

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

SEP 8 1987

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Main Street Historic District

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Historic Name: **Main Street Historic District**

Location: 100 block West Main - 300 block East Main  
Bozeman, Montana (030)  
Gallatin County (031)

Classification: Historic District  
private ownership  
public acquisition: n/a  
occupied  
restricted access  
commercial use

Ownership: multiple

Location of Legal Description: Gallatin County Courthouse, Main Street,  
Bozeman, Montana

Representation in Existing Surveys: Historic Resource Survey of Bozeman, Montana,  
1982-1986, sponsored by the Bozeman City-County Planning  
Office.

Depository of Survey Records: Montana State Historic Preservation Office, 102 S.  
Broadway, Helena, Montana.

**PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: Main Street Historic District**

Contributing buildings: 49  
Non-contributing buildings: 19

The Bozeman Main Street Historic District, the heart of the city of Bozeman and the only urban environment in the Gallatin Valley, is composed of a virtually uninterrupted streetscape of commercial buildings along both sides of four blocks. The district stretches along a segment of the primary east-west thoroughfare in the valley, not far from its emergence from the mountainous Bozeman Pass. It is bounded at either end by the two major city landmarks, the 6-story Baxter and 4-story Bozeman Hotels. With the exception of a few buildings on Tracy Avenue and Babcock Street, the entire district is visible from any point within it on Main Street. Characterizing the district in general are 2-story, late 19th and early 20th century brick commercial blocks of varied height and design. Most have generally high architectural significance, but few stand out as exceptional. Bands of colorful, irregular storefronts, canopies, and signage unify all the buildings at street level, where little historic fabric survives. Of the 68 buildings in the district, 49 are architecturally significant, while 19 are non-contributing structures. Of the latter, several are very small and unobtrusive, such as 115-117, 234, and 303 East Main. At least another three,

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while not yet fifty years old, are nevertheless architecturally important, such as 26, 36, and 225 East Main (the city's only commercial example of the International style) and may be reassessed as "contributing" buildings after more time has passed.

While few, if any, structures retain complete integrity, most have regularly spaced windows and considerable ornamentation - elements that lend a strong visual cohesion to the district overall. Four large historic buildings, which stand on corner lots and which have been completely encased by textured sheathing within the past 15 years (1-5, 2-12, 104, and 136-140 East Main) constitute virtually the only major gaps in the overall historic integrity of the district. (The First Security Bank, built in 1960 at 208 East Main, is the one other major gap.) The largest of these non-contributing buildings is the 5-story, Classical Revival style First National Bank, built in 1920 and completely covered in 1972. The building is a major visual anchor at the district center, equidistant from the Baxter and Bozeman Hotels, and counter-balancing them on the south side of the street. The historic integrity of these encased buildings, however, can potentially be recovered by removal of sheathing, followed by selective restoration if necessary, as was done with two buildings in 1980, 9 and 11 East Main.

Twenty-four percent of the buildings in the district date from the 1870's through the 1890's (this percentage does not include five buildings from this period which have been substantially remodeled during the early 20th century, and three from this period that have been encased). These buildings are concentrated in the eastern half of the district, and form a distinct architectural category, all being built of brick, and most displaying elements of the Italianate and Commercial Queen Anne styles. Only two date from the 1870's: the impressive 2-story Col. L. M. Black Building (118 E. Main) built in 1872, and the small 1-story blacksmith shop built across the street by F. Harper the following year (237 E. Main).

There are two excellent examples of the Italianate style, one of which is the Spieth and Krug Brewery (240-246 E. Main), notable for its large size and high overall integrity. (This building was listed in the National Register on April 19, 1984.) Although much smaller, 29 E. Main displays a more impressive array of hallmark Italianate style features, such as a lavish bracketed cornice, ornate window hood moldings, and corner quoins. Two fine examples of the Commercial Queen Anne style are the I.O.O.F. Hall (221 E. Main), and Barnett Building (11 E. Main). (The Barnett Building was listed in the National Register on December 1, 1980 and its facade was substantially reconstructed prior to listing). In addition to these two styles, the Hotel Bozeman (321 E. Main), most notable for its landmark scale and corner orientation, is a vernacular example of the Romanesque style, and Smith's Palace Saloon (135 E. Main), which retains incised wooden detailing above the windows, is a unique, vernacular example of the High Victorian Gothic style.

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A group of three buildings from this period at the northwestern corner of Bozeman Avenue, all erected between 1882 and 1883, appears to have been planned for an impressive effect. The 2-story buildings progressively increase in height, terminating at the corner with the tallest, the Masonic Temple (137 E. Main). The first of the group, the Basinski Bros. Building at 131 E. Main, was remodeled c. 1925, but retains its original massing and fenestration pattern. Around 1889, a 1-story commercial block with an elaborate bracketed cornice was added to the west, thus continuing the rhythm.

The period from 1900 to 1930 accounts for a full 50% of the buildings in the district, which display a much greater variety of style, material, and color than the 19th century construction. (This percentage includes several earlier buildings remodeled during this period, and excludes only two built in this period that were remodeled after 1930). The diverse facades of these buildings employ stucco, polychromatic glazed brick, molded concrete, terra cotta, marble, and even mosaic designs for tremendously varied effects. These buildings form complete streetscapes on both sides of the street between Willson and Tracy Avenues (with the exception of the remodeled Chambers-Fisher's Golden Rule Store, 7 W. Main), and predominate elsewhere.

