

# A GUIDE TO HISTORIC FORSYTH



Scandal and intrigue surrounded the construction of Rosebud County Courthouse in 1914. Rosebud County citizens recognized the need for a new courthouse when they passed a \$125,000 bond issue in 1911 to fund the building. To design a suitable replacement for the original courthouse—a wood-frame former schoolhouse—county commissioners hired Montana architects Link and Haire. That highly respected firm ultimately designed courthouses for eighteen of Montana’s fifty-six counties. Link and Haire’s design was well received, and Gray’s Construction Company of South Dakota began excavation amid high praise in 1912.

Trouble commenced when it became clear that the project was more than \$40,000 over budget. In September 1913, the editor of the *Forsyth Times-Journal* lambasted the county commissioners for the cost overrun and brought suit to restrain them from further expenditure. Apparently worried that his company would not be paid in full, Gray’s foreman refused to turn over the keys to the completed building, despite a court order. The clash had moments of high comedy: at one point, the foreman locked himself inside the building and secreted himself between the ceiling and the roof. Ultimately, a grand jury vindicated the commissioners. Ruling that the building’s design was “imposing and attractive” and its interior “very harmoniously and artistically decorated,” the grand jury declared that the county received “full value for the money expended.”



A guide for viewing historic buildings  
from streets and sidewalks  
A Horizons Project assisted by  
Business Professionals of America, Forsyth Chapter  
The Montana Historical Society

## FORSYTH MAIN STREET HISTORIC DISTRICT

Captain William Clark trekked through this area on his journey up the Yellowstone River in 1806. By the time General George Armstrong Custer passed by en route to the Little Bighorn in 1876, homesteads dotted the area. As the Northern Pacific Railroad pushed west in 1882, officials platted the town of Forsyth to serve its crews. They planned the town with a one-sided Main Street facing the railroad right-of-way. Growth at first was tentative with businesses clustered around the principal intersection at Main and Ninth Streets. Early urban development resulted from the efforts of Hiram Marcyes and Thomas Alexander, rival businessmen who controlled much of Forsyth's early economy. As the railroad attracted a more diverse population that included doctors, lawyers, merchants, and service providers, Forsyth became a regional trade and social center.

In 1901 Rosebud County was established with Forsyth as the county seat. Main Street expanded rapidly during the homestead boom of the 1910s. Although drought and depression in 1918 halted most development, Forsyth's importance as a local trade center was undiminished. Today twenty-four buildings span the period 1888-1931, offering small-town ambiance. The Marcyes Building and the Alexander Hotel, built by the town's two rivals, represent the early period. The Renaissance Revival style Commercial Hotel (1903-6), the Beaux Arts style Wacholz Building (1917), and the Spanish Eclectic Roxy Theatre (1930) illustrate the vitality of this small but thriving community.

### 807 MAIN COMMERCIAL HOTEL



Owned by pioneer entrepreneur Hiram Marcyes, the hotel was built in stages from 1903 to 1906. Marcyes, who owned a brickyard south of town, had earlier built Forsyth's first brick business block as well as several other properties. A 1905 newspaper article gave Marcyes "credit for constructing not only the most [buildings], but the largest building in the city"—the new Commercial Hotel. The hotel, it said, was "the result of much personal effort," Marcyes "having been carpenter, mason, and painter . . . at different times."

### 869 MAIN DOWLIN & SWEETSER BLOCK



The arrival of the Milwaukee railroad in 1907 and the homesteaders who followed created new business opportunities for Forsyth, which grew in population from 726 people in 1904 to 1,398 in 1910. Recognizing the town's potential, Mayor J. W. Sweetser purchased this tract of land from early Forsyth pioneer Hiram Marcyes in 1907. With financial backing from W.

E. Dowlin, this two-story brick business was built on Forsyth's unpaved Main Street. At the time, its relatively large scale was atypical, but it quickly became a model for others to follow. The second floor offered rental rooms, while a variety of businesses occupied the street-level storefronts. The owners' pride in the structure was obvious: centered beneath the cornice is a concrete panel with "Dowlin 1907 Sweetser."

### 925 MAIN MERCHANT'S BANK BLOCK



A 1912 fire at the next door American Hotel likely provided the impetus to stucco the facade of this brick building. Thomas Alexander, a pioneer business man and founder of the Merchant's Bank, built the first story of the two-story business block around 1893. Alexander's bank occupied the east half of the main floor; the Post Office occupied the west half. The second story was completed in late 1894. According to local legend, business competitor Hiram Marcyes blackballed Alexander from the Masons. However, Alexander was active in other fraternal organizations, and he incorporated a hall on the second floor "for the use of secret societies".

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### 971 MAIN MERCHANT'S BANK



Pioneer businessman Thomas Alexander founded Forsyth's first bank in 1892. In 1898, he built this ashlar stone bank building with material quarried within a mile of Forsyth. Inside, "commodious vaults of stone and steel" helped safeguard deposits from theft or fire. Capitalized at \$12,000 in 1900, Merchant's Bank was a small bank even for its day. Nevertheless, it remained Forsyth's only

bank until 1901. By 1903 the bank had moved, and two storefronts, occupied by a barbershop and a carpentry/tinshop, shared this space. Not long after, J. Z. Northway opened a butcher shop here, where he sold meat and fresh sausage, which were manufactured in the circa 1910 rear brick addition.

## 167 N. 9TH CHOISSER BLOCK



This building was erected as a two-story commercial block in 1908 by Joseph Choisser. The building's original cost was \$30,000. substantial building is significant as one of only two three-story brick commercial blocks in Forsyth. The building also housed the Forsyth Post Office for nearly sixty years. Although the building does not

display a high level of ornamentation, the keystone finestrations, the detailed belt course, and the historic pediment lend attractive vernacular detail to the building, at a level typical locally.

