

**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

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

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



81

**1. Name**

historic Montana State Capitol Building

and/or common Same as above

**2. Location**

street & number Capitol Complex \_\_\_ not for publication

city, town Helena \_\_\_ vicinity of congressional district 1

state Montana code 020 county Lewis & Clark code 049

**3. Classification**

<b>Category</b> ___ district <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s) ___ structure ___ site ___ object	<b>Ownership</b> ___ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public ___ private ___ both <b>Public Acquisition</b> ___ in process ___ being considered	<b>Status</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied ___ unoccupied ___ work in progress <b>Accessible</b> ___ yes: restricted <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted ___ no	<b>Present Use</b> ___ agriculture ___ commercial ___ educational ___ entertainment <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> government ___ industrial ___ military	___ museum ___ park ___ private residence ___ religious ___ scientific ___ transportation ___ other:
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**4. Owner of Property**

name Montana Department of Administration

street & number Mitchell Building, Capitol Complex

city, town Helena \_\_\_ vicinity of state Montana

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Lewis and Clark County Courthouse

street & number \_\_\_\_\_

city, town Helena state Montana

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

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

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

depository for survey records \_\_\_\_\_

city, town \_\_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_\_

## 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		

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

The Montana State Capitol Building is located in Helena, Montana, on a hill sloping down to and overlooking the Prickly Pear Valley. It lies within the Capitol Complex, a cluster of state government office buildings, and is immediately surrounded by 12½ acres of landscaped grounds.

The Capitol building's neo-classical appearance has origins in a late 19th century movement in American architecture that called itself the "American Renaissance". The Capitol's symmetry, its monumental proportions and its smooth surfaces are features generally associated with the movement's neo-classical style and show the influence of the Rhode Island and Minnesota Capitol buildings, both considered among the movement's most important structures.

The Capitol was built in two phases. The original building was begun in 1899 and completed in 1902. It was 260' x 150', 90' high at the wings, 160' high at the top of the dome and constructed of Montana sandstone. Matching east and west wings built of locally cut granite were added in 1909, expanding the building to 464' in length. The wings complement the appearance of the original building. The Capitol is compactly massed and generally rectangular in shape, consisting of five connected blocks; the four flanking blocks and their connecting sections are four stories tall; the central block is five stories tall and topped by a square platform that is framed by pediments and capped with a copper dome. (See Photo #1)

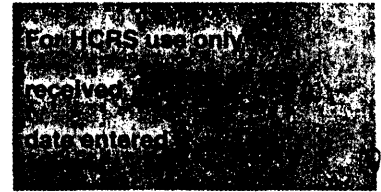
A broad sandstone portico is located at the second level of the central block of the building, over the front entrance (See Photo #2). It is approached by a 35' wide granite stairway with ornamented light standards. The portico has five fluted 25' high ionic columns. The columns support an entablature with a frieze upon which is carved "MONTANA". The entablature is surmounted by four large consoles. Between the consoles are three decorative panels; on the central panel is a bas relief "M" set against a bas relief background of two crossed torches and a garland wreath. On the left and right panels, also in bas relief, are the years "1889 and 1899", respectively, representing the year Montana achieved statehood, and the year construction of the Capitol building began. The consoles reach to the fourth story and provide a base for a paneled pedestal that is flanked by two giant consoles which in turn are flanked by two ornamented urns.

The twin double doors in the portico are topped with transoms and a large semi-circular window with radiating mullions (See Photo #2). The semi-circular window is flanked by two "oieils de boeuf" windows." The portico itself is flanked by four windows. The second level windows have swan necked pediments, and the third level pair has swan necked pediments containing a stone heraldry. The four giant consoles at the fourth level are flanked by two registers with punched out stone frames.

The main rear entrance to the Capitol building is also located in the central block (See Photo #3). Above the ground level entry are two ionic columns engaged as pilasters, which in turn are topped by a pedimented entablature. The base of the pediment is formed by the central block's cornice, and the pediment is backed by the section's parapet or attic story. A semi-circular art glass window lies between the pilasters. A recently built one story glass foyer extends from the rear entrance.

