

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

For NPS use only

# National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

received APR 29 1988  
date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

## 1. Name

historic Beltrami County Courthouse

and or common Beltrami County Courthouse

## 2. Location

street & number Beltrami Avenue and Sixth Street

N/A not for publication

city, town Bemidji

N/A vicinity of

state Minnesota

code 22 (MN)

county Beltrami

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	N/A in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

## 4. Owner of Property

name Beltrami County Board of Commissioners

street & number Beltrami County Courthouse

city, town Bemidji

N/A vicinity of

state Minnesota 56601

## 5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Beltrami County Courthouse -- Recorder's Office

street & number Beltrami Avenue and Sixth Street

city, town Bemidji

state Minnesota 56601

## 6. Representation in Existing Surveys

Beltrami County Historic

title Sites Survey

has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date September, 1986

federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records State Historic Preservation Office - Minnesota Historical Society

city, town St. Paul

state Minnesota

## 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<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		_____ N/A _____

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Beltrami County Courthouse occupies a public square, just north of Bemidji's downtown business district. Completed in 1902, the courthouse is a fairly elaborate, Beaux Arts-inspired structure, which, during the 1970s, received a series of modern, "corporate style" additions along its north facade. In its original configuration, the building was a flat-roofed, red-brick, red-sandstone-trimmed, two-story structure with a raised, rockfaced basement; a denticulated, sheet-metal cornice; a balustraded parapet; and a wood-framed, central tower capped by a sheet-metal dome and bronze statue of "Justice." Measuring approximately 60 feet (north-south) by 90 feet (east-west), the basic rectangular plan was extended by one-window-bay pavilions at the corners and by three-window-bay pavilions centered on the front (east) and rear (west) facades. The slight forward thrust of the end pavilions was accentuated by rusticated brickwork and round-headed windows at the second-story level, which contrasted sharply with the smooth brickwork and rectangular windows of the main block. The corner pavilions were further defined by shallow pyramidal roofs with finials.

The most elaborate detailing, however, was reserved for the front entrance pavilion, which featured a porch on a stepped, half-story platform. Framed by rusticated brick piers with stone, Doric columns in antis, the porch was surmounted by a stone-balustraded, sheet-metal Doric entablature replete with triglyphs, metopes, and guttae. The general outline of the porch was carried upward into the pavilion's second story by rusticated brick piers supporting a denticulated sheet-metal cornice. The brick piers enclosed three rectangular windows with brick pilasters surmounted by three roundels with stone anthemions. Rising above the pavilion in the center of the building was a square-plan, domed tower, consisting of two major sections separated by a denticulated, sheet-metal cornice. The lower section revealed rusticated end piers that framed, on each elevation, an open, round-headed arch pierced by an oversized, ornamental keystone. The upper section displayed paired consoles at the corners, flanking, on each elevation, a concave, oval space intended for (but never equipped with) a clock face.

The most noticeable change to the building's original detailing involves the fenestration, which has been altered by infilling with opaque panels the open arches of the tower, the roundels of the front pavilion, and the upper portions of all other windows. In addition, the original rear porch (of undetermined design) has been replaced by an unadorned, flat-roofed, brick porch. A small, one-story, brick mechanical room has also been added to the southwest-corner pavilion. None of these alterations is of sufficient scale or impact to compromise the building's original integrity. Of more serious consequence, however, is a series of additions that obscure the building's north facade. The earliest of these, completed about 1974, is a flat-roofed, two-story, red-brick, office structure with large rectangular window blocks. Adjoining the north facade of the original courthouse, it occupies the northeast corner of the courthouse square. In the late 1970s, this addition was extended to the square's northwest corner by a long, one-story, flat-roofed, red-brick, office-jail-and-garage structure displaying few windows and an irregularly-shaped plan. Although the 1970s construction adversely affects the courthouse's integrity, it is too anonymous and nondescript in style to compete with the original composition, which still dominates the site by virtue of its scale, massing, and Beaux Arts detailing.

This property consists of one contributing building with an extended, non-contributing addition adjoining its north elevation.

# 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/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> politics government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1902

Builder Architect : Kinney and Detweiler

Contractor: Schmidt Bros.

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Architect of 1970s additions: Thomas/Vecchi Inc.

The Beltrami County Courthouse is historically significant for its long service as the symbolic and functional center of county government in Beltrami. The building is architecturally significant as the county's most imposing example of public architecture and Beaux Arts detailing.

