

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

1. Name of Property

historic name: Wirt County Courthouse

other names/site number: N/A

2. Location

street & number: Washington Street

not for publication: N/A

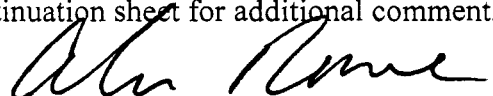
city or town: Elizabeth

vicinity: N/A

state: West Virginia code: WV county: Wirt code: 105 zip code: 26143

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide X locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)


for Susan M. Pierce, Deputy SHPO

Date

7/8/2004

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.
(See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

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:	Signature of Keeper	Date of Action
<div><div></div>entered in the National Register</div> <div><div></div>See continuation sheet.</div>	<div></div>	<div></div>
<div><div></div>determined eligible for the National Register</div> <div><div></div>See continuation sheet.</div>	<div></div>	<div></div>
<div><div></div>determined not eligible for the National Register</div>	<div></div>	<div></div>
<div><div></div>removed from the National Register</div>	<div></div>	<div></div>
<div><div></div>other (explain):</div>	<div></div>	<div></div>

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

private

X

public-local

public-State

public-Federal

Category of Property

X

building(s)

district

site

structure

object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Non-contributing	
3		buildings
		sites
		structures
3	1	objects
6	1	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

Name of related multiple property listing

County Courthouses of West Virginia

Wirt County Courthouse
Name of Property

Wirt County, WV
County and State

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

Current Functions

GOVERNMENT=County Courthouse

GOVERNMENT=County Courthouse

7. Description

Architectural Classification

LATE 19th and 20th CENTURY REVIVALS= Neo-Classical Revival

Materials

foundation: Stone

roof: asphalt, metal

walls: brick and stone

other: wood

Narrative Description

(See continuation sheets)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

- X A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- X C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Wirt County Courthouse
Name of Property

Wirt County, WV
County and State

Criteria Considerations

- ☐ A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ B removed from its original location.
- ☐ C a birthplace or a grave.
- ☐ D a cemetery.
- ☐ E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ F a commemorative property.
- ☐ G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

Architecture
Politics and Government

Period of Significance

1911-1953

Significant Dates

1911

Significant Person

VanWinkle, Peter G.
Rathbone, W.P.

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Smith Fireproof Construction, AIA

Narrative Statement of Significance

(See continuation sheets)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

See Continuation sheets

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

Name of repository: N/A

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than one acre

USGS Topographical map: Elizabeth, W.Va.

UTM References

Zone	Easting	Northing
17	465885	4323680

Verbal Boundary Description

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

See continuation sheet

Wirt County Courthouse
Name of Property

Wirt County, WV
County and State

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11. Form Prepared By

=====

name/title: Alan Rowe and Erin Riebe (WV SHPO) with Barbara E. Rasmussen

organization: Historic Preservation and Research **date:** June 2004

street & number: 224 Wilson Avenue **telephone:** (304) 292-7652

city or town: Morgantown **state:** WV **zip code:** 26501

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Property Owner

=====

name: Wirt County Commission

street & number: Washington Street (Box 53) **telephone:** (304) 275-4271

city or town: Elizabeth **state:** WV **zip code:** 26143

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Location and Setting

The Wirt County Courthouse is located in the small, rural community of Elizabeth. The town is situated along the Little Kanawha River and is reached by State Route 14 which joins Interstate 77 approximately thirteen miles northwest. The nearest town of substantial size is Parkersburg, located approximately twenty miles northwest, on the bank of the Ohio River. The county served by this courthouse consists of only 234 square miles and has a population of approximately 5,200.

The courthouse is a Neo-Classical Revival-style building that sets on a rectangular lot bounded by Court, Mulberry, Market, and Washington Streets. The lot also includes the county jail and a small building that until recently housed public restrooms. Commercial buildings face the courthouse on three sides of the square. Residential buildings are situated along Mulberry Street to the rear of the courthouse. A flag pole, World War I monument, two Civil War cannons, two benches, and a historic marker are located on the front lawn of the courthouse which faces southwest.

