

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: Farmers Trading Company

Other names/site number: Bridger Cash Store/Vaughn-Ragsdale Company/Anthony's/24CB2770

Name of related multiple property listing:
N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location

Street & number: 120 South Main Street

City or town: Bridger State: MT County: Carbon

Not For Publication: Vicinity:

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

___ national ___ statewide X local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

X A ___ B X C ___ D

<p>_____ Signature of certifying official/Title:</p>	<p>_____ Date</p>
<p>_____ State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</p>	
<p>In my opinion, the property <u>X</u> meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.</p>	
<p>_____ Signature of commenting official:</p>	<p>_____ Date</p>
<p>_____ Title :</p>	<p>_____ State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</p>

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4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

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

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

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Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u> </u>	buildings
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	sites
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	structures
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCE/TRADE/department store = mercantile

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCE/TRADE: specialty store = art gallery

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

OTHER: Western Commercial

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: STONE, CONCRETE

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

Built in 1906, the Farmers Trading Company stands at the northwest corner of South Main Street/U.S. Highway 310 and West Sunnyside Avenue in Bridger, Montana, the second largest community in Carbon County with a population of 662 people in 2020. Bridger is located in the broad Clark's Fork of the Yellowstone River valley of southcentral Montana and is surrounded by farmlands, much of it used for the raising of sugar beets. The Farmers Trading Company is a one-story sandstone Western Commercial style structure that displays the classic features of a the style with all the architectural detailing comprised of locally quarried sandstone. The Farmers Trading Company building is part of an extensive downtown commercial district facing onto Main Street/US Highway 310. The building has been a significant and visually outstanding part of Bridger's commercial district since its construction in 1906. The building occupies one city lot.

Narrative Description

Built in 1906, the Farmers Trading Company is a one-story sandstone Western Commercial style building. The building stands on a concrete foundation and the walls are comprised of locally quarried rough-faced sandstone set in common bond. The shed roof is slightly pitched and sheathed in TPO rubber membrane. Parapet walls flank the roof that features an interior brick chimney. Four sandstone blocks are set on the coping of the south elevation that may function as vents for the interior. A projecting stone string course encircles the building on the east façade

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and south elevation. The building shares its north elevation with its neighbor, 118 South Main Street.

Facade

The façade clerestory is obscured by T1-11 siding that was likely installed within the past fifty years. The clerestory, however, has an historic tin cornice and denticulated band that partially wraps around to the south elevation. A recent awning shelters the entry. The entry is central to the façade and recessed. Fixed plate glass windows angle toward the entry flank the doorway. The doorway has a recent aluminum-framed door with a full-length fixed lite. Vertical fixed lite sidelights flank the door; a transom lite is above the doorway. There are fixed display windows on the north and south façade; T1-11 siding appears below them.

South Elevation

A display window is boarded over on the extreme east of the south elevation. It is painted over and reads “Zier Gallery” with the painted portrait of a bison below the lettering. Six small windows are on the central and east end of the south elevation. Each has a sandstone flat arch lintel with a keystone and sandstone sills. The windows openings hold single fixed lites, the majority boarded-over with plywood. The eastern-most window has a single fixed lite. A doorway is central to the south elevation. It too, has a flat sandstone arch with a keystone. The doorway has two recent fixed lite transom windows. The door opening holds a three-panel/one-lite unit with two recently replaced fixed lite transom windows above, though the upper transom was likely originally a window that matched those to the east. The door is historic age. There are three full-length windows on the west of the south elevation. Each has a flat sandstone arch with a keystone and a sandstone sill. The lower two-thirds of the windows are boarded over with plywood, while the upper third displays T1-11 siding.

There are three sets of eight glass blocks embedded in the concrete on the south side of the building along Sunnyside Avenue with horseshoes embedded in the concrete near the doorway. The concrete sidewalk was poured within the last ten years and covers an old steel coal door entrance that existed just to the east of the entry.

Rear Facade

The rear (west) façade holds a central doorway with a sandstone segmental arch. The doorway is partially in-filled and has a recent metal door. It is flanked by full-length window openings to the north and south that both display segmental sandstone arch lintels and sandstone sills. The north window is infilled with plywood. The lower two-thirds of the south window is also infilled with plywood but also displays a recent one-over-one double-hung window in the upper one-third. The sandstone arch with keystone is replaced with newer stone. Two exterior central air conditioner units stand on the concrete apron in front of the façade.

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Interior

Main floor

The main floor of the building is divided into retail/gallery space, an office, and work space. The floor is partially clad in black and white checkered linoleum tiles, and the original decorative tin ceiling remains intact and prominent. Most interior walls display an overlay of drywall. The oak interior finishing details described in the *Red Lodge Picket* in 1906 appear to have mostly disappeared except for the door and window frames.¹

Basement

The basement of the building is unfinished and accessed by the original wood stairs. At the base of the stairs is a trap door and two rooms. A wood dividing wall toward the west end separates the basement into multiple spaces. The basement displays one area covered with wood planks resting on wood stringers and another section of dirt, possibly used for the storage of seed potatoes. Vaults are located under the sidewalks on the south and east. The east vault is in poor condition with the sidewalk beginning to sag above it.² The south vault once included a stairway that has since been removed; it is still lighted by glass blocks embedded in the concrete sidewalk above. The basement has an open ceiling. An Eaton & Prince Company-manufactured freight elevator remains in the basement.³ A company advertisement from 1906 shows an elevator very similar in design to this model. The basement has historically been used for storage and, at one time, functioned as an indoor shooting range.⁴

Integrity

The building retains very good integrity. It stands at its original location and the commercial setting of the property is still present. The design of the building is still intact, including the footprint, fenestration, and materials. It is a good example of a sandstone Western Commercial-style building built from locally quarried stone. Other sandstone commercial buildings that date to this approximate time stand in nearby Belfry and Bearcreek.⁵ The building retains its

¹ "Handsome Business Block," *The Red Lodge Picket*, December 27, 1906.

² The Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) plans to replace the sidewalk on the east (façade) side of the building (2025). The project may entail filling in the vault. Evidence of how it was accessed, however, would remain embedded in the foundation of the Farmers Trading Company building's basement.

³ Based in Chicago, Illinois, the Eaton & Prince Company touted its line of hand-winch freight elevators. The elevator was specifically called out in an article published in the *Red Lodge Picket* when the building opened for business during Christmas week 1906. "Handsome Business Block." *The Red Lodge Picket*, December 27, 1906.

⁴ The reputed use of the basement as shooting range has yet to be definitely proven.

⁵ Kose Hall (NR# 13000152) in Belfry was listed in the National Register on September 15, 2007. The Bearcreek Bank (NR# 4000251) was listed in the National Register on March 1, 2004. There are also sandstone commercial buildings located within the Red Lodge Commercial Historic District (NR# 83001057).

