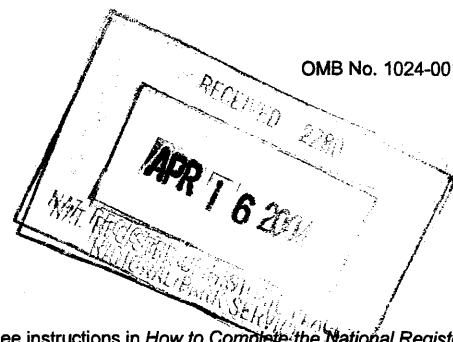


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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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 *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an 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. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Virginia City Hall

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 327 First Street South not for publication N/A

city or town Virginia vicinity

state Minnesota code MN county St. Louis code 085 zip code 55792

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this 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 meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Nina M. Archabal 4/6/04

Signature of certifying official _____ Date _____
Nina M. Archabal, Director and State Historic Preservation Officer, Minnesota Historical Society
State or Federal agency and bureau _____

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title _____ Date _____
State or Federal agency and bureau _____

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:
 entered in the National Register. See continuation sheet.
 determined eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet.
 determined not eligible for the National Register.
 removed from the National Register.
 other, (explain): _____
Signature of the Keeper Edson H. Beall Date of Action 5/26/04

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		sites
		structure
		objects
1	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

GOVERNMENT: city hall

 correctional facility

 courthouse

SOCIAL: civic

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

GOVERNMENT: city hall

 courthouse

SOCIAL: civic

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Late 19th and Early 20th Century Revivals/

 Colonial Revival/Georgian Revival

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation limestone

 walls brick, stucco, limestone

 roof composition

 other

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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)

- 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.
- 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.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or a grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

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 # _____

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Politics and Government

Period of Significance

1923-1953

Significant Dates

1923

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Berg, Elwin H., Virginia; Associate of German & Jenssen, Architects, Duluth, Minnesota; Evenson & Utterberg Co., Minneapolis, contractors

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

Virginia City Hall

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 0.4 acres

Virginia, Minn.
1951, photorevised 1985

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1.	<u>1</u> <u>5</u> Zone	<u>3</u> <u>3</u> <u>4</u> <u>0</u> <u>5</u> <u>0</u> Easting	<u>5</u> <u>2</u> <u>6</u> <u>3</u> <u>1</u> <u>3</u> <u>0</u> Northing
2.	<u> </u> <u> </u> Zone	<u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> Easting	<u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> Northing
3.	<u> </u> <u> </u> Zone	<u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> Easting	<u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> Northing
4.	<u> </u> <u> </u> Zone	<u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> Easting	<u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> Northing

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title	<u>Carmen Tschofen, contract historian</u>	date	<u>7/15/03</u>
organization	<u> </u>	telephone	<u>763/522-5709</u>
street and number	<u>2667 Parkview Boulevard</u>	city or town	<u>Robbinsdale</u>
city or town	<u>Robbinsdale</u>	state	<u>MN</u>
		zip code	<u>55422</u>

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

- A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name	<u>City of Virginia</u>	telephone	<u>218/748-7500</u>
street & number	<u>327 First Street South</u>	city or town	<u>Virginia</u>
city or town	<u>Virginia</u>	state	<u>MN</u>
		zip code	<u>55792</u>

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503

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Virginia City Hall
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Built in the Colonial/Georgian style, construction on Virginia City Hall began in 1923 and was completed in 1924. The building is a basic rectangle with rear extensions, located one block south of the main business district. The hall was constructed at the same time as the adjacent Virginia Recreation Building (NRHP, 1982), which occupies the rest of the block to the east. Farther to the east on the next block is the city Post Office, and, on the south side of the street, the I.O.O.F. Hall. Like City Hall, both of these buildings feature prominent classical elements, including white-columned porticos similar to City Hall. The location of City Hall and these buildings create a stretch of civic-oriented buildings along First Street South in Virginia.

Front façade

The symmetrical front façade is dominated by a central, ceremonial grand staircase leading to a portico with four classical stone columns, effectively dividing the front into three visually defined bays, with the central (portico) bay projecting slightly.

The outside bays are defined by a smooth faced, limestone block foundation course that visually merges with the staircase limestone. A cornerstone laid in 1923 "BY THE MASONIC FRATERNITY" (Virginia Lodge 264) is set in the foundation course in the southwest corner. Two rectangular window openings with flat limestone lintels in each bay provide light to the basement through limestone-lined window wells. Brick above the foundation course and on all facades is common bond. A limestone band course visually separates the basement from the first floor on the exterior, running at the height of the central bay staircase. Two rectangular window openings in the outer bays at the first floor level have smooth limestone sills and are topped with flat relieving arches of brick.

A limestone band course with a drip profile separates the first and second stories across the façade and visually serves as a continuous sill for the upper story windows. The seven upper story windows (three in the central bay) are rectangular, with rounded arch limestone surrounds and tympania above, and horizontal limestone panel window breasts below. Brick above the windows meets with the limestone architrave defined by the portico. In the outer bays, this architrave is topped by a brick balustrade and limestone finishing cap.

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Center/ portico bay

The classical portico is the defining feature of the building. Three-step approaches to the left and right of the grand staircase parallel the façade. These lead to a landing accessing the grand staircase (constructed of smooth limestone block). The staircase rises to the first floor entrance, with the landing stretching the width of the portico and serving as a continuous pedestal for the columns. A cast iron railing with spiral returns at the approach follows the line of the stairs. The four composite-order fluted columns with acanthus leaves adorning the capitals are echoed on the façade by smooth limestone responds. The centered entrance door is defined by an elaborate limestone surround and broken pediment arch with extensive classical detailing, including fluted pilasters, acanthus leaves and egg-and-dart mouldings. Centered within the pediment are an oval medallion and fruit-and-leaf garlands. The tympania of the upper story windows in this central bay have sculpted limestone detailing, with circle motifs and simple geometric arch segments on the outer windows and a more elaborate sculpted scroll medallion on the center window. The fleur-de-lis detail on the scroll is echoed in the centrally-placed ornamentation of the iron railing on the staircase below.

