

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

DATA SHEET

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED SEP 17 1976

DATE ENTERED DEC 18 1976

**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

Benton County Courthouse

AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

Dudley Avenue at Market Street

— NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Prosser

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

4th - Mike McCormack

STATE

Washington

— VICINITY OF

CODE

53

COUNTY

Benton

CODE

005

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S) | <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE | <input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED | <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM |
| <input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE | <input type="checkbox"/> BOTH | <input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS | <input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL |
| <input type="checkbox"/> SITE | PUBLIC ACQUISITION | ACCESSIBLE | <input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL |
| <input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT | <input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS | <input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED | <input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> NO | <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS |
| | | | <input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL |
| | | | <input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY |
| | | | <input type="checkbox"/> PARK |
| | | | <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE |
| | | | <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC |
| | | | <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION |
| | | | <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER: |

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Benton County (Wes. P. Brown, Chairman, Board of County Commissioners)

STREET & NUMBER

Dudley Avenue at Market Street

CITY, TOWN

Prosser

STATE

Washington

— VICINITY OF

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTIONCOURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Benton County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

Dudley Avenue at Market Street

CITY, TOWN

Prosser

STATE

Washington

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Washington State Inventory of Historic Places

DATE

December, 1974

— FEDERAL STATE — COUNTY — LOCALDEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (Washington State Parks)

CITY, TOWN

Olympia

STATE

Washington

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 DATE _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> FAIR | <input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED | | |

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Benton County Courthouse, constructed in 1926, is a three-story, brick and terra cotta building in the neo-classical revival style. It is situated adjacent to the modest commercial district of the town of Prosser. Located in the west-central portion of Benton County, Prosser is bounded by the Yakima River to the north and by the slopes of the Horse Heaven Hills to the south. Although the county is climatically arid, the river valley is green with irrigated orchards and hop fields and wheat grows in abundance on the Horse Heaven Plateau.

The county courthouse and its related dependencies to the rear occupy a full city block within the town. This block is flanked by shaded, residential streets and is fronted by a small pocket park, triangular in plan, across Dudley Avenue to the north. The park and courthouse site are enhanced by well-maintained lawns and by an unusual variety of mature trees including fir, birch, poplar, and oak. To the rear of the courthouse are the county jail and county office annex, both designed in the 1940's, using compatible brick facings. In more recent years, a one-story sheriff's office has been added to this complex. None of these dependencies exerts a notably adverse effect upon the architectural integrity of the courthouse.

The courthouse was designed by architect George Rasquil of the Spokane firm of Link and Rasquil. It is a reinforced concrete structure faced with striated brick and ornamented with classical elements of white glazed terra cotta. A basic rectangle in plan, the building measures approximately 90 feet by 70 feet, and is subdivided on its north or main elevation by seven bays.

The concrete foundation is covered with grey stucco. The ground story of the courthouse is actually a daylight basement defined in the composition of each elevation by a broad belt-course and water table of terra cotta at second floor level. This division is further emphasized by a color variation in the building's brick facing - the dark red tone of the ground-story masonry contrasts with the buff and brown shades of the brickwork above. The four elevations of the courthouse are unified horizontally by an entablature of pressed metal featuring a plain wide frieze, mutules, and dentil course. A brick carpet of substantial height entirely obscures the flat roof form.

The most distinctive design element of the main elevation is the central portico which projects slightly from the plane of the facade. Heavy double doors of oak below a multi-paned transom provide formal access to the courthouse. Above the enframed entryway, a third floor window opens onto a shallow balustraded balcony supported by consoles. These features are flanked by fluted Ionic columns and adjoining brick pilasters, extending from second floor level to entablature. The central pediment above is crowned by a stylized shell motif. These architectural details are, for the most part, of cast stone sheathed with white glazed terr-cotta.

The courthouse fenestration is straightforward in configuration. Three double-hung, one over one light sash flank the central portico at each floor level. The sash are set within moulded wood frames, underlined by glazed terra cotta sills.

The interior of the courthouse is simple in plan, and remains largely unaltered. Decorative features of note include terrazo flooring (on the main, or second floor level), oak banisters, doors, window and door surrounds; and moulded, plastered cornices.

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On the whole, the Benton County Courthouse retains its original architectural design and detail. Alterations to the exterior of the building are limited to the construction of a small penthouse to accommodate an additional courtroom and judges chambers. On the interior modernizations have included the removal of a few office partitions, the addition of carpets and acoustical ceiling tiles, and the 1953-54 installation of continuous wood wall panelling in at least one courtroom.