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distinctive display windows and decorative details, such as the denticulated tin cornice, string course, keystone flat arch window lintels, and segmental arch lintels on the rear façade. Some architectural details, such as the clerestory windows on the façade and the full-length south elevation and rear façade windows are obscured or infilled; those modifications have not significantly diminished the overall appearance or integrity of the building and appear to be reversible. It retains integrity of feeling and association with early commercial development in the Clark's Fork River valley of southcentral Montana in the early twentieth century.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCE

Period of Significance

1906-1961

Significant Dates

1906

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Eric Forsman/Builder

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Farmers Trading Company is associated with the initial permanent commercial development of Bridger in the first decade of the twentieth century, replacing the tents and wooden shacks that first lined the town's main street. It was one of three general stores active on Bridger's Main Street, and the only one having refrigerated storage. Importantly, the building functioned as a general store and grocery for much of its existence, making it significant to the development and prosperity of Bridger and this part of the Clark's Fork of the Yellowstone River Valley. It was a source of supplies, clothing and groceries not only for residents of Bridger, but also for surrounding mines, farms and ranches. The building also retains a high degree of architectural

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integrity and is an exemplary example of a sandstone Western Commercial-style building that is intact with all its original architectural features, massing, and fenestration intact.

The period of significance begins in 1906, when the construction of the building finished and business operations commenced. The year 1961 represents the end of the period of significance, reflecting the approximate year the Vaughn-Ragsdale Company ceased operations in the former Farmers Trading Company building, marking the last of the major business enterprises to occupy the property. The significant date of 1906 marks when the Farmers Trading Company began business and the building's completion.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

The Farmers Trading Company building is eligible for listing at a local level of significance under criteria A and C. Bridger developed in conjunction with the coal mines in the area, from the initial town called "Stringtown," a series of tents and shacks built on the coal easement through the Crow Reservation. The mines were the reason for the extension of the Northern Pacific Railway to the area in 1900 and provided the impetus for the platting of the town in 1902 to serve the mines. With the arrival of the railroad, the community was established to provide goods and services to the railroad, the coal mines, and the surrounding farmers and ranchers. Like many western communities, the commercial development was initially of wood, but quickly evolved into substantial stone and masonry buildings that reflected the permanence of the community. The Farmers Trading Company was one of the first general mercantiles established on Bridger's Main Street and substantial because of its sandstone construction. The building functioned as a general store, mercantile, and grocery through from 1906 until 1948 when it became the Vaugh Ragsdales store, a clothing and goods store until 1961, when it became Anthony's clothing store. After that, the Farmers Trading Company building has served as a hardware store, auto parts store, a print shop and finally an art gallery. It was a significant business operation in Bridger and accommodated customers from throughout the region. The Farmers Trading Company can be listed in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A.

The Farmers Trading Company building is an exceptional example of a sandstone Western Commercial structure built during the first decade of the twentieth century. It is the last remaining sandstone commercial building in Bridger's commercial district and it retains a high degree of architectural integrity. It displays its historic footprint, fenestration, and decorative features. Although the clerestory windows are now obscured behind T1-11 siding, added within the past fifty years, the intact historic windows are still behind the new siding. The building's decorative details (i.e. clerestory cornice and denticulation, sandstone flat arch sills, string course) are still prominent on the building as are the display windows. The building is an

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excellent representative of a sandstone commercial building in the Clark's Fork River valley of southcentral Montana. The Farmers Trading Company can be listed in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C.

History

Human occupation of the Clark's Fork of the Yellowstone River and its tributaries dates back at least 12,500 years ago during the Clovis Complex. The valley and its environs, however, are associated primarily with the Crow (Apsáalooke) people. The "Children of the Large Beaked Bird" split from the Hidatsa tribe in the late seventeenth century and gradually moved into the area. Their territory extended roughly from Yellowstone National Park in the west to the Powder River basin in the east. A branch of the tribe lived in the Judith Basin in central Montana to the north of the Yellowstone River and ranged south into northern Wyoming. Crow chief Arapooish stated that "The Crow Country is a good country. The Great Spirit has put it in right place; while you are in it, you will fare well; whenever you go out of it, whichever way you travel, you fare worse.... The Crow Country is exactly in the right place. Everything good is to be found there."⁶ By the early eighteenth century, the tribe was firmly established in what would become southcentral Montana area.⁷

Captain William Clark and several others passed the mouth of the Clark's Fork in July 1806, but did not explore the river valley to the south. Some United States fur trade activity occurred in the area in the early nineteenth century. The Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851 established southcentral Montana, including the Clark's Fork valley and its tributaries, as within Crow territory. The 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty designated the area south of the Yellowstone River between the Paradise Valley and the Powder River as part of the Crow Indian Reservation. An agreement between the federal government and the Crow tribe in 1892, reduced the size of the reservation to its present boundaries, opening up the Clark's fork valley to non-indigenouse exploitation. Many of the early settlers in the area were Euro-Americans who married into the tribe.

In 1864, famed fur trapper and guide Jim Bridger blazed an alternative route to the southwest Montana gold fields from the Overland Trail that avoided the conflict on the Bozeman Trail on the east side of the Bighorn Mountains. The Bridger Trail followed the west side of the Bighorn Mountains in Wyoming and then proceeded north through the Clark's Fork of the Yellowstone Valley to the Yellowstone River. Bridger's trail passed through the future site of the town later

⁶ Joseph Kinsey Howard, *Montana Margins: A State Anthology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1946), 109-110.

⁷ Michael P. Malone, Richard B. Roeder, and William L. Lang, *Montana: A History of Two Centuries*, rev. ed. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991), 13; Merrill G. Burlingame, *The Montana Frontier*, (Helena: State Publishing Co., 1942), 21-22.

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named for the mountain man. The Bridger Trail crossed the Clark's Fork of the Yellowstone River a short distance south of Bridger townsite.⁸

Bridger

Arthur Barney, a farmer with an Apsalooke wife, obtained the patent to 160 acres now encompassing the city of Bridger in February 1901. Barney lived on the property when it was still a part of the Crow Reservation. The tribe ceded the Clark's Fork of the Yellowstone River valley to the federal government in October 1892. Thereafter, Barney formally filed a homestead claim on his farm or ranch, acquiring ownership in 1901. In 1902, however, he sold the land to copper king William A. Clark, who had an interest in the nearby coal fields. In 1898, Clark convinced the Northern Pacific Railway to construct a branch line from Rockvale (north of Bridger) to his coal mine near Gebo, a few miles north of the future site of Bridger. In June 1902, Clark incorporated the Bridger Improvement Company and the Bridger Coal Company to develop the coal deposits. The *Bridger Free Press* wrote, "the inauguration of the era of municipal development promised Bridger, the second city of Carbon County, . . . is foreshadowed." The company capitalized at \$100,000. Its directors included Clark's general manager, Arthur Harvey Wethey. In September 1902, he transferred the property to the Bridger Improvement Company. Nearly four years later, the company transferred its assets to the Bridger Coal & Improvement Company.⁹

In 1898, the Northern Pacific Railway constructed the branch line to the coal mines, partially financed by William A. Clark. A post office opened at the branch line's southern terminus in 1898, and was originally called "Stringtown." A community began to grow around the post office and the railroad terminus. In 1902, Arthur H. Wethey, the general manager of the Bridger Improvement Company, platted the townsite, named for famed mountain man Jim Bridger. In 1907, Bridger became the northern terminus of the Yellowstone Park Railway (later the Montana, Wyoming & Southern Railroad). The nearby coal mine, the two railroads, the influx of settlers because of the 1909 Enlarged Homestead Act, and, in the 1920s, the discovery of oil in the valley, caused Bridger to boom. Its commercial district was crowded with a bank, general merchandise emporiums, groceries, and other businesses, including a 300-seat opera house. Within a short time, Bridger was the second largest city in Carbon County. The Chicago,

⁸ Burlingame, *Ibid*, 132-133.

