

**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: 07001293

Date Listed: 12/17/2007

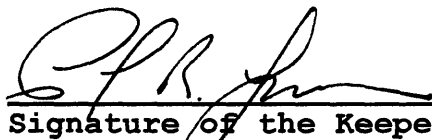
Lavina State Bank
Property Name

Golden Valley 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

12/17/2007
Date of Action

Amended Items in Nomination:

Description/Materials:

The Wall Materials should be listed as: *Wood/Weatherboard*.
[Brick was incorrectly cited on the nomination form.]

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

1293

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

1. Name of Property

historic name: Lavina State Bank

other name/site number: Bank of Lavina, Lavina Post Office; Lavina Temple Lodge #101; 24GV0166

2. Location

street & number: 101 Main Street

not for publication: na

city/town: Lavina

vicinity: na

state: Montana code: MT county: Golden Valley code: 037 zip code: 59046

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.

M.H. F. [Signature] / SHPO November 5, 2007
 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]
 Signature of the Keeper

12/17/2007
 Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property:	Private	Number of Resources within Property	
Category of Property:	Building	Contributing	Noncontributing
Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register:	na	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> building(s)
		<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> sites
		<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> structures
		<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> objects
Name of related multiple property listing:	na	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> TOTAL

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

COMMERCE/FINANCIAL/bank

GOVERNMENT/post office

SOCIAL/meeting hall

Current Functions:

SOCIAL/meeting hall

7. Description**Architectural Classification:**

OTHER/Western Commercial

Materials:

foundation: CONCRETE

walls: BRICK

roof: ASPHALT

other: BRICK (chimney)

Narrative Description

Lavina, Montana is located in the eastern section of Golden Valley County, an area of Montana called the Western Sedimentary Plains. The region is characterized by rolling and rough grasslands watered by intermittent streams, the most substantial of which is the Musselshell River. Precipitation averages 12-14 inches annually, and only about 5 percent of the county is woodland. Predominant vegetation in the region consists of a variety of native grasses and shrubs, especially silver sagebrush, and domestic crops such as wheat, rye, and hay.¹

The Lavina State Bank is a two-story wood frame building located on the corner of Main Street and First Avenue at the south end of the town's historic commercial area. The rectangular building rests on a concrete foundation. Narrow clapboard, highlighted by cornerboards and milled trims, covers the exterior walls. The wood-frame windows feature fixed and double-hung styles, and the doors are vintage. The flat roof slopes down slightly to the west.

Restoration Efforts

Until recently, the historic appearance of the building was buried beneath vinyl siding and masonite. In 2003, using historic photographs and as much of the original material as possible, the Masons of the Lavina Lodge began the restoration of the building.

The fixtures, layout and design of the building and lodge began to make bigger steps when Raymond Barry became the Lodge's Hiram Abiff. In the summer of 2003, Brother Barry quietly began to redecorate the upstairs, adding green and beige tile work around the altar, upholstering benches and covering the altar with brilliant blue, and installing lighting fixtures to the stairwell and over the back entrance. He also purchased gothic thrones for both Senior and Junior Wardens. Barry provided a green empire sofa for the anteroom at a later date.

In the fall after contact with the Montana State Historic Preservation Office, Brothers Barry and Steve Tyrell peeled off the old vinyl siding. In the spring of 2004, Brothers Barry and Robert McNary finished removing the plastic as well as the Masonite siding which exposed the sites of the original windows. Thereafter, Masonic crews, particularly Bob Sasse, Bill Leheldt, and Irwin Allen, restored the original wood clapboard siding, and where the original material was missing, they matched the original material. By the summer of 2004, the exterior restoration process began. Brothers Barry, McNary, and Francis Rose did much of the honors.

Brother Hal Ostlund was responsible for final installation of vintage windows in the original style provided by Brother Danny Smith and his wife, Marilyn. In the fall, Brother Tyrel began the process of power washing the siding and Brother McNary put on a primer coat of paint.

(see continuation sheet)

¹ Montana Agricultural Experiment Station, *Vegetative Rangeland Types in Montana*, (Montana State University, Bozeman, 1976) pp. 8-9; Soil Conservation Service, *Climax Vegetation of Montana, Based on Soils and Climate*, (United States Department of Agriculture, Bozeman, MT, 1976) pp. 18-23, 51, 57.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria: A
Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): n/a
Significant Person(s): n/a
Cultural Affiliation: n/a

Areas of Significance: COMMERCE; SOCIAL
Period(s) of Significance: 1908-1960
Significant Dates: 1908, 1911, 1923, 1938, 1960
Architect/Builder: Unknown

Narrative Statement of Significance

One of the earliest buildings erected in new Lavina, the 1908 Lavina State Bank building is representative of local commercial growth that followed the arrival of the Milwaukee Road in Central Montana, and the ensuing homestead boom. During the homestead era, Lavina served as the social and commercial center for the region's agricultural population. The Bank of Lavina, chartered as the Lavina State Bank in 1911, served as the financial center of the town and surrounding communities. Established in 1908 by Lavina's two most prominent businessmen, Daniel Slayton and Louis Lehfeldt, the bank is representative of early commercial development. Though Lavina State Bank was one of hundreds of Montana banks to fail during the early 1920s, the building continued to serve the Lavina community as a post office, and after 1938, as the Lavina Masonic Lodge as well. The building is an important local representation of the development of commerce during the homestead "boom" of the 1910s, and the devastations of drought and depression in the early 1920s. It gains additional significance as a community hub in its incarnations as the local post office and Masonic Hall. For these reasons it is eligible for listing under criterion A. The period of significance begins with the building's construction in 1908, and runs through 1960, when the post office relocated. Though the significant period ends just less than fifty years ago, 1960 marks an important transition in the use of the building, and is a justifiable close to the building's significant era.

