

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

For NPS use only

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

received **MAY 14 1986**  
date entered

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

**1. Name**

historic Renville County Courthouse and Jail

and/or common N/A

**2. Location**

street & number DePue Ave. E. and Fifth St. S. N/A not for publication

city, town Olivia N/A vicinity of

state Minnesota code 22 county Renville code 129

**3. Classification**

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>N/A</u> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

**4. Owner of Property**

name Renville County

street & number Renville County Courthouse  
DePue Ave. E. and Fifth St. S.

city, town Olivia N/A vicinity of state Minnesota 56277

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Renville County Courthouse

street & number DePue Ave. E. and Fifth St. S.

city, town Olivia state Minnesota 56277

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title Minnesota Statewide Historic Sites Survey has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1984-85  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records State Historic Preservation Office, Fort Snelling History Center

city, town St. Paul state Minnesota 55111

# 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site	N/A
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved	date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed			

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

The Renville County Courthouse, built in 1902, is located on a one square block site in a residential section of Olivia, Minnesota. There is a parking lot on the east portion of the site. The Renville County Jail, built in 1904, is located across the street to the east of the courthouse at the northeast corner of DePue Avenue and Fifth Street.

The courthouse, which was designed by Minneapolis architect Fremont D. Orff, is one of the most ornate of Minnesota's extant turn of the century courthouses. The massive 2½ story building is faced with brown pressed brick and rests on a foundation of rockfaced Portage Entry Red Standstone. The building has a hipped roof from which rises a large central tower consisting of a simple square first story with a metal cornice, a second story with rounded arched vent openings and a cornice supported by Ionic pilasters, and a huge copper covered dome topped by a ball finial. The corners of the building are topped by similar, smaller copper covered domes rising above segmental arched pediments. The main (south) facade of the courthouse has a massive temple front consisting of a five bay projection topped by a simple pediment, and a 1½ story tall open porch supported by fluted sandstone Tuscan columns painted yellow. The columns support a large entablature with "Renville County Courthouse" in applied lettering on the frieze. Above the dentilled cornice is a balustrade with large urn-like balusters. Within the porch (which has a panelled pressed metal ceiling) is a rounded arched double leaf doorway within a rectangular stone surround with foliated ornamentation and the date "1902". The courthouse has rectangular window openings with smooth stone sills, keystones, and quoins across the 11 bay main facade and 7 bay sidewalls. The corner and central bays of each facade project slightly, and a large pediment rises above the center of the north, west, and east facades. The east facade has a projecting two story polygonal bay housing a circular stairway to the second story courtroom. The building is encircled by a simple metal cornice with dentils.

The interior of the courthouse is similar to Orff's Big Stone County Courthouse in Ortonville (built in 1902). The interior has a dramatic central rotunda that rises from the first floor to the peak of the roof. The rotunda has a dome-like vault rising from an embellished entablature with swan's neck pediments, and is topped by an octagonal stained glass oculus. The vault is supported by tall rounded arches which serve as openings to the second story corridors and have ornate wrought iron balcony railings. The rotunda, main (south) stairway, first floor halls, and foyer of the building have white marble floors, wainscoting, and stair treads and risers. The building houses offices in the basement, first, and second floor, and a second story courtroom and judicial chambers, all with oak woodwork and oak furnishings purchased in 1902.

The courthouse is basically intact and in good condition. Interior alterations have included replacing the gas light with electric lighting circa 1912, replacing the coal-fired heating system in 1969, and recently installing sound proof tiles on the walls and ceiling of the courtroom. Exterior alterations have included a 1929 project to replace the roof, cover the domes with copper, and replace an original roof cornice with the present cornice and gutter system; painting the sandstone porch and columns, and installing new three pane fixed metal sash.

