United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of Property
   Historic name: Thief River Falls Auditorium and Municipal Building
   Other names/site number: Old City Auditorium
   Name of related multiple property listing: N/A
   (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location
   Street & number: 123 Main Avenue N
   City or town: Thief River Falls
   State: Minnesota
   County: Pennington
   Not For Publication: N/A
   Vicinity: N/A

3. State/Federal Agency Certification
   As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this 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 ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:
   ___ national ___ statewide ___ local
   Applicable National Register Criteria:
   ___A ___B ___C ___D

______________________________
Signature of certifying official/Title: Date

______________________________
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

______________________________
Signature of commenting official: Date

______________________________
Title: State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government
4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

___ entered in the National Register
___ determined eligible for the National Register
___ determined not eligible for the National Register
___ removed from the National Register
___ other (explain:) ______________________

________________________________________
Signature of the Keeper

________________________________________
Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

Private: □

Public – Local □

Public – State ○

Public – Federal □

Category of Property

(Check only one box.)

Building(s) □

District ○

Site □

Structure □

Object □
Thief River Falls Auditorium and Municipal Building

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Contributing</th>
<th>Noncontributing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>buildings</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sites</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>structures</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>objects</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use

**Historic Functions**
(Enter categories from instructions.)

- GOVERNMENT/city hall
- government office
- RECREATION AND CULTURE/auditorium

**Current Functions**
(Enter categories from instructions.)

- RECREATION AND CULTURE/auditorium
7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions.)
MODERN MOVEMENT/Art Deco

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)
Principal exterior materials of the property: BRICK, STONE

Narrative Description
(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a summary paragraph that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

The Thief River Falls Auditorium and Municipal Building (Auditorium Building) is located in downtown Thief River Falls, Minnesota. It is a two-story Art Deco style building constructed of brick, stone, and concrete. Designed in the Classical Moderne mode of Art Deco, its significant stylistic elements include: a symmetrical façade; a recessed stone-paneled entrance bay; vertically stacked window openings with patterned brick spandrels (suggesting colonnaded façades); and a combination of classical and geometric motifs (see Continuation Sheets, page 11 for an explanation of the stylistic reference). Significant interior spaces include, but are not limited to, the first-floor lobby, the auditorium, the basement-level meeting hall, and the former administrative offices (City Clerk, Civic and Commerce Association, Police Department, and Municipal Court). The Auditorium Building retains excellent historic integrity from its period of significance.

Narrative Description

See Continuation Sheets 1-4
8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria
(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- [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.

Criteria Considerations
(Mark “x” in all the boxes that apply.)

-   A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes

-   B. Removed from its original location

-   C. A birthplace or grave

-   D. A cemetery

-   E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure

-   F. A commemorative property

-   G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years
Areas of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions.)

- POLITICS/GOVERNMENT
- ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION
- ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance
1934-1969

Significant Dates
1934

Significant Person
N/A

Cultural Affiliation
N/A

Architect/Builder
Raymond Gauger

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Thief River Falls Auditorium and Municipal Building (Auditorium Building) is eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places at the local level of significance under Criterion A for Politics and Government and Entertainment/Recreation and under Criterion C for Architecture. The building relates to the statewide context developed by Minnesota SHPO staff, “Railroads and Agricultural Settlement, 1870-1940.” The Period of Significance is 1934-1969, beginning with the completion of construction and ending 50 years prior to the nomination. This
end date was used because the Auditorium Building continued to be the main entertainment venue in Thief River Falls through the 1960s, and it served as the center of city government, including the City Clerk, Police Department, and Municipal Court, into the 1970s and beyond. No suitable end date prior to 1969 was identified.

Under Criterion A, the Auditorium Building is associated with two local trends. First, the building is associated with the city government of Thief River Falls for much of the twentieth century because it functioned as City Hall from 1934-1998. During this time, the building housed the office of the City Clerk, the City Council chamber, the Police Department and local jail, and the Municipal Court Room. In addition, the Auditorium Building fulfilled non-government civic functions, including a community meeting room and veteran’s hall in the basement. Second, the auditorium portion of the building provided a large indoor space for a variety of recreational activities. When the Auditorium Building opened in 1934, it was the only large auditorium and gymnasium space in the city. As such, the building was used by the Thief River Falls high school for basketball games and practices and for theater productions, and by a variety of organizations for dances and conventions. Even after the new Lincoln High School opened in 1938, the Auditorium Building continued to be used by other groups for dances, banquets, and conventions.