Description

Courthouse	1911	contributing building
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The courthouse is a two-and-one-half story brick building supported by a stone foundation. It is rectangular-shaped with a small, flat-roof, two-story wing off the northwest and southeast elevations of the building near the main, or southwest elevation. An additional flat-roof wing spans the rear, or northwest elevation of the building. A cornerstone reads "Laid by Grand Lodge A.F. & A.M.; W.Va. May 30, 1911 = A.L. 5911; Jewel Lodge No. 114 I.O.O.F.; Sterling Lodge No. 80 K of P; Board of Trade, Elizabeth, WV."

The main facade is dominated by a centered, full-height portico that is supported by four Ionic columns on brick bases and four Ionic pilasters. The dentiled cornice includes stone detailing above each column which is carried out around the building above each pilaster. The gable pediment includes dentil molding and a circle with a five-point star centered on acanthus leaves. The main entrance to the courthouse, centered under the portico, includes the original door with a lower wood panel and four windows on the upper section. The door has multi-light sidelights and a multi-light transom. Two windows to each side of the entrance are four-over-four, double-hung sash replacement windows that rest on a stone water table which is also carried throughout the building.

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Situated directly above the main entrance is a small balcony supported by four decorative metal brackets and displaying a decorative metal balustrade. This balcony includes a center entrance with simple pilasters supporting a gable pediment. A one-over-one, double-hung sash window flanks each side of this door. Three diamond-pane, fixed windows are situated above the door and windows. To each side of the balcony are two, four-over-four, double-hung sash original windows topped with two-light fixed windows. The main elevation of each wing has a four-over-four, double-hung sash window. Decorative brickwork separates the first and second story windows throughout the courthouse and decorative brick quoins further elaborate the main elevation of the building.

Each wing has simple brick pilasters and windows on the first and second stories, each of which is four-over-four, double-hung sash, having original windows on the second story. The area of the main courthouse building between the rear wing and two side wings has four sets of paired windows on the first and second stories similar to those on the main elevation including the transom above the second story windows. The rear elevation has a centered entrance with a simple door with sidelights and a transom.

The main section of the courthouse is topped with a hipped roof that has a shed-roof dormer on each side elevation and a large gable pediment on the rear elevation with dentil molding and a fan-light with keystone. Each dormer has a set of five one-over-one, double-hung sash windows and simple, corner pilaster. A centered cupola has a wooden vent on each side, a decorative balustrade with corner finials and a clock on each elevation.

Courthouse interior

The interior of the building features stairs with an original wood railing and newel post in the south corner of the building. A staircase in the east corner of the building has recently been converted to provide elevator service. Beyond the front entrance hall, the courthouse features a long central hallway with decorative terrazzo floor with dark oak trim and paneled doors leading to county offices located along each side.

The courtroom is located on the second floor. Decorated with oak wainscoting, the room features a sloped floor with three rows of wooden benches on each side of the isle. An oak baluster separates the gallery from the court area. The judge's bench is raised in the center of the room and is also constructed of oak. Two offices flank each side of the judge's bench. Period lights are suspended from the ceiling. Formerly, there was a balcony above the courtroom. The balcony was recently closed off and is now used for storage.

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Jail

1911

contributing building

The jail building is located directly behind the courthouse and faces southwest. It was constructed at the same times as the courthouse in a sympathetic style and of the same materials. The two-story, rectangular-shaped building has a low hipped roof and a small, two-story addition on its northwest elevation.

The main elevation displays a centered brick section with a gable parapet. This section slightly protrudes from the facade. A hipped roof porch extends from this section and covers a small concrete porch area which leads to a modern entrance door. To each side of the porch is a downsized, four-light window displaying arched lintels. The second story has three four-over-four, double-hung sash windows with matching windows. The sides and rear elevation of the building displays the same style windows. The building also displays brick corbeling and a simple entablature at the roof line. A side entrance with hipped roof porch faces the rear of the courthouse. Currently, the jail houses the sheriff's office.

Restroom

c.1911

contributing building

The restroom is a small building that is one story tall. Although the building's footprint is square the walls taper out from the top to bottom. It was constructed of brick and has a hipped roof. The building has two entrance doors on the northwest elevation and two, one-over-one, double-hung sash windows on the southwest elevation. Currently storage, the building housed the only courthouse's only restrooms until recently.

