United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

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

1. Name of Property

Historic name: ____Stillwater County Courthouse_____
Other names/site number: _24ST297_____
Name of related multiple property listing:
_____N/A_____
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing

2. Location

Street & number: _400 East 3rd Avenue North_____
City or town: __Columbus_ State: ___MT_____ County: __Stillwater__
Not For Publication: N/A Vicinity: N/A

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

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

I hereby certify that this _X_ nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property _X_ meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

___national ___statewide _X_local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

_X_A ___B _X_C ___D

Signature of certifying official/Title: **Date**

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official: **Date**

Title : **State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government**

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

___ entered in the National Register

___ determined eligible for the National Register

___ determined not eligible for the National Register

___ removed from the National Register

___ other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

Private:	☐
Public – Local	x
Public – State	☐
Public – Federal	☐

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

Building(s)	x
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

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

6. Function or Use
Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

GOVERNMENT/courthouse

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)
GOVERNMENT/courthouse

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions.)
LATE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS: NEOCLASSICAL

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)
Principal exterior materials of the property: CONCRETE, BRICK; STONE (cast)

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

Summary Paragraph
The Stillwater County Courthouse is located in the heart of Columbus, in south-central Montana, near the confluence of the Stillwater and the Yellowstone rivers. The courthouse stands in the center of a full city block bounded by East 4th Avenue North and East 3rd Avenue North on the north and south, and Labey and Norton streets on the east and west.[1] Bordered by modest residential dwellings, the building is three blocks north of the main commercial strip of Pike Avenue (Old U.S. 10). This compact original portion of town lies immediately north of the former Northern Pacific Railway (NPRR) [now Burlington-Northern Santa Fe] right-of-way on the north banks of the Yellowstone River.

Constructed in 1920-1921, the four-story masonry Stillwater County Courthouse is the centerpiece of an approximately 1.93-acre site that it shares with the attached Sheriff's Annex and original jail building to the north. The Norton House (1899) stands immediately west of the courthouse. The site's south half is dedicated to a gracious lawn bordered by sidewalks and mature trees. The south, entry, façade presents a commanding presence towards town, emphasized by the building's symmetrical Neoclassical stylings and the raised entry. Two-story Ionic columns and flanking brick walls support a Beaux Art style entablature and pediment. The

[1] The site and building are not aligned with cardinal north; yet for simplicity, the descriptions herein refer to the front entry side as the south.

graceful and imposing design by Billings architect Warren A. Dedrick was a fitting edifice for county offices. The interior has been remodeled in response to programmatic changes, and the windows and exterior doors replaced with metal units of differing configurations. The overall massing and exterior appearance of the building remain nearly unchanged since its construction.

Narrative Description

General Characteristics

The Stillwater County Courthouse is an example of a trustworthy style befitting a local government building. The hallmark features of the Neoclassical Revival style are prominently displayed and exquisitely detailed: symmetry, solid masonry construction with a central projecting entry, substantial raised entry steps, and the tripartite division of the walls into base, shaft, and capital. The base extends from grade to the second (entry) floor, confined by a beveled course of stone and a profiled stone beltcourse that engages the second floor windowsills. The shaft is comprised of the two-story smooth brick walls with punched window openings, and further expressed by the portico entry that reaches out to engage the entry steps. The stone beltcourse above the third floor windows functions as the entablature to the brick frieze and stone cornice above, forming a classical architrave. Above this, the capital has a stone cornice enhanced by a brick parapet/attic level that conceals the flat roof. Limited to the south elevation, the cornice is accentuated by the prominent stone-clad portico extension capped with a pediment. This division and articulation grace all four elevations, with minor simplifications at the north elevation and an interruption at the north stair extension.

The masonry confirms the early twentieth century construction. The brick from Lewistown, Montana, of standard size, is an iron spot face brick ranging in color from cream to a dark orange. Set in a running bond, in stretcher courses, the brick is presumably bonded to the back-up masonry wall with metal ties. The white mortar joints, of concave profile, differentiate the individual brick units. The trim – cornices, columns, windowsills and lintels, etc. – is of a high quality artificial stone.[2] The base - of all but the north stair extension - is articulated with a pattern of brick set to simulate rusticated stone. The first floor windows are recessed within this base and spanned with segmental brick arches. Cream colored stone keystones demarcate all but the north façade.

Regularly punched and stacked window openings contribute to the formality while providing transparency of the government functions inside. The stone trim treatment is more elaborate at the front and side elevations. Most of the windows are replacement dark-finished aluminum units; aluminum is wrapped over the wood brickmolds and sills. All windows are flat-topped. The typical windows of the lower three floors are divided into three vertical parts with a large central pane, a narrow top opaque panel, and a narrow in-swinging hopper at the bottom of the opening. The typical attic window openings are divided equally, with an opaque top half above the lower in-swinging hopper. Windows that differ from the typical configurations are noted below.

[2] The artificial or cast stone used for the courthouse is of exceptionally high quality to have survived in such excellent condition. It will be referred to as stone throughout the building description.

The South Façade

The full-height entry represents the central feature of the south façade. This extension from the primary wall plane is emphasized with broad entry steps bordered by brick-faced knee walls capped with robust stone copings and terminated with stone newels. The steps provide access to the two-story entry portico supported by brick-faced walls that flank the two Ionic stone columns. The brick walls feature full-height recessed panels, stone bases, and the stone architrave of the full entablature that spans across the recessed entry space. The portico is capped with the smooth frieze featuring the incised lettering of "STILLWATER" and the requisite cornice above. The stone-clad attic above is a little temple with a tripartite window grouping in the center, flanked by walls clad with shields. This composition is terminated with a cornice and pediment.

The entry within this portico presents a classical architrave with carved frieze and cornice. The frieze depicts the agriculture crops important to the country: lifelike potatoes, wheat, and corn. The brick walls bordering this architrave display stone pilasters. All the stone borders and trim work here is machine tooled, in distinct contrast with the smooth finishes of the rest of the stone on the building. The pair of entry doors, with transom above, are replacement aluminum units.

The walls on either side of the raised entry are identical; finished with smooth brick and organized classically and symmetrically. Three windows are spaced regularly at each of the four floor levels. The first floor windows are set within the rusticated base, over the stone base course. The segmental brick arches are set with simple stone keystones. The replacement windows have an operable lower portion that swings in. The second floor windows are the most elaborate, elongated with full stone architraves that culminate in keystoned and eared lintels, with set-in sills, borrowed from the earlier Greek Revival style. The treatment of the third and fourth floor window openings is simpler, with the stone trim relegated to the sills: lug sills at the third floor and stone sills at the fourth floor windows set into the smooth stone course above the primary building cornice.

East and West Elevations

The east and west elevations are configured similarly to each other, in subordination to the main façade. The primary differentiator is the omission of the center portico. Each side elevation holds six windows spaced regularly at each of the four floor levels. The window treatment at each floor is identical to that on the south façade.

North Elevation

The north, rear, elevation is a simplified version of the south façade, with the mass of the extended center stair hall in lieu of the center portico. The walls on either side of the stair mass are identical. Three windows are spaced regularly at each of the four floor levels. The first floor windows, now only visible on the west side, are set within the rusticated base and are not fitted with stone keystones. The treatment of the second, third, and fourth floor window openings is simple, with the stone trim relegated to the sills: lug sills at the second and third floors and stone sills at the fourth floor windows set into the smooth stone course above the primary building cornice. The three windows toward the east part of the third floor (that face the courtroom) are

fitted with aluminum sash windows different than those installed elsewhere. The original wood brickmolds remain exposed at these three windows.

The central stair tower of the north elevation retains the decorative stone treatment at the cornice and parapet wall only. The top landing's large window opening interrupts the cornice; the lower window opening is placed directly in the brick wall. Both of these large openings are trimmed with simple stone, including sills. The two lowest windows are enframed as one unit, with a smooth stone panel between the two. The brick-clad chimney fills the inside corner between the west side of the stair tower and the north wall, close to the boiler room in the northwest corner of the basement. This shaft engages and continues the main cornice and extends above the parapet wall, where it is finished with a profiled stone coping. At grade west of the chimney, the extension of the basement boiler room below is covered with a sloped concrete roof that forms the raised edge of the parking area to the north. A sheet metal duct and steel bulkhead doors penetrate the concrete slab.

A one-story flat-roofed wood framed brick-faced addition constructed in 1980 serves as the Sheriff's Annex and connects the north wall of the courthouse to the 1913 sandstone jail, set approximately thirteen feet north of the courthouse. The connector has an irregularly shaped floor plan and is generally indistinct, except for a pair of brick courses along the window/door heads: rowlock above soldier course. The one-story jail, now connected to the overall courthouse facility via the Sheriff's Annex, is constructed of rough-faced Columbus sandstone ashlar blocks set in running bond. The rectangular shaped building is oriented with the long sides parallel to the courthouse, with the flat roof – concealed behind parapets – sloped to drain to the east. The six regularly spaced window openings on the north façade are all identical, with large rough-faced lintels, smooth-faced lug sills. The window openings are filled in with concrete block and three hold a fixed small rectangular single pane. A single window opening on the east façade is treated the same. The signs of a non-original door remain in the center of the west façade. It is currently filled in with concrete masonry units.

Interior

The configuration of the courthouse interior correlates to the exterior, with the main entry raised to arrive at the center bay of the second floor. This full-width bay acts as the primary circulation core, and extends north to contain the main stairway. The stairs provide access from the first floor to the fourth attic floor. A separate set of stairs to the west lead down from the first floor to the basement. The center hall connects the east side with the west side. The rooms are nearly equally divided along the lengths of the east and west bays, corresponding to the structural concrete beams that support the floors. The third and fourth floors break away from this equal division, with the large west space set aside for the courtroom on the third and its attic above on the fourth. Restrooms are found on the first and third floors.

The center halls on all but the second floor have a square footprint with chamfered corners and wide openings to the adjacent spaces. On the first and third floors, square columns flank the angled corners. Some of the columns at the third floor are subsumed by wall construction (both original and subsequent). The fourth floor center space is less open, with a solid wall shared with the attic space to the east. It is not fitted with exposed columns. The center hall of the

second floor has been compressed on the east and west sides, with the area borrowed for storage in the adjacent offices. These walls, from the 1980s, display a plainsawn oak wainscot finish.

The significant public spaces of the building – the central halls on three floors and main staircase - are finished with the typical high finish materials of the 1920s. With concrete floors as a base, terrazzo flooring was a natural finish for these spaces. The light color of the field is contrasted with a darker border and wall base. The borders of the first and second floor center halls define the center space and the depth of the surrounding structure. The first floor is defined by a solid five-pointed star in its center. The second floor is further accentuated with a dark diamond. An open-center five-pointed star identifies the courtroom level of the third floor center hall. The stairs are similarly fitted with terrazzo treads and risers. The interior stair walls are finished with plaster and a painted wood cap. Simple painted steel pipe railings, fastened to outside and interior walls, appear to be a later addition.

The walls and ceilings were originally finished with plaster. The lower wall portion of the second floor entry is finished with terrazzo. Most ceilings are now concealed above suspended acoustic tile ceilings. The exposed undersides of the stair runs are finished with 1' x 1' acoustic tile, probably glued to the original plaster.

The doors and trim in the public spaces are of clear-finished (i.e. varnish or the like; unpainted) hardwood. The doors are stile-and-rail with flat panels; many have glazed portions. The doors are of hard maple or birch and many doors retain original hardware. Much of the trim is of plainsawn oak of various construction periods.

Structure

The construction drawings indicate that the exterior brick and stone are bonded to interior masonry back-up walls, with additional support provided by steel lintels to help support the bearing ends of the concrete floor structure. The foundation and floor support beams are of poured-in-place reinforced concrete. The roof is supported with traditional wood framing.

Integrity

Exterior

The Stillwater County Courthouse retains an excellent degree of integrity that strongly reflects its historic appearance and character. The Stillwater County Courthouse stands in its original location. The courthouse is centered within the Court House Square but set back presenting a dramatic presentation with the wide-open space drawing all to the raised Neoclassical entry.

The setting of course has evolved over time. A historic photograph taken soon after construction shows the courthouse and adjacent 1899 Norton House as the northern most buildings in Columbus, with nothing but range land beyond.[3] Today, the courthouse sits in the middle of a residential area. Landscaping consists of sidewalks and mature fir trees east of the courthouse and other mature deciduous trees along the perimeter while smaller vegetation has been removed over the years. A paved parking lot is situated to the rear (north) of building.

[3]The Norton House will be discussed in the historic narrative portion of this nomination.

The architectural design, materials and workmanship are wonderfully intact on all elevations with few exceptions. As with many public buildings in the 1980s in an effort to increase energy efficiency, all original windows (double-hung on three floors and casement on the fourth) have been replaced with anodized aluminum with thermo pane glazing reducing the overall window area with some spandrel panels installed. The original doors on the first and second floors also have been replaced with floor to ceiling paired metal doors with sidelights.

The courthouse steps are in a state of disrepair as past attempts to curtail the deterioration have failed. During one of these attempts, the side walls below the entry stairs were parged with concrete and scored and painted to look like brick. The county is presently delaying action on the steps as they consider county infrastructure concerns.

In the 1980s, the newly constructed Sheriff's Annex connected the north courthouse walls to the 1913 jail. Since this one-story brick-faced addition occurs at the rear of the courthouse and serves to meld the three into a single whole, it is not overly intrusive and does not detract from the courthouse appearance and character.

Interior

The majority of the interior alterations have been cosmetic – relegated to trim replacement and installation of suspended acoustical ceiling. The primary spatial modification is the wall construction at the sides of the main second floor center hall. This alteration has narrowed what was an expansive public space into a narrow passage corridor.

Room configurations generally remain the same on the first and second floors with some slight modifications, including removal of a wall in the commissioners' office and installation of a wall in the original treasurer's office. The third floor underwent a complete remodel of the courtroom plus the introduction of a new door and room divisions in various spaces. The fourth floor appears basically unchanged and largely unfinished.

The Stillwater County Courthouse reflects its strong historic association and feeling as the landmark public building and the most prominent building in Stillwater County. Approaching the courthouse from the south, this impressive structure conveys through its architecture a sense of heritage and symbol of local government and laws.

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.)

[X] 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.