## 175-183 N 9TH

## RICHARDSON MERCANTILE IMPLEMENT DIVISION



"Forsyth No Longer a String Town—Side Streets Are Being Utilized" proclaimed a 1910 *Forsyth Times* article lauding the development of Ninth Avenue. Side streets lined with businesses marked a railroad town's coming-of-age, as did construction of brick buildings featuring whatever architectural flourishes their owners could afford. This relatively simple one-story building was constructed between 1907 and 1910. In 1910, a large wooden warehouse stood in back; the Richardson Mercantile used both the warehouse and this brick storefront for its farm implement division. In 1915 the law firm of Loud, Collins, Brown, Campbell and Wood purchased the building.

## 164-170 N. 9th

## KENNEDY-FLETCHER BLOCK



The largest commercial building in Forsyth at the time of its construction, the department store was also the first brick commercial block erected off Main Street. E. A. Richardson bought the business in 1908. In 1916, he sold an expanded operation to his department managers, who transformed the

building into three separate stores that sold groceries, dry goods, and hardware and furniture.

## 933 MAIN DROESE PHARMACY



In 1882 pioneer Thomas Alexander traded a parcel of land to the Northern Pacific in exchange for other property nearby. Alexander's farm became the town of Forsyth and Alexander became an important local merchant and real estate developer. Among his other ventures, he constructed four brick buildings on Main Street's 900 block. In 1897 he rented

this one to a hardware and saddlery shop; construction of the second floor, which features a cornice decorated with a row of short pilasters, was still underway. In 1902 Alexander sold the western commercial style building to Peter Droese, who operated a drugstore here until 1933.

Droese helped found Forsyth's telephone service in 1900 and, despite being a man, worked as its first "Hello Girl." In the teens, Droese stuccoed the building's exterior, which perhaps had suffered damage when the nearby American Hotel burned in 1912. In 1933, Ike Blakesley and Jack Mason converted the drugstore into "Club Cigar," later known as Blakesley's. Ike's son Glen continued to operate the popular bar and lunch room into the 1980s.

## 981 MAIN ROXY THEATRE



"May You Prosper Well in Your New Theatre with Your Steadfast Faith in Forsyth," read one of the many ads that filled the August 28, 1930, *Forsyth Times*. Car and clothing merchants joined building contractors and suppliers in congratulating Anthony Wolke and Frank Faust on the construction of their new theatre. Movies had played

in Forsyth since the turn of the century, first in the Commercial Hotel, then in a converted Main Street storefront. The Roxy, however, was the first building in Forsyth constructed specifically as a theatre; it was also one of the few buildings constructed in Forsyth during the Great Depression. Entrance into the realm of romance and entertainment cost only fifty cents (sixty cents for balcony seats).

## 1001 MAIN VANANDA STATE BANK BUILDING



This bank, was originally constructed in Vananda, seventeen miles northwest of Forsyth. In the days before Federal Deposit Insurance, such designs conveyed a sense of permanence and stability. These solid build-

ings promised a prosperous future for the young communities they served. Vananda was born in 1915 of the homesteading boom and the Milwaukee railroad. In 1917, the bank hired Forsyth builder Louie Wahl to construct the first “semi-fireproof” building in town for \$6,000. The stately little bank was open only five years before it failed in 1923, a victim of ongoing drought and depressed commodity prices. The building then served as a post office and home to the postmaster’s family of twelve until 1959. By that time, Vananda was practically a ghost town. In 2002, the building was carefully separated and lifted from its foundation. Then, in 2003, this 100-ton structure was moved across sixteen bridges to its present location in downtown Forsyth.

## 1187 MAIN BLUE FRONT ROOMING HOUSE



The Northern Pacific Railroad was the lifeblood of many small Montana towns like Forsyth which was founded in 1882 to serve as an operations base for rail crews. Since unmarried men filled most railroad positions, towns like Forsyth had

need of inexpensive basic housing facilities. Originally the railroad provided housing for its Forsyth workers but when the section house burned in 1902, the railroad did not replace it. Gustaf “Gus” Swanland built this rooming house in 1912 to fill a need for housing in Forsyth. He lived there himself along with his single tenants, many whom were Northern Pacific Railroad employees. Although advertised as the Swanland Hotel, the building was commonly known as the “Blue Front” because of its bright blue paint.

A 1905 city ordinance required fire-resistant brick construction, The spartan sleeping rooms had little space, not even closets, but the Blue Front’s common kitchen, parlor, and dining room offered a more homelike atmosphere.

## 1043 MAIN MASONIC TEMPLE



Chartered in 1898, the Forsyth Masonic Lodge met in borrowed quarters until 1905, when enthusiastic Mason Hiram Marcyes included a lodge room in his new Commercial Hotel. Rent from the first-floor storefronts subsidized the building’s \$21,000 price tag. The second floor boasted the lodge room as well as a cloakroom and clubroom designed for members of the short-lived Forsyth Club. During the 1918 flu epidemic, clubrooms

were converted into a temporary hospital. In 1921 the public library, founded by the Forsyth Woman’s Club, occupied the space. While the library moved to the old courthouse in 1927 and into its current building in 1971, Masons continue to meet in this lodge, built by their predecessors in 1911.

## 1025 MAIN MCCUISTION BUILDING



A rear door big enough to drive through hints at this building’s original purpose. Rancher, banker, and businessman Joshua P. McCuiston initially planned to construct a one-story automobile dealership and repair shop here, but the demand for office space led him to add a second story. McCuiston purchased this lot in April 1913, and almost immediately Miles City

contractor Charles Weston began construction of the two-story garage and office building. Arthur Sickler sold Fords, Hudsons, and Franklins in this location and ran the Main Street Garage, which advertised itself as a “Tourist’s Headquarters,” offering “Everything for the Auto Traveler.” Automobile tourism was new and entailed some risk. In 1916, a young man caused a fire when he stopped at the garage for gas. After the attendant began filling his tank, the “tenderfoot” lit a match over the gas tank to check the progress. Luckily, the fire only damaged the car itself. Forsyth gained its first stand-alone filling station in 1923, and Sickler sold his business to McCuiston in 1924. However, automobile dealerships continued to sell cars here until 1950.

