

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

For NPS use only received date entered

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 Buchanan County Courthouse

and/or common Same

2. Location

street & number SW Corner Walnut and Main Streets N/A not for publication

city, town Grundy N/A vicinity of congressional district

state Virginia code 51 county Buchanan code 027

3. Classification

Table with 4 columns: Category, Ownership, Status, Present Use. Includes options like building(s), public/private, occupied/unoccupied, etc.

4. Owner of Property

name Buchanan County, C/o Chairman, Board of Supervisors

street & number Main and Walnut Streets

city, town Grundy N/A vicinity of state Virginia Zip Code 24614

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Buchanan County Courthouse

street & number Walnut and Main Streets

city, town Grundy state Virginia Zip Code 24614

6. Representation in Existing Surveys (2) (See Continuation Sheet #3)

(1) title Historic American Buildings Survey Inventory has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1958 federal state county local

depository for survey records Library of Congress

city, town Washington state D.C.

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" 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		_____ N/A _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

SUMMARY DESCRIPTION

The Buchanan County Courthouse, originally built in 1905-06, is the only building of architectural sophistication in the frontier-like, coal-mining community of Grundy in the hook of southwestern Virginia's tip. The building is located at the town's main intersection with the steep, almost cliff-like wooded hills rising immediately behind. The courthouse is in the Renaissance Revival style; its focal point is a graceful corner clock tower. Rough-faced ashlar of locally quarried stone is used for the wall surface. Because of a 1915 fire and subsequent remodelings, little of interest survives on the interior. Included in the nomination is an adjacent county office building and a large, five-story wing currently under construction.

ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

The Buchanan County Courthouse was designed by the Washington, D.C., architect Frank Milburn in the Renaissance Revival style popular for public buildings at the turn of the century. A copy of Milburn's rendering of the original design survives in the picture collection of the Virginia State Library and shows a fairly standard but dignified medium-size civic structure of the period, carefully and knowingly articulated. Giving the design special character is a tall, slender, corner clock tower with an open belvedere at the top.

Milburn's building unfortunately was gutted by fire when the whole community was engulfed with flames in 1915. It was rebuilt and reopened in 1917. The exterior, as it now stands, closely follows Milburn's rendering, thus it is assumed that most of the original exterior walls survived the fire. Various window treatments and stonework details differ, but they could have been modifications of the original design undertaken as part of the initial construction. In its present form, the courthouse is a two-story structure with additional levels inserted at the corners. It is covered by a shallow, slate-covered hipped roof with a modillion cornice and plain frieze. The original design called for a tile roof and an exposed-rafter cornice. The walls are rough-hewn irregular ashlar of the local stone. The main elevation is on the north side; its central three bays on the second story are marked by large arched windows separated by pilasters. The windows serve the main courtroom and give the building the appearance of having a piano nobile as the first-floor windows are much smaller. Beneath the center courtroom window is an unadorned entrance approached by a set of ^{sto} steps. The first-floor windows have very curious but rather imaginative stone surrounds consisting of plain facings and square indentations at the corners. On the west elevation is a small stone porch topped by a balustrade. At the building's northwest corner is the visually dominant, six-level clock tower; the top level is treated as an open belvedere topped by a shallow pyramidal roof. Below the belvedere are clock faces on all four sides. Below the clock faces, on all but the east side, are tall, very slender, triple arches. The arches are filled with louvres. The windows throughout the building have plain, one-over-one sashes. The courtroom windows have fanlight arches. The original design called for a much more interesting treatment of heavy mullions for these windows.

(See Continuation Sheet #1)

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> industry	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

Specific dates 1905-06 **Builder/Architect** Frank P. Milburn and Co.

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Renaissance Revival-style courthouse at Grundy, in the heart of Virginia's most productive coal mining region, is Buchanan County's most distinguished public building. The fourth courthouse to serve the county since its formation in 1858, the gray sandstone edifice with its tall corner clock tower was designed by Frank P. Milburn and Company of Washington, D. C., specialists in various Classical styles, and completed in 1906. Milburn's firm was responsible for several other courthouses in Southwest Virginia and also supervised the 1917 reconstruction of the Buchanan courthouse interior, gutted by fire in 1915. The subsequent evolution of the building closely reflects the more recent history of the county's burgeoning mining industry.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The General Assembly created Buchanan County from Russell and Tazewell counties on February 13, 1858. Difficulties arising from living so far from the distant county seats at Lebanon and Tazewell had prompted inhabitants of the area's creeks, hollows, and bottom-lands to pray for the designation of a new county, which was named for President James Buchanan, who carried Virginia in the 1856 election. The new county seat was established at the town of Grundy, so named to honor the Virginia-born Tennessee statesman Felix Grundy (1777-1840). On the eve of the Civil War the county saw an influx of farmers from Kentucky, the Carolinas, Tennessee, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York and Maryland, as well as colliers from England and Wales, and a handful of lowland and Piedmont merchants. The population of the county grew slowly throughout the remainder of the 19th century, doubling every twenty years, from 2,755 in 1860, to 9,692 in 1900. At the turn of the century Grundy was still a pioneer town, lacking railroad service and just beginning to feel the county's first wave of prosperity with the movement of large lumber companies into the area in the 1890s.