[X] C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

[ ] D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

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

[ ] A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes

[ ] B. Removed from its original location

[ ] C. A birthplace or grave

[ ] D. A cemetery

[ ] E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure

[ ] F. A commemorative property

[ ] G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

Areas of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions.)
POLITICS/GOVERNMENT
ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance
1921-1969

Significant Dates
1921

Significant Person
(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder
Courthouse: Warren A. Dedrick Architect
James & Ainslie, Builders
Jail: Chase Lumber, Builders

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

The Stillwater County Courthouse is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its importance to Stillwater County in its role as the center of local governance, law and justice for the county. Since the county offices first moved into the courthouse 100 years ago, the Stillwater County Courthouse serves as "… the holder of community memories, not just in the records they contain, but in the collected memory of

thousands of small and large transactions, meetings, and activities that have occurred there" and where people continue to gather as they have for generations.[4]

The importance of the Stillwater County Courthouse to the residents of Stillwater County was overwhelmingly expressed at a public hearing in May 2015 when a large percentage of the audience of 60 supported the preservation and renovation of the courthouse. Most residents recognize the historic value of the courthouse as the only substantial civic building that serves the people of Stillwater County on a daily basis.

The Stillwater County Courthouse especially stands out as a testament to a county government surviving the difficult economic and environmental years in the early twentieth century.[5] The homesteading boom years had ended when the courthouse bond issue passed in September 1919 and the construction of the courthouse occurred from 1920 to 1921 while the county was experiencing the effects of a devastating drought and farm and ranch failures. A second bond issue in late fall of 1920 was not successful and left the commissioners using limited means to complete the courthouse interior gradually over the next few years. The courthouse therefore represents the perseverance of county leaders to complete the courthouse, realizing its importance as the center for local governance, law, and justice and to reflect stability and permanence needed during the trying years in the early twentieth century.

The Stillwater County Courthouse gains additional significance under Criterion C for its representation of Neoclassical Revival architecture as executed in a local public building. The hallmark features of the Neoclassical Revival style are prominently displayed and exquisitely detailed: symmetry, solid masonry construction with central projecting entry, raised entry and temple façade with two-story Ionic columns supporting a entablature and pediment. Although the Stillwater County Courthouse does not display the same opulence as some other Montana courthouses, its architecture clearly identifies the building as the community's landmark structure.

The period of significance begins in 1921, when the county commissioners moved into the courthouse and ends in 1969, the end of the historic period.

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[4] Ray Luce, "Preserving Georgia's Historic Courthouses," Historic Preservation Division, Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Atlanta, GA, 2005.

[5] Please refer to Michael P. Malone, Richard B. Roeder and William L. Lang, *Montana A History of Two Centuries*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002) for further discussion.

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

Stillwater County-an introduction

The following presents a very cursory introduction to Stillwater County and its history.[6]

Stillwater County in south-central Montana became the thirty-fourth county in Montana in March 1913, formed from the existing Yellowstone, Carbon and Sweet Grass counties. The town of Columbus was chosen as the county seat. The county stretches over 1800 sq. miles and has an irregular shape that extends eastward to Park City, westward to Reed Point, the Beartooth Mountains to the south, and Lake Basin to the north, almost reaching to the Musselshell River.

The Yellowstone River divides the county in half and serves as the major east/west transportation corridor through the county. The northern portion consists of wide-open basins, rolling hills and coulees interspersed with small lakes and intermittent streams. The Beartooth Mountains form the backdrop for the southern portion of the county. Numerous clear and rushing streams, like the Stillwater River and East and West Rosebud creeks, issue from the mountains forming the well-watered valley bottoms surrounded by dry land hills.

Stillwater County has always been sparsely populated. The 1920 Census, the first census conducted after it became a county in 1913, recorded a population of 7,630. The population declined each decade after that, dropping to a low of 4,632 people. The 1980s saw a gradual increase in residents, rising to the current population of approximately 9,500.

The histories of the northern and southern portions of Stillwater County reveal both differences and similarities. All of Stillwater County was originally part of Crow tribal territory. The Crow ceded the northern portion in 1868 and cattlemen immediately recognized its grazing potential. Beginning in 1880, John T. Murray developed the Montana Cattle Company or "79" that developed into the largest livestock operation in the region, running both cattle and sheep. The arrival of homesteaders in the early twentieth century coincided with the eventual demise of the "79."

Southern Stillwater County remained part of the Crow Indian Reservation for most of the nineteenth century and for a short period housed the second Crow Agency. In the early 1890s, however, the Crow Tribe ceded this land too, which then opened for settlement in 1892, with the result that squatters soon occupied the well-watered valley bottoms until receiving their public land patents. The inland town of Absarokee served these early settlers.

All of Stillwater County experienced the homesteading boom years from 1909 to 1918 when hundreds of individuals and families came into the county and settled on available public lands, mostly dryland hills. The Northern Pacific Railroad, whose right-of-way parallels the

[6] The two histories of Stillwater County are Jim Annin, *They Gazed at the Beartooths*, 2 vols., (Billings, MT: Reported Printing $ Supply, 1964) and Patty Hooker, *Moccasins, Mining & Montana's 34th County,* (Virginia Beach, VA: The Donning Company Publishers, 2013).

Yellowstone River, brought many of these homesteaders to Stillwater County. In northern Stillwater County, the successful wheat production encouraged the construction of a Northern Pacific Railway spur line, and led to the establishment of the small towns of Molt, Nora (Wheat Basin) and Rapelje. A railroad never ventured into southern Stillwater County but small communities like Fishtail, Dean, Nye and Roscoe served the homesteaders.

The drought and depressions of the 1920s and 1930s affected all of Stillwater County causing population loss and the sale or abandonment of homesteads, resulting in fewer farms with larger acreages. Southern Stillwater County continued as a primarily livestock grazing country with both sheep and cattle in the early years and small dairy herds in the 1940s and 1950s. Today, cattle dominate the ranches with principal crops of alfalfa and mixed native hay.

While Northern Stillwater County remains a wheat and small grains producing region, the area did experience other economic drivers during the first half of the twentieth century. Within the Lake Basin area, a small oil boom began in the mid-1920s and continued through the 1940s. Another brief industrial development occurred near Molt where a Carbon Crystal plant operated until the mid-1930s.

Recently, the development of renewable energy emerged expanding the economy of Stillwater County. Two wind power generation fields were developed in north Stillwater County, and a utility-scale solar power generation facility was constructed near Reedpoint.

Mining developed intermittently in southern Stillwater County, concentrated on the Upper Stillwater, beginning in the early 1880s when prospectors discovered a copper-bearing ore. Efforts to develop the district were abandoned when the claims were found to be within the Crow reservation. Other mining operations were attempted but failed until the 1940s. With the entrance of the United States in World War II, mining of chromium deposits briefly flourished at the Benbow and Mouat mines. Other efforts followed with more consistent mining activity beginning in the early 1980s when the Stillwater Mining Company commenced serious operations to extract platinum and associated palladium; these efforts continue to the present under the Sibanye-Stillwater Mine appellation.

Another significant industrial development in southern Stillwater County occurred in the 1920s when the Montana Power Company constructed a hydroelectric power plant, damming Mystic Lake at the head of the West Rosebud in the Beartooth Mountains. This electrical generation facility is still in operation today.

Along the Yellowstone River, the communities of Columbus and Park City, along with rural subdivisions, contribute to the county's overall population growth as bedroom communities to the population center of greater Billings. Today, the Stillwater County economic base relies on agriculture and mining, strengthened by energy development, ranging from oil and gas to renewable energy, as well as a small manufacturing industry in Columbus. Outdoor recreational activity, cultural opportunities, and second home developments also have become significant, primarily since the 1960's, confined mainly to the southern portion of the county.

Columbus, the county seat of Stillwater County

The following historic context is taken primarily from Jon Axline and Joan L. Brownell "Atlas Block," National Register of Historic Places nomination, (listed 8/24/11). This narrative presents the early history of settlement in Stillwater County and the development of the county seat of Columbus where the Stillwater County Courthouse is located.

The Stillwater County Courthouse is situated in the town of Columbus, Montana, located in the broad Yellowstone River valley of south-central Montana. The Stillwater River empties into the Yellowstone River about one-half mile west of the Stillwater County Courthouse.

Archeological evidence indicates that the Crow people resided in the Montana-Wyoming area for well over five hundred years and possibly longer. The Crow people call themselves Apsaalooke, or "Children of the Large Beaked Bird" and historically recognized three tribal divisions of which two ranged in the vicinity of Columbus, Montana. These two divisions were the River Crow who ranged from the Yellowstone River north to the Milk River, and the Mountain Crow who lived in southern Montana and northern Wyoming, with the Black Hills marking the eastern edge of their territory and present-day Livingston, Montana on the Yellowstone River bounding the western extent of their territory.[7]

Captain William Clark and 22 members of the Corps of Discovery traveled down the Yellowstone River past the mouth of the Stillwater River on July 20, 1806. Clark noted the river's Crow name, the Itch-ke-pe (Rose) ar-ja (River) in his journal. Concurrent with the Lewis and Clark Expedition, Canadian North West Company trader Antoine LaRocque explored much of the Yellowstone River basin in an attempt to establish trade with the Crow Indians on behalf of his employer. Within just a few years, both Canadian and American fur trappers and traders began working the area to tap into the lucrative Crow trade. The fur companies established a system of trading posts on the Yellowstone River to corner that trade beginning in 1807. By the late 1840s, the Yellowstone River and its tributaries were well known to Euro-Americans and an active trade had been established with the Crow.[8]

The town of Columbus is situated on lands originally designated Crow Indian Reservation by the 1851 Fort Laramie Treaty. Crow Territory encompassed all lands (an estimated 38 million acres) south of the Musselshell River between the headwaters of the Yellowstone River to the west, the headwaters of the Powder River to the east and the main ridge of the Wind River Mountains in Wyoming as its south boundary. The Mountain Crow occupied the land south of the Yellowstone River while the River Crow occupied the territory north of the Yellowstone.

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[7] The third division, The Kicked In The Bellies, traveled from the Bighorn Mountains to the Wind River Range in central Wyoming. Information on the Crow Tribe is derived primarily from *The Apsáalooke (Crow Indians) of Montana Tribal Histories* Little Big Horn College, Crow Agency, MT, http://lib.lbhc.cc.mt.us/history. accessed March 5, 2019.

[8] Gary E. Moulton, ed., *The Definitive Journals of Lewis & Clark: Over the Rockies to St. Louis*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 209; Mark H. Brown, *The Plainsmen of the Yellowstone: A History of the Yellowstone Basin*, (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1962), 25-32; Burlingame, *The Montana Frontier*, (Helena, MT: State Publishing, 1942), 48-49, 56-57.

The Sioux and Blackfeet constantly threatened the Crow within this territory and pushed them towards the south-central region of Montana. After the discovery of gold in southwestern Montana in the 1860s, continuous pressures by non-Indians gradually resulted in several reductions to the original Crow Indian Reservation boundaries.[9]

The Crow, cognizant of the fact that Euro-Americans were invading their historic homeland, allied themselves with the US Army and agreed to a second treaty in 1868. The 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty with the Crow severely restricted their reservation, removing all lands north of the Yellowstone River, all lands south of Montana Territory's southern boundary and east of a line between the Big Horn and Powder Rivers. An 1880 agreement, ratified in 1882, eliminated all Crow lands west of the Boulder River. The Crow Tribe also ceded a wide strip of land near the present-day town of Red Lodge, allowing for the development of recently discovered coal deposits. Lands south of the Yellowstone River within today's Stillwater County remained Crow Territory until the last decade of the nineteenth century.[10]

Even before the north side of the Yellowstone was removed from Crow Territory in 1868, and despite the presence of sometimes hostile Lakota and Northern Cheyenne warriors, two men, named Mithof and Kaufman, illegally established a trading post and saloon, known as Eagle's Nest, on the north side of the Yellowstone River across from the mouth of the Stillwater River in 1865. The men traded with the Crow, Lakota, and Northern Cheyenne Indians. They also traded with emigrants on the Bozeman Trail until the Indians forced the closure of the trail in 1868. Like many trading posts located just outside the reservation boundaries, it catered to a primarily Indian clientele and much of its profits came from the sale of whiskey. When the Seventh Cavalry passed through the area in 1875 while escorting railroad surveyors it "did not encounter a single person between Coulson [sic] and Mission except for the folks . . . at Eagle's Nest. It was a dangerous route."[11]

In 1875, the relocation of Crow Agency from Fort Parker on the Yellowstone River at Mission Creek to adjacent to the East Rosebud River south of present-day Absarokee, Montana brought two other traders, Horace and Charles Countryman. These two men moved their ranch down the Yellowstone River to a site near Mithoff and Kaufman's Eagle's Nest. The Countrymans went into business with Hugo Hoppe and William H. Norton and their operation also consisted of a trading post and saloon. In addition, the men operated a toll road west of the settlement and a

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[9] Treaty of Ft. Laramie, 1851, Charles J. Kappler, ed. and comp. *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties 2 vols.,* vol. 2 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1904), 594-596. Crow treaties and agreements are available in Kappler at http://www.digital.library.okstate.edu/kappler/. For a discussion of reductions to the Crow Reservation, see William M. Brooke, "A Contest over Land: Nineteenth Century Crow-White Relations," *Montana Vistas: Selected Historical Essays* ed. Robert Swartout, Jr., (Washington, DC: University Press of America, Inc., 1981), 1-24 and Burton M. Smith, "Politics and the Crow Indian Land Cessions, 1851-1904," *Montana, The Magazine of Western History* 36:4 (Autumn 1986), 24-37.

[10] Ibid.