One of the most notable examples from this period is the glazed brick Hotel Baxter (105 W. Main), an eclectic Art Deco form which dominates the western end of the district by its sheer size. (The Hotel Baxter was listed in the National Register on April 19, 1984.) Another is the Fechter Hotel (128-130 E. Main), which has an unusually striking facade of intricate, high-relief, Neo-Gothic Revival style ornament in white, glazed terra cotta. The National Bank of Gallatin Valley (1 W. Main) exhibits another unusual material - concrete blocks molded in imitation of rusticated masonry. The Saunders Building (124-126 E. Main) displays complex, polychromatic brick work, and one of the very few original storefronts and full transoms in the district. Two fine examples of the Spanish Colonial Revival style, complete with white stuccoed walls and ornamental, pan and tile parapet roofs, are the Bon Ton Bakery (34-42 W. Main) and the Dixon-Alexander Building (17 South Tracy).

While no buildings in the district were built during the ten year period between 1930 and 1940, a number experienced significant facade modifications. Two gained wholly new facades, 9 and 219 E. Main, while three others 118 E. Main, 20 W. Main, and the Hotel Baxter gained Art Deco style storefronts, two of which employ Carrara glass. The curved facade of the Joyce Theatre (219 E Main) is the district's only example of the Streamline Moderne style.

Twenty-one percent of the buildings in the district date in exterior appearance from 1940 to the present, most of which are older buildings that have been remodeled and none of which are considered to be of exceptional significance. Like the previous period, this one is highly diverse in both style, material, and

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color. The Woolworth Building (26 E. Main, remodeled c. 1948), evidences lingering Art Deco style influence; the American Legion Building (225 E. Main, 1949) is the sole example of the International style in the district; and the Owenhouse Hardware Building (36 E. Main, remodeled c.1950) presents a purely abstract facade, the design of which is based on color and texture rather than style. Architecture of the 1960's is represented only by the Security National Bank (208 E. Main) and the Chambers-Fisher facade (7 W. Main), which was remodeled with ornamental concrete blocks and banks of glass. None of these buildings have been judged to make a positive contribution to the historic character of the district.

Several suspended signs in the district, while not eligible for the National Register as contributing elements due to age, nevertheless have significance of their own, often employing neon and Streamline Moderne motifs, and adding color and relief to the streetscape. The signs for the Cosner Apartments (128 E. Main; c.1938), The Pines Cafe (127 E. Main; c.1960), Powderhorn Sporting Goods (33 E. Main; 1948), and of course, Country West's locally famous revolving horse (137 E. Main, 1968), are among the most important.

The Main Street Historic District, with its tremendous diversity of architecture, has retained a high degree of cohesiveness overall. The few significant gaps in the historic fabric that do exist are potentially reversible. Continual building maintenance, such as the recent resurfacing of the stuccoed facade of 23 E. Main, and a thriving downtown economy, indicate that the district will remain a permanent record of both Bozeman's history and its ever-changing appearance.

**STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE: Main Street Historic District**

Period of Significance: 1870-1937

Areas of Significance: Architecture, Exploration/Settlement, Commerce

The Bozeman Main Street Historic District, characterized by generally high architectural quality and cohesiveness, is of both regional historic significance as the economic and cultural center of the Gallatin Valley since the 1860's and of statewide significance as the gateway to the settlement of western Montana. In addition, the rash military ventures and demands for protection promulgated in the early 1870's by Bozeman's Main Street merchants contributed to the events leading up to the nationally significant Battle of Little Big Horn. Despite Bozeman's distinction as the second largest settlement in the territory of Montana by 1872 (following Helena), and its steady growth into a modern city by the early 20th century, there is an absence of high style architecture on Main Street, which attests to the sparse population and rural economy that the commercial district served at that time. Bozeman's regional commercial function, which extended as far west as the gold mining communities of Helena and Bannack in the 1860's and 1870's, and later predominately served the agricultural tracts of the Gallatin Valley, has always had its focus on Main Street.

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Buildings in the Main Street Historic District span chronologically from 1872 to 1983, but are most numerous from two periods: the early 1880's, coinciding with city incorporation and the arrival of the Northern Pacific Railroad in 1883, and from about 1900 to 1925, when Bozeman emerged as the undisputed early 20th century commercial center of the Gallatin Valley. While most buildings in the district are of comparable significance, the 1928 Art Deco style Hotel Baxter (105 W. Main), and the 1891 Romanesque style Bozeman Hotel (321 E. Main), are clearly outstanding by virtue of both their sheer size and visual predominance in the district, and their significance as major, community-sponsored civic improvements.

