

INTRODUCTION

The Casper area has been a natural travel corridor for more than 10,000 years. Strategically located along the Rocky Mountains and the North Platte River the area was used by native American Indians, trappers, explorers and pioneers headed west.

On June 8, 1888, John Merritt and C.W. Eads established the town of Casper at the intersection of McKinley and A Streets. Men, women and children, hearing of the railroad's extension to Casper, soon joined Merritt and Eads. Temporary structures of plain, rough boards or tents housed about a dozen businesses. Flooring in the tents and most of the buildings was earth with the sagebrush and cactus cleared off. The residents of Casper, about 100, celebrated when the first passenger train arrived June 15, 1888. Casper was incorporated on May 6, 1889, fourteen months before Wyoming became a State.

Many of the buildings you see today were built in the early 1900's and the 1920's. During the 1920 oil boom, new buildings were constructed and additional floors were added to existing buildings. Nearly every storefront had clerestory windows (high windows near the top of the first floor ceiling) designed to provide light to the front of the store. Concern about heat loss caused most of them to be removed or covered in later years. The elegance of many buildings comes in the corbeling of the brick, patterns made by projecting some bricks from the flat wall surface. Others are enhanced by carvings of classical Greek or Roman details. The cornice, the topmost band around the building, may be ornately patterned or sculptured.

For your convenience, this brochure is divided into three tours: a walking tour of downtown Casper, a tour of the South Wolcott Historic District and a tour of historic buildings, markers and monuments.

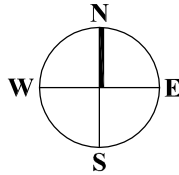
If you have questions or would like further information, contact the Casper Historic Preservation Commission at Fort Caspar Museum, 4001 Fort Caspar Road, Casper, WY 82604; phone 307-235-8462.

