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NATIONAL REGISTER

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 of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Henderson Commercial Historic District

other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 418-526 Main Street

not for publication N/A

city, town Henderson

vicinity N/A

state Minnesota

code MN

county Sibley

code 143

zip code 56044

3. Classification

Ownership of Property

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>12</u>	<u>1</u> buildings
<u>    </u>	<u>    </u> sites
<u>    </u>	<u>    </u> structures
<u>    </u>	<u>    </u> objects
<u>12</u>	<u>1</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing:  
N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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.  See continuation sheet.

Nina M. Archabal  
Signature of certifying official Nina M. Archabal

11/4/88  
Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register.  See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register.  See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain:)

Arthur Dyer

Entered in the  
National Register

12/20/88

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

## 6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/general merchandise

COMMERCE/financial

COMMERCE/business

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/general merchandise

COMMERCE/restaurant

COMMERCE/business

## 7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Italianate

Queen Anne

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Stone

walls Brick

roof Slate

other Stone

Cast Iron

### Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Henderson Commercial District is located along a two-block portion of Main Street, Henderson's main commercial thoroughfare, between Fourth and Sixth Streets. The district, comprised of twelve contributing and one non-contributing structures, encompasses about two-thirds of Henderson's downtown business district. Bordering the historic district are the first Sibley County Courthouse, which is on the National Register (7-2-79), Italianate commercial buildings which have been altered substantially, a vacant lot, and post-1940 commercial buildings. The twelve contributing buildings of the historic district are a visually cohesive grouping of Italianate and Queen Anne commercial buildings. Built between 1874 and ca. 1905, the buildings are compatible in age, proportion, materials, and design. Nine of the buildings are two stories in height. All of the contributing structures are constructed of red brick, made from the Henderson brick yard. Most are intact above the first story and provide good examples of the decorative brickwork common in Italianate commercial architecture. Some of the structures retain original storefronts which are basically intact. Individual descriptions of the 13 buildings follow below.

### North Side of the District:

- Address: 418 Main Street  
Historic Name: Hardware Store  
Current Name: Wagar's Red Owl  
Built: circa 1880  
Status: Contributing

The building, which recently became part of Wagar's Red Owl, was possibly constructed as an addition to the building immediately to the west. The two-story Italianate commercial brick building is faced with the same reddish brick found throughout the district. The three bay main facade has rounded window openings with brick window hoods with keystone. The molding has been painted white. The window openings match the adjacent building to the west. The first story contains a storefront that has been altered slightly. The windows have been recently boarded up, from the inside, with knotty pine. The first floor has three large arches that rise almost to the second story. Each of the arches has a keystone. Two fluted columns flank the main entrance which has a transom overhead. There is an 18" firewall separating this structure with the building to the west. The building has housed a hardware store, the Hoffman Hotel, a clothing store, and a telephone exchange on the second floor.

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2. Address: 422 Main Street  
Historic Name: Charles Keller General Store  
Current Name: Wagar's Red Owl  
Built: 1874  
Status: Contributing

The two-story brick building stands on the northeast corner of Main Street and Fifth Street. The structure is faced with red brick. A decorative brick cornice tops the structure. Originally built by Charles Keller, a prosperous businessman, to house his general store, the three bay main facade and five bay western sidewall have rounded window openings topped by a keystone. Exterior alterations to the Italianate commercial building include partially filling window openings and painting the window hoods white and altering the first floor storefront. The structure housed a general store, the Hoffman Hotel and later a general store with a tin shop in the rear. The second floor housed various club rooms and later doctors' and dentists' offices.

3. Address; 500-502 Main Street  
Historic Name: J. Gerkan Building  
Current Name: U.S. Post Office/the Dabbler Cafe  
Built: 1893  
Status: Contributing

The J. Gerkan Building, constructed in 1893, is a two-story brick veneer building and occupies the northwest corner of Main and Fifth Streets. The second story of the Italianate commercial structure has slightly arched window openings with brick hoods. A decorative brickwork pattern comprises the cornice. The building has seven bays, the middle bay located above an interior stairwell that leads to the second floor. A stone nameplate featuring "J. Gerkan 1893" is located above the second floor windows. The first floor storefront on the left of the main facade is one of the most intact fronts in the district. Cast iron posts frame the windows nearest the entrance. Mankato Ironworks designed the piérs, their nameplate located at the bottom of the posts. The storefront has large display windows and a transom over the central entrance. Originally housing a saloon and then a hardware store, the space is now occupied by a café. The first floor storefront on the right, that currently houses the post office, has been altered. This portion of the building originally housed a general store and later a saloon.