The columns of the portico support a simple classical pediment. On the frieze, a centered engraving reads "VIRGINIA CITY HALL", with sculpted limestone rosettes above the outermost columns. The cornice is emphasized with dentils and a projecting rain cap. Above is a limestone balustrade composed of smooth limestone panels similar to those of the window breasts. Four short limestone panel pilasters aligned with the columns below serve as visual balusters.

West Façade

The west façade maintains the architectural style and rhythm of the primary façade, facing a well-travelled street leading to the main business district. An extension set back at the northern end of this side has simpler window treatment than on the larger portion of the west facade. A modest ceremonial stair of limestone block with an iron railing leads to the first floor entrance. Approach stairs meet at a landing below entrance level, with stairs rising to the entrance from this point perpendicular to the façade. "POLICE" is painted in gold on the glass transom above the door. Paired limestone columns on both sides of the entrance landing support an entablature, with the frieze engraved with the words "CITY HALL." The cornice line of this entablature is simpler than that of the upper story and front portico. An iron balustrade with a central ornament tops the entablature. The five upper story windows are spaced above the entablature, with

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window surrounds as on the primary façade. Above the central window is a limestone inset with a small medallion engraved with the letter "V" and fruit-and-leaf garlands to each side.

The single upper and single first story windows of the rear extension are narrower than those of the main façades. An even narrower glass block window provides light into the first floor of the extension near the corner where the main mass and extension meet. The extension is not as tall as the main building mass, indicating standard ceiling height in this area. The pediment and cornice line are the simpler version of the entablature on this side, and a small brick balustrade provides visual unity with the main building.

North Side (Rear)

The north side of the building is accessed by an alley and is divided visually into three bays, with the outside bays enclosing a more recent single-story brick bay with a slightly-below grade entrance. Some first story window openings on the east and west bays have vertical iron bars. Three rectangular windows are visible on the main building above the central enclosure, with irregular window openings on upper level of the east and west (inner) sides of the rear extensions. The simple architrave and small brick balustrade of the west side of the extension is also present on the north side.

East Side

A recessed single story garage with a below-grade entrance facing south connects the first level of the east façade with the Recreation Building to the east. There are two basement windows at driveway grade level. Two first-story window openings like those on the south are visible on the first story in front of the garage recess. The first three upper story window openings on the south end of the east façade repeat those of the main façade, with arched limestone surrounds. A variety of ducts and ventilation equipment obscures much of the upper level of the east façade, which has a number of unadorned window openings in the center and north end. The architrave and brick balustrade from the southern façade continue around the visible portion of the east side.

The east side of the rear extension has one window opening at grade level, and two window openings each on the first and second levels, some with vertical iron bars.

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Tower

A white-domed cupola is centered on the building's roof. The lower two-thirds of the tower is squared, with corner columns and pediments on each side of four tall windows. The fifteen-light windows, facing each of the cardinal directions, are topped with fan lights. Above a protruding cornice line rests the slightly smaller upper section of the cupola, also with four distinct sides. These sides are adorned with the raised circle motifs found elsewhere on the building. Above the secondary cornice line is the cove-vaulted dome, topped with a prominent flagpole.

Landscape

Other elements contributing to the City Hall's physical presence are the various memorials located immediately in front of the grand staircase and on the southwest corner of the lot. These include three time capsules in the ground at the corner of the lot, commemorating 75th year, centennial, and millennial occasions. A modern flagpole and street lamp also draw attention to this corner.

Exterior Alterations

Based on photographic records, the exterior of the building retains a high degree of integrity. Detectable alteration to the exterior of the buildings was largely restricted to changes in window and entrance infill, without significant changes to their forms or placement. City engineering department records indicate that the original double-hung windows on the major facades were likely replaced with aluminium windows in 1957. An exterior renovation by the firm of Damberg and Damberg¹ in 1964 replaced some of the deteriorating limestone on the portico foundation with new stone. The door and transom on the west entrance was also replaced. An addition and new entrance to the police offices on the north side, with alterations ca. 1968 and ca. 1978, filled the space between the eastern and western wings of the building. This enclosure is visually unobtrusive, seen only from the alleyway. A solid catwalk was built to surround the base of the cupola ca. 1940 as a part of the town's civil defense efforts, but is not visible from street level. The cupola itself was restored in the mid-1990s. The absence of shade trees along First Street is the most notable landscape change.

¹ Reuben Damberg, one of the firm's two owners, was the original construction supervisor for City Hall.

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Interior

The interior of the building retains many of its historic features and functions. On the first and second floors, a central atrium provides access to the offices housed in the sides and the rear of the building. Original features include an oak and iron staircase railing, a central stained-glass rosette window in the ceiling of the second floor atrium, and doors off the atrium which have heavy wood surrounds with broken pediments echoing those on the building's front facade. The second-floor council room retains most of the original décor, including the extensive Craftsman-style furnishings (council table, chairs, podium, benches, etc.). As designated in the original blueprints, the basement area houses heating and electrical functions and finished spaces for meetings, including a frequently used community room.

Interior alterations have accommodated the evolving needs of modern offices, and include the reconfiguration of office spaces and the unobtrusive installation of an elevator in the west wing.

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Virginia City Hall was built in 1923 as part of Virginia's largest municipal building project to that date. It is locally significant under Criteria A in the area of Government and Politics as the center of city government in Virginia. The activities associated with this area of significance were important throughout the period of significance, introduced by the construction of the hall in 1923 and concluding in 1953. The story of the hall's development and use particularly reflects the nature of the era's local political processes. Promoted by Virginia's industry and business leaders and supported by tax levies, Virginia City Hall relates to the state contexts of "Minnesota's Iron Ore Industry (1880s-1945)" and "Northern Minnesota Lumbering (1870-1930s)."

Virginia's City Halls

The current Virginia City Hall is the fourth building to serve city government functions, and the third constructed specifically for government purposes. The City of Virginia was platted in 1892 after the discovery of iron on the Mesabi Range. The town developed rapidly, bolstered by the fortunes of both the mining and lumbering industries. City officials first met in Hayes Hall (non-extant), which, according to historical accounts, served as the town's all-purpose community center, the site of church services and as an entertainment venue. The city rented space in the ground floor of the two-story hall, built in 1892-93, for twenty-five dollars per month. The more immediate needs of the developing town were served through the construction of a separate jail. But by 1893, the city secured lots for an official city hall, which they intended to construct for \$600.¹

Two major fires that destroyed large portions of the town in 1893 and 1900 influenced Virginia's structural history. The first city hall, presumably constructed after the 1893 fire, was destroyed (along with a significant portion of the downtown) in the conflagration of June 7, 1900. The city subsequently passed an ordinance requiring new construction to be fireproof, a factor influencing Virginia's present-day appearance, with its mass of turn-of-the-century brick and brick-veneer buildings.

