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In the spirit of celebrating the history and architecture of downtown Laurel, the Yellowstone Historic Preservation Board sponsored this walking tour guide in conjunction with the Montana State Historic Preservation Office, Western Heritage Center, City of Laurel, CHS-Cenex Laurel Refinery and Heins Creative.



A WALKING TOUR

OF HISTORIC DOWNTOWN LAUREL, MONTANA



THANK YOU

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Laurel Chamber of Commerce

Laurel Outlook

Laurel Public Library

Parmly Billings Library

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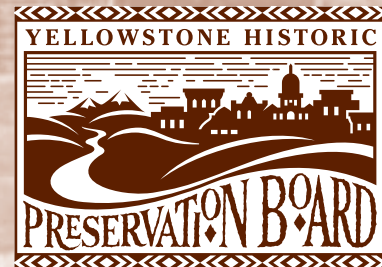
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Yellowstone County, Montana

A BRIEF HISTORY OF LAUREL

Laurel, a short distance from the Yellowstone River, lays within a valley framed by rimrocks to the north and the Beartooth Mountains in the distance to the south. The history of this Montana town is interlaced with the development of agriculture, railroads, tourism and oil interests. It has seen prosperous times, when the city boomed, as well as economic challenges.

The seeds of Laurel's history sprouted during the homestead era, beginning in the 1880s. Homesteaders flocked to the Yellowstone Valley. Soon, dryland wheat farms and ranches dotted the prairie that Laurel now occupies.

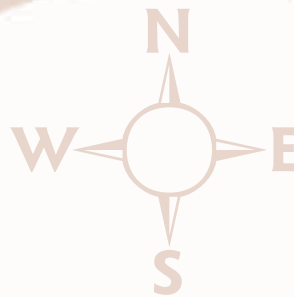
The railroads, however, turned Laurel into a prosperous city. Laurel, which incorporated in 1908, became a shipping and servicing center for the Northern Pacific, Great Northern and

Burlington railroads. By 1909, the Northern Pacific had established at Laurel the largest terminal yards between Minneapolis and Seattle.

During the early 1900s, irrigated farming also bolstered Laurel's growth as irrigation ditches transformed the arid land around Laurel into prime sugar beet farmland. The town swelled even more as tourism became an important industry to Laurel's economy in the late 1920s and the Laurel Leaf Refinery, now Cenex, was built south of town.

The next few decades brought new changes and challenges to the community. National chains moved into Laurel, displacing local merchants. Innovations in the railroad industry decreased the need for the large crews of the past. Then, the completion of the interstate shifted the commercial district from the historic downtown southward as new businesses sprang up between the tracks and the freeway.

For many years, historic downtown Laurel has languished. In the past decade, however, a renewed appreciation for the beauty and heritage of historic properties has emerged. This walking tour guide is an introduction to the history that shaped Laurel and the historic places that for nearly a hundred years have united the community.



HISTORIC DOWNTOWN LAUREL, MONTANA

U.S. Highway 212

- 1 Chamber of Commerce**, 108 East Main
- 2 G. D. Eastlick Grain Elevator**, 106 West Main
- 3 Yellowstone Bank**, 12 First Avenue North
- 4 Laurel Public Library**, 115 West First Street
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HISTORIC DOWNTOWN LAUREL, MONTANA

1 Chamber of Commerce, 108 East Main

The Laurel Commercial Club, hoping to capitalize on the growing enthusiasm for motor travel along the Yellowstone Trail and into Yellowstone Park in the 1930s, created a tourist attraction. In the summer of 1937, the club, now known as the Chamber of Commerce, invited Max Big Man and his family from the Crow Reservation to live in tepees and operate a makeshift museum in what is now Firemen's Park on Main Street. The following year, a crew of volunteers built a replica of Calamity Jane's rustic log cabin on the site to house a tourist information bureau and a permanent museum. In the years since, the cabin also served as the local police station from 1939 to 1958, a meeting place for a Retired Men's Club, and the headquarters of the Laurel Chamber of Commerce. The museum currently showcases photographs of Laurel's early history and offers other visitors' services.



2 G. D. Eastlick Grain Elevator, 106 West Main

The grain elevator at the corner of Main Street and Highway 212 has been a landmark in downtown Laurel since 1913. Dryland farming has been a mainstay of Laurel's agricultural economy for over 100 years, and the Eastlick and neighboring Hageman elevators have played a key role in getting locally-grown grain to market. The Occident Elevator Company built and operated the grain elevator until 1950, when the Peavy Company bought the business. G. D. Eastlick, who owned grain elevators in Billings, acquired the Laurel operation about 1975.



