

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

1. Name of Property

historic name: Daniels County Courthouse

other name/site number: Commercial Hotel

2. Location

street & number: 213 Main Street

not for publication: n/a
vicinity: n/a

city/town: Scobey

state: Montana

code: MT

county: Daniels code: 019

zip code: 59263

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide X locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Mark F. Faumler, Interim State Historic Preservation Officer 3/31/95
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

Montana State Historic Preservation Office
State or Federal agency or bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register

 see continuation sheet

 determined eligible for the National Register

 see continuation sheet

 determined not eligible for the National Register

 see continuation sheet

 removed from the National Register

 see continuation sheet

 other (explain): _____

Edson H. Beall
Signature of the Keeper
5/4/95
Date of Action
Entered in the
National Register

5. Classification

Ownership of Property: Public	Number of Resources within Property	
	Contributing	Noncontributing
Category of Property: Building	<u> 1 </u>	<u> </u> building(s)
Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0	<u> </u>	<u> </u> sites
	<u> </u>	<u> </u> structures
	<u> </u>	<u> </u> objects
Name of related multiple property listing: n/a	<u> 1 </u>	<u> </u> TOTAL

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions:

Domestic: Hotel
Government: Courthouse

Current Functions:

Government: Courthouse

7. Description

Architectural Classification:

Other: Western False Front

Materials:

foundation: stone
walls: wood clapboard
roof: wood shingle
other: n/a

Narrative Description

The Daniels County Courthouse is a two and a half story, wooden frame building constructed in the heart of the Scobey commercial area. Its basic rectangular massing is composed of two parts -- a long, two and a half-story gable roofed mass composes the south half, while the north half is flat roofed and two stories. The building presents a clapboard false front to the street which masks this irregular massing and unifies the form.

As originally constructed as a hotel, the building was half its current width. The first floor of the hotel was divided into individual rooms, while the second floor functioned as an open sleeping room for travelers.¹ Early views of Scobey depicting portions of the Commercial Hotel in the background hint that many characteristics of the original design were retained in the 1927 building expansion. Originally, the building featured a full width, open, two-story porch with square wooden columns, and square rails across the second story. Clapboard sided, a false wooden parapet finished the facade; an original pair of windows, once centered in the false front, and now offset in the south portion of the front, remain. The window units are wooden, double-hung, 1-over-1 windows.

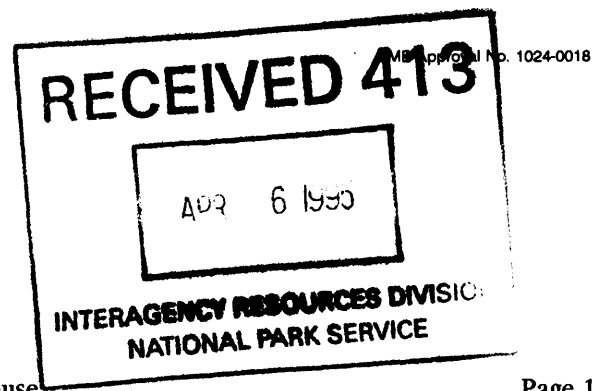
Elsewhere on the original portion of the hotel, these same double-hung windows repeat. Along the south wall, single window openings are regularly spaced across the first and second stories. The rear (west) wall of the original hotel includes such windows, paired and single. A rear door with wooden fire stairs opens on the second story. A paneled, single-light door is placed in the gable end; no access currently leads from this exit. The gable roof is covered with wooden shingles.

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The building was purchased in 1920 to serve as courthouse to newly-created Daniels County. Simple remodeling and addition of toilets soon followed. Later, in 1927, the building was doubled in size with a two-story addition along the north side and a single story appendage projecting from the south rear. The false front was expanded to this new width and designed to tie the original and added portions of the building together. A primary entrance set off-center to the north, and two-story wooden porch spanning the full width achieve this goal.