Under Criterion C, this substantial two-story brick building is a distinctive local example of the Classical Moderne mode of the Art Deco style that stands out in downtown Thief River Falls. Elements of this style exhibited in the building include, but are not limited to: the symmetrical form and classical proportions of its primary (east) façade; the vertical emphasis of the window openings and spandrels, suggesting columns; the smooth wall surfaces; the stone sheathing in the center bay of the primary façade; and the bas relief panels with Modernist motifs. In the interior, the entrance lobby and the auditorium both exhibit Modernist motifs, particularly the walls flanking the stage. In addition, high-quality craftsmanship and materials were used throughout, including terrazzo floors, coffered plaster ceilings with decorative elements, and decorative woodwork.

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least one paragraph for each area of significance.)

See Continuation Sheets 5-13
9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)


Wrong page number, please check and provide the correct page number. Additionally, the content seems to be a list of references rather than a registration form for a property. If you are looking for a registration form, please provide the correct page number. Otherwise, if you are looking for a list of references, the text is as follows:


Thief River Falls Times. “Auditorium is Razed in $150,000 Blaze.” February 9, 1933.
   _______ “City Officials Now Housed in New Quarters.” February 9, 1933.
   _______ “Council Votes to Raze Walls of Auditorium.” February 23, 1933.
   _______ “City Council Requests Suggestions Regarding Plans for Auditorium.” March 2, 1933.
   _______ “Architect for Auditorium is Picked Monday.” April 6, 1933.
   _______ “Another Big Building Season Is in Prospect.” June 1, 1933.
   _______ “Governor Asks Federal O.K. for Work Here.” August 10, 1933.
   _______ “How Auditorium Will Look in the Near Future.” October 12, 1933.
   _______ “Estimated Cost of Auditorium Set at $66,551.” November 16, 1933.
Thief River Falls Auditorium and Municipal Building


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 #
___ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey #

Primary location of additional data:

___ State Historic Preservation Office
___ Other State agency
___ Federal agency
___ Local government
___ University
X ___ Other

Name of repository: City of Thief River Falls

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): PE-TFC-034
10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property  0.5

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates
Datum if other than WGS84:__________
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)
1. Latitude:   Longitude:
2. Latitude:   Longitude:
3. Latitude:   Longitude:
4. Latitude:   Longitude:

Or

UTM References
Datum (indicated on USGS map):

☐ NAD 1927 or ☐ NAD 1983

1. Zone: 14  Easting: 709718  Northing: 5333240
2. Zone:  Easting:  Northing:
3. Zone:  Easting:  Northing:
4. Zone:  Easting:  Northing:

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)
Lot 7, less the south 15 feet, and Lots 8 through 12 inclusive, Block 56, in the Townsite of Thief River Falls, also known as the Original Townsite of Thief River Falls.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)
This portion of the current County-owned land was previously owned by the City and is associated with the Auditorium and Municipal Building.
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service / National Register of Historic Places Registration Form
NPS Form 10-900    OMB No. 1024-0018

Thief River Falls Auditorium and Municipal Building
Name of Property

Pennington County, Minnesota
County and State

11. Form Prepared By

name/title:  Andrew Schmidt, President
organization:  Streamline Associates, LLC
street & number:  400 S. 4th Street, Suite 400-207
city or town:  Minneapolis state:  MN zip code:  55415
e-mail:  aschmidt@streamlineassociates.net
telephone:  612-845-4788
date:  June 24, 2019

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

• **Maps:** A USGS map or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

• **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.