3 Yellowstone Bank, 12 First Avenue North

This stately bank building, constructed in 1921, incorporates elements of Neo-classical architecture. Above the doorway is a pediment supported by ornate corbels. Fluted capitals, edged with acanthus leaves, top the smooth Tuscan columns and brick pilasters that flank the bank's entrance. Close inspection of the inscription above the doorway, "Established 1907," reveals that the seven was carved over a six. It is unclear if the date refers to the founding in 1907 of the Yellowstone Bank or that of the Laurel State Bank, which occupied the two-story brick building until the bank folded in 1924. The Yellowstone Bank of Laurel opened in 1926 and has been an anchor in downtown Laurel ever since.



4 Laurel Public Library, 115 West First Street

The Laurel Public Library opened in 1917 with 137 donated books on the corner of Second Avenue North and West First Street. Built about 1910, the simple brick building originally was the dental office of Drs. Carl Marcus and Ernest Chew. Over the years, as the needs of the library outgrew the cramped quarters, the library expanded by adding an east wing, completed by a WPA crew in 1937. The east wing mirrored the original structure's columns and pediment. A dome, designed by engineer T. A. Rigney, spanned the two wings and created a new entrance. Since the addition was constructed of lumber rather than brick, the entire building was covered in stucco and painted white to give it a uniform appearance. Another addition was added in 1951. After 72 years at this location, the library moved in 1989 to a new facility at 720 West Third. City offices now occupy the former library building.



5 The Creamery, 16 Second Avenue North

This one-story building, built in 1917 by Frank Platz and Frank Weatherford, features rusticated cement block with two bands of dentils. A garage and a tractor dealership occupied the site early in the building's history. In 1933, the building was converted into a creamery. For nearly sixty-five years the creamery operated under a series of owners and names. It first opened as the Norup Dairy, which had moved into the building from its former location next door. The Norup Dairy was renamed the Rose Brand Creamery in 1942 and later the Laurel Creamery before becoming the Laurel-Worden Creameries in 1972. The creamery produced the Rose Brand of ice cream and butter until it closed in 1998.



6 Laurel State Bank / Laird Apartments, 301 West Main

The former Laurel State Bank is Laurel's oldest commercial block. The two-story brick building was constructed in 1904 for entrepreneur Walter Westbrook by contractors George Brown and John Smith. Its design included a bank at the front, a second retail space at the rear that opened onto Third Avenue, and professional offices on the second floor. First National Bank occupied the bank until 1907, when the Laurel State Bank was chartered. The elegant entrance, which faced the southeast corner of the block, once featured a balcony and a parapet bearing the bank's name. The Laurel State Bank relocated in 1921 to First Avenue, and the building was converted into apartments in 1928 under the ownership of Clarence Laird. Stucco now conceals the building's original brick detailing.



7 Lennox Hotel, 219 West Main

The Lennox Hotel is a testament to the resiliency of early Laurel business owners. On September 18, 1907, a fire swept through this block, destroying many of Laurel's most prominent establishments. The newspaper reported that the city suffered heavy losses but, even as their businesses smoldered, orders for brick and lumber went out the next day as owners made plans to rebuild with an eye toward grander and more permanent structures. Among them was Walter Westbrook, a merchant who lost his general store in the fire. He commissioned the building of this two-story red brick hotel in a style that projected Laurel's promising future.



8 Laurel Trading Company, 119 West Main

The Laurel Trading Company, with its false front and stucco-covered siding, is one of the oldest remaining wooden structures in Laurel's business district. When the store opened in 1906, it offered hardware, furniture and undertaking services. The store later expanded into electrical appliances and sporting goods. The Laurel Trading Company, now boarded up and abandoned, is a vivid reminder of Laurel's heritage as a frontier town that bloomed along the railroad.



9 O. M. Wold Building, 101 West Main

The O. M. Wold Company got its start in 1909 as the Funk-Wold Company. After a second partnership, the Wold-Kasner Company, dissolved in 1916, Ole Wold went solo and moved the store from the Lennox Hotel to a building on the corner of First and Main. In 1920, he had a new two-story brick commercial block constructed to accommodate his general store on the first floor with offices above. The O. M. Wold Company, advertised as "Laurel's Own Store," was one of the few local enterprises to survive the influx of national chain stores, such as J. C. Penney and Safeway, that started moving into Laurel in the 1920s. The store stayed in the family until the Wolds sold it in 1977.