⁹ General Land Office Records viewed at www.glorerecords.blm.gov; Deed Book 8, pp. 136, 497; *Progressive Men of the State of Montana*, (Chicago: A. W. Bowen, 1902), 954-955; Business Entity Search, viewed at www.biz.sosmt.gov; Donald B. Robertson, *Encyclopedia of Western Railroad History*, vol. 2 (Dallas: The Taylor Publishing Company, 1991), 335; "Develop Town of Bridger," *The (Bridger) Free Press*, June 27, 1902; "Local and Personal," *Midland Empire News*, June 27, 1902; US Census Records viewed at www.ancestry.com.

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Burlington & Quincy Railroad gave Bridger residents access to three railroads. Although Bridger population has swindled since its hay day, it continues to be an important regional trade center.¹⁰

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The Sanborn Fire Insurance map for September 1907 that includes this property shows a one-story stone commercial building with a metal ceiling on the interior. The building sported an asphalt roof with the façade 20 ft in height and rear façade 18 ft in height. There were no changes to the building shown on the August 1916 and October 1940 Sanborn maps.¹¹

By 1907, Bridger had grown into a sizeable community with a population of around 500 people. The *Red Lodge Picket* wrote in its special industrial edition in February 1907 that the “town is laid out on a level plain, yet with sufficient slope to make it susceptible to perfect drainage. Bridger is well lighted by a system of electricity, has a water system with a reservoir holding 500,000 gallons and is supplied with ample water mains and hydrants.” The new town also featured a substantial school, a church, two lodge halls (one that also served as the community opera house), several brick and stone business blocks, a “roomy” depot, two warehouses, a lumberyard, and a modern hospital. The town’s residents lived in either “pretty cottages and pretentious dwellings.” Bridger also featured a cadre of doctors, lawyers, and dentists, and three general stores, including the Farmers Trading Company.¹²

The Bridger Coal & Improvement Company sold Lot 1 in Block 12 of the Bridger Original Townsite to the Farmers Trading Company in August 1910. Prior to that, in May 1906, Bridger residents J. W. Johnston, Harvey Wolfe, W. H. Spiers, E. T. Prewett, and William Bostic incorporated the Farmers Trading Company “to do business at Bridger.” The company’s founders invested \$20,000 into the enterprise. Johnston served as the company’s president and Harvey Wolfe would manage the store. Construction of the store building began sometime in the summer of 1906. Recent Swedish immigrant Eric Forsman, born in Sweden in 1949, was the building contractor. The store was constructed of sandstone. Although the exact location of the quarry remains unknown, John Stevens and his son Alex quarried the stone for the building,

¹⁰ Roberta Carkeek Cheney, *Names on the Face of Montana: The Story of Montana’s Place Names*, (Missoula: Mountain Press Publishing Co., 1990), 32-22; *Montana Places Names from Alzada to Zortman: A Montana Historical Society Guide*, (Helena: Montana Historical Society Press, 2009), 30; Jeff McNeish, *Clark’s Fork Valley*, Images of America Series, (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2011), 65; Federal Writers’ Project, *Montana: A State Guide Book*, (Helena: Department of Agriculture, Labor and Industry, 1939), 339.

¹¹ Sanborn Fire Insurance maps, 1907, 1916, 1940. Viewed at www.sanborn.umi.com.

¹² “Bridger, The Central City of the Clarke Fork Valley,” *The Red Lodge Picket*, February 14, 1907.

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possibly near the site of the homestead of John McClean.¹³ By mid-October, the contractor had nearly completed the stone work on the new building ornamental cornice.¹⁴

The Farmers Trading Company officially opened its doors for business Christmas week of 1906. The *Red Lodge Picket* wrote, the “large plate glass windows in front of the store are excellently adapted for display purposes. The interior of the building is furnished entirely in oak with the exception of the ceiling which is of [tin].” The building also featured a full basement reserved for the storage of stock and accessed by a freight elevator. Like many commercial buildings built at the time, the trading company could accommodate a second floor should one become necessary for store purposes or office space. The trading company dealt in “general merchandise, dry goods, boots, shoes, hats, caps, and groceries.” Wolfe also functioned as the company secretary-treasurer. An advertisement in the Billings *Midland Empire News* in 1909 boasted that the company was “new, but we’re hustlers.” Such hustling assumed a variety of forms as exemplified during the summer of 1907, when the owners of the new building encountered a problem of swallows building their mud nests under the building’s cornice. Despite protests from the swallows, Manager Wolfe delegated one of his employees to hose the nests off the building during the nesting season.¹⁵

Farmers Trading Company offered a plethora of goods that varied according to season.¹⁶ The store boasted the “finest tailor made suit in the county,” “all kinds of headware in straws, felts and crashes,” shoes made by Mayer Honorbilt—“the Best Shoe,” boys suits that display “some unusually nifty patterns...with the snap and style,” ladies coats, “serge and all wool worsted dresses,” and petticoats.¹⁷

In addition to his local responsibilities, Wolfe’s managerial duties included a trip through Chicago in November of 1910 that the *Bridger Times* reported, “goes without saying that the Farmers Trading Company’s store will, during the holiday season, reflect the results of his purchases in the big market.”¹⁸

¹³ Roly Reamy (nephew of John Stevens), personal communication to Dana Zier, September 2024.

¹⁴ Deed Book 17, p. 193; “Articles of Incorporation,” *The Anaconda Standard*, May 15, 1906; “Local and Personal,” *Midland Empire News*, September 3, 1907; Advertisement, *Midland Empire News*, July 6, 1909; US Census Records; “Bridger,” *The Red Lodge Picket*, October 11, 1906; Advertisement, *Midland Empire News*, July 6, 1909.

¹⁵ “Handsome Business Block,” *The Red Lodge Picket*, December 27, 1906. Deed Book 17, p. 193; “Articles of Incorporation,” *The Anaconda Standard*, May 15, 1906; “Local and Personal,” *Midland Empire News*, September 3, 1907; US Census Records; “From All Over Carbon County,” *The Red Lodge Picket*, July 12, 1907.