Second Edition, July 2008

Casper Historic Downtown Walking Tour

★ Start Here

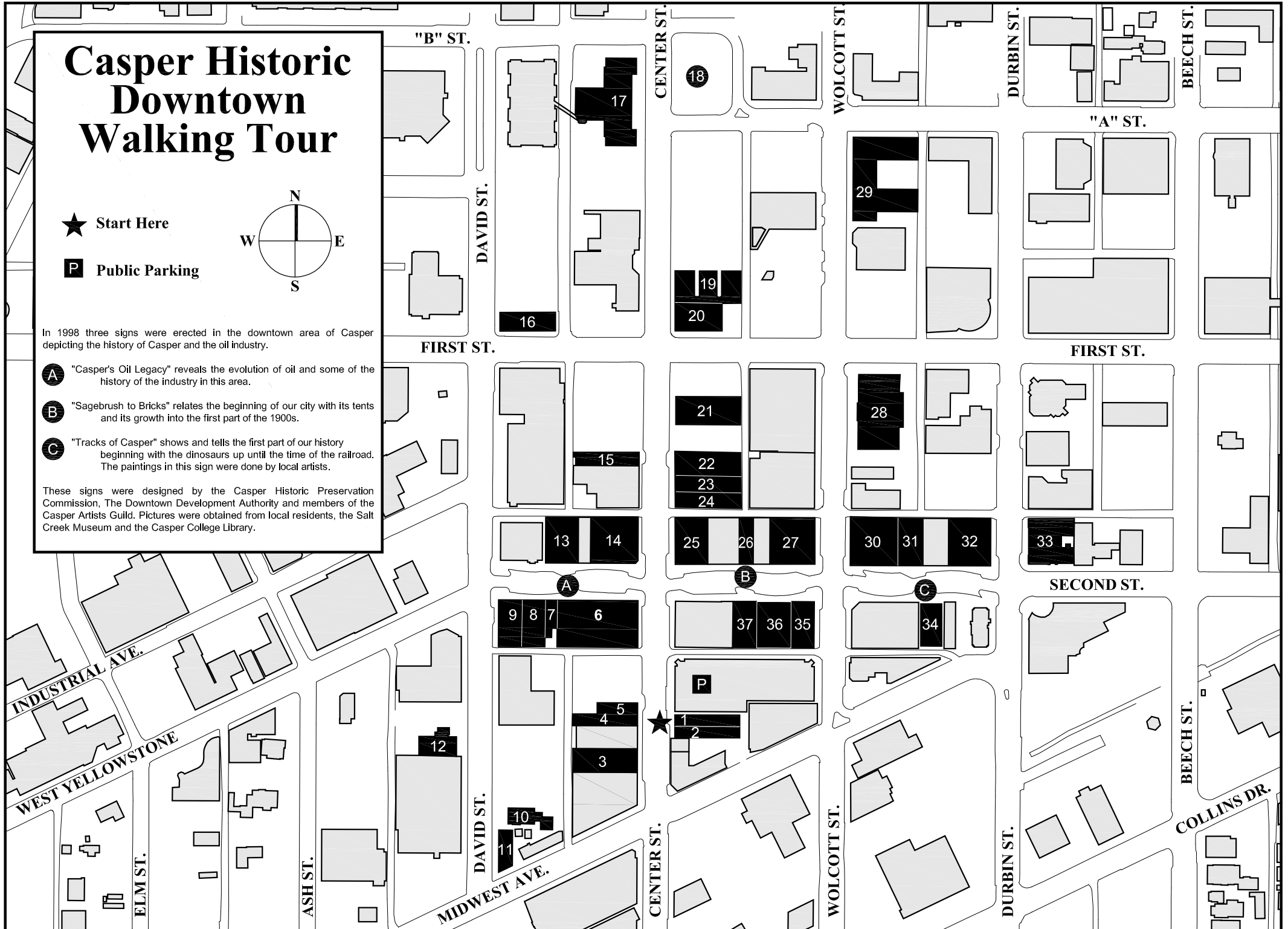
P Public Parking



In 1998 three signs were erected in the downtown area of Casper depicting the history of Casper and the oil industry.

- A** "Casper's Oil Legacy" reveals the evolution of oil and some of the history of the industry in this area.
- B** "Sagebrush to Bricks" relates the beginning of our city with its tents and its growth into the first part of the 1900s.
- C** "Tracks of Casper" shows and tells the first part of our history beginning with the dinosaurs up until the time of the railroad. The paintings in this sign were done by local artists.

These signs were designed by the Casper Historic Preservation Commission, The Downtown Development Authority and members of the Casper Artists Guild. Pictures were obtained from local residents, the Salt Creek Museum and the Casper College Library.



WALKING TOUR OF DOWNTOWN CASPER

Approximate walking time: One hour, thirty minutes.

Begin your tour on Center Street at the City Parking Garage. We suggest that you view these buildings from both sides of the street. A map at the center of this book will help you locate these buildings.

1. 241 South Center

The building you see today was constructed in 1921 by the Tripeny brothers, John and William, as a drug store and a jewelry store. The second story was added to accommodate the increased demand for office space. The soda fountain was a popular attraction for servicemen stationed at the air base during World War II.

The building was remodeled several times. During the last remodeling the tile of the original floor and entrance was exposed. The railing by the windows is the hand rail from the balcony of the 1921 building. The front windows, including the clerestory windows, are original.



Photo by DeLuxe Studios (Tom Carrigen). Tripeny Collection, Casper College Western History Center

2. 245 South Center

This building was constructed between 1898 and 1912. One occupant, Kistler's Tent & Awning, made sheepwagon covers, sheepherder's tents, and other specialties. The sewing machines were set on the floor upstairs where canvas could be spread to make the big sheepwagon covers. A huge painted sign advertising Kistler's products can still be seen on the south side of the building when observed from Midwest Avenue.

As of this printing, the Kistler Tent and Awning Building has been nominated for the National Register of Historic Places, and is pending final review.

Cross Center Street, turn right (north)

From the time Casper was founded until the mid-twentieth century the west side of this block was the only area of town where liquor was sold. Consequently, ladies never walked the length of this block. In 1891, Town Marshal William Hodge shot and killed a cowboy who insulted the wife of J.B. Okie, a prominent rancher. The Okies were unaware that "social custom" prohibited ladies from frequenting the area. The cowboy, who had imbibed far too much liquor, roared out of the local saloon swearing in front of Mrs. Okie, who was offended. Marshall Hodge ordered the cowboy to stop, but his command went unheeded. The marshal fired warning shots into the air and the ground. A bullet ricocheted off a stone, lodging in the heart of the unlucky cowboy who, having mounted his horse, fell dead to the ground.