The newer, fireproof city hall was a two-story, storefront-style brick building designed by architect Edwin S. Radcliffe of Duluth. The cost of the building is listed in a county history at

¹ Van Brunt, Walter. History of Duluth and St. Louis County. 1921.

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\$15,139.12, suggesting a not-inconsiderable commitment for the construction of the hall.² The city hall building was constructed on lots 17 through 19 in block 25, immediately behind the town's main business street. Just five years later, in 1910, the city spent an additional \$15,000 to improve the building, which ultimately housed "12 office rooms as well as other municipal facilities."³

Whatever deficiencies inspired the 1910 remodelling were not recorded in city council minutes or other sources, and apparently the problems were not fully addressed by this remodelling work. In an otherwise promotional publication by city boosters, a picture of the city hall was bluntly captioned "Virginia's city hall is inadequate." In 1913, council minutes record some discussion on the construction of a new city hall. Yet the topic seems to have been abandoned until April of 1916, when Mayor Michael Boyland addressed the council about a number of city improvements. He grouped the need for a city hall with other concerns such as the "inauguration, equipment and maintenance" of a rest room for women. At about this time, a levy of \$15,000 was made for the new building, with the same amount levied in the following years until 1921, with a \$100,000 levy and 1922, with a levy of \$150,000. "The decision was made not to commence construction work until \$400,000 had been reached."⁴

In addition to the efforts of the mayor and council, the Virginia City Clerk, Alfred E. Bickford, also contributed to City Hall planning and development.⁵ Bickford held the position as city clerk for 30 key years, and historian Paul Landis posited that his honesty and incorruptibility in city matters was one of the major factors that placed Virginia on a different and, for many years, more successful footing than the towns of Eveleth and Hibbing. Knowledgeable in both city financing and city development processes, Bickford served as the primary conduit for communication between the council and those involved in issues surrounding the construction of

² Several other buildings built during the construction boom following the 1900 fire are attributed to the firm formed by Radcliffe and his later partner, Vernon Price, including a fire hall, the Fay Hotel, the Minnesota block, and the H.J. George building.

³ *Queen City Sun*, March 9, 1923.

⁴ Skarud, M. *A History of Virginia*. University of Minnesota Master's Thesis, 1941, Chapter 4, p. 26. Skarud cites a pamphlet, "The History of the City Hall of [sic] Recreation Building, Virginia, Minn;" published by the *Virginia Daily Enterprise* in 1922.

⁵ Landis, Paul. Three Iron Mining Towns. A study in Cultural Change. Edwards Brothers, Inc. Ann Arbor, MI, 1938.

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the city hall, and he recorded the council's city hall negotiation processes in detailed meeting minutes.⁶

Controversy

As financially sound as city finances and rationales were, the first real step towards a new city hall was not promising. In April 1916, proceeding with the new city hall concept, the City Council focused on lots 22 through 32 in Block 24, immediately west of the existing city hall, as an appropriate site. They condemned the lots, a few of which were vacant, the others occupied by a hospital, a medicine manufacturing company, and a small number of dwellings. Controversy ensued. Three of these lots were owned by a city council member, who would receive payment for them. Virginia resident Albert Heritage began legal proceedings against the council focusing on the conflict of interest. This stalled the issue for another year, when the district court vacated the appraiser's awards in April of 1917. The issue lingered until the council voted to abandon the condemnation proceedings in August 1918.

The year 1919 offered a fresh start for the new city hall project, in part because of the desire to dedicate a new building to World War I veterans. The council voted to continue occupation of lots 17, 18 and 19 in Block 25, where the existing city hall was located, and condemned the adjacent lots in this block to the east. These were occupied by dwellings and a few small warehouse buildings that supported the businesses on the north side of the block. The only record of conflict in this location was in 1923, when the council requested that Bickford order a vendor, who had taken to operating a popcorn stand on the new building site, "to remove his building at once."

A Successful Plan

Several other factors were still required for successful city hall construction, including the need to sell the idea to the public. Council members began linking the idea of a community or civic center for the people of Virginia to the discussions about a new city hall. It was necessary to amend the city charter to grant the city council authority to construct such a building. The city attorney urged the council to conduct a publicity campaign to garner support for such an

⁶ By 1951, Bickford had retired and relocated to San Diego, California, but was still cited as an expert in city matters. "Virginia... A Range Metropolis." *Missabe Iron Ranger*, For the Employees [sic] and Their Families, December 1951.

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amendment, and the council appointed a committee of business and industrial leaders, as well as other leading citizens, to publicize the concept of a new building and build support for an amendment.

While council opinion was divided as to the necessity of a publicity campaign, newsprint flyers soon appeared. The text of a flyer distributed at this time presumably rebuts the anticipated issues of controversy, and also touted a significant point in favor of construction. Historian Harry Lamppa noted "One of the selling points for the new recreational building was that \$400,000 had already been levied..."⁷ City officials publicly committed half of these funds to the community building. The flyer's text provided a thorough rationale:

Where do the people of Virginia spend their leisure hours? Virginia should have a community building for public purposes of a civic, assembly, social and recreational nature. A community building is the most fitting memorial which could be dedicated by the City of Virginia to the veterans of the world's war. The money to construct such a building as well as a new city hall has already been levied and the construction of a community building at this time will not increase the taxes. The community building to be constructed under the proposed amendment to the city charter will be a meeting place for all the people of Virginia. You can rely upon the members of the city council to see to it that the building contains features which will attract all of the people of the city and make the building a real community center. Do not believe the rumors that such a building will be designated for any particular class or group of people. Investigate the Facts.

