

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section _____ Page _____

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SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 04001380

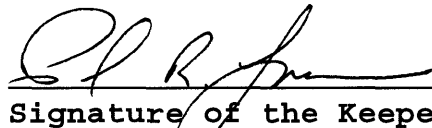
Date Listed: 12/23/2004

Belt Commercial Historic District
Property Name

Cascade MT
County State

N/A
Multiple Name

This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.


Signature of the Keeper

12/23/04
Date of Action

Amended Items in Nomination:

Classification:

The correct ownership categories should read: *Private* and *Public-Local*.

U. T. M. Coordinates:

The correct U. T. M. Coordinates zone should read: *12*

These clarifications were confirmed with the MT SHPO office.

DISTRIBUTION:

National Register property file
Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

1. Name of Property

historic name: Belt Commercial Historic District

other name/site number: 24CA826

2. Location

street & number: Castner Street

not for publication: n/a

vicinity: n/a

city/town: Belt

state: Montana

code: MT

county: Cascade

code: 013

zip code: 59412

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, 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.

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

Montana State Historic Preservation Office
State or Federal agency or bureau

(_ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

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

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
 see continuation sheet
- determined eligible for the National Register
 see continuation sheet
- determined not eligible for the National Register
 see continuation sheet
- removed from the National Register
 see continuation sheet
- other (explain): _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

[Handwritten Signature]

12/23/04

Belt Commercial Historic District**Cascade County, Montana**

Name of Property

County and State

5. Classification

| | | | |
|---|----------|--|----------------------|
| Ownership of Property: | Multiple | Number of Resources within Property | |
| Category of Property: | District | Contributing | Noncontributing |
| Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: | 1 | <u>13</u> | <u>4</u> building(s) |
| | | <u>0</u> | <u>0</u> sites |
| | | <u>2</u> | <u>0</u> structures |
| | | <u>0</u> | <u>0</u> objects |
| Name of related multiple property listing: | n/a | <u>15</u> | <u>4</u> TOTAL |

6. Function or Use**Historic Functions:**

DOMESTIC/hotel
 DOMESTIC/single-family dwelling
 COMMERCE/financial Institution
 COMMERCE/specialty store
 COMMERCE/department store
 COMMERCE/restaurant
 SOCIAL/meeting hall
 RECREATION and CULTURE/theater
 GOVERNMENT/correctional facility

Current Functions:

DOMESTIC/single-family dwelling
 COMMERCE/specialty store
 COMMERCE/restaurant
 GOVERNMENT/city hall
 RECREATION and CULTURE/theater
 VACANT/not in use

7. Description**Architectural Classification:**

LATE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURY
 REVIVALS/Neo-Classical Revival
 OTHER/Western Commercial
 OTHER/Western False-front Commercial
 MIXED

Materials:

foundation: STONE, CONCRETE
 walls: WOOD, BRICK, STONE, METAL; ASPHALT
 roof: ASPHALT
 other: BRICK, METAL

Narrative Description

Belt is a community in Central Montana, approximately twenty-two miles east of Great Falls. High hills, narrow ravines and coulees characterize the area as the geography transitions from the Rocky Mountains to the eastern prairies. The Highwood Mountains rise to the East. Belt Creek runs from the Little Belt Mountains to the south through the town of Belt, then continues north then west, where it empties into the Missouri River just east of Great Falls. The main road through town, Castner Street, originated as part of the Lewistown – Great Falls Road in 1882. Now U.S. Highway 89 connects those two cities, and the community of Belt is by-passed. Access to the town is gained by a steep, winding road that branches northward from the main highway and becomes Castner Street, following the base of the bluff created by the course of Belt Creek. The town is named for nearby Belt Butte, with its visible band of colored rocks.

The Belt Commercial Historic District consists of seventeen buildings and two structures constructed along Castner Street and Bridge Street. Contributing buildings within the district, which include commercial businesses, a theatre, banks, restaurants, and saloons, retain a high degree of integrity and convey the town's historic commercial, recreational, and social patterns. The district is representative of three major periods of development for the community: the transition from a small mining camp to a permanent town during the late 1890s; expansion of the community through the 1910s, and a resurgence in prosperity after the World War II. The resources in the district are clustered along the main commercial thoroughfare through town, and are separated from the residential area by Belt Creek. It is a compact district, only two blocks long, and includes the municipal and business district that has served the community throughout its history.

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Development of the Built Environment within the Belt Commercial Historic District

Photographs of Castner Street taken about 1900 show a jumble of simple wood frame, false-front commercial operations that conform to the curved alignment of Castner Street. The last known wood-frame building of the false-front tradition to be constructed in the Belt Commercial Historic District, Prather's Billiard Parlor at 55 Castner, was built in 1905 and originally housed one of the city's many saloons. Although now clad in asphalt, it retains the original overall form design elements, and fenestration. It is the district's best representation of Castner Street's first phase of commercial development. Other early buildings, such as the Belt Hardware Company at 72 Castner and the jail, both constructed in 1896, are locally quarried sandstone and are indicative of the transition of Belt from a mining camp to a more permanent town.

In 1906, business owners and real estate speculators embarked on a program to improve Castner Street by replacing what were increasingly run-down and decrepit buildings with more substantial masonry buildings. The transformation was largely completed by 1920. Eight of the seventeen buildings located in the Belt Commercial Historic District were constructed between 1906 and 1920, during the peak years of its socio-economic and industrial history. The buildings represent a good cross-section of the community's socio-economic life: a bank (70 Castner), meeting hall/movie theater (58 Castner), hotel (71 Castner), three saloons (56, 64, and 64 ½ Castner), a drug store (68 Castner), and an automobile repair garage (57 Castner). All are constructed of brick or stone and, with the exception of the bank, are simple Western Commercial style buildings with little ornamentation. The Pythian Castle (58 Castner) and the Black Diamond Café (64 Castner) were constructed of similar materials with blond brick used for ornamentation. Both are stone buildings with brick veneer facades. The Pioneer Garage (57 Castner) is also comprised of random coursed sandstone walls and a brick façade. The Oriental Saloon (66 Castner) is the only building composed entirely of sandstone set in a random ashlar pattern that was constructed during this period. The Neoclassical design of the Farmers & Miners State Bank (70 Castner) is the most ornate and high-style building in the commercial district.

The historic district is anchored on one end by the 1913 Clergy Block (71 Castner), the first of the large-scale brick commercial buildings on the northeast end of Castner and the 1916 Pythian Castle (58 Castner, built 1916) on the southwestern end of the district. Constructed by several different contractors, the Clergy Block is built entirely of brick, while the Pythian Castle has locally quarried sandstone walls and a brick façade. Both buildings functioned as social gathering places with businesses located on the ground floor. Both are simple Western Commercial buildings with minimal ornamentation. The Clergy Block, moreover, supplanted John and Mamie Castner's old stage station complex, once the economic and social center of Belt. By 1913, Castner's hotel was out-of-step with the transformation of Belt from a frontier mining camp to a modern trade center.

The New Drug Company (68 Castner), Black Diamond Café (64 Castner), and Manchester's Emporium (56 Castner) all display simple, functional, brick-front designs with little or no ornamentation. All share walls with neighboring buildings and all completely occupy their respective lots. The Black Diamond Café was located adjacent to one of the oldest commercial buildings in Belt, the Hane Building (64½ Castner). This small wood frame building was divided into two business spaces until around 1920 when the partition wall was removed and it became a restaurant. In 1937, the owner of the Black Diamond Café cut a hole into the building and incorporated it into the café operation. In the 1990s, the original architectural details of the Hane Building were completely obscured behind vinyl siding.

The Farmers & Miners State Bank (70 Castner) was likely the last substantial masonry building built during this fourteen-year period of the evolution of Castner Street. Once located in the Clergy Block, the Farmers & Miners State Bank relocated to new quarters across Castner Street in 1920. The most prominent of the town's three banks, the Neoclassical building reflected its status and confidence in the future of the community.

From c. 1915 to 1935, Castner Street was a component of U.S. Highway 89, which passed through the community. The city's transportation history is currently represented by the 12-foot high by 540-foot long sandstone retaining wall located on the west side of Castner Street about 200-feet south of Manchester's Emporium (56 Castner). Evidence suggests the State Highway Commission constructed the retaining wall in 1930 when the state highway was improved through Belt.¹

Commercial development languished in Belt from 1920 to 1940 with no substantial commercial building built in the city. Indeed, many buildings located on nearby Bridge Street and on Castner Street were razed during this period and not replaced. It was not until 1940 that

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a new business building was constructed on Castner Street – a restaurant called the Belt Creek Café at 76 Castner. The Cinker Building was constructed next door (78 Castner) in 1945, a combination commercial establishment and residence. It occupies the former site of Nohl's Tinsmith Shop, which fabricated the ornate cornice on the Belt Hardware Company (72 Castner). Finally, in 1947, Gottlieb Ryffel constructed a concrete block department store building at the intersection of Riverside Drive, Bridge Street and Castner Street. The building has a canted entry and, importantly, is built of concrete blocks, a ubiquitous building material common to commercial buildings after World War II.

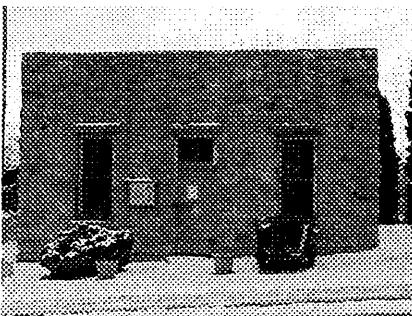
There have been only two additions to the historic district since 1947. In 1987, a corrugated steel commercial building, the Belt Valley Grocery, was constructed at the former site of a bank building and a theater. This metal framed and clad building faces its parking lot to the south, rather than Castner Street. Though modest in design, the building and its accompanying gas pumping equipment and canopy constitute an intrusive element within the district. The other addition is the small "Welcome to Belt Garage" at 49 Castner. The wood-framed building was moved to its current location next to the jail in 1993. While it is non-contributing, the building is compatible with the historic resources in the district.

