

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC Northwestern National Bank of Owatonna

AND/OR COMMON National Farmers' Bank of Owatonna

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER Northeast corner of Broadway and Cedar Streets

CITY, TOWN Owatonna VICINITY OF 1st  
STATE Minnesota CODE COUNTY Steele

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME Northwestern Bank, A. M. Severson, President (507-451-5670)

STREET & NUMBER 101 North Cedar Street

CITY, TOWN Owatonna VICINITY OF STATE Minnesota 55060

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC Steele County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN Owatonna STATE Minnesota

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

DATE

FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN STATE

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## 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

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### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The site of the bank measures 68 feet by 154 feet, the bank itself occupies 68 square feet of the total while a small warehouse, two shops and fifteen office units take up the rest.

Morrison's description follows: "As in all of Sullivan's later buildings, only a partial impression of the beauty of both exterior and interior can be obtained from photographs, since the effect of the original depends so largely on color. The exterior of the bank has a base of reddish brown sandstone ashlar, laid in courses of different heights, and penetrated by simple rectangular door and window openings. Above this the wall is faced by rough shale brick in soft and variegated colors, the general effect being a rich dark red. The walls are opened by two great arched windows thirty-six feet in span, with wide flat archivolt consisting of ten concentric header courses of brick. The glass is set in vertical steel mullions. The walls are treated as large rectangular panels framed by an outer band of enamelled terra cotta relief in bronze-green accented with brown, and an inner five-inch band of brilliant glass mosaic dominantly blue in color but with touches of green, white, and gold. The wall is capped by a heavy cornice of unique design, consisting simply of corbelled courses of brick bounded above and below by bands of brown terra cotta. The total effect is very rich, with the colors blending softly from a distance, but strongly individual at close range.

The interior is a large square room, rich in decorative detail and glowing in color, although the total effect of light spaciousness absorbs the detail so that it is never obtrusive or over-brilliant. The room is amply lighted by the great arched windows on two sides and a skylight overhead, and there is a curious quality to the light--a greenish tinge, like sunlight passed through sea-water. The windows are of double thickness: plate glass outside, and opalescent leaded glass inside, with an hermetically sealed air-space between for protection against extremes of cold and heat. The inner windows are marbled green and buff in color, with center patterns of buff and violet. On the opposite walls, under arches of the same size as the window arches, are two large mural paintings by Oskar Gross representing dairy and harvest scenes. The wide archivolt and out soffits of all four arches are beautifully colored; on the archivolt a stencilled pattern in jade green, brick red, dull green and buff colors; on the soffits, terra cotta relief sheathed in gold leaf. The banking offices project into the room on three sides as one-story enclosures. The walls are of red Roman brick, topped by a cornice of enamelled green terra cotta. The counters and deal plates are of Belgian black marble, and the cashiers' grilles are of bronze. Note-worthy details are the green terra cotta enframing of the clock, the decorative panel over the entrance door, and the lighting fixtures, the shades of which are miniatures of the whole building. The furniture, including the check desks, was all especially designed.

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# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1907-1908

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Louis Sullivan and George Grant Elmslie

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Following his success with the Carson, Pirie, Scott Department Store in Chicago the next most important commission was the National Farmers' Bank at Owatonna, Minnesota. Its success as a work of outstanding architectural merit brought him the commissions that were his only means of support in his later years (8 of his last 11 buildings were small midwestern banks). Many critics feel that Owatonna is the finest of the series.

Hugh Morrison describes how the commission evolved: "In 1907 the bank officers decided to carry out long-contemplated plans for a new building. The vice-president of the bank, Mr. Carl K. Bennett, described in an article their search for an architect: 'The layout of the floor space was in mind for many years, but the architectural expression of the business of banking was probably a thing more felt than understood. Anyhow, the desire for such expression persisted, and a pretty thorough study was made of existing bank buildings. The classic style of architecture so much used for bank buildings was at first considered, but was finally rejected as being not necessarily expressive of a bank, and also because it is defective when it comes to any practical use. Because architects who were consulted preferred to follow precedent or to take their inspiration "from the books," it was determined to make a search for an architect who would not only take into consideration the practical needs of the business but who would heed the desire of the bank officers for an adequate expression in the form of the building of the use to which it would be put. This search was made largely through the means of the art and architectural magazines, including the "Craftsman," with the hope of finding some architect whose aim it was to express the thought or use underlying a building, adequately, without fear of precedent, like a virtuoso shaping his materials into new forms of use and beauty.' It so happened that one of Sullivan's articles, entitled "What is Architecture?" A Study in the American People of Today" had been published in The Craftsman in the preceding year, and this article attracted the attention of the officers of the bank as revealing the architect they sought. Through it Sullivan obtained the commission.

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The plan is admirably adapted to the purpose of a farmers' bank. In addition to the strictly banking rooms, there is a farmers' exchange room intended for the private business or social transactions of the bank's clients; a women's parlor; a private consultation room for conference with the bank's officers; and the president's office. All of these are furnished in quarter-sawed white oak, with walls and ceilings panelled in broad, smooth surfaces, built-in benches cushioned in dull red leather, and especially designed tables and writing desks, carpets, chairs, etc. In the president's office there is a small mural painting by John Norton, dated 1923. This is undoubtedly the best painting to be found anywhere in association with Sullivan's architecture."<sup>1</sup>

There were alterations in the 1930's (tellers grilles removed, etc). In 1958 the architectural firm of Harwell Hamilton Harris and A. Moorman of Fort Worth, Texas were hired to restore and yet modernize the bank. As a result, the exterior has been restored and the interior treated with great respect. Dr. Paul Sprague, the noted Sullivan scholar has commented that the Owatonna bank is one of the very few, perhaps the only major work of architecture to have been saved entirely through the efforts of a business, its management and its money. The mural on the last wall has been pierced by a window. Hammel Brothers and Anderson were the contractors.

<sup>1</sup>Morrison, Hugh. Louis Sullivan, Prophet of Modern Architecture. W. W. Norton, New York 1935, pp. 208-210.

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The National Farmers' Bank was begun in 1907, and completed in 1908. Since only part of the lot was necessary for the bank itself, the remaining land at the east was utilized for a two-story wing containing two stores, several offices, and a small warehouse. This wing is independent of the banking room, but treated in the same material and style."<sup>1</sup>

David Gebhart has established that the building was basically designed by George Elmslie--and that Sullivan contributed only two basic design elements: the ornamental pattern on the underside of the interior soffits of the great arches and the basic box-like concept of the building.

Although small in scale the effect of the Owatonna bank is formal and monumental, embellished with magnificent ornament, functional in its use and most important, perhaps, because it is a superb example of the design partnership of Sullivan and Elmslie.

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<sup>1</sup>Morrison, Hugh. Louis Sullivan, Prophet of Modern Architecture. W. W. Norton, New York 1935, pp. 207-208.

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