The Renville County Jail was designed by Minneapolis architect Frank W. Kinney to complement the design of the courthouse. The jail is a two story brown pressed brick building with a sandstone foundation. It has a southern gabled roof portion which has a three bay main facade and two bay sidewalls, and a rear three bay hipped roof wing. The

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Renville County Courthouse

Continuation sheet and Jail

Item number 7

Page 1

Item #7 (Description) continued:

jail has a hipped roof brick porch topped by a wooden balustrade across the main facade, a rounded arched entrance on the west facade, very slightly segmental arched window openings with 6/1 and 8/1 sash, brick quoins, and pediments on the west and east facades and on the gabled south corner. The second story windows on the rear wing are barred. The jail is in good condition. Exterior alterations have included replacing the roof, enclosing the front porch with new brickwork, replacing some rear wing windows, and installing wood panelling around the west entrance. Behind the building are a small hipped roof brick power plant and a tall metal radio transmitting 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"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> politics/government
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
			<input type="checkbox"/> science
			<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
			<input type="checkbox"/> social/
			<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
			<input type="checkbox"/> theater
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates	Builder/Architect
1902: Courthouse	Fremont D. Orff, courthouse architect
1904: Jail & Power Plant	Frank W. Kinney, jail architect
<b>Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)</b>	O. H. Olsen, courthouse & jail builder

The Renville County Courthouse, built in 1902, is architecturally significant as one of Minnesota's finest turn of the century county courthouses. The building is an excellent and intact example of monumental Victorian architecture and represents the work of accomplished Minneapolis architect Fremont D. Orff. The courthouse and the adjacent Renville County Jail, built in 1904, are historically significant as structures which represent the culmination of a twenty-eight year county seat battle which involved four separate communities, each vying to assure their future development by becoming the county's center of government.

Renville County was established by the Legislature in 1855 and officially organized in 1866 after previous county government records were lost during the Dakota War of 1862. Renville's county seat battle, which began between the settlements of Beaver Falls and Birch Cooley in 1872, was one of the most complex and lengthy of several such conflicts which occurred on the Minnesota frontier in the nineteenth century as new communities were founded and county governments were established. In Renville County the dispute took the form of legal suits, citizen petitioning, several general elections, fierce editorial battles in local newspapers, and accusations of unfair practices by all parties involved.

Beaver Falls, a small community near the Minnesota River in southcentral Renville County, was named the first county seat in 1868 when an Auditor's office was established in a store building there. The county's first jail was built in Beaver Falls in 1872 amidst a legal battle with residents of the nearby village of Birch Cooley who wanted the building constructed there. The Beaver Falls jail building was a two story stone structure designed to house jail cells, two offices, and a second story meeting hall/courtroom. Renville's county seat troubles began in earnest circa 1882 when Beaver Falls was bypassed by the two rail lines built through the county, the Hastings and Dakota which was laid through the northern townships in 1878 and the Minneapolis and St. Louis which was constructed along the southeastern edge of the county in 1882. The construction of these lines isolated Beaver Falls from rail connections and sealed its eventual fate.

Beginning in 1885 the communities of Bird Island and Olivia, both on the Hastings and Dakota line, began petitioning the county commissioners for removal of the county seat to their respective towns. Beaver Falls retained the honor through a county-wide election held in 1889, and that year its position was further secured when a 40' by 60' frame courthouse was built in Beaver Falls and the village petitioned for municipal incorporation. In 1893-94, however, Olivia renewed its campaign, convinced the electorate, and won a general election in 1894. Residents of Beaver Falls countered by obtaining a court injunction against the move. The injunction was dissolved in District Court and the records were moved to Olivia. The State Supreme Court reversed the decision the same summer, and the records were moved back to Beaver Falls. Five years later Olivia and Bird Island fought the battle again when Bird Island offered a newly constructed building to the county for use as a courthouse and Olivia countered with offers of land and/or buildings. The

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

Renville County Historical Society. Renville County History Book 1980. Dallas: Taylor Publishing Company, 1981.  
Fremont D. Orff and Frank W. Kinney files. Northwest Architectural Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 2.54 acres

Quadrangle name Olivia, Minn.

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

### UTM References

A 

1	5	3	4	8	1	4	0	4	9	5	9	7	0	1	0
Zone			Easting				Northing								

B 

Zone			Easting				Northing								

C 

Zone			Easting				Northing								

D 

Zone			Easting				Northing								

E 

Zone			Easting				Northing								

F 

Zone			Easting				Northing								

G 

Zone			Easting				Northing								

H 

Zone			Easting				Northing								

### Verbal boundary description and justification

Lots 7, 8, and 9 of Block 1 and all of Block 2, Peterson's Addition, City of Olivia.