## 933 MAIN WACHOLZ BUILDING



With fellow Scandinavian investors, early Forsyth residents Nels and Sophie Gunderson bought a substantial wood-frame building on the corner of Ninth and Main in 1885. Directly across from the depot, the corner was a prime business location. Nels died soon after, leaving Sophie to manage the property,

which housed a saloon and lodging house. Once brick business blocks began to replace the other first-generation wooden buildings along Main Street, the Gunderson building was likely considered something of an embarrassment. In 1916, it was apparently condemned. By that time, Sophie had married John Wacholz, a local carpentry foreman. The couple hired Billings architect Curtis C. Oehme to design a new building for the corner.

## 905-925 MAIN ALEXANDER HOTEL



Sunrays filtering through a window apparently ignited straw packing in the basement of the J. E. Choisser Wholesale Liquor Company in July 1917. Bottles of liquor burst in the flames, fueling a fire that ultimately gutted the two-story building. Self-

made entrepreneur Joseph Choisser built the original business block in 1908 for approximately \$30,000. The post office shared one of the storefronts with a newsstand from 1910 to 1968. A women's clothing store was also a long-term tenant. The manager of the Alexander Hotel, Choisser used the second floor as a hotel annex. A pedestrian overpass connected the two buildings. After the fire, Choisser hired Billings architect Curtis Oehme to renovate and add a third story to the property. The original 1908 pediment, inscribed "J. E. Choisser," tops the three-story building, one of only two in Forsyth.

## 701 WILLOW FORSYTH WATER PUMPING STATION



Recognizing that successful communities require infrastructure, Forsyth's civic leaders proposed construction of a waterworks and sewerage system in 1906. As the town council asserted when it posted the bond issue, "We desire to improve the town.... If the people do not want the city to advance, they may signify

their desire by their votes." Approving \$45,000 for a waterworks and \$5,000 for sewerage, a majority of voters signaled their support for municipal progress. Construction of the waterworks fell to the Des Moines Bridge Building Co. The project included building a brick pumping station, settling ponds, and a concrete reservoir on the bluffs above town and installing a network of pipes through Forsyth's developed streets. Forsyth's frugal city council did not believe in architectural frills; the stark, industrial design of the pumping station reflects its utilitarian purpose. By February 1908 the waterworks was complete; city residents had only "to tap the mains" to "pipe the purest and clearest of water" into their homes and businesses, according to the *Forsyth Times*. The newspaper's description of the water's purity was somewhat exaggerated, as Forsyth's 1917 typhoid scare and boil order attests. Nevertheless, the new water system did represent a considerable advance for the community, especially in the area of fire suppression. The amount of water needed to fight a fire in the business district determined the design specifications for Forsyth's waterworks, and the community quickly took advantage of its new capacity, establishing a volunteer fire department within weeks of the waterworks' completion.



Although heavy rain disrupted the celebrations, it couldn't dampen the enthusiasm Forsyth residents felt for their new bridge, dedicated on July 4, 1905. Prior to the bridge's construction, Rosebud County residents had to ford the

Yellowstone River in low water or depend on an irregular ferry service; the nearest bridge was forty-five miles downstream at Miles City. Rosebud County commissioned William S. Hewett and Co. to construct this pin-connected Pennsylvania through-truss bridge for \$53,200. One of Montana's most prolific bridge builders, Hewett was responsible for the construction of at least fifteen Montana bridges in and around the Yellowstone Valley between 1897 and 1906. Construction began on December 22, 1904. The crew poured the massive concrete piers before assembling the large steel components, fabricated in the east and shipped to Forsyth by rail. Warming weather and spring flooding sometimes forced the bridge crew to work chest deep in cold water. Nevertheless, construction was completed ahead of schedule. Providing convenient access to the county seat and the Northern Pacific terminal, the bridge saw a marked increase in traffic after construction of the Milwaukee railroad brought homesteaders to north Rosebud County. Originally three spans in length, the southern span crossed the primary river channel; the two northern spans crossed the flood plains. When the bridge was closed in 1958, replaced by a concrete bridge several hundred yards upstream, two of its three spans were salvaged for scrap metal. The southernmost span remains, an example of the tremendous public investment in infrastructure that accompanied the homesteading boom.

## FORSYTH RESIDENTIAL HISTORIC DISTRICT

Founded for the railroad, Forsyth's residential neighborhoods were platted in 1882 but much of the land lay undeveloped until the 1900s. Forsyth's first-generation homes were simple dwellings rapidly constructed of wood or log to serve the immediate needs of the railroad workers who were Forsyth's first residents. The historic district northeast of the commercial area was home to many of these. By the 1890s, however, the railroad crews had moved on, the population had become more diverse, and the town was more settled. The landmark vernacular Gothic style Methodist Episcopal Church, built in 1890, represents this earliest period of permanent development.

A few carpenter-built American foursquare and gable-front-and-wing cottages survive from the 1890s. These dwellings follow the national folk housing trends of the era. Builders and owners added distinctive details such as bay windows, small dormers, and porches, lending each home a distinct personality.

After 1901, domestic building styles became more varied when pattern books made the latest architectural plans widely available. Forsyth enjoyed rapid growth and new prosperity in the first decades of the 1900s. Stylish Colonial Revival homes and Craftsman bungalows reflect the optimism of the homestead era. Today the historic district is a dynamic mix of these later elements interspersed with the earlier carpenter-built cottages. The quiet, inviting avenues personify the enthusiasm of hard-working citizens and early town boosters.