Perhaps the single most historically significant structure in the Main Street Historic District is the Black/Cooper Building (118 E. Main), which was built in 1872. This building, the first impressive masonry building erected in Bozeman and the oldest existing structure in the district, was associated with the perpetual quest for gold and the wars with the Indians that permeated early Montana history. Bozeman ranked only fourth in population of all towns in the territory of Montana in 1870, but by the time of the construction of this block, it was second, behind only Helena.<sup>1</sup> A newspaper editor from that town visited Bozeman in 1872, and gave an impressive description, reprinted in Bozeman's Avant Courier, that was typical of other accounts that appeared frequently in the paper at the time. He remarked that in Bozeman: "Businessmen jostle each other on the sidewalks, [and] the rumble of drays and freight wagons is continuous from early morn till long after nightfall, while the sound of the hammer and trowel is heard above all the din of business."<sup>2</sup> Even Frank Harper, a blacksmith, built an impressive brick shop, still standing today across the street from the Cooper/Black Building at 237 E. Main. Similar in detailing to that large block, the small, 1-story, 3-bay, false-fronted shop may have been executed by the same masons, Messrs. Crowell.

By the early 1870's, Spieth and Krug, two German immigrants who had returned to Bozeman after having passed through early in the 1860's on their way to the gold mines, had opened a brewery, and held dances for those described as Bozeman's "elite", in an upstairs hall.<sup>3</sup> Spieth and Krug replaced their first frame brewery in 1883 with a brick one of similar dimensions on the same site, still standing at 240-246 E. Main. In addition to social functions at Spieth and Krug's hall, dances were frequently held by the officers of Fort Ellis and their

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<sup>1</sup> Avant Courier, October 31, 1872, p.2

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, March 7, 1873, p.2

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, September 19, 1872, p.3

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wives at the fort.<sup>4</sup> Tourists on their way to the newly created Yellowstone National Park brought further activity to Bozeman in the early 1870's.<sup>5</sup>

Despite this lively social climate - at least, relative to other settlements in the vast, sparsely populated territory - the future of the town could never be certain amid the perpetual, although perhaps unfounded uncertainties, over the security of Bozeman Pass, the primary route of passage to the city from the east and south.

The Northern Pacific Railroad, steadily advancing across the Great Plains during the early 1870's, promised an end to these fears by forging an imperturbable link with civilization. Completion of the rail line became the obsession of Bozeman residents. Hardly an issue of the Avant Courier was printed in the early 1870's without some account, usually quite extensive, of the progress of the railroad, along with an excessively optimistic estimate of the time of its arrival. Thus, when large groups of plains Indians gathered to impede construction of the railroad in June, 1872, and when a survey party that left Fort Ellis with a military escort was attacked and forced to turn back in July, calls for action against the Indians became frequent. "Mere defensive measures are insufficient," declared an Avant Courier editorial.<sup>6</sup>

Within a few months, the Panic of 1873 had stalled the encouraging economic growth of the previous few years, which only compounded the mounting frustration over the Indian situation. A desperate group of Bozeman merchants met in the Chesnut Saloon, which stood at the northwest corner of Main Street and Bozeman Avenue, in 1874 to discuss this recurring threat to Bozeman's commercial vitality. As a result of the meeting, the "Yellowstone Wagon Road and Prospecting Expedition" was organized and would travel into the Indian-controlled area of the Yellowstone River Valley, with the stated purpose of investigating rumored gold deposits in the area and locating new trade routes into Bozeman. The actual purpose however, was more likely to provoke a new war with the Indians in an effort to boost business for Bozeman's merchants, as Meagher's War had done in 1867. This venture, as well as similar outbreaks between white and Indians along the Oregon Trail the following year, caused officers in the military headquarters at St. Paul to investigate the possibility of a massive offensive

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, May 2, 1872, p.2

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, March 7, 1872, p.2

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, June 6, 1872, p. 2

<sup>7</sup> Billings Gazette, 2nd Edition, February 10, 1935, p.1

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against the Indians.<sup>8</sup> The Battle of Little Big Horn on June 25, 1876 indirectly accomplished just what Bozeman merchants had wanted for years: control of the Indians on reservations, and a military force stationed on the Yellowstone, both of which would be supplied with goods from Bozeman.

Despite the effective elimination of the Indians as a factor in the completion of the railroad, line construction remained stalled, and depressed conditions persisted in Bozeman. As late as 1878, Col. Black, one of Bozeman's most active and successful businessmen, took a substantial loss when the First National Bank that he organized in the thriving year of 1872, folded.<sup>9</sup> However, by 1880, with completion of the long-awaited railroad still three years off, economic activity in the city began an abrupt and dramatic upswing, as evidenced in the Main Street Historic District by the numerous, mostly Italianate style brick blocks dating from the first three years of the 1880's. Thus Bozeman, first conceived as a frontier outpost that was strategically located at the most easily traversed pass through the southern mountains, was able to survive as a viable economic entity long after the need for such an outpost had passed.