¹⁶ Advertisement, *The Clark Fork Herald*, April 4, 1907.

¹⁷ “Local News,” *The Clark Fork Herald*, June 6, 1907; “Jottings About,” *The Bridger Times*, June 5, 1909; Advertisement, *The Bridger Times* June 19, 1914; Advertisement, *The Bridger Times*, October 16, 1914.

¹⁸ “Additional Local News,” *The Bridger Times*, November 11, 1910.

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Although the first to occupy the building, Farmers Trading Company would not be the last. In October 1919, the owners of the Farmers Trading Company sold their stock and fixtures to George Brandt, who worked as a clerk at the store since 1915. He changed his store's stock from general merchandise to groceries. It operated until July 1922. By the prior year, 1921, Harvey Wolfe was sole owner of the building. He then leased the building to Morrie Levander and Ole Overby, who ran the business as a general merchandise store. Wolfe died in March 1925 and his son, Donald, sold the building to Levander and Overby in November 1926. Levander and Overby (reference as Levander & Overby in advertisements) sold a wide variety of merchandise, including women's clothing, hats, dry goods, hardware, groceries, paint, men's and women's stockings, golf socks (both "fancy and plain"), dress gloves, overalls, and bath towels.¹⁹ Staying current with modern trends, the store soon stocked and sold the "New Edison Phonograph and a big supply of records,"²⁰

The owners of the store were obviously proud of their building and business, announcing improvements and updates to the building when they occurred: "Installation of new, modern display lighting is the latest improvement at the Levander & Overby store. The new lighting will add to the effectiveness of window displays. The decorative screens enclosing the show windows will provide a suitable background."²¹

Special sales occurred including the Levander & Overby's dollar day event in December of 1922. This occasion offered a variety of goods for \$1.00 that included aprons, work shirts, 2 lbs. of green tea, 6 lbs. of cocoa, 5 lbs. of raisins or currants, 22 bars of Lvan Soap, dinner plates, tams and coffee.²²

Levander & Overby also enticed customers with giveaways. In 1926, the store handed out coupons with every fifty-cent purchase that could potentially award the winner of the lucky ticket-holder a "Star Roadster child's automobile." The store suggested, "start collecting coupons...get your friends and neighbors to help."²³ By 1927, the store offered large items such as kitchen ranges, chairs, beds, rugs, and mattresses.²⁴

Undoubtedly, because the store offered such a diverse selection of goods, it became a target of burglars. A mid-September 1927 break-in proved the third in a few months with the latest

¹⁹ "The News In Brief," *The Bridger Times*, November 2, 1922; "The News In Brief," *The Bridger Times*, April 12, 1923; Advertisement, *The Bridger Times*, April 26, 1923.

²⁰ "The News In Brief," *The Bridger Times*, November 13, 1924.

²¹ "The News In Brief," *The Bridger Times*, February 4, 1926.

²² Advertisement, *The Bridger Times*, December 7, 1922.

²³ Advertisement, *The Bridger Times*, October 7, 1926.

²⁴ Advertisement, *The Bridger Times*, May 12, 1927.

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robbery garnering winter weather clothing.²⁵ The thieves apparently had a plan as very few lower cost items were absconded with, the focus being higher end garments, such as lined leather jackets. The store prided itself on its quality offerings boasting, “the store of better merchandise at less cost.” They doubled down on their boast stating, “You can do as well here as out town--- and save your gasoline.”²⁶

In August 1937, though, Morrie Levander and Ole Overby leased the building to the Billings-based Vaughn-Ragsdale Company. Like its predecessor, Vaughn-Ragsdale specialized in general merchandise and was a popular department store chain in southcentral Montana and northern Wyoming. The company operated 24 stores in Montana, Wyoming, and Michigan. After a 17-year run in Bridger and shuttering their Levander & Overby operation, Levander and Overby left town and moved to Seattle.²⁷

With the transition from Levander & Overby to Vaughn-Ragsdale, the new occupant noted they “will continue the grocery and meat department of the store on a cash and carry basis” and “the new store would carry a large stock of merchandise in all departments” and “give the Clarks Fork Valley a bang-up store.”²⁸ True to their word, Vaughn-Ragsdale (also referred to as V & R) advertised a wide assortment of food stuffs such as baking powder, salad dressings, “Vegetole,” peas, coffee, flour, catsup, lard, sugar, cheese, soap chips, cracker, and candy.²⁹

Vaughn-Ragsdale supported the community in ways that extended beyond the store. In the early 1940s, they sponsored the radio program “Yesterday’s neighbors.”³⁰ As noted in the *Bridger Times*, “a unique aspect of...: the radio show “...is that it includes no direct commercial appeal, the sponsor of the series placing the entire emphasis on promotion of the store communities.” In 1942, the company sponsored the “Fourth Annual Advance Showing of Furs.”³¹ The show

²⁵ “Winter Wearing Apparel Attraction—Gain Entrance By Breaking Rear Window,” *The Bridger Times*, September 22, 1927.

²⁶ Advertisement, *The Bridger Times*, March 28, 1929; “Bridger Business Firms,” *The Bridger Times*, October 4, 1934.

²⁷ “Bridger News,” *The Billings Gazette*, October 7, 1919; “Announcement,” *The Bridger Times*, October 9, 1919; “Quality in Groceries is Featured at Bridger Cash Store,” *The Bridger Times*, November 18, 1920; “Notice,” *The Bridger Times*, July 20, 1922; “The News in Brief,” *The Bridger Times*, January 14, 1926; “Our Autumn Fashion Display,” *The Bridger Times*, September 9, 1926; Deed Book 40, p. 266; US Census Records; “Closing Out!” *The Fromberg Herald*, August 12, 1937; “Vaughn Ragsdale Open Store in Bridger,” *The Fromberg Herald*, August 12, 1937.

²⁸ “Vaughn-Ragsdale Will Open New Store In Bridger Next Month States Company Mgr.,” *The Bridger Times*, August 12, 1937.

²⁹ Advertisement, *The Bridger Times*, January 20, 1938; Advertisement, *The Bridger Times*, September 15, 1938.

³⁰ “New Program Over KGHL,” *The Bridger Times*, September 12, 1940.

³¹ Advertisement, *The Bridger Times*, July 23, 1942.

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highlighted assorted fur coats, sable-blend "marmink," sable-blend muskrat, sable-dyed coney and fur jackets starting at \$39.

