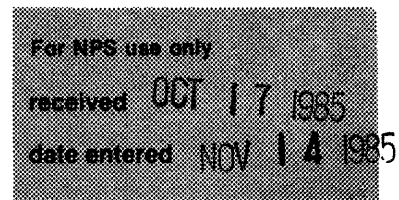


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NAME: Kidder County Courthouse

LOCATION: Broadway Avenue, bounded west by Mitchell Avenue and east by Haupt Avenue, Steele, North Dakota 38, Kidder County 043

OWNER: Kidder County, Steele, North Dakota

VBD (LEGAL): Block 3 of the "Resurvey" Plat situated North of the Original Townsite of Steele and immediately south of the railroad tracks.

ACREAGE: Less than 1 acre

UTM: Zone 14, Easting = 430270, Northing = 5189185; Steele N. Dak. Quad.

DESCRIPTION: The Kidder County Courthouse stands at the northern end of downtown Steele. The two story brick building occupies the site with a small attached vault to the west and a brick addition (1981) to the east and connected by a 30' corridor. The courthouse originally had an Italianate composition as seen in its projecting three-story tower and non-rectangular plan, and Italianate expression in its double brackets, segmentally arched windows and mansardic roof. The windows on the main two floors were paired double hung one-over-one with wooden sash and those on the dormer were single one-over-one double-hung.

In 1913 several alterations were made to the building. Maintenance concerns led to the replacement of the third story's roof with a multiple hipped roof carrying two dormers. Also, the entrance was shifted to the Broadway side, and an attendant 180° rotation of the main stairway followed. In 1963 the windows were replaced with glass block, and two openings bricked over. The 1981 addition intrudes on the site because of its size and incompatible design.

The interior retains many more of its character-giving features. Oak is liberally used in the baseboards, wainscoting, and stairs. The ceilings retain their original height and pressed metal. The prominent stairway ascends to the second floor without enclosure. The courtroom and public spaces have their historic electrical light fixtures. Transoms light offices on the main floor.

Today the building's exterior exhibits several of its historic design features: brackets, original arches over windows, the front door with transom and sidelights, brick piers and corbelling at the cornice.

SIGNIFICANCE: Date: 1883

Architect: Unknown  
Builder: Unknown

The Kidder County Courthouse has served as a courthouse longer than any other in the state. The building is as old as the Stutsman County Courthouse, the oldest extant court building. The Stutsman county building has been vacated and Kidder's County building continues in excellent condition.

The Kidder County courthouse is significant for its historic association with Wilbur F. Steele. In 1877 Steele came to the town which now has his name and began developing

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its economic potential. He and a partner bought the town site and began to erect businesses to support their activities. By 1881 Steele had established a brick yard as on step in his plan to capture the territorial capital. In 1883 he built a grand hotel with the intent to convince legislators to relocate the capital from Yankton (now in South Dakota) to his town. His offer was extended with the promise of a \$100,000 contribution to the general fund upon removal. Ultimately the legislators rejected his proposal and he was left with the \$25,000 hotel.

Fortunately for his financial state he was chairman of the board of county commissioners. It took less effort to convince county officials that the hotel could be put to use. They quickly acquired it for use as a courthouse upon Steele's urging.

Bricks from Steele's brickyard were erected into several buildings in the area. The courthouse, though, is the most visible and enduring of those. The structure represents more clearly than any other courthouse in the state the singular vision of an early town builder and his attempt to realize his goals by exercising all political and commercial resources available. The building is also significant as a courthouse in facilitating the activities of county government by providing space for offices, records, and trials.

Although the building lacks sufficient integrity to be considered eligible under criterion C, it is highly unusual insofar as few buildings in North Dakota remain with Italianate styling. The popularity of the style occurred before heavy settling of the state. The few Italianate buildings in North Dakota were built during settlement days and have since been destroyed. The Kidder County Courthouse testifies existence of the style and, through its once-fashionable styling, further reveals the extent of Steele's aspirations.

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Draft nomination prepared by Joan Kenmetz, Steele, N.D.

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