At the beginning of the building season in 1883, the year of city incorporation, the Avant Courier surmised: "The prospect now is that there will be double the building of business blocks and residences ever before known in the history of the city of Bozeman."<sup>10</sup> This estimate may not have been far from actuality. A list of building and improvement costs included in Alderson's 1883 guide to the city and county indicated that only \$50,000 was spent on construction in the city in 1879, while in 1880, that amount had quadrupled, and remained in the six-digit figures throughout the first half of the decade.<sup>11</sup>

In 1883, Walter Cooper and John S. Dickerson, both substantial land owners in Bozeman, responded to the new conditions and the completion of the railroad to town by placing an advertisement in the St. Paul and Minnesota Daily Pioneer Press describing their city as: .."The finest field on the Northern Pacific for investment in Real Estate."<sup>12</sup> Perhaps over-anticipating the demand for land in

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<sup>8</sup> Freeman, Cortland, The Growing Up Years: The First 100 Years of Bozeman as an Incorporated City: 1883-1983, p.13

<sup>9</sup> Griffen, Harvey, "First National Dominated Bozeman Banking History," 1964/1971, typescript, p.2

<sup>10</sup> Avant Courier, May 10, 1883, p. 3

<sup>11</sup> Alderson, Matt W., Bozeman: A Guide to Its Places of Recreation, 1883, p.1

<sup>12</sup> Daily Pioneer Press, St. Paul and Minneapolis, June 2, 1883, p.1

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Bozeman, Cooper, Dickerson, and Nelson Story ambitiously platted the Park Addition - an extensive area at the west end of the city. It would be twenty years before residential development would actually occur there. Although the Park Addition was not developed, the rest of the city was dramatically transformed during the first few years of the 1880's, and in 1884, the Avant Courier commissioned a new bird's eye view of Bozeman to be drawn, probably to both document and flaunt the growth.

Brick commercial blocks and residences were going up so fast in the first few years of the 1880's that brick makers had difficulty meeting the demand. Construction of both the Tivoli Beer Hall (17 E. Main) and the Spieth and Krug Brewery (240-246 E. Main) were delayed for lack of brick.<sup>13</sup> The Tivoli, a building of only modest size, consequently took nine months to complete, while Spieth and Krug had to settle for brick of a slightly different color for the second floor of their large building -- a difference which is quite evident today.

The Tivoli, which was more impressive when built with its arcaded first floor and overhanging balcony, which have since been removed, and the impressive Spieth and Krug Brewery, were matched in architectural quality by Smith's Palace Saloon and Billiard Hall (135 E. Main). The Palace was designed in the High Victorian Gothic style by architects Vreeland & Kemna, and was constructed as part of a formal grouping of three buildings, 131, 135, and 137 E. Main, all built between 1880 and 1883, that progressively increase in height. The group terminates with the tallest and perhaps most impressive of the three, the Italianate style Masonic Temple, which stands on the corner.

Another impressive, intentional grouping of three buildings built in the early 1880's was composed of 23, 27, and 29 E. Main, although only the Italianate style 29 E. Main retains its original appearance. The westernmost of these buildings, (23 E. Main) remodeled around 1920 with a completely new facade, was originally very similar to 29 E. Main. These two framed the wider and much more simple block in the middle, 27 E. Main. This grouping was built between 1880 and 1883 by the mercantile firm of Achilles Lamme and Co., one of the several businesses in the city that served the entire Gallatin County region by the 1880's. Such a regional role, which had been established during the previous two decades, was greatly augmented by the railroad, which provided large, dependable shipments of goods.

Like Lamme's business, L. S. Willson and Co. had a "wholesale trade in all the county commercially contributing to Bozeman," according to Ellsworth's 1898

<sup>13</sup> Avant Courier, September 28, 1882, p.3 and February 10, 1881, p.3

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account.<sup>14</sup> In 1882 the Willson Company, which was founded by Bozeman pioneer and prominent citizen, General Lester S. Willson, built a block very similar to the Osborn Block, the latter of which still stands today at 229-231 E. Main. In 1903, the Company built a new commercial building, presently standing at 101 E. Main.

F. L. Benepe built a commercial block at the west end of the historic district (104 W. Main) for his "agricultural implements" business, which catered to farmers throughout the Gallatin Valley. He also operated large grain elevators in Bozeman in connection with his regional grain trade. Leeson's 1889 History of Montana notes that Benepe ... "brought and sold more grain than any man in the Gallatin Valley." His ninety foot deep commercial block still displays its original, c.1886 painted sign on the west side of the building that reads: "F. L. Benepe Agricultural Implements."

Sebree, Ferris & White, another of the several businesses in Bozeman that conducted an extensive regional trade, was established in Bozeman in 1882, specifically due to the economic opportunities presented by the coming railroad. This company built a large brick block to house its hardware store across from Benepe's block in 1890 at 34-42 W. Main (completely remodeled in 1928).

As these numerous 19th century commercial blocks attest, Bozeman by the 1880's had become the economic hub of the increasingly prosperous agricultural region of the Gallatin Valley. The commercial hub of Bozeman, in turn, has always been the Main Street Historic District. Distant settlements, such as Virginia City and Helena, which in the 1860's and 1870's had close economic ties with Bozeman, by the 1880's had either been eclipsed or become self-sufficient. Newer settlements closer to Bozeman, however, such as Chestnut, Pony, Red Bluff, the military post Fort Ellis, and others, sprang up and funneled substantial commercial activity into Bozeman. A number of these early settlements had become ghost towns by the early 20th century. Thus, Bozeman became a bustling city that thrived on regional commerce rather than the presence of any specific local businesses or industries. In 1883, Matt Alderson boasted that visitors from the east arriving in Bozeman on the railroad would often remark, "You must have a splendid country here to have built up such a town so far from other settlements."

