

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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**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 Centre County Courthouse

AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

High Street

CITY, TOWN

Bellefonte

STATE

Pennsylvania

VICINITY OF

CODE

42

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

23

COUNTY

Centre

CODE

027

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

- DISTRICT
- BUILDING(S)
- STRUCTURE
- SITE
- OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

- PUBLIC
- PRIVATE
- BOTH
- PUBLIC ACQUISITION**
- IN PROCESS
- BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

- OCCUPIED
- UNOCCUPIED
- WORK IN PROGRESS
- ACCESSIBLE**
- YES: RESTRICTED
- YES: UNRESTRICTED
- NO

PRESENT USE

- AGRICULTURE
- COMMERICAL
- EDUCATIONAL
- GOVERNMENT
- INDUSTRIAL
- MILITARY
- MUSEUM
- PARK
- PRIVATE RESIDENCE
- RELIGIOUS
- SCIENTIFIC
- TRANSPORTATION
- OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

The Centre County Commissioners

STREET & NUMBER

Courthouse

CITY, TOWN

Bellefonte

VICINITY OF

STATE

Pennsylvania

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

High Street

CITY, TOWN

Bellefonte

STATE

Pennsylvania

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE Historical Reflections of Centre County

DATE

1970, 1972

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Centre County Planning Commission

CITY, TOWN

STATE

Pennsylvania

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 _____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Centre County Courthouse is a two story rectangular structure (with transept) of stone and brick, with stucco facing, gable roof, cupola, and porch. The building, excluding the 1963-64 addition (which we do not consider here), has the approximate dimensions of 135 feet in length, including the porch, and 60 feet in breadth.

The porch is period Greek Revival with eight 26 foot high smooth faced columns with Tonic capitals, supporting a triangular pediment articulated with modillions. The interior perimeter of the porch roof is articulated with dentils.

The main facade of the building, behind the porch, is composed of five bays with a central doorway. The windows are 12 over 12 lights and are crested with iron lintels bearing a scroll and foliate design. The lintels are, in their rativeness, strictly out of keeping with the purity of the simple Greek porch. The doorway may have its original cornice, but all below, including the door, appears to be more recent.

The cupola is octagonal with Doric pilasters on all corners. It is pierced by louvers, alternatively paired and single. Dentils below the cornice complement the modillions of the porch pediment. The cupola's roof is sheated with copper and is topped with a fish vane surmounting a ball and open with iron-work ornament.

The interior decoration of the building owes entirely to renovation in the years 1909-11. The design throughout is, it appears to us, in the spirit of Georgian Revival, excepting the lobbies which are 1909-11 vogue.

The foyer displays a double staircase leading to the second floor and the courtroom. The floors, wainscoating, and stairways are done in white marble, with black marble borders on the floors. The "newel", at either stairway, consists of a segment of fluted marble column surmounted by brass fixtures, or standards, of proto-Deco character and spherical glass globes. The handrail is supported by ironwork in an arch and plume (though foliate) design and is painted golden.

The stairway leads to an upper lobby with three arched glassed doors flanked by Corinthian pilasters leading to the courtroom.

The courtroom has an elaborate ceiling focusing on a circular, sculptural medallion of leaves, fretwork, and central foliate medallion. From this hangs the central electric fixture. A consistent decor of sculpted borders and medallions has been applied to the ceiling. Most of this is painted golden.

The judge's bench is articulated with a row of dentils.

A law library lies beyond the courtroom, to the rear, and possesses a variation on the sculpted ceiling design. The theme here is cornucopia.

All hallways in the building are floored and wainscoated with marble. Offices, excepting the judge's chamber (done in the manner of the courtroom, in terms of furnishings), are strictly plain and functional.

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 1

Description:

The first Centre County Courthouse was erected in 1805 and was a simple two-story rectangular limestone structure, approximately 20 feet deep and, perhaps, 60 feet wide (the rear wall of the original courthouse makes up the back wall of the present Registrar's Office and of the Prothonotary's Office). The first picture we have of the Courthouse appears on a hand-drawn map of Bellefonte, dated to 1818, in the collection of the Centre County Library and Museum (see photo of detail). Two brick wings had been added to the Courthouse in 1811. These appear in the picture as does a fish vane surmounting a large ball (which we believe to be the same as adorns the present cupola). Although the drawing is naive, it seems safe to assure that this 1818 picture is literal. The cupola appears to have lights and terminates in a cone or short spire at its apex.