Native American Use and Euro-American Exploration of the Lavina Area

In the centuries prior to permanent Euro-American settlement of the area, central Montana was home to several American Indian nations, including the Blackfeet, Crow and Sioux tribes. These three tribes used the region most frequently, but groups of Flatheads, Gros Ventre, Metis, Nez Perce, Northern Cheyenne, and Shoshone also made occasional forays into central Montana on hunting expeditions.² The Blackfeet used the river bottoms and foothills in their territory for winter campgrounds, where there was shelter from winter storms and firewood was available. When the grass began to green and the buffalo began to form large herds during early spring, the Blackfeet would begin to move onto the plains, using experience, tradition, and information from neighbors to chart their course to collect berries and hunt for elk and buffalo. The River Crow also lived in the lands north of the Yellowstone, and claimed much of what is now Central Montana as their territory. Through the late 1700s and the mid 1800s, territorial conflict between these two powerful nations often erupted in the Musselshell Valley.

Shortly after the Lewis and Clark expedition traveled through the Missouri River country north of Lavina, American fur companies turned an eye to the upper Missouri and its tributaries. In 1809, a party of 150 men working for the St. Louis-based Missouri Fur Company began plying the streams of central Montana for beaver and other fur-bearing animals. In the course of their travels they probably worked the banks of the Musselshell River in what would become Golden Valley County. Although its trapping efforts proved successful the party faced violent opposition from the Blackfeet and their allies, and in subsequent decades trapping along the upper Missouri and its tributaries consisted of infrequent expeditions by small groups of men.

Sustained, large-scale trapping by Euro-Americans in the region would not reappear until the 1830s-1840s with the establishment of a series of trading posts in Blackfeet territory. The last and most enduring of these posts was Fort Benton, founded in 1846.³ In subsequent decades, Fort Benton would prove to be important to the development of central Montana, as it grew into a trade center that influenced the growth of communities throughout the surrounding region. For the time being, however, most of central Montana remained undeveloped by non-Indians. After the Treaty of 1851, the US government recognized the area as part of the Blackfeet nation.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, private parties and various arms of the federal government sponsored exploratory expeditions into the many unsettled areas of the West. Among the ventures undertaken in this period was Ferdinand Hayden's geological survey of the area between the Missouri and Yellowstone Rivers in 1854-1856. Hayden's expedition, funded in part by the Chouteau family of Fort Benton, passed through the Golden Valley County area.⁴ In doing so, it made history by becoming the first recorded group of Euro-Americans in the Lavina region. **(see continuation sheet)**

² Montana State Engineer's Office, Water Resources Survey, Golden Valley County, Montana, Part 1, History of Land and Water Use On Irrigated Areas, (State Engineer's Office, Helena, MT, 1949) p. 6; Harold Joseph Stearns, "A History of the Upper Musselshell Valley to 1920," (Unpublished Master's thesis, University of Montana, Missoula, MT, 1966) p. 6.

³ Malone and Roeder, *Montana: A History of Two Centuries*, (University of Washington Press, Seattle, 1976) pp. 38-46.

⁴ William Goetzmann, *Exploration and Empire: The Explorer and Scientist in the Winning of the American West*, (W. W. Norton & Company, New York, 1966) pp. 489-492; Montana State Engineer's Office 1949, p. 6.

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:

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: Less than one

UTM References: Zone 12 Easting 658860 Northing 5128618 (NAD 27)

Legal Location (Township, Range & Section(s)): SE ¼ SW ¼ Section 2, T6N, R22E

Verbal Boundary Description

Lot 1, Block 5, Lavina Original Townsite.

Boundary Justification

The boundary is drawn, based on legally recorded lines, to include the land historically associated with the building and that conveys the property's historic setting.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Delia Hagen
 organization: Historical Research Associates, Inc. date: August 2003
 street & number: 125 Bank Street telephone: (406) 721-1958
 city or town: Missoula state: MT zip code: 59802

name/title: Francis Rose
 organization: Lavina Temple Lodge #101 date: December 2006
 street & number: 101 Main Street
 city or town: Lavina state: MT zip code: 59046

Property Owner

name/title: Lavina Temple Lodge #101
 street & number: 101 Main St.
 city or town: Lavina state: MT zip code: 59046

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Major interior renovations began over the summer of 2004 when Brother Barry ripped out the lowered ceiling structures. By late fall, Brothers McNary and Steve Fraser took to brushing the exposed tin ceiling and painting it beige. Barry and Fraser painted a gold frieze border to the ceiling, and Barry placed presidential prints supplied by Rose on alternating tile rectangles. Joan Krause cut them to fit.

Brother Barry purchased and installed four gasoliers to light the front parlor. He pulled out gold damask fabric, which he had carried around the country for 20 years, out of storage and upholstered the walls. Barry also purchased a long teller cage to cover the back wall of the parlor. He also procured interior trim that closely matched the original, which had been removed after the historic period. These were installed appropriately by Barry, Rose, and Fraser. Not long after, Barry stripped the modern flooring to reveal the original hardwood floor. Wood stoves from the Dan Olson family and Joan Krause took their stations in back and front rooms. The original post office safe remains in the building and on display.

In the winter of 2005, renovation of the back room began and was completed fairly quickly. After Barry cleared the premises, McNary completed the paint job. Barry and Rose built the new postal front around a cage saved for years by Postmasters Minnie Krause and Kim Grammens, who also provided postal memorabilia, leather mail bags, and a giant Lavina Post Office sign. The postal frame was constructed using bead board. Display cases in the postal room were donated by Brother John Dougherty. Mirrors and picture frames have been provided by Raymond Barry. A number of prints were donated or procured for the Lavina Lodge by Brother Rose.

Exterior

As a result of this restoration effort, the building once again displays its historic appearance. The two-story wood-frame building features narrow clapboard siding, painted a creamy tan, with darker tan cornerboards, trim, and sashes. Its flat roof slopes gently from the front (east) elevation to the rear (west). A narrow milled cornice circles the building at the roofline. A tall, narrow brick chimney pierces the roof near the southeast corner. In 1938, a two-story addition extended the building to the west.

The Bank's east elevation features a vintage, wood entry door on its north side. The door contains a single, plate glass window. Above the door is a large, transom filled with a single fixed light. Two shallow concrete steps lead from the sidewalk to the door. Centered on the south side of the first story is a large display window, featuring a single plate glass fixed sash below a fixed one-light transom. The Masonic Lodge members recently painted the words "BANK OF LAVINA" in gold lettering with black highlights across the lower pane of glass. The second story of the east elevation contains two evenly-spaced one-over-one double-hung windows.