[11] *Montana Place Names: From Alzada to Zortman*, (Helena, MT: Montana Historical Society Press, 2009), 52; Don Spritzer, *Roadside History of Montana*, (Missoula, MT: Mountain Press Publishing, 1999), 346; Clyde Reichelt, "Captain Clark Spent a Week in 1806 on Site of Columbus," *The Great Falls Tribune*, June 22, 1958; Jim Annin, *They Gazed on the Beartooths*, vol. 2, 22.

cable ferry across the Yellowstone River just to the south of their trading post. The Countrymans would play a significant role in the settlement of the Columbus area.[12]

Like Mithof and Kaufman, the Countrymans and their partners traded mostly with the Crow with much of their profits based on the sale of bad whiskey to the Indians. Indeed, their Euro-American customers soon called their operation Sheep Dip, because the alcohol distilled there "tasted more like insecticide than whiskey;" not surprising since the Countrymans intended the vile concoction for the Indians and not for Euro-American consumption. The Countrymans had earned a reputation as whiskey traders by 1876. In April 1876, General John Gibbon's "Montana Column," camped near their trading post on its way down the Yellowstone River to rendezvous with General Alfred Terry and Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer during the campaign against the Lakota and Northern Cheyenne. Lieutenant James Bradley described Countryman's operation as "the last occupied house on the Yellowstone. It is a trading establishment, whiskey being the principal commodity, and the customers primarily being the Crow Indians."[13]

In 1879, as the Northern Pacific Railway advanced its transcontinental railroad through eastern Montana, it became obvious to the residents of Sheep Dip that the railroad would pass through the Yellowstone Valley near them, so they changed the name of their little settlement to Stillwater in the hopes of enticing the railroad to include it on its mainline and began development near the old trading post site. As the railroad neared the settlement, Stillwater included three saloons, the Stillwater Hotel, several dwellings, a blacksmith shop, and general store. The railroad, however, was not pleased with the site of the "town" and established its rail station one-half mile east of Countryman's old trading post in 1882.[14]

There is no indication that the Northern Pacific Railway platted the original townsite of Stillwater (today's Columbus) but the town developed in an orderly geometric pattern similar to other railroad towns. In 1889, Patrick Lavelle purchased approximately 28 acres from the Northern Pacific Railway Company north of the railroad. That same year, he platted his Lavelle's Addition to the town of Stillwater within this acreage, all north of the tracks. Lavelle's

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[12] Born in Ohio in 1824, Horace Countryman arrived in Montana Territory from California in 1866. For a while, he operated stamp mills at Virginia City, Philipsburg, and Highland before moving to the Yellowstone Valley in 1873. When the agency relocated to the upper Stillwater, they simply packed up and moved downriver with it. Jim Annin, *Horace Countryman: Unsung Hero*, (Privately Published, no date), 1-2; Roberta Carkeek Cheney, *Names on the Face of Montana: The Story of Montana's Place Names*, (Missoula: Mountain Press Publishing, 1990), 59; Spritzer, *Roadside History of Montana*, 347; Brown, *Plainsmen of the Yellowstone*, 356-57; Annin, *They Gazed on the Beartooths*, vol. 2, 22; Reichelt, "Captain Clark;" Albert L. Babcock, *An Illustrated History of the Yellowstone Valley*, (Spokane: Western Historical Publishing Co., 1907), 308; M. A. Leeson, *History of Montana, 1739-1885*, (Chicago: Warner, Beers & Company, 1885), 1362-1363.

[13] *Montana Place Names*, 52; Spritzer, *Roadside History of Montana*, 347; Brown, *Plainsmen of the Yellowstone*, 356-57; James H. Bradley, *The March of the Montana Column: A Prelude to the Custer Disaster*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961), 37-38; Annin, *They Gazed on the Beartooths*, vol. 2, 24; Reichelt, "Captain Clark."

[14] Annin, *Horace Countryman*, 1; *Montana Place Names*, 52; Brown, *Plainsmen of the Yellowstone*, 357; Annin, *They Gazed on the Beartooths*, vol. 2, pp. 23-26; Reichelt, "Captain Clark;" Babcock, *Illustrated History of the Yellowstone Valley*, 308; Montana Land Tract Books, Volume 71, Montana Historical Society, Helena, Montana.

Addition is arranged in a grid pattern with a single main business street called Pike Avenue parallel to the Northern Pacific Railway right-of-way with streets for businesses and residences perpendicular to Pike Avenue and the tracks. Horace Countryman followed Lavelle in 1891 and formalized his plat of the town of Stillwater, consisting of blocks (complete and incomplete) on either side of the Northern Pacific Railway tracks. Long-time residents Horace and Charles Countryman, Pat Lavelle, and William H. Norton owned much of the townsite either through various land laws or purchase of railroad land.[15]

The Northern Pacific Railroad officially christened the town Stillwater and it soon became the trading center for a large cattle and sheep ranching area. In 1890, the federal government negotiated another agreement with the Crow Tribe (ratified in 1892) for a further reduction of their reservation. On October 15, 1892, a vast territory south of the Yellowstone River became available for non-Indian land settlement.[16]

In 1893, the Northern Pacific changed the name of the community to Columbus because of confusion with Stillwater, Minnesota. Yellowstone Valley booster and historian Albert Babcock later wrote of Columbus that

> [I]t did not grow up as rapidly as did many of the towns which came into being with the building of the railroad, and there was no "boom period" there. A prosperous trade was enjoyed by the few business houses that constituted the town, however, and [Columbus] became known early as one of the substantial towns of Yellowstone County.[17]

Horace Countryman and Joe Kern built a timber toll bridge across the Yellowstone River south of the community in 1893. The bridge and the railroad made Columbus the second most important community in Yellowstone County after Billings. By 1894, Columbus had four grocery stores, a general store, five saloons, a weekly newspaper, a bakery, a blacksmith shop, a hotel, and a harness shop. It boasted a population of 150 in 1895. In the same year, a sandstone quarry opened north of Columbus and the stone used to build the Montana State Capital in 1900. At its height in 1901, the Montana Sandstone Company employed 72 men with a NPRR spur line built to the quarry. It continued to ship sandstone for government buildings throughout Montana throughout the first decade of the twentieth century and provided the sandstone for local commercial businesses along Pike Avenue.[18]

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[15] "Plat of the Town of Stillwater Yellowstone County Montana," on file, Office of Clerk and Recorder, Stillwater County Courthouse, Columbus, MT; Deed Book 2, 342, Office of Clerk and Recorder, Stillwater County, Columbus, MT; "Plat of LaVelle's Addition to the Town of Stillwater Montana," on file, Office of Clerk and Recorder, Stillwater County, Columbus, MT. The discrepancy between dates has yet to be solved – it is possible that Countryman just did not file his plat until 1891, the year before ceded Crow lands were open for settlement.

[16] Kappler, *Indian Affairs*, vol. 1, 432-436.

[17] Babcock, *Illustrated History of the Yellowstone Valley*, 307-308.

[18] Federal Writers' Project, *Montana: A State Guide Book*, (Helena: Department of Agricultural, Labor, and Industry, 1939), 196; Brown, *Plainsmen of the Yellowstone*, 357; Babcock, *Illustrated History of the Yellowstone Valley*, 307-308; Annin, *They Gazed on the Beartooths*, vol. 2, 26-27; Sanborn Fire Insurance Map: Columbus, Montana, 1897, Montana Historical Society, Helena, Montana; Kennedy Henry and James Geiger, *Tri-County*

In the early twentieth century, Columbus served as an important agricultural trading and shipping point in the Yellowstone Valley. Columbus grew steadily, and with its solid business base incorporated in 1907. The 1909 Enlarged Homestead Act had a profound impact on Columbus as hundreds of families flooded into lands south of the Yellowstone and onto the benchlands north of the city. The population of Columbus grew from 175 people in 1900 to 521 people by 1910. Columbus became an important trade center with access to national markets through the Northern Pacific Railroad. In March 1913, Stillwater County was created from portions of Carbon, Sweet Grass, and Yellowstone counties. The Legislature designated Columbus as the county seat.[19]

With the formation of Stillwater County, Columbus enjoyed a moderate economic boom. The city boasted a modern water system and the Billings & Eastern Montana Power Company provided it with electricity. Columbus had an elementary and high school and two churches in 1913. The city's commercial district transformed from mostly wood frame buildings facing onto the Northern Pacific Railway in 1907, to a district consisting primarily of sandstone and brick buildings by 1920. Businesses included two banks, three hotels, several large mercantiles (including the prominent Columbus Mercantile Company), a barber, cobblers, and only two saloons. In 1913, the city awarded a contract to Livingston, Montana contractor A. L. McLaughlin to construct concrete sidewalks on Pike Avenue and the city installed lampposts in the business district. Two years later, in 1915, the city and the Northern Pacific Railway collaborated to construct a city park on the railroad right-of-way opposite the business district. As predicted by its supporters, Columbus was the "key to the resources of the whole Stillwater Country. Its resources are the resources of the county: its inhabitants the true citizens of Stillwater."[20]

Like all Montana cities, Columbus survived economic depressions, droughts, and a mass exodus of homesteaders from the state in the first half of the twentieth century. The community's prominence as a trade and shipping center enabled it to weather the bad times. Except in 1930 when the population of Columbus dropped to 834 people, it has steadily grown since 1940 with a current (2017) population of a little over 2000. The Yellowstone Trail in 1912, and later US Highway 10, passed through town on Pike Avenue. This made Pike Avenue part of the primary east/west highway corridor through Montana until replaced by the interstate highway system in the 1950-1960s. During World War II, Columbus prospered due to its proximity to the Benbow and Mouat chrome mines in the Beartooth Mountains south of town. The ore was trucked to the

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Atlas: Meagher, Sweet Grass, and Carbon, (Big Timber, MT: *Tri-County News*, 1903), 76, 78-79; Annin, *Horace Countryman*, 2; United State Census Records: Yellowstone County, Montana, viewed at www.ancestry.com; for a comprehensive history of the sandstone quarry, see soon to be published Linda Dutcher, *They Built Columbus. . . and Montana* (Columbus, MT: Museum of the Beartooths, 2019).

[19] United States Census Records; Annin, *They Gazed on the Beartooths*, vol. 2, 22, 26; Babcock, *An Illustrated History of the Yellowstone Valley*, 307, 308; Henry and Geiger, *Tri-County Atlas*, 76; *Montana Place Names*, 254-255, Cheney, *Names on the Face of Montana*, 255; "Stillwater County Now a Reality," *The Columbus Democrat*, March 22, 1913.

[20] "Many Improvements Now being Made," *The Columbus Democrat*, September 20, 1913; "Stillwater County – Foster Parent of Territorial Waifs," *The Columbus Democrat*, November 22, 1913; Sanborn Fire Insurance Map: Columbus, Montana, 1912; "Will Build a City Park," *The Columbus News*, April 29, 1915.

Northern Pacific Railway at Columbus and US Highway 10. Since the 1980s the Stillwater Mining Company (now Sibanye-Stillwater) have operated a smelter and metallurgical complex in Columbus which is the major economic force in the county. Timberweld Manufacturing specialized in custom timber roof systems and operated from the 1950s until recently. Montana Silversmiths began in 1973 and continues to produce quality silver products from buckles to jewelry in Columbus.

Unlike many towns along the old Northern Pacific Railway, the Columbus economy for most of its existence has been notable for its stability. The town's traditional function as the county seat, a trade center for farms and ranches in Stillwater County, its location on the railroad and Interstate 90, and its proximity to Billings, Montana's largest city, have kept the town prosperous.

Stillwater County Courthouse

Stillwater County was created on March 15, 1913 by an overwhelming majority of voters from Yellowstone, Carbon and Sweet Grass counties. On March 31, 1913, the newly-elected Stillwater County Commissioners (after the county celebration) held their first formal meeting, "drawing a great number of spectators who were anxious to witness the first official meeting in the new county."[21] At this meeting, they finalized their lease agreement with A. L. Thomas for the Maryland Hotel on Pike Avenue to serve as the temporary Stillwater County Courthouse. The county officers moved into the building by the end of May after some remodeling.[22]

The commissioners felt the "need for a permanent home was a matter of deep concern" and began discussions with William Norton about purchasing his property for county buildings. As previously mentioned, William Norton joined forces with Hugo Hoppe and Horace Countryman on the north side of the Yellowstone River after the Crow Agency relocated south of present-day Absarokee. Norton remained in the area and served in both the territorial legislature and the first state legislature for Yellowstone County. Norton settled north of the Yellowstone River where he received 320 acres in 1889 through a cash entry land patent from the federal government. He also acquired lands within the present-day town of Columbus, both from the Northern Pacific Railway in 1887 and the estate of Horace Countryman in 1899. Mr. Norton, a strong town promoter, involved himself in numerous local businesses and endeavors and moved into Columbus after he built an impressive two-story brick house in 1899.[23]

His house sat in the middle of his Norton Addition to the Town of Stillwater that he platted in 1907, a few blocks north of the commercial district of Columbus. He left the area surrounding

[21] *The Columbus News*, "Commissioners Meet For Important Session," April 3, 1915.

[22] A. L. Thomas to Board of County Commissioners of the County of Stillwater, Lease No. 73, April 3, 1913, Office of Clerk and Recorder, Stillwater County Courthouse, Columbus, MT; *The Columbus News,* May 29, 1913.

[23] *The Columbus News,* March 10, 1938. William C. Hagen of Columbus has recently authored a book on Norton entitled *Colonel William H. Norton Shadowing Montana History*, (New York: Page Publishing, 2017); see also Jim Annin, *They Gazed on the Beartooths*, vol. 2, 61-63; William Norton, T2S R20E Section 22, www.glo.org, accessed February 25, 2019; Deed Book 2, page 329 and Deed Book 3, page 271, Office of Clerk and Recorder, Stillwater County Courthouse, Columbus, MT. The Norton House was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1982.

the house free of block and lot divisions, fortuitous for both him and newly created Stillwater County as it became the location of the Stillwater County Courthouse. By the end of April, talks between Norton and the commissioners came to fruition and on May 13, 1913, the County purchased the Norton property, including the house, for $7,000. It appears that as part of this purchase the commissioners requested that Norton separate the property from the rest of the Norton subdivision. Therefore, Norton platted the Court House Subdivision of Block 10 that designated a Court House Square situated between Third and Fourth Avenues and Block 10 and 11 of Norton's Addition.[24] The Nortons moved out of their house after the county purchased the property.

With the purchase of the Norton property, the commissioners could now move forward with another priority, the erection of a permanent county jail. They first advertised for contractors to construct the county jail in April but had to re-advertise in May. On June 3, 1913, they awarded the jail construction contract to Chase Lumber Co. for $4,965.00, who had a lumber yard in Columbus managed by B. E. Berglund.[25]

> The price for the new structure, with fixtures and equipment will amount to nearly $7,000. The jail will be placed on the land which was recently purchased by the officials for a courthouse site, and will be provided also with quarters for the sheriff and jailer. Stone from the home quarry will be used in the building.
>
> All the modern apparatus in fixtures have been purchased, including four cells which can be opened all together or single. There will be accommodations for 16 prisoners in the bastille.[26]

Of course, the stone "from the home quarry" is stone from the Columbus Sandstone Company, whose sandstone quarry was located immediately north of Columbus. The Montana State Capital Building is constructed of this sandstone, as well as numerous public buildings across Montana and all the sandstone commercial buildings along Pike Avenue in Columbus.[27]

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[24] Plat of Norton's Addition to the Town of Stillwater, 1907; Deed Book 1, pages 62-63; Plat of Court House Subdivision of Block 10, 1913, all at Office of Clerk and Recorder, Stillwater County Courthouse, Columbus, MT. It was Eliza Norton who sold the property, not William Norton, although he also signed the deed. The same day Norton platted the Court House Square subdivision, the county gave the City of Columbus land on either side of Court House Square to be used as streets, the street to the west named Norton and the street to the east named Labey, the maiden name of Eliza Norton.

[25] Commissioners Journal, Book 1, April 28, 2013 and June 3, 1913, Office of Clerk and Recorder, Stillwater County Courthouse, Columbus, MT; *The Billings Gazette,* "Contracts Are Let For Stillwater Jail," June 5, 1913.

[26] *The Billings Gazette,* "Contracts Are Let For Stillwater Jail," June 5, 1913. C. H. Chase Lumber originated in North Dakota but expanded to Montana by 1908. By 1914, when it sold out to Midland Lumber and Coal Company, it had lumber yards in numerous eastern towns including Columbus. *Billings Gazette*, January 10, 1908; December 19, 1914. The original jail cells were removed in the late 1990s.