4. Address: 506 Main Street  
Historic Name: Barbershop  
Current Name: Private residence  
Built: circa 1905  
Status: Contributing

The red brick building, the smallest structure in the district, is a one-story commercial building. A decorative brick cornice is found at the roofline. The

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storefront has been altered. The earliest known occupant was the local barber.

5. Address: 510 Main Street  
Historic Name: General Store  
Current Name: Private residence  
Built: circa 1905  
Status: Contributing

The building, which is now used as a private residence, is one-story and faced with reddish brick. Originally housing a general store, the store front has remained intact. A decorative brick cornice tops large glass display windows with a central entrance that sports a transom. Three panes of glass are found over each of the large display windows. The building was constructed around 1905.

6. Address: 514 Main Street  
Historic Name: Blasing Building  
Current Name: American Legion Club  
Built: 1900  
Status: Contributing

The Blasing Building, built in 1900, is a one-story brick building with a triangular parapet. The year 1900 is engraved in the parapet in stone. An arcaded frieze in decorative brick is interrupted by the Blasing nameplate in the center. A metal cornice, painted white, is found below the frieze. Exterior alterations include remodeling the storefront. A shingled overhang has been attached under the cornice. The building originally housed a drugstore and later a restaurant.

7. Address: 518 Main Street  
Historic Name: N/A  
Current Name: American Legion Post #74  
Built: 1977  
Status: Non-contributing

The American Legion Post, built in 1977, is a one-story building constructed of horizontal sandstone bricks of different sizes that rises approximately three feet and corrugated metal sheeting. This is the only non-contributing building in the district. Prior to 1977, a metal implement warehouse and auto repair shop were among the businesses that occupied the lot.

8. Address: 522 Main Street  
Historic Name: Saloon  
Current Name: River Valley Belle  
Built: 1877  
Status: Contributing

The brick building, which now houses a cafe, was built in 1877. It is a two-story

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Italianate commercial building faced with red brick. The second story has a decorative brick cornice and three rounded arch window openings. The eastern sidewall second story windows have slightly arched window openings. Exterior alterations include partially filling window openings with wood and altering the first floor storefront with vertical wood framing. Until 1917 the building housed a saloon.

9. Address: 526 Main Street  
Historic Name: H. Poehler and Co. Building  
Current Name: Wise Furniture  
Built: 1877  
Status: Contributing

The H. Poehler and Co. Building is a two-story Commercial Italianate structure faced with reddish brick which stands at the northeast corner of Main Street and Sixth Street. The top of the facade has a metal cornice with corbelling. A slightly projecting triangular parapet has the words "H. Poehler and Co. 1877" molded into the interior of the parapet. The second story has six rounded arch window openings with keystones in three of the openings. The western sidewall has five upper story bays with the same rounded arch window openings. Alterations to the exterior include partially filling the window openings with wood and altering the storefront. H. Poehler and Co., the original occupants, were in business until 1916 when the store was purchased by the Henderson Mercantile Co. The structure is now used for storage.

Southern Side of the District:

10. Address: 417 Main Street  
Historic Name: The Wentker Building  
Current Name: Henderson Drug  
Built: circa 1899  
Status: Contributing

The Wentker Building stands at the southeast corner of Main and Fifth Streets and is faced with reddish brick and trimmed with stone. The two-story Commercial Queen Anne building has a small parapet at the roofline. Square window openings flank a pair of smaller square window openings on the second story. Large stone lintels top three bays. The middle bay has the name "Wentker" carved into a stone nameplate. Upper story bays are separated by pilasters and pilaster corner posts on the western wall. A bay is wrapped around to the second story sidewall with the same decorative stone lintels. This sidewall also contains seven bays with a stone beltcourse forming the sills. Small square window openings with stone lintels appear on the first floor western sidewall. An entrance towards the rear on Fifth Street formally housed the Greyhound bus depot, a hanging sign still remains. The eastern sidewall previously had an exterior stairwell going up to the second floor. An entrance on the southeast portion of the structure, located on the eastern sidewall, has a large transom still intact. The rear windows on the first and second floors remain unaltered. Exterior alterations include altering the the storefront by moving the entrance from the center of the facade to the northwest corner. The building originally housed a general

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store and later a drugstore and clothing store.

