

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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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 BELT JAIL

AND/OR COMMON

LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER
CASTNER STREET

--- NOT FOR PUBLICATION
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

CITY, TOWN
BELT

--- VICINITY OF

STATE
MONTANA

CODE
30

COUNTY
CASCADE

CODE
13

CLASSIFICATION

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

OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME
CITY OF BELT

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN
BELT

--- VICINITY OF

STATE
MONTANA 59412

LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.
Cascade County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN
Great Falls

STATE
Montana 59401

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

DATE

--- FEDERAL --- STATE --- COUNTY --- LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

EXCELLENT DETERIORATED
 GOOD RUINS
 FAIR UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

UNALTERED
 ALTERED

CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE
 MOVED DATE _____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

This one-story jail was built of native stone to serve a small coal mining town. The building measures 28' 4" by 30' 4". The exterior walls are of buff colored sandstone laid up in a random ashlar pattern. The stones on the front (west) facade are larger than those of the side and rear walls. The exterior walls are over a foot thick. The window sills and lintels are rough faced dressed stones, as is the lintel of the single centrally located door.

The roof is built of rough sawn 2 by 8's. These are standing on edge and nailed together to form a solid roof. The roof is a slightly pitched shed roof with a built-up roof covering.

The front facade has two tall rectangular barred windows, one on each side of the single doorway. There are no openings on the sides of the building. The three cell windows on the rear wall are horizontal rectangular barred units and are set high up on the wall near the roof.

The interior layout has a large office on the front of the building running its full width. This room is 15' 6" in depth. Three cells occupy the rest of the building with the cell doors opening off of the office. The wall between the office and the cells and the walls dividing the cells are built of rough sawn 2 x 8's laid up flatwise forming solid 8" walls. On the office side, the solid wall is plastered down to a board and bead wainscot. The exterior walls of the office are plastered over the random ashlar stones and the ceiling is whitewashed. The cell walls are whitewashed, as are the cell ceilings.

The cell doors are of more than passing interest. Built of steel straps in a grid pattern, the openings between the straps are about 2-1/2", too small for a person to put his hand through. In the center of each door there is a food slot or passage way. The office side of the cell doors have ornate wooden trim.

The floor is of T & G fir boards over floor joists. The joists are located near the ground. The office floor has suffered the most over the years due to this; it is rotted to the point that there is little left of the floor.

The solidly built building survived a disastrous fire started by a train wreck that occurred about a block south. Two nearby buildings were destroyed, but two feet of snow on the jail roof protected it. Local plans are to restore the jail and make it into a museum. The building stands adjacent to one of the two access roads into the town of Belt from U. S. Highway 89 which links Great Falls with Lewistown in central Montana.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
__PREHISTORIC	__ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	__COMMUNITY PLANNING	__LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	__RELIGION
__1400-1499	__ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	__CONSERVATION	__LAW	__SCIENCE
__1500-1599	__AGRICULTURE	__ECONOMICS	__LITERATURE	__SCULPTURE
__1600-1699	__ARCHITECTURE	__EDUCATION	__MILITARY	__SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
__1700-1799	__ART	__ENGINEERING	__MUSIC	__THEATER
__1800-1899	__COMMERCE	__EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	__PHILOSOPHY	__TRANSPORTATION
__1900-	__COMMUNICATIONS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	__OTHER (SPECIFY)
		__INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1896 (Probable) BUILDER/ARCHITECT UNKNOWN

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE CRITERION A

The town of Belt and the valley in which it is situated take their name from nearby Belt Butte, so designated by Lewis and Clark for the girdle of rocks around the butte, resembling a belt. The first settler of the town was John K. Castner who had come to Montana from the Pennsylvania Coal Country in 1867. He was a hunter, trapper and freighter during his first decade in Montana.

In 1877, a demand developed in Fort Benton for coal. Castner, who had recognized the coal formations in the Belt Valley from his youth in Pennsylvania, staked some claims and began to haul coal from there to Fort Benton. He and his wife built the first log cabin in Belt and later enlarged it to become the town's first hotel. They opened a store and Castner and a partner founded the Castner Coal Company. By 1880 the population of the little community was 30 and growing.