[27] For a history of the sandstone company, see Dutcher, *They Built Columbus . . . And Then Montana*. By 1920, the sandstone quarry no longer produced large blocks but only stone for memorials, etc. which is presumably one reason while the courthouse is not sandstone.

With the completion of the jail, plans for a permanent courthouse did not resurface until the beginning of 1917 when the *Columbus News* asked for public comments about whether the residents of Stillwater County supported a new courthouse.[28] W. F. Olsen thought that "the prisoners at Big Timber have better quarters than any of Stillwater county's officials" and felt that a new courthouse "is entirely in keeping with the progressive spirit of the county." Nathan Nordahl "was heartily ashamed of the county courthouse when I entered a dilapidated shell of a building." The *Park City Pioneer* called the temporary courthouse a "firetrap" and "old rattle-trap." The cost of the rental and maintenance also presented as a major concern. A few individuals felt that the county should first pay more attention to road improvements rather than build a new courthouse.[29]

Regardless of either positive or negative comments, the commissioners did not return to the courthouse question again until early March 1918 after five years of growth and prosperity since the creation of Stillwater County. After the commissioners examined the temporary courthouse to determine its "fitness," they declared in a resolution that the building serving as the county courthouse "is insufficient and insecure for the proper housing of the County officials, the County Records and for holding of the District Court" and "for the convenience of said County, that a new, modern, fire-proof and adequate Court-house be built and furnished."[30]

In May 1918, the commissioners hired architect Warren A. Dedrick to design the Stillwater County Courthouse. Dedrick told the *Billings Gazette* that the new courthouse "is to be three stories in height and of fireproof construction, with every modern convenience. It will be of reinforced concrete and brick and stone. The site selected is admirable and includes a plan for a future civic center arrangement."[31]

The commissioners announced that the cost for the new courthouse would be $90,000.00 and a special county election would be held to determine if they could issue and procure bonds for this amount. In May, they sent their request to the federal financial board to issue and sell bonds for not over $100,000.00.[32] The federal agency responded stating that the U.S. policy was that "all but absolutely necessary projects be deferred until the close of the war," emphasizing they would

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[28] Patty Hooker in her *Moccasins, Mining & Montana's 34th County,* The Donning Company Publishers, Virginia Beach, VA, 2006: 37, states that the county commissioners pledged not to build a permanent courthouse until five years after the creation of Stillwater County; *The Columbus News*, "Officials Move To Courthouse," May 5, 1921.

[29] *The Columbus News*, "Shall County Build Courthouse? Express Your Views to the News," January 18, 1917; "What Others Think of a New Courthouse for Stillwater Co.," January 25, 1917; "State Objections to New Courthouse." February 1, 1917.

[30] Commissioners Journal, Book 1, March 8, 1918, Office of Clerk and Recorder, Stillwater County Courthouse, Columbus, MT.

[31] Agreement between Stillwater County and Warren A. Dedrick, May 7, 1918, Office of Clerk & Recorder, Stillwater County Courthouse, Columbus, MT; *The Billings Gazette*, "$100,000 Court House Proposed for Stillwater," May 8, 1918.

[32] The extra $10,000 was to cover county indebtedness for the bonds.

"consider it a very patriotic action" for the commissioners to "defer" the courthouse construction. The commissioners therefore had no choice but to call off the bond election.[33]

World War 1 ended in November 1918 but the commissioners waited until late summer 1919 to reintroduce a new resolution for issuing bonds for a new courthouse. This time they asked for $75,000.00 for courthouse bonds and called for a special election in September. Although this proposition met with some opposition, the courthouse bond issue passed with 821 voting for and 458 voting against.[34]

With the success of the courthouse bond issue, the commissioners, presumably on the suggestion of their architect, Warren A. Dedrick, immediately visited the Granite County Courthouse in Philipsburg Montana "with a view to building one in this county along the same general lines."[35]

With the courthouse plans ready to go, the commissioners advertised for basement and foundation work in November 1919. They had to re-advertise, and in late December the commissioners awarded the contract to Sam Webb of Columbus for $10,630.00. Webb completed the work the following spring.[36]

In the beginning of March 1920, the commissioners requested proposals for the "erection of a court house building." The commissioners opened the bids on April 8 and awarded the contract to James and Ainslie of Helena, Montana at a cost of approximately $59,000.00. The commissioners also awarded the plumbing and heating contract to Columbus Plumbing and Heating at a cost of $13,057.50.[37]

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[33] *Columbus News-Democrat*, "County Commissioners Take Steps to Build Court House," May 5, 1918 and "Court House Bond Issue Is Called Off," June 6, 1918; Commissioners Journal, Book 1, June 4, 1918. The United States entered World War II in April 1917.

[34] Commissioners Journal Book 1, August 1919; *The Columbus News-Democrat*, "New Courthouse Will Cost 20 Cents Per $1000 Taxable Value," August 7, 1919; Commissioners Journal, Book 1, September 1919; *The Columbus News*, September 11, 1919.

[35] *The Billings Gazette*, September 15, 1919. John Link and Charles Haire, of Link and Haire of Billings, MT designed the Granite County Courthouse completed in 1913. It is a three and one-half story Neoclassical civic building and the Stillwater County Courthouse holds some similarities, Historic Markers in Montana, "Granite County Courthouse," https://hmdb.org, accessed April 6, 2019.

[36] Commissioners Journal Book 1, November 12, 1919, December 12, 1919; December 22, 1919; Agreement between Sam Webb and Stillwater County, December 22, 1919, Office of Clerk & Recorder, Stillwater County Courthouse, Columbus, MT. Sam Webb came to Montana around 1892 and settled in Columbus after trying ranching. He began a road construction business in Columbus and served as the chairman of the Montana Highway Commission under Governor Sam Steward in the 1910s. Jim Anin, *They Gazed at the Beartooths*, vol. 2, 264-266.

[37] Commissioners Journal, Book 1, March 3, 1920 and April 8, 1920; Agreement between James & Ainslie and Stillwater County, April 8, 1920, Office of Clerk & Recorder, Stillwater County Courthouse, Columbus, MT. The contractors from Helena apparently joined forces to bid on the Stillwater County Courthouse project. R. C. James came to Montana in 1907 and constructed many buildings in the capital city including the Montana Livestock building, Hawthorne School and Park Avenue apartments as well as other public and private buildings in the state. James T. Ainslie came to Helena in 1884, moved to Anaconda to work at the smelter and then returned to Helena in the early 1900s. He was a carpenter and contractor in Helena until his death in 1922. The *Anaconda Standard*, December 4, 1922; the *Independent-Record*, December 4, 1922 and October 4, 1963.

The *Columbus News* announced the award exclaiming that three stories will be completed that will "give plenty of room for the proper operation of the county's business" for years to come.

> The building is about sixty by ninety, with all the floors above grade line, and store rooms and a furnace room in the basement. The best of concrete has been used in the foundations and basement. Brick will be used for the superstructure, trimmed with Indiana limestone of [sic] artificial stone. The interior will be finished in hardwood throughout. Vault space which is fireproof and burglar proof will be spacious enough to run the county for years.[38]

Reports on the progress of the construction are few. In July 1920, the *Columbus News* reported that the "courthouse contractors are getting well along with the first story and are now preparing to cast the first floor which will be of reinforced concrete. A light colored brick with white mortar joints is being used on the building, which with the cast concrete stone trim being used, makes quite a nobby effect." Henry Hallert reportedly laid the brick that came from the Lewistown Tile and Brick Plant in Lewistown, Montana.[39]

As the work continued, it became apparent to the commissioners that the county did not have enough funds to complete the courthouse and the costs for the courthouse were going to exceed the budgeted amount. In October 1920, they attempted another courthouse bond issue for $50,000.00, which failed. The failure of the bond should have been no surprise in 1920 when Stillwater County and most of eastern Montana were experiencing a severe drought and depression. According to the *Columbus News*, the county had already spent $88,000 on the courthouse and needed approximately $20,000 more with the decision to add a fourth floor during construction. With the failure of the bond, the commissioners were legally allowed to spend only $10,000 per year on the project. A review of the commissioner's minutes for 1920-1921 reveals them transferring monies from different county funds into the courthouse fund.[40]

By December 1920, the courthouse exterior was near completion and they sold all the surplus brick in January 1921. Understandably impatient to move into the courthouse, the commissioners decided to plaster and finish the cement floors for all the "working rooms" on the first two floors. By March 1921, the "plasterers have completed their work in the new Courthouse, and the concrete floors will be finished this week. Work will be immediately started on the finish work and the building should be ready for occupancy within a few weeks."[41]

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[38] *The Columbus News*, April 15, 1920.

[39] *The Columbus News*, July 29, 1920; *The Anaconda Standard*, July 29, 1920; Commissioners Journal, Book 2, December 16, 1920.

[40] Commissioners Journal, Book 1, September 9, 1920; *The Columbus News*, October 28, 1920, April 5, 1921, May 5, 1921.

[41] Commissioners Journal, Book 2, December 15, 1920; December 16, 1920; January 5, 1921; *The Columbus News*, March 3, 1921.

The new Stillwater County Courthouse opened its doors on May 2, 1921. The *Columbus News* suggested that everyone "should make it a point to give the new court-house the once over. It is really a dandy and one of which we should all be proud."[42]

> Stillwater's new home is the finest building [sic] the city and one of the best looking courthouses in the state. It is 66 by 88 feet in dimension and consists of four floors, and a subbasement. Brick has been used for its walls and partitions, while the trimmings are made of artificial stone on the ledges, cornices, facades, etc. A side-stairway leads to the first floor from the outside, while two passages to the ground floor are available.
>
> In the sub-basement is the furnace room, and sewer flushtanks. On the ground floor are the offices of the county agent, superintendent, sheriff, surveyor and for the present Gus Iverson is holding out in Number 1, although his real abode is supposed to be 2 flights nearer heaven. On the landing floor the west half is used by the county assessor and treasurer, while the commissioners room, and county clerks office is in the east side. The second floor above the ground floor is not finished, nor is the fourth floor of the building. It is one this floor that the judges chamber and court room are located. On the east side E. E. Wilson has rented an office for his abstract business. The other east room is Gus Iversons.[43]
>
> The last floor holds the jury room and other offices.
>
> On each floor is a spacious hall, with stairs at the north side leading up on two sides to the new floor up. Lavatories and wash-rooms are found on two of the floors, with a drinking fountain on each one. There are lots of windows, finished in fine fashion, to give plenty of light. Between each two offices is a big fire-proof vault to more than secure all the "dope" that the county officials may compile. Each office has a clothes closet, and apparel rom [sic].[44]

Unfortunately, the courthouse interior remained incomplete.

> There are no stairs as yet, the corridor floors are not finished in anything but the rough concrete, and most of the hardware is still lacking. The drinking fountains are not installed. The jury and court-rooms are unfurnished. A visitor into the building is immediately impressed with the necessity of a few thousand more dollars with which to complete the building. Lawn, trees and a

[42] *The Columbus News*, "Officials Move To Courthouse," May 5, 1921.

[43] Mr. Iverson was the Clerk of Court.

[44] *The Columbus News*, "Officials Move To Courthouse," May 5, 1921.

> landscape effect will have to wait until more money is forthcoming.[45]

During the 1920s, the courthouse gradually changed from an incomplete shell to a finished interior. It is difficult to trace how the improvements progressed as the commissioner's journals provide little detail. District Judge A. P. Stark reportedly was "authorized" to order the county to complete the courtroom and jury room but it is unclear when this happened. In November 1923, District Judge Miller ordered the commissioners to finish several rooms on the courthouse floor (third floor), including the judge's chambers and clerk of court office. Another major project was the installation of the terrazzo flooring. In December 1924, the commissioners awarded the contract to Frank Puccinelli of Puccinelli Brothers of Billings for the installation of the flooring and base for the first two floors and connecting stairway at a cost of $2200.00[46]

In October 1923, the commissioners ordered a flagpole erected on the courthouse roof although only temporary steps (possibly railroad ties) accessed the courthouse entrance and there was still a pile of dirt from the basement excavation. It was not until 1927 when the commissioners awarded the contract to construct sidewalks, stairs and landings to Arthur Archibald. This was followed in 1928, by a contract with William Jongsma of Columbus to paint all the exterior surfaces and putty the windows.[47]

Landscaping for the Court House Square had a slow start. The excavation dirt was finally "smoothed out" in the spring of 1925 and it was hoped with additional soil added and a "border of flowers and trees," the courthouse will become "a beauty" that will be "impressive and attractive." Eventually landscaping within the Court House Square included small shrubs and larger deciduous trees along the perimeter of the square.[48]

The depression years undoubtedly restricted any courthouse improvements besides regular maintenance. The commissioners in December 1937 approved applying for a Works Projects Administration (WPA) project to finish the fourth floor, paint courthouse walls and install lighting. However, no other information regarding this project was found.[49]

Another statewide WPA project in the early1940s inventoried all Montana county offices and provided floor plans that identified all county offices. For Stillwater County, it showed the first floor housed the offices of the sheriff, county attorney, superintendent of schools, extension agent, home demonstration agent and the county "free" library. The second floor held the offices of the commissioners, clerk and recorder, assessor and treasurer. The third floor served as the

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[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid; *The Columbus News*, "Will Complete Two Rooms," November 22, 1923; Commissioners Journal Book 2, December 29, 1924; *The Columbus News*, "To Finish Courthouse Floors," December 11, 1924. The Puccinelli Brothers of Billings also laid the terrazzo floors at the Babcock Theatre in Billings.

[47] Commissioners Journals, Book 2, October 23, 1923; Book 3, September 8, 1927 and March 7, 1928.

[48] *The Columbus News*, "To Plant Courthouse Lawn," April 2, 1925. Historic photographs available at the Museum of the Beartooths in Columbus provide a window on courthouse landscaping. In the Stillwater County Archives on the fourth floor of the courthouse is a drawing entitled "Proposed Landscape Planting," identified as a WPA project. However, no further references to this project were found.

[49] Commissioners Journals, Book 4, December 20, 1937.

district court and held the courtroom, jury room, judge's chambers, abstract office and clerk of court and county surveyor. The fourth floor, still unfinished, had the public welfare office, offices of two federal agencies and attic space for archival records.[50]

In 1969, the Stillwater County Commissioners contracted with a Colorado company, Rocky Mountain Restoration Company, to repair an unknown emergency at the courthouse. The commissioners remarked that the deterioration of the courthouse was a serious concern for both them and previous commissioners.[51]

The Stillwater County Courthouse will celebrate its 100th birthday in 2021. The graciousness of the design and monumental and substantial nature of the courthouse is evidence that the county leaders wanted a building that would put "a stamp" on Columbus and Stillwater County as a prominent member of the political subdivisions of the State of Montana. After numerous years in ramshackle temporary quarters for the courthouse, the new courthouse made a statement that both government and civil life were trending upward in the young county. At it happened, both environmental conditions (severe drought) and a regional and national economic downturn caused the completion of the courthouse to stretch out for many years. But the final result is represented by a building that has withstood the passing years, and in the early twenty-first century still shows the pride in civic accomplishment that was present in the first quarter of the twentieth century. It is truly a monument and symbol of Stillwater County's cultural heritage and pride.