Windows currently on the front appear to date to the 1927 remodeling. These include large, square window openings divided vertically into two panes, with transoms across the top. These windows are banded across the first floor facade, to either side of the entrance. The doorway has been altered. It appears to have once included double doors, but has been filled in to each side and now houses just a single door. The transom remains, however, divided in two parts to match the windows. On the second floor, double-hung windows to match those on the original portion are set across the front and north side of the north addition.

The north addition is finished with stucco. The roofline steps down toward the rear. The courthouse abuts an adjacent building to the north; only the second story is visible from the outside. In 1954, a gabled vault appendage was tacked on at the rear, southwest corner.

On the interior, the original central hallway with adjacent rooms was opened into three large office spaces. In 1927, addition of the north half added two more offices and vault space on the first floor. At the same time, a rear office was tacked onto the south rear. Another vault was added on the south in 1954. (See attached floor plans). On the second floor, 1927 renovations divided that space into the courtroom, judge's chambers and other offices.

Integrity

Today the Daniels County Courthouse aptly reflects its history as a courthouse and home to county offices since the creation of Daniels County in 1920. Since completion of remodeling in 1927, the building has remained in a high state of integrity. The historic design, fabrics and use are preserved, with some minor impact made by the addition of the 1954 vault. However, its rear corner placement minimizes its visual effect.

In addition, the unusual early history of the courthouse can still be traced on the exterior, by contrasting the original hotel form with the later dimensions and design as a county building. These qualities convey past associations and the importance that the building took on as it was turned to community service. The building still anchors the Scobey downtown, maintaining the solid presence of county government in Scobey.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria: A, C Areas of Significance: Politics/Government, Architecture
Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): n/a Period(s) of Significance: 1913-1945
Significant Person(s): n/a Significant Dates: 1913, 1920, 1927
Cultural Affiliation: n/a Architect/Builder: unknown

Narrative Statement of Significance

The Daniels County Courthouse is an important historic building, significant for its associations with the founding of the town of Scobey, and soon thereafter for its long career as home to the seat of government for Daniels County. It is a surviving example of the Western False Front frame architecture which prevailed in Scobey and many early 20th century homestead towns, giving these young towns a look of instant prosperity in the desolate Montana hinterlands. For these important associations, it is eligible for the National Register according to Criteria A and C.

Historical Significance

The town of Scobey is located near the Poplar River, along a prehistoric travel route known as the Old Wood Mountain Trail. Extending from Wood Mountain in North Dakota into Canada, the trail became well known during historic times for its use by Sioux Chiefs Gaul and Sitting Bull as they evaded the U.S. Army during the Sioux Wars of the 1870s.

In the wake of the Army's suppression of native tribes on the plains, white settlers followed. The first white settlers along this part of the Poplar River were Mansfield Daniels and Jake Timmons who founded a large cattle ranch. Located about 60 miles upriver from the town of Poplar, the Timmons Ranch became a stopover place for travellers and newcomers to the area. To accommodate these visitors, rooms and provisions were added to the main house. Soon after, Major Charles R. A. Scobey was instrumental in helping to secure a post office appointment for the ranch, and in his honor, the budding settlement was named Scobey.

The homestead boom and construction of the Great Northern Railway along the Poplar River prompted settlement in this remote northeastern corner of Montana. Much to the chagrin of early settlers, the Great Northern plotted a route which bypassed the original Scobey settlement, opting instead for a route along the east side of the river and a new townsite just a mile and a half away.

Businesses and residents of Old Scobey uprooted during the summer of 1913; buildings were moved and new ones built in the new townsite. By the arrival of the first Great Northern train on Thanksgiving Day, a new town awaited. One of the largest buildings constructed that year was the Commercial Hotel, a two story frame hostelry on Main Street. At the time of construction it was the largest building in the town. ²

The best known proprietress of the Commercial Hotel was a woman widely rumored to have operated a bordello there, One-Eyed Mollie, so-named for the glass eye she used. Mollie reportedly arrived in Scobey on the Great Northern Railway, to cash in on the boom.³ The first deeded transaction for lot 7, site of the Commercial Hotel, was between the Northern Town and Land Company that platted the Scobey townsite, and Minnie Wakefield on December 29, 1915. From all appearances, One-Eyed Mollie was the alias for Minnie Wakefield, from Kansas City. Minnie, "a single woman" according to the deed, sold the property on September 17, 1917 to John Fuller of Scobey.⁴ According to local sources, One-Eyed Mollie operated the establishment until returning to Kansas City during the Prohibition era.

