

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

received MAR 31 1987  
date entered APR 30 1987

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

1. Name

historic Mountainair Municipal Auditorium

and/or common Mountainair Community Building, Community Center

2. Location

street & number Southwest corner Roosevelt Ave. & Beal St. N/A not for publication

city, town Mountainair NA vicinity of

state New Mexico code 35 county Torrance code 57

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	NA in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> government <input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" 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 Town of Mountainair

street & number

city, town Mountainair \_\_\_ vicinity of state New Mexico

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Torrance County Courthouse

street & number

city, town Estancia state New Mexico

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title NA has this property been determined eligible? \_\_\_ yes  no

date \_\_\_ federal \_\_\_ state \_\_\_ county \_\_\_ local

depository for survey records

city, town state

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## 7. Description

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<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

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

The Mountianair Municipal Auditorium (also known as the Community Building) was designed by local architect-builder Everett Crist and erected between 1934 and 1936. The project was sponsored by the city with grants from the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) and the Works Progress Administration (WPA). Located one block northeast of the city's commercial area, the Auditorium is a two story, rectangular building, measuring 72 by 120 feet. Its foundation, walls and engaged pilasters are rough-faced, ashlar sandstone. The sandstone and the lime for the mortar were produced east of town in Goat Canyon, site of Abo Mission, a unit of the Salinas National Monument. The auditorium's entrance, defined by four pilasters which step up toward the middle, is a provincial version of the Modernistic style. The auditorium space, measuring 67 by 85 feet, is notable for the two-foot diameter, tree-trunk pillars which support side balconies and the roof. The building has had no notable modifications, but is in poor repair. A smaller city hall and police station, added to the side, do not detract from the historic character of the Auditorium.

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The Mountianair Municipal Auditorium is a two-story, rectangular building, 72 by 120 feet. Its foundation and two-foot-thick walls are rough-faced, light-brown sandstone. Above about five feet, the walls are ashlar masonry, below that point, the work is a poorer-quality, somewhat irregular, random ashlar. Along both sides, eleven, thirty-six-inch-wide, engaged pilasters project twelve inches from the walls. At the front, the entrance is defined by four engaged pilasters which, along with the parapet between them, step up slightly to the middle section. At the rear, the parapet walls step up to a centered, projecting smokestack. All parapets and piers are capped by projecting stone copings.

Metal, hopper-style windows, with projecting stone lintels are used throughout. Single doors open from either side of the building near the rear. The recessed, main entryway is 15 feet deep and tapers from 27 to 24 feet in width. Two sets of double doors flank a semi-hexagonal ticket booth. The three ticket windows are topped by carved stone lintels showing a bear, the front facade of the building and the statement "Built by the WPA 1936."

Above the front entrance is a projection booth and to either side, on both floors, are offices. The auditorium measures 85 by 45 feet flanked by side aisles with balconies 11 feet wide. The balconies and the wooden roof trusses are supported by tree-trunk pillars, 24 inches in diameter and stripped of bark, and by rough hewn beams. The auditorium floor is hardwood and the ceiling fiber-board. The stage is 18 feet deep and 28 feet wide. To either side are restrooms, on the first floor, and storage rooms, on the second. Seven Spanish Colonial Revival style benches and a similar number of chairs, which likely date to the construction of the building, remain in the auditorium.

The low-pitched roof over the auditorium and the shed roofs over the balconies drain to valleys directly above the tree-trunk pillars. These valleys, which drain to the rear, have leaked, damaging the hardwood floor and sections of the rear walls. Although in need of maintenance, the building is structurally sound. The only alterations have been the enclosing of three windows at the rear and the addition of a city hall and police station on the south. These two buildings, which are connected to forty feet of the south wall of the Auditorium building, detract little from the historic character of the Auditorium and the boundary has been drawn to exclude them from the nominated area.