The surrounding country was indeed "splendid," for the high fertility of the valley was prized by the earliest settlers in the 1850's. F. L. Benepe must have had little trouble finding customers for his agricultural implements, or finding grain to fill his elevators, for Alderson noted that Bozeman was surrounded by an agricultural and stock raising community whose annual income in 1883 was \$15 million - a tremendous figure at the time. The total for the Gallatin Valley must have been considerably higher.

<sup>14</sup> Ellsworth, W., A History of the Gallatin Valley and the City of Bozeman, 1898, p. 18

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Although Bozeman's growing economic predominance in the valley in the 1880's, in retrospect, can be considered to have been inevitable due to sheer momentum, the appearance of the small town of Belgrade, founded about eight miles west of Bozeman by Thomas Buchanan Quaw, was thought to pose a substantial threat to the city's economic vitality at the time. Belgrade was more centrally located in the Gallatin Valley than Bozeman, and by 1886 received over half of the entire grain crop of the valley for shipping.<sup>15</sup> Bozeman entrepreneurs conducted behind-the-scenes dealings with Northern Pacific Railroad officials, which apparently resulted in the sale of "sheltered lots" along the railroad right-of-way in Belgrade, the intention being to hamper the growth of this potential rival.<sup>16</sup>

Suspecting wrong doing, and frustrated by the sluggish growth of his town, Quaw lashed out at his rivals and in so doing, ironically, summed up the historic basis for the economic success of Bozeman. In an advertisement for his Belgrade Grain and Produce Co. in June, 1891, he claimed, "...Bozeman, a city of 3000, ...owes its existence not to the wealth, enterprise, or intellect of its citizens, but to the fact that a region thirty miles in length ...has for twenty years been pouring a steady stream of wealth into the strong boxes of its bankers and merchants."<sup>17</sup> This "stream of wealth" would steadily increase throughout the early 20th century, and allow Bozeman to grow into a modern city. We can only imagine Quaw's perturbation if he could hear contemporary descriptions of Belgrade as merely "a suburb of Bozeman."

By 1891 Quaw had witnessed from his Queen Anne style house in Belgrade, which today stands vacant, not only the steadily increasing prosperity in Bozeman, but a new surge of confidence among the people there as well. That year marked the completion of three major masonry buildings at the corner of Rouse and Main, intended to rapidly urbanize the city. The Hotel Bozeman, an immense, four-story, Romanesque style building and the only one of the three still standing, represented perhaps more than any other single structure, Bozeman's unabashed ambition to win the distinction of state capital in a state-wide vote in 1892. George Hancock, an architect from Fargo, North Dakota, set up a temporary branch office in Bozeman specifically to design and oversee the construction of the hotel, as well as other monumental buildings being erected at the time.

Across the street from the Hotel Bozeman is the former car barn for Bozeman's electric streetcar system (316 E. Main). The streetcar was rushed to completion

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<sup>15</sup> Avant Courier, January 21, 1886.

<sup>16</sup> Burlingame, Merrill G., Gallatin Valley Century of Progress, 1964, p. 62-66.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p.66

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in 1892 as another part of this capital bid. The Avant Courier avidly proclaimed that "the electric street car has come to stay and with it increased prosperity for Bozeman and eventually the acquisition of the permanent capital."<sup>18</sup>

Along with these physical improvements, a broad boulevard, today So. Eighth Avenue, was laid out, which terminated at the aptly named, "Capital Hill Addition," which was platted in 1890. These new streets which existed only on paper, as well as the new buildings, represented an attempt to make Bozeman, which was still plagued by axle-deep mud on Main Street, appear larger and more urbane than it actually was in order to impress Montana voters.

If the long-awaited railroad was the first milestone toward Bozeman's coming of age from an outpost community to a city, the completion of the Hotel Bozeman, also long-awaited, was certainly the second. Calls for a "modern hotel" had appeared in the Avant Courier since the early 1880's. In a letter to that newspaper in 1891, John Vesuvius, as early Bozeman mayor, confided that "Walter Cooper and I once vowed that if ever Bozeman got a railroad and a modern hotel, we'd get drunk."<sup>19</sup> Indeed, theirs was not the only celebration, for on March 2, 1891, eight years after the Northern Pacific Railroad reached Bozeman, a grand opening celebration took place in the new hotel that rivaled the festivities that ushered in the railroad.<sup>20</sup> The first class hotel, considered an indispensable amenity for any respectable city, was a community effort, \$20,000 being raised by local citizens as a "cash bonus," which helped to lure a credulous group of Boston capitalists, who put up \$100,000.<sup>21</sup>

The Hotel Bozeman, as well as the other buildings of comparable scale built concurrently, was indicative more of community ambition and optimism rather than the state of the economy. Indeed, these buildings, along with three elaborate residences (all three still standing), comprised virtually the only significant construction in the city during what was an economically depressed decade of the 1890's. In a comment on the economy in July, 1892, the Avant Courier made mention of the "...rather quiet times..." in the Gallatin Valley. The overall depression is remembered as the "Panic of 1893". The bid to become state capital proved fruitless, and while Bozeman was instead designated the home of Montana State College of Agriculture and Mechanical Arts (today Montana State University), little economic gain was anticipated from it at the time. The incentive for further ambitious construction in defiance of the state of the

<sup>18</sup> Avant Courier, July 30, 1892, p. 3

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, January 1, 1891, p.1

<sup>20</sup> Bozeman Chronicle, March 28, 1893, p.2

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, December 30, 1891, p.1

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economy consequently subsided.

