

INVENTORY SHEET FOR GROUP NOMINATIONS: IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY, BOISE, IDAHO

NOMINATION: (TOURTELLOTTE AND HUMMEL ARCHITECTURE IN IDAHO 712)

✓ SITE NAME: Owyhee County Courthouse SITE NUMBER: 128

✓ LOCATION: ²⁰⁴⁵ ~~South of Highway 45, Murphy, Owyhee County (073), Idaho~~

OWNER'S NAME AND ADDRESS:

Owyhee County
Murphy, ID 83650

QUADRANGLE AND SCALE: Silver City, 15 minute ACREAGE: less than one

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION:

The nomination includes the Owyhee County Courthouse and the property on which it stands, block 6, county subdivision to Murphy Townsite. Legal description on file at the Owyhee County Courthouse, Murphy, Idaho.

UTM(S): 11/5,36,525/47,84,800

DATE OR PERIOD: 1936

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE: Architecture

EVALUATED LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE: Local

CONDITION: good altered original site

DESCRIPTION:

The Owyhee County Courthouse is a single-story brick and concrete art deco structure built to a basically rectangular 105 foot, 2 inch-by-63-foot plan set laterally to the street. Additions to it, on both ends and in the rear, have effectively obscured the laterally corridorred interior plan, but have had less effect on the exterior. They are in a clearly distinguishable but compatible reddish brick and maintain the flat cornice line established by the original structure. The additions are set back from the original front elevation, which is visually free and unaltered except for an inconspicuous clerestory section behind the main entrance.

The entrance is centered and very slightly outset on the facade. On either side of it are lateral expanses of brick containing five tall four-part windows each, with one more window form in the small setbacks at either end (the form is blind on the right or west side, which is the wall of the clerk's vault. The centerpiece of this symmetrical composition is a cast concrete entryway, giving access from a small brick-paved terrace, up two brick risers, to a small recessed paved porch containing double sidelighted and transomed doors. The entry is in the form of a square arch, with broadly fluted pilasters on the sides. Above them is an entablature consisting of precast foliated sunburst panels on either side of a frieze of floral, triangular, and wavelet forms. Above this is a large plain panel with the "Owyhee County Courth House" legend incised on it; its upper margin is stepped

back and elevated slightly above the prevailing cornice line. This cornice line is embellished along its full length with a broadly fluted concrete coping. The additions to the building have plain coping continuous with it.

The only elaboration of the plain brick surfaces which flank the elaborated concrete entry arch is a series of four rather widely spaced outset string courses running above the windows on the main, outset section. Only the bottom of these courses, which is on a line with the pilaster tops, continues around the setback sections at the ends of the original building. It too has been carried out in the additions.

SIGNIFICANCE:

The Owyhee County Courthouse has exceptional architectural significance as the single most important institutional building in that very sparsely populated political subdivision, a building executed in a very appealing small-scale version of the art deco style. This style is otherwise uninventoried in Owyhee County. This single story building is scaled to site but expresses its style very forcefully: neatly finished in brick with a surprisingly elaborate deco entrance, facing the highway which skirts the northern edge of the tiny county seat of Murphy, on the open plain south of the Snake River. The building is also a fine local example of the WPA-financed buildings which brought the firm through the Depression, and more important, produced a large number of functional and stylistically progressive public buildings in the small towns of Idaho. This building, for a sparsely settled county, makes an effective contrast in scale with the Ada County Courthouse, the most grandiose county building in the state and another in which these architects participated during these years; or even with the Gem County Courthouse, more compact but still several times larger than the Murphy Building. The depth this building lends to the Thematic Group, therefore, as well as its individual charm and outstanding local significance justify its inclusion in the Thematic Group.

The cost summary for the project was \$30,000 in the firm's list of Volume of Work by Year.

MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES:

Boise, Idaho. Hummel Jones Miller Hunsucker P.A. File 406F. Collection book references 1935-1937. List of Volume of Work by Year, 1936. Drawings signed Tourtellotte and Hummel.