

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 *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. 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. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

Historic name First Commercial Bank
Other names/site number Old West Trails Center (NeHBS #GA12-005)

2. Location

Street & number 301 Main Street Not for publication
City or town Odell Vicinity
State Nebraska Code NE County Gage Code 067 Zip code 68415

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this 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 meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

/s/ Michael J. Smith October 2, 2007
Signature of certifying official Date

Director/State Historic Preservation Officer
Nebraska State Historical Society
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register. _____
 - see continuation sheet. _____
 - determined eligible for the National Register. _____
 - see continuation sheet. _____
 - determined not eligible for the National Register. _____
 - removed from the National Register. _____
 - other, (explain): _____
- _____
Signature of Keeper Date of Action

First Commercial Bank

Name of Property

Gage County, Nebraska

County and State

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

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		Buildings
		Sites
		Structures
		Objects
1		Total

Name of related multiple property listing

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

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCE: Financial Institution

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

OTHER: Visitors' center

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

OTHER

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Foundation **Stone**

Walls **Stone**

Asphalt (Historic)

Roof **Rigid Insulation/Membrane**

Other

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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.)

Property is:

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

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Commerce

Period of Significance

1885-1894

Significant Dates

NA

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above.)

James D. Myers

Cultural Affiliation

NA

Architect/Builder

Unknown

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

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 # _____

Primary location for additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other
- Name of repository: _____

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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property Less than one acre

UTM References (place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet).

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
1.	14	687514	4435411	3.			
2.				4.			

[] See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title L. Robert Puschendorf

organization Nebraska State Historical Society

date June 2007

street & number PO Box 82554

telephone (402) 471-4769

city or town Lincoln

state NE

zip code 68501

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

Property Owner

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

name/title Village of Odell

street & number 202 Main Street

telephone (402) 766-4122

city or town Odell

state NE

zip code 68415

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determined 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, (15 USC 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the 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 chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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The First Commercial Bank building is located in Odell, Gage County, Nebraska (2000 population 345). It was built in 1885 of coursed ashlar, locally quarried limestone. A cornice of pressed metal crowns the top of the one-story building. The building has been rehabilitated and now serves as a visitors' center.

The main part of the former bank building is rectangular in shape, 22 feet wide by 30 feet in depth. The building is constructed of local limestone quarried along the Big Indian Creek, laid in coursed ashlar. A water table of cut limestone surrounds the building on the primary facades of the south and east.

The building is crowned with a pressed metal cornice on the south and east facades. Above the entrance is a continuation of the cornice, which rises to a pediment at the southeast corner. The center of the pediment displays the word "BANK."

The main entrance is set at an angle to the main part of the building. Limestone steps lead to a set of double doors. Above the doorway is a half-round transom window infilled above to form a Gothic arch, surrounded by cut limestone and topped by a keystone. The date of construction - "1885" - is located above the transom window.

Interior features include the original vault, although without the vault door. A new oak floor, pressed tin ceiling, and oak wainscoting have been installed.

Two significant alterations were made in the process of converting the building to a visitors' center while still retaining the integrity of the historic building. First was an addition to the rear accommodating handicapped accessibility and a modern restroom. The addition is the former location of a residence, once added to the rear of the building and consisting of frame construction and tin siding. The addition was removed at an unknown date. The new addition is constructed of wood frame and stucco, 17 feet in width and 13 feet in depth, and topped by a flat roof and cornice. A handicapped ramp enters the new addition. The addition is clearly delineated as new construction and allows the historic bank building to read as original construction.

Second is the replacement of the large storefront window. In 1945, the property was deeded to the village and subsequently converted to a garage, resulting in the removal of the original storefront. It has now been replaced and although not detailed to the historic appearance is retained in a configuration similar to the original.

The building now serves as a visitors' center.

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The First Commercial Bank building is significant under Criterion A for activities important to the community's commerce and economy during Odell's earliest period of settlement, growth, and development. Under Criterion B, the property is significant for its association with James D. Myers, who was instrumental in the founding of the village of Odell. Through his banking business he contributed to the town's development during the decade of the 1880s, the period of its greatest building and growth.

James D. Myers of Chicago arrived in Nebraska in 1880 in the interest of the Lincoln Land Company, a business dealing in locating and developing town sites along the expanding Burlington & Missouri Railroad. Myers acquired 360 acres and an undivided half interest was sold to the Lincoln Land Company.¹ The tract included what became the town site of Odell. The village was platted in 1880 and incorporated by C.E. Perkins, President of the Lincoln Land Company, Myers, and his wife, Elizabeth.² Myers established a mercantile store and real estate business. He amassed valuable farmland and town property.

The decade of the 1880s was a period of unprecedented growth in Nebraska. Good crops, expansion of the railroads, and a growing population all contributed to the optimism brought by the decade. Behind this growth were the financial institutions that bolstered this economy.

By 1882, Odell had every reason to be optimistic of its future. Just two years after its founding it could boast a school, steam sawmill, stockyards, stone quarry, and flour mill. A directory listing included forty businesses and professionals. It had the entire range of establishments needed for a town of emerging prosperity including two physicians, a druggist, newspaper, hotel, liveries, an implement dealer, hardware store, brick yard, lumberyard, blacksmith and wagon shop, general merchandise and grocery stores, restaurant, lumber yard, and grain dealer. The town grew to a population of 250.³

By 1886, fifty-eight businesses and professionals were listed in a directory for the town.⁴ In 1890, the village reached a peak population of 500, never to be exceeded.⁵

In villages such as Odell, one or two financially solid banks reflected and bolstered the economy.⁶ In the 1880s, the establishment of banks gave an indication of the prosperity during the decade. Loans to businesses, industrial enterprises, and farmers largely spurred that growth. Everywhere, the boom of the decade was fueled by borrowed money.