1180 CEDAR FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH AND MANSE



When an overheated furnace set fire to the First Presbyterian Church in December 1919, the congregation lost everything but the Prairie style manse built next door in 1910. While church members temporarily held services in the Masonic Hall, news of the fire and pleas for help rebuilding spread through the national Presbyterian press. Among those who responded was an unnamed benefactress from Illinois, a member of Chicago's distinguished Fourth Presbyterian Church. Because she admired her own church building, the benefactress hired Howard Van Doren Shaw, a Chicago architect associated with Fourth Presbyterian, to design a new church for Forsyth. Shaw's design, as adapted by Montana architects McIver and Cohagen, echoed on a much smaller scale the basic lines of the prestigious Chicago church. In 1950 Forsyth's Presbyterians and Methodists joined together to form the Federated Church; the united congregation continues to meet in this downtown landmark.

1059 CEDAR NORTHWAY RESIDENCE



This lot was owned by Thomas Alexander in the 1890's. A notice in the October 3, 1895 Forsyth *Times* indicated that J.F. Kennedy was building a new four-room house for Alexander opposite the "school house." The article probably referred to either this building or the home at 1095 Cedar. This home is clearly visible in an 1898 photograph of the town, and appears in Sanborn undocumented, the porch may have been removed when the porch was re-sided. Although no specific historical events have been linked to this building, this home is a representative example of the many square, hip-roofed homes erected in early Forsyth. These wood-framed buildings were generally erected locally between 1895 and 1915 as homes for married railroad workers and blue-collar Forsythians.

209 N 11TH WILSON RESIDENCE



Dr. Arthur C. Wilson moved to Forsyth after graduating medical school in 1891. He worked as a surgeon for the Northern Pacific Railroad, as a medical examiner for insurance companies, and as the county health officer. Forsyth's first resident physician, he also maintained an active general practice and is said to have covered "the territory between Miles City and Musselshell and to the Wyoming line." He and his wife Ida had this home built in 1903, replacing or substantially enlarging the small wooden home that occupied this lot by 1897. Placing the kitchen under separate roof minimized fire risk. Bucket brigades could more easily reach a one-story roof, perhaps saving the main house in case of a kitchen fire.

214 N. 11TH



By 1897, a single-story home stood on this site. By 1920 that house had been replaced with this one-story bungalow. When railroad conductor William Moore and his wife, Ruth, purchased the home in 1918, it was worth more than \$2,500. Four years later, the couple sold it to Northern Pacific yardman Fred Gardkey, who rented it to various tenants. Among them was Burt Clark, a self-proclaimed "finger print expert." In 1928, Fred and his wife, Bessie, died of pneumonia within days of each other. Fred did not have a will, and his estate was tied up in court until 1936. That year, roundhouse foreman T. E. Beals and his wife, Ella, purchased the home for \$675—much less than its \$1,250 appraised value.

389 N. 11TH F. V. H. COLLINS RESIDENCE



In 1901 prosperous rancher Thomas Hammond built "a fine residence in Forsyth ... one of the architectural adornments of the city." He and his wife, Adelaide, and their four children used the home as a town house until 1905. That year they sold the residence to Fred and Jemima Collins. A prominent lawyer and real estate developer, Fred later made a fortune in coal and oil near Roundup. By 1910 the Collinses had added a one-story back addition and remodeled the front porch to create a jutting, prominent entryway. They changed the porch a second time before 1920 to feature a screened second-floor sleeping room and balustrade atop the second story.

## 313 NORTH 11TH AVENUE



This house was built in 1896. The first known owner was Major J.E. Edwards and his wife, Julia. He was a State Senator, an Indian Agent, organized the Bank of Commerce with E.A. Richardson and Charles M. Bair, owned the Forsyth Electric and Power Plant and organized the Cartersville Irrigation district, to name a few of his pursuits. In later years an addition was added to the house, enlarging

the living room, adding a garage to the ground level and a large bedroom and sun porch on the second floor. The cupola off a bedroom was used by the owners' daughter as a playhouse. Russ and Helen Kelly bought the house about 1940 and did extensive remodeling. At some point the cupola was removed, the style of the windows changed, and the house lost its church-like exterior architecture.

## 610 N. 12TH AVENUE



Standing just outside the original town site, this two-story home is believed to be one of the first residences constructed so close to the Yellowstone River. It was a dangerous place to build since despite early dikes, the river was still prone to floods. The concrete block foundation of this wooden home dates its construction to around 1906, after local mason

Carson Conn had begun manufacturing the "pressed stone building material," which he "guaranteed against frost and dampness." Although several local buildings used the material in their foundations, only two Forsyth homes prominently feature the decorative concrete blocks. These were built by E. A. Richardson, founder of the Richardson Mercantile, and his nephew and employee E. A. Cornwell.

## 542 N. 12TH AVENUE



Northern Pacific conductor Frank Runyan and his wife, Nellie, built this one-story bungalow in 1914. County jailor Dick Wright and his wife, Edith, lived here from 1919 to 1923. A. J. and Ina Freeman owned the home in 1940. A. J. was justice of the peace; Ina helped found the Forsyth library and served as its first librarian. In 1942 dentist

Craig Phillips and his wife, Julia, rented the residence, which they purchased in 1949. Before the Phillipses moved in, the house had been used as a duplex. One family lived in the daylight basement and the other on the main floor. Both families shared the bathroom on the back stairs landing. A community-minded dentist, Craig served on both the school board and the hospital board. The summer of 1999, the owners took on the project of removing those same stones from the basement through a window and redoing a basement wall. They built a fountain base from the stones. They discovered a small safe cemented into the rock wall and eventually found a key hanging from a nail on a rafter. Excitedly, they opened the safe and found ----- recipes!