By the early 1950, the Vaughn and Ragsdale Company became "a member of one of the largest groups of independently owned department stores in America."³² The company's increased profile allowed them to stock a larger selection of items, including work cloths such as Blue Bell's "free'n-easy" overalls, Wrangler jeans (for \$3.59!), Kast-Iron work clothes, Wolverine boots, Chambray shirts, and gloves.³³ Although likely not the first, by 1957, the store offered gift cards for those where the "Christmas gift that has you guessing."³⁴

The year 1955 ushered in Vaughn-Ragsdale's 40th anniversary. What began in the community of Columbus, just to the northwest, expanded to numerous locations in Montana and Wyoming, including Bridger.³⁵ With the company's 40th anniversary, Lloyd Hogan served as the manager of the Bridger store.

The Vaughn-Ragsdale company occupied the building from 1937 until the 1960s. In September 1948, Levander and Overby sold the building to William C. Kelty, employed by Vaughn-Ragsdale since 1931. In 1938, the company promoted him to manager of its Bridger store. He and his wife, Burniece, were active members of the Bridger community. Kelty continued as manager of the store after purchasing the property. In October 1949, he left Bridger to take a position as a buyer at the company's flagship store in Billings, though he retained ownership of the building. In June 1950, he was killed when a Northwest Airlines passenger plane crashed into Lake Michigan during a thunderstorm. He and his boss, Leo Wohler, were returning to Billings from a buying trip in New York City when the airplane went down. He was one of 58 victims of the crash, the worst airline accident in US history up to that point.³⁶

Kelty's widow, Burniece, sold the building to Marguerite Baker in February 1961. Vaughn-Ragsdale continued to occupy the building a few years beyond its sale, to about 1964.³⁷ Little is known about Mrs. Baker. She was born in Billings in 1917 and married Bridger area rancher William Baker in 1938, Baker's second wife. William Baker also operated a service station in Bridger. He died in town in February 1971. The title and occupation history becomes a little

³² "V & R Manager Attends Meeting," *The Bridger Times*, March 20, 1952.

³³ Advertisement, *The Bridger Times*, April 21, 1955.

³⁴ Advertisement, *The Bridger Times*, December 12, 1957.

³⁵ "Vaughn-Ragsdale Store Celebrating 40th Anniversary," *The Bridger Times*, October 6, 1955.

³⁶ Deed Book 66, p. 478; US Census Records; "Kelty Will Take Billings Position," *The Bridger Times*, August 11, 1949; "W. C. Kelty. Former Bridger Man, Lost in Plane Disaster Friday Night," *The Bridger Times*, June 29, 1950. "Local Residents on Lost Airline," *The Billings Gazette*, June 25, 1950; "58 Missing, Including Four Montanans, on N.W. Airlines," *Livingston Enterprise*, June 24, 1950.

³⁷ Bridger School Annual Yearbook, 1963, 1964.

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murky after 1964. Although apparently gone from the building after 1964, Vaughn-Ragsdale paid for a new exterior paint job, interior decorating, and new shelving in 1961.³⁸ Around 1965 to around 1971, C.R. Anthony's, a clothing store, occupied the building. Alas, little information regarding that company's presence in the building found its way to media; what little did noted, "better values" and "the store for your family's everyday clothing needs."³⁹ By 1978, Coast to Coast Hardware sold their wares from the building.⁴⁰ In June 1988, the estate of insurance agent William R. Currie deeded the property to the remarried Marguerite Goodman, nee Baker. Shortly after the estate action, she transferred ownership of the building to Robert and Marguerite Sommerfeld. The couple owned the building until 2000. The building has housed Zier Gallery and Vacation Rental since 2014.⁴¹

Eric Forsman

Born in Sweden in 1849, Eric Forsman apprenticed as a stone cutter at an early age. By the 1880s, he worked in Oslo, Norway, where he met and married Marit (Mary) Bakken in 1885. The couple had two daughters. In July 1906, the family immigrated to the United States and settled in Bridger, where Eric's younger brother, John, operated a mercantile. Eric worked as a stone mason in Bridger and Carbon County until at least 1920.⁴²

Forsman died of a heart attack in Bridger in February 1929. The *Bridger Times* described him as "kindly man, a quiet peace-loving citizen, a finished craftsman, upright and scrupulously honest in every transaction while he understood the English language, never succeeded in mastering it." The newspaper also praised his work and that he left behind "numerous structures in which his skill was employed."⁴³

Sandstone Commercial Buildings in Carbon County

Sandstone was a common building material used for commercial and a few residential buildings in the Clark's Fork of the Yellowstone River valley. Thick and extensive ledges of Eagle sandstone occur in the area. The sandstone originated about 98 to 65 million years ago in the late cretaceous Era. It was deposited on coastal plains and swamps and flanked the Western Interior Seaway. Eagle sandstone is fine grained and contains coal, clay, and uranium. It also contains

³⁸ "Changes Noted, *The Bridger News*, June 8, 1961.

³⁹ Bridger School Annual Yearbook, 1965, 1968.

⁴⁰ Bridger School Annual Yearbook, 1978, 1981.

⁴¹ The Farmers Trading Company was incorporated by five men: J. W. Johnston, Harvey Wolfe, W. H. Spiers, E. T. Prewett, and William Bostic. Bostic is the current owner, Dana Zier's great great grandfather. Information provided by Dana Zier. Deed Book 75, p. 488; US Census Records; "William Baker," *The Billings Gazette*, February 4, 1971; Deed Book 117, p. 879; Warranty Deed 296246; Cadastral Records.

⁴² "Eric Forsman Dies Monday in 80th Years," *The Bridger Times*, February 14, 1929; U.S. Census Records.

⁴³ "Eric Forsman Dies Monday."

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plant and animal fossils. Extensive coal deposits are in the formation north of Bridger and the Bear Creek and Red Lodge coal fields.⁴⁴

Large sandstone quarries existed at Red Lodge, Gebo, and Bridger, “but only at the latter place is the stone quarried to any extent.”⁴⁵ It is not known the extent of the quarry operation at Gebo or Bridger. Stonemason Eric Forsman built the building with sandstone obtained from the quarry near Bridger. In 1906, the *Carbon County Republican* reported about the Bridger quarry that the “stone will probably never be widely known, as it has no marked properties but will have a local demand and will furnish a substantial building material.”⁴⁶

Eagle sandstone commercial buildings were constructed in Clark’s Fork valley in the first decade of the twentieth century and still exist in Bridger, Belfry, and Bearcreek. Sandstone buildings in Belfry (Kose Hall, NR# 13000152) and Bearcreek (the Bearcreek Bank, NR# 4000251) still stand and are listed in the National Register of Historic Places. In Bearcreek, moreover, there are sandstone foundations for commercial and residential buildings still extant on the city’s main street.

In Bridger, the August 1906 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map shows four buildings on Bridger’s Main Street built of sandstone. In addition to the Farmers Trading Company, they included the Amoretti, Barclay, and Company Bank, a dry goods store, and a print shop. A paint shop and a sheriff’s office were located on a side street. By August 1916, the number of stone buildings had nearly doubled. These included a commercial building adjacent to the Farmers Trading Company (built in 1907; it has a brick veneer facade), the rear of a second bank building, and the Bridger Garage. A new feed storage building was constructed across Sunnyside Avenue from the Farmers Trading Company. As of 2024, the Farmers Trading Company and the adjacent building (118 South Main Street) are the only two sandstone commercial buildings remaining in Bridger.

