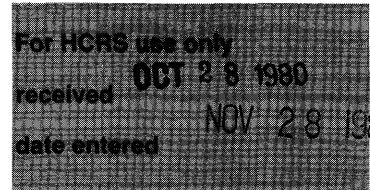


United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form



See instructions in How to Complete National Register Forms
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Mercer County Courthouse

and/or common

2. Location

street & number Courthouse Square not for publication

city, town Princeton vicinity of congressional district Fourth

state West Virginia code 54 county Mercer code 055

3. Classification

Table with 4 columns: Category, Ownership, Status, Present Use. Includes sub-sections like Public Acquisition and Accessible.

4. Owner of Property

name Mercer County Court

street & number Mercer County Courthouse

city, town Princeton vicinity of state West Virginia

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Mercer County Courthouse

street & number Courthouse Square

city, town Princeton state West Virginia

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date federal state county local

depository for survey records

city, town state

## 7. Description

### Condition

excellent  
 good  
 fair

deteriorated  
 ruins  
 unexposed

### Check one

unaltered  
 altered

### Check one

original site  
 moved      date \_\_\_\_\_

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Mercer County Courthouse stands at the center of an ellipse bounded by Princeton Street and Main Street, in the business district of Princeton, West Virginia. The four-story limestone-faced building commands an impressive position atop a rise where its nearly identical front (north) and south (rear) elevations may be viewed from downtown locations.

Monumental scale is echoed in the 4-story center block flanked by two-story wings which extend beyond the front and rear facades of the central unit. The bisymmetry of this arrangement succeeds in emphasizing the impressive architectural detail of the central block front and rear elevations divided among six, two-story engaged square columns. Metal sash, two-story windows recessed behind the columns lend additional vertical character to the central unit.

A series of architectural forms emerging from the minds of tradition-rebellious designers of Europe and America in the late 1920's and 1930's are found in the Mercer County Courthouse. These ideas were spawned by a desire to jettison historical and traditional forms in hopes of creating a "modern" consensus. The style represented in the Mercer County Courthouse represents such design purpose. Buildings of this architectural manner are frequently called "Art Deco" or "Moderne"; in the example of the Mercer County Courthouse it is the most spectacular representation of the 1930's era movement in southern West Virginia.

Various hallmarks of Art Deco design stand out in the building. The setback, in which rectilinear masses of unequal height play against another, is present along the side elevations. Sharp, angular edges and general flatness of surface is created by square or rectilinear openings. Windows with flanking ribbed borders form impressive Deco motifs in the two-story recessed panels of the front-facing wings. Idealized carved relief depicting a shield between fasces embellishes each spandrel of the side elevations. Flanking the carved surround at both the north and south entrances is a richly carved frieze representing phases in the historical development of the county. Above the colonnade in a broad flat entablature carved with six medallions is centered a magnificent round shield adorned with symbols of justice and flanked by Roman fasces. The date, 1930, is carved beneath in Roman numerals.

Upon close observation, the apparently identical north and south fronts reveal subtle dissimilarities. In place of relief sculpture high on the south wall, a row of clerestory windows has been placed in the northern counterpart.

Interior space of the first floor is occupied by county offices. The central corridor may be reached from the four major entrances that allow for convenient entry from any direction in the community. The northern section of the second floor is occupied by the circuit courtroom and judicial chamber; the southern part contains the criminal courtroom. Finish throughout is black walnut originally rubbed to a dull sheen to match the walnut furniture. Cast metal newels and rails are especially significant features of Art Deco design in the stairhalls. The panels of the newel posts are cast in a vertical row of fan-like figures, another reference to idealized art forms. The decor of the courtrooms echoes the severe, uncluttered lines of the exterior. Ceiling plasterwork is painted in colors of white, light yellow, and light blue.

FHR-8-300A  
(11/78)

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No alterations of consequence have impaired the original fabric.  
A statue (not originally on the grounds) honoring settlement period residents  
of Mercer County now faces north from the walkway of the Main Street entrance.

