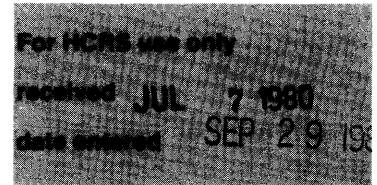


**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

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

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



1. Name

historic Chouteau County Courthouse

and/or common

2. Location

street & number 1308 Franklin Street not for publication

city, town Fort Benton vicinity of congressional district 2

state Montana code 30 county Chouteau code 015

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	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input 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 Chouteau County

street & number

city, town Fort Benton vicinity of state Montana

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Chouteau County Courthouse

street & number 1308 Franklin Street

city, town Fort Benton state Montana

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title State Inventory
Historic District of Fort Benton has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1968 and 1972 federal state county local

depository for survey records Montana Historical Society

225 North Roberts
city, town Helena state Montana

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		date <u>November 13, 1979</u>

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Situated in the center of block 40 in Fort Benton, the Chouteau County Courthouse is a two-and-one-half story rectangular building of soft local brick with cut granite stone trim. The building is Queen Anne style, having a large square tower on the left front corner with three large gabled bays on front and the two sides. The clock tower never had a clock inserted, but the tower has many decorated stone inserts with pilasters and painted metal roof. The main building has a modified hip roof with a flat top. The building is 62 feet by 88 feet with a daylight basement for additional office space. The first floor windows have straight stone lintels and sills, the second story ones have arched stone lintels with stone sills.

The entrance hall on the first floor runs the entire length of the original building with twelve-foot ceilings plastered and four-foot wainscoting of beaded wood. Offices enter off both sides. On the left is the main staircase to the second floor and to the basement. The stairway is within the tower and enters on a large foyer in front of which the large front window opens. On each side are two small offices and then double doors open into the large court room. A second stairway is located at the rear left which also gives access to the basement and to the second floor. On the second floor back of the court room is a small foyer with two offices off of it, one to the back and one on the right. The floor plan in the basement is the same as the first floor, a center hall with offices opening off both sides and a boiler room at the rear where both staircases enter from the left side. The interior has had little changes from its original building on the first and second floors; the basement has experienced extensive remodeling. Only the furnishings on the first floor have been changed; the court room has the original furnishings.

The one major alteration was a two-story brick addition built to the rear of the building for additional office space and storage of records. These offices are occupied by the Clerk of the District Court and the County Clerk. The rear wall has no openings. The sides have two windows on the first story and three on the second story. No trim has been placed around these windows or to the addition. The roof on the addition is a hip roof. In 1972 the building underwent a complete restoration of brick and stone as well as a new roof. Today it is in excellent condition on the exterior.

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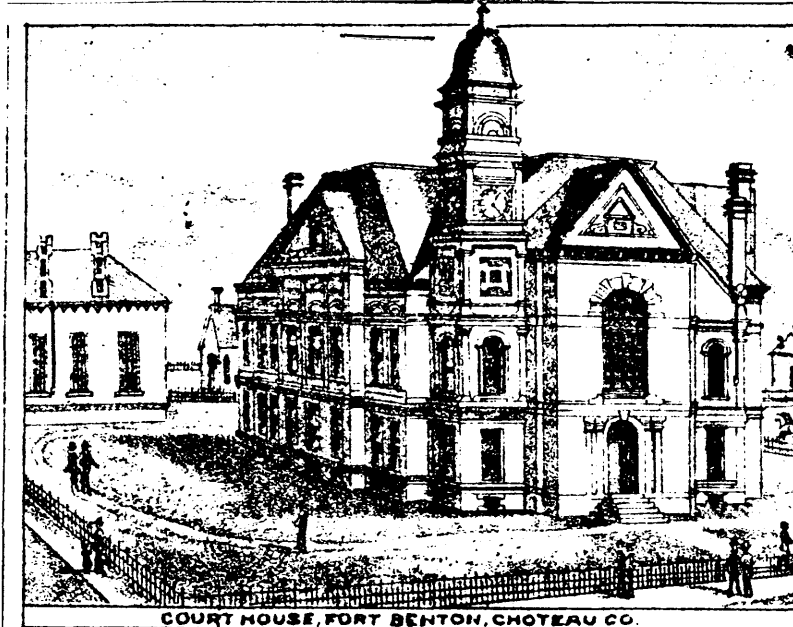
For HCRS use only
received _____
date entered _____

Continuation sheet

Item number 7

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Woodcut done in 1885, from Warner and Beers



COURT HOUSE, FORT BENTON, CHOTEAU CO.

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input 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 1883-1884 **Builder/Architect** Gus Senieur/Kees and Fisk

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Chouteau County Courthouse is significant for its historic associations with the politics and government of one of Montana's original nine counties. Also it depicts the era of rapid settlement of the 1880's when Fort Benton was one of the important cities in Montana. This stands with the Grand Union Hotel as the two most impressive buildings in the river town. Architecturally, the building is unique in composition and is the only one done by architects from the East.