⁴⁴ Donald W. Hyndman and Robert C. Thomas, *Roadside Geology of Montana*, second edition, (Missoula: Mountain Press Publishing Co., 2020), 206, 254.

⁴⁵ “Carbon County Resources,” *Carbon County Republican*, June 29, 1906.

⁴⁶ “Carbon County Resources.”

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Name of Property

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June 29, 1950.

“William Baker.” *The Billings Gazette*, February 4, 1971.

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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 # _____
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
 - Other State agency
 - Federal agency
 - Local government
 - University
 - Other
- Name of repository: Montana Department of Transportation

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property 0.1

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Farmers Trading Company
Name of Property

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Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 45.294818 Longitude: -108.914534 (center of building)

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The National Register of boundary of the Farmers Trading Company is a rectangle measuring 30 x 100 feet, equating to one city lot. The rectangle encompasses the building and a parking area to the west, adjacent an alley. Per the Montana Cadastral, the building sits in the Bridger Original Townsite, Lot 1, Block 12 of the NE¹/₄ SW¹/₄ of Section 21, T6S, R23E. Reference to the maps on pages 26 and 27 confirm this location. The latitude and longitude coordinates correlate with the center of the building.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary conscribes the Farmers Trading Company building includes the legal lot where the building stands in Bridger, Montana.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Jon Axline/Historian
organization: _____
street & number: 448 Parriman Street
city or town: Helena state: MT zip code: 59602
e-mail jaxline@mt.gov
telephone: (406) 422-2111
date: October 2024

Property Owner:

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Dana Zier Revocable Trust
street & number PO Box 12 telephone _____
city or town Bridger state MT zip code 59014

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Farmers Trading Company
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Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log, All Photographs

Name of Property: Farmers Trading Company
City or Vicinity: Bridger, Montana
County: Carbon State: MT
Photographer: Jon Axline
Date Photographed: April 2024
Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:
1 of ____.

Please see Continuation Sheets

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

United States Department of the Interior
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Farmers Trading Company
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Location of the Farmers Trading Company. Found on the USGS 7.5' Quadrangle map: Bridger (2011). Center point = Latitude: 45.294818 Longitude: -108.914534.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

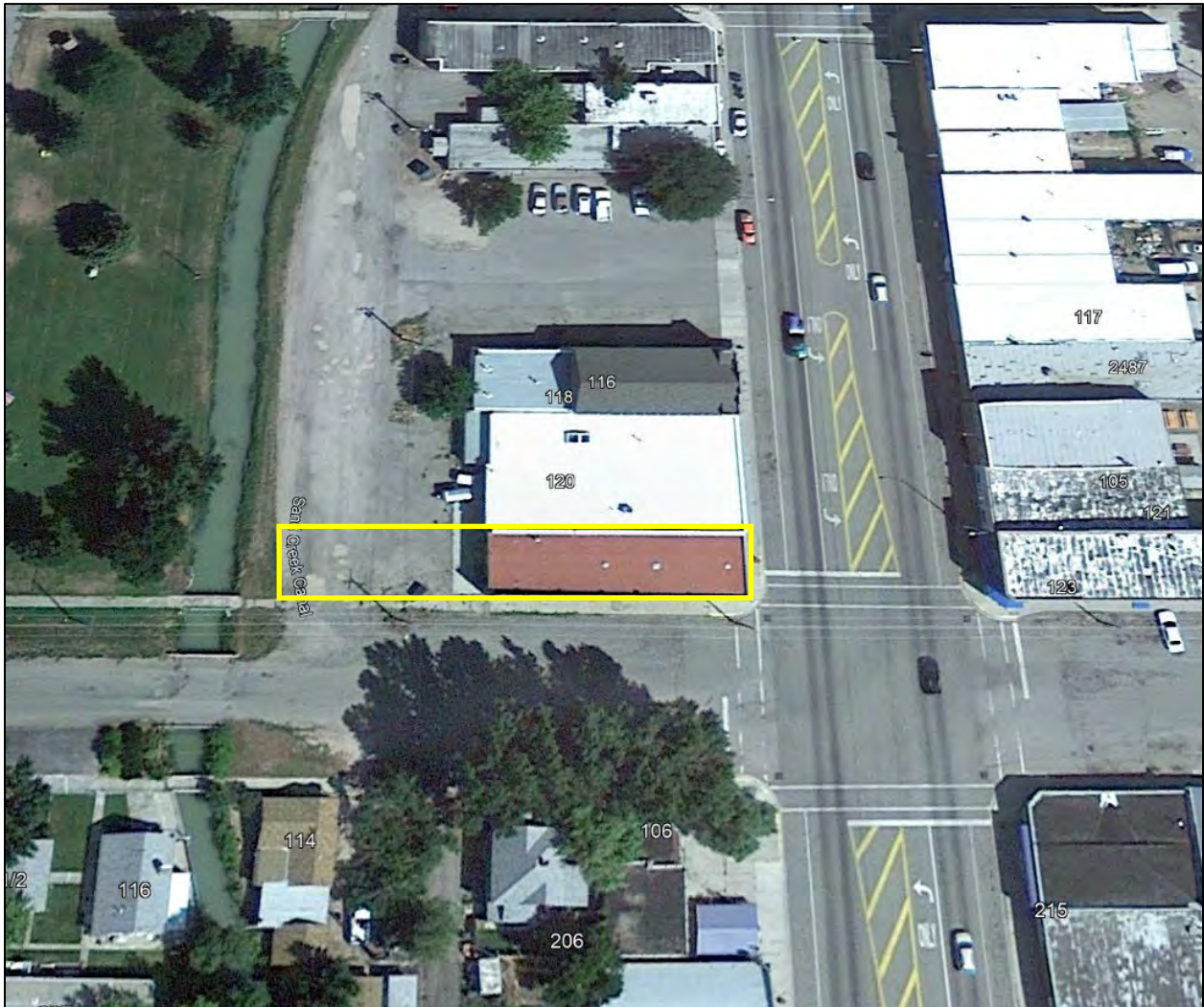
National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Carbon County, Montana
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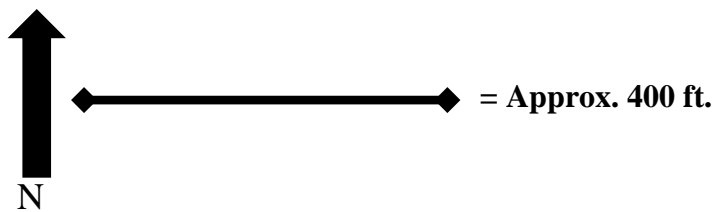
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Additional Documentation—Maps

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Aerial view of the Farmers Trading Company (bordered in yellow). Center point =
Latitude: 45.294818 Longitude: -108.914534.