The Benton County Courthouse is an exceptionally well-preserved example of local, classically inspired, public architecture of the 1920's. Within the context of Prosser and 71 year-old Benton County, the courthouse embodies permanence, stability, and architectural monumentality.

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/HUMANITARIAN |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799 | <input type="checkbox"/> ART | <input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING | <input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC | <input type="checkbox"/> THEATER |
| <input 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 1926 BUILDER/ARCHITECT George Rasque, Architect

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

For fifty years the Benton County Courthouse has served as the headquarters of county government in this historically colorful region of south central Washington. The town of Prosser and Benton County itself were only recently established entities at the time of the building's construction in 1926. The early potential of the town of Prosser and its surroundings was prophetically advertised by the Northern Pacific Railroad in an 1893 guidebook of the region:

The first town on the Cascade Division, after crossing the Columbia river, is Prosser which has a mill two stores, a hotel, and a livery stable, and is the point of departure from the railroad to an extensive grazing and farming region, called the "Horse Heaven County", which lies just south of the low range of grassy mountains that rise immediately back of town. The country north of the Yakima, stretching out to the Rattlesnake Mountains, is known as the "Sunnyside Country". The land is very fertile in spite of its desert like appearance, and will soon be reclaimed by irrigating canals and ditches, and will in time become a well-settled and very productive farming region.

The platting of townsites, the development of networks for irrigation, and the coming of the railroad were closely interwoven in Benton County, as in other areas of central and eastern Washington. The Northern Pacific laid tracks in the vicinity of Prosser between 1885-1888. This length of track formed a portion of the railroad's Cascade Division, the last leg of the transcontinental line. Homesteaders were drawn to the region in the 1880's and 1890's by the promise of widespread reclamation projects which would transform the fertile but arid soil into a productive agricultural district. As early as 1894, the Prosser Falls Land and Irrigation Company operated a pumping plant on the Yakima River which irrigated some 4,000 acres of surrounding farmland. By 1900, the same falls made possible the generation of electricity and the pumping of water for domestic use to Prosser residences. Diversified farming was a well-established reality by the close of the first decade of the 1900's.

The settlement of the town of Prosser, known variously in its earliest days as Lone Tree, Yakima Falls, and Tumwater, predates the formation of Benton County by some 25 years. In 1880, James Kinney first established a homesteader's claim just west of the future village. Kinney was followed in 1882 by Colonel William Ferrand Prosser and his wife Flora, who homesteaded on the south bank of the Yakima on the present-day townsite. In 1884, the site was surveyed and platted, and the first post office, bearing the name of Prosser, was opened. Incorporation of the town did not occur until 1899.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

The Book of the Counties. 1853-1953. Washington State Associations of County Commissioners and County Engineers.
 Brown, Wes. P., Chairman of the Board of Benton County Commissioners, Interview.
 Jones, Silvia Case. From Cabin to Capola. National Society of the Colonial Dames of America, 1971.
 Minutes of the Meetings of Benton County Commissioners, Benton County Courthouse.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than one

UTM REFERENCES

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| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|------|---|---------|-----|---|-----|----------|---|---|---|---|-----|
| 1 | 0 | 2 | 8,6 | 3 | 5,0 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 7,0 |
| ZONE | | EASTING | | | | NORTHING | | | | | |

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| ZONE | | EASTING | | | | NORTHING | | | | | |

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| ZONE | | EASTING | | | | NORTHING | | | | | |

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

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

Virginia B. Evans, Chairman

and

Florence K. Lentz, Hist. Pres. Spec.
 Washington State Parks & Recreation Com
 P. O. Box 1128, Olympia, WA. 98504

ORGANIZATION

Courthouse Beautification Assoc.