• **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn’t need to be labeled on every photograph.
Photo Log

Name of Property: Thief River Falls Auditorium and Municipal Building
City or Vicinity: Thief River Falls
County: Pennington    State: Minnesota
Photographer: Andrew Schmidt
Date Photographed: March 19, 2019

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

1 of 18. Main Avenue (east) elevation, looking west.
2 of 18. Main Avenue (east) elevation, center bay detail, looking west.
3 of 18. Main Avenue (east) elevation, looking northwest.
4 of 18. Main Avenue (east) elevation, bas relief detail, looking west.
5 of 18. 3rd Street (north) elevation, looking southwest.
6 of 18. 3rd Street (north) elevation, looking southeast.
7 of 18. 3rd Street (north) elevation, east bay detail, looking south.
8 of 18. South elevation, looking northwest.
9 of 18. South elevation, west bay detail, looking north.
10 of 18. Interior, entrance lobby, looking northeast.
11 of 18. Interior, City Clerk office door surround detail.
12 of 18. Interior, entrance lobby crown molding detail.
13 of 18. Interior, auditorium, looking west.
14 of 18. Interior, auditorium, looking southwest.
15 of 18. Interior, auditorium balcony seating, looking west.
16 of 18. Interior, Police Department jail cells, looking north.
18 of 18. Interior, basement community room, looking northeast.

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.
Located on the southwest corner of Main Avenue North and 2nd Street West, the Auditorium Building is within a cluster of historic-period civic buildings that includes the Pennington County Court Administration Building, the Thief River Falls Arena, the Post Office, the Carnegie Library, Lincoln High School, and St. Bernard’s Catholic Church and School. The Arena and the County building are adjacent to the Auditorium Building to the west and south, respectively. Commercial buildings and parking lots are located across the street to the north and east. The street address of the Auditorium Building is 123 Main Avenue North, and the building’s primary façade is oriented to Main Avenue. The building’s setback from the street is the width of the sidewalk. There are no additional buildings, structures, or objects on the property.

The Auditorium Building is two stories in height with a raised basement level, and most of the floor plan is encompassed by the auditorium space. The building’s structural system consists of reinforced-concrete, mushroom columns supporting a reinforced-concrete, flat-slab floor. The barrel-arched roof of the auditorium is supported by two, paired, steel, Parker through trusses with riveted joints.

Full-sized copies of the architectural drawings by Ray Gauger are extant and located at the Thief River Falls Public Works Department. Since its construction in 1933, there have been minor modifications to the Auditorium Building. The most noticeable alteration was the removal of original four-over-four and six-over-six window sashes in the 1980s. The window openings remain intact but have been infilled with synthetic siding, either completely infilled or partially infilled with a single-light casement sash. In addition, the exterior concrete steps leading to the main entrance on the east elevation were altered in the early 1990s. Originally, the steps extended across the recessed center bay, but the outer portions of the steps have been infilled to form ramp-like surfaces. Other alterations include repointing the exterior brick in 1990 and replacement of the roofing with rubber roofing in 2000. Interior alterations include partition walls in the former City Council Chamber and Courtroom, suspended ceilings in the basement, and replacement of interior lighting with fluorescent lights.

**Exterior**

The foundation of the Auditorium Building is built of poured concrete, which extends above the ground level. The upper portion of the basement and the first- and second-story walls are clad with variegated orange brick in running bond at the basement level and, on the first and second story, common bond with headers every seventh row. Brown brick in various patterns is utilized in the spandrels and other places, as described below. In addition, Kasota limestone is utilized for decorative elements and for window sills.

The main (east) façade is symmetrical and consists of three sections: a center entrance bay flanked by projecting pavilions that house the office spaces. The center section is faced with smooth-finished Kasota limestone panels. The main entrance consists of a pair of doorways separated by a fluted limestone pilaster, each containing a glass- and-aluminum door with aluminum-framed sidelight and transom. The entrance is accessed by concrete steps flanked by sidewalls with flat metal railings. The outer sections of the steps have been covered with concrete. Narrow windows with spiral-patterned wrought iron grills flank the entrance. To the north of the entrance, a stone panel is etched with “AD 1933.”

Above the entrance, the words “AUDITORIUM AND MUNICIPAL BUILDING” are carved in bas-relief into limestone panels and are flanked by floral motifs and surmounted by swag motifs, also in bas-relief. These patterned panels form the spandrel between the entrance and a pair of window openings, which are separated by a fluted stone pilaster. The windows once contained six-over-six sashes but now are partially infilled with siding and a pair of casement sashes in each. A series of five, inset, square patterns adorn the cornice level above the windows, and this section is topped with a rectangular stone parapet.
The projecting pavilions are stepped at the corners, and each has a center window bay flanked by full-height vertically stacked brown bricks. Below the first-story windows, stacked brown bricks separated by orange-brick headers form vertical patterns. The spandrel between the first- and second-story windows consists of brown brick laid in diagonal patterns that form a chevron motif. The window openings are also infilled with siding and casement sashes. A limestone band course runs across the entire façade at the lintel-level of the second-story windows. Above the windows, stone panels with corn-and-sunburst motifs in bas-relief adorn the cornice level, and stone coping surmounts the brick walls.

