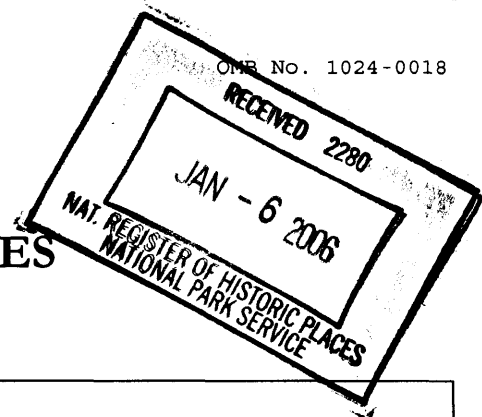


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service



NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

1. Name of Property

historic name: Shelby Town Hall
other name/site number: Shelby Chamber of Commerce/Visitor Information Center

2. Location

street & number: 100 Montana Ave. not for publication: n/a
city/town: Shelby vicinity: n/a
state: Montana code: MT county: Toole code: 101 zip code: 59474

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this 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 meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally.
John Wilmoth 1/24/06
Signature of certifying official/Title Date
Montana State Historic Preservation Office
State or Federal agency or bureau (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

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):
for Signature of the Keeper *Edson H. Beall* Date of Action *2/14/06*

5. Classification

| | | |
|---|--|---------------------|
| Ownership of Property: Public-local | Number of Resources within Property | |
| Category of Property: Building | Contributing | Noncontributing |
| Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: n/a | <u>1</u> | <u>0</u> buildings |
| | <u>0</u> | <u>0</u> sites |
| | <u>0</u> | <u>0</u> structures |
| | <u>0</u> | <u>0</u> objects |
| Name of related multiple property listing: n/a | <u>1</u> | <u>0</u> Total |

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions:
GOVERNMENT – City Hall

Current Functions:
GOVERNMENT – Municipal Building

7. Description

Architectural Classification:
LATE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURY
AMERICAN MOVEMENTS -
Craftsman (commercial)

Materials:
foundation: CONCRETE
walls: STUCCO
roof: OTHER - tar
other: METAL

Narrative Description

Constructed in 1923, the one-story, rectangular Shelby Town Hall is situated on a grassy lot at the north-west corner of the original Shelby Town Square, on the east end of Main Street. Its wood framing rests on a concrete wall foundation, and is covered by stucco on each of its exterior walls. The slope of the property reveals a full daylight basement at the north (side) and east (rear) elevations. Painted white with Williamsburg blue highlights, this modern paint pattern gives the appearance of an Art Deco style, but the building in fact dates to the arts and crafts period, when historic multi-tonal painting emphasized the horizontality of the building, accented by raised banding.

The west elevation serves as the façade, and welcomes visitors from Main Street. A metal ramp to the south and concrete steps to the north both lead to a full-width concrete stoop. A semi-circular modern awning shelters the stoop and reads CHAMBER OF COMMERCE across the front. Four decorative pilasters are spaced evenly across the façade, one on either side of the centered entry, and one at each corner. These pilasters extend beyond the short parapet wall at the roofline and effectively divide the elevation into three bays. They are topped with decorative banding, chevrons, and rounded caps. The flanking bays each contain a centered, metal-framed, one-light fixed window. Within the parapet wall above the door is a modern sign that reads: VISITOR INFORMATION CENTER. The flanking bays of the parapet wall each contain a raised, rectangular panel.

The north (side) elevation features two levels: the main floor and the daylight basement. Pilasters define the space at the corners. The main story displays three original window openings, all containing modern, vertically divided, metal-framed windows. The central opening is narrower and contains two-lights, while the east and west openings each contain four ribboned lights. Within the parapet wall, a raised rectangular panel is located above each of the window openings. A modern, centered, one-light metal door, protected by a metal storm, provides entry below grade at the basement level. Centered on the wall on either side of the door is a large, modern, two-light, metal-framed sliding window. A concrete ramp leads down to the door from the northeast corner of the building.

Fenestration on the south (side) elevation is limited to a single, centered modern window. The parapet wall steps down twice from east to west. In 2005, the historic small entry extension on the west (rear) elevation was expanded to accommodate handicapped accessible bathrooms. The two-story, stuccoed, wood-frame addition features entry doors at the basement level, and a very shallow gabled roof.

