

JOSEPH MAIN STREET  
(Main Street)  
(Highway 82)  
Between Joseph & Second Avenues  
Joseph  
Wallowa County  
Oregon

HABS OR-174

OR-174

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OR-174

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

National Park Service

U.S. Department of the Interior

1849 C Street NW

Washington, DC 20240-0001

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

### JOSEPH MAIN STREET

HABS No. OR-174

- Location:** Main Street, between Joseph Avenue and 2<sup>nd</sup> Street in the City of Joseph, Wallowa County, Oregon  
USGS Joseph Oregon Quadrangle  
UTM Coordinates: Zone 11 482073E 5021716N
- Date of Construction:** 1880-1929
- Architect:** Various
- Builders:** Various
- Present Owners:** Various
- Present Use:** Downtown Business District
- Significance:** The Joseph Main Street is a good example of a historic Eastern Oregon commercial district and social center that retains many of the characteristics of a small town that developed with the arrival of a railroad and declined after the Great Depression. It is eligible for the National Register under Criterion C, because it embodies many of the distinctive characteristics of a rural Oregon Main Street.
- The Joseph Main Street was determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places on July 14, 1993.
- Report Prepared By:** Timothy P. Murphy, M.S. Research Specialist  
ODOT Environmental Services, Salem, OR
- Date:** November 2001

## I. DESCRIPTION AND HISTORY

Joseph is a small northeastern Oregon town located along the main east - west route to Wallowa Lake recreational area. The town is located approximately six miles southeast of Enterprise, the Wallowa County seat. The Joseph Main Street includes the brick and wooden commercial buildings located along Main Street (Highway 82) between Wallowa Avenue and 2nd Street. Sixteen contributing buildings and seven non-contributing buildings comprise the district, located on either side of the main street (Highway 82). Primary contributing resources include: The Wallowa Valley Lanes, constructed in 1917; the (second) First Bank Building; the 1906 Jennings Hotel; the Barnard/First National Bank Building, constructed in 1908; the (first) First Bank of Joseph, constructed in 1888; and the Schluer Building, constructed ca. 1900.

Wallowa County was carved out of Union County in 1887. Oregon's most northeastern county never experienced a period of booming growth. Rather, it was gradually settled by ranchers and farmers, and it developed as an agricultural county with logging an important secondary economic activity. The United States Post Office first recognized Joseph, Oregon, in 1879. It was originally called Lake City and Silver City. The town was later named for Chief Joseph (1837-1904) of the Nez Perce Indian tribe. It was platted in 1883 and incorporated in 1887. In 1908 the Oregon-Washington Railway and Navigation Company line, which extended from the Union Pacific Railroad in LaGrande, reached Joseph. The commercial buildings along Main Street were constructed primarily between 1900 and 1929, a time framed by growing commercial activity brought about by the railroad links and ended suddenly when the rural economy was devastated by the onset of the Great Depression.

Historically, the town provided the major services and trade goods for the nearby rural area. Wallowa County was isolated and self-sufficient in the early 1900s. Cattle, sheep, and hogs were raised on ranches. Wheat, oats, barley, and hay were produced on farms. Many large orchards were planted and thrived countywide. Most of the population lived on homesteads and raised nearly all of their own food. Extra butter, ham, bacon, and eggs were sold in town or shipped out of the county. The Wallowa Mountains provided an abundance of timber, which was logged and milled at local sawmills. Gold and copper mining activities contributed to the local economy as well.

The majority of commercial buildings on Joseph's Main Street were constructed between 1900 and 1929. The town supported an electric company, flour mills, saw mills, doctors, dentists, attorneys and a host of merchants that provided services needed to maintain the community and the surrounding area. During this time, Joseph had three hotels, a brewery (that went out of business during prohibition), and a brickyard and kiln (that manufactured the brick evident in most if not all of the red brick buildings along Main Street). Joseph was connected to the outside world by two telephone lines and by stage lines running to Elgin and to Lewiston, Idaho. The Oregon-Washington Railway and Navigation Company, which connected to the Union Pacific Railroad in LaGrande, brought two trains a day to provide passenger and freight service. Like other small towns in Northeastern Oregon, the locals met on Main Street. Social activities varied in their formality, their location and intensity, but the end result was that people met people. At the turn of the century, face-to-face interaction was the medium for conducting business, as well as socializing. Main Street was where things happened.