By 1882, just two years after the founding of the town, James D. Myers organized a private banking house, reflecting his rise to prominence and his optimism for the new town and its future. The business was known as Myers, Wentworth and Co.⁷ By 1884, the village was now served by Myers' bank and the Bank of Odell.⁸

¹ Hobbs, Hugh J., *History of Gage County, Nebraska*. Lincoln: Western Publishing and Engraving Company 1918, page 284.

² Renshaw, Catherine, *More Than Common Land: A History of Odell, Nebraska*, n.d., page 13.

³ *Nebraska State Gazetteer and Business Directory*, 1882-1883.

⁴ *Nebraska State Gazetteer and Business Directory*, 1886-1887.

⁵ Perkey, Elton A., *Perkey's Nebraska Place Names*. Lincoln: Nebraska State Historical Society, 1982, page 82.

⁶ Nebraska State Historical Society, Nebraska Historic Buildings Survey, "Historic Context Report 12.02.01.02." Greg Miller, April 1990.

⁷ *Portrait and Biographical Album of Gage County, Nebraska*. Chicago: Chapman Brothers, 1888, pages 441-442. See also *Nebraska State Gazetteer & Business Directory for 1882-1883*.

⁸ *Nebraska State Gazetteer and Business Directory*, 1884-1885.

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Myers completed his new bank building in 1885. Its solid architecture exuded confidence in the town and stability for the business.

The name of the bank was changed to the First Commercial Bank with Myers as president. In its annual report to the Nebraska Department of Banking for 1885, it reported \$15,000 in capital.⁹ In 1888, the First Commercial Bank was organized under state banking laws.¹⁰

But by the end of the decade, the prosperity began its downturn, followed by a depression lasting into the next years of the 1890s. In 1893, a financial panic hit the country. In Nebraska, bank deposits decreased nearly 50 percent between 1892 and 1896. Creditors of banks had over \$5 million tied up in 101 financial institutions.¹¹

On the eve of the financial panic in 1892, Monroe Robertson was operating the First Commercial Bank as its president. That year the bank proclaimed a capital of \$25,000.¹² But by 1894, the bank ceased operation, apparently a victim of the financial situation.¹³

Properties associated with important events that have contributed to the broad patterns of history, such as activities important to a community's commerce and economy can be eligible under Criterion A. These may include general, repeated activities of general focus to a community's growth and development.¹⁴ The First Commercial Bank of Odell fulfills this criterion. It represents the emergence of the village of Odell and the village's most prosperous decade of growth; all made possible by its financial institutions, specifically the First Commercial Bank.

Properties associated with the lives of persons significant as founders and leaders of banking institutions important to a community's commerce and economy can be eligible under Criterion B.¹⁵ The property is significant for its association with James D. Myers, who quickly rose to prominence following his role in the founding of the village of Odell. Establishing his banking business just two years after the founding of Odell, he contributed to the town's development during its first decade, its greatest era of town building and growth.

The property's significance is at the local level. Its period of significance is 1885, with the construction of the bank building, to 1894 when the bank ceased operation.

Postscript

Due to the work of the Odell Community Foundation and Odell Community Club, plans for renovation began in 2000. In 2005, the building was transferred from the Odell Community Foundation to the Village of Odell. It was then rehabilitated to serve public use as a visitors' center. The project received Federal-aid funding by the Federal Highway Administration, authorized by the Transportation Efficiency Act (TEA-21). The program is administered in Nebraska by the Nebraska Department of Roads. The building now serves as the Old West Trails Center, dedicated in September 2007.

⁹ Nebraska Department of Banking, Annual Report, filed January 1886, RG004, Nebraska State Historical Society.

¹⁰ Portrait and Biographical Album of Gage County, Nebraska. Chicago: Chapman Brothers, 1888, pages 441-442.

¹¹ Olson, James C. and Ronald C. Naugle, History of Nebraska. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, Third Edition, 1997, page 250.

¹² Advertisement dated May 27, 1892, source unknown. Copy in the files of the Nebraska Historic Buildings Survey, Nebraska State Historical Society.

¹³ Nebraska State Gazetteer and Business Directory, 1894-1895. Listings for the First Commercial Bank ceases for this issue, which states that only one financial institution served the village, the Bank of Odell.

¹⁴ Nebraska State Historical Society, Nebraska Historic Buildings Survey, "Historic Context Report 15.05.03." L.Robert Puschendorf, January 1989.

¹⁵ Nebraska State Historical Society, Nebraska Historic Buildings Survey, "Historic Context Report 15.05.03." L.Robert Puschendorf, January 1989.

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Nebraska State Historical Society, Nebraska Historic Buildings Survey, "Historic Context Report 12.02.01.02." Greg Miller, April 1990.

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Verbal Boundary Description:

The east fifty-eight (58) feet of Lot Twelve (12), Block Two (2) Original Town of Odell, Gage County, Nebraska.

Boundary Justification:

The nominated property includes the entire parcel historically associated with the First Commercial Bank building, Odell, Gage County, Nebraska.



Photo 1 of 3 – Front view

Photo by Stacy Stupka-Burda, July 2007, NSHS (original image at NeSHPO)



Photo 2 of 3 – Side view

Photo by Stacy Stupka-Burda, July 2007, NSHS (original image at NeSHPO)



Photo 3 of 3 – Back view

Photo by Stacy Stupka-Burda, July 2007, NSHS (original image at NeSHPO)