Neoclassical Architecture

While classical architecture in America first emerged in the United States with Thomas Jefferson's concepts of law and democracy, it was the 1893 Columbian World Exposition in Chicago that inspired the Neoclassical Revival architecture style, where the architects designed an entire fair modeled after Greek and Roman architecture. The popularity of the exposition began a renaissance of classicism in the early twentieth century, especially for public buildings. Neoclassical Revival includes the features of classical symmetry, full-height porch with columns and temple front. Neoclassical architecture reflects the county desire to reflect permanence, and stability, as well as pride and confidence in the county and its future. Such Neoclassical buildings are often referred to as "Temples of Justice."

Three primary symbolic elements of government, power, and law are evident in the architectural character of courthouses: the site, the main elevation and the lobby. The Stillwater County Courthouse clearly evokes the first two of these elements. The Courthouse Square, as platted by Norton in 1913, provides a wonderful open space with the courthouse set back from the street. The courthouse is strategically placed in connection to downtown Columbus, particularly by the unobstructed view from Pike Avenue north on 4th Avenue directly to the courthouse steps that

[50] Works Projects Administration, Division of Community Service Program, *Inventory of the County Archives of Montana,* No. 46 Stillwater, January 1942. A few offices and rooms are in the same location today like the Clerk and Recorder's office and the Commissioner's office on the 2nd floor and the Courtroom and the Clerk of Court on the 3rd floor.

[51] Commissioners Journal, Book 8, May 6, 1969. This company happened to be in the area for some other work. It is not known what exactly comprised the "emergency," or what work was completed to the courthouse.

lead to the raised building entry. The powerful approach reflects the "architectural timelessness and a sense of permanence and symmetry equating a balance of justice."[52]

The courthouse main elevation reflects all of the Neoclassical elements with its bilateral symmetry, the temple front with two-story Ionic columns, pedimented front gable, its four-story height, and decorative lettering above the entry. The architect also incorporated a few classically inspired ornamentations, like the simple garland and shields. The impressive courthouse façade conveys a strong expression of Stillwater County's heritage and the most visual symbol of local government and law as reflected in the Neoclassical design.

Warren A. Dedrick

Warren A. Dedrick was born in 1891 in South Dakota but educated in Billings, Montana, graduating high school in 1908. He received his architecture degree from the University of Michigan in 1914. In January 1915, Dedrick and Natt Piper opened an architectural office called Dedrick and Piper in the Stapleton Building in downtown Billings. By 1918, Dedrick had his own downtown office, later joined by Earle R. Bobbe. Early in his career, Dedrick was recognized in a "Gallery of Prominent Billings Business Men & Women."[53]

Some of his early Montana projects included the Melstone School in 1916, the McElroy Apartments in Billings in 1917, and a rural schoolhouse south of Ballantine, in 1918. School buildings quickly became his specialty and he designed many in Montana and Wyoming. In Wyoming, Dedrick designed schools in Meeteetse, Basin, Greybull, Worland and Newcastle. In Montana, Dedrick designed schools in Custer, Choteau, Forsyth, Hardin and Molt. Other major projects in Billings included the Losekamp Building at Rocky Mountain College and Midland Empire Fair buildings. He also designed the Carnegie Library in Red Lodge in 1919.[54]

Mr. Dedrick moved to Long Beach California in 1923, following his former partner Natt Piper and joined by another Billings architect, Earle R. Bobbe, to open the architectural firm of Piper, Kahrs, Dedrick & Bobbe Co. Dedrick remained in Long Beach for the rest of his career and became a prominent architect in the City of Long Beach, designing multiple public and private buildings. One of his final major projects was the Port of Long Beach Administration Building. Mr. Dedrick retired in 1966 and died in 1975.[55]

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[52] The concept of symbolic elements in the architectural character of a courthouse is taken very broadly from Paul Filicetti, "Identifying and Preserving Symbolism: Montana's County Courthouses", MA Thesis in Historic Preservation, Goucher College MA, 2002.

[53] Tom Stout, Mo*ntana: Its Story and Biography.* Vol. 1, (Chicago: The American Historical Society, 1921), 244-245; *Billings Gazette*, "City News in Brief," January 19, 1915; "Gallery of Prominent Billings Business Men & Woman," @1914, http://mtmemory.org (accessed March 15, 2019).

[54] *Billings Gazette*, various dates, 1915-1922; Stout, 245; *Billings Gazette*, "Notice for Bids," various dates 1915-1924.

[55] *Billings Gazette*, "Billings Architects Form Long Beach Firm," April 14, 1923; Aubrie Morlet and M. Colleen Hamilton, "Port of Long Beach Administration Building Photographic, Architectural & Historical Documentation," Prepared by Applied EarthWorks, Inc. for Science Applications International Corporation, January 2010, http://csus-dspace.calstate.edu (accessed March 16, 2019).

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

____ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
____ previously listed in the National Register
____previously determined eligible by the National Register
____designated a National Historic Landmark
____ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #_____
____recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
____ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

__x_ State Historic Preservation Office
____ Other State agency
____ Federal agency
____ Local government
____ University
____ Other
Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property ____less than one acre_____

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates (decimal degrees)
Datum if other than WGS84:_____
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)
1. Latitude: 45.64091 Longitude: -109.25353

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)
NE1/4 SE1/4 of Section 21 and NW1/4 SW1/4 Section 22, T2S R20E. Court House Subdivision of Block 10 in Nortons Addition To The Town Of Columbus.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)
The boundary encompasses only the footprint of the building plus a 10-foot buffer.

---

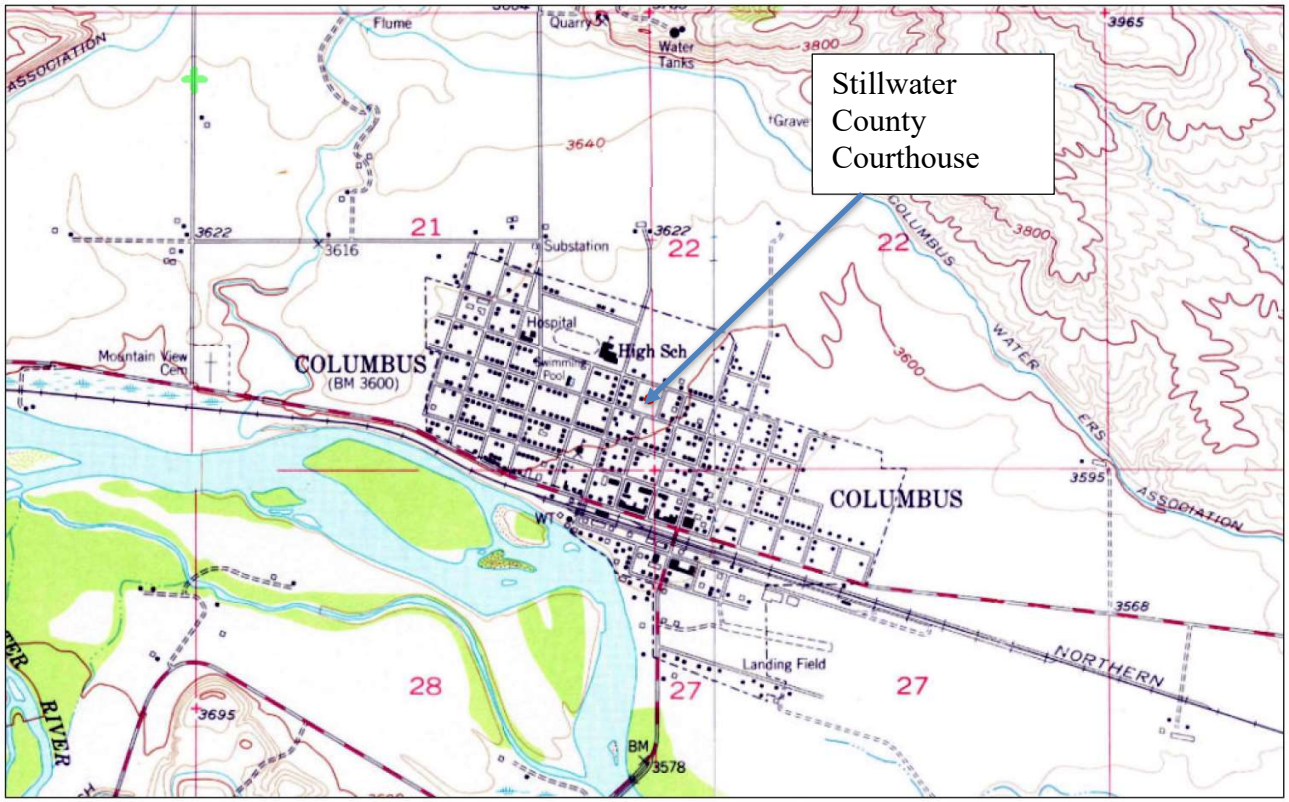
11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Joan L. Brownell
organization:
street & number: PO Box 600
city or town: Fishtail state: MT zip code: 59028
e-mail
telephone:
date: 4/4/2019

and

name/title: Lesley Gilmore
organization:
street & number:
city or town: Bozeman state: MT zip code: 59715
e-mail
telephone:
date: 4/4/2019

Owner
name/title: Stillwater County
organization:
street & number: 400 East 3rd Avenue North
city or town: Columbus state: MT zip code: 59019
e-mail
telephone: 406.322.8010