The north elevation faces First Avenue, and is divided by a vertical narrow member into a long east bay and a smaller west bay of the 1938 addition. The first story features a secondary entrance at its west end. Much like the east elevation entry, the door is vintage wood with one large light within and a large transom opening above. The transom is infilled with wood. East of the entry, and within the west bay, is a window opening that contains a single one-light fixed sash below an infilled sash. The upper sash contains a sign that reads LAVINA-TEMPLE LODGE 110 AF-AM. Another window is located at the east end of the north elevation. This window is similar to that on the east elevation's first story, containing a large fixed, one-light display sash below a large transom. "BANK OF LAVINA" is painted on the lower sash in gold lettering with black highlights. There are three one-over-one double-hung windows at the second story. Two are evenly spaced across the east bay of the elevation, and the other is off-center in the west bay. Historically, a door, accessed by a wood-frame staircase, provided additional entry to the second story of the building at the west end of the east bay. Clapboard currently covers the opening, and a modern wood frame staircase is under construction.

The south elevation overlooks a small grassy yard. Fenestration on this exterior wall is limited to five windows: two at the first story and three at the second story. Like the north elevation, a narrow vertical member defines the 1908 building and the 1938 addition. There is a single one-light, smaller, fixed, wood-frame window off center in the south side of the first story, and a one-over-one double-hung window at the west side. Two one-over-one double-hungs are evenly spaced across the east bay's second story, and there is single window of the same style centered in the west bay. The west (rear) elevation has no fenestration.

Integrity:

The Lavina State Bank building retains integrity of location, setting, feeling, and association. Though some of its original exterior siding and fenestration material was removed after the historic period, suitable wood clapboard matching the original, together with vintage windows and doors of the same dimensions, materials, and style, have restored the building's integrity of design. The materials and workmanship are sufficient to convey the building's historic associations.

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Regional Mining, Transportation, and the Beginning of Agriculture Give Birth to Old Lavina

Shortly after Hayden's expedition, gold discoveries began drawing miners and merchants to the mountain valleys of western Montana. The mining camps spawned trade and travel corridors in all directions, for the isolated settlements depended on imports from both coasts and food stuffs from the fertile bottom lands of the broader valleys in the region. Fort Benton, located about 150 miles northwest of what would become Lavina, served as a major supply center for the western mine settlements. The booming trade town stimulated activity in surrounding regions, and by the late 1870s several men were grazing cattle herds along Swimming Woman Creek in the northwest corner of what would become Golden Valley County.⁵

Other cattle operations quickly followed on the heels of these early stockmen. In 1880 the "79" outfit, a large livestock venture, set up headquarters in Big Coulee southwest of Lavina. From its Big Coulee base, the enormous ranch was soon running thousands of cattle, sheep, and horses tended by some 100 employees.⁶ In 1881, cowboys from the "79" joined employees from other ranches in the Lavina region's first roundup. Stockmen started gathering the herds at the lower and upper reaches of the Musselshell River and its tributaries, and ultimately met on the banks of the river near what would shortly become the first Lavina townsite. In doing so they began a practice that would endure for decades, as Lavina became the endpoint for the area's annual fall and spring roundups.⁷

As the central Montana range filled with cattle, the Northern Pacific railroad pushed westward across the Northern Plains. The rails reached Billings in August of 1882. The preceding spring, T. C. Power, a Fort Benton businessman, watched the progress of the track laying crews and envisioned a stage line connecting the growing soon-to-be rail town of Billings with Fort Benton. In May of 1882, Power founded the Billings-Benton Stage Company. He immediately dispatched construction crews under the command of Walter Burke to build trail over the 220 miles that separated the two towns. Burke was charged with the task of completing the road, erecting 17 stage stations, and stocking the line in less than six weeks. Completion of the road entailed finding a suitable passage not only over land but also across several streams that ran through the route, the most substantial of which was the Musselshell River. Burke assessed possible crossings of the river and settled on a ford about a mile upstream from the present town of Lavina. He erected "a stage stables, mess house, bunk house for the men to sleep in, and ... [a] saloon" and named the settlement Lavina in homage to his former sweetheart.⁸ That summer the Musselshell Valley "settled up thick," and the stage stop became the hub of activity. It was soon surrounded by the home ranches of several big cattle outfits, the closest of which was the Three V Cattle Company, which established its headquarters a quarter mile west of present-day Lavina. By the following year, the settlement offered daily stage service to Billings and bi-weekly stages east to Roundup and north to Lewistown, by then a bustling burg of over 1,000 people.⁹

Shortly after it initiated service, the stage line constructed a log bridge at the Lavina river crossing to ease the passage of its coaches. The bridge, however, proved insufficient, for the violent spring floods on the Musselshell washed it out annually. In 1885, the stage company replaced it with a steel structure. An increase in traffic followed the completion of the new bridge, which was the only steel bridge on the Musselshell and made the crossing passable year round. Lavina was thereafter "on one of the most important wagon roads of the state." The small settlement prospered with the trade from "freighters carry[ing] anything from flour, bacon, calomel, Lydia Pinkhams, overalls, calico dress goods, bonnets, guns and ammunition, to whiskey and mouth organs," and with the business generated by the surrounding stock operations.¹⁰

Over the next twenty years empty ranges in the region slowly disappeared as stock outfits moved more herds into the Musselshell country. As a trade and transportation hub for the area, Old Lavina, as it came to be known, grew apace. With the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Railway Company's decision to build its main line along the Musselshell in the first decade of the twentieth century, the future of the town seemed secure. But railroad surveyors, perhaps in response to landowner resistance at the old townsite, located the train station a mile downstream from Old Lavina. In 1906-1907 the old town enjoyed a last burst of activity as grading and track laying crews passed through the river valley. A Missouri firm held the grading contract, and hired African-American

⁵ Montana State Engineer's Office 1949, p. 6.