Civil War Monument

1914

two contributing objects

There are two Civil War era cannons on the front lawn. They were positioned on a concrete base in 1914 and are inscribed with "G.A.R. 1914."

World War I Monument

1920

contributing object

A stone monument to Wirt County's World War I veterans is located at the base of a new flag pole.

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Statement of Significance

The Wirt County Courthouse is eligible under *Criteria A: Politics and Government* for its significance in Wirt County’s political history. Although the courthouse is not the county’s first, the building is associated with the political tendency to form new counties in western Virginia as populations increased. This demonstrated a desire on the part of rural and remote citizens to bring the institutions of local government to their communities. The current courthouse is a representative of that trend. Citizens desired close access to civil government and were hopeful of economic and political benefits that a county seat would bring to the area. The Wirt County Courthouse is the material evidence of the county’s population growth and a symbol of the residents’ values.

The building is also eligible under *Criterion C: Architecture* as a locally significant example of the Neo-Classical Revival style of architecture. The period of significance is 1911, the year the courthouse was constructed, to 1954, the National Register’s fifty-year cut-off date.

History

Wirt County was first settled in 1796 by navy veteran William Beauchamp who claimed 1,400 acres along the Little Kanawha River. In 1803 Beauchamp constructed a mill that triggered population growth in the area. By 1817 the area was formally laid out as a town. Five years later, in 1822, the Assembly of Virginia incorporated a town which was named Elizabeth after Beauchamp’s wife.

The county was not formed until January 19, 1848 when portions of Jackson and Wood counties were reorganized into Wirt County. The county was named after William Wirt, who served in the cabinet of President James Madison. When Wirt County was established there was a considerable struggle between the community of Palestine and Beauchamp’s Mills (Elizabeth) as each desired to become the county seat. Until a courthouse was built, the Virginia General Assembly stipulated that the county court would meet in the home of miller Alfred Beauchamp.

Two of Western Virginia’s most important citizens helped to design the first courthouse. According to the West Virginia Historic Records Survey, the building was designed by Peter G. VanWinkle, who was paid \$10 for his services. VanWinkle was an attorney and president of the Northwestern Virginia Railroad, a subsidiary line of the Baltimore & Ohio. He later became the most prominent actor in the West Virginia statehood conventions, and served as one of the new state’s first U.S. senators. VanWinkle’s father-in-law, oil baron W.P. Rathbone, supervised construction of the building. Isaac Tavener and Rathbone each donated land for the new

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courthouse. A one-acre tract of land for the courthouse lot was conveyed to the county by Tavener and surveyed by Daniel Lovett. The terms of Tavener's conveyance stipulated that if the site ceased to be used for a courthouse, or if the courthouse remained vacant for more than two years, the property would revert to his heirs. Lysander Dudley of Wood County was the builder, assisted by his apprentice H.W. Tucker.

In the mid-nineteenth century the county's population was burgeoning. At this time, industrialists flocked to Burning Springs which was found to be rich in oil. There were fewer than twenty permanent residents in the town of Elizabeth until oil was discovered in nearby Burning Springs early in 1861. More than 6,000 hopefuls descended on the town as word of the oil discovery spread. The Civil War loomed, however, and approximately 200 locals joined the Confederate Army and 468 joined the Federal forces. On May 9, 1863, General William E. Jones burned the oil drilling equipment to the ground, along with all of the oil in the storage tanks. One hundred thousand barrels of oil were ignited. The light from the fire was visible in the night sky as far as Parkersburg. The Confederates burned the courthouse in retaliation for a supposed Union firing of the Boone County Courthouse. Anticipating the event, County Clerk Daniel Wilkinson and his father, Dr. James A. Wilkinson, rapidly removed the county records from the courthouse and took them by horse and wagon to safety in Parkersburg. Later in the war, Union soldiers used the shell of the original courthouse as a barracks. The future first governor of West Virginia, Arthur I. Boreman was the presiding judge of the local judicial circuit at that time, further associating tiny Wirt County with the leaders who would be active in forming the state of West Virginia. Tavener did not exercise his reversionary options when the first courthouse burned, as a second courthouse was erected on the same site.