(see continuation sheet)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria: A
Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): n/a
Significant Person(s): n/a
Cultural Affiliation: n/a

Areas of Significance: POLITICS/GOVERNMENT
Period(s) of Significance: 1923-1955
Significant Dates: 1923
Architect/Builder: Bossuot, Frank - Architect
Humphrey, J.P. - Builder

Narrative Statement of Significance

Constructed in early spring of 1923, the Shelby Town Hall served as city offices, a local citizens meeting hall and a few years later, a jail for the bustling oilfield community. The Town Hall was quite modern considering the streets were dirt and sewer and electrical lines were just being laid in the community. The building was constructed in only two months anticipating the “droves” of fight fans and media who would be flocking to Shelby for the infamous “World Heavyweight Championship Fight of 1923.” The building was to be the headquarters for the media men who would be covering the big event and a symbol of the progress of Shelby. More importantly, it was built to serve the growing needs of a small, bustling community just beginning to lay its roots. Through the twentieth century, the building served the local government needs of the town, and served as the center of political activity. The Shelby Town Hall is historically significant under National Register Criterion A for its association with the development of Shelby and local government.

Long the territory of the Blackfeet, the front range of the Rocky Mountains boasts a rich history. The Gros Ventre, Blackfeet, Salish, Kootenai, Assiniboine and the Plains Cree crossed the plains to their sacred grounds in the Sweetgrass Hills, approximately 50 miles northeast of Shelby. The Hills have a significant traditional, historical and ceremonial value to the Native Americans of this area. The native Blackfeet and Blood names for the Sweetgrass Hills translates to “Place of the Sweet Pine”, “Sweet Pine”, “Sweet Pine Hills” or “Pine Needles Buttes”, but the name was mistranslated into “Sweetgrass Hills”. During the 1880s, gold was discovered there, enticing hundreds of miners to the area in search of the precious metal. By 1886, 400-500 miners had come into the area.

The city of Shelby itself had quite meager beginnings. Shelby was born with the coming of the Great Northern Railway in 1891. The railway builders threw off a boxcar at the site and named it Shelby Junction for Peter P. Shelby, then general manager in Montana for Jim Hill’s railroad. Having been so honored, the general manager is said to have remarked: “That mudhole, God-forsaken place will never amount to a damn!” Despite Mr. Shelby’s prediction, Shelby became the distribution center for a sizeable trade area with the coming of the Great Northern. It was a typical cowtown in which cowboys and sheepmen gathered for supplies and revelry. Within a short time, wheat fields began to spring up across the prairie as homesteaders followed the cowboys into the area.

Following the boom of World War I, there came the dry year of 1919, and the vast area around Shelby suffered a time of drastic drought and financial turmoil. Real estate and livestock valuations sank, and the many small banks which had freely granted loans were being pressed for payment by eastern lenders. So desperate was the situation that a national magazine published an article about it entitled, “The Pain in the Northwest”.

Almost overnight, the discovery of oil in the Kevin-Sunburst fields by Gordon Campbell in March of 1922 sparked an incredible economic boom for Toole County and the county seat, Shelby. Shelby was being hailed as the “Tulsa of the West”. Headlines cited Shelby as the fastest growing city in the U.S. With this tremendous influx of oilfield workers and their families, Shelby businessman, James A. Johnson and his son, James W. (Body) Johnson set to work selling lots and buildings, small office spaces, houses and apartments to meet the new demand. The real estate market boomed that summer and into late fall of 1922.

As 1922 drew to a close and a long winter ensued in northern Montana, the real estate market slowed down. Ever the shrewd businessman, James A. Johnson, feeling the economic turndown, creatively hatched the “big fight” idea as a publicity stunt to bring renewed attention to Shelby and hopefully spur business. Not surprising, businessman James A. Johnson was also mayor of the City of Shelby. Likely in anticipation of the event, he convinced the city council to take the necessary steps to build the Shelby Town Hall, establishing Shelby as a city of growth and perpetuity. Plans were drawn up for a one-story building with a full basement. On April 4, 1923, Mr. Frank Bossuot, an architect from Havre, Montana was hired to design the government building.¹ “Time being of the essence,” in less than two weeks, at the April 16th council meeting, builder J.P. Humphrey was awarded the bid.