⁶ Montana State Engineer's Office 1949, p. 6; Gordon et al. 1971:6-9

⁷ Bicentennial Committee 1976: 13

⁸ Bicentennial Committee 1976: 11-13

⁹ Bicentennial Committee, *Bicentennial, Golden Valley County, Heritage '76*, (Roundup Record Tribune, Roundup, Montana, 1976) p. 13; Albie Gordon, Margaret Lehfeldt, and Mary Morsanny, *Dawn in Golden Valley, A County in Montana*, (No publication information, available at Montana Historical Society Research Center, Helena. 1971) p. 136.

¹⁰ Bicentennial Committee 1976, pp. 13, 16; Gordon et al. 1971, p. 136.

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grading crews to run the graders that were pulled by 600 horses and mules. The crews camped for a time just across the river from the present townsite. They continued to contribute to Old Lavina's last business boom after the camp moved on, for the transport of camp supplies translated into a flurry of freight traffic.¹¹

Completion of the Milwaukee Road and Construction of New Lavina

Louis Lehfeldt completed a two-story, twenty-two room hotel at Lavina, called The Adams (NR listed 12/6/2005), in 1908, just as trains began serving the town. By the fall of 1908, several other businesses had joined The Adams in serving new Lavina, including Slayton's Mercantile (NR listed 12/28/2000), a livery stable, and a land office. Other commercial establishments followed, and Lavina soon offered every service central Montanans might need. In short order, the town boasted a second hotel (called a different times The Adams Annex, the Radford, and the Hotel Clermont), a lumber company, a barber, a dentist, a restaurant, a saloon, a druggist, a butcher, a jeweler, a milliner, an attorney, a piano tuner, a blacksmith, a harness shop, two garages, a newspaper, three grain elevators, and various other skilled tradesmen.¹²

Also in 1908, Lehfeldt and Slayton joined forces to establish and construct the Bank of Lavina. As with the Adams and original Slayton Mercantile, Lehfeldt and Slayton chose a wood-framed design. In 1911 their bank was chartered as the Lavina State Bank. In doing so, they were part of a nation-wide trend in bank expansion. Banking historian Henry C. Klassen explains:

As established markets such as commerce, manufacturing, transportation and communications, agriculture, and mining developed in the nation, the demand for credit soared. Between 1896 and 1913 loans at all commercial banks in the United States rose from \$3,741 million to \$12,280 million, and in the same years the number of American commercial banks more than doubled, from 11,474 to 26,664.¹³

The ranks of the surrounding populace swelled with the town itself. Homesteaders poured into the Musselshell country in immigrant cars that moved over the new Milwaukee rail line. Even before the rail reached Lavina, the Milwaukee set about promoting the region. The railroad company established an experimental dry farm near Lavina, and employed Dr. W.X. Suddeth to farm the property and to publicize his successes. The Milwaukee experimental farm placed Lavina at the forefront of agricultural development in the Musselshell Valley. Word of the region's "fine future" spread rapidly. In a single week in the spring of 1910, ten carloads of immigrants detrained at the town's depot.¹⁴ Lured by free land and dreams of profitable farming, immigrants arrived at the depot with all their worldly possessions packed into a single boxcar. A typical immigrant railroad car would have looked a lot like that unloaded at Lavina by an early settler named Carl Krause. It contained "sixteen chickens, three pigs, three barrels of water, thirty sacks of seed oats, twelve bales of hay, household goods, bed clothes, food, some meat," a cow and heifer and four horses.¹⁵

These homesteaders relied on local banks to further their dreams of success. Quoting fellow historian Geoffrey Jones, Klassen further explains:

"banks can perform several functions in an economy: they act as intermediaries between savers and investors; they supply part or all of the circulating means of payment; and they may supply initiative and enterprise." This observation provides guidance for examining growing banking industries in other economies and in other periods, particularly in Montana's rural economy at the turn of the century.¹⁶

Real estate was often the only collateral the homesteaders could offer, and as a state bank, the Lavina State Bank was permitted to lend on that basis. National Banks were not permitted to do so in Montana until after 1915.

Homesteaders established schools in the countryside for their children, but commercial centers like Lavina were the focus of the region's financial and social life. The scale of Lavina's 1911 Fourth of July celebration attested to both the importance of town gatherings and to population growth in the surrounding countryside. About 1,000 people turned out that year to witness the parade,

¹¹ Bicentennial Committee 1976, p. 16; Gordon et al. 1971, pp. 136, 155, 160.

¹² Gordon et al. 1971, p. 136.

¹³ Henry C. Klassen, "Banking and Rural Development in Montana, 1890-1913," *Montana Business Quarterly*, September 22, 1996, available online at: <http://www.allbusiness.com/finance/596719-1.html>, p. 1.

¹⁴ Stearns 1966, pp. 113-114, 119; Stearns 1966a, pp. 87, 118.

¹⁵ Gordon et al. 1971, p. 170.

¹⁶ Klassen, p. 3.

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baseball game, and other patriotic festivities. The town served the trade as well as the social needs of its rural neighbors. As one resident recalled of Lavina:

...during the 'teens, the big night of the week for all farmers was Saturday, when all business was open until 10p.m., even the post office. We hitched up the horses to the spring-wagon, taking our produce, eggs, etc. to Slayton Mercantile and Tom Linton [sic] store to exchange for food and clothing. The children received a penny or nickel to spend...In summer when the sweetpeas were in bloom the children would trade them for ice-cream cones at Farr's Drug Store. Lavina had a good band [that gave] concerts on Saturday nights outside in the summer.¹⁷

In addition to summer concerts, town diversions included basketball games, men's and women's baseball clubs, a women's literary club, and various fraternal and civic organizations.¹⁸ After its construction in 1912, the Lavina Opera House, above the garage, hosted a great number of these events, including basketball games.