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The town of Scobey made steady gains through the decade of the 1910s as hopeful farmers were drawn westward by the promise of fertile lands and bumper crops. From 550 residents in 1914⁵, Scobey's population swelled to 1,170 by 1920. The town was incorporated in 1916 and public utilities -- water, sewer and street lights -- were installed under the administration of the first mayor. Rural population rose as well, and across the state new counties were drawn. Scobey's future was assured in 1920, when voters in this area of Sheridan County approved creation of Daniels County, and voted 964 to 358 for Scobey as the county seat over Madoc.

Located in Montana's northern grain belt and at a branch terminus on the Great Northern Railway line, Scobey has been a cattle and wheat production center from the time of its founding. During the early 1920s, it was hailed as the primary wheat shipping point in the world⁶ and boasted 7 grain elevators.

Growth of Scobey peaked during the 1920s, then fell off during the 1930s as widespread depression and stagnation of agricultural markets took their toll on the farm population. The town of Scobey survived these hard times, in part thanks to its position as the seat of county governance.

In 1920, to house the new county offices, Daniels County commissioners purchased from John Fuller the Commercial Hotel along with two adjacent lots⁷. To accommodate the change in use, the interior was remodelled and toilets added. Outside, a brick and concrete vault was added behind the building. In 1925 the building received new siding. Two years later, the size of the building was doubled through an addition along the north side, and an expansion to the rear. At that time, the fireproof vault at the rear was incorporated into the building and a second vault in the north addition was added to house county records. Over the ensuing decades the Daniels County Courthouse remained in service with minimal alteration. (A concrete addition was made at the rear in 1934, and in 1954, a new vault was added on the south side for the Clerk and Recorder).

Architectural Significance

The Daniels County Courthouse is a most interesting example of western false front architecture. Across Montana's homesteading frontiers, small towns sprouted almost overnight. Rapid construction and limited resources led to false front building patterns, which gave a look of greater substance and style to these emerging communities. In the earliest frontier communities, such buildings were of log construction; during the homesteading era, when milled lumber was more readily available, frame construction was also common.

The Daniels County Courthouse represents these patterns, embodying many characteristics of the building form. These include the gable roofed, simple rectangular form perpendicular to the street, the false front lending greater height and style to the building, and the uniform clapboard siding which finishes the exterior. The spare frontal design of the Daniels County Courthouse, with its spacious porch and simple cornice, is characteristic of the front treatments in smaller rural communities, especially in the eastern portions of Montana. While rather plain, it is none-the-less representative of a large number of Montana's early twentieth century buildings.

The Daniels County Courthouse remains in use today, maintained and occupied by county officials that take some pride in the colorful history and unusual architecture of their courthouse. For the town of Scobey and Daniels County, it is a link to the founding of community and the roots of county government.

9. Major Bibliographic References

Billings Gazette January 2, 1986

Daniels County Bicentennial Committee Daniels County History. Scobey: 1977.

Daniels County Deed Records, Lots 6,7&8, Block 11, Original Townsite of Scobey, Montana.

Daniels County Museum Association "Time Marches On". Scobey: 1989.

Gunderson, Milton "Scobey: Pioneer Country", Montana Magazine, pp. 6-11. Helena, no date.

Homesteaders Golden Jubilee Assoc. "Homesteaders Golden Jubilee and Daniels County Fair", Dorothy Rustebakke, editor. Scobey: 1963. pp. 40, 46.