DATE

3-15-76

STREET & NUMBER

900 Memorial Street

TELEPHONE

(509)-786-3879

CITY OR TOWN

Prosser,

STATE

Washington 99350

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE X

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 National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE



TITLE State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE September 13, 1976

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

ATTEST:  DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

DATE 12/12/96

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE 72/6/76

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Colonel Prosser was as colorful as the region in which he settled. Born in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, Prosser engaged in mining and Indian fighting in California between 1854 and 1861. He served as a Union Army officer during the Civil War, after which he promptly moved to Nashville, Tennessee and involved himself in Republican Reconstructionist politics until 1879. In that year, he was appointed by President Rutherford B. Hayes as a special agent for the Department of the Interior for the territories of Washington, Oregon, and Idaho. As a homesteader in the Yakima Valley, Prosser was influential in the organization of the Prosser Falls Land and Irrigation Company, and in the development of the region's earliest irrigation system. In 1889, Colonel Prosser participated as one of 75 delegates to the state's Constitutional Convention in Olympia.

At the turn of the century, the town of Prosser was fast becoming a prosperous service center for the surrounding agricultural community. Early businesses included such varied enterprises as a Chinese laundry, a cigar factory, and a carpet factory with its looms situated in the back yard. Prosser's flour mill had been established in 1887 by Mr. Heinzerling, a bridge engineer from Pennsylvania. A brick manufactory operated at an early date, a fact which may account for the unusual number of distinctive brick commercial structures of that era which remain today in downtown Prosser.

In spite of the advent of "progress", elderly residents of the town recall that Prosser at the turn of the century was still a wild and woolly town in the best western tradition. Jail breaks, armed robberies, and tavern brawls were not uncommon occurrences. In 1907, an opium den in operation behind the town's Chinese laundry was raided by the county sheriff, and the captured "dope fiends" were duly incarcerated in the county jail. Long-time residents of Prosser clearly remember early physical features such as dirt streets, hitching posts, and a sheep-shearing camp near the center of town, as well as popular community activities like the annual wild horse round-up on Horse Heaven Hills south of town.

In typical western style, Benton County was born in contention. The creation of a new county within Yakima County boundaries had been the subject of long discussion and lively rivalry between Prosser and the younger village of Kennewick - each intending to be named county seat should the separation occur. With the state legislator's passage of the county division bill in March of 1905, the formation of Benton County was approved and Prosser, with its larger and more stable population, became the seat of the new government. The county was named in honor of Thomas Hart Benton, senator from Missouri whose homestead bill opened the West to settlement.

For two years, Benton County leased Prosser's frame, hipped-roof Riverside Hotel for \$60 per month. Court was held in the hotel dining-room, and county offices were set up in the hotel's chambers. From 1907-1919 the county occupied offices in the Viles Block on Seventh Street. During that interval, agitation for a county-owned courthouse led to a revival of the county seat controversy, with Prosser, Kennewick, and Benton City in competition. In the election campaign of 1912, the Prosser Republican Bulletin bitterly accused the Kennewick Courier of "willful perjury" in its allegation that county funds

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had been mishandled. Moreover, Kennewick was accused of luring the county seat to its jurisdiction with the promise of rent-free courthouse facilities. Between 1919 and 1927, county officials were again situated in temporary quarters in Prosser's Central Hotel.

The action which spurred construction of the present-day neo-classical revival courthouse was the presentation of a petition to the county commissioners by the Prosser Community Club. Three possible courthouse sites were offered for sale by local property owners. The commissioners voted to purchase Block B of Nelson Rich's Addition for \$9,500.00. To finance the project, negotiable bonds totalling \$100,000.00 were sold by the county to the State of Washington. Fourteen general contractors submitted construction bids in April of 1926. Ernest White and Company of Twin Falls, Idaho were awarded the contract on the basis of their low bid of \$75,321. The commissioners hired the architectural firm of Link and Rasque of Spokane, Washington to design the new edifice. George Rasque originally of Wisconsin, headed the project. During his 55-year career, Rasque served for 16 years as a State Architect for eastern Washington. The Eastern Washington State Mental Hospital at Medical Lake, and the state penitentiary at Walla Walla are attributed to him.

The Benton County Courthouse remains as the first permanent courthouse facility built in Benton County. A structurally sound and visually attractive building today, it continues to serve as the official center of county record-keeping and courtroom activity. Construction of the courthouse in Prosser in 1926 was a turning point in the unsettling county-seat controversy, and thus helped considerably to establish political stability within Benton County. In addition, the courthouse represents the area's first example of monumental public architecture with deliberate "high-style" design features. In both a political and cultural sense, the courthouse symbolizes the coming of age of Benton County, Washington.

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Prosser Record Bulletin, 75th Anniversary Edition, August 29, 1974. Prosser,
Washington.

Sacville-West, Jack, Former Partner of Architect George Rasque, Spokane. Interview.