11. Address: 501 Main Street  
Historic Name: Sibley County Bank  
Current Name: Valley Western Wear  
Built: 1874  
Status: Contributing

The Sibley County Bank stands at the southwest corner of Main and Fifth Streets. The two-story Commercial Italianate structure is faced with reddish brick. The second story of the main facade has three rounded arch window openings with brick hoods and a keystone. A decorative brick cornice tops the building. Exterior alterations include filling the four eastern sidewall window openings with brick, partially filling the main facade window openings, and altering the storefront. The building originally housed the Sibley County Bank until ca. 1950's. The Henderson Independent used the second floor during the turn of the century to publish its newspaper. The building, built in 1874, now houses a clothing store.

12. Address: 503-505 Main Street  
Historic Name: The Brahs Building  
Current Name: Nelson/Jones Law Office, American Pig Development Co., Dentist  
Built: circa 1896  
Status: Contributing

The two-story Commercial Italianate brick building has five rounded arch window openings, grouped in a set of three and a set of two. A half-circle parapet tops the roofline over the center bay of the group of three window openings. Exterior alterations include partially filling the window openings and altering the storefront. Three large arches with keystones are still visible under the stucco applied to the main facade. Originally the building housed an opera house on the second floor and two businesses on the first floor. A general store, saloon, bank, hardware store, tin shop, and hall have all occupied the first floor.

13. Address: 507 Main Street  
Historic Name: Farmers and Merchants Bank  
Current Name: Miller, Cowell, and Hagen Law Office  
Built: circa 1896  
Status: Contributing

The two-story Commercial Italianate brick structure has four bays of square window openings with flat stone arches. A decorative brick cornice complements the building. Exterior alterations include partially filling the window openings and altering the storefront. The building also housed a drugstore.

**8. Statement of Significance**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally  statewide  locally

Applicable National Register Criteria  A  B  C  D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions)  A  B  C  D  E  F  G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Exploration/Settlement

Architecture

Period of Significance

1874-1905

Significant Dates

1874, 1877

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

unknown

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The Henderson Commercial Historic District, located on Main Street in downtown Henderson, is historically significant as a strong visual and historical link to Henderson's development as an early agricultural river community and as the first county seat in Sibley County. Henderson was still thriving long after the era of steamboat trade had slowed on the Minnesota River, which forms the eastern border of the county. It continued to prosper after the Minneapolis and St. Louis Railroad cut diagonally through the county in 1881-1882. Architecturally, the district provides a significant collection of existing late nineteenth century commercial buildings which served as a supply and trade center for settlers and surrounding farms.

In 1851 the Treaty of Traverse des Sioux opened up the Minnesota River Valley for white settlement. Many immigrants travelled down the Minnesota River and steamboats played an important role in the influx of early settlers to Sibley County. The river town of Henderson, platted in 1855 by Joseph R. Brown, a notable fur trader, lumberman, politician, Indian Agent, land speculator, and inventor, became the junction of steamboat transportation and a road Brown built to the Sioux reservation on the Upper Minnesota River. Henderson became an important distribution center for inland settlements and military posts. Five different stage lines advertised their services for bringing supplies and immigrants to the interior region. Henderson was unique in that it was the only point on the Minnesota River, in the area, that could be approached from these interior towns. During 1856 over fifty tons of supplies were transported to Fort Ridgely alone and over 200 people passed through Henderson in one three-week period. As the first county seat, Henderson also served the governmental needs of the people of the county. Henderson also had one of seven land offices in the state.

Henderson became an important agricultural distribution point long before the railroad penetrated the county. During the 1850's small crops of potatoes, corn, and rutabagas were raised on cleared land north and west of Henderson. In 1857 a few fields of winter wheat were sown in northern Sibley County. The first bulk shipment of 4,000 bushels of wheat was sent on a barge to LaCrosse, Wisconsin in June 1861. Wheat became the principal export of the Minnesota River Valley, furs remaining the only other valuable commodity.

When the St. Paul and Sioux City Railroad line extended from Minneapolis along the eastern side of the Minnesota River Valley to New Ulm in 1871, steamboat trips on the river

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steadily disappeared. Henderson took advantage of the new mode of transportation by ferrying agricultural products across the river to be transported by rail car. A bridge was built across the river in 1877. Already a major agricultural distribution point, Henderson continued to flourish. In the Henderson Times date February 22, 1873 Charles Keller and Thomas Welch, local businessmen who each built the two oldest structures in the district and were partners in the grain elevator business, reported that their elevator and all the warehouses being full of wheat have taken possession of the freight house at the depot, on the eastern side of the river, and are filling it with wheat. Receipts for a total of 82,865 bushels of wheat were received that month. Charles Keller built a new brick general store in 1874 and Thomas Welch built a brick building in that same year to house the Sibley County Bank founded January 1, 1875. Although the Minneapolis and St. Louis Railroad, built through the county in 1881-1882, further hindered river traffic, Henderson continued to thrive as a viable town. Census figures show that from 1880-1900 Henderson's population remained between 900 and 965. In 1910 Henderson remained the second largest city in the county.