East side of Caster Street:

Within the district, the east side of Castner Street changed considerably through the period of significance. Sanborn maps dating from 1897 and 1900 show that a series of small, one-story, wood-framed offices and stores lined the street to the south, a substantial two-story fraternal hall and theatre was located toward the middle of the block, and the north end was dominated by John Castner's complex of seventeen log buildings, including his hotel, kitchen, dining hall, offices, laundry, and storage. The 1910 map shows many of the same buildings, plus a few more one-story wood-frame storefronts, and a two-story masonry bank north of the theatre. Of the resources on the east side of Castner shown on the 1897, 1900, and 1910 maps, only the jail and Prather's Billiard Parlor stand today.

After the 1910, more substantial sandstone and/or brick establishments were replacing the buildings within the district. Castner's complex was replaced in 1913 with the Hotel Waldo/Clergy Block that now anchors the north side of the district. In 1917, Swedish stonemason Otto Hokanson constructed the substantial Pioneer Garage for former ACM Mine Superintendent Hank Morrow on a series of lots that had been occupied by two modest wooden buildings. The Sanborn Map updated in 1927 clearly shows a tightly-packed grouping of buildings from the Pioneer Garage (which also functioned as a fire station) north to the Clergy Block. Many of those buildings were dismantled after the late 1920s and through the 1930s, as Belt suffered an economic downturn due to drought and the depressed national economy.

Resource Descriptions



Belt Jail, 37 Castner (NR Listed 3/10/1980; constructed c. 1896, one contributing building)

As a traveler approaches the district from the south, one of the first buildings visible in the town is the Belt Jail, located on the east side of the street at 37 Castner and individually listed in the National Register on March 10, 1980. Constructed c. 1896, it is small, flat-roofed, one-story and nearly square, measuring twenty-eight feet four inches by thirty feet four inches. Like other buildings in the district from that era, its exterior walls are of buff-colored native sandstone laid in a random ashlar pattern. The simple building still displays metal vertical bars on the windows. The front (west) elevation features a centered, heavy, wooden door with metal strap hinges and a barred transom light above. Single, double-hung wood-frame windows flank the door opening. The side elevations contain no fenestration. Three horizontal, rectangular, barred windows are located high across the east (rear) elevation and provide light to the cells on the interior. The interior of the jail retains its original layout, with an office across the full width of the front and three cells to the rear. The interior walls are whitewashed, horizontally placed, rough-sawn two-by-eights. The office features plastered walls and wainscoting. The ceilings throughout the building are whitewashed. The jail now serves as the community museum.

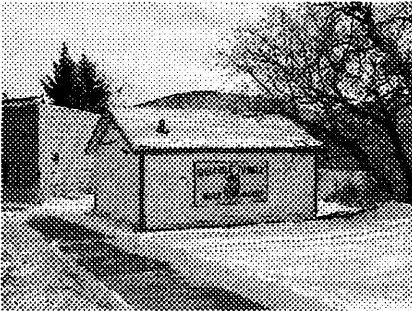
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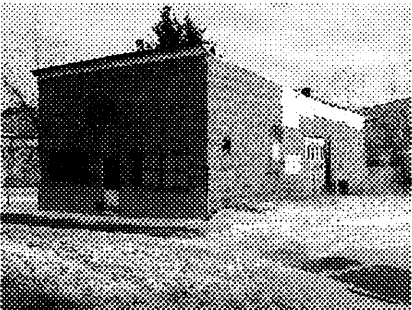
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Welcome to Belt Garage, 49 Castner (construction date unknown, moved to present location in 1993, one non-contributing building)

Northeast of the jailhouse is the "Welcome to Belt Garage" at 49 Castner. This modest, wood-framed gable-roofed building features asphalt shingle roofing, novelty wood siding and cornerboards. Roof features are limited to slightly overhanging eaves, fascia, and a single metal stovepipe protruding from the west side of the south slope. A sign proclaiming "WELCOME TO BELT/HOME OF THE HUSKIES" graces the south elevation. The west elevation that faces Castner Street has no fenestration. The north elevation contains two sets of board and batten double doors. A wood-panel pedestrian door is centered on the east elevation, facing Belt Creek. During the period of

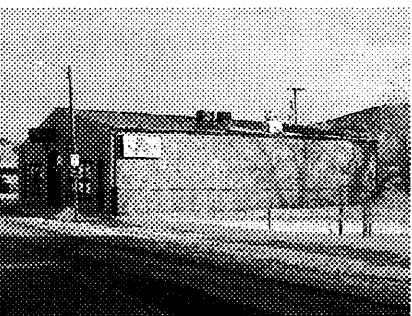
significance, these lots were occupied by a millinery and office. Martha Leland, whose husband owned the Belt Hardware Company at 72 Castner, and Lena Hane, whose husband ran a billiards hall at 64½ Castner Street, owned the building in succession. It was under Leland's and Hane's ownerships that the site functioned as a millinery shop. By the 1950s, the millinery and office buildings were removed. The building currently at 49 Castner was moved there in 1993, and does not contribute to the Belt Commercial Historic District.



Prather's Billiards Parlor, 55 Castner (constructed c. 1905, one contributing building)

Constructed c. 1905, the building at 55 Castner Street is wood frame, and has a shed roof. The roof pitches down to the east, giving the appearance of a two-story building at the front (west) elevation, but it is in fact only a single story. Though not technically a false-front, the roof configuration does serve the same purpose: to make the building appear much more substantial than it actually is. This simple, rectangular building rests on a sandstone foundation. Its exterior walls are covered with novelty rolled asphalt, pressed to resemble gray brick. The side elevations have some pressed metal panels as replacement exterior siding. The roof is covered with rolled asphalt and features two

interior brick chimneys. A simple wood cornice graces the façade (west elevation). A centered, nine-light wood door, protected by a battered wood screen door, permits entry from the front elevation. On either side of the door is a window opening containing a pair of four-light fixed, wood-frame windows. The south elevation contains a single, multi-light, multi-panel wooden garage door off center to the east. A single small window opening just off-center to the west is fixed and has five lights. The north and east elevations contain no fenestration. Though the siding material is not original, it does date to the period of significance. The overall form and design of the building remains intact, and it retains sufficient integrity to convey its historic associations. Prather's Billiards Parlor contributes to the Belt Commercial Historic District.



Pioneer Garage, 57 Castner (constructed 1917, one contributing building)

The resource consists of a one-story, rectangular, masonry commercial building. It is oriented east and west and faces west onto Castner Street. The building has a low-pitched gable roof sheathed in metal and rests on a concrete foundation. The walls are composed of regular-coursed blond brick on the façade (west elevation), while the side and rear walls are composed of locally quarried, cut sandstone laid in a random ashlar pattern. The façade (west elevation) belies the building's original function as an automotive repair business, as there are large openings that accommodated garage doors across the center, and single pedestrian doors at the north and south sides. Remodeling c. 2000 resulted in the garage doors being removed and the original pedestrian entries being in-filled.

Currently, the center opening contains a pair of modern wood-paneled doors topped with an arched window filled with a single light. The large openings on either side of the centered entry each feature soldier-coursed sills that extend beyond the plane of the wall, flat arch lintels, and contain a ribbon of three metal-framed windows. Each of these windows features a fixed light

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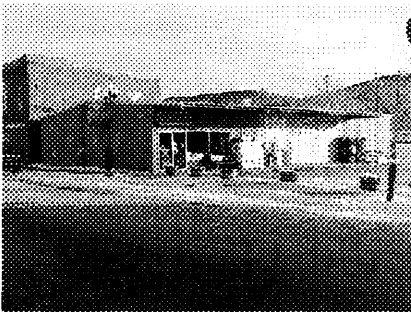
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below a one-light casement sash. Raised brick detailing on the façade includes pilasters capped with concrete toppers at the north and south corners, the segmental arch above the centered entry that continues from the top of the doorway to the street level, a soldier course across the bottom of the gable end, and a raised brick panel in the gable end reads: "PIONEER."

Both the north and south elevations contain a single, in-filled arched window opening to the east. The east (rear) elevation features concrete pilasters at the north and south corners. A large arched opening off-center to the north now contains a three-light overhead garage door. Five windows, two to the north of the garage door and three to the south, are evenly spaced across the elevation. Each of the wood-frame double-hung, one-over-one light windows have arched brick lintels and soldier-coursed sills. Though modern remodeling has resulted in the loss of some historic doors and windows, the integrity of design is still largely intact and the building reads as a historic automobile garage. Its massive form and quality masonry are important contributions to the historic district, both for its historic associations with the commercial development of the town, and as a substantial example of local architecture. The Pioneer Garage is a contributing building within the Belt Commercial Historic District.



Belt Valley Grocery, (constructed c. 1984, one non-contributing building)

The most modern and intrusive building within the Belt Commercial Historic District is the Belt Valley Grocery at 65 Castner Street. The grocery is a modern metal framed and sided, rectangular building constructed on a concrete pad foundation. The building faces south onto the parking lot between the grocery and the neighboring Pioneer Garage. The building is purely functional in style and purpose with no decorative features. A low-pitched gable roof covers the square plan. The roof is also comprised of corrugated metal, and has been extended over the entry and display windows to provide shelter. The extension is supported by steel I-beams. The primary entry and display windows are located on the west end of the façade. The steel framed door features a full-length plate

glass window. A fixed window of the same dimensions as the door is located immediately to the east. East of that window are two large, fixed, plate glass display windows. The west and north elevations contain no fenestration. On the east elevation, there is a pair of large steel doors to the north side. This modern building does not contribute to the Belt Commercial Historic District.



Clergy Block/Hotel Waldo (constructed 1913, one contributing building)

This anchor building within the district was constructed in 1913, at the height of Belt's prosperity during the Homestead Boom (1909-1918) and is representative of the fundamental changes the commercial district underwent during that period. The Clergy Block/Hotel Waldo replaced the original stage station and hotel around which the community of Belt developed. In addition to a hotel, it also housed banks, a grocery and assorted other commercial enterprises. It is representative of the transformation of Belt during the 1910s from a late 19th century false-front dominated streetscape to a modern masonry commercial block district.