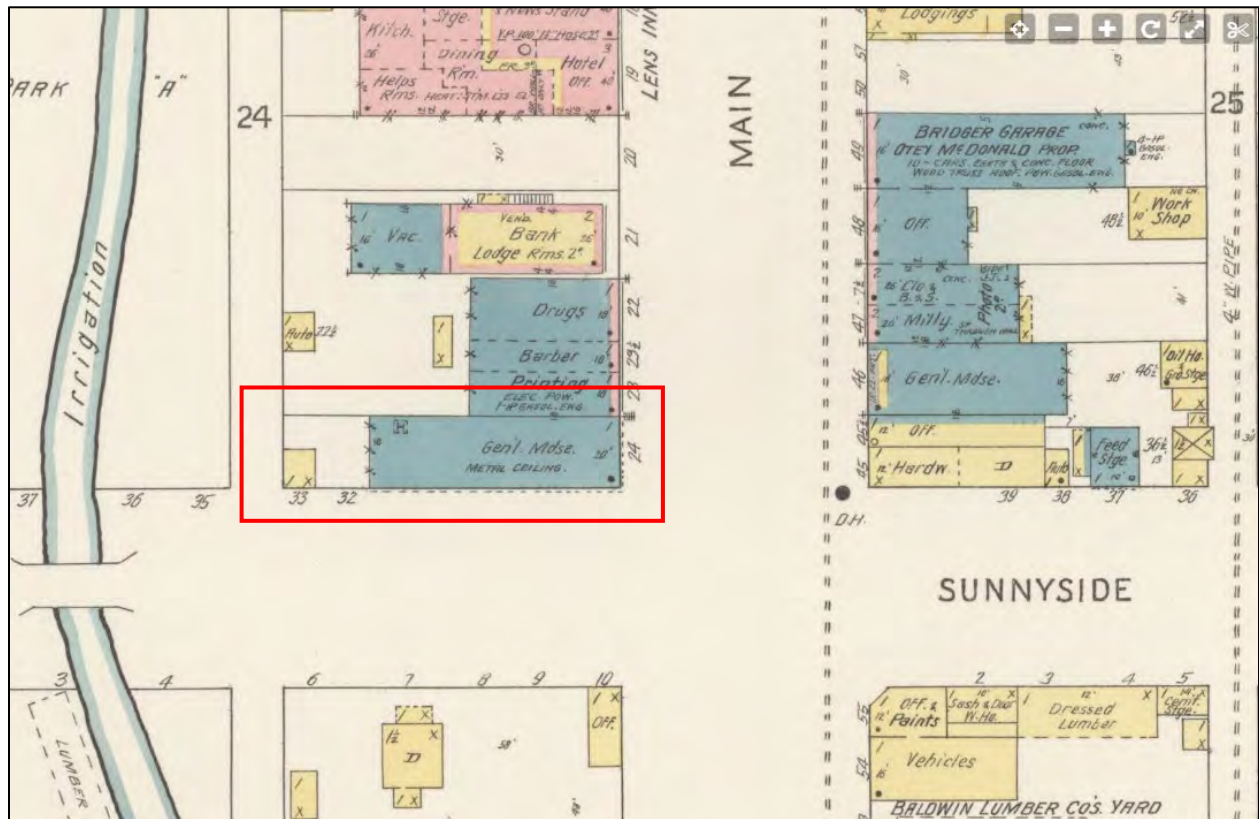
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Sanborn Fire Insurance Map Showing Location of Farmers Trading Company. August 1916.

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Farmers Trading Company, c. 1920, noted by arrow above building. Carbon County Historical Society, Red Lodge, Montana.

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Farmers Trading Company, c. 1910, noted by arrow above building. Carbon County Historical Society. Red Lodge, Montana.

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Carbon County, Montana
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This Store Hoist
*Shipped Direct to You
F. O. B. Your City*
All Parts Inter-Changeable

The annexed cut shows our standard type Center Lift Hand Elevator, the safest and most economical on the market; does not drag to one side or bind on guides.

Controlled by Screw Brake, (our own patent): Noiseless Wooden Brake Shoes.

Use of Roller Bearings assures scarcely no friction in operation.

This Elevator is shipped K. D. with full directions for assembling.

You can install it at no expense to yourself except the help of the average mechanic or handyman.

Buy direct of the makers and save the middleman's profit. Ask for catalogue No. 99.

EATON & PRINCE COMPANY
70-76 Michigan Street, Chicago

1906 Eaton & Prince Company advertisement for its Center Lift Hand Elevator. Retrieved from www.mycompanies.fandom.com.

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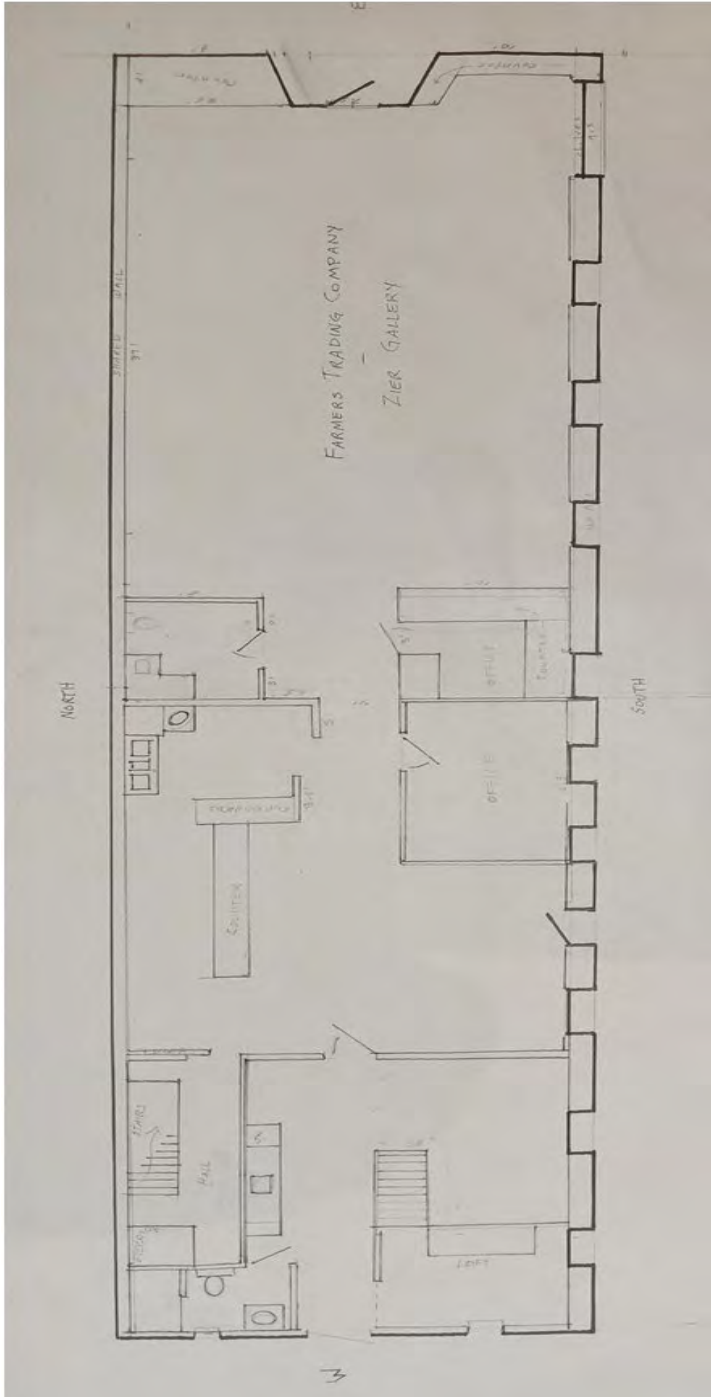
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Main Floor Plan for the Farmers Trading Company (Dana Zier).