(see continuation sheet)

¹ Bossuot designed the Phillips County Courthouse (1917), Hill County Courthouse (1915), and Judith Basin County Courthouse (1925).

Shelby Town Hall
Name of Property

Toole County, Montana
County and State

9. Major Bibliographic References

(see continuation sheet)

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:

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: less than one

UTM References: **Zone 12** **Easting** **Northing**
 12 436903 5372509 (NAD27)

Legal Location (Township, Range & Section(s)): Township 32 North, Range 2West, NW ¼ SE ¼ NW ¼ of section 27

Verbal Boundary Description

The Shelby Town Hall is located in the Original Townsite tract of land 349.8 ft. by 103.2 ft. adjacent to U.S. Highway 2. Original - Shelby Unplatted Addition, 1899. This tract is located at the northwest corner of the city owned, Shelby Town Square, abutting Block 2, Lot 1, 2, 4-9 of the Original Townsite.

Boundary Justification

The boundary is drawn, according to legally recorded lines, to include the land historically associated with the Shelby Town Hall.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Lorette Carter
organization: City of Shelby date: May 2005
street & number: 112 1st St. So. telephone: (406) 424-8799
city or town: Shelby state: MT zip code: 59474

Property Owner

name/title: City of Shelby
street & number: 112 1st St. So. telephone: (406) 434-5222
city or town: Shelby state: MT zip code: 59474

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Interior:

Not much is known of the original interior of the Town Hall as council minutes only touch on the bids for upkeep and maintenance. Conversations with several long-time Shelby residents indicate the main level of the building had several smaller office spaces and a restroom. The October 17, 1938 council minutes record a WPA Project to remodel the building. Plans were made to tear out partitions to make one large room in the front of the building; build a small storm vestibule around the outside of the front door; repair the roof and install small floor furnaces.

The basement had several rooms designed for meeting rooms. Several groups included a woman's club and the fire department requested space in the basement as clubrooms and a library in the winter months. Two years after the original construction, bids were advertised for two cells to hold four prisoners creating a jail in the basement of the Shelby Town Hall.

Today the Shelby Town Hall serves as a Visitor Information Center. The main level now is a large open space with a counter on the north side of the room separating the Chamber Office from the visitors' section. A partial wall divides the room running east-west. The south side of the room is office space for the Visitor Information director and restrooms. The front receiving area is furnished in a western flair for visiting tourists. On display is a mountain lion captured and killed in the Shelby area in 1996, display cases with Montana products, brochures and magazines for travelers. The basement of the building is now used as additional office space for city personnel.

The building is unique in its architectural design. The foundation is of concrete construction. Exterior walls; standard wood framed, were finished with a rough stucco/plaster, with prominent vertical pilasters accenting the corners and doorway of the building. Historic photos indicate a dark multi-colored exterior with light-colored trim and accents. Its original four-over-one double-hung windows and horizontal banding of color is indicative of Craftsman style as well, more in line with the type of designs Frank Bossuot was known for creating. The roof of the building is flat, constructed with timber beams and a tar and paper covering.

Integrity:

The building has been altered through its history, including a 1938 enclosure surrounding the original entrance and interior reconfiguration sponsored by the Works Progress Administration. Non-historic changes include the loss of original windows and doors, resulting in diminished integrity of design, workmanship and materials. However, the property retains sufficient integrity to convey its associations with community development and government in Shelby. It retains excellent integrity of feeling, setting, location, and association.

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Mr. Humphrey's bid of \$4920.00 was accepted over the McLean Brothers bid of \$4,700.00, as the McLean Brothers would not accept the city's general fund warrants in payment. Work began immediately on the Shelby Town Hall.

Jack Dempsey v. Tommy Gibbons

Information regarding the fight was taken from "History of Shelby, Montana," online at <http://www.bigskyfishing.com/Montana-Info/Hi-Line/history-hi-line.shtm>.