The Clergy Block/Hotel Waldo is a two-story, rectangular, brick veneered, two-part commercial block. The entrances and windows across the first story have been altered, but the locations of the original storefronts are still distinguishable by the locations of the door and window openings and raised brick panels above. It is a typical Western Commercial style building, with minimal decorative features that are limited to the façade (west elevation), including a contrasting smooth concrete parapet wall, simple corbelling at the cornice, and raised brick rectangular panels above the window level at both the first and second stories. The storefront to the north side of the west elevation originally functioned as the office and lobby for the Hotel Waldo. It is now the Ranch Saloon. Within the original large window opening at the north side is a steel-frame, one-light plate glass window. Though the window is a replacement, the recessed brickwork and sandstone sill indicate that the opening is original to the building. The pedestrian entrance south of that window is also original, though the door has been changed with a modern wood

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door and the large rectangular transom has been infilled with plywood. The storefront north of center was the original location of the Farmers and Miners State Bank. The large opening now contains steel-framed windows and a boarded over entry. The three rectangular transom windows are purple glass block, and clear glass block fills the window frame to the north side of the entry. The south side of the first story level has been reconfigured from two storefronts to appear as a single business. Modern brickwork defines the locations of two large, evenly-spaced display windows. The windows are covered with plywood, though wooden decorative lintels are visible. A pedestrian door, also boarded over, is incorporated into the north side of the southernmost opening. The second story of the façade remains unaltered. Six, one-over-one light wood-frame double hung windows are evenly spaced across the elevation. Each window is slightly recessed and features a sandstone sill.

The north elevation features three original window openings across the first story. Two of these windows are one-over-one light double hung, wood-frame style. The third has been in-filled. At the second story, two original window openings are boarded over. The south elevation contains two single one-over-one light double hungs to the west side and a pair of smaller one-over-one light double hungs to the east. There is a single window of the same style centered at the second story.

The east (rear) elevation features two, one-story, small wood frame additions at the north side. The northernmost addition features a flat roof encircled by a railing, creating an open porch area accessible from the second story. A small shed extension is attached to the south side of the west elevation of this addition. Immediately to the south is the second addition, which features a shed roof covered with rolled asphalt. This addition also features a shed-roofed extension on its west elevation, protruding from the north end. The south third of the west elevation of the building features the original brick wall, and contains a door opening flanked by single window openings. All three openings are covered with plywood. There is an original one-story, shed-roofed brick extension at the south side. This extension is stuccoed on its north elevation. Fenestration on the addition is limited to a single, centered, in-filled window opening on the east wall. The Clergy Block is a contributing building within the Belt Commercial Historic District.

The West Side of Castner Street

Within the Belt Commercial Historic District, the west side of Castner Street features a series of buildings and business blocks in close proximity, often sharing interior dividing walls. The result is a dense, impressive row of resources that accurately convey the commercial development of Belt through the first half of the twentieth century. Like the east side of Castner, this block underwent a series of changes through the period of significance that were indicative of the economic phases Belt witnessed from the late 1890s through the 1940s. The initial phase of development in the district is exemplified on the west side of Castner by two buildings. Both are representative of the type of construction patterns that initially characterized the district: small, one or two-story wood-frame buildings that often housed two businesses (64½ Castner) and the other a substantial two-story stone building (72 Castner) that reflected the owner's confidence in the future of the fledgling community. The Belt Hardware Company (72 Castner) was the first of four stone commercial buildings that would be constructed on Castner Street from 1896 to 1917. Built of locally quarried stone, it retains the original ornate tin cornice that characterized many Montana commercial buildings in the late 19th century.

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Manchester's Emporium, 56 Castner Street (constructed c. 1920, one contributing building)

Manchester's Emporium consists of an unadorned, single-story brick commercial building. It faces east onto Castner Street. The building rests on a concrete foundation and has a stepped parapet wall with a shed roof sheathed in asphalt. The building has a decorative brick cornice. Its single bay is delineated by a soldier-coursed brick lintel. The bay is divided into three sections each defined by brick pilasters. The entry is central to the façade and has an in-filled transom. The modern two-light wood door is flanked by glass block sidelights. The display window openings have been partially in-filled with vertical board and batten. The south window is a single-light fixed unit, while the north window is a 2-light casement. The sills of the display window openings have extended soldier coursed brick and the kick plates are comprised of vertical board and batten. There is a shed roof addition attached to the rear of the building. It has a corrugated metal roof and vertical board and batten siding. A section of tile wall is exposed at the rear. The exposed south elevation contains no fenestration. Manchester's Emporium is an important contributing building within the Belt Commercial Historic District.



Pythian Castle, 58 Castner Street (constructed 1916, one contributing building)

The Pythian Castle is a two-story vernacular commercial comprised of locally-quarried, rough-faced stone set in a random pattern. The façade is veneered in brick. The building rests on a stone foundation with a partial basement.

Rolled asphalt covers the shallow-pitched shed roof, which is hidden from the street view by stepped parapet walls. There is an interior brick chimney. Typical of the Western Commercial style, the east elevation (façade) is divided into two storefronts at the street level, and seven one-over-one light double-hung windows evenly-spaced across the second story. Each window features a stone sill and a vertically divided multi-light transom (four lights over the five central windows and three over the slightly narrower flanking windows). The façade also has a decorative blond brick pattern that highlights the second story windows and creates a nameplate just below the parapet. "19 \diamond K of P \diamond 16." Terra cotta shields on either side of the nameplate display the Knights of Pythias symbol: a sword, pick, hammer, and Bible with other implements represented. At three points on the shields are the letters, F, C, and B, alluding to the mission of the fraternity – Faith, Charity and Benevolence.

A recessed entry is centrally located at the first story of the façade. A corniced, flat-roofed hood, supported by decorative scrolled brackets, shelters its wooden pedestrian door. A one-light transom window with a stone flat-arch lintel is located above the entry. Blond brick with terra cotta footings surrounds the north-side storefront. Transom lights that originally filled the top third of the storefront have been in-filled with wood. The original door and windows have also been replaced, most likely after the period of significance of the district. An aluminum-frame, two light pedestrian door is located slightly off-center to the south of the storefront, and a large aluminum-frame picture window fills the space north of the door. Glass block fills the door's south sidelight and the space below the picture window.

Blond brick also delineates the south-side, recessed storefront. It has a decorative, oriental-style spindle frieze with decorative scrolled brackets. The bay, which has historically functioned as the entry to a theatre, features a canted, centered box office flanked by recessed entries. The entries each have double, wood-paneled doors with four fixed lights. The south entry has a 10-lite transom. The box office bay is wood-paneled and canted with three fixed windows. The wall of the recessed bay is stuccoed with exposed timbering.

There are six in-filled windows across the second story of the south elevation. Each has a segmentally-arched brick lintel with extended brick soldier-coursed sills. Both the south and north elevations are stuccoed.

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On the rear (west) elevation there is a recessed entry on the north side at the second story. It is has a metal door and is accessed via a wooden ramp extending from the hillside to the rear of the building. There are two entries on the ground floor. One is centrally located and has a brick segmental arched lintel and a transom over the door. A nine-over-nine-light double hung window to the north also has a brick segmental arch. Another entry to the north of the window also has the arched sill and a wood door. The Pythian Castle anchors the south end of Castner Street, and contributes to the Belt Commercial Historic District.



Black Diamond Café, 64 Castner Street (constructed 1919, one contributing building)

The Black Diamond Café is a two-story vernacular brick-front commercial building. It abuts the Pythian Castle on the south and is stylistically similar to it. The building has a shed roof sheathed in asphalt. The south and north walls, and west (rear) elevation are comprised of rough-faced stone set in a random pattern. The façade (east elevation) is comprised of brick. The cornice of the building is sandstone. Blond brick was used to frame the ground floor architectural features, to visually connect the 2nd floor windows and to delineate a red brick panel on the façade. The east elevation features four one-over-one light double-hung windows across the second story. Each of these windows displays a sandstone sill and in-filled transom

The ground floor has been modified somewhat by the alteration of the primary entry and flanking windows. The existing features appear to be much smaller in scale than originally designed. The primary entry is slightly north-of-center and consists of a metal door set flush with the façade. It is flanked by glass block sidelights. A single fixed-lite transom is located above the entry. The plate glass display windows that originally flanked the entry have been partially in-filled and replaced by smaller, modern fixed plate glass units. Glass blocks have replaced the kick plates on both sides of the entry. A modern awning shelters the entry and flanking windows. A secondary entry is located on the south side of the façade. It has a metal door and an in-filled transom.

The rear of the building's second floor has been converted into an apartment. It is clad in masonite siding and there is a modern sliding glass door to the north and a window to the south. The top of the main floor has been extended and is currently functioning as a deck for the apartment. It has a wood deck and is enclosed in lattice-type fencing. The walls of the main floor appear to be clad in corrugated metal. Constructed during the second wave of economic expansion in Belt, the Black Diamond Café contributes to the patterns of development and architectural significance of the district.



Hane Building, 64½ Castner Street (constructed c. 1899, one noncontributing building)

The Hane Building is a single-story, wood-frame commercial building. The shed roof is sheathed in asphalt and the building physically abuts the buildings to the north and south. The heavily modified façade (east elevation) is clad in vinyl siding. A single recessed metal entry door is located to the north side of the façade, and the canted wall adjacent to the entry is wood paneled. A modern, fixed, one-light window is located on the south side of the façade. Two lighted signs, one flush with the wall and above the entry, the other attached perpendicular to the building, announce its function at the "Black Diamond Supper Club."

The rear (west) elevation is covered with a small shed and carport. Because of the extensive alterations to the façade, the building is not reflective of the period of significance and does not contribute to the Belt Commercial Historic District.