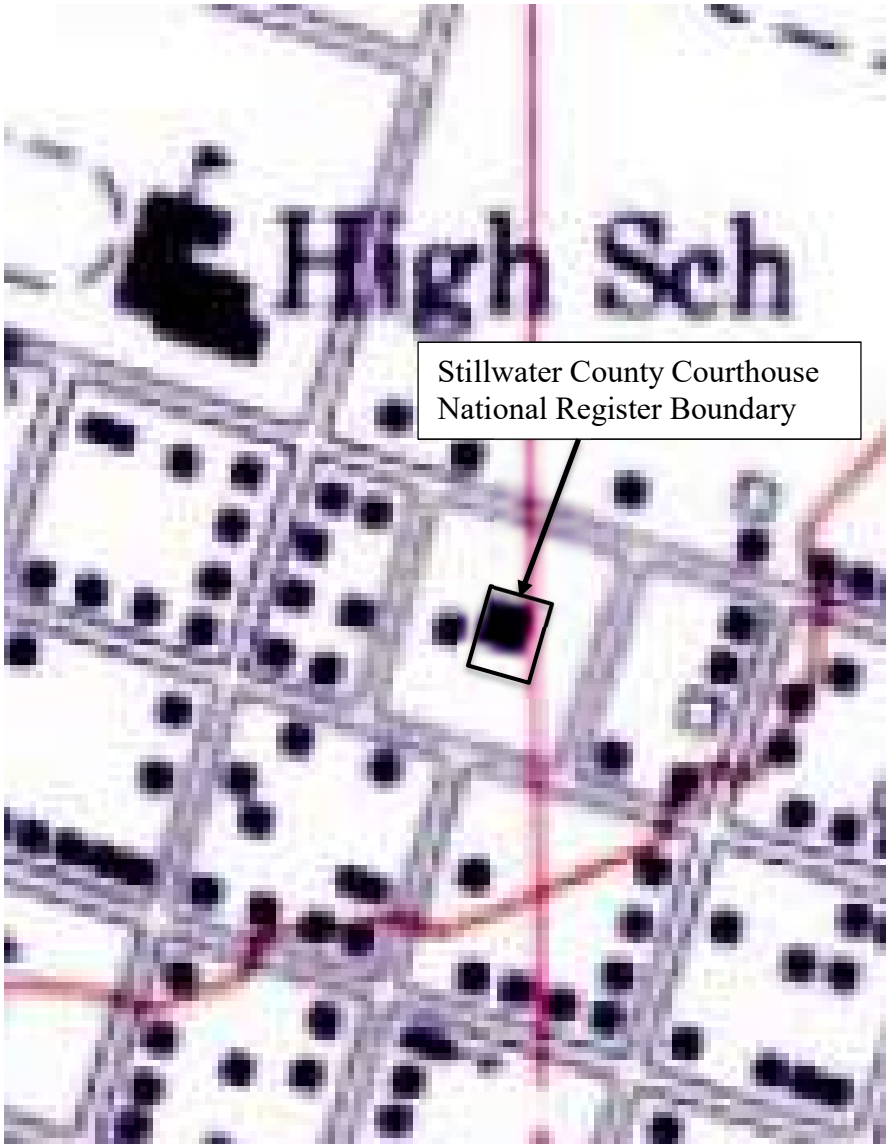
= ½ mile

N

Map created using the Digital Atlas March 14, 2019
http://msl.mt.gov/GIS/Atlas

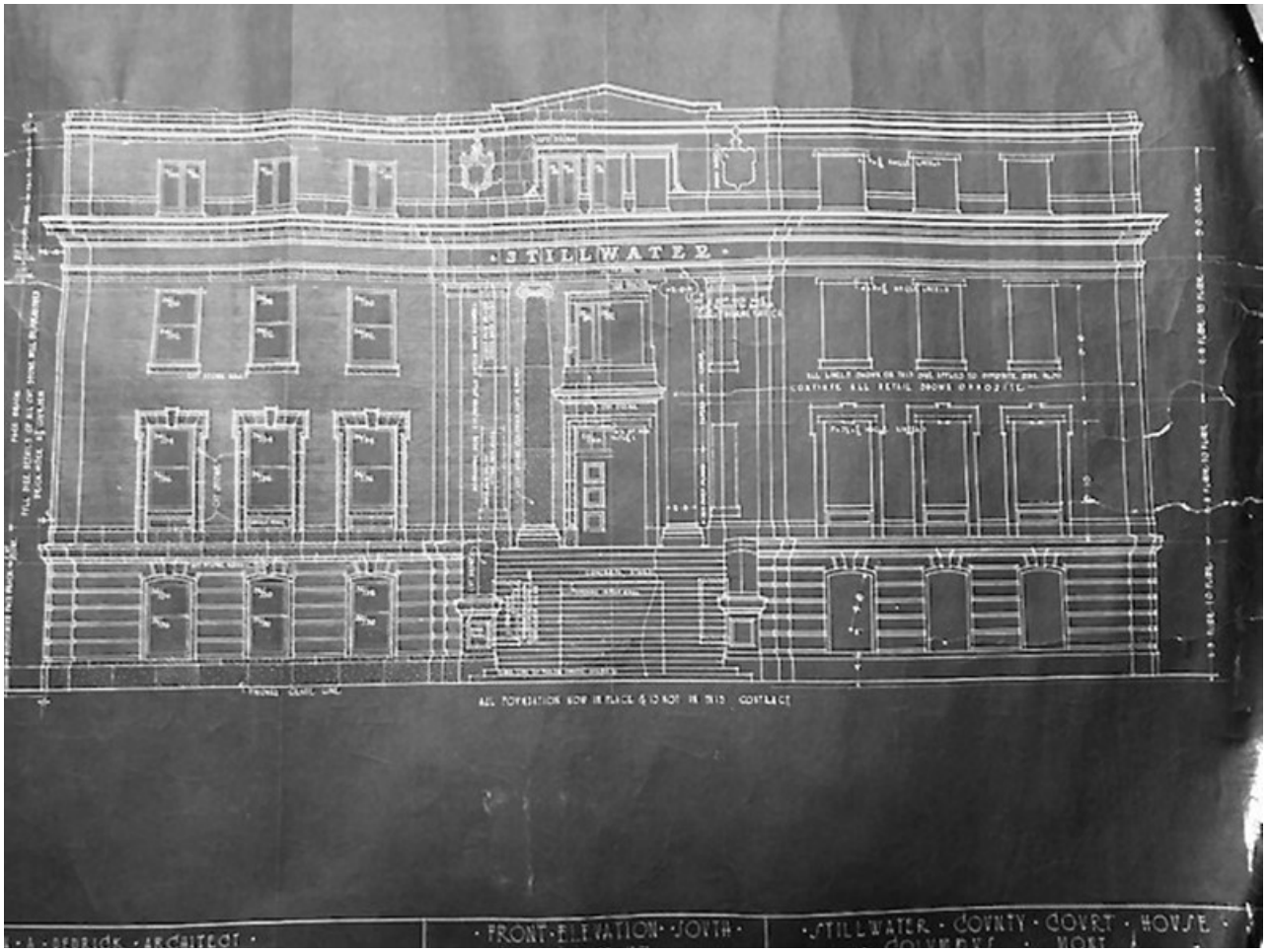
Montana State Libary - Digital Library
(406) 444-5354 | geoinfo@mt.gov | http://msl.mt.gov

Location of Stillwater County Courthouse, sections 21 and 22 T2S R20E. Located on the Columbus West 7.5' topographic map.

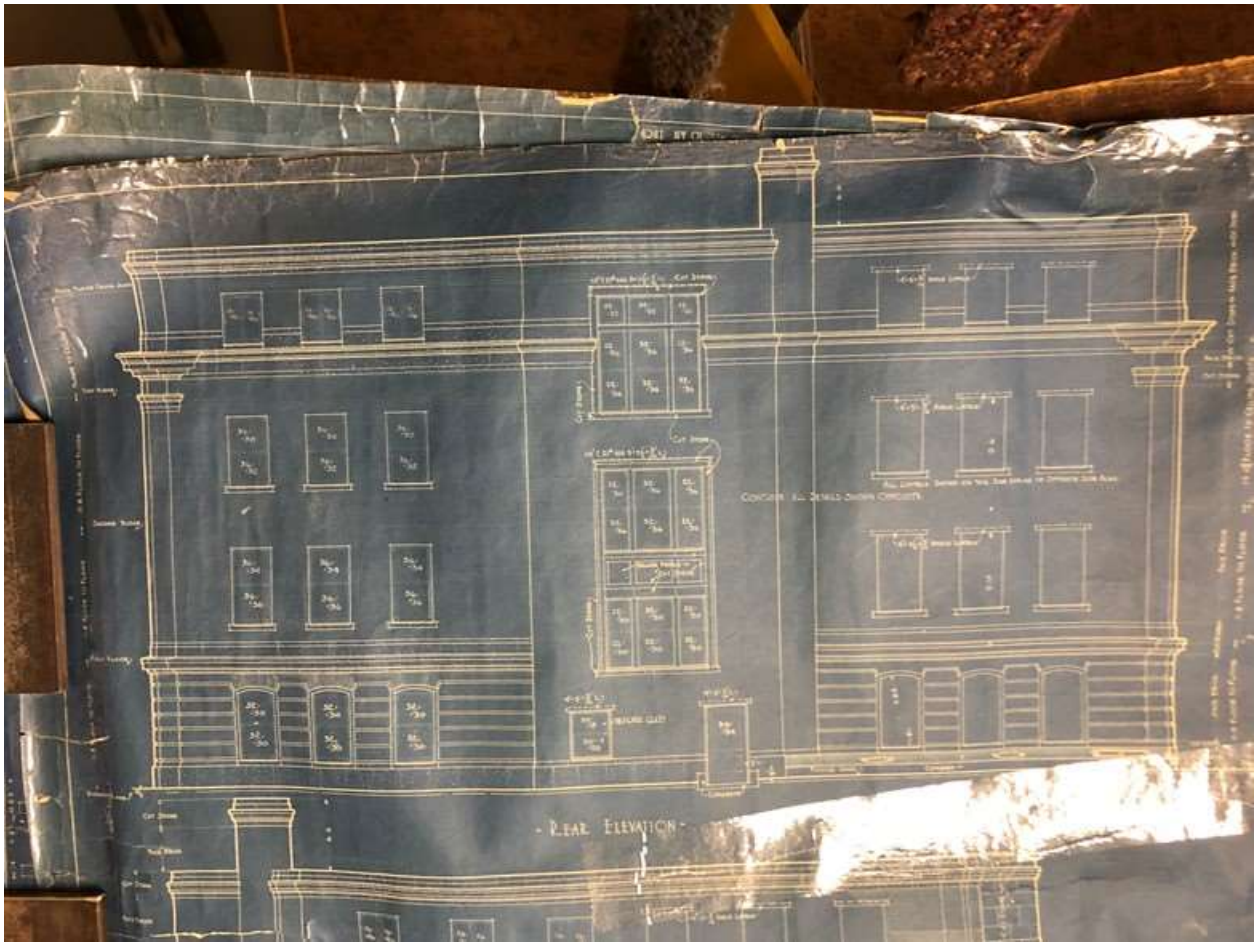


Closeup showing National Register boundary of Stillwater County Courthouse, sections 21 and 22 T2S R20E. Located on the Columbus West 7.5' topographic map.

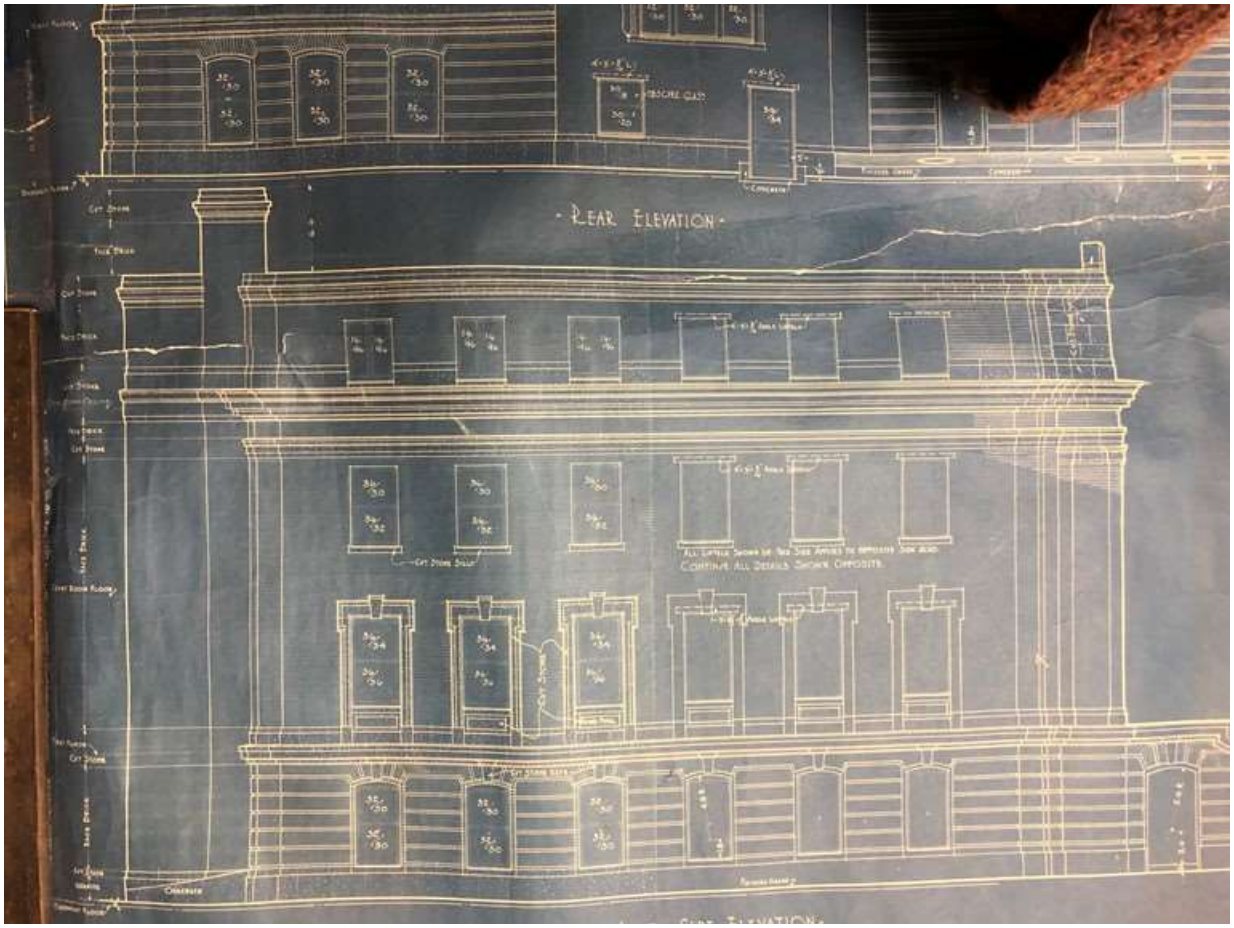
Aerial view of Stillwater County Courthouse (center of image), showing National Register boundary. Top of image is north.



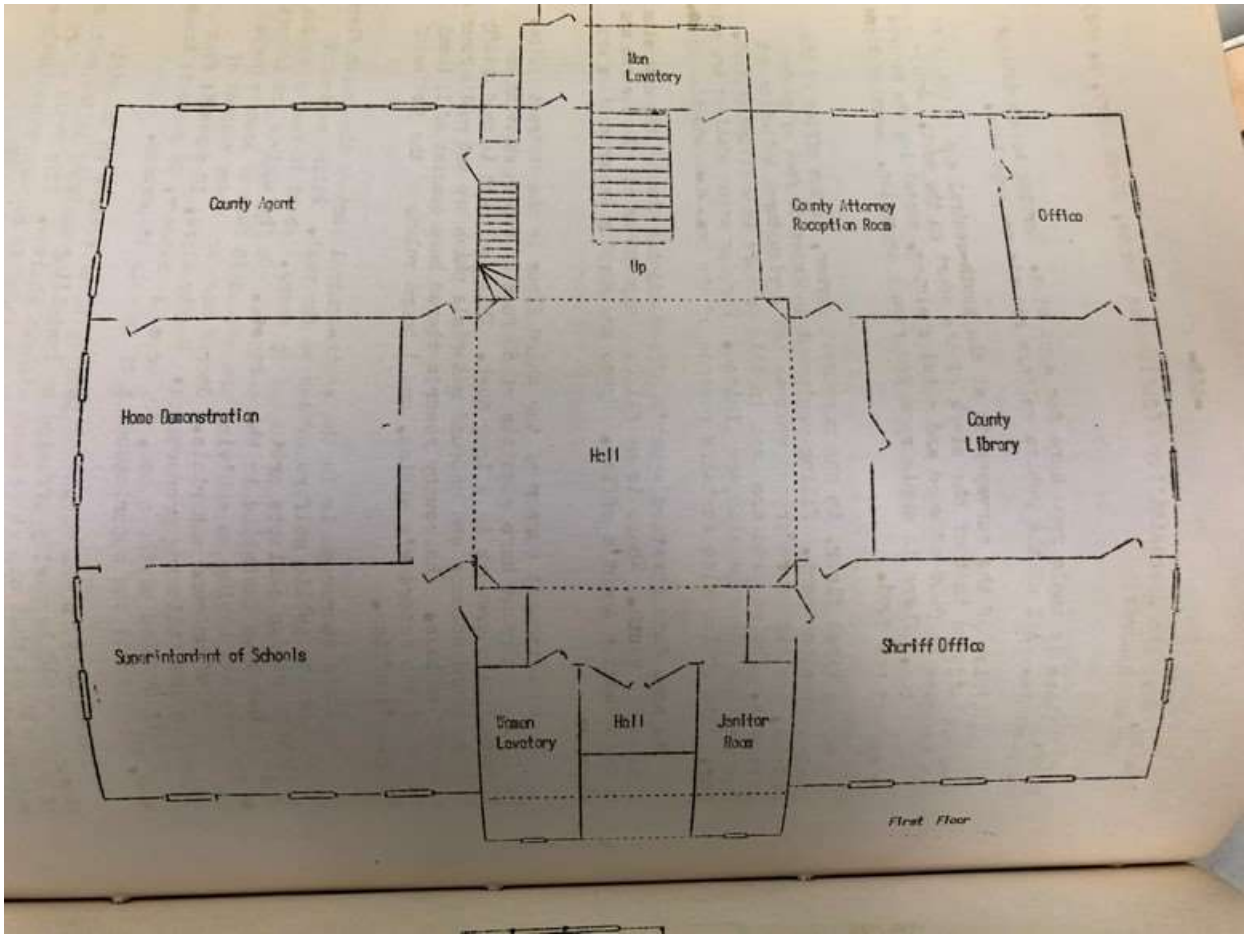
Stillwater County Courthouse, south façade.