In 1835, a Greek Revival porch was added to the front of the Courthouse. The design has been credited to Dr. William Harris of Bellefonte (1), but as this gentleman died in 1806, we cannot be confident of its source.

A painting, also in the collection of the Centre County Library, and judged to be circa 1850 from the analysis of information it contains, depicts the old Courthouse with the 1835 porch in place (see photo of detail).

In 1854-55, a reconstruction and enlargement of the structure behind the porch was undertaken. George W. Tate of Bellefonte was contracted for this work, which was completed at a cost of \$9,528.00. The walls were of stone and brick. The building as reconstructed and enlarged, extended about 90 feet behind the porch. An octagonal cupola with clock was placed on the roof.

The Courthouse remained essentially unchanged for several years following this and the engraving printed in Linn's History (see bibliography), may be taken to represent this stage of development.

In 1909, the decision was made to build an extension onto the eastern end of the Courthouse and architects Newman and Harris of Philadelphia were contracted for the work. The addition was 80 feet wide and 40 feet deep and appears as a transept at the back of the earlier building. As there was no basement under the old building, one was excavated under the new addition. Other decisions made at this time called for a complete remodelling of interiors and a thorough fireproofing of the entire building. New stairways were constructed of iron with marble treads. Marble was also used extensively in

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER

7

PAGE

2

Description:

flooring and wainscoating all lobbies, hallways, and stair halls. Finally, the cupola was essentially reconstructed and a new clock installed.

The final stage of construction, still further to the east, is modern (Heidrich-Kennedy-Rishberger, State College, PA, 1963-64) and is not stylistically integrated with the old building.

(1) J. Thomas Mitchell, A Glimpse of Local History, p. 35

181 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 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 checked="" 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: 1805, 1811, 1835, 1854-55, BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

Centre County Courthouse stands as a permanent, articulate reminder of the County's distinguished legal and political heritage. Although geographically remote and relatively sparsely populated, Centre County could boast of a considerable number of individuals distinguished in these fields.

Three successive judges of "The Central District" (composed of Centre, Huntingdon, Lycoming, Mifflin, and Northumberland Counties) proceeded from position of President Judge of the District to appointment to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court - Charles Huston (President Judge, 1818-26, and Supreme Court of Pennsylvania from 1826); Thomas Burnside (President Judge 1826-42, and Supreme Court of Pennsylvania from 1845); and George W. Woodward (President Judge, 1842-51, Supreme Court of Pennsylvania from 1852, and U.S. District Court, from 1863). The latter two, as well as Jonathan Hoge Walker (President Judge, 1806-1818, and appointed to U.S. District Court in 1818); who preceded Huston, were all residents of Bellefonte, the county seat of Centre County, indicative of the importance of Centre County in the District.

The political field also places Bellefonte and the courthouse in an exceptional position in the 19th century. The county has had twelve candidates nominated for governor including Andrew Gregg Curtin, governor 1861-7; General James A. Beaver, governor 1867-91; and Colonel Daniel H. Hastings, governor 1895-99; among others.

There have been many land law cases tried at the courthouse. Numerous disputes arose over the ownership of tracts of land rich in iron, lumber, and coal. In most instances, the early judges had no precedent for these decisions, and it is a great tribute to such men as Jonathan H. Walker and Charles Huston that few, if any, of their rulings were overturned.

The architectural significance of the Courthouse derives largely from the fact that its classical porch (1835) is the sole surviving example of period Greek Revival architecture in the County, on a large scale. Also worthy of mention are the fish vane on the cupola, which might well be the earliest visible feature of the structure, and the sumptuous interiors, dating to the 1909-11 remodelling.

In the county seat, the courthouse is the legal, political and also historical and social center of the county. Centre County Courthouse is an excellent of such a tradition, being both the symbolic center of the county and a fine architectural structure of the "Classical" type.

