

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

PHO 677167

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED **MAR 28 1979**

DATE ENTERED **MAR 29 1979**

**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

Municipal Building of Bluefield, West Virginia

AND/OR COMMON

Old Bluefield Municipal Building

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

514 Bland Street

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Bluefield

VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Fourth

STATE

West Virginia

CODE

54

COUNTY

Mercer

CODE

055

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

OWNERSHIP

STATUS

PRESENT USE

DISTRICT

PUBLIC

OCCUPIED

AGRICULTURE

MUSEUM

BUILDING(S)

PRIVATE

UNOCCUPIED

COMMERCIAL

PARK

STRUCTURE

BOTH

WORK IN PROGRESS

EDUCATIONAL

PRIVATE RESIDENCE

SITE

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

ACCESSIBLE

ENTERTAINMENT

RELIGIOUS

OBJECT

IN PROCESS

YES: RESTRICTED

GOVERNMENT

SCIENTIFIC

BEING CONSIDERED

YES: UNRESTRICTED

INDUSTRIAL

TRANSPORTATION

NO

MILITARY

OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

City of Bluefield

STREET & NUMBER

200 Rogers Street

CITY, TOWN

Bluefield

VICINITY OF

STATE

West Virginia 24701

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Mercer County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

Courthouse Square

CITY, TOWN

Princeton

STATE

West Virginia 24740

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

DATE

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<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 Old Bluefield Municipal Building in Bluefield, Mercer County, West Virginia, stands on a promontory at the corner of Bland and Ramsey Streets overlooking the downtown business district. The eastern or front elevation facade facing Bland Street is a full three stories in height, while the western or rear elevation rises but two stories as a result of the construction of the building against a hillside. Architectural plans for the building were produced by Wilbur T. Mills, a successful architect of Columbus, Ohio, and by Garry & Sheffy, local architects who held associate status with Mr. Mills on the project. The Old Municipal Building was erected in 1924.

A city lot 140 feet square is nearly covered by the building. The commanding site and rather sizable dimensions of the structure were enhanced with Neo-Classical Revival styling, an architectural mode popular in public buildings of the early twentieth century

The contractor's use of heavy and durable materials in construction, including structural steel and reinforced concrete, produced a building of lasting quality. The solid masonry walls are faced on the exterior with Williamsport, Ohio, impervious brick, and with Buff Bedford limestone trim.

The building is dominated by a three-story high pedimented central pavilion. The base of this unit is comprised of three arched openings that form the major entrance of the building and carries above it four engaged Ionic columns and a triangular pediment. The shaft of each limestone column is comprised of three drums. Rusticated brick flanking the central pavilion at the ground floor level is seen on the east, north and south elevations. A limestone beltcourse encircles the building between the first and second stories. Additional stone detailing is seen in the entablature beneath the brick parapet that is adorned with modillion brackets.

The north (Ramsey Street) and south elevations are divided by brick pilasters that feature limestone Ionic capitals carved with egg and dart and fruit swag reliefs.

The principal interior feature of the Old Municipal Building is a three-story high lobby (atrium) that is centered in the structure off the front entrance. The space is naturally lighted with multi-paned skylights set within nine principal coffers. The enriched plaster mouldings embellishing the lobby ceiling include consoles, keystones and cove cornices. The three levels of the lobby are open corridors or galleries on the east, north and south sides of the lobby rotunda. The galleries are reached by a five-flight stair from the north and south sides of the lobby floor. The gallery openings at the first floor level are trabeated; those of the second, segmental; and those of the third, round-arched.

The city clerk, city treasurer and police department were housed in offices on the north side of the first floor. The Bluefield Public Library

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was located on the south side of the same floor.

The second floor provided offices for the city manager, purchasing agent, engineering department and health department. A suite of handsome rooms was also available to the city directors on the same floor in the center of the east front.

A jail located above the auditorium was reached by a special private stairway and elevator leading up from the police department. The police court, adjacent to the jail, was situated on the third floor.