After seeing a headline in a Great Falls paper of how Montreal was offering a \$100,000 purse for a boxing match between Heavyweight Champion Jack Dempsey and a yet unnamed challenger, an enterprising individual named James W. "Body" Johnson, who wanted to call attention to his own land holdings, came up with the unique idea to up the offer a bit. The hopes were that by offering a sky high proposal to bring a professional boxing match featuring Dempsey to Shelby, on July 4th of all days, the publicity would spark an interest in this otherwise ordinary Hi-Line Town, leading to a nice rush of land sales. Or so the theory went.

As it turned out, things didn't quite work out as planned. First, the offer somehow ended up being increased to \$300,000 through some shrewd negotiations in Chicago by Dempsey's manager, Jack "Doc" Kearns. Then a massive stadium had to be built to accommodate the vast floods of people who were expected to pour into town to see the fight. An octagonal stadium that could seat 42,000 people was built – seemingly overnight, all at great cost. And to house all these people, a huge number of "temporary hotels" were built all up and down Shelby, destined to be torn down following the fight. The Shelby Town Hall was built in less than two months, in part due to the necessity for space for the expected "press men" who would be gathering to cover and record the July 4th extravaganza and to show the world the progress and prosperity of the small hi-line community.

A few things got in the way of prosperity, though. The town had great difficulty in selling advance seats. Moreover, right when it seemed like the town had finally succeeded in booking some advance tickets and organizing the trains to bring people out, the fight seemed like it would not happen, as Shelby wasn't able to come up with the final \$100,000 payment. As such, Dempsey's manager leaked word that the fight would not happen – resulting in the virtual cancellation of all advanced ticket sales. And, by the time word got out that the fight was on again, it was too late to sell tickets and transport all the people out to Shelby.

Thus, on the date of the fight, in a stadium designed to seat 42,000 people, only a handful of people were in attendance. However, there was no shortage of people milling around. Problem was, they were Montana locals, and balked at paying the exorbitant price for admission. Right before the fight the price was lowered drastically, from \$25 to \$10. This persuaded a few people to pay to go in and see the fight. However, not to be left out, the others who refused to pay to see the fight just pushed over the barbed wire that surrounded the stadium right before the opening bell of the first round – leading to a rush of over 4000 people into the stands – none of whom paid. The result of all this was a near empty stadium that was primarily filled with local spectators who were seeing a championship heavyweight boxing match the town of Shelby paid for, all for free.

The fight itself, between Heavyweight Jack Dempsey and challenger Tommy Gibbons, was roundly considered a spectacular fight, as it was the first time anyone had gone the full 15 rounds with Dempsey. But that was the high point.

Following the fight, the town of Shelby was basically broke. With virtually no income received from the fight (since no one came), the town was straddled with debts. Indeed, money was so short IOU's had to be used for payment following the fight. The end result was that four banks in Montana completely went out of business due to the losses they sustained in promoting the fight, including the bank which was owned by James W. "Body" Johnson's father. City council reports don't even show whether Frank Bossuot and J.P. Humphrey were ever paid in full for the design and construction of the town hall. Nonetheless, the building stands as a reminder of the heady days during the spring of 1923, as well as a landmark of local government and the early progress of Shelby, Montana.

Shelby through the Twentieth Century

Much to the credit of area homesteaders, oil producers and businessmen, Shelby did survive the "fight fiasco". The "Town Fathers" quietly paid their debts, journalists, fight fans and curiosity seekers left without a trace, and Shelby returned to the peaceful community it once was. Drought periods came and went and area farmers found their niche in dry land farming. Ranchers found

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grassland for their cattle and sheep, oil production stabilized and area businessmen kept Shelby thriving. The railway system maintained Shelby as a distribution center and the coming of the interstate highway system further identified Shelby as a crossroads for the western region. Throughout these times, the Shelby Town Hall served as government offices and a community meeting area. Removed from much of the worldwide events, Shelby quietly survived depression and wars. The years following saw Shelby's population grow and decline, businesses came and went, but the courage and determination of those early homesteaders remained strong and loyal.