The north and south elevations are nearly identical: a projecting eastern section that houses the office spaces, a center auditorium section, and a slightly projecting west end section that houses the stage area. On the north elevation, the east section has stepped corners, and the limestone-band course from the main façade continues across this section. There are three vertical stacks of windows, with openings at the basement, first, and second stories. The spandrels consist of stacked orange brick separated by brown-brick headers, forming vertical patterns, which are continued in the cornice level above the second-story windows. The first-story windows are partially infilled with siding and casement windows, and the second-story windows are completely infilled with siding. The center section consists of five window bays separated by recessed vertical panels in the brick. The outer bays have doorways on the first floor, which were once accessed via steps that have been removed, and which have been infilled with siding. Window openings in the first story of the middle bays and in all second-story bays have been infilled with siding and, on the first story, casement sashes. Basement level windows also have been infilled with siding. The spandrels in this section have the diagonal-pattered brown brick like on the east elevation. Soldier courses of brown brick run the length of this section under the eave of the arched roof. The west section has two vertical bays, a door-window combination and a window-window combination, and vertical patterns of brown-brick stacks separated by orange-brick headers extend above and below the window openings. The windows are partially infilled with siding and casement sashes. A limestone band extends across the lintel level of the second-story windows.

The south elevation is nearly identical to the north. On the east section, however, the spandrels are stacked brown brick with orange-brick headers, and all windows are partially infilled with siding and casement sashes. In the middle section, the only difference is that all openings are windows. The west section is identical to that of the north. The north elevation is devoid of openings except for four basement-level windows, partially infilled with siding and fixed sashes.

**Interior**
The interior of the Auditorium Building is divided into two distinct spaces, the lobby and offices in the east section and the auditorium and stage in the middle and west sections. The first-floor lobby, at the center of the east section, accessed from the primary entrance, leads to the auditorium on the west, and offices to the north and south. The floor is tan and pink terrazzo, the walls are plaster with zigzag-and-sunburst-patterned crown molding, and the ceiling is coffered. The entryway consists of a small vestibule with a pair of interior doorways (the doors have been removed) with narrow wood surrounds and transoms with geometric-patterned leaded glass. The offices are accessed via double doorways with fluted wood surrounds and wood identification plates above. On the south, the plate is carved with the words “CITY CLERK,” but on the north the plate is smooth. The doors are wood with center glass panels. On the west side of the lobby, terrazzo stairs lead to the auditorium, accessed via a pair of wood double doors. To the north, a stairwell leads to the basement and second floor.

---

1 Shadow lettering appears to read “CHAMBER OF COMMERCE,” but the architectural plans identify this area as “Council Chamber.”
The office to south is a large single room with a built-in service counter/desk. The floor is carpeted, the walls have wood wainscoting and wallpaper, and ceiling is suspended acoustic tiles. A vault with a steel door is in the northwest corner. The office to the north has been divided into two rooms with a partition wall. The floor is carpeted, and the walls have wood wainscoting and plaster above, including a floral-patterned crown molding. The ceiling is coffered plaster.

The auditorium is a two-story equivalent, 86 x 65-foot space that is used for music and theater performances as well as basketball and volleyball. A raised stage is located at the west end, and upper-level balcony seating is along the north, east, and south. The floors are hardwood, the walls are concrete block with concrete piers between window bays. The Parker trusses supporting the barrel-arched roof are visible. Projecting molded concrete blocks form surrounds at the east entrance. The stage is built up on concrete blocks with wood flooring, and the side walls are stepped and have fluted pilasters with geometric-patterned capitals and geometric- and floral-patterned bases. Narrow vertical bands adorn the wall above the stage. Dressing rooms are located north and south of the stage, as are stairwells leading to the balcony. Exterior doorways are at the first floor of the stairwells, and storage rooms are at the top of the stairs. The balconies each have two, tiered rows of metal-framed wood seats.