A statement of the "Public Building Committee" at the same time also provided further solid arguments likely to appeal to taxpayers and patriots. Noting the availability of funds, they added:

We came to the conclusion that it would be a waste of the people's money to construct a city hall larger than is needed for administration purposes, and that it would be a mistake to carry out a building program that would not take care of the needs of a civic, assembly, social and recreational nature. It is planned to dedicate the proposed building to the Veterans of the World's war. The members of this

⁷ Lamppa, Harry. "Virginia City Hall Preliminary Evaluation," SHPO files, no date.

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*committee ... have been advised that the returned veterans prefer such a building to any other kind of memorial.*⁸

The statement further acknowledged that while there was likely to be difference of opinion about what features such a building should have, the city council "must necessarily be left" with such decisions. Statement writers backtracked on this stance in the conclusion, noting that following an affirmative vote for an amendment, "the people and their representatives" could determine the features.

The flyers and statement reflect the nature of much of the rest of City Hall's construction narrative; while essential and executed with style, the building was something of an afterthought. It was the Recreation Building that subsequently received much of the public attention and newspaper coverage. Early publicity and notes on the architectural bidding process indicate a notable lack of initial clarity about whether the city hall and recreational facilities were to be constructed as one or two buildings. Both concepts, however, were permitted when the townspeople of Virginia voted on March 30, 1922, to amend the city charter to allow the construction of a community building, with 838 citizens in favor, and 338 rejecting the proposed amendment.

More Controversy

The first task following this approval was to retain the services of an architect. Council minutes indicate that Albert W. Kerr and Company, with offices in Virginia and Minneapolis, had been retained in 1919 to develop preliminary sketches of a proposed or remodelled facility, but by March, 1922, the company had "wholly failed" to fulfil this contractual obligation.⁹ New proposals from architects were solicited during two weeks in April.

Even though the issue of building lots had long since been resolved, the dissent on the city council in matters related to city hall was far from over. Confusion reigned in the architects' bids. When the council opened bids on April 25, 1922, one architect caused consternation when he appeared in person to make a proposal, apparently not understanding the need for a written

⁸ "Community Building." Statement of Public Building Committee. Virginia Area Historical Society files, ca. March 1922.

⁹ The ongoing confusion over which lots and what type of building would be required may well have created some difficulty for the architect. Kerr and Company later billed and sued the city for \$12,000 for services rendered, and were eventually paid \$3000.

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proposal. Twenty-one formal ballots were required before the council agreed to accept the bid of the firm of Frederick George German & Leif Jenssen of Duluth. On April 28, a resolution including slightly modified language was passed, accepting the bid of German & Jenssen and Elwin H. Berg of Eveleth. The resolution maintained the vague status of the nature of the buildings to be constructed:

Resolved... That the buildings and improvements may contemplate a) a city hall in one building and a recreational or community building in another building; b) a city hall and recreational or community building combined in one building.¹⁰

But there was still more debate. The final ballot approving the architects had been 5 to 3, with one blank. On May 2, the city attorney ruled that the vote required six in favor, and the resolution was declared, "not adopted." Yet on May 15, the council voted to meet with German & Jenssen and Berg about drafting a contract, which was subsequently issued. Council minutes indicate that the conflict was still not resolved, and dragged on for several meetings. Ultimately, a consensus was reached, but only after "conferring" outside council chambers. From the minutes, June 13, 1922, kept by city clerk Alfred E. Bickford:

Mayor Empie addressed the council on matters in connection with steps to be taken to appoint some architect for the construction of the city buildings on the city hall site and stated that there was no reason why the council could not get together and take the necessary action to carry out the promises to the people of the city in connection with such public building construction and recommended that the members of the council again try to come to some decision. Moved and supported that the council take a recess for the purpose of conferring together on the appointment of architects...

Bickford did not note how long the recess took, but the contract with German & Jenssen and Berg was subsequently approved and entered into record.¹¹

¹⁰ Virginia City Council Minutes, April 28, 1922.

¹¹ The cause of the contentiousness among council members during the architect selection process is not known. However, records from subsequent decades indicate a history of competition between various local labor units, which complicated other public planning and building decisions.

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Elwin H. Berg, Architect

From this point on, council minutes and other publicity regarded Elwin H. Berg as "the architect" of the city hall and recreation building (or buildings). He was recorded first on blueprints as "architect," with a second line noting he was "associated" with German & Jenssen. Council minutes suggest that Berg was not particularly prompt in providing further drafts of building plans, which first arrived in September. A revised version finally appeared in February after much prompting by the council via Bickford to Berg. A resolution accepting Berg's final plans, which included two separate buildings with a recessed garage between the two, was accepted on February 27, 1923, with a payment of \$10,500.

Elwin Berg was born on March 18, 1890 in Duluth and attended school there. He graduated from Washington University in St. Louis in 1912, remaining there two more years with an architectural firm. He relocated to Duluth for two years, then moved to Fort William, Ontario to work with architect Carl Wirth. In 1919 he relocated to Eveleth, perhaps following successful area commissions such as the Eveleth Recreation Building, designed by Berg and constructed in 1918. His obituary also credits him with the construction of the additions to the Virginia municipal hospital and the state hospital in St. Peter.¹²

Berg's apparently temporary connection with German & Jenssen seems to have been a mutually beneficial one. The firm had experience with municipal buildings, and provided a solid backing for Berg, who was able to serve as the local man for the Duluth-based firm.

Berg also had opportunity to shoulder more responsibility for the buildings. Leif Jenssen died during the course of construction, acknowledged by the council through condolences to his widow. (Prior to arriving in Duluth in 1904, Jenssen had worked in the offices of Jarvis Hunt in Chicago. German and Jenssen were also mutually credited with the designs of Duluth's YMCA and YWCA buildings, the city's Pilgrim Congregational Church, buildings associated with the Marshall-Wells Company, and the Chisholm Junior High School.)

Berg ran unsuccessfully for state representative later in his life. He died in 1942 at age 52 while working in Sioux Falls, S.D., for another Virginia architecture firm, Lenci, Lenci and Englund, on the large U.S. Army radio school.

¹² "Range Architect Heart Attack Victim. *Virginia Daily Enterprise*, July 15, 1942.