The Shelby Town Hall continued to serve the community for these past 80 years. It served as government offices; a local citizen's meeting hall and even a jail. The upstairs served as the council meeting room as well as the clerk and secretary's office. The mayor had an office in the basement of the building as well as an office for the building inspector. The Town Hall also served as the headquarters for the Shelby Ground Observer Corps in the 1950's. The Ground Observer Corps, dubbed "Operation SKYWATCH", was organized October 20, 1954 at a meeting held at the Capital Café.

The Shelby Ground Observer Corps with its roots to World War II, was part of the 16,000 observation posts positioned along the nation's coasts. With limited radar detection capability, the GOC's mission was to visually search the skies for enemy aircraft attempting to penetrate American airspace. A large crowd attended the meeting and many volunteered to serve as need in what they called, "an important phase of national defense." The Shelby police, sheriff's office, highway patrol, Marias River Electric and the Montana Dakota Utilities Company all pledged to help in reporting planes in the Shelby area through the use of their two-way radio equipped cars and trucks. Sergeant Pettetti and Ferrick of the GOC center in Helena were at the meeting and explained operational matters, such as how to call in a plane flying over the area and how to fill out the aircraft flash message records. The operation would take around 100 volunteers, whose services would be required for only two hours each week, sitting in the observer tower on top of the town hall watching for planes.

Shelby initially had problems recruiting the volunteers it needed, which prompted the GOC president, Tom Crayon to call a special meeting on December 8, 1954, which he called a "wake up and sign up session." Interestingly, the majority of the volunteers were the women of Shelby. A tower was constructed on the roof of the building and manned mostly by these women volunteers. Not much is known as to how long the tower stood on the roof of the building as the deployment of the short-range AN/FPS-14 radar resolved the problem of detecting low-flying planes and disestablished the Ground Observer Corps on January 31, 1959. Despite only being in service for four years, the Shelby Ground Observation Corps played an important and interesting role in the history of Shelby and the Shelby Town Hall.

In 1998, the former Toole County Hospital was renovated and revitalized to create the Marias Heritage Center, an assisted living facility for elderly residents. The facility also became the new offices for the City of Shelby. The Shelby Area Chamber of Commerce took over the old town hall office space and shortly after a Visitor Information Center was established for the benefit of visitors traveling through the area.

Conclusion:

The Shelby Town Hall served as a monument to ingenuity and determination of the town fathers to create a lasting, perpetuating building to serve as a community center, cementing a small group of homesteaders, oilfield workers, and businessmen and their families into a "town". The dirt roads, sparse buildings and single railroad track became a viable, economic community and the Shelby Town Hall served as its headquarters.

Today, the integrity of the building has been maintained and the facility used as a Visitor Information Center, Shelby Area Chamber of Commerce office and additional city office space. The City of Shelby is developing plans to restore the building to its former glory and make it a wonderful stop for visitors to the community recreating the glory of the "oil days" in North Central Montana.

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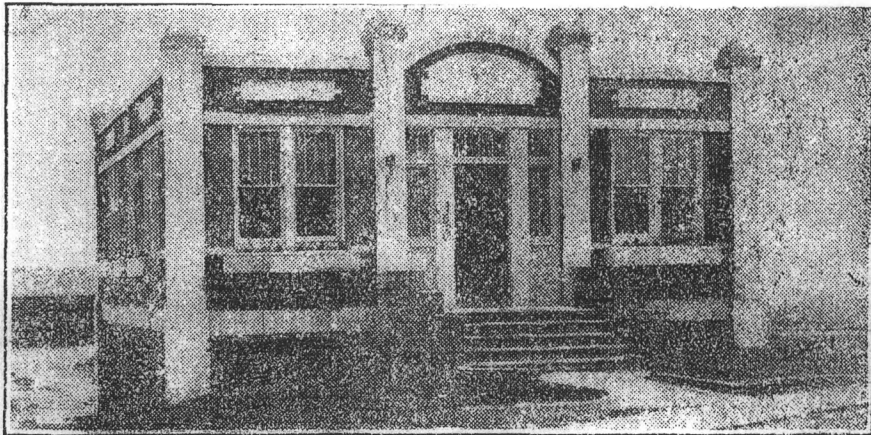
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Shelby Town Hall c. 1924.