Although Joseph developed more slowly than many towns, the period between 1900 and 1910 brought about significant construction of commercial, residential and religious buildings on Main Street. In 1908, the year the railroad came to town, Dr. J.W. Barnard the area's first doctor and pharmacist, Ludwig Knapper, rancher, and Frederick Scribner, co-founder of the First National Bank of Joseph, constructed a building to house their businesses. The J.W. Barnard and First National Bank buildings shared a common wall and housed the Joseph Drug Store and Dr. J.W. Barnard's drug store, fountain counter, apothecary, and offices. The local contractor, Frank Marr, constructed the buildings with local stone and brick in the Richardsonian Romanesque style from mail order plans from J.A. Flesch & Sons, Chicago architects. Although the bank collapsed in 1923 when the value of agriculture plummeted after World War I, the building became the Post Office and continued to play an important role in the community until the Post Office was moved out in 1960. The J.W. Barnard Building and the First National Bank of Joseph building have been placed on the National Register of Historic Places, and they are contributing historic resources located within the boundaries of the National Register eligible historic district along Joseph's Main Street.

The First Bank of Joseph, a contributing historic resource located on Joseph's Main Street, (currently the Wallowa County Museum), was constructed in 1888, a year after Joseph was incorporated. The First Bank is a fine example of High Victorian Italianate Commercial architecture. The building was built by F.D. McCully, a pioneer businessman from Salem, Oregon, known as the Father of Wallowa County. The building, which housed the bank and town's newspaper through 1914, and converted into a hospital from 1914 to 1927, then served as Joseph City Hall and community center through 1973. The building was restored to house the Wallowa County Museum since 1976. The First Bank of Joseph has been placed on the National Register of Historic Places. The historic Jennings Hotel, now known as the Cowboy Bar and Gold Room, was constructed in 1906 by C.G. Holst, from locally produced brick.

Joseph's Main Street developed and prospered through the 1920's although some of the town's banks failed during that decade. During the Great Depression the population declined and empty storefronts lined Main Street. The area started to recover in 1936 and in 1945 several new businesses moved in to the abandoned storefronts. However, the town never fully recovered its commercial independence after the Depression. As with many small downtowns the commercial core is located in larger towns and/or shopping centers (i.e., most of the local population do most of their shopping in Enterprise, La Grande or Lewiston, Idaho). Joseph's Main Street now caters primarily to a developing arts and tourism industry.

## II. SOURCES

Bailey, Barbara Ruth. Main Street, Northeastern Oregon, The Founding and Development of Small Towns. Oregon Historical Society. Portland, OR . 1982.

Keeney, Rosalind Clark. "Joseph Main Street Historic District: Determination of Eligibility Report". Oregon Department of Transportation. 1999.

Perkins, Carol-Lee. "Barnard, Dr. J.W. Building and First National Bank of Joseph", Oregon State Historic Preservation Office, Salem, OR, 1991.

Sutton, Robert K. "First Bank of Joseph", National Register Nomination, Oregon State Historic Preservation Office, Salem, OR, 1977.

## III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This documentation has been prepared by the Oregon Department of Transportation, as mitigation for a Section 106 Finding of "Historic Properties Adversely Affected" for the National Register-eligible historic district along Joseph's Main Street, due to the project impacts caused by the streetscape enhancement project undertaken in 1999. The ODOT funded project involved reconstruction of pavement, sidewalks, and storm drainage on Highway 82 through Joseph. The Joseph Section Project also included construction of sidewalk "bulbouts", the addition of street trees, street furniture, and faux-historic light fixtures to enhance safety and desirability of the downtown area for pedestrians.