3. 256 South Center

Two frame buildings were joined in 1918 to make Middleton's Pool Hall. Except during Prohibition, liquor sales and billiards have been the main business at this site. In 1941, the building's best-known occupant, the Wonder Bar, began business here. The tavern's motto, "A stranger is a friend we haven't met," described the atmosphere of this lively place frequented by many famous people: Ernest Hemingway, Dizzy Dean, Ty Cobb, Rex Allen, and Ken Curtis (Festus, of Guns).

In 1954, baseball star Dizzy Dean stopped at the world-famous Wonder Bar while on a Wyoming hunting trip. News quickly spread through town that the famed St. Louis Cardinal pitcher was seated at the bar. Children gathered at the bar entrance, eager to catch a glimpse of their hero. Upon hearing about these young fans, Dean gave a waitress \$20 and asked her to go and purchase as many baseballs as possible. In 1954, baseballs could be bought for only a few cents each. He autographed the balls, and handed them out to the adoring crowd.

4. 246 South Center

Constructed in 1913, this building was originally four buildings. Renovations in 1929 and 1980 have eradicated evidence of this. Note the six small attic windows included in the frieze of the building.

5. 240 South Center

The original brick building was constructed in 1907. The beautiful blue, yellow and white tiles on the front of the building were salvaged from a dismantled theater in Colorado and added in 1924.

After purchasing the building in 1950, Ivor and Elizabeth Bowen discovered a room under the original sidewalks that held evidence of bootlegging activities carried out during Prohibition--gallon jugs, corks, etc. That area was filled and sealed off when the 1974 street and sewer improvements were made.

6. 200 South Center

The Grand Central Hotel stood on this corner and was the heart of downtown Casper for many years. Built in 1894, the hotel had a huge balcony where people would gather to socialize, conduct business, listen to the band that played across the street or watch the movements of the townsfolk, freighters and cowboys.

At the announcement of a successful new oil well, crowds would gather on Second Street buying and selling stocks. Holding large amounts of cash in their hands, waving them aloft, they called bids for a favorite stock. The street often became impassable to traffic because of the crowds trading and watching the market.

Turn left at the corner, proceed West



Frances Seely Webb Collection, Casper College Western History Center

7. 125 West 2nd Street

This building was constructed in 1899. In the late 1930's the Knights of Columbus held meetings upstairs. Remnants of their history were discovered during a 1982 renovation, including a 1910 Liberty Head coin and several ribboned medals which were found in the floor boards.



Casper Area Chamber of Commerce Collection, Casper College Western History Center

8. 129 West 2nd Street

This business operates in two buildings. The easternmost building was built before 1912 and has housed a grocery store, harness shop, office and restaurant. The west building was constructed in 1915 for the Trail Bar, a gathering place for ranch hands and shepherders. A safe dated 1855 and a mirror from the Trail Bar are in the restaurant.

9. 139 West 2nd Street

Originally this was the site of the J.T. McGrath Blacksmith Shop which made a popular style of sheepwagon used throughout the West. An example can be seen at the Fort Caspar Museum. The present building was constructed in 1917 to house Shockley's Car Garage. An elevator carried cars to the body shop on the third floor. In 1976, the building was remodeled for business offices.

Turn left on David Street and proceed South



10. 323 South David Street

Built between 1912 and 1918, this building was home to Dave Davidson, one of the biggest bootleggers in the country. He was legendary for being a sly bootlegger. One story says that to keep the revenuers from finding his still, he herded sheep behind his truck so they would eat any corn that fell. While they were eating the evidence, the sheep hooves would erase the tire tracks leading to the still.



Natrona County Pioneer Association Collection, Casper College Western History Center

11. 331-335 David Street

The Marshall Apartment building was constructed in 1923 as housing for downtown workers. Constructed of steel, concrete and brick, it was one of the first fireproof buildings in town.

Cross David Street and turn right (North)

12. 302 South David Street.