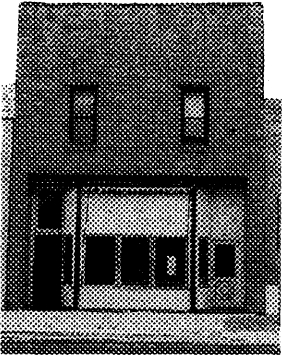
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Oriental Saloon, 66 Castner Street (constructed 1906, one contributing building)

The property consists of a two-story masonry commercial building with a shed roof sheathed in rolled asphalt. The east elevation (façade), including the parapet wall, is constructed of rough-cut sandstone set in irregular courses. Stone coping defines the cornice. Sandstone pilasters are located at the north and south corners of the façade. Two one-over-one light, wood-framed, double-hung windows are evenly spaced across the second story. At street level, the façade features a single recessed bay topped with a decorative pressed iron lintel. Within the bay, there is a single, multi-paneled modern door and one-light transom to the south, and a single, nine-light modern pedestrian door to the north. A canted feature projects between the doors, and contains a ribbon of five one-light, fixed frame windows: three across the center and one on each of the angled walls. Above the windows is painted lettering that reads: "BELT LIVESTOCK SERVICE." The Oriental Saloon storefront surfaces are covered with board and batten and masonite. The north, south and west (rear) exterior walls are comprised of rubblestone. There are three recessed window openings on the south elevation, each containing a single, one-over-one light double-hung window. There is also an exterior brick chimney on the wall.

The west (rear) elevation features a centered entry central at the second story. It has a wood paneled door with a boarded-over window and a single-lite fixed transom window. The door is flanked by one-over-one double-hung windows. A shed roof addition is attached at the first story. Its roof is sheathed in rolled asphalt and the walls are clad in masonite. A bay entry on the south side contains a metal roll-up door. The only building constructed during the 1906-1920 economic period of development that features sandstone construction set in irregular courses, the Oriental Saloon is an important transitional building, and contributes to the Belt Commercial Historic District.



New Drug Company, 68 Castner Street (constructed 1916, one contributing building)

Like the Manchester Emporium at the south end of the block, the New Drug Company is a single story Western Commercial style building. The blond bricks used to construct the building are set in regular courses. The roof slopes gently from east to west, sealed with rolled asphalt. The building rests on a concrete foundation and there is an interior brick chimney. On the east (front) elevation, sandstone blocks highlight the cornice, which has decorative header and soldier coursed blond brick denticulation. The clerestory atop the single storefront bay has been in-filled with brick, but is still slightly recessed, and features a soldier-coursed brick lintel. The recessed, one-light wooden entry door is centrally located on the façade and

flanked by plate glass display windows. A single-light, wood-framed transom is located above the door. The kick plates have been in-filled and veneered with stucco. A decorative steel ventilation grate is located on the left kick plate. A cloth awning shelters the façade of the building. The rear (west) elevation of the building is clad in masonite with no windows. A shed roof addition at the rear has rolled asphalt roof and masonite siding. An entry is located on the left; it has a metal door. A window on the right is in-filled with insulation and has a metal grate covering. The New Drug Company is a contributing building within the district.



Farmers and Miners State Bank, 70 Castner Street (constructed 1919, one contributing building)

The Farmers and Miners State Bank is the only Neoclassical building in the district, and its distinctive capped pilasters, pedimented entry, and carved frieze are indicative of the style. This one-story sandstone building features a roofline the slopes gently to from east to west and is hidden from view by an elaborate, balustraded parapet. The roof also features an interior chimney at the northeast corner, and a corbelled cornice. The Carved frieze reads: "FARMERS AND MINERS STATE BANK." Four pilasters, topped with unornamented capitals, define the three bays of the east elevation (façade) storefront. The single pedestrian entry is centered within the façade and sheltered by a protruding

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pedimented hood. The heavy wood door has one full-length light. A decorative carved frieze fills the space between the beveled stone doorframe and the hood. Above the pediment is a fixed, thirty-two light wood-frame window. The fenestration pattern is balanced on the façade, and includes one single-light plate glass window in each of the flanking bays, with large, fixed twenty-five light windows above.

The building shares walls with the Belt Hardware Company and New Drug Company. The rear of the building has a gable roof sheathed in corrugated metal. The rear (west) elevation is comprised of brick. There are two windows openings to the north side of the west elevation: one has a one-over-one light, wood-frame double-hung window, while the other is filled with an air conditioning unit. The entry is south of center and has a metal door. An opening to the south contains a one-light fixed window.



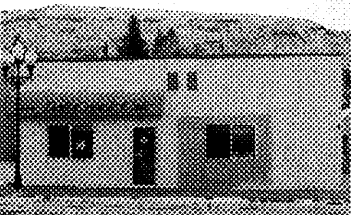
Belt Hardware Company, 72 Castner Street (constructed 1896, one contributing building)

Belt Hardware Company was constructed in 1896, and is one of the anchor buildings in the district. The substantial two-story sandstone building is ornately decorated with a pressed metal cornice, pediment, and storefront. The sandstones are rough cut and set in irregular courses. The roof slopes slightly to from east to west, and is sheathed in rolled asphalt. The metalwork announces the date of the building, 1896, in the upper triangle, "BELT HARDWARE CO." across the nameplate, and "HARNESS," "FARM IMPLEMENTS," and "VEHICLES" stamped across the entablature. Other details include a dentiled, corbelled cornice, and scrolled decorative brackets. The metal storefront surrounds a centered, recessed double-door entry flanked by large plate glass, two-light display windows. The doors are wood frame with full-length fixed lights, and a single, large one-light transom above. Sidelights include one-light, tall narrow windows on either side of the entry, and two-light fixed frames on either side of the transom. At the second story level, there are three, four-light casement windows are spaced evenly across the façade. Each has a brick segmental arched lintel.

Originally a shared wall with a general store, the north (side) elevation has no openings. A portion of the stone warehouse that was once attached to the rear of the elevation still remains. A stepped parapet wall obscures the roof from view along the north side of the building. The south elevation is visible at the second story, and is clad with vertical board and batten.

The west (rear) elevation has paired windows at both the north and south sides of the second story. Both openings have segmental brick arched lintels and extended soldier-coursed brick sills. Each unit has one in-filled window while the other is one-over-one double-hung style. There is a central bay entry with a segmental brick arched lintel on the ground floor. The entry has wood doors. It is flanked by paired one-over-one double-hung windows with brick segmental arched lintels and soldier coursed brick sills.

The Belt Hardware Company was constructed during the first phase of commercial development in Belt, and its fancy Late Victorian metalwork belies its age. The building retains a high degree of integrity, and is an important contributor to the Belt Commercial Historic District.



Belt Creek Café, 76 Castner Street (constructed c. 1945, one noncontributing building)

The Belt Creek Café is a one-story commercial building. The building has a gable roof sheathed in corrugated metal and the walls are comprised of concrete blocks. The false-front façade (east elevation) is clad in vertical board and batten siding as is the north elevation. The primary entry is located slightly south-of-center on the façade. It has a modern metal door with a full-length plate glass light. Two modern, two-light casement windows flank the entry. Two exhaust vents open from the attic on the façade. An awning shelters the entry and left window. It reads "Belt Creek Café." A two-light casement window is located on the west side of the north elevation. There are no windows on the south elevation. Metal sheeting covers the west (rear) elevation gable end. An

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exterior cinderblock chimney is attached on the south side of the rear (west) elevation. An exterior air conditioning unit is located to the south of the chimney.

A concrete block addition is attached to the north side of the west elevation. Corrugated metal covers the saltbox roof, and vertical board and batten siding covers the gable end. A large exterior air conditioning unit is attached to the east side of the addition's north elevation.

Though built during the last phase of the period of significance, the Belt Creek Café displays modern siding and fenestration, and does not retain sufficient integrity to contribute to the district.



Cinker Building, 78 Castner Street (constructed c.1946, one contributing building)

The property is a single-story combination residence and commercial building. The site is located on the northwest corner of Bridge and Castner Streets with the commercial portion of the building facing Castner and the residence onto Bridge Street. The building is L-shaped with a gable roof sheathed in asphalt shingles. The commercial portion has a pedimented false-front. The walls are clad in masonite siding and the building rests on a concrete foundation. There is an interior brick chimney.

The commercial section of the building faces east onto Castner Street. It houses a business currently called "Tanning Fever," which sells "Something for Everyone." The false front is clad in vertical board and batten, while the lower zone is clad in masonite. Aluminum frame windows fill the storefront. The wood, one-light door is centered and features a transom light above. Large, two-light plate glass windows are located on either side of the door, and four, one-light transoms are located above each of the display windows. The south elevation features a single three-light casement window to the east side. Another three-light casement is located on the east side of the north elevation.

The residential portion of the building faces north onto Bridge Street. It is one and one-half stories, with a combination gable and hipped roof oriented north to south. The roof is sheathed in asphalt shingles and the walls in masonite. A two-over-two double-hung window is centrally located in the north gable-end, which is sheathed in vertical board and batten. The primary entry faces east toward Castner Street at the junction of the "L." It has a pedestrian door with a sidelight to the north. Paired two-light double-hung windows are located south of the entry. A bay entry faces north adjacent to the primary entry. It has a two-light, wood roll-up door. The bay and primary entry are sheltered by a shed roof supported by a wood post. The west half of the north elevation features, from east to west, a pair of two-light double-hung windows, a pair of four-light double-hungs, a small four-light double-hung, and another four-light double-hung window. The west elevation contains a four-light, wood-paneled door protected by a twelve-light storm. The door is located off-center to the north, and accessed via a concrete stoop. Four-light double-hung windows are located on either side of the entry: one on the south side of the elevation, and two to the north. Though not ornately styled, the Cinker Building is an important representative of the mid-twentieth century economic upswing in the Belt economy, and contributes to the historic district.