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In addition to the ionic columns on the front portico and rear entrance, there are also a number of two story ionic columns engaged as pilasters on the 1899 wings. Also, two story ionic colonades form inset pavillions on the three full sides of each of the 1909 wings. (See Photo #4)

The exterior of the ground floor of the Capitol is composed of rusticated smooth ashlar. The ground floor windows in the original section are topped with rusticated smooth ashlar lintels, and the ground floor windows in the 1909 wings have rusticated smooth ashlar relieving arches. A string course with cyma reversa molding encircles the Capitol above the ground floor. (See Photos #1, 3 & 4)

The smooth walls of the second and third level are composed of smooth ashlar. The second and third levels of the 1899 wings have a symmetrical order of protruding stone frame windows along the front and rear facades. The protruding sills of the second level windows extend to form a string course that encircles the building just above the string course that tops the ground floor (See Photo #1). The windows at the second level of the 1909 wings flank the wing's pavilions and are topped with pedimented entablatures. There is a stone heraldry in the tympanum of the pediments, and small consoles bracketing the pediments. (See Photo #4)

The third and attic story levels of the 1899 section are separated by a string course with ovola molding. Above the string course at the attic story level is a frieze with a band of symmetrically ordered iron grill registers. The cornice topping the frieze has a band of cyma reversa molding, a dentil course and ovola molding. A high smooth ashlar parapet rises above the cornice. The parapets at the front of the 1899 wings are divided by posts, with intervening panels of bas relief heraldry. (See Photo #1)

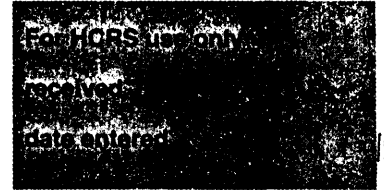
Between the third and attic story levels of the 1909 wings are a string course with cyma reversa molding, a frieze, a cornice with a band of ovola molding, a dentil course, and a band of cyma reversa molding. The attic story is surmounted by a high smooth ashlar parapet. Above the pavillions on the 1909 wings the parapet is made up of a stone balustrade. (See Photo #4)

Set back from and behind the parapets are six low roofs. The most visible of these are a pair of copper truncated hip roofs on each of the sections connecting the building's central block with the wings. The 1909 sections are topped with gable ended roofs with composition roofing. A flat roofed one story penthouse lies atop the section connecting the 1909 west wing to the original building.

A one story square platform with a balustraded parapet rises from the mid-section of the Capitol's central block. The platform is in turn topped by a second platform that is set back from the balustrade and framed by pediments on all four facades. All facades have three vertical windows topped with semi-circular windows. The windows are separated by corinthian columns engaged as pilasters. Flanking the windows are bas relief garlands and torches. The Capitol's copper dome rises from the platform. Four copper half domes protrude from the base of the dome at the platform's corners. The dome is encircled at its base by sixteen "oieils de boeuf" windows, which alternate with panels of bas relief torches and garlands. The dome is topped by a bronze statue of liberty. (See Photo #1, 6 & 7)

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The interior of the Capitol building has undergone a number of changes since 1902. However, important elements of its French Renaissance decor remain. Paradoxically, the Capitol's interior decor exhibits the opulent gilded age taste to which the Capitol's neo-classical exterior features were a reaction. Above the second level, the rotunda still suggests the flowery opera hall style popular in the gilded age (See Photo #8 & 9). Gilded niches at the first and second levels and projecting basket balconies at the second level make the rotunda, according to architectural historian Henry-Russel Hitchcock, "resemble a theatre with boxes." (See Photo #10)

Other major features in the rotunda are scagliola columns with gold, composite order caps, an open flaring marble staircase with Newell posts topped by ornamented light standards (See Photo #10), and a band of sixteen circular art glass windows in the dome of the rotunda. (See Photo #8)

The wide hallways leading from the floor of the rotunda have marble pilasters and wainscoting. The east hallway leads to the Governor's reception room in the Capitol's easternmost wing. The reception room features two marble fireplaces, eight oak columns and oak panelling.

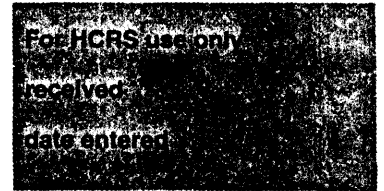
The Supreme Court Chamber, at the third level, is ornate in design with scagliola columns and pilasters supporting an ornamental cornice, from which spring curved ribs and panels running up to art glass ceiling lights. The panels contain murals with Montana related themes. The Senate Chamber, also at the third level, has been drastically changed below cornice level, but like the court chamber, has a 12' deep ornamental cornice leading up to ceiling lights, with murals depicting Montana themes. The House Chamber, located in the building's west wing (1909), features marble columns supporting a second story balcony, and a Charles Russell painting depicting Lewis and Clark meeting the Flathead Indians at Ross' Hole. (See Photo #11)

Only minor changes have been made in the external appearance of the Capitol building over the years. These include changes in the ornamentation of the dome, in the landscaping of the Capitol grounds, and the enlargement of the steps serving the front entrance (1946). However, the interior of the 1899 section of the Capitol has undergone significant changes. The east wing of the original building was remodeled in 1955, and the two lower levels of the rotunda and the entire west wing were remodeled in 1964-66. Much of the "flowery opera house" decor of the lower rotunda was destroyed in a remodeling project undertaken in the mid 1960's, as was a vaulted art glass ceiling over the marble stairway leading up from the rotunda; the ceiling was removed and filled by a committee and hearing room. The senate chamber was also remodeled at that time, leaving only the murals above its cornice intact.