Sanborn Fire Insurance Company, Maps for Scobey, Montana. Chicago, 1914, 1920, 1929.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other - Specify Repository: Daniels County Courthouse

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: less than 1 acre

UTM References: **Zone** **Easting** **Northing**
 13 469150 5404060

Legal Location (Township, Range & Section(s)): Located in the NE¼, SE¼, NW¼ of Sec 15, T35N, R48E.

Verbal Boundary Description

The Daniels County Courthouse is located on lots 6 and 7, block 11 of the Original Townsite of Scobey, Montana.

Boundary Justification

These are the lots associated with the building since the time of its construction and dedication to use as county courthouse.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: C. William Tande (research)
organization: Daniels County Commission
street & number: 213 Main Street
city or town: Scobey

Chere Jiusto, (writing)
MT SHPO office date: January 1995
telephone: 783-5681
state: MT zip code: 59623

Property Owner

name/title: Daniels County
street & number: 213 Main St
city or town: Scobey

telephone:
state: MT zip code: 59263

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ENDNOTES

1. Billings Gazette, Jan. 2, 1986.
2. Gunderson Scobey: Pioneer Country, p. 7
3. Billings Gazette, Jan. 2, 1986
4. Warrantee Deeds for Lot 7, Block Eleven, Original Townsite of Scobey, Montana.
5. Sanborn Map for East Scobey, 1914
6. Gunderson, p. 8
7. Homesteaders Golden Jubilee, p. 40