# 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

**Specific dates** 1930-31 **Builder/Architect** Alex B. Mahood, architect

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)** Boone, Eason and Wood, contractor

The Mercer County Courthouse at Princeton, West Virginia, is one of the most significant examples of Moderne architecture in southern West Virginia. The various hallmarks of the style, popular in the United States from 1925 to 1940, are present in the building. The edifice also represents one of the most significant achievements of Alex B. Mahood, a prominent architect of Bluefield, Mercer County's largest city.

Mercer County's present (1980) courthouse, built in 1930-31, is the sixth of a series of buildings that has served the county as the seat of justice and government. It replaced the one built in 1875. The courthouses of the county have not fared well from the date of the county's founding in 1837. The second building was destroyed during the Civil War, and the fourth, built in 1874, was burned to the ground in a suspicious fire of 1875. Quality of construction and size, not to mention the departure from traditional architectural modes, distinguishes the present building dedicated in 1931, and assures it a bright and secure future.

A national and international movement of professionals to abandon the eclectic and historic revivals of the early 20th century in favor of something modern or "moderne" gave rise to an architectural mode in the United States of the 1930's that is sometimes called Art Deco. The Mercer County Courthouse is a significant representative of this style.

Vertical emphasis of the central block is achieved in the slender, 2-story windows and square engaged columns. Geometrical features and sharp angles present themselves in the hard limestone surface of rectangles juxtaposed. Ornament is sparse and subordinate to flat surfaces. Reeded or ribbed surfaces, such as the panels of front-facing windows in the two-story blocks, echo the vertical.

Despite the Modernistic manner of the building, eclectic references peer through. The entrance surrounds recall lines of Egyptian pylons with battered walls and bold, molded cornices. Classical elements are especially strong in the two-story engaged colonnade at the front and rear elevations. It is the combination of these elements with decoration that creates a strong composition.

Rich examples of symbolic relief sculpture are found on highly visible surfaces of the structure. Stylized fasces fill the spandrels of the side elevations. Surmounting the colonnade of the north facade a neatly designed round shield centered with symbols of justice is joined to flanking Roman fasces with ribbons. Friezes above the front and rear entrances depict scenes in the history and industry of Mercer County. The carvings were executed from a painting by Mrs. S.L. Mahood, mother of the architect, who received formal training in art in both the United States and Europe.

Alex B. Mahood (1888-1970) moved to Bluefield from Lynchburg, Virginia in 1912 to supervise work on the Law Commerce Building. He studied architecture in the United

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

County Records of Mercer. Book 12, pp. 561,566,569,574; Book 13, pp. 89,282,287.  
 "Fine New Courthouse to be Dedicated Today". Bluefield Daily Telegraph. Aug. 8, 1931, pp. 1,5.  
 Hedrick, Charles B. Official Blue Book of Mercer County, West Virginia. Mercer

# 10. Geographical Data

**ACREAGE NOT VERIFIED**

**UTM NOT VERIFIED**

Acreage of nominated property 1 acre  
 Quadrangle name Princeton, West Virginia

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

**UMT References**

A	<u>17</u>	<u>490860</u>	<u>4135220</u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing
C			
E			
G			

B			
	Zone	Easting	Northing
D			
F			
H			

**Verbal boundary description and justification** Centered on an ellipse (town square) bounded by Princeton Street to the south, Main Street to the north, and streets to the east and west which form the sides of the ellipse connecting Princeton and Main.

**List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries**

state	code	county	code
state	code	county	code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Rodney S. Collins, Architectural Historian

organization W.V. Dept. of Culture and History date July 14, 1980

street & number The Cultural Center, Capitol Complex telephone 304/348-0244

city or town Charleston state West Virginia

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature Clarence Morrow

title State Historic Preservation Officer date October 6, 1980

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

Forrest W. Ray, Jr. date 11/28/80  
 Keeper of the National Register

Attest: \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_  
 Chief of Registration

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

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States and at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, in Paris. Several prominent Bluefield landmarks, including the Perry Building and the West Virginia Hotel, are his.

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County Bluebook Association, 1931. n.p.