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Architecture

Berg's selection of the Colonial/Georgian style for the City Hall building was likely an obvious one. The style was associated with neo-classical architecture, which predominated during the City Beautiful movement (1890-1930). Discussions about the 1923 building began many years before, years in which communities across the country embraced the City Beautiful movement. This social and architectural philosophy revolved in part around neo-classical principals. Virginia was a well-established city by 1922, when architect's plans for the building were presented, and the Colonial/Georgian style evoked permanence and success. Other civic buildings, including the Post Office on the next block, also were of this style. Architectural historian William H. Wilson noted several general features of the Neo-Classic Revival style which are reflected in Virginia City Hall:

*[The style] was ideally suited to any building requiring easy public access to a few floors, controlled vertical movement, and a high degree of functional utility. It was... a superb envelope for buildings low in proportion to their length and breadth, however much their monumental domes or interior spaces suggest height...*¹³

And while limited examples make it difficult to evaluate the body of Berg's work, Wilson also notes the Neo-Classic Revival style was likely suited to anyone's talents, whether great or small:

*The neoclassical mode encouraged talented architects to pursue their experiments in arrangement and detail within the confines of a discipline...just as important, its discipline rescued a great many mediocre talents. So long as an architect followed precedent it was reasonably difficult for him to design a bad neoclassic building.*¹⁴

Ultimately, the hall's style and its central location adjacent to the town's main street echoed those of other city halls across the country.¹⁵

¹³ Wilson, William H. The City Beautiful Movement. The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1989, p 88.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Gebhard, David and Tom Martinson. A Guide to the Architecture of Minnesota. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977, p. 302.

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City Hall Construction

Following several bids from across the state, the city council selected without much controversy two separate contractors to execute Berg's work, one for each building. Evenson and Utterberg of Minneapolis¹⁶ became the contractors for City Hall, with Fred Gorham of Virginia the contractor for the recreation building. When work on the City Hall finally began, Berg employed an on-site inspector, Rueben Damberg of Eveleth, to oversee construction and material quality.

Several matters compounded construction considerations. The council granted permission to the Mesaba Railway to temporarily extend their tracks for the purpose of transporting building materials to the site. Local stonemason and bricklayer Carl Lanquist requested that the council include protection for local labor in the subcontracting specifications as "this policy had been pursued by the city councils in the past." The council moved that "where it is expedient and possible the successful proposers ...[will] be expected to employ all local labor and materials in the construction of these buildings or any part thereof..."¹⁷ The council also asked the Park Commission to protect the trees on the city hall construction site during the building process, reflecting a concern for landscaping elements characteristic of the City Beautiful movement. (However, when the Park Commission later expressed concern "relative to flowers and plant culture surrounding the new city hall grounds," the council deferred the matter and sent it to committee.)

Council members kept track of the fine details of the building with construction discussions at most meetings. Soon after issuing the general construction contracts, the council modified them to allow Bedford stone to be used for the cornices on both buildings, rather than sheet metal. In July 1923, the council requested that Berg provide plans for interior details such as electrical components, window shades and furnishings. In August, the council refused to "entertain any notion" regarding the installation of a telephone switchboard in city hall following a proposal from the local Northwestern Bell Company, finding single-line service quite adequate. They also expressed concern during the winter months at the cost of heating the buildings when workers were not present. March, 1923 council minutes note that it was, "Moved and supported that

¹⁶ Davison's Minneapolis City Directory of 1920 lists the firm of Evenson and Utterberg, with Arthur Evenson and Hjalmar Utterberg as general contractors operating at 550-552 Builder's Exchange. (The men are listed individually in 1915.)

¹⁷ Virginia City Council Minutes, March 12, 1923.

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Architect Berg be authorized to provide for the city all necessary toilet paper holders for the... buildings.”

Community Interaction

While decision-making in regard to the new buildings was clearly the purview of the city council, citizens seem to have followed the buildings’ progress. As construction progressed, an increasing number of bids were taken from vast numbers of community and state-wide businesses to fulfil needs pertaining to interior and furnishing details. (Bickford faithfully recorded the proposal of the Range Paper Company, which “submitted a communication in connection with the furnishing of toilet paper cabinets and the use of a certain grade of paper.”¹⁸) Community awareness of the building projects was also reflected in council minutes through the large number of applications from townspeople for jobs available in the buildings. In the early months of 1924, applications for the positions of “janitor,” janitress,” and “matron” (for the recreation building) poured in. (This position of head janitor for both buildings eventually went to James H. Cudlip.)

June 23, 1923 offered the first public celebration of the construction, when the council was informed that arrangements for the placing of a cornerstone would need to be made with all possible speed, since contractors were ready to construct the walls above cornerstone level. The cornerstone box, laid by Virginia Lodge 264 in a ceremony led by Minnesota’s Grand Master of Masons, James Moore McConnell, was to contain “the usual and proper corner-stone articles of history.”¹⁹

A larger and less hurried celebration was held at a dedication in April 1924. The front page of the *Queen City Sun* announced the “dedication ceremonials in connection with the opening of Virginia’s city hall and recreational building,” although the text of the articles referred largely to the recreational building alone. One article indicated that the city hall still required “finishing touches.” The ceremonies included a mayoral speech, a tour of the recreation building, lunch served by the Ladies Auxiliary to more than 3,000, and a great ball in the Recreation Building, sponsored by the J. Burt Pratt American Legion Post 239, with an expected attendance of 2,000.

¹⁸ Virginia City Council Minutes, April 22, 1924.

¹⁹ Virginia City Council Minutes, June 13, 1923.

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Two weeks later, on April 25, the paper definitively declared, "City Hall is Ready," but text again indicated another three weeks would be needed to complete the painting and furnishing.

On May 20, 1924, the first city council meeting was held in the new city hall, opened with a prayer for spiritual guidance in "serving the public as servants of the people."

All operations that were housed in the old city hall, "with the exception of the park board," had been accommodated in the County Courthouse during ten months of demolition and construction. Most of these temporarily displaced offices were assigned to spaces in the new building. Building functions depicted on the 1922 blueprints include a generous council chamber, a courtroom, a jury room, a public health clinic, and offices for the mayor, city clerk, treasurer and assessor, engineer, judge, court clerk, park commission and health officer.