## 510 N 12TH SORENSON RESIDENCE



Northern Pacific Railroad engineer Thomas Sorenson and his wife Hannah built this one-and-one-half story residence circa 1910. That year the Norwegian immigrant couple lived here with their five children and two boarders, both of whom also worked for the railroad. The large gambrel roof dormer distinguishes this home from its neighbors. Such plans sometimes came

with precut lumber for easy assembly on site; other times, the popular plans simply provided local builders with specifications for complex structures that may otherwise have been beyond their skill. In either case, pattern books expanded housing options for families like the Sorensons who wanted more than what local builders could easily offer, but who could not afford to hire an architect to design a home exclusively for them.

#### 440 N. 12TH MEREDITH HOUSE



Around the turn of the century, Forsyth was a thriving little community and a lot was purchased at 440 N. 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue. A house was built by Guss Huff about 1910 and then sold to Mr. and Mrs. Robert (Shorty) Meredith in 1920 for \$2500.00. He even had to borrow the 50% down payment but was thankful he had a good job to make the payments. About 1931, Mr. Meredith paid two men \$500 to hand dig

the basement and use a conveyer belt and a team of horses to remove the dirt. Then the rock foundation was completely placed by hand. Many remodels and an addition were necessary to accommodate the Meredith's growing family, which ultimately numbered eight children who grew up in this house.

#### 411 N 12th HEFFERIN RESIDENCE



Early Pioneers Thomas and Mary Alexander owned large swaths of land around Forsyth, including most of this block, which they subdivided into lots. They sold this tract to Edward Jones in 1903, who likely built this asymmetrical two-story residence soon after. Builders like Jones had begun to turn away from Victorian excess after the turn of the century. Edwin and Isobel Katzenstein

rented the home in 1912. Edwin, known affectionately as "Katzie," was proprietor of the Forsyth News Co., a community institution. John and Mabel Hefferin lived here with their family in 1914. Hefferin was co-owner of a Main Street saloon. That he and Mabel lived in this elegant home on a prestigious corner reflected the family's rising fortunes, as the Twelfth Avenue residence was certainly quieter and more comfortable than their earlier accommodations on Main Street.

#### 389 N. 12TH E. A. CORNWELL RESIDENCE



"E. A. Cornwell, the popular Forsyth merchant and banker, will move this week into the first cement block house ever built in Forsyth," reported the *Forsyth Times* on October 3, 1907. "It is fitted with steam throughout, electric lighted, and modern in every convenience." a relatively new technology in 1907, cement blocks cost less than wood or stone, came in a variety of finishes, and were

easier to lay than brick. According to local mason and cement block manufacturer Carson Conn, the material was "the warmest in winter; the coolest in summer. Guaranteed against frost and dampness."

Nevertheless, in Forsyth the material was mainly used for foundations. In fact, Forsyth's only other cement block home was that of prominent merchant E. A. Richardson, Cornwell's uncle and employer. Clearly a fan of the new technology, Richardson owned the land on which this house was built and may have had some say in the home's design

#### 25 N 12TH LIDA PARKER RESIDENCE



Cattleman Lafayette H. Parker and his wife, Lida, purchased a small home on this lot in 1910. Lafayette died two years later of tuberculosis, but Lida continued to live here, and in 1917 she obtained a mortgage to replace her home with a two-story clapboard residence with a full basement, which she opened as a boarding house. Both Forsyth

newspapers commented on the new construction. The *Democrat* called the building "among the best and most expensive residences being constructed in the city this year," while the *Times-Journal* noted that "the house will be thoroughly modern in every respect" with steam heat and "hot and cold running water." For the lodgers' convenience the upstairs bathroom did not have a washstand; instead each bedroom had its own sink. In 1920 Parker lived here with her divorced daughter and two-year-old granddaughter, three single male lodgers (an engineer, railroad fireman, and bookkeeper), and a married couple and their ten-month-old baby. She sold the building in 1928, but it continued to serve as a boarding house until 1966, after which it became a private residence.

## 316 N 12TH E. A. RICHARDSON RESIDENCE



Cast concrete block was an exciting new technology in the 1900s. While critics labeled it “cheap and vulgar,” builders and homeowners embraced it as a “substantial and beautiful substitute for stone.” Durable, affordable, and simple to manufacture, the material—virtually unheard of in 1900—was widely used by 1906, when Forsyth mason

Carson Conn began producing concrete blocks in a variety of finishes. E. A. and Lillian Richardson, for whom the house was built, moved to Forsyth from Crow Agency in 1907 to take advantage of the booming homestead economy. Richardson first opened his Forsyth store in 1903; under his watchful eye, it grew into the city’s largest department store.

## 214 N. 13TH MCCUISTION RESIDENCE



Forsyth contractor Louis Wahl built the elegant residence for rancher and businessman Joshua McCuistion and his wife, Grace, in 1914. Grace, who had traveled to Asia, had a great appreciation for eastern architecture and was reportedly intimately involved with the home’s design and construction. She is said to have checked every load of lumber delivered

to the site, sending back any boards that didn’t meet her specifications. Described by the *Forsyth Times* as “one of the most costly in the city,” the residence served as the McCuistion’s “town house.”

## 262 N. 13th BEEMAN RESIDENCE



Arrival of the Milwaukee railroad and the masses of homesteaders who followed in its wake meant land-office business for Forsyth. As Rosebud County seat, Forsyth provided plenty of work for lawyers like Henry Beeman, who opened a title abstract company in 1911. The following year, he and his wife, Maude, erected this Craftsman style home a half block from the county courthouse where

Henry conducted much of his business. In the 1920s, the Beemans, who had two children, let rooms to unmarried schoolteachers. Before becoming a lawyer, Henry served as Forsyth’s first superintendent of schools.