# 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 type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input 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** 1934-1936      **Builder/Architect** Everett Crist/FERA-WPA

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)**

The Mountainair Municipal Auditorium meets National Register Criterion A as the most prominent public building ever erected in Mountainair which reflects the period of the city's greatest growth and prosperity as the self-proclaimed "Pinto Bean Capital of the World." The Auditorium also satisfies Criterion A as a good representative of the importance of public works projects in Torrance County and New Mexico during the 1930s. It typifies FERA-WPA funded projects in New Mexico in the labor-intensive reliance on locally produced materials and in Governor Clyde Tingley's use of the building as a political symbol of New Deal programs. Finally the Auditorium satisfies Criterion C as a distinctive, local manifestation of the design aesthetic seen in public works projects of the 1930s, most notably the Modernistic style of the exterior, the rustic inflection imparted by the locally-produced materials and the over-scaled monumentality of the auditorium interior.

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet.

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property less than 1

Quadrangle name Mountainair

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM References

A 

1	1	3	3	8	5	9	2	0	3	8	2	0	4	5	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

Lot 1 and the first 33 feet of lot 2 (adjacent to lot 1) of Block 25 of the original addition of Mountainair. The boundary is drawn to include the Municipal Auditorium but exclude the Town Hall and the Police Station.

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

state NA code county code

state code county code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Chris Wilson, Consulting Architectural Historian

organization for NM Historic Preservation Div. date December 30, 1986

street & number 219 Cornell SE telephone (505) 266-0931

city or town Albuquerque state New Mexico

# 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 *Chris Wilson*

title State Historic Preservation Officer date 3-9-87

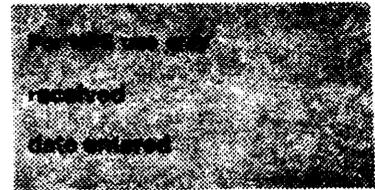
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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

*Alvina Byers* date 4/30/87  
Keeper of the National Register

Attest: \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_

Chief of Registration

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Mountainair was founded in 1903 in anticipation of the construction of the Santa Fe Railway's Belen Cut-off. In 1908, a year after the cut-off was completed, Mountainair was selected as the location for a Chautauqua because of its rail connection and location near the center of the state. The Chautauqua was held annually until 1917. The city emerged as a marketing center for the surrounding dry farming region. In recognition of the major crop which passed through its elevators, the city promoted itself as the "Pinto Bean Capital of the World." Its population grew from 577 in 1920, to 1,027 in 1930 and 1,477 in 1940--more than twice the size of any other town in Torrance County. The construction of the Municipal Auditorium reflected the community's rapid growth and emergence as a regional center. A decade-long drought in the late 1940s and 1950s caused a switch in the local economy from bean farming to less labor-intensive ranching. Mountainair's population declined to 1,428 in 1950 and in 1970 the population for the Mountainair Census Division (which included outlying areas) stood at 1,718.

The project was begun in November, 1934 with a \$35,000 grant from the FERA. A second grant of \$44,654 was received in September, 1935 from the FERA's successor, the WPA. The city sponsored the project, hired its own architect to design the building and oversee construction, and provided all supplies that could not be locally produced, which included doors, windows, hardwood flooring, a steam boiler and cement for the front steps.

In order to maximize employment from the Federal funds, most materials were produced locally. Lumber harvested from the Manzano Mountains ten miles to the northwest was fashioned by hand into tree-trunk pillars and hewn beams. Sandstone for the foundations and walls was quarried in Goat Canyon ten miles to the southwest, where a kiln to produce lime for the mortar was also established. The Mountainair Independent described the kiln's operation:

About twenty five loads of rock are burned at one time and produce several tons of lime. The kiln is filled with limestone and this burned for eight days and nights and then it is allowed to cool for three days and four nights and the burned limestone is removed and ... hauled to the city before being slaked.

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The preparation of material occupied most of the workers; the work force ranged from six to fifty-three, but the number of stonemasons on the project ranged only from one to five. The work proceeded fitfully, interrupted by snow, the wait for additional funding or for a new kiln of lime to be burned, and by two strikes by the masons for higher wages. In October, 1936 the building was dedicated, although the ceiling was not installed until February of the following year.