The Hotel Bozeman floundered economically, and the Bozeman City Hall and Opera House, another of the group of three immense brick buildings completed in 1891, only operated as such until the 1920's when movie theaters posed greater competition. During the Opera's brief heyday, major name acts such as Otis Skinner, Al Jolson, Eddie Fay, and John Philip Sousa, who traveled the Northern Pacific between Minneapolis/St. Paul and Portland, would stop over for the night in this small, isolated city, and perform at a loss.<sup>22</sup> The Opera House was demolished in 1966.

Nelson Story, who had become a self-made millionaire by the early 1880's by master minding one of the west's first major cattle drives, built what was probably the first multi-unit commercial block in the district in c.1890, which was intended solely as a real estate venture, at 2-12 E. Main (completely remodeled in 1928). Story rented portions of the building to various unrelated businesses, but occupied none of it with a business of his own. After the turn of the century, Story and others built several other commercial blocks of similar size and purpose, such as the Story Block (33-39 E. Main, c.1901), which augmented the architectural and economic diversity of the commercial district.

The Montana State College of Agricultural and Mechanic Arts, which made its appearance in the 1890's, profoundly influenced the early 20th century economy of the city. Less obvious than the long-term benefits of the college to the city economy were the indirect benefits resulting from its influence on agriculture in the Gallatin Valley, which in turn affected commerce in the city.

The information provided by the college to Gallatin Valley farmers was a body of scientific knowledge that was revolutionizing agriculture throughout the country at the turn of the century. Through the agency of the college, farmers were encouraged to, and provided direct assistance in, increasing overall farm efficiency through mechanization, new management techniques, and new crops. By the 1910's Bozeman had capitalized on the agricultural character of the surrounding area by naming itself the "Sweet Pea City" as a promotional gimmick. Main Street consequently hosted many an elaborate "Sweet Pea Parade" - the centerpiece of the Sweet Pea Festivals, which have recently been revived.

The college was only one of the services Bozeman provided to the region after the turn of the century. While several mercantile and hardware stores had done business throughout the Gallatin Valley since the 1880's, Bozeman by the early 20th century, was providing a much greater diversity of goods, services and entertainment to surrounding towns and farms than it did in the 19th century. Main Street consequently took on a more urbanized appearance than it had

<sup>22</sup> Mrs. Beatrice Freeman Davis, "From Plain to Plane," typescript, 1967, p.34

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previously, as reflected in the diverse commercial architecture of the period.

This centralization of the regional economy at Bozeman is perhaps attributable to nothing more than a "snowball effect," as suggested by local historian Merrill Burlingame.<sup>23</sup> Bozeman, with its ever-increasing population and diversity of businesses, simply continued to expand its role in the economy of the valley, at the expense of smaller towns. The process was expedited in 1909, when the narrow-gauge Gallatin Valley Electric Railway was constructed. According to the promotional magazine, The Coast, the railway connected "...all the outlying districts in the southern and western part of the county with Bozeman, the metropolis of the valley."<sup>24</sup>

Gallatin County residents arriving in Bozeman on the electric railway found paved streets, and a streetcar network connecting distant parts of the city. The sole remnant of the streetcar system today is the former car barn and office, 316 E. Main, today the Eagles' Lodge. The number of stores, services and entertainment available on Main Street increased steadily into the 1920's, to the point that commercial growth outgrew the street, and expanded onto S. Tracy Avenue, a cross street, with the construction of 17 and 23-39 S. Tracy between 1927 and 1928.

As noted above, commercial blocks after the turn of the century were largely built as real estate investments, often named after the owner, intended for lease. One notable exception is the Saunders Block (124-126 E. Main), which was built by Gary F. Saunders in 1924 to house his own dry cleaning business. Others however, such as the Story Block (33-39 E. Main), built in 1901, the Owenhouse Block (24-26 W. Main), built around 1918, the Martin Block (29-43 E. Main), built around 1904, and the Michigan Block (20 W. Main), built around 1905, are large, architecturally diverse blocks intended to maximize the economic returns on individual parcels of real estate. The latter two were built by E. Broox Martin, a rancher and entrepreneur who in 1892 became the first president of the Commercial National Bank (today the First National Bank), which in 1920 built a five story office building it still occupies today. Martin also built two apartment buildings in residential areas of the city.

As farmers strove to maximize efficiency, bank loans for equipment and land took on increased importance, and the four impressive, early 20th century bank buildings in the district, 1 W. Main, 2 W. Main, 104 E. Main, and 107 E. Main attest to the importance of the city as a regional banking center. Bozeman's banks, supported in large part by investment by farmers, were vulnerable to the vagaries of an agricultural economy. Indeed, an agricultural depression in the 1920's caused by a relentless drought brought down at least one bank in Bozeman,

<sup>23</sup> Merrill Burlingame, interview, September 4, 1985.