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Shelby Orthophotoquad – photo date 7/20/1991

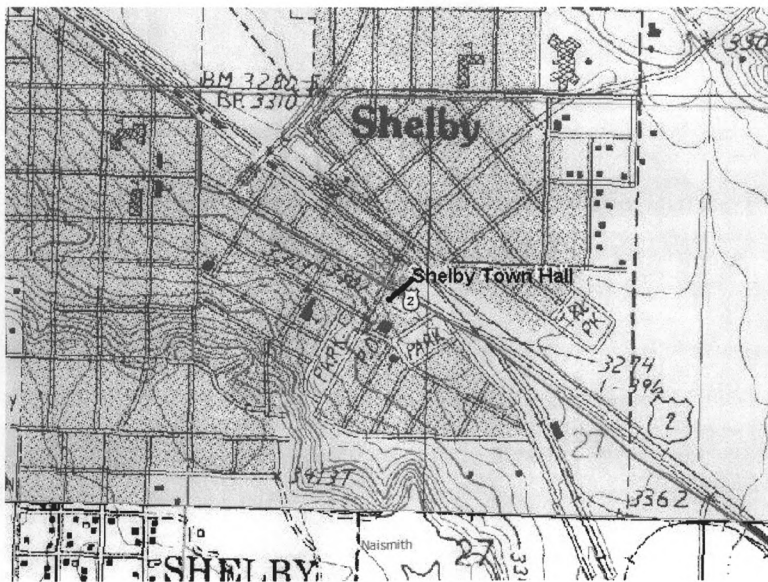
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Detail of Shelby 7.5 minute Quadrangle

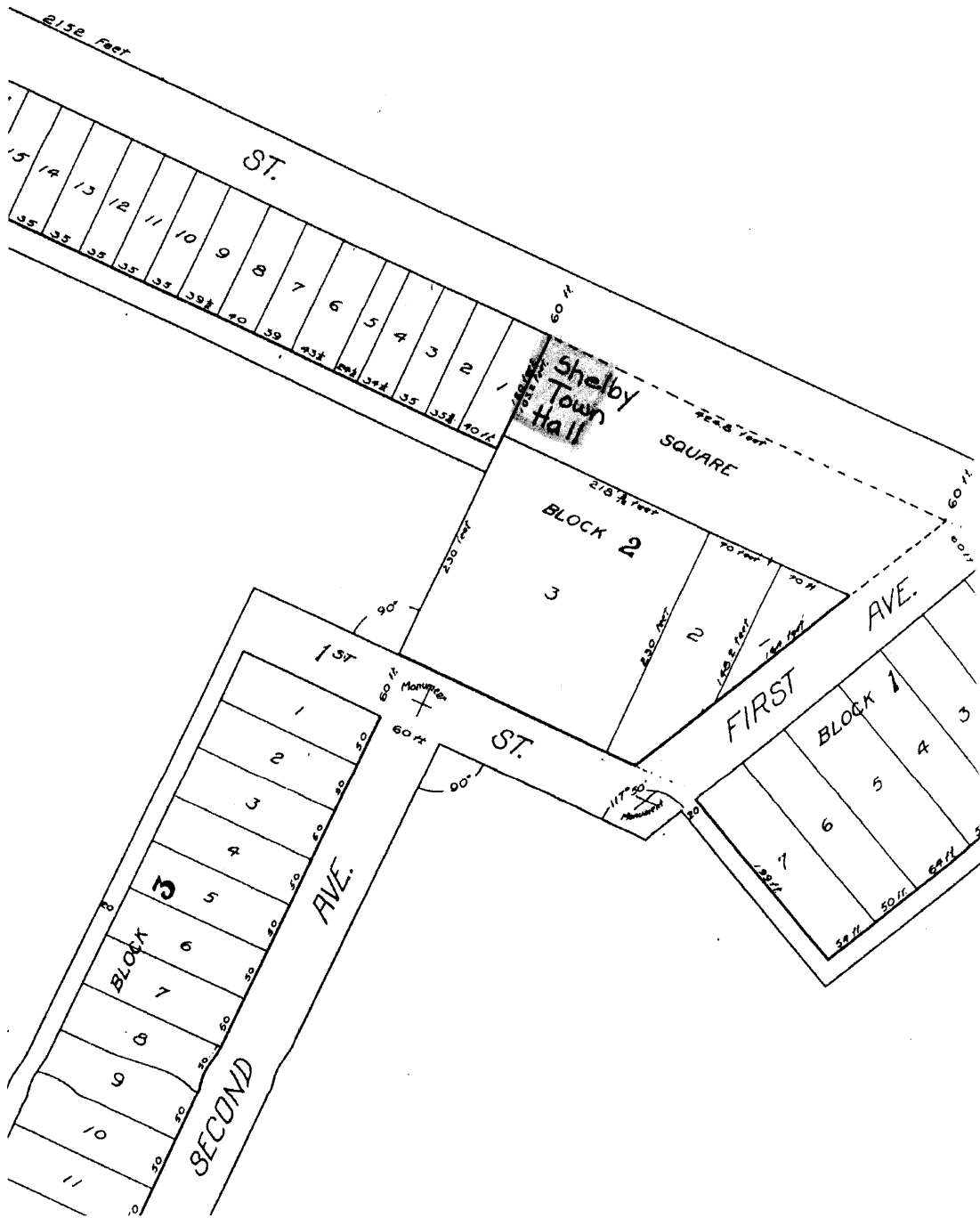
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Map of Shelby showing Shelby Town Hall parcel.

