

PH0690961

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**DATA SHEET**

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED APR 6 1976

DATE ENTERED AUG 18 1976

**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 Mellette House

AND/OR COMMON  
same

**LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER  
421 Fifth Avenue, Northwest

\_\_\_ NOT FOR PUBLICATION  
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

CITY, TOWN  
Watertown

\_\_\_ VICINITY OF

No. 1

STATE  
South Dakota

CODE  
046

COUNTY  
Codington

CODE  
029

**CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

**OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME  
Mellette Memorial Association

STREET & NUMBER  
421 Fifth Avenue, Northwest

CITY, TOWN  
Watertown

\_\_\_ VICINITY OF

STATE  
South Dakota

**LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.  
City Assessor's Office

STREET & NUMBER  
Codington County Courthouse

CITY, TOWN  
Watertown

STATE  
South Dakota

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE  
South Dakota Historic Sites Survey

DATE  
1974

\_\_\_ FEDERAL  STATE \_\_\_ COUNTY \_\_\_ LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS  
Historical Preservation Center, USD Alumni House

CITY, TOWN  
Vermillion

STATE  
South Dakota

# 7 DESCRIPTION

## CONDITION

EXCELLENT                       DETERIORATED  
 GOOD                                 RUINS  
 FAIR                                  UNEXPOSED

## CHECK ONE

UNALTERED  
 ALTERED

## CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE  
 MOVED      DATE \_\_\_\_\_

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### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Mellette House, a towered two story red brick Italianate villa, sits on a hill overlooking the town of Watertown and distant Lake Kampeska. Constructed in 1883 by Arthur Mellette, later governor of both Dakota Territory and the State of South Dakota, the house was one of the best examples of this style of architecture in the frontier territory and remains a classic example today.

The house appears very much as it did when it was constructed, with the exceptions of the small garage attached to the rear, the asphalt shingles on the low hipped roof, and the red paint on the once natural brick. A large porch, added to the house after the Mellette years, has been removed to preserve the original appearance.

Two story bay windows separated by a bellcast mansard constitute the most attractive feature of the house. To the south of the bay windows is one of two porches. Supported by attenuated classical columns, the porch protects the front door and two segmental windows. A smaller porch on the northeast corner of the house provides a second entrance.

Segmental windows, framed by arches featuring radiating voussoirs and small key stones, decorate the rest of the house. Exceptions are characteristic Italianate round headed windows on the second and third stories of the tower and the oeil de boeuf window on the tower's first story. Twin segmental windows adorn the north side of the house.

Brackets and molded panels beneath the extended eaves add interest to the cornice; they are also found above the bay windows. A dentil course further embellishes the cornice above the bay windows and likewise appears on the tower.

# 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/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1883

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Arthur C. Mellette/

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Mellette House, when constructed by Arthur C. Mellette in 1883, served as the only example of the Italianate villa in the community of Watertown and one of the better models of this style of architecture in Dakota Territory.

Arthur C. Mellette, born in 1842, was a native of Indiana, where prior to his residence in Dakota, he was editor of the MUNCIE TIMES, a prominent lawyer, and an active Republican politician. Due to his wife Margaret's ill health, in 1879, Mellette moved his family to Springfield, Dakota Territory, where the government appointed him register of the district land office. A year later, the land office was transferred to Watertown and Mellette and his family followed.

In the same year that Mellette erected his home, he became involved in territorial politics. As a promoter for statehood of the southern half of Dakota territory, he was a delegate to the constitutional convention in Sioux Falls in 1883. This convention was denied legal status by the federal government, thus forcing statehood advocates to renew their efforts.

During the next six years, Mellette tirelessly worked for the admission into the Union of Dakota Territory, spending a large amount of his own personal wealth in the campaign. At another constitutional convention in 1885, delegates, aware of Mellette's endeavors, elected him governor of the proposed state. Again, the attempt for statehood failed.

With the Republicans winning at the national polls in 1889, and Benjamin Harrison elected president, the chance for statehood seemed sure. Mellette and Harrison had been personal friends for twenty years, dating back to the period when Mellette campaigned for Harrison for governor of Indiana. One of the first acts of Harrison after his inauguration was the appointment of Mellette as territorial governor in 1889. Harrison and the Republican congress also quickly passed the Enabling Act, allowing Dakota Territory to divide and form state governments. On October 1, 1889, voters approved the proposed state constitution for South Dakota and elected Mellette governor; they re-elected him again in 1890.

As governor from 1889 to 1892, Mellette faced serious problems. The droughts of the late 1880's and early 1890's and the low prices commanded by farm products created much unrest in the predominantly agricultural state. Governor Mellette, consequently, organized relief for the homesteaders and distributed much of it at his own expense.

Factionalism within the state's Republican party also added to Mellette's problems, and eventually ended his political career. The powerful Senator R.F. Pettigrew successfully built a coalition of followers and ousted Mellette from leadership of the state's Republican party.

## 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Schell, Herbert S. HISTORY OF SOUTH DAKOTA, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961, pp. 216-233.  
Robinson, Doane, HISTORY OF SOUTH DAKOTA, Volume I. B.F. Bowen & Company, 1904. P. 913.  
Robinson, Doane, SOUTH DAKOTA, Volume I. Chicago: American Historical, Inc., 1930. pp. 554, 343-349.  
Information supplied by Mellette Memorial Association.

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 18,150 sq. feet

UTM REFERENCES

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6	4	8	3	1	9
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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

## 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Judith Barjenbruch, Researcher

ORGANIZATION

South Dakota Historical Preservation Center

DATE

1974

STREET & NUMBER

USD Alumni House

TELEPHONE

605/677-5314

CITY OR TOWN

Vermillion

STATE

South Dakota

## 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 National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

TITLE

Cult. Pres. Dir.

DATE

3-30-76

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

4/13/76

Attesting DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST

DATE

8.13.76

Attesting KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE One

After Mellette's retirement from politics in 1892, he devoted his time to his law practice in Watertown. The only event bringing the name of Mellette and, ironically, the Mellette home into state news again concerned the embezzlement of \$367,000 of state funds by W.W. Taylor, state treasurer from 1890 to 1894. As a bondsman for W.W. Taylor, Mellette turned over to the state in 1895, all of his assets including his family home in Watertown. Mellette died a year later in Kansas.

The State of South Dakota returned the house to the governor's widow in later years, but it never again was the home of the Mellette family. In 1943, a group of Watertown citizens organized the Mellette Memorial Association to save the house from destruction. Later the Association restored the interior of the house to the original period; and today, it is open to visitors.

The Mellette House commemorates the last governor of Dakota Territory and the State of South Dakota's first governor, a territorial politician instrumental to bringing Dakota Territory to statehood, both through his local campaign and through his influence with national leaders. At the same time, the house is associated with one of the more unsavory aspects of the early statehood period--the embezzlement of state funds.