This Late Gothic Revival building was constructed in 1921 to house the Casper Fire Station and Municipal Garage. It is made of concrete and brick with terra cotta ornamentation. The frieze above the arches spells out "Casper Fire Department Station 1" and the terra cotta shield with the construction date is at the center of the parapet on the facade. Casper invested \$85,000 in new fire fighting equipment and construction of this fire station. The City was changing from a small town with a volunteer fire department to a booming population center with a paid fire protection staff. The building was renovated into office space in 2004.

The Casper Fire Station 1 was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in November 1993.

Head East on 2nd Street, back to downtown



Photo by Bell, Courtesy of Martha Horn, Casper College Western History Center



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3. 130-120 West 2nd Street

In the early 1900's this site was the Grand Central Stables. The stables disappeared by 1924 when the present building was constructed by Fred Cottman, a local businessman and rancher.

The facade frame is imported Italian marble inlaid with glazed concrete flowers. The canopy on the front of the building is wood covered with copper that has developed a dark patina though the years. Inside, the high ceilings and balconies are still in existence. The clerestory windows have been covered.

14. 110 West 2nd Street, 166, 152 and 156 South Center

In 1888 the first business lot to be sold in Casper was the northwest corner of 2nd and Center Streets where the C. H. Townsend business block is located. Groceries, grain and stock feed were sold at the original small frame building. The employees of the store slept in the building, and for the first few years their beds were surrounded with sacks of grain to protect them from bullets that were often carelessly fired by cowboys who had come in from the range to celebrate.

In 1903 a new building of brick masonry was completed and served as the Stockmen's National Bank and a dry goods store. In 1934 the building was expanded and covered with a limestone veneer reflecting the architectural style of the day. As a part of the project, the bank lobby was redecorated with ornate plaster castings of the same architectural style as the exterior.

A fire in 1985 almost destroyed the entire building. During reconstruction, the plaster castings were removed and installed in the building lobbies to preserve the feel of the old building. The Stockmen's National Bank name is still visible over the corner door at 2nd and Center.



Photo by Wiswall. Frances Seely Webb Collection, Casper College Western History Center

Turn left at the corner and proceed North on Center Street



Photo by Wiswall. Frances Seely Webb Collection, Casper College Western History Center

15. 136-134 South Center

Constructed in 1890, this building was the first brick building in Casper and the first Town Hall. The cupola, a small dome on the roof, held a bell that rang fire alarms in the early days and gave the name to the Bell Movie Theater that occupied the building beginning in 1908. That bell is now in the Fort Caspar Museum.

Cross First Street and proceed West

16. 120 W. First Street

This building is called the Century Building because of its location in the 100 block of three streets--Market, Center and First Streets. It was built in 1909 on the edge of town known as the Sandbar. Before the North Platte River was dammed, it would swell to the steps of the building and men and boys would fish off the porch.

Return to Center Street and continue North

17. 200 North Center

This handsome building is the third courthouse built in Casper. A project of the Public Works Administration organized under Franklin D. Roosevelt, the building was completed in 1940. It is constructed of carved limestone and includes a frieze representing the heritage of Casper. The bronze statue from the second court house and many historic photographs of Casper are on display in the lobby.

Cross Center Street



Casper Journal Collection, Casper College Western History Center

18. Pioneer Plaza

The Pioneer monument was erected in 1911 to commemorate the pioneers who traversed the Oregon Trail. It was originally placed at the Chicago Northwestern Railroad depot. The monument was moved to its present location in 1952 when Pioneer Plaza was constructed.

Proceed South on Center Street



Frances Seely Webb Collection, Casper College Western History Center

19. 115-117 N. Center

Built in 1923, the Townsend Hotel is the only remaining "Grand Hotel" in Casper. The beautiful cornice, the carved columns beside the entrance and the panel of highly stylized flowers and urns are characteristics of the grand hotels of the "Roaring 20's."

As of this printing, The Townsend Hotel is being converted into part of a new courthouse and justice center.

The Townsend Hotel was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in November 1983.