But other groups had their eyes on the new building. Following an inquiry by the Chamber of Commerce, council members decided during the course of construction that "when the city hall building is completed the city council will consider a proposition of assigning rooms"²⁰ to various agencies. The race was soon on for space not specifically assigned on the plans. Both former city hall occupants and new groups jockeyed for space in the new facility. The Chamber of Commerce repeatedly renewed its request for space, finally appearing en masse before the council, which granted it a room in the basement. The city attorney asked to have the law library relocated from the library building to city hall. The library board requested space for a reading room. The Park Commission claimed that the room it had been assigned was too "small, dark and inadequate," requesting a southwest corner room on the second floor. The council was not swayed, often deferring or denying such requests.

The initial months in the city hall showed that the building would require tweaking, and Berg was contacted frequently. The garage needed a cement driveway. An electric clock was needed in the lobby. Water taps and sprinklers were needed on the grounds. The "shower bathers" in both buildings lacked "indicators." An adequate floor preparation was needed to literally settle the dust in the building. A light was needed in the police department stairwell. By November, a lack of heating efficiency was of major concern, and cracks had begun to appear in various floors.

²⁰ Virginia City Council Minutes, July 12, 1923.

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When the dust finally settled, literally and figuratively, the citizens of Virginia had a multi-function building that housed several significant government and civic operations. Perhaps most elaborate were the new police department facilities, which included jail cells to accommodate up to 18 prisoners, with separate facilities for women and juveniles. The *Queen City Sun* pointed out that off-duty or on-call police officers "will not be forced to idle their time away in the corridors of the station," as the new Virginia City Hall facilities contained, "billiard rooms, shower bath rooms, a gymnasium, [and] rifle range."²¹ By 1949, the police department also had its own radio transmitter in city hall, with a 15-mile range for broadcasting on signal WDCX.

Lettering on doors dating from the early years of city hall also showed that an attic-level room was assigned to the Girl Scouts. Sizable public rest rooms and large vault rooms for the housing of documents were also included in the city hall building.

In Virginia City Hall, Virginians also had a showpiece for an increasingly important group: tourists. As early as 1921, literature promoting tourism in Virginia noted: "During 1922 the city will construct a fine city hall and a recreational building, adding another attraction."²² The same newspaper edition that announced the completion of the city hall also devoted front-page space to noting that over 2,000 tourists from 25 states visited Virginia in 1923, with more expected. The city promoted itself by improving camping facilities and beautifying city boulevards with trees and shrubs. Tourism brochures from the 1930s and 1940s consistently pictured the City Hall and Recreation Building, with one such photo set captioned "A Modern City on the Edge of the Wilderness." Tourists likely benefited more directly from the Recreation Building's facilities, but the Chamber of Commerce often noted that the city hall served as the Chamber's "headquarters."

Virginia City Hall was adapted to civic needs through the following decades. In 1968, a League of Women Voters publication noted that, in addition to offices mentioned previously, City Hall also housed the City Civil Defense office, the Draft Board, the Economic Opportunity Office, the Social Security office, and the local office of the American Red Cross. Local accounts suggest the presence of the Civil Defense was also evident through the 1940's addition of a catwalk surrounding the building's central cupola, also referred to as a "spotter's tower."

²¹ "Police Officers Have Unusual Facilities." *Queen City Sun*, April 11, 1924.

²² The use of the singular "attraction" may be attributed to the confusion over whether the new facilities would be housed in one or two buildings, or may reflect that the Recreational Building was more likely regarded as a tourism asset.

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Today Virginia City Hall remains a vital hub of city government, standing side-by-side with other intact civic buildings built during the same era.²³ Some of the offices once housed in the building have relocated, including the Parks Department and the Chamber of Commerce. The space once occupied by the municipal court now serves the city's engineering department. (All court functions were removed to the county courthouse in the mid-1980s.) Offices for the mayor, clerk, assessor and city attorney remain, many in their original locations. City Hall now also houses offices for organizations such as the Virginia Economic Development Authority and the Mesabi Literacy Council. The police department continues to be headquartered in the building, although jail facilities were removed in the spring of 2002. The general public appears to be most familiar with the large basement Community Room, which provides a flexible gathering space and kitchen facilities for a number of community organizations. The second floor lobby also serves as gallery space for local artists and other recognition programs.

²³ The Recreation Building is currently in its third incarnation, serving as an example of adaptive reuse by housing a range of medical facilities and offices. Recreational use of the building was abandoned in the 1940s, and in 1947, the Cluett-Peabody company, maker of Arrow shirts, converted the building to a factory, offering a significant employment opportunity to women. The company first employed almost 80 women, with 400 working by 1949, according to a centennial souvenir booklet of that year. Cluett-Peabody operated four such plants on the Range, with others in Chisholm, Gilbert and Eveleth. The Eveleth plant was housed in the town's converted Recreation Building as well, which had been designed by Berg in 1918.

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10. Geographical Data

Verbal Boundary Description

City Lots 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, and 22, Block 25, City of Virginia, Original Addition.
Lot size 150'x120'.

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes the entire city lots that have historically been associated with the property.

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Virginia City Hall ca. 1945
Minnesota Historical Society
Location No. MS2.9 VG8 r7

