THEME: 19th-Century Architecture

1 NAME
HISTORIC
Northwestern National Bank of Owatonna

AND/OR COMMON
National Farmers' Bank of Owatonna

2 LOCATION
STREET & NUMBER
Northeast corner of Broadway and Cedar Streets

CITY, TOWN
Owatonna

STATE
Minnesota

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

OWNER'SHIP

STATUS

PRESENT USE

DISTRICT

PUBLIC

X OCCUPIED

AGRICULTURE

BUILDING(S)

PRIVATE

UNOCCUPIED

COMMERCIAL

X STRUCTURE

BOTH

WORK IN PROGRESS

EDUCATIONAL

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

ACCESSIBLE

ENTERTAINMENT

PURCHASE

SITE

PRIVATE ACQUISITION

YES: RESTRICTED

GOVERNMENT

IN PROCESS

NO

INDUSTRIAL

BEING CONSIDERED

MILITARY

OTHER

OBJECT

PRIVATE RESIDENCE

PRIVATE: RESTRICTED

RELIGIOUS

PARK

PRIVATE: UNRESTRICTED

SCIENTIFIC

MUSEUM

TRANSPORTATION

OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY
NAME
Northwestern Bank, A. M. Severson, President (507-451-5670)

STREET & NUMBER
101 North Cedar Street

CITY, TOWN
Owatonna

STATE
Minnesota

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC
Steele County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN
Owatonna

STATE
Minnesota

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

DATE

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE
DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

X—EXCELLENT
GOOD
FAIR

CHECK ONE

—DETERIORATED
—RUINS
—UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

—UNALTERED
X—ALTERED
—MOVED DATE

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

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

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

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

PERIOD | ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC | ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC | COMMUNITY PLANNING | LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE | REligION
---|---|---|---|---|---
PREHISTORIC | | | | | 
1400-1499 | | | | | 
1500-1599 | | | | | 
1600-1699 | X | | | | 
1700-1799 | | | | | 
1800-1899 | | | | | 
1900- | | | | |

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW

- ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC
- ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC
- AGRICULTURE
- ART
- COMMUNICATIONS
- COMMUNITY PLANNING
- CONSERVATION
- CONSERVATION
- ECONOMICS
- EDUCATION
- ENGINEERING
- EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT
- INDUSTRY
- INVENTION
- LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE
- LAW
- LITERATURE
- MILITARY
- MUSIC
- PHILOSOPHY
- POLITICS/GOVERNMENT
- RELIGION
- SCIENCE
- SCULPTURE
- SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
- THEATER
- TRANSPORTATION
- OTHER (SPECIFY)

SPECIFIC DATES 1907-1908

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

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

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

(See Continuation Sheet)

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**GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY __________________________

UTM REFERENCES

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ZONE EASTING NORTHING

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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION:
Commencing 6 feet east of southwest corner of block 4, north 67 1/2 feet, east 87 feet, south 22 1/2 feet, west 19 1/2 feet, south 45 feet, west 67 1/2 feet to beginning. Lots 1 and 2 of Block 4 of original town Plat of Owatonna, 1854.

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LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

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FORM PREPARED BY

**NAME / TITLE**

Carolyn Pitts, Architectural Historian

**ORGANIZATION**

Historic Sites Survey, National Park Service

**STREET & NUMBER**

1100 L Street NW.

**CITY OR TOWN**

Washington

**STATE**

D.C.

**CODE**

20240

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STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL _X_ STATE ____ LOCAL __

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

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FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

**TITLE**

**DATE**

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FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

**DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION**

**DATE**

**ATTEST:**

**DATE**

**KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER**

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

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

National Farmers' Bank, Minn.

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

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

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


