

About ACHPC

Established in 1988, the Historic Preservation Council is a group of dedicated volunteers seeking to preserve and enhance cultural and historic sites throughout Ada County. They serve in an advisory role to the Board of Ada County Commissioners. The group relies heavily on volunteer efforts, grants and some support from Development Services staff. The Board of County Commissioners provides matching funds for state and federal grants.

The Council has authority to conduct a survey of local historic properties, cooperate with outside agencies toward historic preservation objectives, make recommendations and participate in local planning processes, and promote awareness of the importance of historic preservation through education and outreach.



Ada County Historic Preservation Council
Preserving Ada County's Heritage



The Ada County Courthouse





Constructed in 1938 and 1939, the Ada County Courthouse is listed on the National Register of Historic Places as a contributing element in the "Boise Capitol Area District." This district is significant for its association with the history of politics and government in Boise and the state. The primary buildings that make up this district include the Ada County Courthouse, the Idaho Statehouse, and the Federal Building (Post Office). It is significant that one can stand at one spot and see the seats of all three levels of government. The Courthouse is an important element in this juxtaposition as it is the embodiment of local government on the Capitol Mall. The Ada County Courthouse building itself is also significant as a Works Progress Administration (WPA) project, and as an excellent example of the Art Deco style of architecture - a style that saw limited application in Boise.

The Courthouse was designed as a collaborative effort by two very important early Idaho architectural firms: Tourtellotte & Hummel (now Hummel Architects) and Wayland & Fennel (now CSHQA Architects). The early design drafts for the building show a neoclassical structure similar in detail to the adjacent Statehouse. But the final design was rendered in the Art Deco style. The Art Deco style emerged out of the 1925 Paris Expo as a determined and purposeful rejection of earlier styles. The style is characterized by a geometric, angular, hard edge, suggesting machine precision, and has an emphasis on the vertical, a visual characteristic often enhanced in larger buildings by stepped setbacks on

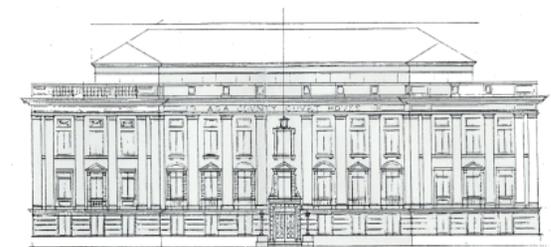
upper stories. Decorative elements are spare and stylized. The focus of the style was on modernity and the future, in direct opposition to the classical and period revival styles of the past.

The Courthouse is a significant Idaho example of the achievements of the federal Works Progress Administration (WPA) relief program. The WPA, a Depression-era, New Deal program established in 1934, was designed to help localities by infusing funds for new construction projects which created new jobs. Most of the WPA projects were for the construction of public buildings or infrastructure; however, the program also had an interesting element that provided employment for artists, musicians and craftspersons. The buildings built through the WPA program were regarded as superior structures, carefully supervised and well designed with quality materials. This reflected the public's need for confidence in their government and optimism for the future.

The history of the WPA and its programs are interwoven with the architectural design of the Ada County Courthouse. The program's projects were faced with using workers who were often not highly trained in construction methods. For this reason, the architects often designed new buildings in more minimal styles; simplicity of style was better suited for workers with limited skills. The result was that WPA buildings frequently utilized the Art Deco style of architecture.

The Ada County Courthouse building is an excellent example of the embodiment of the WPA program. The nine-story building is constructed of reinforced concrete and faced with white Indiana limestone. The very sturdy building is designed in the Art Deco style, possessing the hallmarks of the style: an angular appearance, but with a vertical emphasis realized by the pinnacles on the eighth-story parapet; the stepped setbacks of the upper stories; and spare and stylized decoration. In addition, the design by prominent local architects, a durable structure of reinforced concrete, and a facade of high quality limestone, are also hallmarks of WPA construction projects. The solidly constructed building was meant to represent the stability of government during trying times.

The Ada County Courthouse is at once the historic seat of the county government, the embodiment of a significant historic New Deal program, a fine example of a particular style and period of architecture, and the work of important local architects. *(text from Preservation Idaho, a non-profit organization)*



Tourtellotte & Hummel proposal, 1939