The Auditorium was designed by Everett Crist, a builder-architect hired by the city. Crist had worked for a time in California before returning to Mountainair in 1933. The exterior of his design is a provincial version of prevailing Modernistic fashion, most closely resembling a type which Californian architectural historian David Gebhard has termed P.W.A. Moderne. Typical features of this style, which appear in the Auditorium, include the symmetrical facades, unornamented piers and the entrance which steps up toward its middle. The use, out of necessity, of rough-faced stone gives the building a rustic appearance not usually associated with Modernistic design but seen in other WPA projects in the West. In addition, the massive, tree-trunk pillars inside give the auditorium a monumental feeling similar to many civic spaces built with Federal funds during this decade.

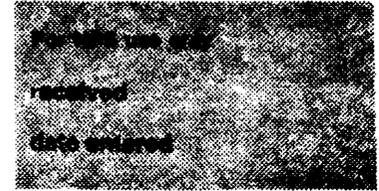
The auditorium was designed for multiple uses, with a stage for theater and public ceremonies, with a thirty-five-foot high ceiling, hardwood floors and balconies for basketball, and with a movie projection booth. Everett Crist, the designer, noted years later:

Mountainair did not have a place for a gymnasium so the Town tried to build a building large enough for Basketball, etc. as well as a meeting place. ([When] my first wife, Ercelle Jackson Crist, daughter of John & Bertha Jackson died in 1938 (month of July) there was not a Church in Town large enough to hold the crowd so we had the funeral service in the Community building. Volunteers hauled chairs from Churches Schools etc. for the Service.)

Although the capacity of the auditorium (excluding the balconies) is now rated at 1070, a crowd of 1500 attended when Governor Clyde Tingley dedicated the building, October 28, 1936. Tingley was a New Deal Democrat, it was was less

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than a week to the national election and the brief dedication ceremony was followed immediately by a Democratic campaign rally. The message was clear: This building represents what the New Deal has done for you; vote for Roosevelt, Tingley and the Democrats.

In addition to political rallies, public meetings, funerals, plays and movies, the building has been used through the years for dances, wedding receptions, fund raisers for civic projects, roller skating, boxing and youth recreation programs. Many of these activities shifted to the new high school gymnasium after it was completed about 1967. The building is only very occasionally used now and is in poor repair. Funds were raised in the community in 1983 to repair roof leaks. At the same time, plans were prepared for a full scale renovation of the building, although it has not yet been possible to obtain funding for the project.

The Auditorium is the most prominent public building ever erected in Mountainair and among the few major historic, non-residential structures in the town. Others significant structures include the railway depot (built 1908) and the Shaffer Hotel (1923), both of which are on the State Register of Cultural Properties, as well as the hospital (ca. 1940) and two bean elevators (ca. 1920s).

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Major Bibliographic References

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- "Auditorium is Half Finished." Mountainair Independent. December 12, 1935, p. 1.
- "Auditorium Work Moves Steadily Ahead As Laying Stone Begins: Lime Kiln Is Making High Grade Lime for Local Building." Mountainair Independent. January 10, 1935, p. 1.
- Biebel, Charles. Making the Most of It: Public Works In Albuquerque During the Great Depression, 1929-1942. Albuquerque: Albuquerque Museum, 1986.
- "City Projects Filed Tuesday." Mountainair Independent. September 5, 1935, p. 1.
- "Civic Building Ready For Roof." Mountainair Independent. June 25, 1936, p. 1.
- Crist, Everett. Untitled statement about construction of Mountainair Municipal Auditorium. Undated. NMHPD files.
- "Crowd Estimated At 1500 Hears Governor Speak In New Town Auditorium," "Dedication of Building Brief." Mountainair Independent. October 29, 1936, p. 1
- Jehu, Robert. Application For Registration, Mountainair Community Building. February 3, 1986. NMHPD files.
- Jehu, Robert. Personal interview. December 10, 1986.
- Herrera, Marie. Personal interview. December 10, 1986.
- Torrance County Historical Society. History of Torrance County. n.p.: n.p., 1980.

Mountainair Municipal Auditorium

Mountainair, New Mexico 1986

N → Photos

Boundary - - - - -

Municipal Auditorium

Town Hall

Police Station

0 10 20 30 40 feet