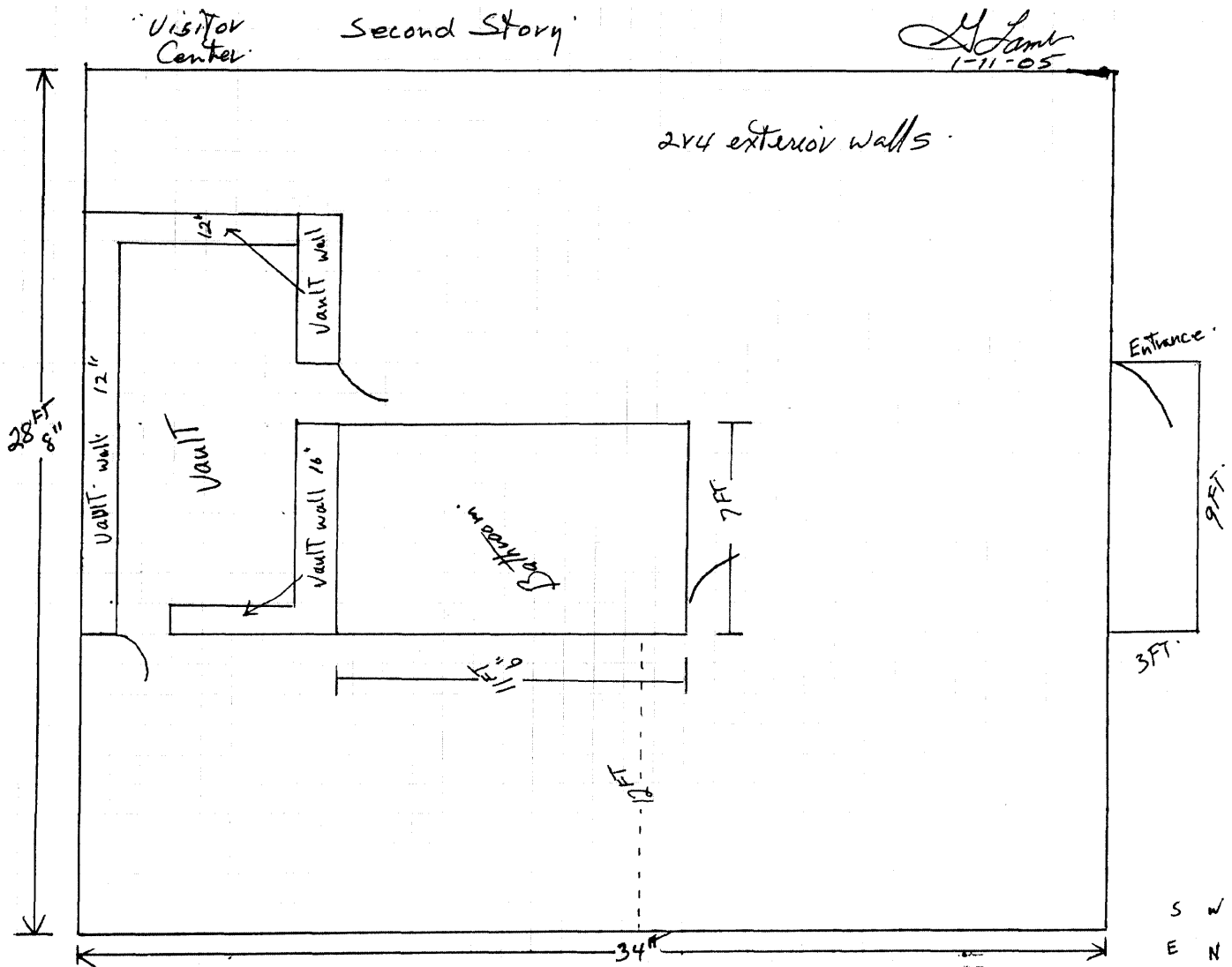
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Main Floor plan of Shelby Town Hall