Although the wells continued to produce oil until 1870, Elizabeth never fully recovered from the fire and the community remained small. The second courthouse building served the county for approximately forty-five years before it also succumbed to flames in 1909. The county began to conduct business in Elizabeth's public school on court street as the commission worked quickly to come up with a plan to erect a new courthouse.

On Saturday, June 9, 1910 a special election was held for the purpose of voting on the question of issuing bonds for the construction of the courthouse. After county residents voted for the bond Wirt County Commissioners entered into a contract with B.F. Smith on September 3, 1910 to prepare plans and specifications for the new courthouse. Smith was paid \$325 for these services. The commission adopted his plans on November 30, 1910 and solicited bids for the construction of the courthouse and jail in *Manufacturers Records* (Baltimore, MD), *Wirt County Journal*, and *Elizabeth Messenger*.

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The commissioners also advertised for bonds in the amount of \$40,000 with an interest rate of five percent. Interested bidders included S.A. Kean & Co. of Chicago, C.H. Coffin of Chicago, A.J. Hood & Co. of Detroit, and Seanongood & Morgan of Cincinnati. The commission accepted the bid of the S.A. Kean & Co. Bonds included twenty \$1,000 bonds and forty \$500 bonds with in interest rate of five percent per to be paid in full by January 2, 1931. While the commission originally accepted Kean’s bid, the company refused to comply with their original offer and the bid of John F. David was eventually accepted.

On January 1, 1911 the commission accepted bids for the construction of the courthouse and jail from Standard Building & Construction Company (\$49,150), A.L. Shockey (\$47,800), C.W. Dowling (\$46,000), D.J. Chipps (\$44, 925), and B.F. Smith Fireproof Construction Company (\$43,150). The commission entered into contract with the lowest bidder, B.F. Smith Company.

In their letter, the B.F. Smith Company agreed to complete the project by December 15, 1911. They also described the brick they would use on the exterior of the courthouse. The brick, known as Onyx Shade Austrakan [sic] Face Brick, was made by the Columbus Brick and Terra Cotta Company which operated from 1897 to 1921 (their specialty was the Standard Roman, Norman and Ornamental brick in Buff, Gray, Terra Cotta, Buff Speckled, Red and Mottled Enameled). B. F. Smith claimed that the brick was much better than that being used on other buildings because it would hold its color. The company also offered a check of \$3000 as evidence of a “good faith” bid. In the case that the company backed out of their bid, the check could be cashed by the county.

After the project commenced and the foundation was laid the commissioners held a special session on May 30, 1911 in which they met on a platform situated on the foundation. The Honorable J.M. Hamilton delivered an address in place of the Honorable H. H. Moss, Jr. who fell ill, a parade was held, and a cornerstone was laid by the local masons. Construction was complete by the end of the year and court was held early in 1912. Court has been held in the current courthouse since this time.

Architecture

The Neo-Classical Revival architecture of the building is significant for such a rural place, and joins Wirt County with many other small West Virginia communities whose courthouses also are executed in this style. Neo-Classical Revival architecture was popular during the later years of the second Industrial Revolution in America and was often chosen for courthouses and other public buildings constructed at during the same era. For Wirt County, the style differs greatly from the vernacular buildings that otherwise characterize the small community. This courthouse

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replaced the earlier courthouse which burned in 1909. That courthouse replaced the original courthouse that was fired during the Civil War.

Summary

The Wirt County Courthouse is eligible under *Criteria A: Politics and Government* for its significance in Wirt County’s political history. Since the early twentieth century, this building as provided a place for lawmakers and county officials to gather and conduct business. The building is also eligible under *Criterion C: Architecture* as a locally significant example of the Neo-Classical Revival style of architecture. The period of significance dates from 1911, the year the courthouse was constructed, to 1954, the National Register’s fifty-year cut-off date.

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Bibliographic References

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Verbal Boundary Description

The Wirt County Courthouse Square is that parcel of land encompassed by Market, Washington, Court and Mulberry streets in the town of Elizabeth, WV, and further described in Wirt County Deed Book 1, page 9.

Boundary Justification

The site is the footprint of the county courthouse, square, and old jail, in Wirt County.