The buildings in the Henderson Commercial Historic District represent many components essential to a growing river community and county seat. General merchandise, clothing, hardware, saloons, banks, drugstores, and hotels occupied the storefronts of the buildings. Many of the buildings in the district are second generation brick buildings which replaced earlier wood frame structures, more moderate in size and design and precariously susceptible to fire. The twelve contributing buildings were constructed over a thirty year period and represent efforts to construct handsome, substantial, and permanent structures in architectural styles popular at the time. The materials of brick, stone, and cast iron reflect permanency and represent stability. The buildings bear witness to the optimism which penetrated Henderson at the time.

Until 1915 when the county seat moved from Henderson to the geographical center of the county, Gaylord, Henderson remained a viable, economically sound community. With the move of the county seat, Henderson's population decreased about 20%. Although the population remains at 739, the supply of goods and services is now largely dispensable as local farmers travel to larger cities to obtain commercial services. As a result, some of the buildings in Henderson's downtown district remain underused. The economic future of the town's small businesses remain uncertain. Recently the town has turned to other means of promoting the quaint river town. Focusing on tourism, the Sibley County Historical Society, still located in town, gives tours of the August Poehler House, a site listed on the National Register. The townspeople are also planning for the restoration of the former Sibley County Courthouse, another site listed on the National Register. A brochure promoting the historic sites and buildings of the town and surrounding area was published in 1987 and is being distributed by the Minnesota Office of Tourism.

The Henderson Commercial Historic District was included in an historic sites survey of Sibley County recently conducted by the State Historic Preservation Office. The survey staff determined that the historic buildings in Henderson's central business district are unusually intact both individually and as a group in comparison to commercial districts in other communities of similar size and age in the county. The Henderson Commercial Historic District fits within the SHPO Early Agriculture and River Settlement historic context.



**9. Major Bibliographical References**

"Henderson Centennial Edition 1852-1952," The Henderson Independent, Henderson, MN, 1952.

The Henderson Times. February 22, 1873.

History of the Minnesota River Valley by Rev. Edward D. Neill, and History of the Sioux Massacre by Charles S. Foote. Comp. by George E. Warner and Charles S. Bryant. Minneapolis: North Star Publishing Co. 1882.

The Sibley County Independent. July 15, 29, August 5, 1874.

Thom, Edward Arthur. The Railroad and Concomitant Factors Influencing the Growth and Development of Two Minnesota River Valley Towns, St. Paul, 1960. Thesis (located at the Minnesota Historical Society Reference Library in St. Paul.)

See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of property 1 acre

UTM References

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

C | 1,5 | 4|2,8|0,2,5 | 4,9|3,0|7,0,5 |

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

D | 1,5 | 4|2,7|8,5,5 | 4,9|3,0|6,8,0 |

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

That part of the Townsite of Henderson described as follows: Beginning at the point of intersection of the southern edge of the West-East Alley of Block 67 of the Henderson Townsite and the northern extension of the western lot line of Lot 6 of said Block 67, thence easterly along the northern lot line of said Lot 6 to a point of intersection with the northern lot line of Lot 7, Block 58, thence southerly along the eastern lot line

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes the city lots that have historically been associated with the properties included in the district,

See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Liz Holum Johnson / Contract Research Historian

organization Minnesota Historical Society/SHPO date 6/87

street & number Fort Snelling History Center telephone (612) 726-1171

city or town St. Paul state Minnesota zip code 55111

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Verbal Boundary Description continued:

of said Lot 7 to a point of intersection with the southern lot line of said Lot 7, thence westerly along the southern lot line of said Lot 7 to a point of intersection with the southeastern corner of Lot 6, Block 58, thence southerly along the eastern lot line of Lot 6, Block 57 to a point of intersection of the northern edge of the West-East Alley of said Block 57, thence westerly along the northern edge of the West-East Alley to a point of intersection with the western lot line of Lot 10, Block 68, thence northerly along the western lot line of said Lot 10 to a point of intersection with the southern lot line of Lot 10, Block 67, thence westerly along the southern lot line of said Lot 10 to a point of intersection with the southern extension of Lot 6, Block 67, thence northerly along the western lot line of said Lot 6, to the point of beginning.