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ITEM NUMBER 9 PAGE 1

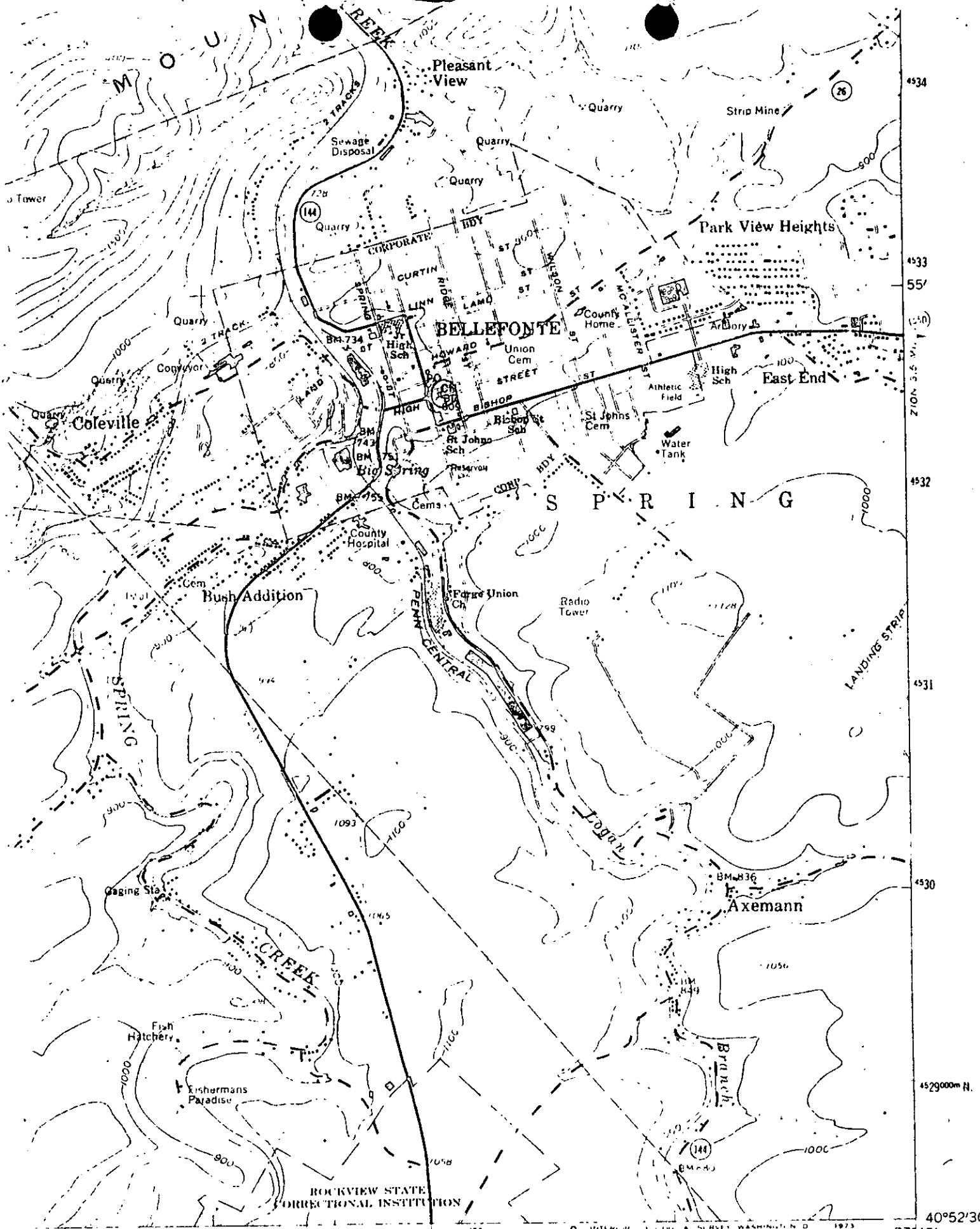
Bibliographical References:

Maynard, D.S. Industries and Institutions of Centre County. Bellefonte, Richie and Maynard, 1877.

Mitchell, J. Thomas. "A Glimpse of Local History," being a collection of newspaper articles published in the Keystone Gazette, Bellefonte, Pennsylvania, 1951-58. Arranged and photo-copied by J. Marvin Lee and bound for the Centre County Library, Bellefonte.

— "A Review of the History of the Bar of Centre County by J. Thomas Mitchell," manuscript, 1942

Newman and Harris, Architects. Souvenir: Centre County Court House, Bellefonte, Pennsylvania, May 19th, 1911.



40°52'30" N
 77°45' E
 1266065 / 4532500
 ROAD CLASSIFICATION
 Courthouse UTM