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Photos

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Name of Property: Wirt County Courthouse
Address: Washington Street
Town: Elizabeth
County: Wirt
Photographer: Erin Riebe and Alan Rowe

- Photo 1 of 8

Main (southwest) elevation
View facing northeast
- Photo 2 of 8

Main (southwest) and side (southeast) elevations
View facing north
- Photo 3 of 8

Rear (northeast) and side (southeast) elevations
View facing west
- Photo 4 of 8

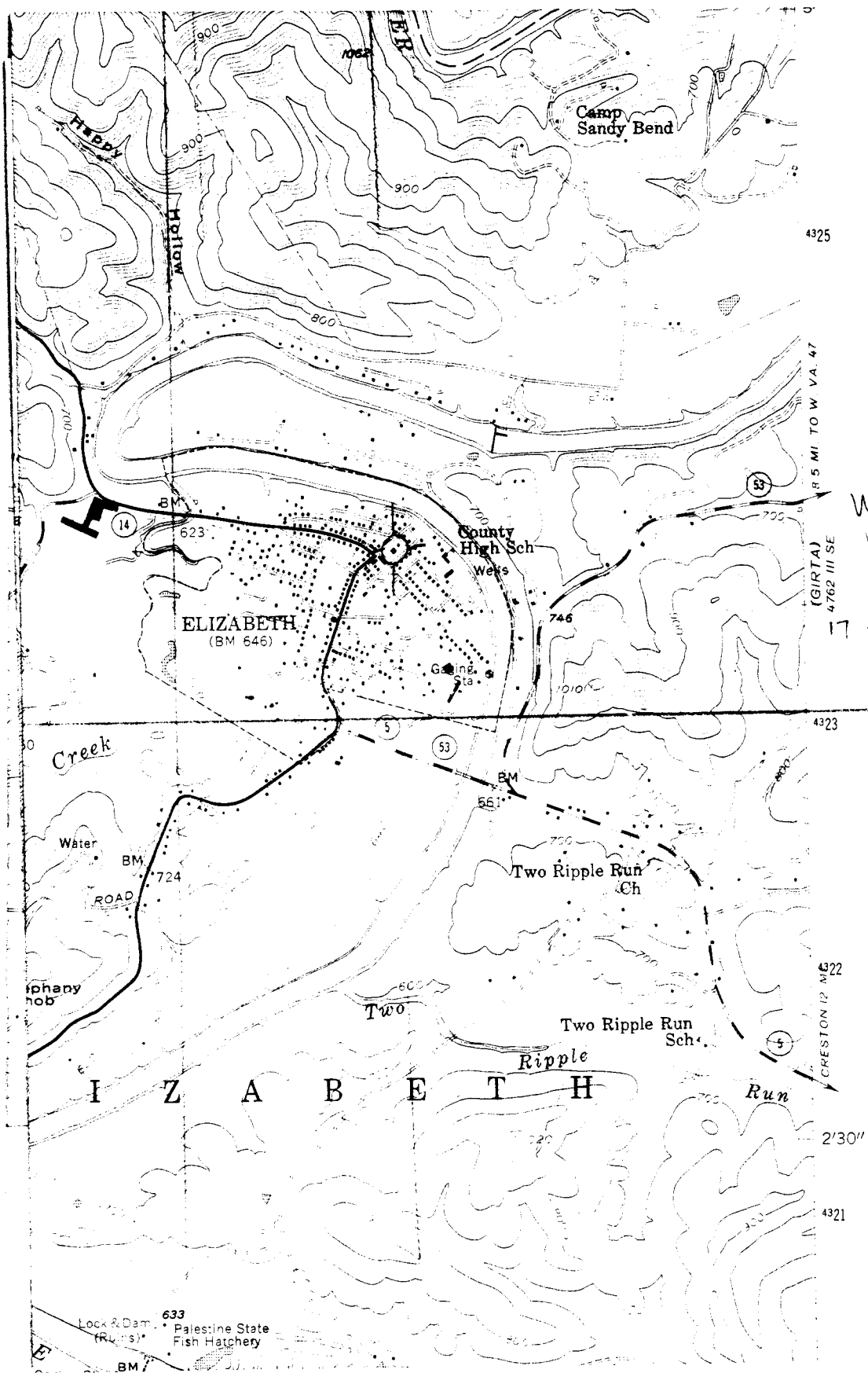
Jail building with courthouse in rear
View facing south
- Photo 5 of 8