G. Ryffel & Sons Department Store, 23 Bridge Street (constructed 1947, one contributing building)

The property is a single-story commercial building situated on the corner of Bridge Street and Belt Drive. The building is roughly square in configuration with the canted entry facing onto the intersection of the streets. The roof is slightly sloped and is sheathed in asphalt. An interior brick chimney is located at the southeast corner of the building. The walls are comprised of rough-faced concrete blocks. A portion of the north elevation is sheathed in vertical board-and-batten siding. The canted entry faces west and is flanked by full-length brick pilasters. The entry has a wood paneled door with a single fixed light. It is flanked by fixed sidelights and a transom is located above the door. The sidelights have concrete block kick plates. There are two fixed, plate glass display window units on the northwest elevation.

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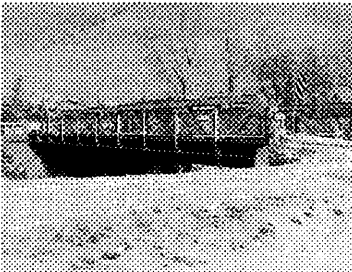
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They are separated by brick pilasters. Each unit is divided into two plate glass sections. The kickplates have been sheathed in vertical board-and-batten. There are two fixed plate glass window units on the southwest elevation. They, too, are delineated and framed by brick pilasters. To the east side of the display windows on this wall are four, twelve-light casement windows with extended brick soldier-coursed sills. The display windows and entry are sheltered by a flat-roofed, wrap-around awning supported by eyebars with turnbuckles. Two lighted signs are located on the canted wall above the awning; the wall is stuccoed over. There are three in-filled windows on the rear (southeast) elevation and an entry with metal door located to the north.

A three-bay garage addition is attached to the northeast elevation of the building and faces onto Belt Drive. The garage has a low-pitched gable roof sheathed in corrugated metal. The walls are comprised of concrete block. The east bay has been in-filled, but is still discernable by the wood lintel. The bays on the west have metal doors mounted on exterior metal tracks. There are two casement windows on the northeast elevation. An entry is located on the left of the rear (southeast) elevation, it has a metal door.

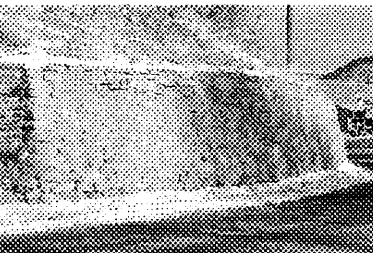
Despite infilled windows, the garage addition on a non-primary elevation, and some modern, exterior finish, the G. Ryffell and Sons Department Store retains sufficient integrity to convey its associations with the late phase of economic development in Belt. It contributes to the district.



Belt Street Bridge (constructed 1923, one contributing structure)

The Belt Creek Bridge is a single-span rived Warren pony truss structure. It is 93 feet long with a roadway width of 20 feet. The bridge has a maximum span width of 90 feet. Two five-foot sidewalks are attached to the sides of the bridge. The structure rests on stepped concrete abutments with concrete wingwalls. The lower chords are riveted channel sections with batten plates. The upper chords and inclined endposts are comprised of steel plates riveted atop channel sections laced together. The vertical and diagonal members are laced channel sections connected at the panel points by gusset plates. The concrete deck is supported by nine steel I-beam floor beams riveted to the lower chords.

The sidewalks are supported by cast steel brackets riveted to steel I-beams connected to the superstructure of the bridge. The concrete sidewalks have lattice-type "guardrails" that are riveted to the angle sections, which are, in turn, riveted to the ends of the brackets. Photographs suggest that the "guardrails" may have been salvaged off another structure. The "guardrail" ends are anchored to concrete endposts that are bolted to the abutments.



Stone Retaining Wall, southwest end of Castner Street (constructed 1930, one contributing structure)

A sandstone retaining wall defines the west side of Castner Street at the south end of the district, approximately 200 feet south of Manchester's Emporium. The wall is twelve feet high and 540 feet long. The rough-cut stones are set in irregular courses, and pointed with concrete. The wall was constructed as an improvement to Highway 89, and its native materials are in keeping with the feeling of the district. The wall is a contributing structure within the district.

Integrity of the Belt Commercial Historic District

The Belt Commercial Historic District retains a high degree of integrity. Though some storefronts have been altered, overall, the design, materials, and workmanship original to the resources is apparent. The district's feeling, setting and associations with the period of significance are clear. There is only one modern, intrusive element within the district boundary, the Belt Grocery. Other non-contributing buildings, such as the Hane Building, Belt Creek Café, and the Welcome to Belt Garage, do not detract appreciably from the overall integrity of the district.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria: A, C

Areas of Significance: COMMERCE; COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT; ARCHITECTURE;

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): N/A

Period(s) of Significance: 1896 - 1947

Significant Person(s): N/A

Significant Dates: 1896, 1906, 1913, 1916, 1920, 1947

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: Eugene Barto, Nels Roman, Otto Hokanson, Lease & Lease, Contractors

Narrative Statement of Significance

Summary Statement of Significance

The Belt Commercial Historic District includes commercial businesses, a theatre, banks, restaurants, and saloons, that convey the town's historic commercial, recreational, and social patterns. The district is representative of three major periods of development for the community: the transition from a small mining camp to a permanent town during the late 1890s; expansion of the community through the 1910s; and a resurgence in prosperity after the World War II. For these reasons, it is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) under Criterion A. The Belt Commercial Historic District is eligible for the NRHP under Criterion C as an excellent and largely intact example of late 19th and early 20th century commercial architecture. The Farmers & Miners State Bank (70 Castner Street) exhibits elements of the Neoclassical, and thirteen other buildings are excellent examples of Western Commercial architecture common to rural communities in the American West. Four are built of native stone, while two have brick veneers to present a more modern and substantial appearance. All are minimally ornamented.

They are good examples of non-architect designed buildings that have been little modified since their construction between 1896 and 1947. They represent the full gamut of popular architectural design from the peak years of 1896 to 1920 and the post-World War II commercial boom in Central Montana. The contributing buildings on Castner and Bridge Streets represent the transformation of Belt from a frontier mining community to a modern 20th century trade center.

Introduction

Belt was founded in 1885 as a stage station on the Lewistown – Great Falls Road. Rich coal deposits in the vicinity of the station on Belt Creek were under development by the late 1870s by local entrepreneur John Castner and Fort Benton merchant T. C. Power. Coal mined there was sold to the Great Northern Railway, households in surrounding communities, and to the Boston & Montana Refinery in Great Falls. Although the initial commercial development in the camp occurred in the immediate vicinity of the coal mine, by the early 1890s it had largely relocated to the Lewistown – Great Falls Road, which was called Castner Street after the community of Belt was platted in 1894. With the exception of the Belt Hardware Store (72 Castner), built in 1896, the commercial buildings that lined Castner Street were wood-frame false-fronted style. The streetscape presented a true late 19th century frontier “feel” to it in combination to the number and type of business enterprises located there: saloons, mercantiles, restaurants and other service oriented businesses.

Belt did not suffer the familiar fire and reconstruction cycle that characterized other Montana communities at the time and which contributed to the construction of masonry and stone commercial buildings. Instead, the transformation began in earnest in 1906 with the expansion of the Anaconda Copper Mine Company (ACM) coal mine and the resulting influx of new residents of the city. Between 1906 and 1920, the Belt commercial district on Castner Street transformed itself from a ramshackle mining camp to a modern 20th century business district. The makeover intensified with the passage of the Enlarged Homestead Act in 1909 and the subsequent Homestead Boom in central Montana. Belt's economy was based both on the coal mine and as a trade center for the surrounding homesteads.

New construction in the historic district languished because of the post-World War One and Great Depressions, the conversion of the Boston & Montana Refinery to natural gas fuel, and the collapse of the Homestead Boom. The post-World War II economic and transportation boom, however, revitalized the community and included the construction of new commercial buildings on Castner and Bridge streets in Belt. The thirteen contributing buildings and two contributing structures in the Belt Commercial Historic District represent the beginnings of the transformation of the camp into a substantial community in 1896, through 1947 when the last significant commercial building from the historic period was constructed.

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The Founding and Development of Belt

John K. Castner came to Montana from the coal country of western Pennsylvania in September 1867. Although popular accounts state he came to Montana to seek his fortune in the gold, Castner never made it to the gold mines. Instead, he worked as a freighter based in Fort Benton and as a real estate speculator until 1877. In 1870, he scouted in central Montana and discovered coal seams in the Belt Creek Valley. In the late 1870s he filed a pre-emptive homestead claim in the NW¹/₄ NE¹/₄ of Section 26, T19N, R6E. The claim included exposed coal seams, which Castner and friends, Mike Worley and Henry Millard, began working in 1877. Castner freighted the coal extracted from the mine to Fort Benton where he gave it away to households and the steamboats to test its suitability for domestic and transportation purposes. The tests were a success and the Castner Coal Company Mine began development as one of the territory's first commercial coal mines. Fort Benton trader T. C. Power also owned property in the area and was heavily invested in Castner's mine. Millard discovered additional coal deposits on the east side of the valley in 1881. He and George Watson coked coal for Castner after Millard built the first coke oven in Belt in 1878.¹

Castner and his wife, Mattie (or Mammy), built a log cabin on their claim near the Lewistown – Great Falls Road. The cabin functioned as a stage stop, diner, and “frontier hotel” for travelers on the road. The Castners continually added additional buildings and structures to the cabin site until, by the early 1890s, it included 17 buildings. In addition to the “hotel,” Castner also leased portions of his property in Belt for commercial purposes. In 1883, he leased his mercantile business at the current site of the Cinker Building (78 Castner Street) to Peterson and Price. By 1884, it was operated by Eugene R. Clingan, a former resident of Fort Benton. It was under Clingan's tenure at the store that the settlement obtained a post office. The village was originally called Pittsburgh, then Beltane and then Castner in honor of the “Coal King from Little Pittsburgh.” By 1885 when the post office officially opened, the community was known as Belt. The Castner mine and other small operations functioned as wagon mines, selling their product to local markets – especially in Fort Benton. Beginning in 1886, however, sheep ranchers and homesteaders began to settle in the region surrounding Belt. The tiny community thus became important to local agricultural trade.²

