

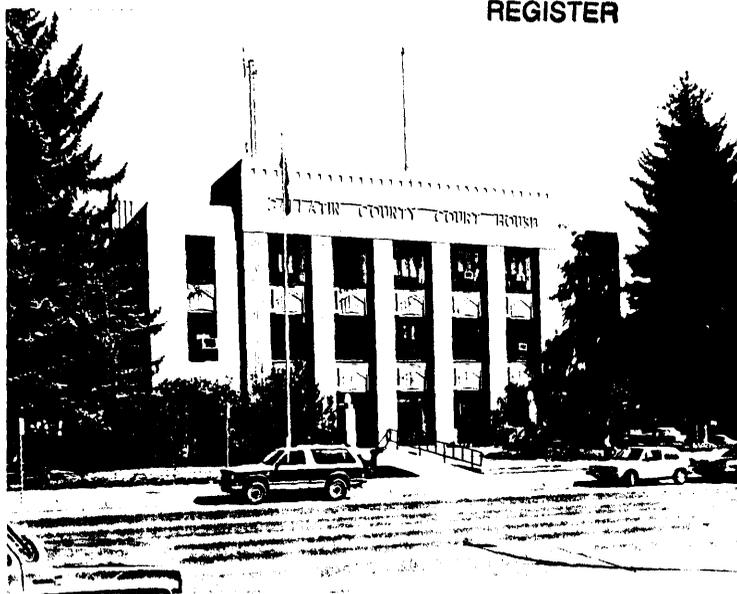
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MONTANA HISTORICAL/ARCHITECTURAL INVENTORY #1

NATIONAL
REGISTER

HISTORIC NAME: Gallatin County Courthouse
ADDRESS: 301 W. Main
LEGAL BOUNDARY: Tracy's Blk D
Lots 1-9
OWNER'S NAME: Gallatin County Commission
OWNER ADDRESS: P.O. Box 1905, Bozeman, MT
SPECIFIC DATE: 1935-1936
ARCHITECT: Fred F. Willson
BUILDER: Unknown
ORIGINAL OWNER: Gallatin County
ORIGINAL USE: courthouse
PRESENT USE: courthouse
UTM REFERENCE: 12/496 800/505 8260
ACREAGE: less than one
U.S.G.S. QUAD: Bozeman, 1953



STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

Applicable Criteria: A and C

Areas of Significance: government, architecture

Number of Contributing Properties: 1

Bozeman's most notable example of the Art Deco style, this monumental regional landmark is also one of the most significant examples of the work of local architect Fred F. Willson. The building bears hallmarks of the style such as a large central pavilion, a compositional emphasis on vertical bay divisions, lettering and other designs cast in the concrete walls and ornamental, metal spandrels. Willson, whose practice in Bozeman lasted from 1900 to 1956, designed the majority of architect-designed buildings in the city during that time, and many in the surrounding region as well. The new Courthouse was built between 1935 and 1936, although the design probably dates to 1933, when this project was listed on the Fred Willson Job List. Across the street stands the Willson School, originally the Gallatin County High School, to which was built a large addition also designed by Willson. That addition is of equal impact, and was built one year later than the Courthouse.

The Gallatin County Courthouse, as well as many of Bozeman's public schools, was built with PWA assistance during the Great Depression to replace an earlier, 19th century building on the same site. Although the previous brick Gallatin County Courthouse, which was designed by architect Byron Vreeland, was only 55 years old, the sponsors of the new building had the old one condemned in order to justify the cost of new construction. A powerful group of Bozeman businessmen had formed to promote the city's interests and their attempts to attract federal money to Bozeman during the Depression met with considerable success. Prominent names such as Graf, Kenyon, and Chambers dominated the group.

The building remains very well preserved, inside and out, with the exception of some window replacement that has been accomplished with modern casement units that fit well into the original window openings.

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PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:

This three-story civic building in the Art Deco style has a square plan with bronze panel spandrels located at the building floor lines in the window friezes. The three-part facade is symmetrical and consists of a central front entrance with vertical windows patterned after the entrance on the main level. Many of the original windows were replaced in 1983 using vertical, aluminum retrofit 4-paned windows similar to the original. Operating sashes in the new windows and air conditioning units are not part of the original design. The stone construction is finished in limestone veneer with a granite base and sets on a concrete foundation. Art Deco style stone light bases flank the entrance steps. The flat roof is of built-up material. A ramp was cut into the granite steps in 1976.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Fred Willson Job List: 1933, Job # 3325, "Gallatin County Courthouse - Bozeman".
Merrill Burlingame, interview, October, 1985
Bozeman Chamber of Commerce, brochure, 1942, p. 16

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