Lavina's Heyday, Rapid Demise and Modest Renaissance

Despite losing its bid for county seat of the newly formed Musselshell County in 1912, Lavina flourished through the 1910s. Homesteaders grew flax, wheat, rye, and oats and joined the established stock operations in producing sheep and cattle for market. The widespread adoption of steam engines in this period eased farmers' workload and allowed farming on a larger scale.¹⁹ Through it all, the Lavina State Bank served the community as the financial center of the town and region. When drought descended on the region in 1918, those who had settled near streams "started the construction of small diversion dams and canals to divert water to their lands"²⁰ most often financed by bank loans.

Adaptation and optimism, together with loans and other financial support from the bank, pulled most of the homesteaders through the first few years of drought, and by 1920 the growth of the area's population created a need for more accessible government. Lavina again lost the contest for county seat, this time to Ryegate, which became the civic center of Golden Valley County. At the time of its formation, Golden Valley County housed 49 school districts and five banks. The abundance suggested by such numbers would not last. While homesteaders, and the services they supported, managed to weather the first years of drought, the climate did not reward their tenacity. The rains failed to come, and the drought lasted into the mid-1920s.

In 1919 eastern Montana homesteaders faced humidity that averaged four percent, massive grasshopper infestations, and prairie fires. The effect was devastating. Homesteaders enticed by boosterism about the fertile lands of Montana saw their investments literally blown away by the dry wind. Historian Joseph Kinsey Howard described the continuing disaster:

In the spring of 1920, however, it rained...but the rain stopped and the wind came. These winds were the first "dusters" the northern plains farmer had ever seen. Day after day he watched, first incredulous, then despairing, as the gale whipped his fields into the sky...The ruined homesteaders gathered in little groups in the towns to compare notes...the fourth dry year, and now the wind! Nothing like it had happened before...But the stockmen grinned wryly, knowing it had happened before and would happen again...²¹

By the early 1920s, over 11,000 Montana farms "blew away," leaving more than 40,000 people in eastern and central Montana destitute. Some farmers turned to the towns for alternate employment; others moved on to more fertile locales out of state. Compounding the natural disasters were the strains on the national economy following World War I, and the resultant constriction of extractive industries in Montana, such as logging and mining. This combination of factors resulted in a keen economic depression that brought "upon the State and its banking structure an almost complete breakdown."²²

During the period 1919-25...twenty thousand mortgages were foreclosed, and half of Montana's farmers lost their land. The average value of farmlands fell by 50 percent. During the flush times prior to 1918, Montana had become

¹⁷ Gordon et al. 1971, p. 171.

¹⁸ Gordon et al. 1971, p. 138, 167, 171.

¹⁹ Millie Schanz, n.d. "A Glimpse Into the Past," courthouse history file, Ryegate; Gordon et al. 1971, p. 165.

²⁰ Montana State Engineer's Office 1949, p. 6-7.

²¹ Joseph Kinsey Howard, *Montana: High Wide and Handsome*, (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press/Bison Books, 2001), p. 202.

²² Clarence W. Groth, *Montana Banking History 1864-1954*, Helena Branch of the Federal Reserve Bank, (Helena Montana: Montana Historical Society, June 1955) pp. 42-3.

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heavily overstocked with banks, and many of them had been reckless in their lending policies. Now the overextended banks fell like dominoes. Between 1920 and 1926, 214 of Montana's commercial banks - over one-half the state's total - failed, carrying thousands of family savings accounts with them.²³

Though the banking industry thrived in Montana during the early 1910s, the state law that prohibited state and national banks from creating branches resulted in institutions that were wholly reliant on local assets, and tied to the prosperity of the locality.²⁴ By January of 1924, all five of the county's banks, including the Lavina State Bank, had failed and settlers fled the dry land in droves.²⁵ The devastation in Golden Valley County mirrored that in the state as a whole, as the influx of immigrants that characterized the 1910s reversed itself as destitute Montanans began a sustained exodus in search of greener pastures. In the 1920s, Montana became the only state in the union to lose population.²⁶

When the Lavina State Bank failed in 1923, both Lehfeldt and Slayton lost their fortunes. They used their own money to refund their customers as best they could. Lehfeldt was unable to recover financially. His Adams Hotel closed in 1922, and Lehfeldt ran a bar out of the Slayton Annex until his death in 1955. Slayton fared better than Lehfeldt, as his mercantile and business interests elsewhere in the region sustained him and his family.

Daniel Slayton served as postmaster for the new town of Lavina, and ran the post office out of his mercantile after 1910. Because of its location along the rail line, mail service in Lavina was relatively reliable, when the letters and parcels were not delayed by freight more lucrative for the railroad. After Slayton's tenure, the post office continued in the mercantile building until 1923, when the bank failed. At that time, Ralph Rorabeck purchased the bank building and ran the post office from the first story storefront. Both "Old" and "New" Lavina were served well by the postal service, as they were located along major transportation lines - first the stage road and then the railroad. The U.S. Postal Service explains the importance of the railroad for mail delivery:

When railway mail service began, the cars were equipped primarily to sort and distribute letter mail. By about 1869, other mail was being sorted. Parcel Post service, added in 1913, soon outgrew the limited space aboard trains. Terminals, established adjacent to major railroad stations, allowed parcels to be sorted then loaded into mail cars and RPOs for transport to cities and towns...In 1930, more than 10,000 trains moved mail.²⁷

Wisconsin native Rorabeck was a farmer in the area by 1920, and appointed postmaster within a few years. He continued to serve in that capacity from the former bank building until 1960, when a new post office was constructed across the street. Throughout its occupancy in the bank building, the post office served important functions as a physical reminder of the government presence in Lavina, continued faith in the vitality of the town, and a community gathering place, even during the economically depressed 1920s and 1930s. As the county's population fell from 2126 in 1930 to 1607 in 1940, and again to 1337 in 1950, the post office played a critical role as a ritual meeting place and information clearinghouse for the locality. These interactions were crucial to an already remote and dwindling population. Rorabeck rented the second story space as offices until 1938, when the local Masonic lodge chose the space for their hall. After they purchased the building that year, Rorabeck rented the first story for his post office.