## 273 N 13TH BLAND RESIDENCE



“The three Longley cottages in the eastern part of the city have been completed and are ready for occupancy,” announced the *Forsyth Times* in November 1901. In 1914 real estate salesman Arthur Bland lived here with his wife, Maude, and their daughter, Marvel. The public administrator for Rosebud County from 1913 to 1928, Bland had to scramble to make a living after the

homestead boom dried up; by 1920 he was working for the railroad as a brakeman. In 1928, the Blands moved to Billings, where Arthur once again sold real estate.

## 286 N. 13TH MEYERHOFF RESIDENCE



Emmett and Anna Meyerhoff arrived in Forsyth in 1902 and quickly became prominent in Forsyth society. The assistant cashier of the newly organized Forsyth State Bank (later First National Bank), Meyerhoff was bank president by 1913. Anna was active in the Forsyth Woman’s Club, whose meetings she sometimes hosted here, while Emmett was a committed Mason and a founding

member of the Chamber of Commerce. He also served a term as mayor. After the agricultural depression forced the closure of all of Forsyth’s banks in 1923, the Meyerhoffs moved to Los Angeles.

## 310 N. 13th HARRY AND FRANCES CORNWELL RESIDENCE



Mary Philbrick had the residence built as a wedding present for her daughter Mary Frances and son-in-law Harry Cornwell, a hardware merchant. The Philbricks were a wealthy Rosebud County ranching family, and Mary reportedly gave “munificent gifts of property” to each of her three children on their marriages. Harry and Frances Cornwell married in Minneapolis in 1916, and the house was still under construction

when they returned to Forsyth after a month’s honeymoon. The Cornwells enclosed the front porch sometime after 1941. The Cornwells raised two children in this home, and their son Howard, who later managed the Philbrick family ranch

## 342 N. 13TH VREDENBURGH AND SAWTELLE SANITARIUM



Osteopaths Norman Vredenburg and Claude Sawtelle built this Craftsman style bungalow in 1915 as a “sanitarium,” a small hospital and nursing home. The building looked more like a house than a hospital. However, according to its newspaper advertisements, the sanitarium served as a center for “Osteopathy, Hydrotherapy, Electrotherapy, Violet Rays, Electric

Light Sweat Baths, and the famous Ozone Treatment.” Dr. Vredenburg lived next door while Dr. Sawtelle resided at the hospital. Many such private hospitals opened in towns across Montana before resources were available to construct larger facilities. In this case, the venture was short-lived. The sanitarium closed before the 1918 flu epidemic hit Forsyth; flu victims received treatment at a makeshift emergency hospital in the Masonic Lodge. Forsyth finally gained a permanent hospital when Rosebud County contracted with Deaconess organization to open a thirty-two-bed facility in 1922.

## 357 N 13TH MAURICE AND MARY LORD RESIDENCE



When the 1907 arrival of the Milwaukee road boomed Forsyth, carpenter Maurice S. Lord decided to open his own business. “It won’t cost you anything to talk to me,” he advertised, “and if I can’t suit you as to price and quality, then give the job to the other fellow and we will still be friends.” A few years earlier, he and his wife Mary built this two-story

transitional Queen Anne/Colonial Revival home. Lord likely constructed the residence himself. Its unusual T-shaped floor plan was a good advertisement for his skills as a homebuilder, especially since the house doubled as his office. Nevertheless, evidence suggests that business was slower than he hoped. Plumbers who added a bathroom in 1909 sued the Lords for payment, and three years later Richardson Mercantile temporarily attached a lien to the property. The Lords sold the home in 1912 and left Forsyth to try their hand at farming. By 1914, however, the family had moved to Columbus, where Maurice once again worked as a carpenter.

## 426 N. 13TH AVENUE



Carpenter Charles Bailey built the residence at the beginning of Forsyth’s boom, following its selection as county seat in 1901. In 1905, he sold the home to Sidney and Josephine Erwin, who owned the J. H. Austin livery stable. Erwin survived the transportation revolution by transforming his livery stable into a garage by 1920. That year, he sold the home to Guy and Ethel Haywood,.

Guy was a physician who worked for both the Northern Pacific and the Milwaukee railroads and served as county coroner. Ethel was a music and art teacher. Although few married women of means worked in the 1920s, and many school districts refused to hire married women, Ethel taught school even after the birth of her first child. By 1930, however, she fulfilled her calling more conventionally, by offering music lessons from home.

## 471 NO. 13TH STREET WINNIE DOWLIN HOME



The construction date of this 1 1/2 story Craftsman residence is not documented. It probably was erected by Winnie Dowlin c. 1910. Dowlin was a prosperous local businessman who had a number of local homes built, including the two houses immediately to the south. At an early point in the building’s history, it apparently became home to an interesting

but short-lived Forsyth institution, the Bachelor’s Club. The Club functioned as a boarding house, but apparently attempted to maintain a higher standard and a home-like atmosphere, geared to a largely white-collar clientele. The Bachelor’s Club faded by the end of the decade.

## 474 N. 13TH AVENUE



According to papers found tucked inside the home’s walls for safekeeping, the house was built in 1897. However, it was not moved to this lot until circa 1909. Robert Lane, who owned a sheep ranch near Big Porcupine, lived here with his wife, Dora, and their three children from 1909 to 1914. Rosebud County rancher Charles Straw and his wife, Mabel, owned the home between 1914 and

1918. Both the Lanes and the Straws left Rosebud County before 1920, likely due to the extended drought, which made it difficult to make a living from the land.

## 290 14TH THURSTON RESIDENCE



The home's relative lack of adornment owes much to the early twentieth century's emphasis on simplicity and clean lines. Its longest-term residents were Andrew and Ellen Thurston and their four daughters. Andrew managed the Yellowstone Elevator Company before becoming a car salesman while Ellen was locally known for her hospitality. The

popular Forsyth couple may have built the home after purchasing the lot from prominent businessman and banker Emmett Meyerhoff in 1919. They owned the residence until 1937. The wooden home with clapboard siding has changed little since it was first built. Except for the modern porch screens, storm windows, and metal roof, the exterior looks much as it did in 1920. The interior still boasts hardwood floors, wood trim, crown molding, and even some of the original light fixtures.