<sup>24</sup> The Coast, "Gallatin Valley, Montana," Seattle, 1908, p. 427

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the National Bank of Gallatin Valley. That bank was housed in the unusual, molded concrete building at 1 W. Main, which is fronted by two immense columns, which were to symbolize the bank's financial stability, ironically.

In addition to the diverse stores that rented space in commercial blocks, chain department stores, a phenomenon that swept the country in the early 20th century, began to appear in the district in the first decade of this century, and were certainly a major draw for residents of outlying areas. Smaller department stores such as "The Fair" (located in 40-42 E. Main) in 1901 and the Chambers-Fisher Store (7 W. Main) in 1906 were the first to open. These were followed by larger national chains such as the F. W. Woolworth Co. (26 E. Main), which first opened in the 1910's in the ground floor of the Fechter Hotel (and later moved to 6 E. Main, remodeling it to its present appearance in 1950); the Montgomery Ward Co. which occupied a large, new building (201 E. Main) in 1928, which was custom designed for the franchise; and the J. C. Penney Co., which opened its doors in 1929 and moved to 9 E. Main in 1937, when it constructed the present facade. Because of this variety of stores a farm family would typically turn a trip to Bozeman to deliver grain to one of its multi-story elevators into a day's shopping excursion.<sup>25</sup>

Another indication of Bozeman's central role in the economy of the valley is the significant number of automobile showrooms for a city of this size. Two showrooms in the district retain identifying features such as large plate glass windows with broad transoms, and garage doors, typical of this distinctive functional type. Two examples surviving today are 241 E. Main and 23-39 S. Tracy, though several others existed in the 1920's and 1930's.

Of the numerous movie theatres that operated on Main Street at various times between 1900 and the Depression, the four most significant are still intact on the exterior. Those are the Gem Theatre (18 E. Main; installed around 1908 in an existing building and remodeled in 1927), the elaborate, Renaissance Revival style Ellen Theatre (17 W. Main; 1919), The Rialto Theatre (4 W. Main; installed in an existing building in about 1925), and the Streamline Moderne style Joyce Theatre (219 E. Main; c.1938). Only the Ellen and the Rialto remain in use as theatres.

The city offered three hotels, the Hotel Bozeman (321 E. Main), built in 1891, the Baltimore (222-224 E. Main), built in 1918 and expanded in 1925, and the Fechter (128-130 E. Main), also built in 1918, until a group of local businessmen pooled their resources to construct a new, large and modern hotel, which was intended to meet the first class standards of the 1920's. The resulting Hotel Baxter rose at the eastern end of the district in 1928, and remains today one of Bozeman's two major city landmarks.

<sup>25</sup> Louis Spain, Sr. Interview, September 4, 1985

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The Baxter was designed by local architect, Fred F. Willson, whose work presently comprises about fifteen percent of the buildings in the district (including both new construction and visible alterations to existing ones). Two very large buildings designed by Willson, 2-12 E. Main and 104 E. Main, were completely covered in 1983 and 1972, respectively, and are not included in the above percentage. Willson's diverse, although very typical work - in the context of American architecture of the period - testifies to the increasing role of the architect of the early 20th century, whose principal task was often to match an appropriate design with the needs of a particular client. While the beginning of Willson's career in 1910 coincided with the commencement of about two decades of rapid growth in the district, the Depression and the post-Depression periods left little significant physical evidence.

Little important construction took place in the district after the period of significance, which currently ends in 1937, although a few buildings were completely covered with various types of sheathing in the 1970's, creating large, non-contributing gaps. Today, only minor changes are occurring in the district and are generally confined to storefronts and signs. Bozeman's modest economy today thrives on the infrastructure developed throughout the city's history. Automobile traffic along U.S. highway I-90 approaches the city through Bozeman Pass today as covered wagons had previously. The railroad, the original tracks for which were laid over a century ago, continues to play a role, albeit greatly reduced over the past 40 years, in the city economy. Harvests from surrounding farms continue to fill the multi-story grain elevators here as they have since the 1880's and the Main Street commercial district serves an area far beyond the city borders, as it always has. The Montana State College of Agriculture, established in 1893, has become Montana State University and, today, is the largest employer in the city.

Despite the fears of some, Main Street was affected to a relatively minor degree by the construction of Main Mall in 1980 about two miles to the west. Few substantial changes are anticipated in the Main Street Historic District in the near future, as it continues to serve as the social and commercial focal point of the city.

## BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION AND JUSTIFICATION:

The 4-story Hotel Bozeman stands at the far east end of the Main Street Historic District, matched by the 6-story Hotel Baxter at the west end. Between these two dominant buildings are four facing blocks of primarily one-, two-, and three-story masonry commercial blocks that form a very cohesive grouping. Three half-blocks along Babcock Street are also included within the district, as well as the commercial buildings on the half-blocks oriented toward the cross streets: Willson, Tracy, Black, and Bozeman Avenues.

The northeastern corner of the district boundary is at the intersection of the

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alley between E. Main Street and E. Mendenhall and N. Rouse Avenue; then, south to the alley between E. Main Street and Babcock Street; then, west to S. Bozeman Avenue; then, south to Babcock Street; then, west on Babcock Street to one lot west of Willson Avenue; then, north to the alley between W. Main Street and W. Mendenhall; then, east to the southwest corner of lot 22 of block A of the Tracy Addition; then, north approximately 35 feet; then, east to N. Tracy Avenue; then, south on N. Tracy to the alley between Main Street and Mendenhall Street; then east along this alley to the point of beginning.