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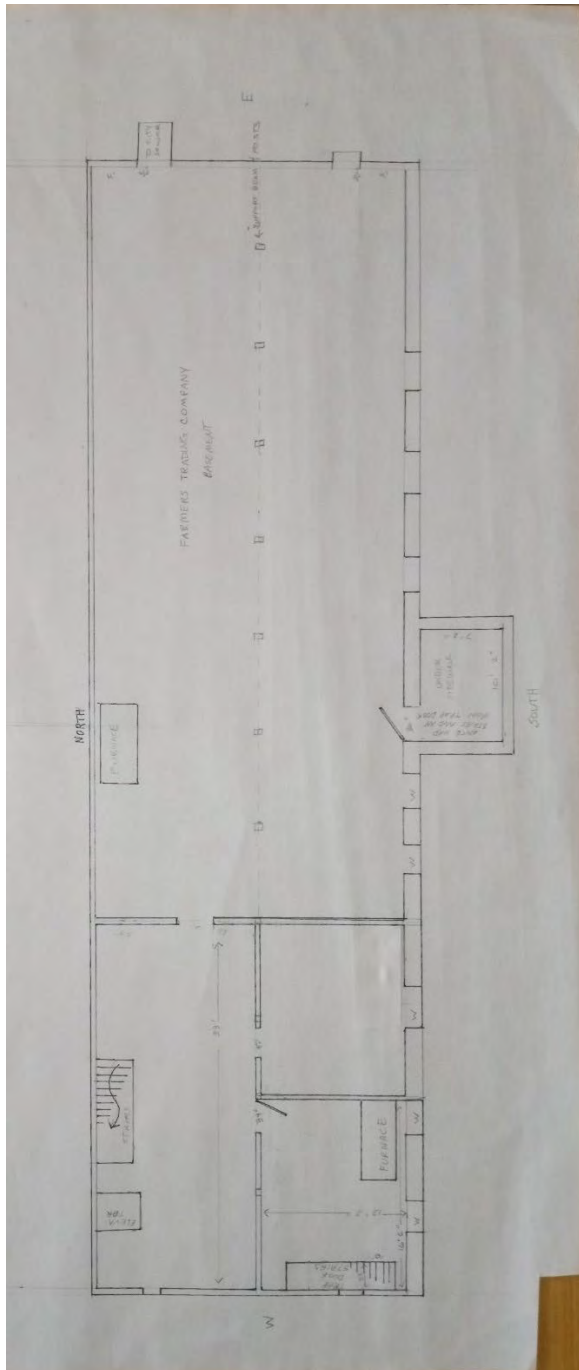
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Basement Floor Plan for the Farmers Trading Company (Dana Zier).

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Interior Photographs



Basement of Farmers Trading Company showing staircase, view to Northwest

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Basement of Farmers Trading Company, view to Southeast

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Main Floor of Farmers Trading Company, view to West

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Basement of Farmers Trading Company showing close-up of elevator conveyance, view to North

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Main Floor of Farmers Trading Company, elevator hoist pulleys

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Basement of Farmers Trading Company, view to North

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Farmers Trading Company
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Carbon County, Montana
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Photo Log, All Photographs:

Name of Property: Farmers Trading Company
City or Vicinity: Bridger
County: Carbon State: MT
Photographer: Jon Axline
Date Photographed: April 2024



**Farmers Trading Company. Façade and south side. View to west.
MT_CarbonCounty_FarmersTradingCompany_0001**

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Name of Property
Carbon County, Montana
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**Farmers Trading Company. facade. View to the west.
MT_CarbonCounty_FarmersTradingCompany_0002.**

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Name of Property
Carbon County, Montana
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**Farmers Trading Company. South side. View to north.
MT_CarbonCounty_FarmersTradingCompany_0003.**

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National Park Service

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Name of Property
Carbon County, Montana
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**Farmers Trading Company. South side and rear facade. View to northeast.
MT_CarbonCounty_FarmersTradingCompany_0004.**

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Name of Property
Carbon County, Montana
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**Farmers Trading Company. Rear facade. View to the east.
MT_CarbonCounty_FarmersTradingCompany_0005.**

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Farmers Trading Company
Name of Property
Park County, Montana
County and State
MT's Historic Steel Truss Bridges
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

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**Farmers Trading Company. Rear façade. View to east-southeast.
MT_CarbonCounty_FarmersTradingCompany_0006.**

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Farmers Trading Company

Name of Property
Park County, Montana

County and State
MT's Historic Steel Truss Bridges
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

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**Farmers Trading Company. Detail of facade. View to the north-northwest.
MT_CarbonCounty_FarmersTradingCompany_0007.**

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Farmers Trading Company
Name of Property
Park County, Montana
County and State
Montana's Historic Steel Truss Bridges
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

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**Farmers Trading Company. Detail of façade. View to southwest.
MT_CarbonCounty_FarmersTradingCompany_0008.**

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Farmers Trading Company

Name of Property
Park County, Montana

County and State
Montana's Historic Steel Truss Bridges

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

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**Farmers Trading Company. Detail of facade. View to north-northwest.
MT_CarbonCounty_FarmersTradingCompany_0009.**

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
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Name of Property
Park County, Montana
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Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

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**Farmers Trading Company. Detail of south side. View to the northwest.
MT_CarbonCounty_FarmersTradingCompany_0010.**

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Farmers Trading Company

Name of Property
Park County, Montana

County and State
Montana's Historic Steel Truss Bridges

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

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**Farmers Trading Company. Detail of south side. View to the north.
MT_CarbonCounty_FarmersTradingCompany_0011.**

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Farmers Trading Company

Name of Property
Park County, Montana

County and State
Montana's Historic Steel Truss Bridges

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

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**Farmers Trading Company. Detail of south side sidewalk blocks. View to the east.
MT_CarbonCounty_FarmersTradingCompany_0012.**