## 1379 PARK STREET

## FAUST FAMILY HOME



At the beginning of the twentieth century, Dr. H. J. Huene and his bride received a wedding present from her father in the amount of \$10,000 to build and furnish a new home in Forsyth. They chose a Colonial Revival architecture and built the home in 1905. In 1936, Frank and Minerva Faust bought the house and raised their two children Ron and

Sharon Faust Lincoln, there. Mrs. Faust commented that the house was built the year she was born.

## 458 N 14TH AVENUE



This cottage was built between 1911 and 1916. Thomas Patterson, Jr., likely had the house constructed for rental income at the same time he had his own home built one door north. It was a savvy business investment. The population boom that followed the arrival of the Milwaukee Railroad in 1907 created a thriving rental market. Harry and

Jessie Butterfield rented the residence in 1916 before purchasing it in 1920.

## 281 N. 17TH ROSEBUD COUNTY DEACONESS HOSPITAL



"Remember the 1918 Flu epidemic" declared a notice advocating support for the Rosebud County hospital. In 1918 and 1919 influenza killed over 5,000 Montanans. Flu victims in Forsyth received care at the Masonic Hall, temporarily converted into an emergency hospital, but the epidemic underscored the need for a well-equipped hospital

close to home. Despite drought and declining crop prices, Rosebud County voters responded to the call, passing a \$70,000 bond issue in November 1919 and a second \$20,000 bond issue in 1920. To manage the hospital and nurses' training school, the county contracted with the Deaconess organization, a Methodist women's order that opened its first Montana hospital in 1896 in Great Falls. On April 22, 1921, Rosebud County Deaconess Hospital held an open house and "shower day"; approximately 1,000 visitors, many bearing donations for the hospital's food pantry, came to admire the new facility. Three days later, under direction of Deaconess superintendent Lyra Sanborn, the hospital admitted its first patient.

## 390 S. 7TH CLAUDE O. MARCYES HOUSE



Five brick houses, all built by early Forsyth merchant Hiram Marcyes, lined this block in 1903. Marcyes arrived in Forsyth in 1882 when it was just a tent town. In 1888 he built the first brick business block in Forsyth; fifteen years later he constructed the grand Commercial Hotel. The owner of a brick-yard, Marcyes was responsible for most of

Forsyth's brick residential construction. While the town's other businessmen built elegant wooden homes on the north side, Marcyes built a brick house for himself (since razed) and several rental properties on the south side. He also had south side homes built for each of his five children, including this one-and-one-half story Queen Anne style residence, constructed in 1899 for his oldest son Claude. Claude was in college when his father built this house. In 1910 he was living on a nearby ranch. He may have used this residence as a town house until he sold it in 1916. In the 1920s he worked for the Northern Pacific Railroad. He reportedly crossed the picket line during a 1923 strike, after which the Northern Pacific relocated him to Missoula, where he worked as foreman in the tool department.

## 262 S. 7TH BROTHERHOOD OF LOCOMOTIVE ENGINEERS HALL



On May 8, 1882, the first train rumbled through Forsyth, and the growing town soon became home to many Northern Pacific Railway workers. Among them were locomotive engineers, whose skills were in high demand, particularly in the West during the heady days of railroad expansion. The Forsyth engineers operated their steam-powered locomotives to

the crew change point of Billings (and later Laurel). By September 1882 enough engineers had moved to Forsyth to form Division 195 of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers (BLE), the United States' first railroad union. Founded in Detroit in 1863, the BLE generally avoided strikes in favor of negotiations; it became a pioneer in collective bargaining and a strong lobby for railroad safety. BLE Division 195 built this meeting hall in 1886 with labor and funds donated by its members. The building contains a small vestibule, a closet, and a single meeting room that still boasts its original wood floor, baseboards, and chair rails. From 1886 to 1899 the engineers leased the land on which the hall stands from the Northern Pacific Railway; in 1899 they purchased the lot when the railroad sold the land to a townsite company, creating Forsyth's NP Addition. Many organizations used the BLE Hall for meetings, dances, and family gatherings, and one early Forsyth congregation worshipped here until it could build its own church.

## 209 S. 7TH HERMAN AND HANNAH ANDERSON HOUSE



Twenty-year-old Herman K. Anderson arrived in the United States in the late 1880s. One of over 1.5 million Swedes who left their homeland between 1850 and 1930, he quickly found work in North Dakota and eastern Montana on the Northern Pacific Railroad. Lonely, he corresponded with an old sweetheart, Hannah

Svenson, and convinced her to join him in America. She traveled first to New York, where she worked at a children's home to earn money before moving west. The couple married in 1895 in Glendive, Montana. In 1908, longing for their own home, the Andersons hired contractor J. W. Waddell to build them an eleven-room house. The comfortable, two-story, clapboard residence with a large wraparound porch was within easy walking distance of the railroad shop .

## 257 SOUTH 8TH STREET



This section house was moved from Northern Pacific Railroad tracks in the 30s or 40s to its present location by the Bergam Family, who lived in it until Charles and Bernice Higginbotham purchased it in 1954. In 1950, on the same property, the Higginbothams began the construction of The Charles Motel.