UTM REFERENCES:

ACREAGE: approximately 20 acres

- Q: 12/497550/5058280
- R: 12/497550/5058200
- S: 12/497050/5058200
- T: 12/497050/5058280

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## Main Street Historic District

p: primary significance      c: contributing      nc: non-contributing

Address	Date of Construction	Building Name	Status
105 West Main	1927-29,1939	Baxter Hotel	p
104 West Main	1886,1976	Benepe-Owenhouse Co. building	c
29-43 West Main	c.1895,c.1900,c.1905,1942	Martin Block/Hathorn Building	nc
34-42 West Main	c.1887,1928	Sebree, Ferris and White building/ Bon Ton Bakery	p
30 West Main	c.1905		c
24 West Main	c.1918	Owenhouse Building	c
23 West Main	c.1903	"Universal Athletics"	c
20 West Main	c.1905,1935	Michigan Building/Lovelace Building	c
17 West Main	1919,1965 (marquee)	Ellen Theatre	p
10-12 West Main	c.1910	U.S. Post Office building	p ✓
7 West Main	1906,1960	Golden Rule Store	nc
2-4 West Main	1908	Gallatin State Bank	p
1 West Main	1905	National Bank of Gallatin County	p
24 S. Willson	c.1929	"Gallatin Chick Hatchery"	c
32 S. Tracy	1915	U.S. Federal Building	p ✓
23-39 S. Tracy	c.1926	Fred Siver's Pharmacy/ Dokken-Getchell Funeral Home	c
17 S. Tracy	1928,1940	Dixon-Alexander Building	p
23 N. Tracy	c.1906,1935	Northern Transcontinental Toll Line building	c
19-21 West Babcock	1943	"Montana Motor Supply"	nc
9 East Babcock	c.1980	U.S. Army Reserce Center	nc ✓
19-21 East Babcock	c.1915	Owenhouse Hardware Co. Garage	c
135 East Babcock	c.1982	First Bank Drive-up Facility	nc
137 East Babcock	1918	Bozeman Steam Laundry	p
1-5 East Main	1879,1881,1973	Avant Courier building	nc
2-12 East Main	1890,c.1982	Etha M. Story Building	nc
9 East Main	c.1887,1937	Park Pool Hall/J.C. Penny Co.	c
11 East Main	1889	Tracy Block/Barnett Co. building	c
17 East Main	1880-81	Travoli Beer Hall	c
18 East Main	1900,1908,c.1927	Gem Theatre/Montana Power Co.	c
23 East Main	c.1882,c.1922	Raliegh, Lamme & Co. building	c
26 East Main	1889-90,c.1950	F.W. Woolworth Co. (c.1950-1980)	nc
27 East Main	1880,1982	A. Lamme & Co. building	nc

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29 East Main	1883-1884	A. Lamme & Co. Annex	c
36 East Main	1891-04/c.1950,1983	Benepe-Owenhouse Hardware	nc
33-39 East Main	c.1901	Story Block	c
40-42 East Main	1901	Gallatin Block	c
101 East Main	1903	Willson Company building	c
104 East Main	1920,1972	Commerical National Bank building	nc
107-113 East Main	1888	Nevitt Block	c
115-117 East Main	c.1880,c.1972	"Montana Amory" building	nc
118 East Main	1872,1940,1972	Cooper Block/Black Building	c
119-121 East Main	c.1889,1972	"R. Evans Jewerly" building	nc
123 East Main	c.1889,c.1910,c.1972		nc
124-6 East Main	1924	Saunders Building	p
128-130 East Main	1918	Fechter Hotel and Annex	p
131 East Main	c.1882,c.1925	Basinski Bros. building	c
135 East Main	c.1882	Palace Saloon & Billiard Hall	c
137 East Main	1883	Masonic Temple, Gallatin Lodge	c
136-140 East Main	1891,1970	Krueger Block	nc
201 East Main	1928	Montgomery Ward Company building	p
201A East Main	c.1890		c
208 East Main	1960	First Security Bank building	nc
209-215 East Main	c.1929		c
219 East Main	1889-90,1936	Joyce Theatre (1936)	c
221 East Main	1891	IOOF Hall	p
222-224 East Main	1918,1925	Hotel Baltimore	c
225 East Main	1949	American Legion, Gallatin Post	nc
226-232 East Main	c.1925	Hotel Balitmore Annex	c
229-231 East Main	1882	Osborne Block	c
234 East Main	1956	"Heinold Commodities" building	nc
237 East Main	1873	Harper Block	p
240-246 East Main	1883,1890	Speith and Krug Brewery	p
241 East Main	c.1917	Studebaker Auto Showroom	c
303 East Main	c.1975		nc
307-315 East Main	1890-91	Hotel Bozeman Annex	c
312 East Main	1898	Featherston Block	c
316 East Main	1901,c.1945	Electric Block	c
321 East Main	1890-91	Hotel Bozeman	p

MAIN STREET HISTORIC DISTRICT  
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