10 Citizen's National Bank, 101 East Main

The Citizen's National Bank first opened in 1907 in a small building two blocks west. A few months after it opened, a fire consumed the bank along with the rest of the businesses in the block. In 1908, the bank moved into a new brick building at 101 East Main, where it remained until it closed in 1922. The Citizen's National Bank, along with the Laurel State Bank and the American Bank of Laurel, collapsed in the early 1920s when a long run of droughts and depressed market prices caused a rash of farm foreclosures. Laurel was left without a local bank to cash payroll checks or loan money for nearly two years until Yellowstone Bank opened in 1926.



11 McCauley-Spencer Building, 103 East Main

The McCauley-Spencer Building is a three-story brown brick building featuring plain grey window spandrels, a third floor balcony, a dentil-lined cornice and a balustrade along its roofline. A variety of businesses have occupied this building since it was completed in the summer of 1908. The storefront has accommodated shops selling groceries, dry goods, hardware and, most recently, antiques. The upstairs professional offices that once housed dentists and attorneys have since been converted into apartments.



12 The Cheerio, 109 East Main

In its early years, Laurel had its share of saloons. Then came prohibition. By 1920, most drinking establishments had been transformed into cigar stores, billiards halls and soda parlors. Others closed altogether, replaced by grocery stores and meat markets. Such was the case with this building. During prohibition, it housed a creamery and, for a short time, a grocery store. After beer was legalized, Oliver Harp, who had operated a billiard hall next door, opened a beer parlor here in 1935 called the City Club Inn. It has been a tavern ever since, although the name changed to the Cheerio Bar and Lounge about 1942. The bar's slogan in the 1940s was "For cheers drop into the Cheerio."



13 Gene's Pharmacy, 111 East Main

Gene's Pharmacy is the latest of a string of family-run drugstores to occupy this building since it was completed in 1909. Although the façade has been updated with plate glass windows and brick, much of the original architecture remains, including an arched parapet, a grey-colored cornice and Gibbs window surrounds that contrast with the building's brown brick. The storefront also sports a candy-striped awning and signs dating to the 1950s when Gene's Pharmacy opened. Early newspaper advertisements for Gene's Pharmacy creatively promoted modern medicine over folk remedies. One read: Insomnia sufferers of old ate raw white onions to woo the arms of Morpheus. Pity the poor husband or wife! Today we have more reliable methods of inducing sleep.



14 Hageter Building / Marshall Apartments, 119 East Main

The Hageter Building, at one time referred to as the American Bank Building, is a two-story brown commercial block with retail spaces at street level and apartments above. The Hageter Building is Laurel's finest example of architectural integrity inside and out. Its exterior features brick pilasters, multiple cornices, contrasting keystones above the second floor windows and a parapet with decorative castellations. Although the original windows and brick façade of the storefront have been updated, inside the tin-paneled ceiling and ornate light fixtures remain.



15 Sonny O'Day's Bar & Lounge, 209 East Main

When Charles George bought Slick's Inn in 1946, he opened a sports bar. Known as Sonny O'Day among professional boxers, the retired welterweight fighter lined the walls of his bar with boxing memorabilia and photographs. He even had a boxing ring installed in the bar and hosted St. Patrick's Day celebrations that drew folks from around the state.



16 New Yellowstone Hotel, 301 East Main

For the most part, Laurel's hotels relied upon Northern Pacific railroad crews to rent their rooms. A surge in tourism in the late 1920s prompted hotels to begin catering also to motorists driving the Yellowstone Trail and rail passengers traveling to Yellowstone Park. Tourism also fueled a demand for modernized accommodations. In 1930, William and Lena Stauffer converted their old hotel into a rooming house and opened a new, three-story brick hotel directly across from the train station. The New Yellowstone Hotel offered guests 52 rooms with private gas heaters and linoleum flooring for 50¢ a night. The hotel also featured bathrooms on each floor and a cafe next door called the Yellowstone Grill. The hotel's success was short-lived. By the 1950s, motels attracted the bulk of motorists, and train travel had waned to a trickle. The biggest blow was the loss of patronage by railroad crews following the switch in 1958 from steam to diesel engines, which dramatically reduced the number of men on each crew. The New Yellowstone Hotel closed a few years later.