Integrity of the Old Bluefield Municipal Building must be considered good despite minor changes resulting from heavy use of the building over the last half century. Some structural damage is evident in the form of cracks in some exterior walls; deterioration of the brick parapet on the southwest elevation must be looked into. The upper walls of the lobby, including several plaster consoles, were damaged by leaking water which seeped through the roof of the structure housing the lobby skylight. (The roof has been repaired.) The major alteration of the original fabric occurred with the adaptation of the auditorium to parking space needs. The original metal skeleton supporting the arched ceiling and blank lunettes survives, as does the plaster mouldings around the proscenium. The small auditorium east entrance was enlarged for traffic, the floor and seating removed, and the balcony enclosed.

Today (1979), the Old Municipal Building stands nearly empty. Though city offices have relocated to a larger and newer facility, the old building will not be lost. The present city administration had made a public commitment to physically restore the building and adapt it for the public good and use. The auditorium will be restored, and plays will again be produced on its stage. Old meeting rooms will be reopened for the use of local organizations. The Old Bluefield Municipal Building will become, thereby, an important illustration of adaptive reuse and historic preservation planning for southern West Virginia.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW

<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" 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 1924 BUILDER/ARCHITECT Architect, Wilbur T. Mills Associated, Garry & Sheffey Builder, H.A., Lucas

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Old Municipal Building at Bluefield, Mercer County, West Virginia, was built in 1924 to house offices of all principal city government departments. The building was designed by an important Columbus, Ohio, architect in the Neo-Classical Revival style to accommodate the expanding needs of Bluefield, a major commercial center and gateway to southern West Virginia's great Pocahontas coal fields. The Old Municipal Building with its offices for the City Clerk, City Treasurer, Police Department, Public Library, City Manager, Purchasing Agent, Engineering Department, Health Department and City Board of Directors, became the identifiable symbol of government in Bluefield and a focal point for almost all public activities. These activities extended also to cultural events held in the municipal auditorium of the building, and to public order when lawbreakers were escorted to the Municipal Building's jail.

During a period of less than a century, the City of Bluefield has built and occupied three city buildings. The expansion of the city's population, commerce and wealth, has necessitated the new buildings, although the City Fathers would never have guessed in 1924 that their new Municipal Building would reach, in little over fifty years, a point of obsolescence.

Bluefield was incorporated in 1889, following the extension into the region of the Norfolk and Western Railroad. In 1888, the first shop facilities of the railroad were established at Bluefield, and Bluefield was established as the division point of the railway. The general offices of the Norfolk and Western Railroad were moved to the company's Bluefield Inn in 1909. An important factor in the choice of Bluefield as the site of the railroad's shops and yards is that Bluefield, with an elevation of 2557 feet, is the top of the mainline from Columbus to Norfolk, and this permitted gravity switching in either direction. The railroad that opened the Pocahontas coal fields in the 1880s, saw its coal traffic of 1900 double that of 1889, and by 1910, it was seven times as great as that of 1889.

The population of Bluefield grew rapidly from 1889, and the City Fathers issued a bond for twenty-five thousand dollars to finance the purchase of a lot (from Sudduth and Tyler) and to build a city building. In 1892, the lot at the corner of Bland and Ramsey Streets was secured (same site as the Old Municipal Building) and a red brick building was erected by contractors Murrell and Wilson. Though it served Bluefield well with its auditorium, police court and fire department, the city government's rapidly expanding needs required more

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Bluefield, West Virginia, Daily Telegraph, November 13, 1924, p. 1
 _____, November 14, 1924, p. 1
 _____, March 29, 1925, p. 2
 _____, May 14, 1925, p. 1, and "Municipal Building Section".

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY one city lot, 140' x 140'

QUADRANGLE NAME Bluefield

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:24,000

UTM REFERENCES

A 17 480240 4124390

B

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C

D

E

F

G

H

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The Old Bluefield Municipal Building stands at the northeast corner of Bland and Ramsey Streets on city lot # 602. The lot is square and measure 140' x 140'.