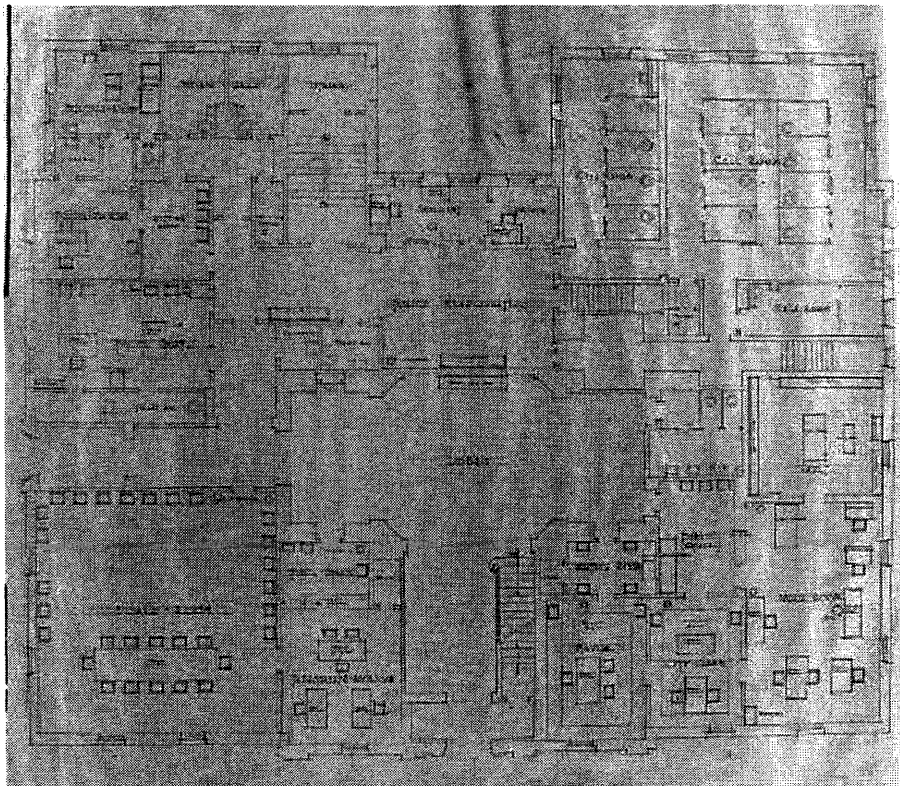
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First Floor
Virginia City Hall
1922 blueprint
Elwin H. Berg- Architect- Virginia, Eveleth
German & Jenson- Associated- Duluth, Minnesota

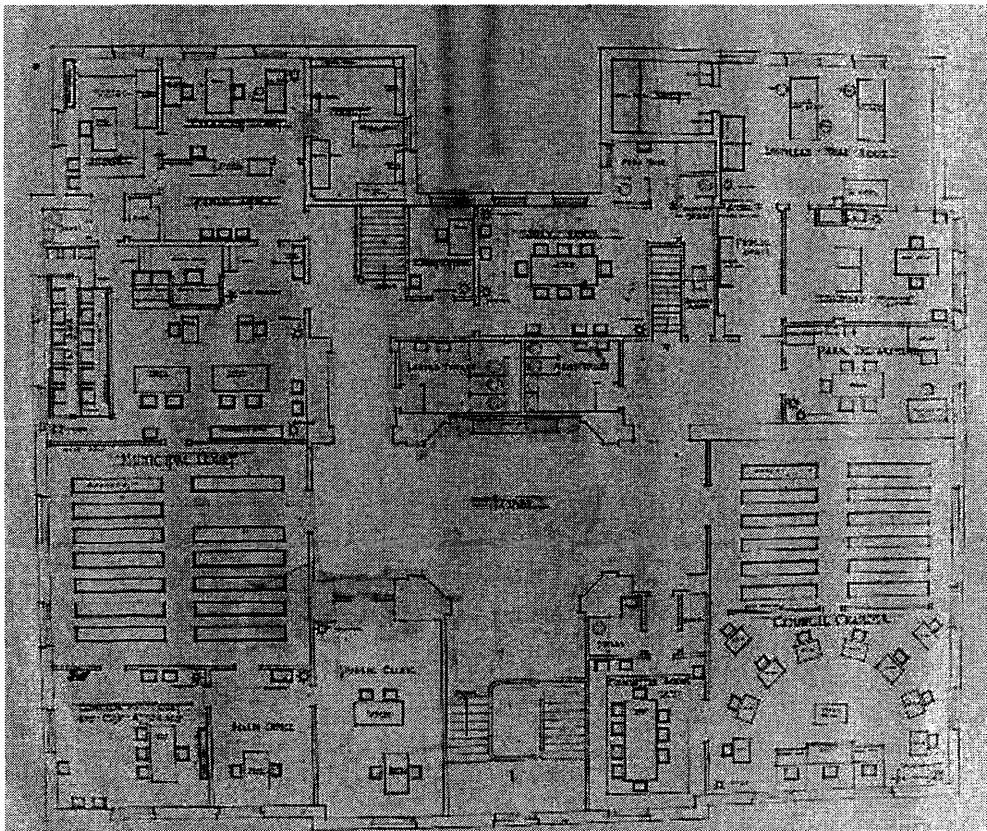
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Second Floor
Virginia City Hall
1922 blueprint
Elwin H. Berg- Architect- Virginia, Eveleth
German & Jenssen- Associated- Duluth, Minnesota

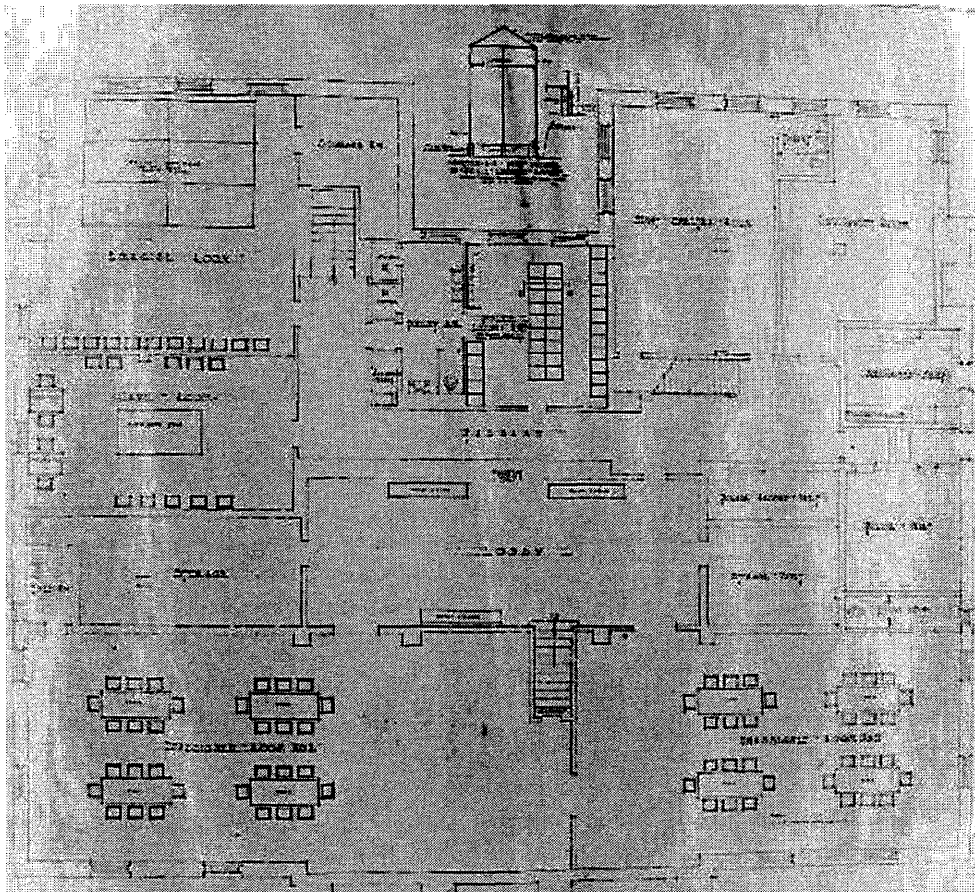
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Basement
Virginia City Hall
1922 blueprint
Elwin H. Berg- Architect- Virginia, Eveleth
German & Jenssen- Associated- Duluth, Minnesota

