchased by the First National Bank and installed in its community room in the fall of 1922.

Also included in the historic district are several buildings which served as fraternal halls. The largest is the Masonic Hall at 415 Main St E. which is the home of Blooming Prairie's oldest fraternal organization--a men's Masonic chapter which was founded in 1875--and its associated women's group--the Order of the Eastern Star which was founded in 1904. The Veterans of Foreign Wars, established in 1931, met in the Betlach Meat Market and in the Treat Building. The American Legion, organized in 1919, met in the First National Bank at 345 Main St. E. John C. Hudson explains that the predilection that townspeople had for

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lodges and secret societies was a direct import from their northeastern or middle western, small-town origins. Rare was the town that could not boast of a Modern Woodmen or Odd Fellows organization within two years after the first buildings appeared on the townsite, and most fraternal organizations had their women's counterparts that were no less active. These were the social gathering points for town dwellers. Among the officers of the lodges, poetry clubs, church groups, and various auxiliaries were the names of all leading merchants and their spouses. Successful farmers, especially in later years, joined these groups but rarely participated to the same degree that townfolk did (Hudson 1985, 125).

The buildings in the historic district were also the site of much local political and civic activity as many of Blooming Prairie's early merchants and tradesmen served as civic leaders. For example, John C. Brainerd, president of the First National Bank from 1877-1915, helped write the first village charter, served as the first village recorder and treasurer, served in the state legislature from 1894-1901, and was active in local affairs for 50 years (Severson 1980, 36-38, 258). Ole K. Benson, one of the founders of the Farmers and Merchants State Bank, was called the "father of cooperatives" because he was an organizer of the Blooming Prairie Cooperative Creamery Association, the Farmers' Cooperative Elevator Association, and the Blooming Prairie Production Credit Association (Severson 1980, 248). Samuel A. Rask, who became president of the First National Bank in 1915, and C. A. Peterson, who became president in 1935, were both charter members of the Blooming Prairie Commercial Club which met in the basement of the bank. Longtime hardware merchant Frank Faltejsek was a 16-year member of the school board, a 16-year member of the Steele County Free Fair Board, a 17-year member of the Central Cooperative Oil Association, and a volunteer fireman for 37 years (Severson 1980, 126). Many members of the Morton family were also active in civic affairs and held public office.

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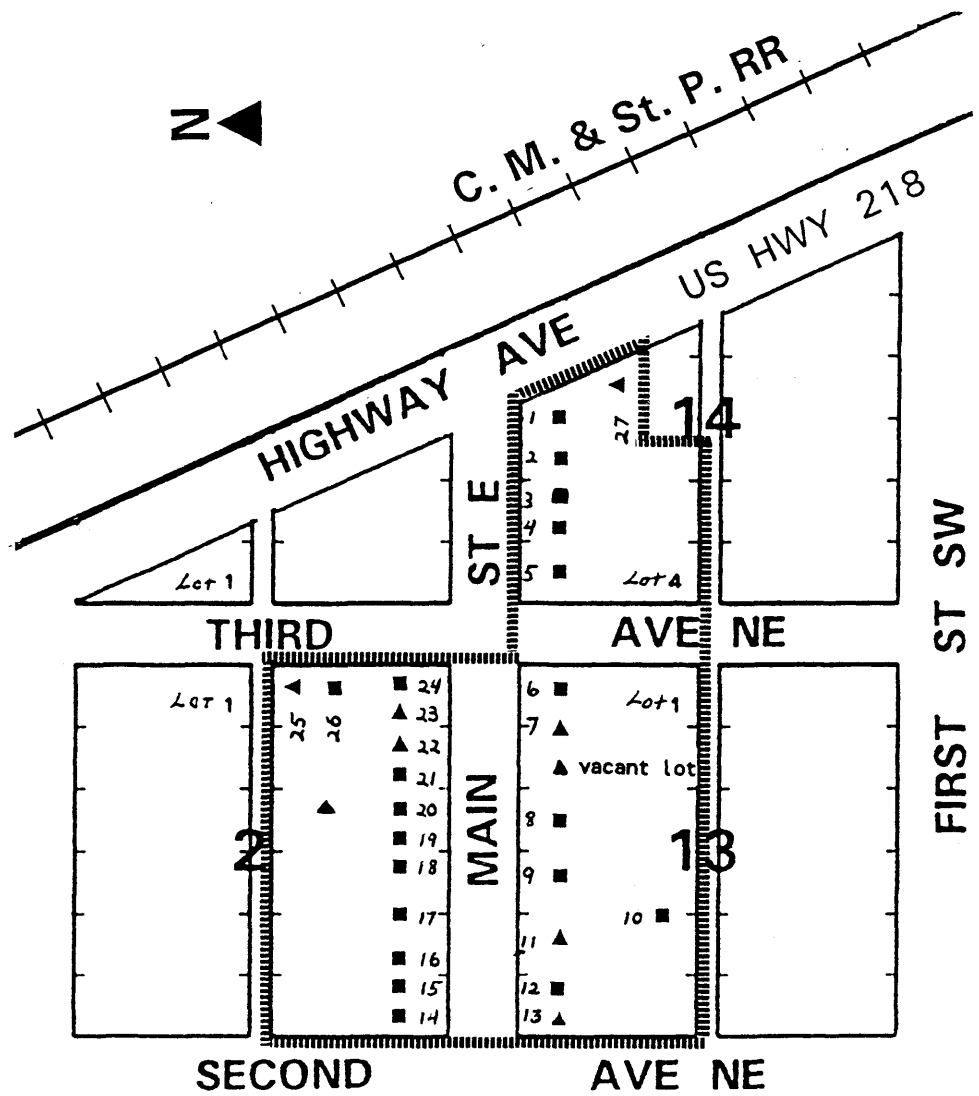Steele County, Minnesota

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Verbal Boundary Description:

The boundary of the Blooming Prairie Commercial Historic District is shown by the solid black line on the accompanying map entitled "Blooming Prairie Commercial Historic District, Blooming Prairie, Minnesota."

Boundary Justification:

The boundary of the district encompasses a cluster of adjacent commercial buildings in the central business district of Blooming Prairie which date from the period 1894-1932 and which retain integrity of design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. At the southeastern corner of the district the boundary jogs to exclude Blooming Prairie's city hall and library which was constructed circa 1992. Commercial buildings outside of the boundary of the district were excluded from the district because they either did not date from the period of significance or because they did not retain sufficient integrity to contribute to the district.

N ◄

C. M. & St. P. RR

US HWY 218

HIGHWAY AVE

ST E

FIRST ST SW

Lot 1

THIRD

AVE NE

Lot 4

1 ■
2 ■
3 ■
4 ■
5 ■

27 ▲

14

Lot 1

Lot 1

MAIN

◄ ■ ■ 24
25 26 ▲ 23
▲ 22
■ 21
▲ ■ 20
■ 19
■ 18
■ 17
■ 16
■ 15
■ 14

6 ■
7 ▲
▲ vacant lot
8 ■
9 ■
10 ■
11 ▲
12 ■
13 ▲

2

13

SECOND

AVE NE

Scale 1" = 189.5'

■ = Contributing

▲ = Non-Contributing