

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: IDENTIFYING AND PRESERVING SYMBOLISM:
MONTANA'S COUNTY COURTHOUSES

Degree Candidate: Paul Nicholas Filicetti

Degree and Year: Master of Arts in Historic Preservation, 2002

Thesis Directed by: Ellen B. Baumler, Ph.D., Chair
Center for Graduate and Continuing Studies
Goucher College, Baltimore, Maryland

Individual county courthouses of Montana are symbolic of the county seat and county. As a group, they are symbolic of the development of the State of Montana. Historic courthouses of Montana represent not only the contribution of individuals who developed the county seat and established the county, but of Montana's proud cultural heritage, history, and statehood. The county courthouse is the primary locus both physically and symbolically of the county seat, local county government, and county development in the State of Montana.

This thesis investigates symbolic elements in the architectural character of a select group of Montana county courthouses. It describes the building type, defines symbolism, identifies five goals of county courthouse symbolism, defines architectural character, and identifies, by analysis of architectural character, symbolic elements in three Montana courthouses: the Madison County Courthouse in Virginia City, the Missoula County

Courthouse in Missoula, and the Gallatin County Courthouse in Bozeman. The focus of the analysis is the courthouse site, main elevation, and lobby.

This thesis identifies and discusses symbolic elements in the architectural character of the courthouse. It asks what symbolic elements are evident in that architectural character and discussed how the preservation of the symbolic elements maintains courthouse symbolism. The hypothesis presented assumes the site, main elevation, and lobby of the courthouse contains physical, identifiable symbolic elements.

The hypothesis of this thesis is correct: symbolic elements are evident in the architectural character of the courthouse site, main elevation, and lobby. The symbolic elements do strengthen courthouse imageability; their identification is integral to the preservation process. Goals of county courthouse symbolism are evident in the architectural character of the courthouse. Significant elements of courthouse symbolism are found in the site, main elevation, and lobby.

The county courthouse is the public symbol of county government, development of the county seat, and Montana's proud cultural heritage. Identifying and preserving symbolic elements in the architectural character of the courthouse site, main elevation, and lobby is imperative to preserve the public symbol. Symbolic elements are irreplaceable. The complex layering of symbolism builds imageability associated with legitimizing government and reinforcing democratic society.