Although Beltrami County was established by the Minnesota Legislature in 1866, the sparsely-settled, heavily-wooded region was not officially organized until 1897, when the county seat was located at the newly platted townsite of Bemidji. In the summer of 1898, the Great Northern Railway built an east-west line through the county, and shortly afterwards, the Brainard and Northern Minnesota Railway provided north-south rail access. Since Beltrami County had few streams suitable for driving logs, railroad construction was essential for developing the region's timber industry. With the establishment of rail transportation, homesteaders also entered the county, either clearing and selling their own timber so they could begin farming, or purchasing "cutover" land from lumber companies. From barely 300 settlers in 1890, Beltrami County's population increased to over 10,000 residents by 1900.<sup>1</sup>

In January 1902, the Beltrami County Commissioners assembled at their small meeting hall in Bemidji and voted to build a new county courthouse that would suitably reflect the region's burgeoning pride and prosperity. The local press applauded, presciently noting: "Never will the county be better able to afford a courthouse worthy the name than today. In a timber country as in a mining section, the loss of its timber and mineral makes it poorer day by day. Public improvements should be made when the natural wealth will pay its just dues to the needs of the people."<sup>2</sup>

On May 5, 1902, the County Commissioners accepted plans and specifications from Kinney and Detweiler, an architectural firm in Austin, Minnesota that would subsequently design county courthouses in Aberdeen, South Dakota; Antigo, Wisconsin; and Decorah, Iowa. Three weeks later, the commissioners awarded a construction contract in the amount of \$39,750 to the low bidder, Schmidt Bros. of West Superior, Wisconsin. On a downtown site donated by the Bemidji Townsite Company, the new courthouse went up so rapidly that it was accepted by the county in December of the same year.<sup>3</sup>

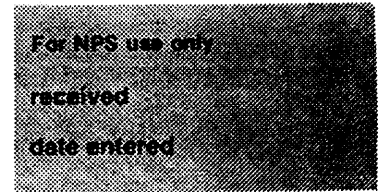
From its inception, the courthouse was intended to be the county's "most imposing" building, expressing "the wealth and public spirit of Beltrami."<sup>4</sup> Since "imposing" architecture in the early 1900s was synonymous with Beaux Arts design, the courthouse was equipped with a full panoply of classical detailing, including central domed tower with arches and consoles; balustraded parapets; denticulated cornices; rusticated pavilions; pilasters punctuated with anthemions; and a full-blown Doric entablature over columns in antis. Indeed, there is so much detailing that the building never quite achieves a harmonious, integrated design. But what it lacks in grace, it more than makes up in ungainly vigor. Although the original design has

(See continuation sheet.)

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National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

Beltrami County Courthouse, Bemidji, Beltrami County, Minnesota



Continuation sheet

Significance

Item number 8

Page 1

Significance con't.

been diluted by a series of 1970s, "corporate-style" additions, the courthouse is still "the most imposing" building in Beltrami County. Currently, the county offices are divided between the old courthouse and the new, adjoining additions. Symbolically, however, there is no question that the old domed courthouse remains the center of county government in Beltrami.

NOTES

1. The Beltrami County Courthouse is associated with two statewide "historic contexts": "Agricultural Development and Railroad Construction, 1870s-1920s," and "Northern Minnesota Lumbering, 1870s-1930s." For elaboration, see Minnesota History in Sites and Structures. Historic Context Outlines: The Post-Contact Period Contexts (St. Paul: Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office, Minnesota Historical Society, 1985), pp. 10-15; Barbara Hightower and Jeffrey A. Hess, "Beltrami County Historic Properties Survey 1986," unpublished report prepared for Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office, 1986. The impact of railroad construction on the county's development is discussed in Harold T. Hagg, "The Beltrami County Logging Frontier," Minnesota History, 29 (June 1948), 137-149.
2. Bemidji Pioneer, January 16, 1902.
3. Beltrami County Commissioners' Minutes, May 5, 24, December 12, 1902, unpublished, Beltrami County Courthouse.
4. Bemidji Pioneer, January 16, 1902.
5. Beltrami County is named for Italian Explorer, Giacomo Constantino Beltrami, who in 1823 visited the northern sources of the Mississippi River. (Upham, Warren. Minnesota Geographic Names. 1969. page 34.)

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

Beltrami County Commissioners' Minutes, 1902, unpublished. Beltrami County Courthouse. Bemidji Pioneer, January 12, 1902.