The Dust Bowl and Great Depression of the 1930s followed the drought and farm depression of the 1920s, and many producers who had survived the turbulent twenties abandoned their operations in the dirty thirties. Between 1929 and 1934, American agricultural commodity prices fell an average of 40 percent, while industrial prices fell only 15 percent.²⁸ Montana lost over 10 percent of its remaining farms in the 1930s, as agriculturalists facing both drought and poor prices proved unable to pay their expenses. The outcome would have been worse were it not for the infusion of vast amounts of federal aid: only one state received more federal funds than Montana in the 1930s, and at times roughly one in four residents relied on some form of relief.²⁹ Lavina suffered with the farmers

²³ Michael Malone, Richard B. Roeder, and William L. Lang, *Montana: A History of Two Centuries*, rev. ed. (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1991), p. 283.

²⁴ Klassen, p. 4.

²⁵ Montana State Engineer's Office 1949, p. 8; Anonymous, "Golden Valley County," courthouse history file, Ryegate. n.d.(post 1980), p. 1.

²⁶ Malone and Roeder 1976, p. 216-243.

²⁷ United States Postal Service, "Publication 100: The United States Postal Service: An American History 1775-2006," available online at: http://www.usps.com/cpim/ftp/pubs/pub100/pub100_079.htm.

²⁸ John A. Garraty, *The Great Depression: An Inquiry into the Causes, Course, and Consequences of the World Wide Depression, as Seen by Contemporaries and in the Light of History*, (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, San Diego, 1986), p. 54.

²⁹ Malone and Roeder 1976, p. 227-237.

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and ranchers that surrounded her, for "the fortunes of people in Golden Valley County [were] most dearly tied to agriculture."³⁰ The town welcomed the return of rain in 1938. Record crop yields combined with booming wartime commodity prices in the early 1940s translated into prosperity for Montana's producers and the commercial centers they supported. Golden Valley County's rural residents once again had money to spend in town, as the net income of Montana ranchers increased 188 percent between 1940 and 1948.³¹

The national transition to extensive automobile and truck use, effectively completed by about 1940, also reinvigorated Lavina. By 1923, the road connecting Billings and Lavina was a part of the "Buffalo Highway," an officially designated tourist route that ran from Cheyenne, Wyoming to Glacier National Park. It became a part of the Federal Aid Secondary Highway system in 1942, and in 1947 the State Highway Commission contracted for the reconstruction and paving of the dirt and gravel road. Some new buildings accompanied the road improvements, as residents erected two gas stations and a new cafe to serve travelers passing through.³² The return of veterans after the end of the war contributed as well to the modest second building boom. Service men and their families founded Lavina's American Legion Post in 1946, and in 1953 the post completed a permanent hall on the west side of Main Street.³³ Relative economic stability continued through the end of the 1950s, and manifested itself physically in the construction of several comfortable homes and a new Post Office, completed in 1960.³⁴

After 1960, the population of Golden Valley County fell from 1,203 to 931 in 1970. A resurgence of agricultural prices, coupled with a burgeoning oil industry saw some recovery in the 1970s, but fell again in the 1980s and 1990s. This is reflected in a small population increase to 1,026 in 1980 but a fall to 912 by 1990.³⁵ Since then, the community of Lavina has seen little growth in its commercial enterprises, but its Masonic brotherhood continues to serve as a stabilizing force in the community.

Masons in Montana

Masonry is an important thread in the history of Montana that began with the Lewis and Clark Expedition. The explorers left little tangible evidence, but among features named by the Expedition are three rivers in Madison County. The Wisdom, Philosophy and Philanthropy Rivers are named for Masonic ritual. Meriwether Lewis, likely the first Mason to set foot in the region, left this evidence of his Masonic affiliation.

Half a century later in September of 1862, Captain James Fisk's wagon train camped on the western edge of the Rocky Mountains. Nathaniel Langford, George Gere and Richard Charlton - the only Masons in the company - climbed to the summit of Mullan Pass where they opened and closed an informal lodge of Master Masons.

Bedazzled by the grandeur of the mountains in the clear September twilight, there atop the pass, they opened and closed an informal lodge of Masons. Langford wrote: "I have listened to the solemn ritual of Masonry a hundred times, but never when it impressed me so seriously as upon this occasion; and such also was the experience of my companions."³⁶

This meeting of the three Masons, according to Masonic tradition and as an alternative to other theories, is one of three events represented in the vigilante ultimatum "3-7-77" that symbolizes Montana's turbulent early history and survives today as part of the insignia of the Montana Highway Patrol. The second event was the funeral of William Bell whose death of mountain fever on November 12, 1862, was the first natural death at Bannack. His funeral brought 76 Masons together for the first formal fraternal gathering. Bell himself was the 77th Mason. The third momentous event was the forming of the vigilance committee, or Vigilantes, at Virginia City on December 22, 1863. This came in the wake of the murder trial and conviction of George Ives. The next day 7 men, all reputedly Masons, organized the Vigilantes and adopted the "3-7-77" signature. Not all Vigilantes were Masons and although this

³⁰ Anonymous n.d, p. 2.

³¹ Malone and Roeder 1976, p. 230,237; Anonymous n.d, p.2.

³² Axline 2001; Gordon et al. 1971, p. 35, 168.

³³ Gordon et al. 1971, p. 139.

³⁴ Golden Valley County Real Property Records, Golden Valley County Clerk, Ryegate, MT.

³⁵ Richard L. Forstall, "Population of Counties by Decennial Census: 1900-1990," available online at: <http://www.census.gov/population/cencounts/mt190090.txt>.

³⁶ Ellen Baumler, "Montana Episode: The Masonic Apron of Meriwether Lewis and the Legacy of Masonry in Montana," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History*, Winter 2005, p. 57.

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theory has been often challenged, Masons undeniably played a very important role in laying the strong foundation upon which the state of Montana rests.