There are three smaller buildings on the southeast corner of the Capitol grounds. (See accompanying map entitled Montana State Capitol Grounds.) The livestock Building (#2) (Photo #12 & 13) is a 40 x 64, three story, flat roofed brick building built in 1918. The Capitol Annex (#3) (See Photo #14 & 15) is a 30 x 57, one story, brick, hip roofed building that was built in 1922. The Capitol heating plant (#4) (See Photo #16 & 17), is a 56 x 72 x 13' high, one story building with a rusticated cement block

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exterior and a Mansard roof with concave metal slopes. It was constructed in 1969. The three buildings do not significantly detract from the integrity of the Capitol building and its grounds. Also, there are two large pieces of statuary on the Capitol grounds. Fronting the Capitol is an equestrian statue of Territorial Governor Thomas Meagher, and at the rear entrance, a statue of vigilante leader Wilbur Fisk Sanders.

The boundary of the nomination is drawn to include the landscaped grounds immediately surrounding the Capitol.

Note: Photo #1 dates from circa 1935. It is used because the growth of the trees and bushes used in landscaping the Capitol grounds make similarly panoramic photos impossible today. For a current photo from a nearby perspective that documents the integrity the Capitol has maintained since the 1930's see photo #18.

## 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 checked="" 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	Builder/Architect
1895-present	1899 section: Montana Construction Company (builders) Bell & Kent (Architects) 1909 section: Gagnon & Company (builders) F.M. Andrews & Co., Link & Haire (Architects)

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Montana State Capitol Building is historically significant for its role as the center of Montana's political life since 1902. Also, the Capitol building is architecturally significant as a product of architecture's "American Renaissance" in the last decade of the twentieth century.

For many Montanans in the years immediately following statehood, the construction of a permanent, impressive Capitol building symbolized the young state's maturation into a full fledged member of the union. However, Montana was thirteen years into statehood before its Capitol was finally completed.

One obstacle to the construction of the Capitol was the controversy over which city should be its site, a controversy which had begun during Montana's territorial days. After much acrimonious debate, the city of Helena was finally chosen in 1894, nearly five years after statehood had been achieved.

The first step toward building Montana's Capitol came soon after, in 1895, when the legislature named a State Capitol Commission and charged it with overseeing the Capitol's design and construction. Although the Capitol Commission developed ambitious plans and successfully sponsored a nationwide competition to select a suitable design for the capitol, it was soon plagued with funding problems and intrigue; the only visible sign of its efforts after two years was a \$40,000 debt, and an excavation for a grandiose building that the 1897 legislature decided Montana could not afford.

In response to the first commission's lack of success, the 1897 legislature formed a new commission, instructed it to hire only Montana builders and architects and provided it with what was hoped would be adequate funding for a more modest Capitol building. The legislator authorized a \$350,000 bond issue, securing the bonds with the 182,000 acres of land granted by the federal government at statehood for funding the construction of a Capitol building. To the legislature's embarrassment, the low interest rates assigned the bonds made them unattractive, and none could be sold; it appeared that the construction of a Capitol would be delayed again. Fortunately, Thomas Cruse, a wealthy Helena miner and capitalist, agreed to purchase the entire issue at a loss, enabling work on the Capitol building to begin.

The laying of the Capitol's cornerstone in 1899, and the dedication of the completed building in 1902, were both major events that drew visitors from across the state. Many of Montana's leading political figures spoke at the gatherings, including Governors Robert Smith and Joseph Toole, and U. S. Senator W. A. Clark.

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

1. Blumenson, John J. Identifying American Architecture, Nashville, American Association for State and Local History, 1977.
2. Hitchcock, Henry Russel and Seale, William, Temples of Democracy, New York, Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich, 1976. (Also see continuation sheet)

## 10. Geographical Data **ACREAGE NOT VERIFIED**

Acreeage of nominated property 12½  
Quadrangle name Helena **UTM NOT VERIFIED** Quadrangle scale 1:62,000

### UMT References

A	1 2	4 2 2 2 1 0	5 1 5 9 5 2 5	B	1 2	4 2 2 2 1 0	5 1 5 9 3 5 0
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
C	1 2	4 2 1 2 1 9	5 1 5 9 3 5 0	D	1 2	4 2 1 9 5 0	5 1 5 9 5 2 5
E				F			
G				H			