The arrival of the Montana Central Railway's branch line to Neihart in 1892 sparked the further development of Belt. The railroad gave access to statewide markets for the Belt coal producers. By the time the railroad arrived in the camp, it contained Castner's hotel complex, Clingan's store, a livery stable, saloon, blacksmith shop, a hut belonging to Henry Millard and several dugouts. All of the buildings were constructed of log. In 1891, Butte copper king Marcus Daly sent his wife's brother-in-law, P. J. Shields, to scout for good sources of coal in central Montana. Daly planned to use the material to fuel his smelter operations in Anaconda. Shields found coal outcroppings everywhere and advised Daly to acquire rights to it. He obtained the land by having his employees file homestead claims on it. Work began in the mines in 1892. In 1893, Daly leased the 320-acre Castner coal mine from John Castner and T. C. Power; he then incorporated as the Castner Coal and Coke Company. The acquisition of the coal property around Belt by Marcus Daly's Anaconda Copper Mine Company (ACM) sparked a boom in Belt. The Boston and Montana Mining Company also began operations in the Belt coal fields in 1893. It sent coal to fuel its new smelter in Great Falls.³

¹ Don Spritzer, *Roadside History of Montana*, (Missoula: Mountain Press, 1999), 282; Montana Land Tract Books; GLO, 1882; *Montana: A State Guide Book*, (Helena: Department of Agriculture, Labor, and Industry, 1939), 269; *Progressive Men of the State of Montana*, (Chicago: A. W. Bowen, 1902), 1019-1020; Joe Morris, “A Tale of Belt,” *Belt Valley Times*, 20 November 1958; Harriett Fitzgerald Sanders, *History of Montana*, volume 2, (Chicago: Lewis Publishing, 1913), 1077-1078; Tom Stout, *Montana: Its Story and Biography*, volume 3, (Chicago: The American Historical Society, 1921), 724-725; “Reminiscing on Our 70th Birthday,” *Belt Valley Times*, 2 July 1964; Ethel C. Kennedy & Eva Stober, *Belt Valley History, 1877 – 1979*, (Belt: The Authors, 1980), 20-21; *Cascade County Directory and Gazetteer*.

² George M. Smith, “Montana Memoirs of an Uncommon Man,” *Montana The Magazine of Western History* XVIII: 3, (Summer, 1967), 80; Stout, *Montana*, 2, 724-725; *Progressive Men* 1902, 1019-1020; *Belt Valley Times*, 2 July 1964; Kennedy & Stober, *Belt Valley History*, 20; Roberta Carkeek Cheney, *Names on the Face of Montana: The Story of Montana's Place Names*, (Missoula: Mountain Press, 1990), 19; *Montana*, 269; Joe Morris, “A Tale of Belt,” *Belt Valley Times*, 18 December 1958.

³ Morris, “A Tale of Belt,” *Belt Valley Times*, 20 November 1958; Donald B. Robertson, *Encyclopedia of Western Railroad History*, Volume 2, (Dallas: Taylor Publishing, 1991), 322; *Belt Valley Times*, 2 July 1964; Kennedy & Stober, *Belt Valley History*, 22, 28; Grace Stone Coates, “How Belt Came Into Being; Mines, Developed by Daly and Shields,” *Unknown newspaper*, 25 November 1931; Spritzer, *Roadside History*, 282; *Montana*: 269; Sanders, *History of Montana* 2, 1077.

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In 1894, the ACM began an extensive expansion program at Castner's former mining properties. The Company built a \$15,000 washing plant, constructed 100 coke ovens and spent \$100,000 on other improvements including a tippel, rail tracks, and housing for the miners. There were 75 miners working in mines surrounding Belt in 1894; the following year, a rumored 300 men were working in the mines there. Within a year, the mines were shipping out 200 rail cars a day. John Castner, still the major property owner in the area, platted a townsite in 1894 and began a new career as real estate speculator and insurance agent. People flooded into Belt to work in the mines and provide services to the miners. Saloons were thick on the community's main street (Castner Street), with most of the non-saloon businesses clustered around the mine in the Anaconda Addition. By 1897, the commercial district had shifted to Castner and Bridge streets. The Belt Hardware Store (72 Castner Street) was among the first of the substantial businesses on Castner Street. In 1897, the mines produced 3 million tons of coal, most of which was shipped to the smelters in Anaconda and Great Falls or used for domestic purposes in central Montana. If success could be measured by the amount of smoke produced by the ACM's smokestacks, then Belt was a very prosperous place indeed – overhung by a blanket of sulphur smoke from the mine and smoke from a smoldering slack pile.

Belt contained a large immigrant population, consisting mostly of Slavs, Finns, Germans, and Swedes. Many lived in boarding houses near the mines or on the east side of Belt. Those with families settled in enclaves scattered around the coulees in the area. Like other mining camps in Montana in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Belt was a cosmopolitan place with a polyglot of languages and customs. By 1900, the population of Belt reached 2,858 persons. They were served by a variety of businesses along Castner and Bridge Streets, including mercantiles, meat markets, groceries, hardware stores, jewelers, drugstores, bank, barbers, restaurants, and billiard halls. For entertainment, there were at least sixteen saloons, an active red light district, and several churches to counter the earthier amusements available in town. For family outings, fifteen-acre Castner Park was established at the south end of town near the ACM mine.⁴

By 1907, the population of Belt had grown to the point where Cascade County couldn't provide the necessary services. That year, Belt incorporated as a third-class city. During that time, the city was undergoing a profound change in the appearance of its commercial district on Castner Street. The lines of false-fronted, wood frame business buildings began to disappear and were replaced by more substantial brick and stone structures that better reflected the prosperity of the community. Ironically, before 1915, the city lots owned by Belt's most vigorous promoter, John Castner, were those that saw the least development. While the Oriental Saloon (66 Castner Street), Pythian Castle (58 Castner Street), Black Diamond Café (64 Castner Street), New Drug Store (68 Castner Street), Pioneer Garage (57 Castner Street), and the Belt Hardware Company were representative of the metamorphosis of Belt from mining camp to modern 20th century city, Castner's property consisted of ramshackle log and false-fronted wood-frame buildings. By 1916, the city had a water system, good fire protection, an extensive concrete sidewalk network, and a modern lighting system. Over \$30,000 had been expended in 1916 alone on the construction of public and private buildings. The editor of the *Belt Valley Times* crowed:

Can you name any city in the state that has a better recommendation as a desirable place to live in? We might go further and mention scenery, climate, beautiful drives, fishing and hunting; we have them all, but what's the use. We have knockers too, but we are aware that species exist everywhere and in Belt they are in a very small minority.⁵

Belt was the second largest city in Cascade County by 1913. With Castner's death in January, 1915 began the final transformation of Belt into a modern 20th century city.⁶

The ACM closed its coal mines in Belt in 1912. While this may have been a fatal to other mining communities, Belt continued to

⁴ *Cascade County Directory and Gazetteer* 1896, 200; Spritzer, *Roadside History*, 283; Sanders, *History of Montana* 2, 1078; *Belt Valley Times*, 2 July 1964; Kennedy & Stober, *Belt Valley History*, 19, 22, 26; *Montana*: 269.

⁵ *Belt Valley Times*, 18 May 1916.

⁶ Kennedy & Stober, *Belt Valley History*, 23, 24; Sanders, *History of Montana* 2, 1077; *Belt Valley Times*, 2 July 1964.

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thrive because it had diversified its economy to serve the ranches and farms in the surrounding area. The homestead boom, which reached its peak in Central Montana between 1909 and 1918, had a significant impact on Belt's economy, providing new customers to the many businesses located there. Its importance, moreover, was enhanced by the presence of the railroad and the community's proximity to Great Falls, the state's second largest city. The mines reopened in 1914 when the European War created new markets for coal. The overseas conflict also caused agricultural prices to surge, thus causing a boom economy in Belt. The ACM mine was leased by George Merkel, who continued to operate it until 1925. The coal mined at Belt was used primarily by the railroad and Great Falls smelter because other, higher-grade coal from Carbon County supplanted much of the state's domestic market. Belt coal, moreover, was used mostly for coking purposes. By 1919, Cascade County had the greatest number of operating coal mines in the state.⁷

Despite a post-war economic depression and the population exodus of the 1920s, Belt continued to prosper because of the Merkle Mine. There was also a host of small wagon mine operations surrounding the town that also provided income to Belt's residents. By 1927, most of the old pre-1910 buildings had been removed and replaced by more substantial business blocks on Castner Street. By 1930, the population of the camp was 1,091 or only 10% different than what it had been in 1920 during its peak years.

In the 1930s and 1940s, the market for Belt coal substantially declined when the Anaconda and Great Falls smelters converted to natural gas. Increasingly, Belt began to depend on agriculture and its proximity to Great Falls for economic survival. The town city saw a short lived economic resurgence in the 1940s, coinciding with bumper crops and increased agricultural values following World War II. It did not last, however, as the death blow for the coal industry in Belt occurred in the early 1950s when the Great Northern Railway completed its conversion from coal-fired to diesel locomotives. By the mid-1960's, Belt's economy depended on agriculture and more on the service industries as the city increasingly became a "bedroom community" for Great Falls. Today, Belt retains its historic commercial district.⁸

The Belt Commercial Historic District retains strong associations with the commercial boom-and-bust development of the town through the first half of the twentieth century. Contributing buildings within the district are representative of the three major periods of growth of the community: the preliminary transition from mining camp to permanent town is exemplified by the earliest false-front buildings that date from 1886 through the 1890s; the second period of growth between 1906 and 1920; and the small resurgence of the economy during and immediately following World War II. The buildings, which include commercial business, a theatre, banks, restaurants, and saloons, retain a high degree of integrity and convey the town's historic commercial and developmental patterns. For these reasons, the district is eligible under Criterion A.