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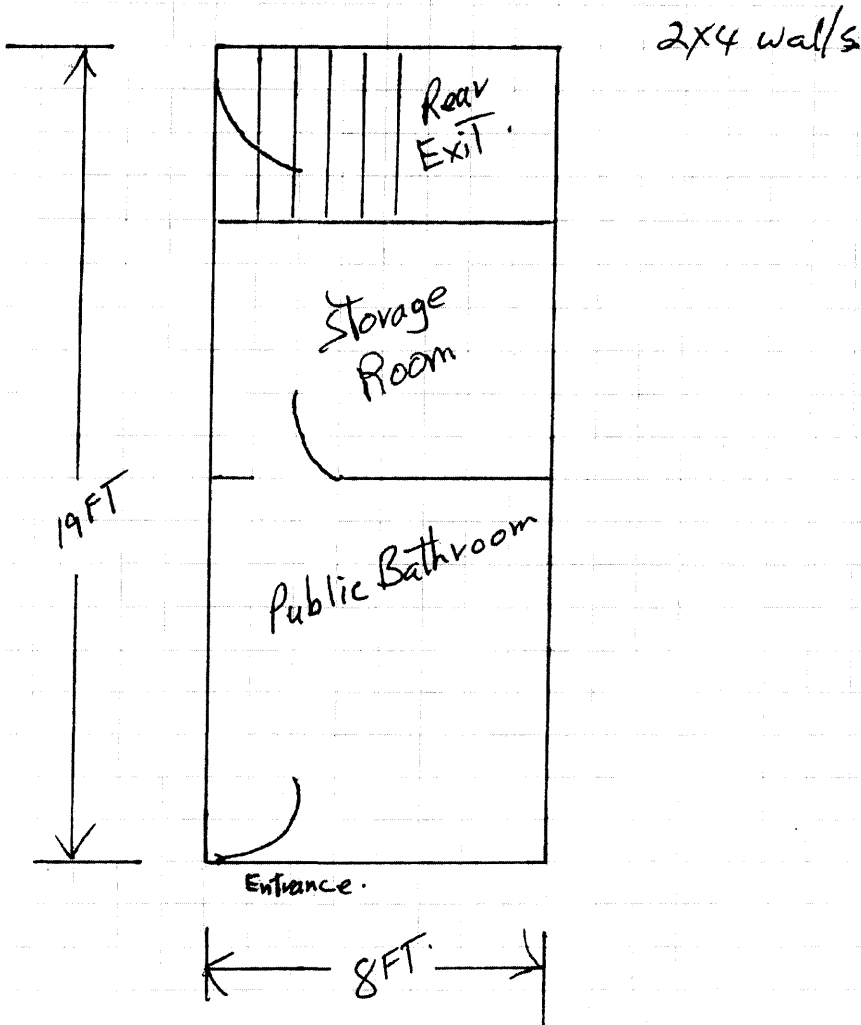
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Visitor
Center.

addition.

L. Lamb.
1-11-05



East elevation addition plan for Shelby Town Hall.