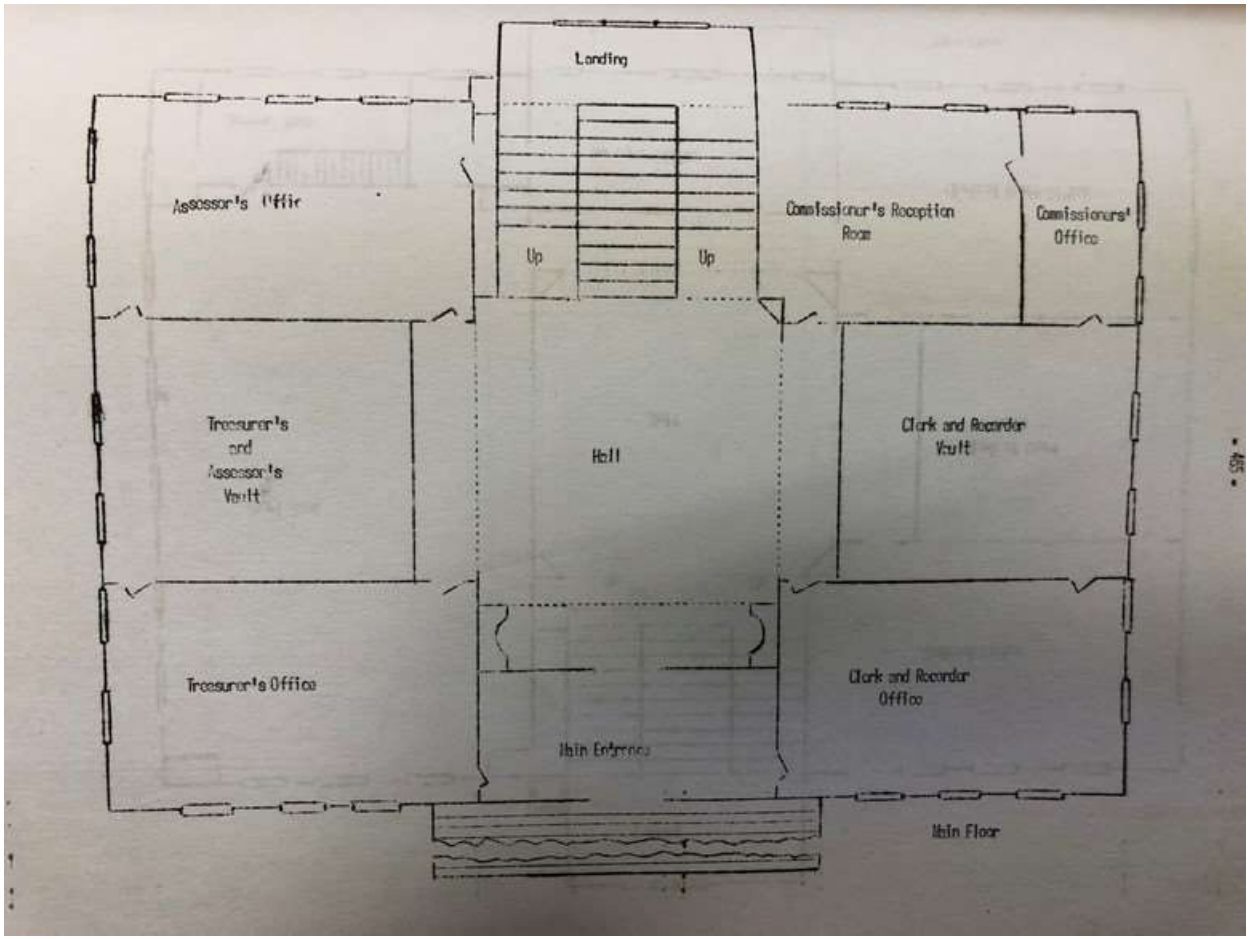
Stillwater County Courthouse, north elevation.



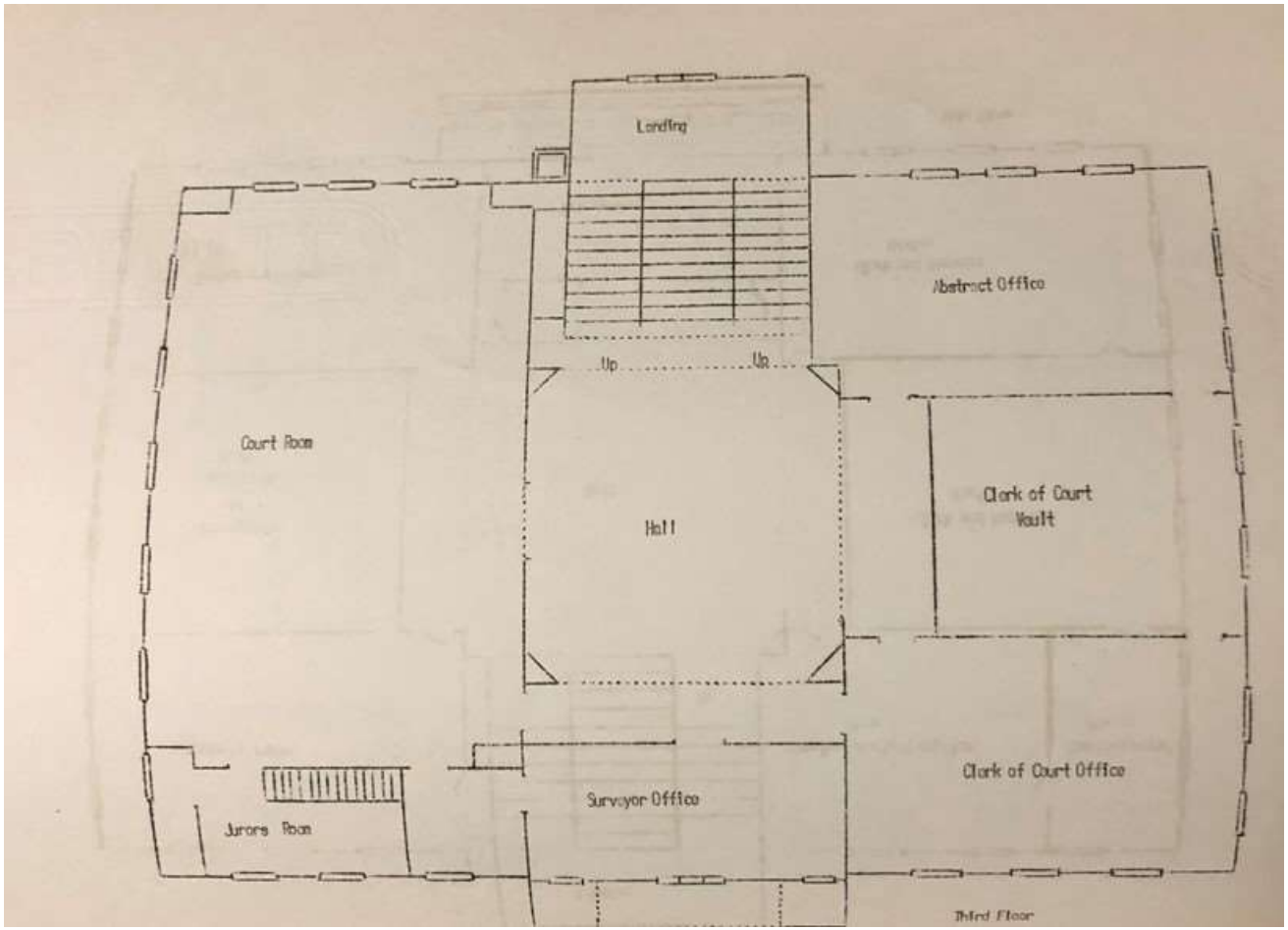
Stillwater County Courthouse, east elevation.



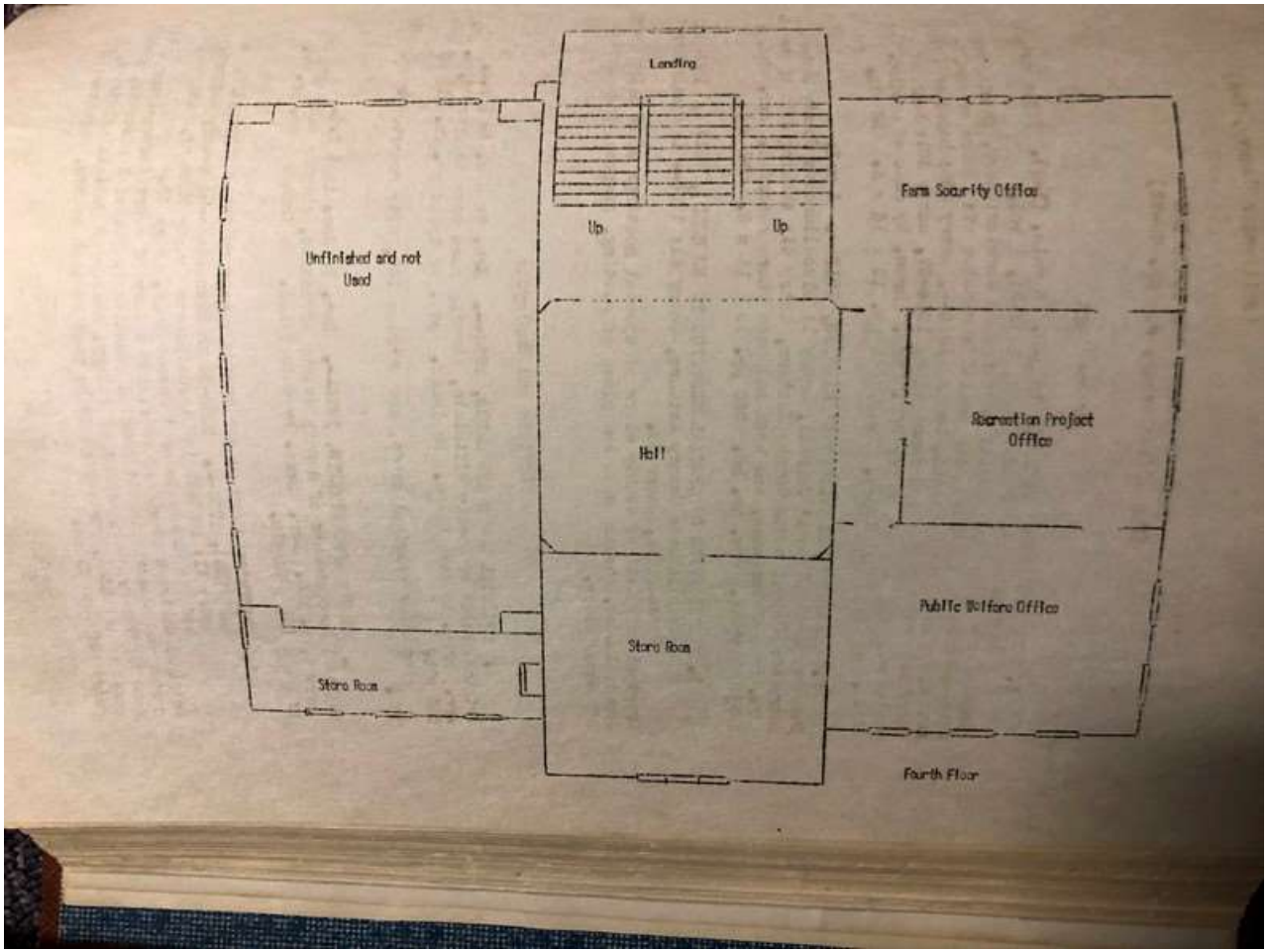
Stillwater County Courthouse, First floor, 1942



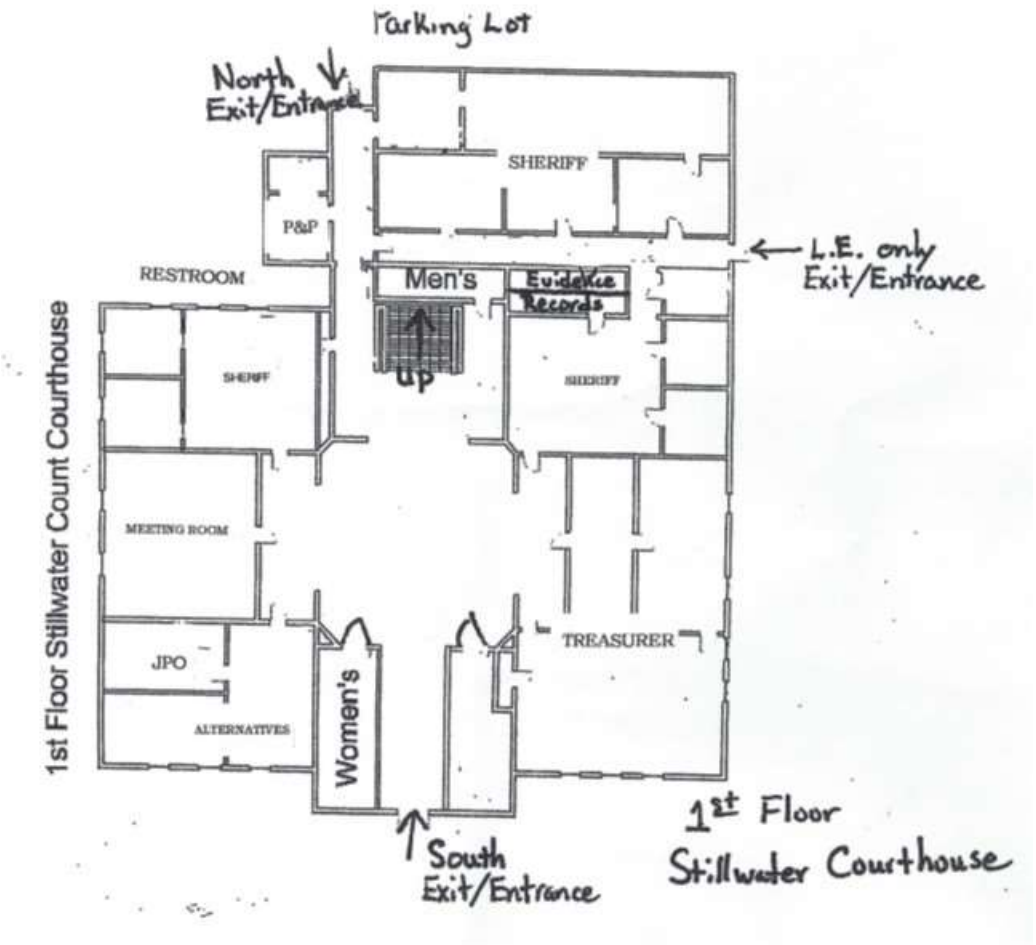
Stillwater County Courthouse, Second floor, 1942.