The big boom for Belt did not come for another ten years, however. In 1889, the Boston and Montana Consolidated Copper and Silver Mining Company selected Great Falls as the site for a new reduction works, in part because of the proximity of the Belt coal fields. Castner soon sold his mining claims to the Anaconda Copper Mining Company which had absorbed the Boston and Montana. A thousand men employed by A.C.M. provided the reduction works by 1500-2500 tons of coal per day and 100-150 tons of coke. By 1900, Belt was the second largest town in Cascade County, with a population of 2,858. Most of the new settlers were miners, many immigrants -- Frenchmen, Finns, Slavs, Germans and Swedes. As the newcomers arrived, they settled in their own parts of town and even today one part of Belt is known as "Slav Town" and another as "French Coulee." Belt incorporated in 1907 and John Castner became its first mayor.

Although coal was the incentive for growth of the town, agriculture gradually increased in importance and by 1910 equalled coal mining in economic value. Winter wheat, oats, flax and alfalfa became major crops, and the dairy industry developed rapidly as well. As coal mining decreased in importance more and more of the miners turned to farming. In 1915 the A.C.M. No. 1 mine was destroyed by fire, as well as the tippie, machine shop and other shops, then in 1930, the smelters began to use natural gas. The population of the town dropped to about 800, where it remains today.

The date of construction of the Belt Jail is not accurately known. Some humorist has nailed a sign to the door saying, "Holiday Inn, Belt, Montana. Free Room - Board, 1887" A newspaper article in 1970, dates the building from 1896. Considering the history of development of the town, the latter date seems more credible. From the middle of the 1890's Belt was a boom town. Churches were established, stores opened, houses were built--and thirty-two saloons flourished.

(continued)

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Great Falls Yesterday, U. S. Works Progress Adm., 1939, pp. 11, 74.
Montana Bureau of Agriculture, Labor and Industry Reports, 1895, 1900,
 1903-4, 1905-6, 1907-8, 1909-10, 1911-12.
 Helen F. Sanders, History of Montana, II, 1077-78, Lewis Publishing Co.,
 Chicago, 1921.
 Great Falls Tribune (newspaper), Dec. 10, 1970; Nov. 28, 1976.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA **ACREAGE NOT VERIFIED** **UTM NOT VERIFIED**

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than 1

QUADRANGLE NAME Belt, Mont.

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:62500

UTM REFERENCES

A 1,2 50,54,50 5,24,780,0

B

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C

D

E

F

G

H

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Lot 13 Block 2 Castner's First Addition, Belt, Montana

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

STATE None CODE COUNTY CODE

STATE CODE COUNTY CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE JOHN N. DeHAAS, JR., ARCHITECT

ORGANIZATION DATE FEBRUARY 10, 1977

STREET & NUMBER 1021 S. TRACY TELEPHONE 406-586-2276

CITY OR TOWN BOZEMAN STATE MONTANA 59601

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL STATE XX 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 [Signature] DATE 2/21/80

TITLE STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER	
<u>W. Ray Luce</u>	DATE <u>3/10/80</u>
KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER	
ATTEST: <u>William H. Graham</u>	DATE <u>3.6.80</u>
CHIEF OF REGISTRATION	

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BELT JAIL

CONTINUATION SHEET 1 ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 1

This little building, remnant of the early days of Belt and the coal mining era of Montana, has survived several disasters as well as the ravages of time. Belt was hit by major floods in 1909 and in 1953, but the closest call for the jail occurred November 26, 1976. Burlington Northern freight cars de-railed and crashed into gasoline and propane tanks beside the Farmers Union Oil Co. building, setting off a series of explosions. Five homes, a lumber yard, the Farmers Union Supply Store (originally the A.C.M. Co. store), and the office of the town's weekly newspaper were burned to the ground. The jail was in the path of the fire but it's stone walls and a thick layer of snow on it's roof saved it from burning.

The people of Belt want to convert the jail into a museum to house artifacts of the town's history. It is a fitting memorial to a colorful era.