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Rodney S. Collins, Architectural Historian

ORGANIZATION West Virginia Department of Culutre & History
Historic Preservation Unit

DATE
January 5, 1979

STREET & NUMBER Capitol Complex
The Cultural Center

TELEPHONE
304 348-0244

CITY OR TOWN
Charleston

STATE
West Virginia 25305

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL STATE LOCAL X

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

Clarence Moran 3/26/79

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

William Bobovich
 KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE May 29, 1979

ATTEST *Anna Jane Saxe*
 CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

DATE 5-29-79

Regional Review Coordinator

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generous quarters. The building was razed in October 1923, and replaced a year later with the present building.

Public approval for issuance of bonds was given on June 23, 1923, and a contract for the building's plans awarded shortly thereafter to architect Wilbur T. Mills of Columbus, Ohio, and to associate architects, Garry and Sheffey of Bluefield. Mills practiced architecture in Columbus from about 1895 until about 1935. He is best remembered for the Davis Building (1895) at 85 East Long Street in Columbus (demolished 1977) and for the Columbus Public Library (1903-06, in association with Albert Randolph Ross of New York City). Mills was a very active architect in south-central and southern West Virginia in the 1920s.

The Old Bluefield Municipal Building reflects the stately and rather austere architectural elements typical of public buildings styled in early twentieth century classicism. The architectural significance of the Old Municipal Building is its representation as one of the few good local examples in existence. Furthermore, the originality of the interior three-story atrium with its three sides of galleries is reflective of the talent of Mr. Mills who was thought important enough in West Virginia to have been officially contacted by the West Virginia Capitol Building Commission in 1921 to attend its hearings on the selection of an architect. In a letter to the Commission dated August 8, 1921 (on letterhead "The Mills & Millspaugh Co."), Mills wrote: "Allow me to congratulate you as a member of the Capitol Commission in the selection of Mr. Cass Gilbert of New York as architect for your new Capitol. Personally, I question whether there is another man in America who possesses so many qualifications fitting him to handle a commission of that character and magnitude as Mr. Gilbert, and I feel that the West Virginia Capitol Commission has used more than ordinary good judgment in this selection".

Construction of the Old Municipal Building began in March 1924, under contractor H.A. Lucas of Bluefield. The building's cornerstone was placed on the northeast side of the nearly completed building on November 13, 1924. The event was one of the greatest in Bluefield's history; the ceremonies were directed by the Grand Lodge A.F. and A.M. of West Virginia. Mayor William H. Thomas presided and the principal speaker was Rev. Samuel W. Moore of the local Presbyterian Church. The Municipal Building was occupied by city officials by the weekend of March 29, 1925, and was officially opened to the public on the evening of May 14, 1925.

The Old Municipal Building was one of a number of substantial buildings erected in downtown Bluefield during the mid-1920s. Others included the highrise Peery Building and the Bluefield Freight Depot. As a public building, the Old Municipal Building holds recognition as a symbol of Bluefield's 1920s

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building boom.

Bluefield was among the very first cities in the nation to adopt the council-manager form of government (although in Bluefield the council is referred to as a Board of Directors). It was this form of government that the building housed and helped develop for the city. Since the Old Municipal Building was completed, ten City Managers have maintained offices within it. One of them, Mr. Clarence E. Ridley, went on to achieve national recognition as a City Manager and was appointed the first Executive Director of the International City Managers Association.

In 1977, the city government of Bluefield moved to its new building. Though the Old Municipal Building has outlived its usefulness as a seat of government, the city recognizes the building as the symbol of the community that directed its day-to-day events for so many years. The city has therefore committed itself to the restoration of this landmark and to its adaptation for public good and use.

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Underwood, ed. Wilbur T. Mills to Fred M. Staunton, August 8, 1921, Capitol
Commission Correspondence, Charleston, West Virginia, pp. 802-03.

Young, Paul E., Jr. to Rodney S. Collins, July 26, 1977 (biographical
information on Wilbur T. Mills discussed by Ohio State University professor).