The county's first courthouse was a small frame structure that burned in 1865. It was soon replaced by a second crude structure, destroyed by fire in 1885. As a consequence of these two fires, very few county documents predate 1885. As a precaution against further fire damage, the crude wooden building which replaced the 1865 courthouse featured a stone vault. This structure served the citizens of Buchanan until the present courthouse was built in 1905-06.

Construction of this larger and more imposing building was necessitated chiefly by a surge of population into Buchanan between 1890 and 1910 in search of employment in the county's growing lumber industry. By 1901 a town government for Grundy had been organized, construction of the Big Sandy and Cumberland logging railroad was complete, and telephone service had been introduced into the area. In a region of Virginia known at the turn of the century for its lawlessness, a condition fostered by the isolation of most of its inhabitants from the law, the new courthouse stood as a towering symbol of justice and order in a society not very far removed from conditions on the closing American frontier.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Baker, Nancy Virginia. Bountiful and Beautiful: A Bicentennial History of Buchanan County, Virginia, 1776-1976. Grundy, Va.: Buchanan County Vocational School, ca. 1976.
 Coleman, Ron. We Dig Coal: The Story of Coal Mining in Buchanan County, Virginia. Radford, Virginia: Commonwealth Press, ca. 1975.

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property one acre
 Quadrangle name Grundy, Va. Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UMT References

A	<u>17</u>	<u>4 0 2 5 6 0</u>	<u>4 1 2 6 0 4 0</u>	B			
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
C				D			
E				F			
G				H			

Verbal boundary description and justification Beginning at a point at the SE corner of the intersection of Walnut & Main; thence extending about 200' E along the S side of Walnut; thence about 200' S; thence about 200' W to E side of Main; thence about 200' N along the E side of Main to point of origin. **Justification:** The boundaries have been drawn to encompass the courthouse and its addition presently under construction and also an office wing to the east of the courthouse.
List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	N/A	code	county	N/A	code
state	N/A	code	county	N/A	code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Staff
 organization Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission date July 1982
 street & number 221 Governor Street telephone (804) 786-3144
 city or town Richmond state Virginia 23219

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:
 national state 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.

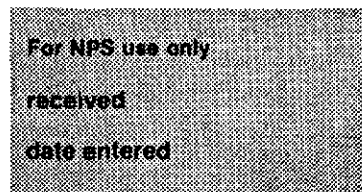
State Historic Preservation Officer signature H. Bryan Mitchell
 title H. Bryan Mitchell, Executive Director date JUL 20 1982
Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission

For NPS use only
 I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.
 _____ date _____
 Keeper of the National Register
 Attest _____ date _____
 Chief of Registration

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

BUCHANAN COUNTY COURTHOUSE, Grundy, Virginia



Continuation sheet

#1

Item number

7, 8

Page 1, 1

7. DESCRIPTION - Architectural Analysis

Inside the building is little of architectural interest. Any 1917 trim is plain stock material of the period. The courtroom was completely remodeled in recent times and currently has a somewhat austere modern appearance unrelated to the original character of the building. The only early feature surviving in the courtroom is a handsome stained-glass window in the Tiffany mode over the judge's bench. The window contains an allegorical figure seated in front of a colonnade with vignettes consisting of the national and state seals.

To the east of the courthouse and attached by a small, cage-like metal bridge is a two-story county office building. It is harmonious in style with the courthouse but more domestic in feeling. The two-story, hipped-roof building has similar stonework and an arcaded front porch. On the rear of the courthouse is a large jail wing, also in a similar style. The courthouse received an addition on its south side in 1949-50, but this has been completely hidden by a large, four-and-five-story office building addition currently under construction. This addition, although large and severe, does not significantly interfere with the architectural effectiveness of the original section; the style of the stonework has been carefully reproduced.

Like all communities of the Virginia coal fields, Grundy is wedged between steeply sloping hills and follows a creek bed. So narrow is the valley that there is room only for one or two streets. With its tall tower, the courthouse, however, holds its own visually with its surroundings and effectively symbolizes the force of law and order for the region's ruggedly independent society.