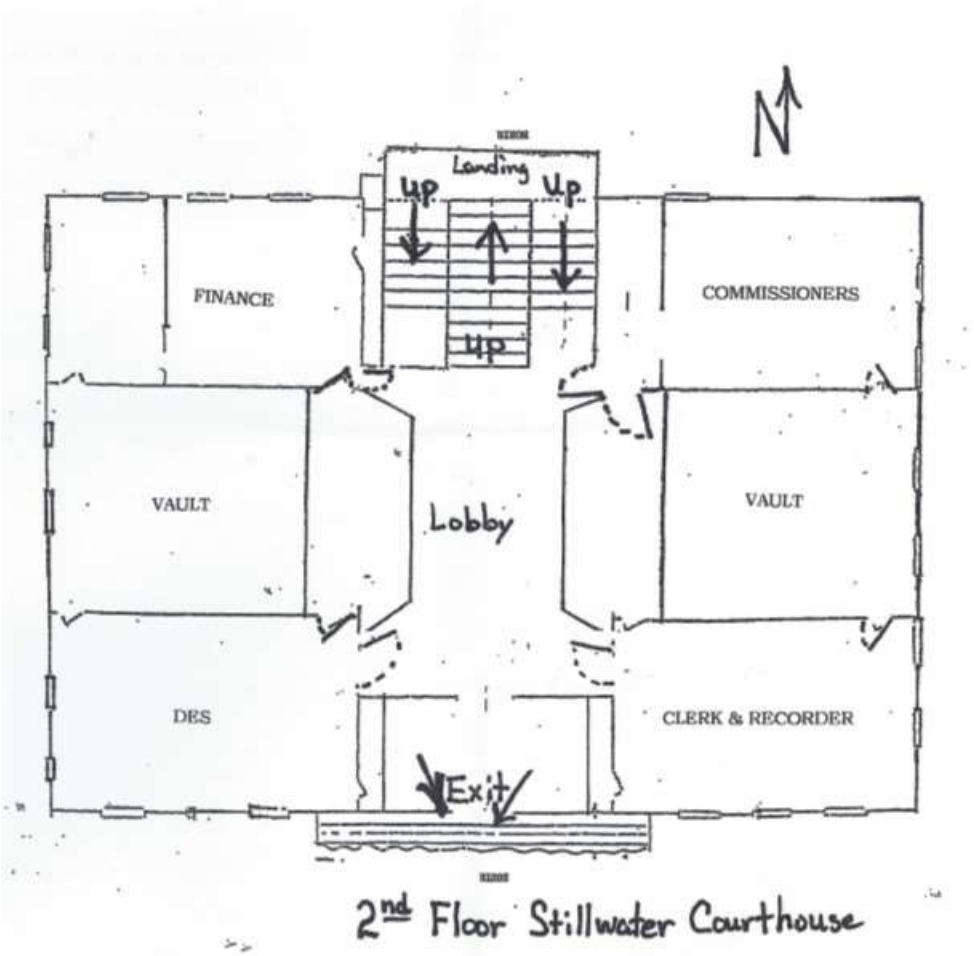
Stillwater County Courthouse, Third floor, 1942.



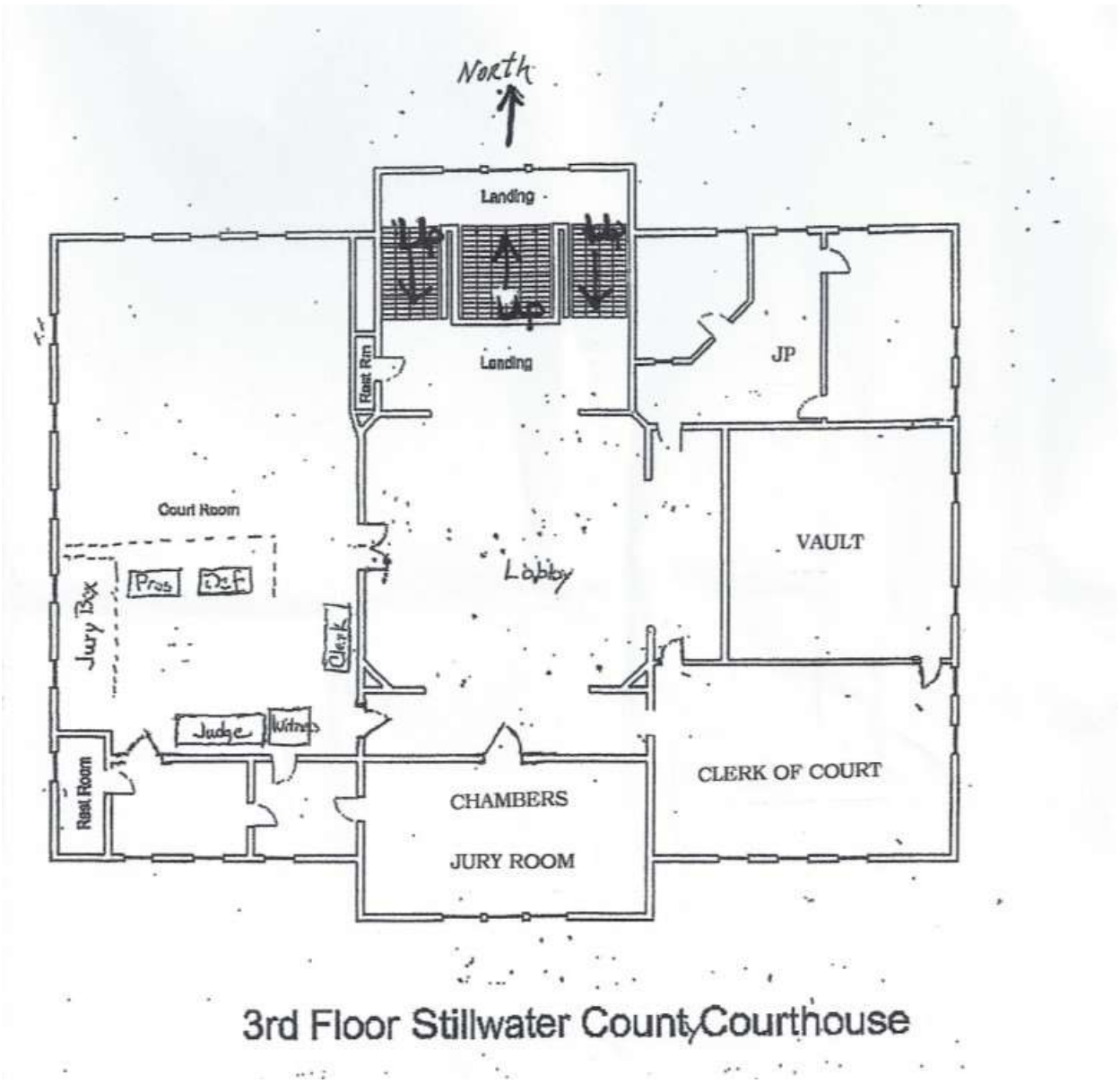
Stillwater County Courthouse, Fourth floor, 1942



Present Floorplan of Stillwater County Courthouse, first floor.



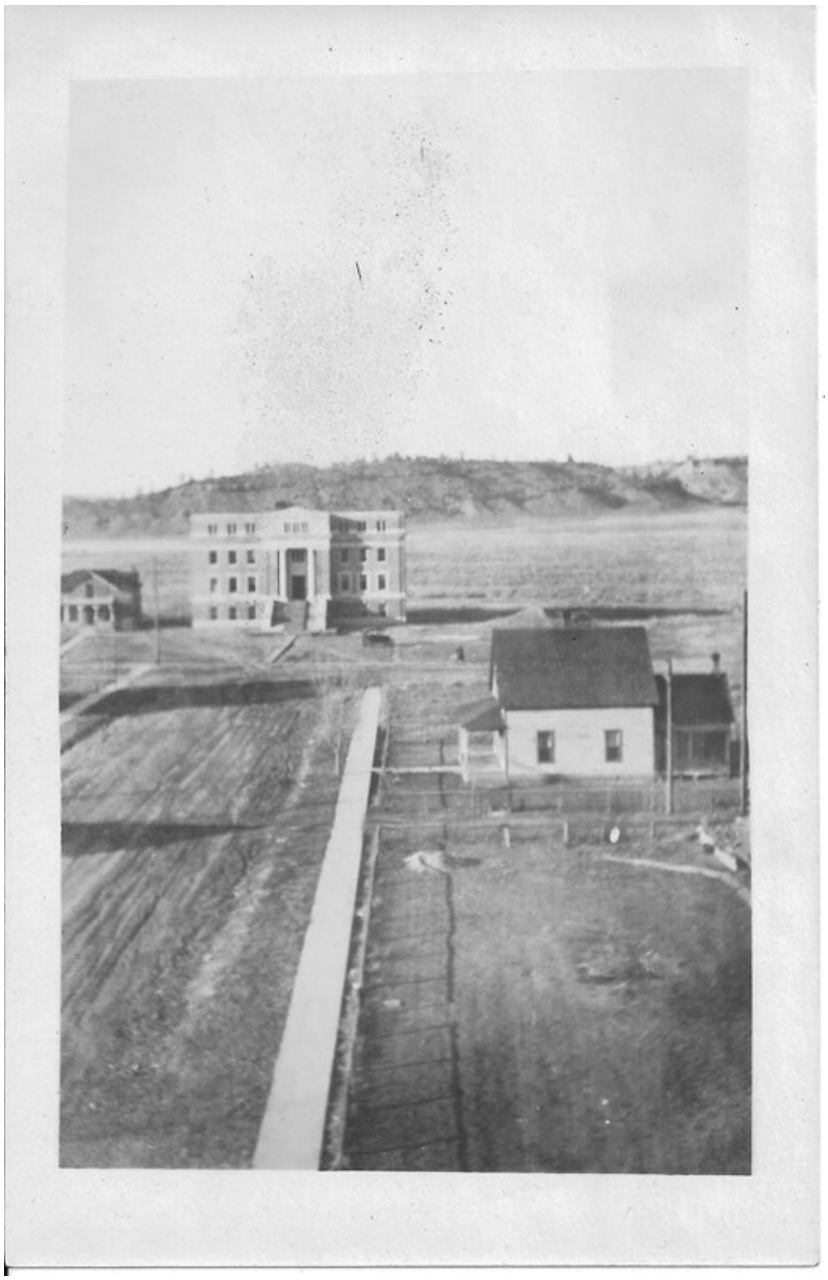
Present Floorplan of Stillwater County Courthouse, second floor.



Present Floorplan of Stillwater County Courthouse, third floor.

1916 view of Columbus. Jail in background, slightly left of center. View to northwest.
Courtesy the Museum of the Beartooths, Columbus, Montana.

Stillwater County Courthouse, 1921, Norton House on left. View to the north. Courtesy the Museum of the Beartooths, Columbus, Montana.



Stillwater County Courthouse, circa 1921, Norton House on left. View to the north. Photograph by Thayer. Courtesy the Museum of the Beartooths, Columbus, Montana.

Stillwater County Courthouse, circa 1930s. South and east elevations. Courtesy the Museum of the Beartooths, Columbus, Montana.

Stillwater County Courthouse, circa 1935. South and west elevations. Courtesy the Museum of the Beartooths, Columbus, Montana.

Photographs

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

Photo Log

Name of Property: Stillwater County Courthouse
City or Vicinity: Columbus
County: Stillwater State: MT
Photographer: Joan Brownell
Date Photographed: February and March 2019
Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:
1 of ___.

Stillwater County Courthouse, View to the north. South elevation.
MT_StillwaterCounty_StillwaterCountyCourthouse_0001

Stillwater County Courthouse, View to the northeast. South and west elevations. Norton House left side of photograph

MT_StillwaterCounty_StillwaterCountyCourthouse_0002

Stillwater County Courthouse, View to the north. South and west elevations.
MT_StillwaterCounty_StillwaterCountyCourthouse_0003

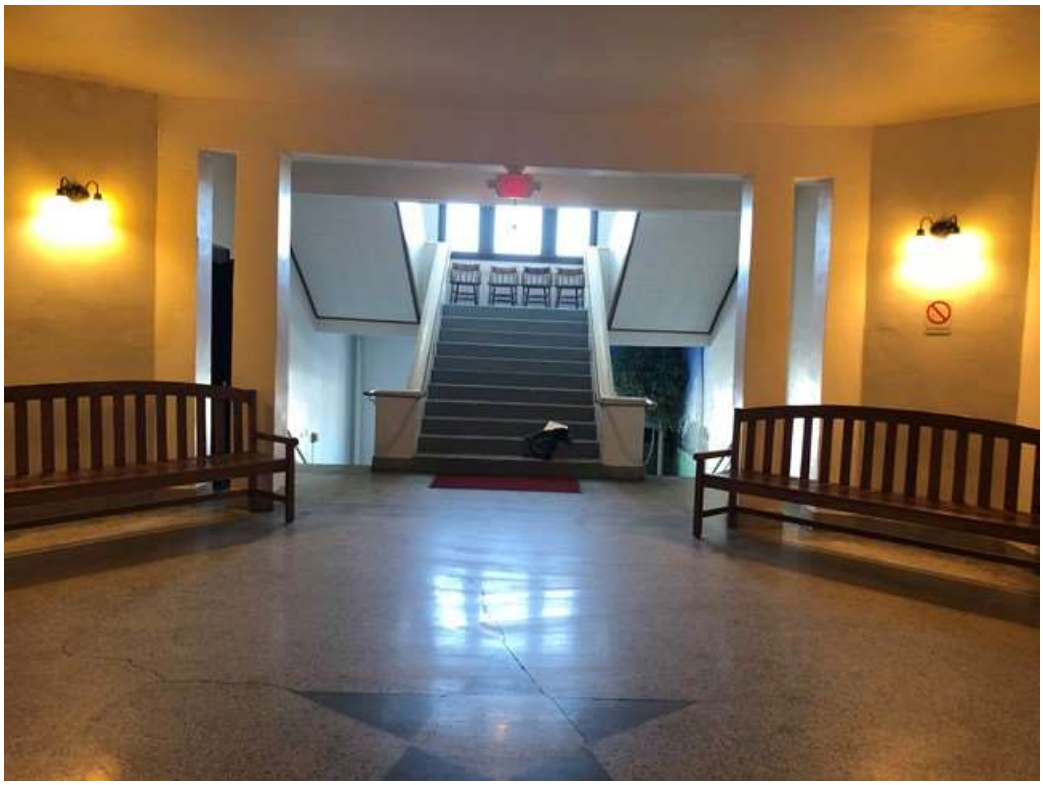
Stillwater County Courthouse, View to the north. South elevation.
MT_StillwaterCounty_StillwaterCountyCourthouse_0004

Stillwater County Courthouse, View to the west. East elevation.
MT_StillwaterCounty_StillwaterCountyCourthouse_0005

Stillwater County Courthouse, View to the south. North elevation.
MT_StillwaterCounty_StillwaterCountyCourthouse_0006

Stillwater County Courthouse, interior view of commissioner's door, second floor.
MT_StillwaterCounty_StillwaterCountyCourthouse_0007

Stillwater County Courthouse, close up of third floor terrazzo.
MT_StillwaterCounty_StillwaterCountyCourthouse_0008



Stillwater County Courthouse, third floor, view to north.
MT_StillwaterCounty_StillwaterCountyCourthouse_0009

Stillwater County Courthouse, second floor closeup, view to north.
MT_StillwaterCounty_StillwaterCountyCourthouse_0010