PROJECT

Photocopy onto archival paper for submission

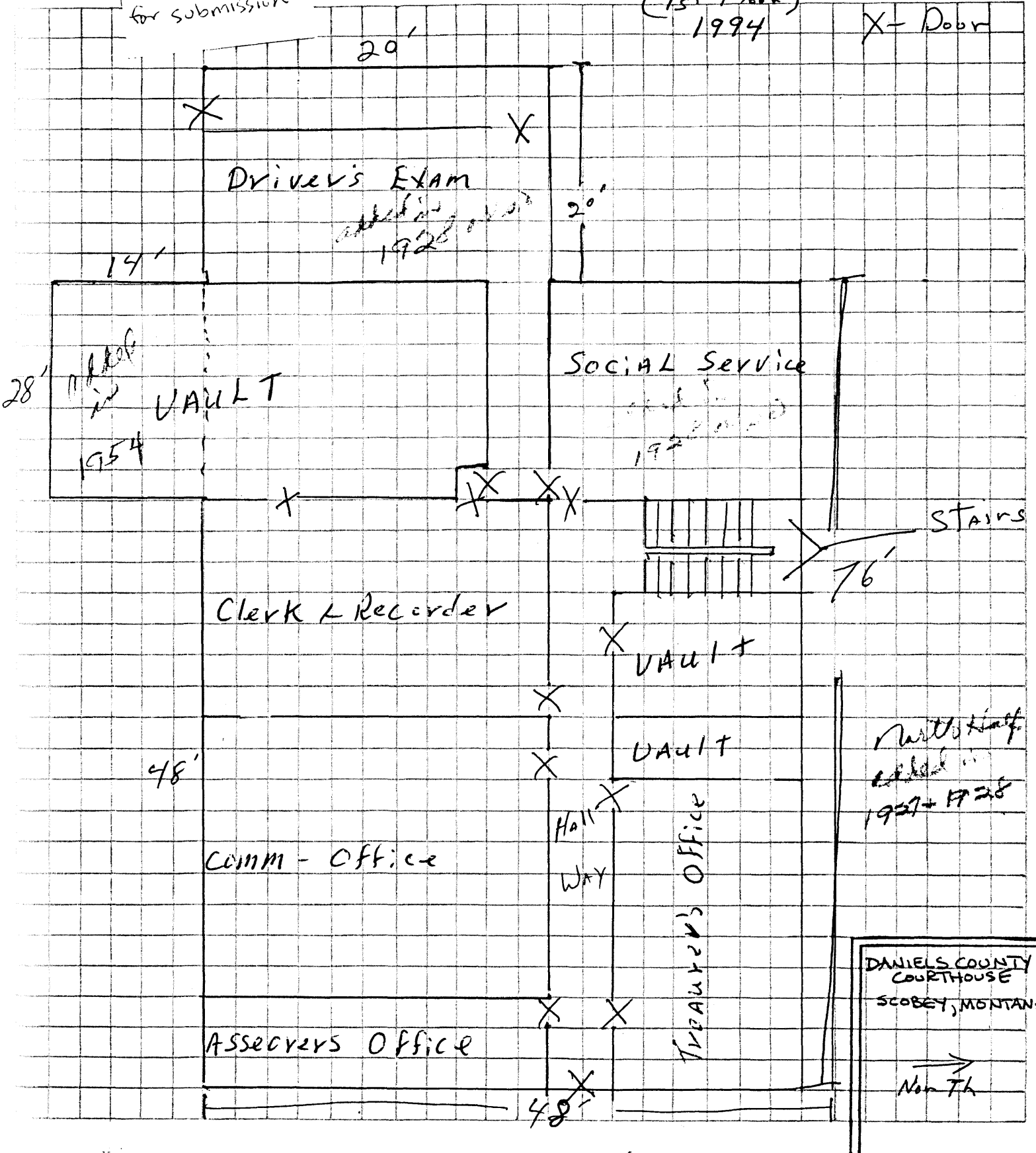
HOUSE

Floor PLAN (1st Floor) 1994

DATE

Mar 94

X - Door



PROJECT

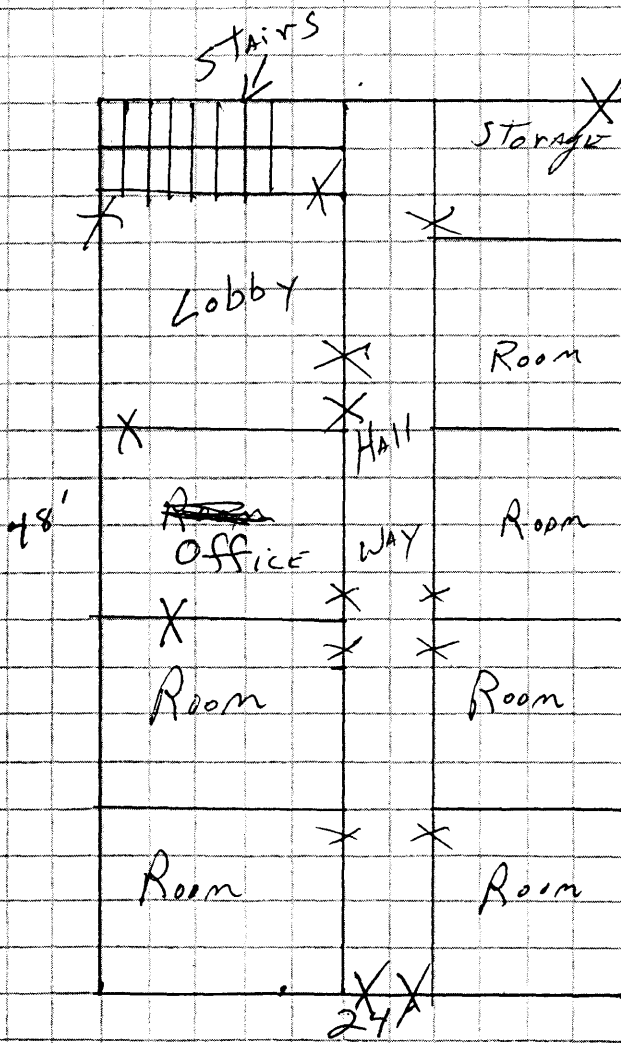
COMMERCIAL HOTEL

Floor Plan

DATE

(ONE-EYED MOLLY'S)

(1st Floor)
1917



DANIELS COUNTY
COURTHOUSE
SCOBEE, MONTANA

North →