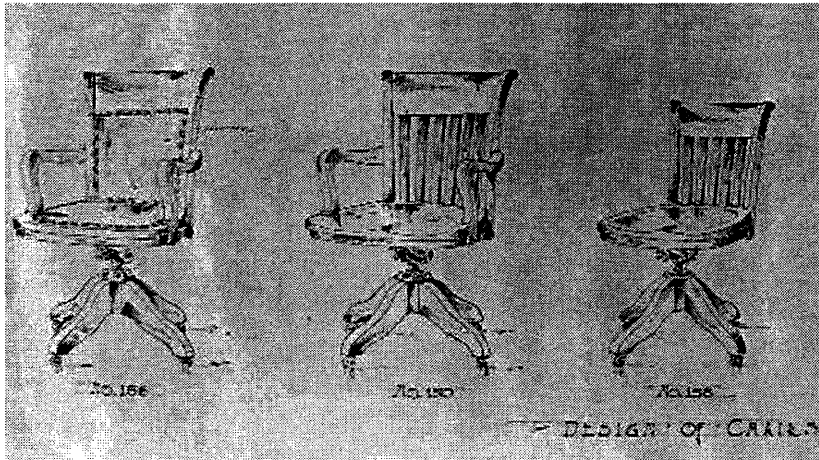
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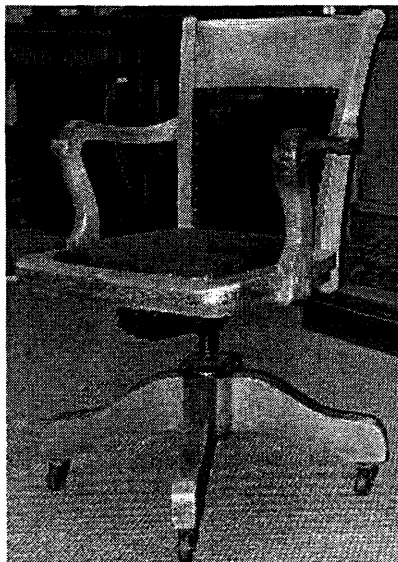
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Virginia City Hall
1922 blueprint
Design of chairs
Elwin H. Berg- Architect- Virginia, Eveleth
German & Jenson- Associated- Duluth, Minnesota



Virginia City Hall
Chair in Council Chamber
April, 2003

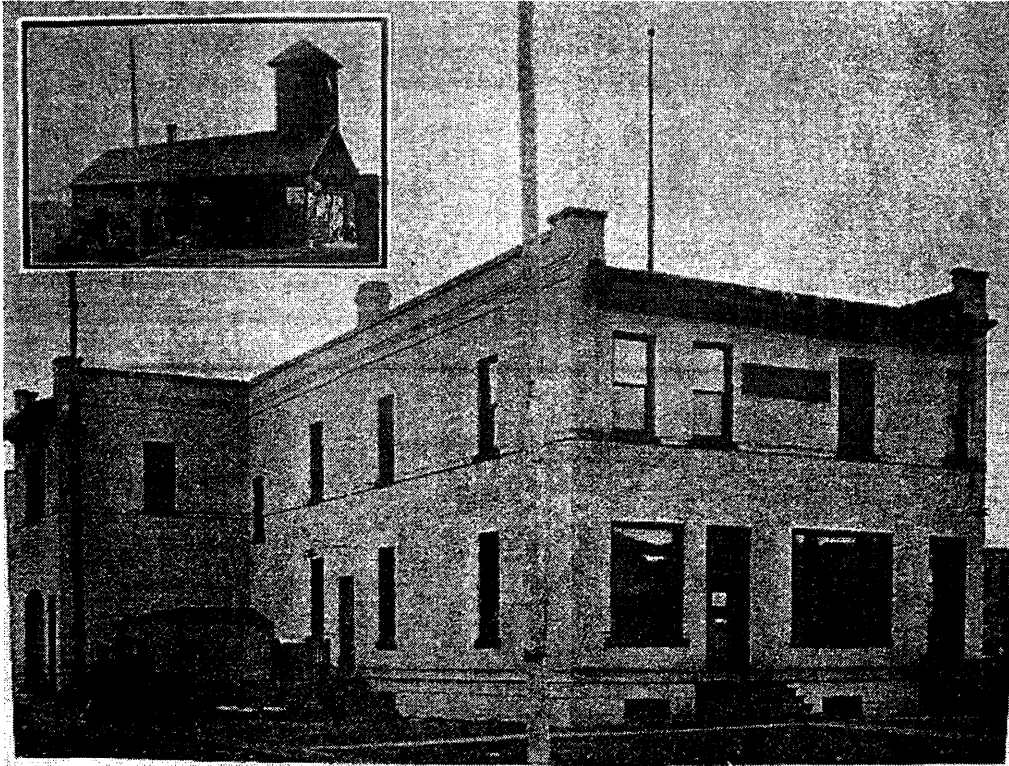
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New and old City Hall.

“Old and New City Hall”

From: *The Virginia Story. Historical Souvenir Booklet of the Virginia Centennial Celebration.* 1949

Inset photo: built ca. 1893, burned 1900.

Larger photo: built 1905, remodelled 1910