20. 105 N. Center

The Masonic Temple was built in 1914. Masonic symbols are engraved in the arched door and the words "Masonic Temple" are inscribed upon the cornice. In 1916, a famous daredevil tightrope walker walked between the roof of the temple to a building across the street.

The Masonic Temple was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in August 2005.



Frances Seely Webb Collection, Casper College Western History Center



Casper Area Chamber of Commerce Collection, Casper College Western History Center

21. 119 S. Center

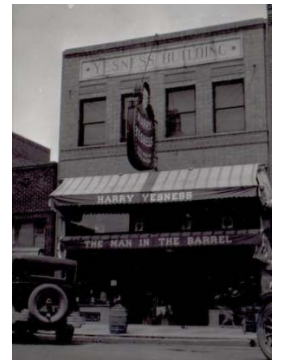
The America Theatre was built in 1918. Originally the America featured live stage shows and was the first theatre in Casper to show motion pictures.

The Building on the corner was demolished and is now the First Interstate Plaza.

22. 133 S. Center

The original building was home to the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) between 1901 and 1918. Known for opening the first library in Casper in 1902, the WCTU also poured all the liquor found in town into the Platte River during Prohibition.

The present building was constructed around 1920 and housed the second Harry Yesness Store. Harry Yesness was a vaudeville entertainer who came to Casper to perform for the Elks Club. When he found out how expensive it was to have his suit pressed, he sold his possessions, bought the suit pressing business and stayed in Casper. Yesness was known as the "man in the barrel." During an Elks' Club initiation, Yesness had to walk down the street wearing nothing but a barrel. For years a water fountain shaped like a man in a barrel sat in front of the store.



Casper Area Chamber of Commerce Collection, Casper College Western History Center

23. 137-141 S. Center

This five-story ornate building, constructed in 1917, is one of the few commercial downtown buildings to maintain its architectural integrity. The scalloped top trim and terra cotta tiles keep the neoclassical design intact. During Casper's oil boom this site was the hub of activities for visiting oil dignitaries.

In November 1993 the Consolidated Royalty Building was added to the National Register of Historic Places.

24. 143-147 S. Center

Smaller and less ornate than other downtown commercial buildings, the Campbell Building was constructed in 1914.

25. 102 East 2nd Street

Built in 1921, the Rialto Theatre's elegant interior made it the preeminent theatre for first run films. Admission for adults was 40 cents and a dime for children. In 1928, the Rialto Theatre was the first Casper theatre to feature a Vitaphone sound system which signaled the end to the silent film. This building has decorative cornices with consoles holding concrete wreaths.

The Rialto Theatre was added to the National Register of Historic Places in February 1993.

Turn left and proceed East on 2nd Street



Casper Area Chamber of Commerce Collection, Casper College Western History Center



Photo by Carrigen, Art Randall Collection, Casper College Western History Center

26. 116-118 East 2nd Street

This building was constructed in 1912 and housed a dry goods and clothing store and later a movie theatre. In 1919 Claude Ayres drove through Casper on his way to Republic, Washington. Quoting from his journal:

"arrived Casper... much building... six houses in one block...walked around town, wonderful town... one and a half million payroll... ALIVE... found chance for jewelry with fine drug store."

Mr. Ayres was so impressed by Casper that he soon returned and settled here. The Ayres' clock on the sidewalk is a downtown landmark.

27. 134-136 East 2nd Street

The Odd Fellow Building, constructed in 1896 at a cost of \$10,000, is the oldest commercial structure in downtown. This building was the social center of Casper and served as a meeting place for all clubs and organizations for many years. Electric lighting was installed in 1900 and the emblem for the Odd Fellows, three intertwined rings, was added to the cornice of the building in 1918.

In 1902, Sheriff W. C. Ricker, Noble Grand of Casper Odd Fellow Lodge No. 22, was murdered in the line of duty. His killer, Charles Woodard, was taken from his jail cell forty minutes after midnight and hanged by a vigilante committee from the gallows erected for his legal hanging.