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8. SIGNIFICANCE -- Historical Background

The principal architect for the gray sandstone edifice was Franklin Pierce Milburn (1868-1926). The prominent Washington, D. C., architect designed a number of other courthouses in Southwest Virginia, including those for Wise, Grayson, Wythe, and Smyth counties. Also architect for the Danville Railroad Station, Milburn was responsible for the designs of several prominent public buildings in eastern Kentucky and for renovations to the South Carolina State Capitol Building.

From its completion the new courthouse served as the hub of community life in Buchanan. On monthly court days hotels filled up with visitors, including attorneys from the surrounding counties, while citizens from throughout the county crowded onto Grundy's wooden sidewalks, stopping at the courthouse to catch up on the news. A ca. 1912 photograph of the town shows a cluster of small frame buildings surrounding the usually prominent stone courthouse building which then appeared much as it does today. The first judge of the circuit court to sit in its chambers was William E. Burns, who served from 1905 until succeeded by A. G. Lively in 1929. Alfred A. Skeen and Frank A. Skeen also served as circuit court judges in these early years. The practice of local attorneys such as M. T. Bray, R. E. Williams, Frederic H. Combs, and H. Claude Pabst, among others whose business brought them

(See Continuation Sheet #2)

**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

BUCHANAN COUNTY COURTHOUSE, Grundy, Virginia

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Continuation sheet

#2

Item number 8

Page 2

8. SIGNIFICANCE -- Historical Background

frequently to the courthouse, centered primarily on contested land titles and legal work for the large lumber companies. The courthouse at once served as the depository for the records of myriad land transactions involving guarantees of timber rights; rights to coal, oil, and natural gas; rights of way for construction of railroads and tramroads; as well as access to various buildings or structures that several decades later would be necessary in the mining of coal.

A severe fire on Christmas Eve 1915, which ignited half the town of Grundy and destroyed many of its frame buildings, also gutted the county courthouse interior, necessitating its reconstruction in 1917. Architects for the reconstruction were Milburn, Heister and Company. S. R. Hurley was the contractor.

Although investors began to speculate in Buchanan coal lands as early as 1887, commercial mining proved impractical until completion of a standard-gauge Norfolk and Western spur line in 1931, the same year in which the county's first coal mine was established. Hundreds of men swarmed into the area to work the mines, doubling the county's population in less than a decade from 16,740 to 31,477. As large-scale drift mining operations became crippled in the post World War II period by the increasing reliance of railroads on diesel fuel and of homeowners on oil, Buchanan's union-dominated drift mines became more costly and less efficient to operate than so-called non-union truck mines. When union miners came actively to oppose the spread of truck mining, widespread violence erupted in the Buchanan coal fields in 1948 and 1950. These violent episodes highlighted the need for larger space and newer facilities in the county courthouse. This need was met by the modernizations and additions of 1949-51, executed by contractor J. Clarence Hildreth.

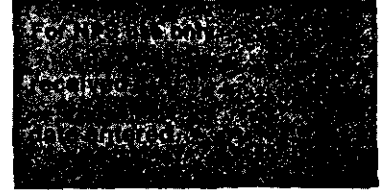
The present addition under construction by Price-Rothe-Muse of Blountville, Tennessee, reflects the growing prosperity of the county since the 1973-74 oil crisis and subsequent coal boom. Over the last decade Buchanan has become one of the wealthiest counties in Virginia, producing more than 40% of the state's coal output. Described recently as "Coal Town U.S.A." in the national press, Grundy everywhere projects the image of a hustling, bustling boom town, with hundreds of coal trucks roaring through its streets each day. As coal again has become an important commodity of the world market, land prices have soared in Buchanan. Housing sites, always at a premium in the hills and hollows of the rugged county, are practically unavailable to the average family; hence the ubiquitous mobile homes.

The new courthouse addition also reflects the county's renewed determination to prevent future destruction of its official archives by fire or flood. On April 4, 1977, heavy rains struck Southwest Virginia and more than a hundred county deed books as well as several will and plat books kept in the basement records room were nearly destroyed by flood.

Thanks to the technical assistance of the Virginia State Library and the Library of Congress, 99% of the damaged materials was salvaged through a process of vacuum drying in two space simulation chambers at the General Electric Space Center in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. The successful rescue attempt was significant as the first time General Electric's process was tried in regard to public records in Virginia.

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**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**



**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

BUCHANAN COUNTY COURTHOUSE, Grundy, Virginia

Continuation sheet

#3

Item number 6

Page 1

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

- (2) Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Survey (229-1)
1967 State
Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission
221 Governor Street
Richmond, Virginia 23219