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

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Susan Granger/Contract Historian

organization State Historic Preservation Office

organization Minnesota Historical Society

date May 1985

street & number Fort Snelling History Center

telephone (612) 726-1171

city or town St. Paul

state Minnesota 55111

## 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

Russell W. Fridley

title State Historic Preservation Officer

date

5/8/86

For NPS use only

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

Entered in the  
National Register

date

6-13-86

for Melores Byers  
Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Renville County Courthouse

Continuation sheet and Jail

Item number 8

Page 1

Item #8 (Significance) continued:

county's last general election on the issue was held in 1900, and again Olivia was named the new county seat. Local historians report that legal records were moved from Beaver Falls to Olivia in a virtual stampede, as teams, wagons, and volunteers who were waiting at the courthouse in Beaver Falls worked through the night to make the move into temporary quarters in Olivia. Plans to construct the present courthouse began immediately, pushed on by Olivia residents who feared a reopening of the issue. Neither community attempted further action, and Bird Island's unused courthouse building was converted to a school and later destroyed by fire. Beaver Falls' courthouse was sold in 1902, converted to a poorhouse, and eventually both it and the jail were demolished. Beaver Falls' residents began an exodus to Olivia and other communities, leaving the community a virtual ghost town within a few years.

Financing for the present courthouse was secured eight months after the county seat general election of October 1900 with voter approval of a bond issue. A site was chosen, and Minneapolis architect Fremont D. Orff was selected as the architect on June 29, 1901. Stillwater contractor Ole H. Olsen constructed the basement during the fall of 1901 and completed the rest of the \$100,000 courthouse in 1902. Within a year the county made plans to construct the present jail building and in April of 1904 the present site was purchased at a cost of \$1,000. Frank W. Kinney of the Minneapolis firm of Kinney and Detweiler was chosen as the architect and the jail was constructed during the summer of 1904 by contractor Ole H. Olsen at a total cost of approximately \$21,000. As early Olivia residents had hoped, the establishment of the county seat in Olivia and the construction of the courthouse and jail secured the future of the town and growth began, although somewhat slowly. In circa 1920 Olivia surpassed Renville as the most populous community in the county, and today it remains the county's largest commercial center. The Renville County Courthouse has served as the center of county government since its completion. The Renville County Jail served as jail and sheriff's residence until fairly recently, and now serves as the headquarters for the county sheriff's department.

Fremont D. Orff, the courthouse architect, was born in Maine in 1838, was educated in Boston, and moved to Minneapolis in 1879. He practiced in Minneapolis alone and with various partners including his brother George W. Orff and Edgar Joralemon. Orff maintained a successful practice in Minneapolis until circa 1914. His Minnesota designs include courthouses in Waseca County (1897, with Joralemon, on the National Register), Big Stone county (1902), Renville County (1902), Red Lake County (1910, on the National Register); the Little Falls Public Library (1905), and many houses and commercial buildings in the Twin Cities. Orff also designed the Polk County Courthouse in Balsam Lake, Wisconsin (1899, with Guilbert), and the Bayfield County Courthouse in Washburn, Wisconsin (with Joralemon). Frank W. Kinney, the architect of the jail, was in partnership with Minneapolis architect Menno S. Detweiler from circa 1902 to 1904. The firm of Kinney and Detweiler designed Minnesota's Beltrami County Courthouse (1902), the Brown County Courthouse in Aberdeen, South Dakota, the Lafayette County Courthouse in Darlington, Wisconsin (1904), and the Langlade County Courthouse in Antigo, Wisconsin (1904). Kinney worked as an architect in Minneapolis until at least 1918.

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

Renville County Courthouse and Jail, Olivia, Renville County,  
Minnesota

Continuation sheet

Resource Count

Item number

8

Page 2

For NPS use only

received

date entered

The Renville County Courthouse and Jail Nomination  
contains 3 contributing buildings (Courthouse, Jail and  
Power Plant), and one non-contributing structure (Radio Tower).

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 2 Page 1

---

REFERENCE NUMBER: 86001281

STATE: Minnesota

COUNTY: Renville

RESOURCE NAME (HISTORIC): Renville County Courthouse and Jail


CITY/TOWNSHIP: Olivia

VICINITY OF:

ADDRESS: 500 E. DePue

COMMENTS: Address Correction



  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Ian R. Stewart  
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

4/24/98  
Date