Whether the Vigilante warning originated in Masonry or not, the Masons were of considerable importance to Montana's first white communities. Masons played a prominent role in Lavina as they had in most of Montana's frontier. The fraternity embodied in the establishment of a Masonic lodge served to bind the nascent communities together with familiarity and ritual.³⁷

As Montana's economy became more diversified, agricultural and trading centers developed across the state, often along the railroad lines. Indeed, the founding dates of the Masonic Lodges throughout the state are geographic indicators of the state's development – mining towns such as Virginia City, Philipsburg, and Red Mountain City in the 1860's, trading centers along transportation routes, such a Bozeman and Missoula in the 1860s and 1870s and the railroad towns –Glendive, Miles City, Billings –in the early 1880s, coinciding with the arrival of the Northern Pacific. Towns filled in through the homestead boom and the arrival of the Milwaukee Road in the early 1900s and 1910s, culminating with the "Hi-Line" towns along the Great Northern in the 1910s.

Lavina's Masonic Lodge

Lavina Masonic Lodge #107 was initiated in 1916 with Worshipful Master Thomas Smalley, Senior Warden A.O. Englet, and Junior Warden Arleigh Johnston presiding. It appears that the Lodge met for a time above the Linton Store, and for many years in the Opera House at 9-11 Main Street until 1938 when the Lodge purchased the old bank building from Mr. Rorabeck. That year, coinciding with the end of the drought and the beginning of a more prosperous era in the history of Lavina, the Masons constructed an addition to the bank building, providing additional space, including a hall within the second story, in which to conduct their rites.

From 1938 until 1960, the Lodge convened on the second floor while the U.S. Post Office rented the lower floor. During this period, the Masons continued their tradition of community service and fraternity, serving as an important social and cultural touchstone for the town and surrounding agricultural community. By the 1960s, the building was partially re-sided with Masonite, and later with vinyl siding. At some time along the way, the front ceiling on the main floor was dropped and acoustical tile installed, and wood floors were covered with linoleum tiles. Despite the prosperity these renovations would seem to indicate, the Lavina Masonic Lodge, though functional, did not thrive for the three decades that followed.

Vitality began to return to the Lodge when the Ryegate and Lavina Lodges combined in 1995 to form the Lavina Temple Lodge #101. Membership expanded. Dinners preceded monthly lodge meetings. The Lavina Masonic Lodge's renaissance is fittingly manifested in the restoration of their building.

Conclusion

Through the first half of the twentieth century, the building at 101 Main Street in Lavina, Montana, has served as an important hub of community life. During its earliest incarnations as the Bank of Lavina/Lavina State Bank, it served as the financial center of the region, upon which the agricultural community and local commercial development depended. During the early 1920s, banks across the state failed in quick succession, as drought, over speculation, and national depression contributed to financial crisis. The Lavina State Bank is an important local representation of these events. Though it no longer functioned as a bank, the building continued to be an important gathering place and institution in its function as the local post office. When the Masons purchased the building in 1938, and expanded it footprint to accommodate their needs, its dual role as post office and fraternal hall cemented the building's important social function in Lavina, which continued through 1960. For these reasons, the building is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 58.

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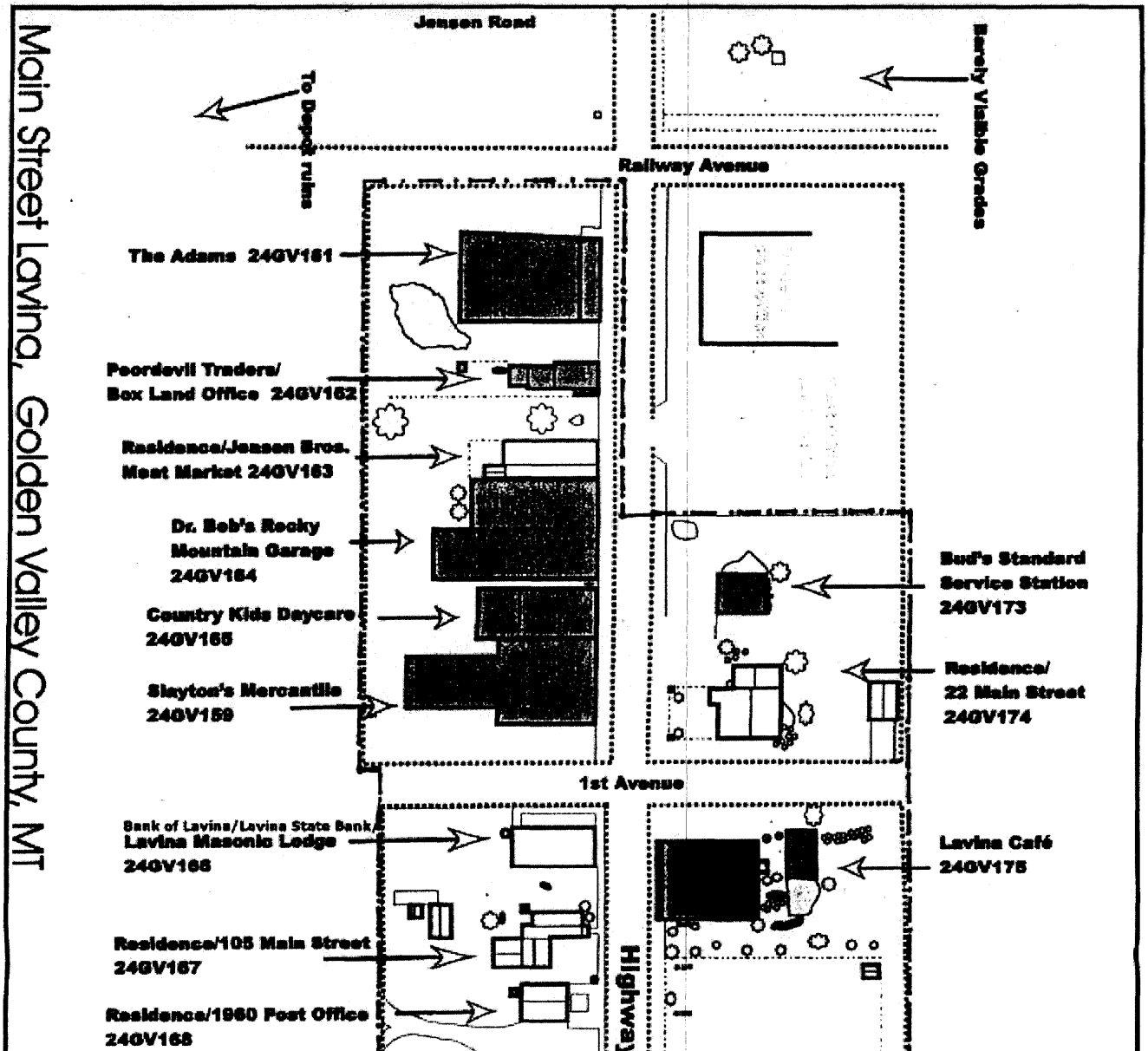
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Map of Lavina's Main Street.