The original courthouse was a one-story wood structure built in 1880 which burned on January 5, 1883 with a loss of \$12,000. The new courthouse was already in the planning stages by a committee composed of Charles Conrad, T.E. Collins and Judge J.W. Tattan when the old one burned. A contract was let to Gus Senieur as a builder in 1883 for \$43,300; the design came from the architects Kees and Fisk of Minneapolis. The inside was decorated like the Syndicate Block of Minneapolis. Sam Houston and Charles Berg held the brick and stone contract with stairways by James Moore of Cleveland, Ohio. One of the two architects is very important in American architecture and in the architecture of Minnesota. Frederick Kees, at the time of the building of the Chouteau County Courthouse, was in partnership with B.W. Fisk. In later years he had two other partners. He designed the Syndicate Block in 1883, at that time the largest building in Minneapolis. The following important historic structures of Minneapolis were designed by Kees:

Minneapolis Public Library	1889	Flour Exchange	1900
Lumber Exchange	1885	Northern Imp. Company	1910
Masonic Temple	1888	Long House	1894
First Baptist Church	1887	Cotton House	1906
City Hall & Hennepin Co. Courthouse	1888	Comstock House	1883

The courthouse has been the seat of county government in Chouteau County, one of the nine original counties of Montana, since it was opened for business in September 1884. Newspapers commented that it was the finest in the territory with the exception of the one built that same year for Silver Bow County in Butte, costing \$200,000 so Chouteau County's was built for far less money to the taxpayer. The building has had so little alteration inside or outside that it is a perfect example of the western courthouse built in growing communities with affluent citizenry of the early 1880's.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Chouteau County Records
 "Benton Record" - 1879
 "River Press" - 1883-1884
 History of Mont. - Warner, Beers &
 Co.

A Guide to the Architecture of Minn. - Gebhard &
 Martinson, 1977
 Bibliographical Dictionary of Am. Architects -
 Hennessey & Ingalls, Inc. 1970

UTM NOT VERIFIED
ACREAGE NOT VERIFIED

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property Approximately 2.0 acres

Quadrangle name Fort Benton

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UMT References

A

1	2	5	2	5	1	0	0	5	2	9	5	8	6	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

Block 40, original townsite of Fort Benton

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

state None code county code

state code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title John G. Lepley, Curator

organization Fort Benton Museum date November 13, 1979

street & number 817 Main Street telephone 622-3278

city or town Fort Benton 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 Marcella Shepley

title Deputy SHPO date originally signed 2-21-80
6-26-80

For HCRS use only
 I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

John W. Ray date 9/29/80
 Keeper of the National Register

Attest: Paula Jones date 9/17/80
 Chief of Administration

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

FOR HCRS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	FEB 26 1980
DATE ENTERED	SEP 29 1980

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

CONTINUATION SHEET

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Fort Benton's significance in the early settlement of Montana is immeasurable. No other town played such a prominent role in the opening of the Northwest from 1860 to 1887. Until the transcontinental railroads (the Northern Pacific, the Canadian Pacific and the Great Northern) crossed this country, Fort Benton's role as the greatest trade center and jumping off point was unchallenged. Three-quarters of all freight which entered the mining regions of Montana and Idaho came up the Missouri River from St. Louis, Sioux City, Omaha and Bismarck, and was unloaded on the levee at Fort Benton. There all of the Merchant Princes of the region had their headquarters and lived. Most entered other enterprises in later years and became the cattlemen, bankers and politicians of Montana. Some of them were Matt Carroll, T.C. Power, John Power, I.G. Baker, W.G. Conrad, C.E. Conrad, Kleinschmidt, W.S. Wetzel and John T. Murphy. The happenings in Fort Benton were closely tied to Virginia City, Helena and the other lesser early-day communities, so much so that the entire area was dependent upon the freight leaving Fort Benton. The vast majority of the people arrived and spent their first days in Fort Benton before heading to the gold fields or other endeavors in the wilderness. All major roads in the area had their terminal in Fort Benton. The first U.S. Government-built road (the Mullan Road) in the West left Fort Benton to Fort Walla Walla on the Columbia, forming a transcontinental route via the two rivers and the road.

Fort Benton also played a most important part in the settlement of the Canadian West. Most freight and supplies from Edmonton south came up the river and were transported from Fort Benton up the Whoop-Up Trail. The Northwest Mounted Police received their supplies by that same route; even their payroll was entrusted to Benton merchants for delivery. So all of Fort Benton's businesses played a significant role in the settlement of this part of the West. The large companies acted over a widely spread area, but surely the small businesses were of local significance in that booming freight town which was called the "Chicago of the Plains" during its twenty-seven years as the Northwest's greatest trade center.