Cross Wolcott Street and turn left, proceed North



Frances Seely Webb Collection, Casper College Western History Center



U.S. Post Office and Court House - Casper, Wyoming
Ruth Scott Hocker Collection, Casper College Western History Center

28. 111 South Wolcott

The Ewing T. Kerr Federal Building and United States Court House is a Classical Revival style office building with a hip roof clad with slate tiles. The building is trimmed with Wyoming sandstone from a quarry in Rawlins. One of Casper's few major construction projects in the early 1930's, this building provided much needed employment to local workers during the early years of the Great Depression. Excavation was completed with mule teams and scrappers. Wheeled pushcarts were used to transport and pour concrete within the building and manual hoists moved materials to the upper floors. Throughout its lifetime, this solid structure housed the Post Office and various government offices.

The Ewing T. Kerr Federal Building and United States Courthouse was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in December 1998.

29. 159 North Wolcott Street

The North half of the building was designed and constructed in 1948-49 to house the Casper regional office for the Ohio Oil Company. In 1955-56 the almost identical T-shaped South half of the building was added, completing the basic U-shape of the building. The open area of the U-shape provides natural light to the interior offices. Its most distinctive feature is its regularly spaced rows of brick pilasters that is characteristic of the Art Deco architectural style.

The Ohio Oil Company Building was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in July 2001.

Walk South back to 2nd Street and turn left (East)



Photo by Ken. Casper Area Chamber of Commerce Collection, Casper College Western History Center



Photo by Bell, Blackmore Collection, Casper College Western History Center

30. 202 East 2nd Street

The Wyoming Building, constructed in 1920, was the first large downtown office building. It was renovated into apartments in 2007.

31. 216 East 2nd Street

The Tribune Building was constructed in 1920 by J.E. Hanway to house the Casper Tribune Herald. You can see the words "Hanway" and "Tribune" carved into the building. The building is an Italianate Commercial style popular during that era. Elements of the Italianate Style include an ornate protruding cornice supported by scrolled brackets and other connected geometric designs.

Before television and radio, the area in front of the Tribune Building was roped off and residents would "watch" the World Series. Commentary from the Associated Press was read and a magnetic board showed play-by-play action for baseball fans.

The Tribune Building was added to the National Register of Historic Places in February 1993.

32. 232 East 2nd Street

Originally constructed as two buildings, the Smith Building and the Becklinger Building, were joined in 1977. The smaller Smith Building to the east was once occupied by the Natrona Butter Company. Milk wagons brought milk daily from the surrounding area. Many Casper residents can remember the large milk cooler in the alley behind the store. This building was constructed of locally made bricks with walls that are 18" thick and can be viewed from inside the building. The original floor is still in the building.

The cornerstone for the Becklinger Building was laid in 1922. Carved columns and urns embellish the face of this building.



Chuck Morrison Collection, Casper College Western History Center



Frances Seely Webb Collection, Casper College Western History Center

33. 302 East 2nd Street

The Methodist Church has occupied this site since 1893 when the First Methodist Episcopal Church was housed in a frame building. A long, narrow, white clapboard structure shared this pasture with an encampment of Indians. As the town grew, the congregation flourished and in 1907 a second building was constructed. The present building was constructed in 1950.

Cross 2nd Street and turn right (West)

34. 229 East 2nd Street

This building was constructed in 1917 to house the Mountain States Telephone Company. In 1917 the telephone company had 634 customers, six years later there were 4,606 subscribers.



David Collection, Casper College Western History Center



35. 137 East 2nd Street

This building was constructed between 1914 and 1917. Originally featuring sky lights, mosaic tile floor covering and beautiful solid-oak doors and trim, it has been renovated significantly over the years.

36. 125 East 2nd Street

The first business in this 1910 building was an Undertaker's Parlor and furniture store. It was not uncommon for the two enterprises to be located in the same building because caskets were considered a regular item of furniture. While the exterior is somewhat altered, the quality of the original workmanship is clearly evident in this four-story building.

37. 119-117 East 2nd Street

This building was constructed before 1912 and was renovated in 1955 after a fire destroyed the building to the west. During the cleanup, vibration from the jackhammers and bulldozers caused some of the brick face of this building and a wall in the basement to collapse. The plain brick face popular at that time replaced the ornate brickwork of the original facade. Designs which were in the original brick facade are repeated in the interior and can still be seen in wooden panels and the ceilings of the showcase windows.