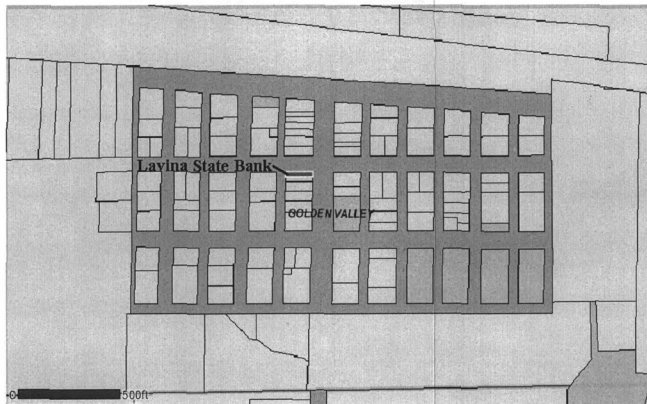
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Cadastral Map detail indicating location of the Lavina State Bank property.

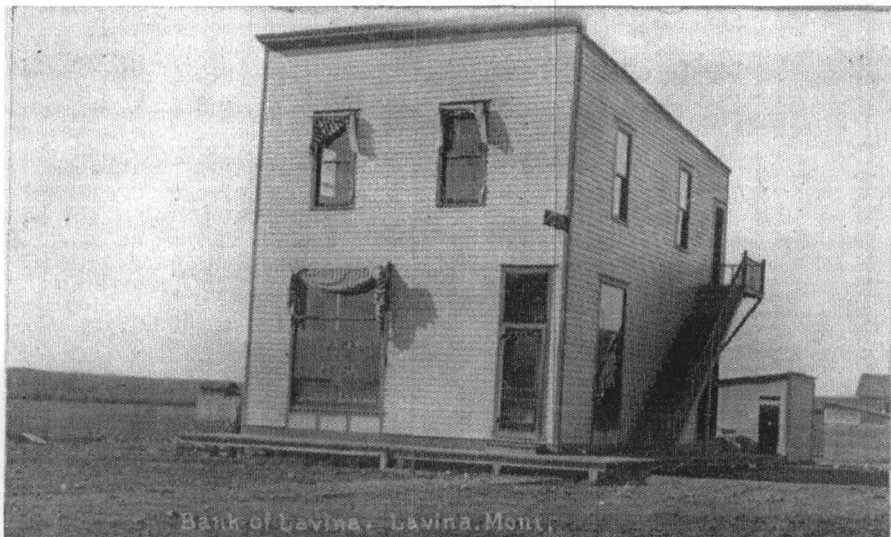
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Bank of Lavina c. 1908.



East elevation 2005.

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Detail of east elevation first story window.



Detail of east elevation entry.

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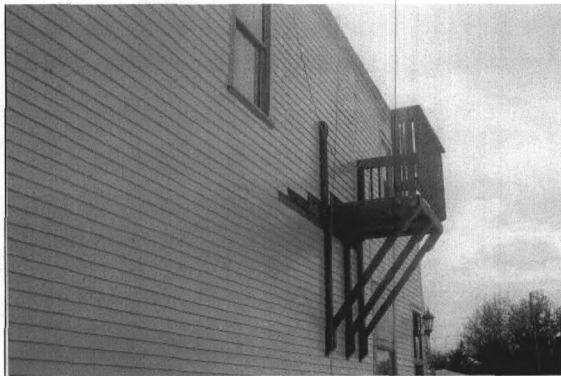
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North elevation 2005



North elevation detail of balcony/incomplete fire escape stair, 2005.

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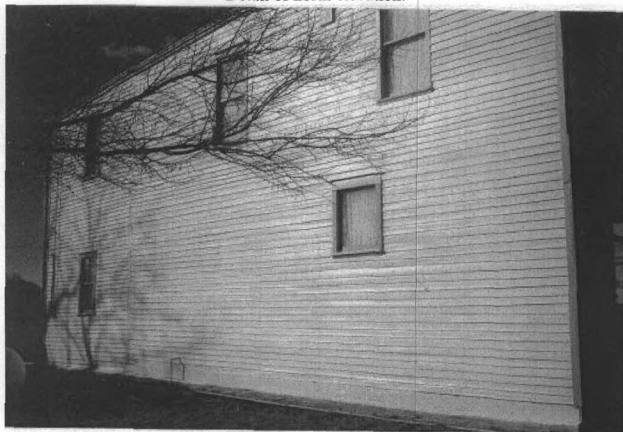
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Detail of north elevation.



South elevation 2005.

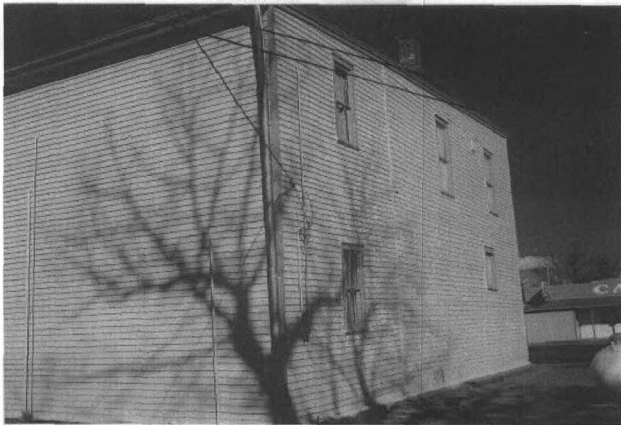
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South and west elevations, 2005.