## 657 WILLOW STREET



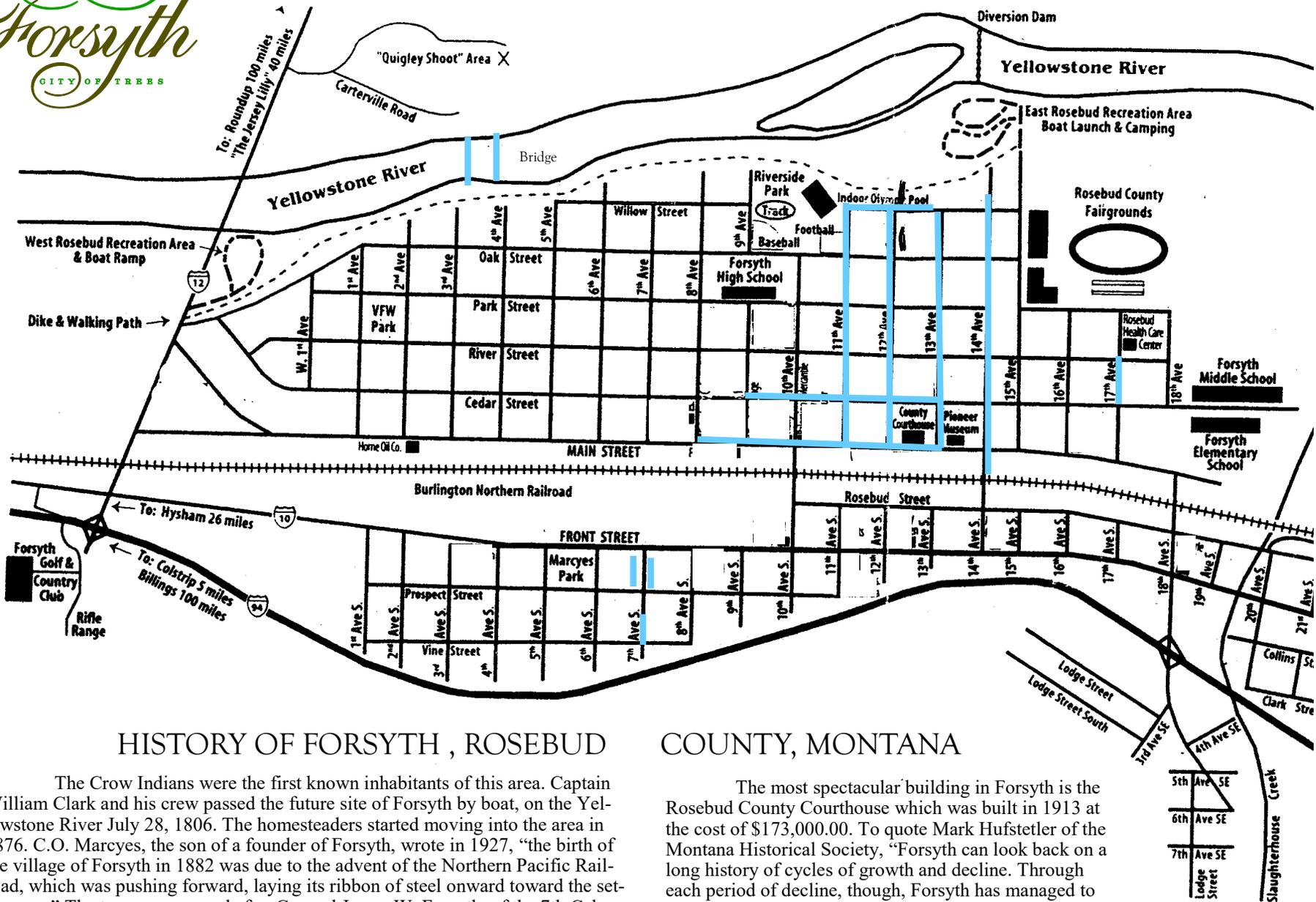
Della Keller built this home in 1942. Prior to the construction of the dike by the Army Corps of Engineers there was a huge barn on the property and, not wanting the wood to be wasted when the barn was torn down to make way for the levy, Mrs. Keller had the home built next to 635 Willow where she resided. This property has stayed in the family for more than 85 years. Presently Paula Seliski, the wife of Mrs. Keller's grandson Don, lives in the home.

## 216 PROSPECT STREET



The intriguing architecture of this home has fascinated many since the early part of the 20th century. John Wachholz was born in Little Russia in 1868 and came to Forsyth in 1893 as a carpenter for the Northern Pacific Railway Company. He married Sophia Gunderson and started his own contractor business in 1910. When their first child

Elizabeth was born, Sophia became paralyzed and lived the rest of her life in a wheelchair. According to reliable sources, in 1916, John designed and built a house to accommodate her so she could go through French doors onto the veranda or go out on the second story balcony and sit in the sunshine. During the 1940s, the house was used for other purposes, but then became a family home again.



## HISTORY OF FORSYTH , ROSEBUD COUNTY, MONTANA

The Crow Indians were the first known inhabitants of this area. Captain William Clark and his crew passed the future site of Forsyth by boat, on the Yellowstone River July 28, 1806. The homesteaders started moving into the area in 1876. C.O. Marcyes, the son of a founder of Forsyth, wrote in 1927, "the birth of the village of Forsyth in 1882 was due to the advent of the Northern Pacific Railroad, which was pushing forward, laying its ribbon of steel onward toward the setting sun." The town was named after General James W. Forsyth, of the 7th Calvary. For the sum of \$400, the railroad bought the original plat of land from Thomas Alexander. Alexander and the railroad reached an agreement whereby land was traded for land, and the town was born. In 1901 Rosebud County was created from the western half of Custer County.

The most spectacular building in Forsyth is the Rosebud County Courthouse which was built in 1913 at the cost of \$173,000.00. To quote Mark Hufstetler of the Montana Historical Society, "Forsyth can look back on a long history of cycles of growth and decline. Through each period of decline, though, Forsyth has managed to survive with the resources needed to face the future. The future, of course, is far from certain, but if the past is any precedent, Forsythians should face the future quite well."

By: Donna Coate