Restroom building
View facing east
- Photo 6 of 8

Interior staircase
View facing north
- Photo 7 of 8

Interior hall on first floor
View facing northeast
- Photo 8 of 8

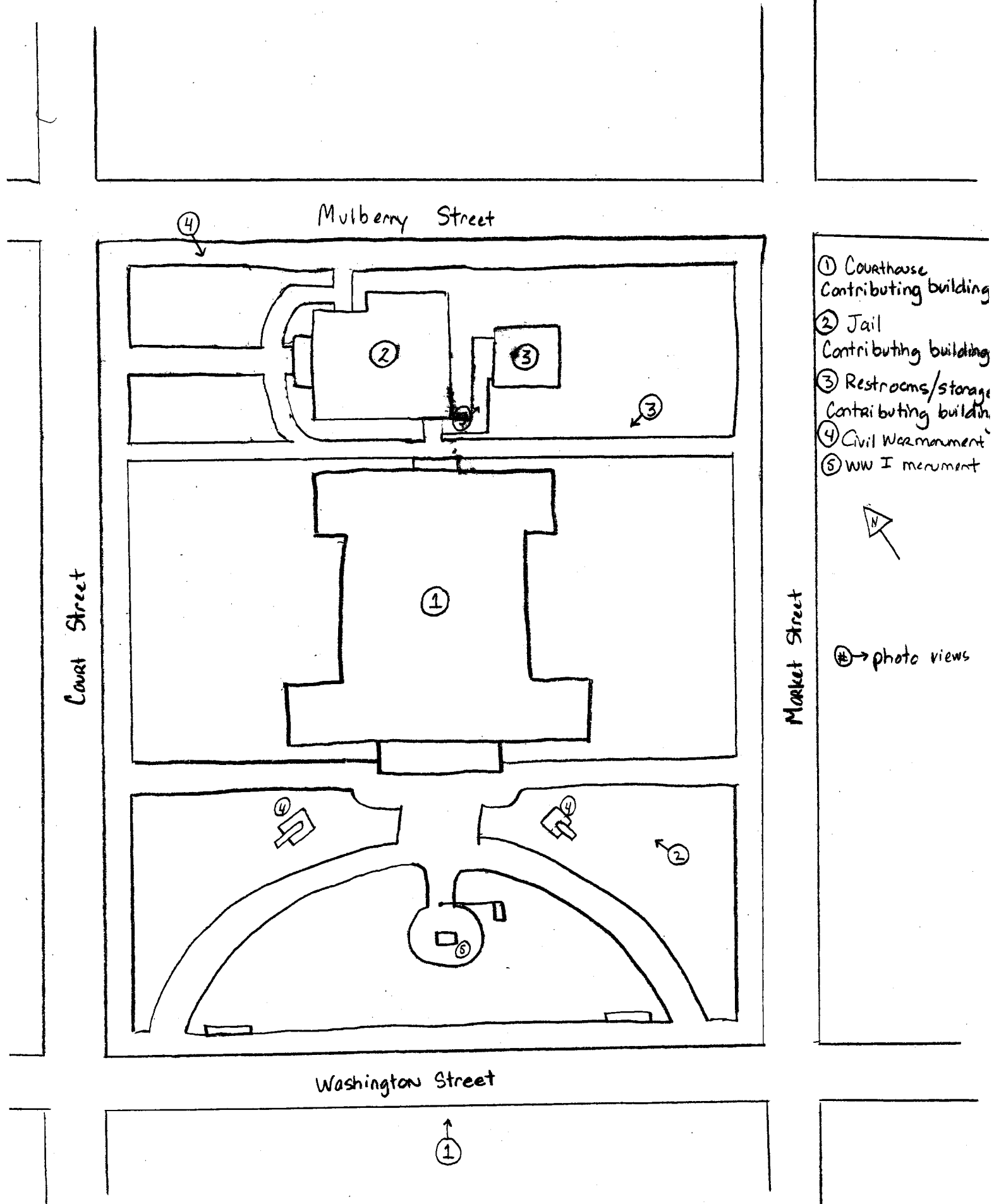
Courtroom
View facing northeast

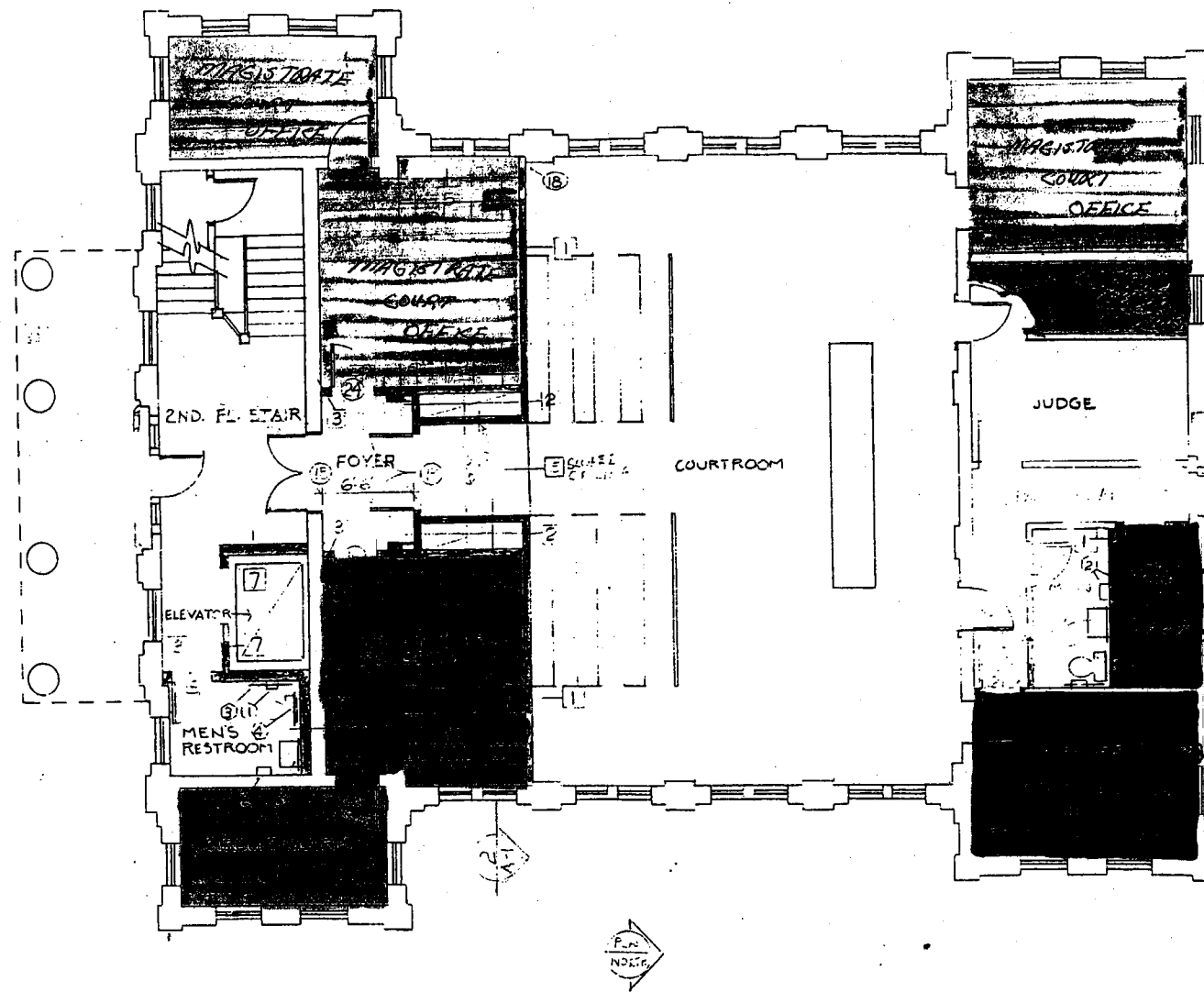


Wirt County Courthouse
Wirt County, W. Va.