Architectural Significance

Commercial Design

The Belt Commercial Historic District is significant architecturally for its impressive selection of representative examples of early commercial architecture in the American West. While the majority of the buildings in the district do not exhibit detailing indicative of any distinct style, the false fronts are extremely important local representations of early commercial architecture. The fronts masked the diminutive nature of the overall building, giving an impression of relative grandeur, permanence and stability. Architectural Historian Kingston Heath explains that "The linear progression of tightly packed false-front buildings that were hurriedly constructed... was at once the pretense and reality of 'city'."⁹ While false front construction is indeed false on a number of pretenses, including materials, structure, and formality, but they did succeed in giving the impression of a mature

⁷ *Great Falls* 1917: 36, *Great Falls* 1919, 40; Joe Morris, "A Tale of Belt," *Belt Valley Times*, 20 November 1958; *Belt Valley Times* 18 May 1916; Sanders, *History of Montana* 2, 1077; Kennedy & Stober, *Belt Valley History*, 29-30, 31, 65.

⁸ Michael Malone, Richard Roeder and William Lang, *Montana: A History of Two Centuries*, Rev. Ed., (Seattle: University of Washington, 1991), 280-281, 283; Spritzer, *Roadside History*, 283; *Montana*: 269.

⁹ Kingston Heath, "False-Front Architecture on Montana's Urban Frontier," in *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture, III*, edited by Thomas Carter and Bernard Herman for the Vernacular Architecture Forum (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1989), p. 199.

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commercial area. "What *was* real," Heath continues, "was the striving for legitimacy and permanence through architectural expression."¹⁰ During the 1880s, Belt was transitioning from a temporary mining camp to a vibrant community. Businessmen and investors along Castner Street attempted to provide an impression of stability and success. Examples of wooden false-front buildings in the district are 55 and 76 Castner Street. Using architectural forms common to other mining communities in the Montana frontier, these entrepreneurs followed the classic pattern of architectural development in the West. Heath explains:

Basically, the psychic and social conditions...differed from other entrepreneurial ventures of nineteenth century town life in the degree of intensity with they are experienced. Hence, while many of the building forms that appear in the (mining) camp are similar to those found elsewhere in urban American environments during the same period, their appearance on the mining frontier and their role in signaling social, economic, and technological change give them added significance. The sooner a young mining camp grappled with the sudden urban realities and provided the facilities necessary to manage or exploit the moment, the better were its chances for survival. The wooden commercial front, then, reflects the first attempt at stability on the western frontier.¹¹

The architectural evolution of the district from the 1900s through 1920 includes masonry commercial buildings, both stone and stone with brick facades that furthered the impression of stability and permanence. Brick or stone construction is inherently more expensive and requires laborers skilled in their craft. The brick storefronts included in the district boundary are 56, 64, 68, and 71 Castner. The stone buildings in the district were built from locally-quarried sandstone.

Stone Buildings in Central Montana

The information for this section comes directly from Jeff Sheldon's Stone Buildings in Lewistown and Vicinity MPS, July 1992, on file at the Montana State Historic Preservation Office, Helena, MT.

Commercial stone production came to Montana with the discovery of valuable stone resources across the state. East of the Rocky Mountains, quarrymen began to excavate a large quantity of sandstone from Cretaceous formations. By 1908 this stone was profitably being quarried in eight counties. Geology professor Dr. Jesse Perry Rowe cited Columbus (approximate 200 miles south of Belt) as the principal area in Montana for sandstone production in terms of both quality and quantity. Here a highly-regarded fine-grained bluestone was produced in great amounts.¹² Excavated from the Laramie formation, masons used this stone extensively in the construction of the State Capitol at Helena. Rowe states that practically every town in Montana, from Wibaux to Livingston had a quarry producing various types of sandstone.¹³ Stone had long been completely hidden in the shadows of gold, silver, copper, and coal mines. By the turn of the twentieth century, however, it had finally found a glimmer of light in its recognition as a staple non-metallic product. The sandstone quarried from the Belt area varies in color from light tan to deep gold and pinkish hues.

Western Commercial Architecture

The stone and brick building within the Belt Commercial Historic District are constructed in the Western Commercial style familiar to many Montana towns. Western Commercial differs somewhat from the Commercial style. According to Marcus Whiffen, the Commercial style is often

five to sixteen stories with straight fronts, flat roofs, and level skylines. The character of the façade derives from the fenestration, to which any ornament – often there is none – is altogether subordinate. The pattern is entirely regular. The windows are rectangular, very large, and variously divided... bay windows are often employed. The total area of glass normally exceeds that of the brick or other structural material.... A cornice

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 200.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Jesse Perry Rowe, *Some Economic Geology of Montana* (Missoula, MT: Montana State University Press, 1908), p. 47.

¹³ Ibid., pp 44-45.

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of moderate projection is the commonest upper termination of the façade, though many have been removed in the interests of safety.¹⁴

The Western Commercial style is typically less than five stories, built of brick or stone masonry with numerous windows stacked in columns, and is capped by a flat roof and a cornice, parapet, and/or simple corbelling. A building of this style typically rests on a raised foundation, is mostly without ornament, and has a more utilitarian appearance. Within the district the Clergy Block, Manchester's Emporium, Pythian Castle, Black Diamond Café, Oriental Saloon, New Drug Company, and Belt Hardware Company are excellent representative examples of the Western Commercial Style.

Bank Architecture in Montana

The builders of the Farmers and Miners State Bank in Belt, understood that substantial masonry construction furthered an impression of stability and permanence. Brick and stone construction is inherently more expensive than log or frame buildings, and requires laborers skilled in their craft.

The Neoclassical architecture of the Farmers and Miners State Bank performed a variety of functions. It was a symbol of the prosperity and confidence in the future of the town, as well as an advertisement of the stability and financial assets of the institution. The sturdy sandstone facade and Classic details went far in furthering that cause. Architectural historian Christopher Nelson explains:

A successful bank was supposed to represent certain characteristics, such as dignity, solidity, and security, and avoid the appearance of others, such as extravagance, waste, and instability. The most immediate way of achieving such ends was the bank building itself. In fact, not only was the building often the bank's largest monetary asset, it was also its most important advertising tool...and no where was this truer than in the West, where banking institutions lacked even an indigenous tradition to legitimize their existence.¹⁵

The Farmers and Miners State Bank is significant as an excellent example of small-scale Neoclassical design. In 1893, leading American architects gathered to design the buildings for the World's Columbian Exposition. They chose a design based in Classical elements, not only for the massiveness, gleaming white columns, domes, and archways, but also associations with "democracy, purity, and art."¹⁶ The element of classical design quickly became the vogue across the country. The bank on Castner Street in Belt is representative of this style, with architectural features such as the pedimented entry supported by capped pilasters. Other elements that contribute to the Neoclassical style are the dentiled cornice, frieze band, and symmetrical fenestration.¹⁷

The bank is the most high-style building on Castner Street, and contributes to the overall architectural significance of the district. Indeed, the district displays the commercial evolution of the community, and displays false-front, Western Commercial, and Neoclassical. Concrete block buildings dating from the 1940s round out the district.

¹⁴ Marcus Whiffen, *American Architecture from 1780: A Guide to Styles*, rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1992), pp. 183-185.

¹⁵ Christopher Nelson, "Bank Architecture in the West," *Journal of the West* Vol XXIII, No. 2 (April 1984), p. 77.

¹⁶ Jones, *Carnegie Libraries*, p. 55; Richards, "Carnegie Architecture," p. 76.

¹⁷ Virginia and Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), pp. 343-346.

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Resource List

| Address | Name | Construction | Status | Smithsonian # |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------|---------------|----------------------|
| 37 Castner Street | Belt Jail | 1895 | c | 24CA0234 |
| 49 Castner Street | Welcome to Belt Garage | 1935 | nc | 24CA0962 |
| 55 Castner Street | Prather's Billiards Parlor | 1905 | c | 24CA0961 |
| 56 Castner Street | Manchester's Emporium | 1920 | c | 24CA0960 |
| 58 Castner Street | Pythian Castle & Theater | 1916 | c | 24CA0959 |
| 64 Castner Street | Black Diamond Café | 1919 | c | 24CA0958 |
| 64½ Castner Street | Hane Building | 1898 | nc | 24CA0963 |
| 65 Castner Street | Belt Valley Grocery | c. 1984 | nc | |
| 66 Castner Street | Oriental Saloon | 1906 | c | 24CA0957 |
| 68 Castner Street | New Drug Co. Building | 1916 | c | 24CA0956 |
| 70 Castner Street | Farmers & Miners State Bank | 1920 | c | 24CA0955 |
| 71 Castner Street | Clergy Block/Hotel Waldo | 1913-1914 | c | 24CA0979 |
| 72 Castner Street | Belt Hardware Co. | 1896 | c | 24CA0954 |
| 76 Castner Street | Belt Creek Café | 1940 | nc | 24CA0953 |
| 78 Castner Street | Cinker Building | 1945 | c | 24CA0952 |
| 57 Castner Street | Pioneer Garage | 1917 | c | 24CA0680 |
| 23 Bridge Street | G. Ryffel & Sons Dept. Store | 1947 | c | 24CA0682 |
| Bridge Street & Belt Creek | Belt Creek Bridge | 1923 | c | 24CA0631 |
| South end of Castner Street | Sandstone retaining wall | 1930 | c | |

9. Major Bibliographic References

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: Great Falls/Cascade County
 Historic Preservation Office.

