

MINNESOTA HISTORIC PROPERTIES INVENTORY FORM

HISTORIC NAME: Aitkin County Courthouse and Jail

COUNTY: Aitkin

CURRENT NAME:

CITY/TWP.: Aitkin

LEGAL DESC.: Lots 1, 2, 3, 10, 11, & 12, Block 16,  
Original Town of Aitkin

ADDRESS: 209 and 217 2nd Street  
NW

<b>CLASSIFICATION:</b>	<b>CONDITION:</b>	<b>SIGNIFICANCE:</b>	<b>THEME/S:</b>
Building <u>  X  </u>	Excellent <u>  X  </u>	Local <u>  X  </u>	Primary <u>  Government/Politics  </u>
Structure <u>      </u>	Good <u>      X  </u>	State <u>      </u>	Secondary <u>  Architecture  </u>
Object <u>      </u>	Fair <u>      </u>	National <u>      </u>	Others <u>  Social/Humanitarian  </u>
District <u>      </u>	Deteriorated <u>      </u>		

<b>OPEN TO THE PUBLIC:</b>	Yes <u>  X  </u> No <u>      </u> Restricted <u>  X  </u>	<b>PRESENT USE:</b>
<b>VISIBLE FROM THE ROAD:</b>	Yes <u>  X  </u> No <u>      </u>	Courthouse and Jail
<b>OCCUPIED:</b>	Yes <u>  X  </u> No <u>      </u>	

<b>DATE CONSTRUCTED:</b>	Jail - 1915	<b>ORIGINAL USE:</b>	Residence
<b>ORIGINAL OWNER:</b>	Courthouse - 1929 Aitkin County	<b>ARCHITECT/BUILDER:</b>	Jail: E.C. Pell/N.J. Holden Courthouse: Toltz, King, & Day

<b>OWNER'S NAME AND ADDRESS:</b>	Aitkin County; Board of County Commissioners; Aitkin County Courthouse; 209 Second St. NW; Aitkin, MN 56431	<b>ACREAGE:</b>	Less than one acre <u>  X  </u>
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<b>LOCAL CONTACT/ORG.:</b>	Aitkin County Historical Society, 316 1st Ave. NE., Aitkin, MN 56431	<b>UTM REFERENCE:</b>	Aitkin MN. Quad. 7.5 15 / 445530 / 5153300
<b>FORM PREPARED BY:</b>	Mark Haidet		
<b>DATE:</b>	February 1981		

**DESCRIPTION:**

The Aitkin County Courthouse and Jail occupy a prominent site three blocks west of Aitkin's central business district on State Route 210. The buildings are the only structures on the block.

The courthouse, designed by the St. Paul architectural firm Toltz, King, & Day in 1920 and constructed in 1929, is a two story structure covered by a flat roof concealed by a parapet. The structure, a 1920s version of Beaux Arts Classicism, is comprised of a slightly projecting three bay central section flanked by single bays on either side. Exterior surfaces are of light colored brick and Bedford, Indiana, stone. Stone is utilized for the raised foundation walls, paired engaged pilasters defining the central bays on the front facade, window surrounds, inscription stone reading "Aitkin County" located on the parapet above the entrance bay cornice, and various decorative trimmings. Fenestration is symmetrical with multi-paned rectangular windows linked vertically by placement in recessed panels or engaged pilasters. Upper floor windows are shorter than those on the main level. Shallow hoods with consoles are located above the three central openings in the front first floor facade.

Interior surfaces utilize marble wainscoting, terrazo floors, and oak woodwork. A stained glass skylight is located in the court chamber. Both the interior and the exterior have retained a significant degree of integrity.

The 1915 Aitkin County Jail, designed by Minneapolis architect E.C. Pell, is located immediately west of the courthouse. The two story red brick hip-roofed structure consists of a nine room sheriff's residence (presently used as office space) with a cell block extending to the rear. Decorative features include a columned portico sheltering the principal entrance with transom and side lights, brick quoined corners, a full unadorned entablature, and stone sills and lintels with keystones. Double-hung six-over-one windows are regularly spaced throughout the structure. Segmental dormers light the sheriff's residence attic. The structure is symmetrical. The only major exterior alteration has been replacement of the original slate roof with asphalt shingles.

**SIGNIFICANCE:**

The Aitkin County Courthouse and Jail are significant as two highly visible landmarks which have housed most Aitkin County offices since courthouse construction in 1929. In addition, the courthouse is significant as a well-preserved example of the Beaux Arts Style "replacement" courthouses erected in several Minnesota counties during the initial

(see continuation sheet)

Significance - Continued

decades of the twentieth century. Construction of both structures resulted from the overcrowded facilities in the original courthouse built on the same site in 1887 when the county's population numbered under 2000. By 1910 the courthouse facilities were deemed inadequate to meet the county's governmental needs. Erection of the jail in 1915 brought temporary relief by providing additional office and storage space in that portion of the courthouse occupied by the jail and sheriff's residence. County officials decided in 1920 to erect a new courthouse; plans were accepted and a building fund established. As was the case with the jail earlier, the courthouse was erected (1929) without a bond issue. While continued use of the courthouse in its original function is anticipated, the county board is currently contemplating construction of a new jail facility. Initial plans, however, call for the jail's adaptive reuse as needed office and storage space.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Aitkin Independent, 1910-1912.

Aitkin Independent-Age, 1914-1915, 1920, 1928-29.

Klee, A.C. and Dorothy Ratcliffe Lindquist, eds. The Story of Aitkin, Minnesota, 1871-1971. Aitkin, MN: Aitkin Area Centennial Executive Committee, 1971.  
pp. 16 & 17.