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property less than one acre

Quadrangle name Bemidji West

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM References

A 

1	5	3	5	7	2	3	0	5	2	5	9	3	7	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

C 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

D 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

E 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

F 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

G 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

H 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

Verbal boundary description and justification

The nominated property occupies all of Block 5, in the Original Townsite of Bemidji. The boundary includes the entire city block that has historically been associated with the property.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Jeffrey A. Hess

organization Jeffrey A. Hess, Historical Consultant date February 16, 1987

street & number 305 Grain Exchange Building telephone (612) 338-1987

city or town Minneapolis state Minnesota 55415

## 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

*Nina M. Archabal*

Nina M. Archabal

title State Historic Preservation Officer

date 4/22/88

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

*[Signature]*  
Keener of the National Register

date 5-26-88

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

Minnesota Ave.

Inv. 9'-6" Deep

4" WATER LINE 8' DEEP

EXIST. SIDEWALK

300'

MAINTAIN ACCESS TO DRIVE

OWNER TO PATCH BITUMINOUS SURFACE

CONTR. TO PROVIDE CONC CURB CUT & APRON TO CITY SPECIFICATIONS

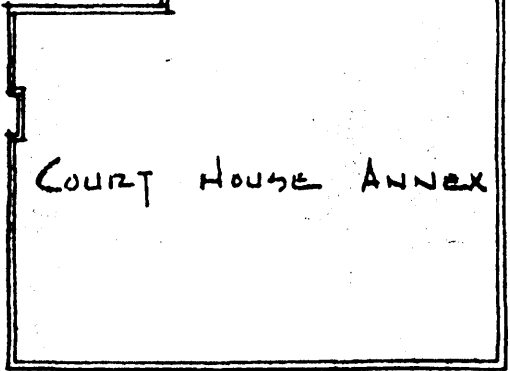
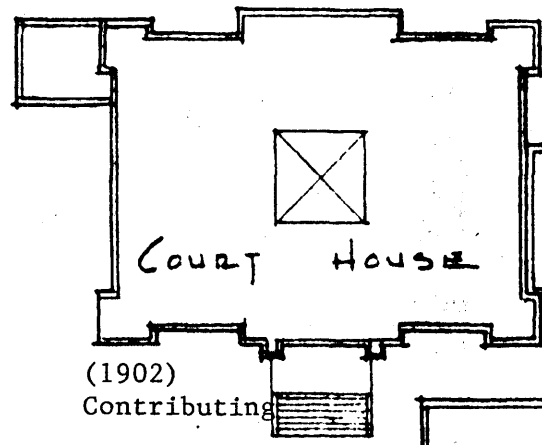
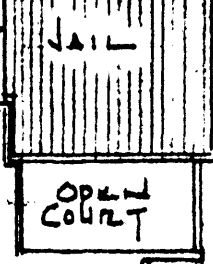
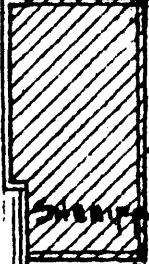
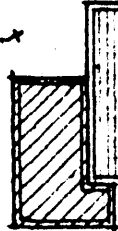
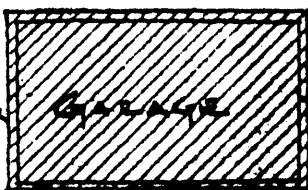
x100.10 (late 1970s) Non-contributing

CONTRACT LIMITS

x99.28

x100.26

1st FLR FLOOR ELEV. 100.65



CONC. DRIVE TO STREET

x99.51

SOP

NEW HEDGE

x97.90 GUTTER

SOP

CONC. WALK

EXIST. SIDEWALK PATCH ALL DISTURBED WALK

S E V E N T H



SIXTH ST.

Sketch Map of Beltrami County Courthouse (This is not a boundary map)

1" = 40'

(1974)

Non-contributing

Beltrami Ave.

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 2 Page 1

*no correction made*  
RECEIVED 2280  
MAY - 1 1998  
NAT. REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
*Not same property*

REFERENCE NUMBER: 80001940

STATE: Minnesota

COUNTY: Beltrami

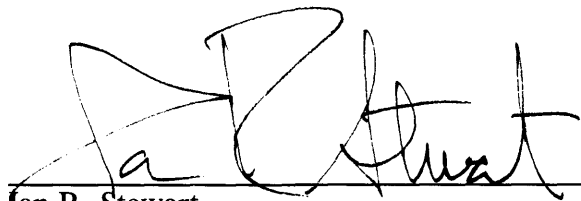
RESOURCE NAME (HISTORIC): Beltrami County Courthouse

CITY/TOWNSHIP: Bemidji

VICINITY OF:

ADDRESS: 619 Beltrami Ave. N.W.

COMMENTS: Address Correction

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Ian R. Stewart  
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

*4/24/98*  
Date