10. Geographical Data**Acreage of Property:** approximately 8

| UTM References: | Zone | Easting | Northing |
|-----------------|------|------------|----------|
| | A | 12 505463E | 5248071N |
| | B | 505626E | 5248008N |
| | C | 505570E | 5247937N |
| | D | 505538E | 5247961N |
| | E | 505438E | 5247812N |
| | F | 505401E | 5247846N |
| | G | 505462E | 5247924N |
| | H | 505433E | 5247958N |

Legal Location (Township, Range & Section(s)): E ½ NE ¼ NW ¼ and W ½ NW ¼ NE ¼ of Section 26, T19N, R6E**Verbal Boundary Description**

The boundary of the nominated district is roughly delineated by the polygon whose vertices are marked by the following UTM reference points: A/505463E/5248071N; B/505626E/5248008N; C/505570E/5247937N; D/505538E/5247961N; E/505438E/5247812N; F/505401E/5247846N; G/505462E/5247924N; H/505433E/5247958N.

The boundary begins at the southeast corner of Bridge and Park Streets (the northwest corner of the lot occupied by the Cinker Building; Point A) and runs east-southeast to the east bank of Belt Creek, including the lots on which Ryffell and Sons Department Store rests. From the east side of the creek (Point B), the line meanders along the river bank to the southwest, and includes the abutments for the Belt Creek Bridge. South of the bridge, the boundary redirects west (Point C) across the creek to the west bank (Point D). From there, the boundary turns southwest again, and follows the contours of the creekbed. The boundary pivots north-northwest at the southeast corner of the Belt Jail property, Lot 13, Block 2 of Castner's First Addition (Point E). From Point E, the boundary line follows the west lot line and continues across to the northwest side of Castner Street. The boundary jogs north-northeast at Point F and curves along the contour of the northwest side of the road, including the sandstone retaining wall. Where the retaining wall ends, and the west side of Castner Street opens into lots, the boundary steers again to the northwest (Point G) to the southeast side of Park Street (Point H). Continuing along the east-southeast side of Park Street, the boundary meets to point of beginning, Point A, at the intersection of Park and Bridge Streets.

Boundary Justification

The boundaries for this district were drawn to include the highest concentration of historic buildings within the historic commercial business district; linked by history and purpose.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Jon Axline
 organization: Montana Dept. of Transportation
 street & number: 2701 Prospect Ave.
 city or town: Helena state: MT date: April 23, 2003
 telephone: (406) 444-6258
 zip code: 59620-1001

Property Owners

name/title: Multiple
 street & number:
 city or town: telephone:
 state: zip code:

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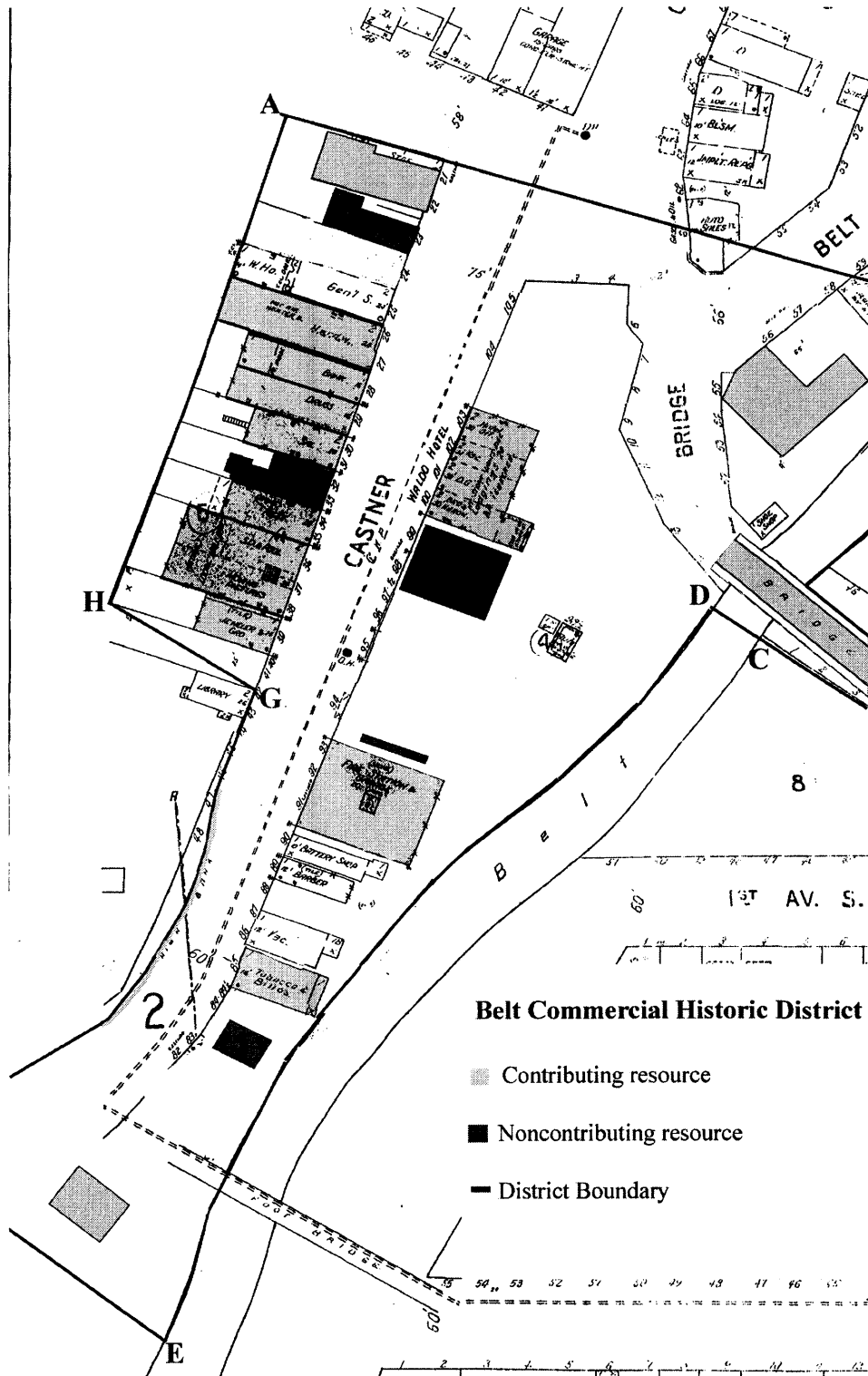
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1927 Sanborn Map for Belt, highlighted to indicate contributing and noncontributing resources.

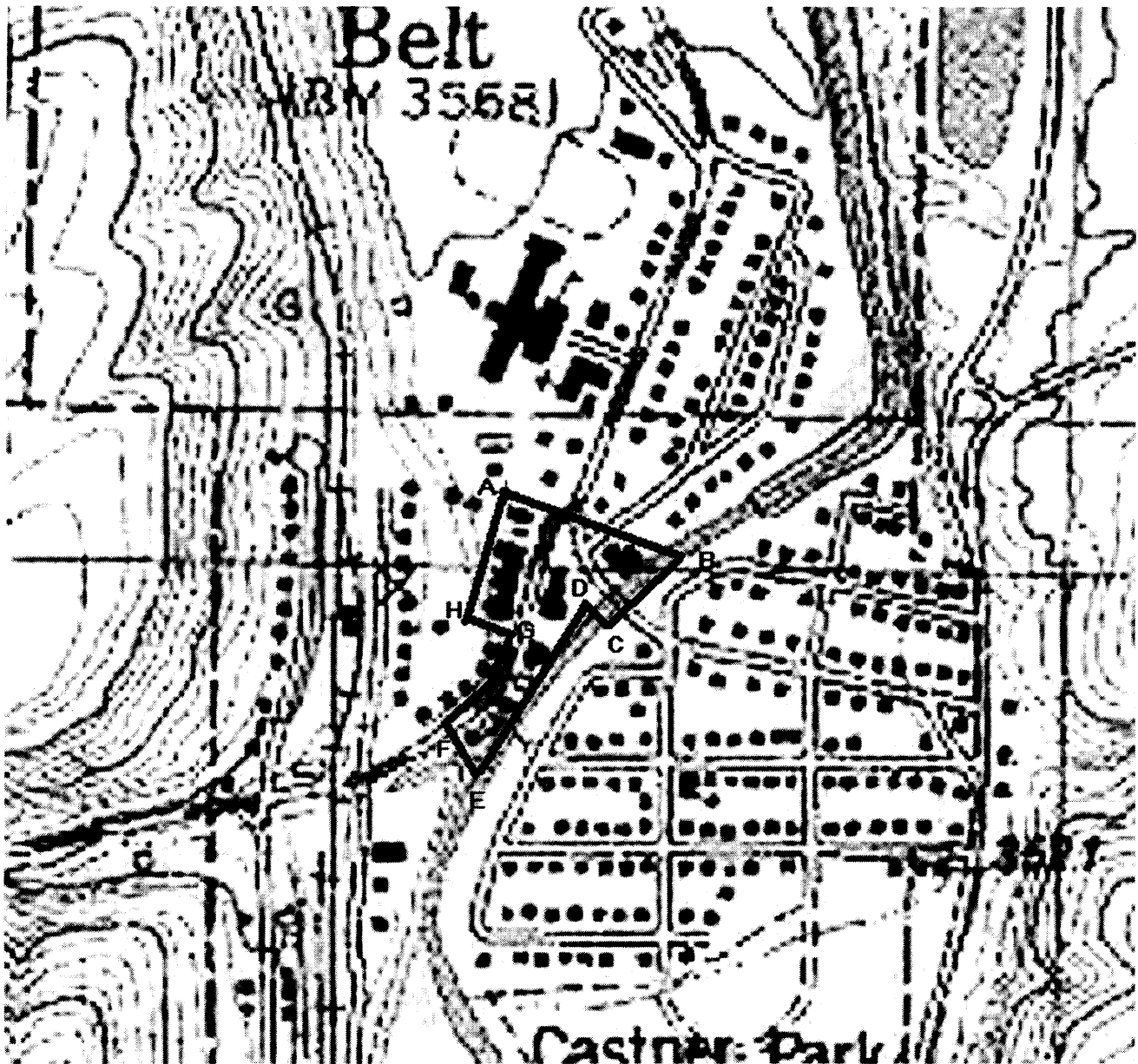
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Belt Quadrangle detail, with Belt Commercial Historic District Boundary.