

PH0368288

DATA SHEET

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED MAY 16 1977

DATE ENTERED

DEC 16 1977

**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  
 AND/OR COMMON  
Billings County Courthouse

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER: Fourth Street at Fourth Avenue  
CITY, TOWN: Medora VICINITY OF: 1  
STATE: North Dakota CODE: 38 COUNTY: Billings CODE: 007

**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 type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input 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	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME: Billings County  
STREET & NUMBER: Billings County Courthouse, Post Office Box 168  
CITY, TOWN: Medora VICINITY OF: North Dakota STATE: 58645

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.: Billings County Courthouse  
STREET & NUMBER: Post Office Box 168  
CITY, TOWN: Medora STATE: North Dakota 58645

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE: North Dakota Historic Sites Survey  
DATE: 1977  
FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS: State Historical Society of North Dakota  
Liberty Memorial Building  
CITY, TOWN: Bismarck STATE: North Dakota 58505

# 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input 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

Located on lots 13 through 18 of block 18, City of Medora, the Billings County Courthouse is fronted by a paved sidewalk lined with a row of deciduous and cedar trees. Outbuildings formerly on the site have been removed, and the side and rear grounds are planted in grass. A pair of flagpoles flank the front of the building, and in the south yard is a brick monument to Billings County veterans of World War II.

The oldest part of the courthouse is the first floor of the 2-story frame central portion. The original 1-story unit with cellar featured clapboarded walls and a brick chimney at the ridge of the wood-shingled, hipped roof. Similar roofs on the transverse axis now cover 1-story brick wings added subsequently to the north and south elevations of the original block. Barred windows were installed in the south wing, or jail, but the facility is no longer used and prisoners from Billings County are housed at the Dickinson jail in adjacent Stark County.

The original portion of the courthouse has a second story dating from 1913, with wood-shingled, gabled roof hipped at front and rear, and shaped junctures between fascia boards and corner posts. A second hipped-roof brick wing added to the north elevation in 1953 is the only portion of the courthouse not yet sheathed in red-stained cedar siding, a project which commenced in 1976. (In previous years, both the brick and the frame portions of the building were painted white.) Larger windows have also been recently cut, but placement of the openings is approximately that of the originals.

The interior of the courthouse features plaster walls with wainscoting of vertical matched boarding; large decorative metal grilles over floor vents; a straight-flight stair with closed stringer and turned newels and balusters; plain door and window casings; and vault doors set in framings enriched with classical motifs. The second-story, cove-ceilinged courtroom retains much of its original character: exposed wooden floors; roll-top desks; carved wooden armchairs around a lawyers' table; pew-like benches made by John Tester (who designed the 1913 remodeling) to provide public seating; and a judge's bench paneled in beaded vertical boarding. Auxiliary heat is provided by a particularly ornate cast-iron, coal-burning stove (Hot Blast Buck's Stove and Range Company, St. Louis, Missouri). In 1917 an electric light plant was installed in the courthouse by Lahr Motor Sales Company, Bismarck, at a cost of \$797.50, and new furnaces were acquired in 1926 and 1961. Changes to the interior finish in portions of the building over the years have included acoustical tile ceilings, vinyl tile flooring, plywood wall paneling, and fluorescent lighting fixtures.

# 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"/> 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input checked="" 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 <sup>1880s</sup> 1913 (Remodeling) BUILDER/ARCHITECT John Tester (1913 Remodeling)

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Billings County Courthouse symbolizes the orderly administration of justice in a county which is one of the least populated in North Dakota. The structure is also a physical link with the first years of settlement in the region, its core being formed from a building believed to date from the 1880s.

Created by the legislature of Dakota Territory on February 10, 1879, Billings County was named for Frederick Billings, president of the Northern Pacific Railroad Company and holder of extensive land interests in Burleigh and other western North Dakota counties. On October 25, 1883, Governor Nehemiah G. Ordway designated a board of commissioners for the purpose of organizing the county, which during the ensuing 32 years would undergo frequent changes in its boundaries: in 1883, 1885, 1887, 1891, 1895, 1912, and 1915. Medora, chosen the county seat, was located on the Little Missouri River, which traverses the county north to south, and the main line of the Northern Pacific Railroad. Named for his wife, New York heiress Medora Von Hoffman, the town of Medora was founded in 1883 by a visionary French nobleman, the Marquis de Mores (1858-1896), as headquarters for his commercial scheme of slaughtering range-fed cattle and shipping the meat to Eastern consumers by railroad. The growth of Medora was generated by the meat-packing plant built by the Marquis in 1883 at a cost of \$250,000 (the plant burned in 1907 and the site, marked by a tall brick chimney and masonry foundations, is entered on the National Register of Historic Places). After the failure of the Marquis' enterprise in 1886, Medora entered a period of decline which lasted until the 1960s. At that time the local economy was rejuvenated by the restoration and promotional activities of the Gold Seal Company of Bismarck, which capitalized on the associations of the town not only with the Marquis de Mores, but also with another short-term and even more famous area resident of the 1880s, Theodore Roosevelt.

The first courthouse in Medora was a 2-story frame structure, the second floor of which was used as a dance hall. Destroyed by fire at an undetermined date, the building was located about two blocks west of the present courthouse. The latter was originally a dwelling, and during the winter of 1903-04, it was occupied by a current Medora resident, Mrs. Viola Ray, then a small child, and her mother and two brothers. Mrs. Ray recalls that there were two apartments in the building, one on the north and another on the south, with a common storage area between them. After becoming the courthouse, the original central unit was enlarged by the addition of annexes on each side, with the south wing used as a jail.

## 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Billings County Commissioners' Minutes. Billings County Courthouse, Medora, North Dakota.

Maddox, Dawn. Personal inspection, February 17, 1977.

Ray, Mrs. Viola. Medora, North Dakota. Telephone interview, February 17, 1977.

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than 1 acre.

UTM REFERENCES

A 

1	3	6	1	2	5	4	0	5	1	9	6	3	2	0
ZONE				EASTING				NORTHING						

B 

ZONE				EASTING				NORTHING					

C 

ZONE				EASTING				NORTHING					

D 

ZONE				EASTING				NORTHING					

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

Dawn Maddox, Architectural Historian

ORGANIZATION

State Historical Society of North Dakota

DATE

May 3, 1977

STREET & NUMBER

Liberty Memorial Building

TELEPHONE

(701)224-2666

CITY OR TOWN

Bismarck

STATE

North Dakota 58505

## 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

*James E. Sherry*

TITLE N.D. State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE May 3, 1977

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

*W. S. ...*  
DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHITECTURE AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

DATE

*12/16/77*

ATTEST:

*Charles ...*

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

*12.14.77*

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 1

In March, 1913, further remodeling was undertaken which, according to the Billings County Commissioners' Minutes, would provide additional space necessary to house expanding governmental functions. The second floor containing the courtroom was the result, with the plans of John Tester and the \$2,200 construction bid of J.T. Savren accepted. A second addition was erected on the north side of the building in 1953 to serve as the register of deeds' office. Other occupants of the courthouse at present are the treasurer; auditor; judge; clerk of court; office of state's attorney; superintendent of schools; and U.S. Department of Agriculture Farmers' Home Administration. In recent years the local Lutheran congregation temporarily met in the courthouse until it acquired a church building in town.