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Wirt County Courthouse, Wirt County, WV

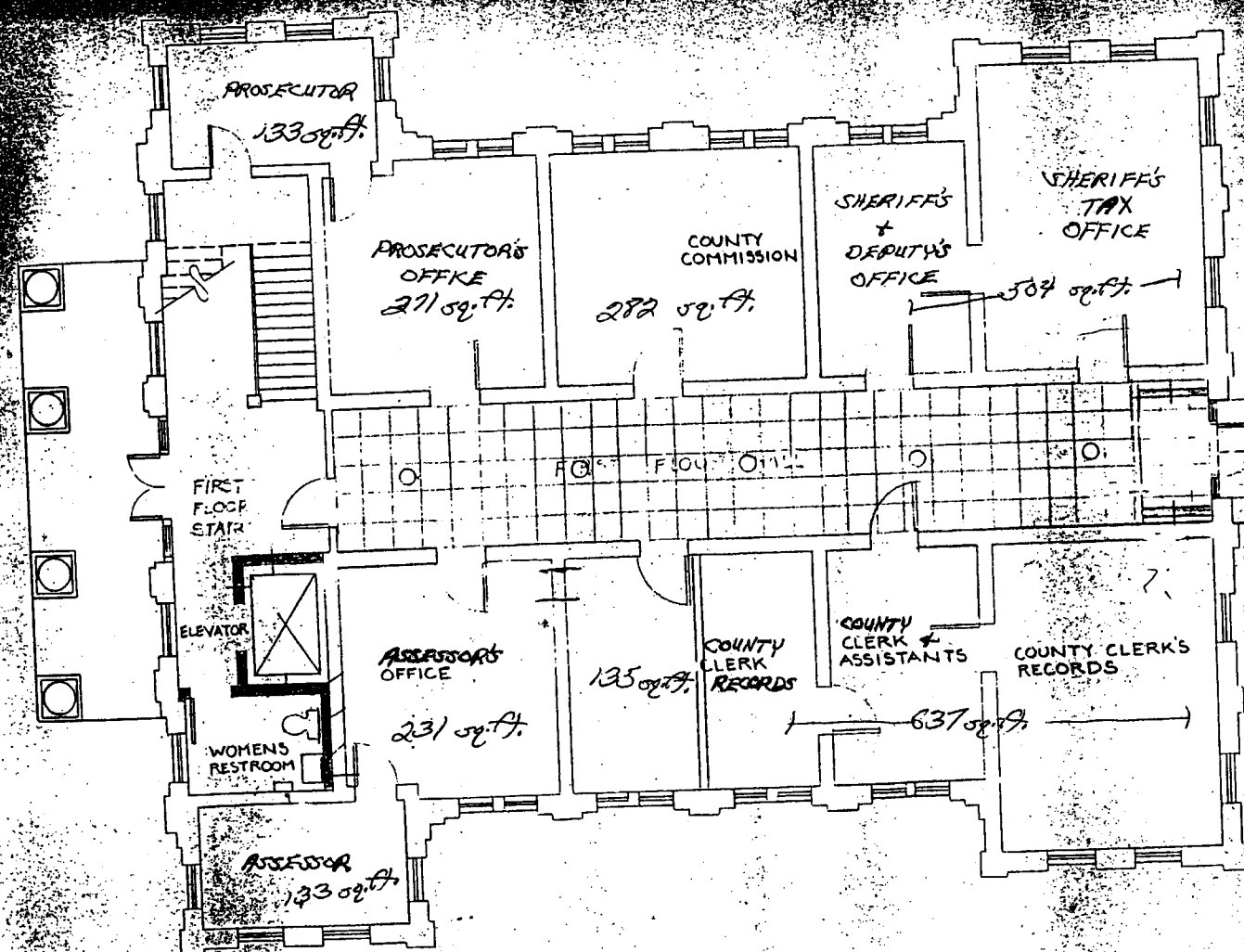




- = REST ROOM ACCESSORIES
- = DOOR NUMBERS
- = CODED NOTES
- = WALL TYPE

(8)

SECOND FLOOR RENOVATION





ELIZABETH

Settled by William Beauchamp,
1796. Named for wife of David
Beauchamp. Near here in 1752,
Christopher Gist placed a
marker for the Ohio Company
whose plan to colonize the
western lands was halted by
the French and Indian War.