### Verbal boundary description and justification

See attached map entitled "Montana Capitol Building Grounds"

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

state	code	county	code
state	code	county	code

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title John Westenberg  
organization Montana Historical Society date October 22, 1980  
street & number 19 North Benton telephone (406) 443-1274  
city or town Helena state Montana

## 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 Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature Maecelle Sheffy  
title Deputy State Historic Pres. Officer date 12-30-80

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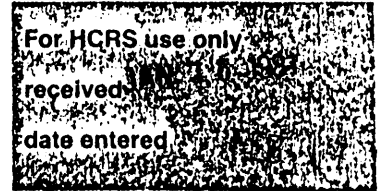
The completed building was handsome, impressive and a source of pride to the speakers. Architecturally, it showed the influence of the 1893 Columbian Exposition, whose neo-classical buildings had launched a movement that called itself the "American Renaissance" in architecture. Indeed, the Capitol's design, by Helena architects Bell and Kent, resembled that of the Minnesota and the Rhode Island Capitols, both of which were considered to be in the mainstream of the movement's neo-classical style. Through their large scale and classical symmetry, neo-classical buildings such as Bell and Kent's Montana Capitol captured the period's spirit of material progress and democratic perfectability. In addition to reflecting the spirit of the period, the neo-classical features of Montana's Capitol building fit well with the symbolic importance Montanans attached to its completion, and with the state's turn of century optimism; according to the speakers at the Capitol's dedication, the state had come of age and was about to enter a golden era of democracy and abundance.

In the first years after its completion, the Capitol building housed all of Montana's state offices. Growth of the state's government in those years led to the addition of complementary wings to the original building in 1909. Beginning in 1919, other state office buildings have been erected in the area around the Capitol, forming an areas called the "Capitol Complex". However, despite the number of new buildings, the Capitol remains the center of state government, housing the state's main executive and judicial offices and the state's legislative bodies. It also remains the state government's visual centerpiece, overlooking the buildings and the landscaped lawns of the Capitol complex. The Capitol building serves as a reminder of Montana's distinct political identity and heritage, and is visited by thousands of Montanans who admire its appearance and the Montana related paintings, murals and statuary it contains.



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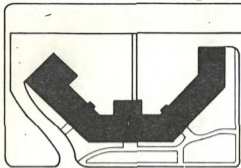
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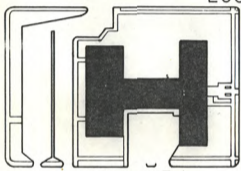
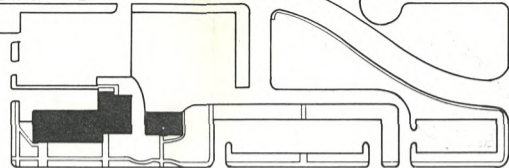
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3. Linse, Paul, "Montana Capitol Building." unpublished paper, Department of Architecture, Montana State University, Bozeman, 1978.
4. Montana's Capitol Building, vertical file, Montana Historical Society Library, Helena.
5. Montana Capitol Commission Report to the Sixth Legislative Assembly, December 1, 1898.
6. Raymer, Robert George, Montana, the Land and the People, Chicago, New York, Lewis Publishing Co., 1930.
7. Personal Communication, Martha Catlin, October 1980.
8. Personal Communication, Bill McEnaney, October 1980.
9. Personal Communication, Doug Olson, October 1980.
10. Ware, William R. The American Vignola, New York, W.W. Norton Co., 1977.
11. Whiffen, Marcus, American Architecture since 1780, Cambridge, M.I.T. Press, 1969.

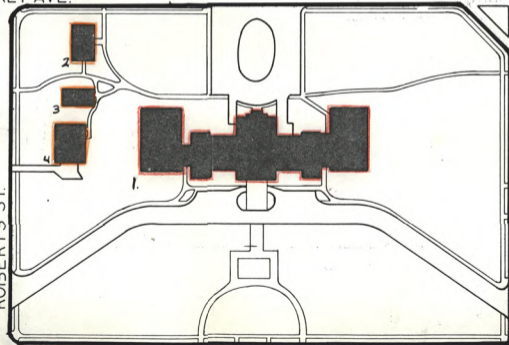
13 BROADWAY AVE.



LOCKEY AVE.



FIFTH AVE.



nomination boundary ———  
capitol building ———  
other buildings ———

SANDERS ST.

ROBERTS ST.

SIXTH AVE.

MONTANA AVE.

MONTANA  
STATE  
CAPITOL  
GROUNDS