The stairwell off the main lobby leads to a second-floor lobby and offices. On the west side of this second-floor lobby, access to the balcony is through wood double doors with fluted surrounds and a wood plate carved with “AUDITORIUM.” The offices to the north and south have similar doorway arrangements as the first-floor offices, except the identification plates read “COURT ROOM” on the south and “POLICE DEPARTMENT” on the north. The former court room has been divided with partition walls and has linoleum floor, plaster walls, and suspended acoustic-tile ceiling. A storage vault with a steel door is located in the northwest corner. The former police department space includes an office, with linoleum floors and plaster walls and ceiling, and two jail cell groups on the north side with heavy steel bars and concrete-block walls. The men’s group consists of three individual barred cells and a sally port area with a steel-bar door. The women’s group consists of a single, larger cell with a steel-bar door. A small room on the south side was labeled “Padded Cell” on the architectural drawings but appears to have been used as storage.

The basement of the Auditorium Building consists of a lobby area, a hallway with meeting rooms, and an assembly room with a kitchen. The lobby provides access to the men’s and women’s restrooms, which have replacement fixtures, a small room labelled “Card Playing Rm.,” and an east-west hallway. Floors on the basement level are generally carpeted, and the walls are plaster. A meeting room is on the south side of the hallway, and two offices, originally separate but later joined via a sliding-glass door, are on the north side. The offices have wood-paneling on the walls and suspended acoustic-tile ceilings, and the doors are wood with upper glass panels. The western third of the basement is an open assembly room punctuated by square concrete columns. Wood double doors with upper glass panels lead to the hallway, and a pair of wood “in/out” doors with small square glass panels access the kitchen. The kitchen has linoleum floors with diamond and circle patterns and ceramic tiles half way up the walls. The wood cabinets and porcelain sink appear to be original.

Integrity
The Thief River Falls Auditorium and Municipal Building retains sufficient levels of all seven aspects of integrity to convey its historic significance and retains much of its appearance from the period of significance (1934-1969). The Auditorium Building has not been moved and retains integrity of location. Through the retention of the exterior massing, masonry exterior, intact gymnasium, and intact public office and community spaces the building retains integrity of design and materials. Through the extant Art Deco detailing, at both the exterior and interior,
Thief River Falls Auditorium and Municipal Building

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Property</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pennington, Minnesota</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County and State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

as well as historic signage and finishes the building retains integrity of Workmanship. The neighborhood around the Auditorium has remained largely intact, housing most of the municipal function of the city and county government at the edge of the commercial district. The building is still used for public functions, including meetings and sporting events. This, in addition to the high level of historic material in the building, support the integrity of Feeling and Association.
Development of Thief River Falls

The city of Thief River Falls is located near the confluence of the Thief and Red Lake Rivers. The first Euro-American settler was John Baptiste LaBree who started a general store in 1881. Growth at the future townsite was slow during the 1880s, until in 1889, settlers platted a townsite on the southeast side of the rivers and named it Red Lake Rapids. A year later, settlers on the west side of the rivers platted Thief River Falls. An iron bridge was built across Red Lake River in 1891, facilitating connection between the two towns. In 1892, a sawmill was built at the falls, and logs cut from the pine forests to the east could then be floated down the Red Lake River for milling. That same year, the Great Northern built a railroad line into Thief River Falls to access the lumber from the new mill. By 1896, the two villages voted to incorporate as a single city, and Thief River Falls was chosen as the name. Spurred by the railroad and lumber milling operations, by 1900, Thief River Falls had grown to a population of 1,800.2

During the early 1900s, Thief River Falls continued growing. In 1904 a second railroad, the Minneapolis St. Paul and Sault Ste. Marie (Soo Line) built a line through the city and named it a division point. This new role had an immediate effect on Thief River Falls. The Soo Line established a roundhouse, mechanics shop, and associated structures on the north edge of town and passenger and freight depots downtown. A corridor of wholesale warehouses, grain elevators, and a creamery soon lined the tracks. By 1910, the population of Thief River Falls had doubled to 3,714. During this decade of growth, the city established new infrastructure, including an electric light plant in 1901, powered by the falls. In addition, LaBree Avenue developed as the main business district, two blocks west of the Soo Line railroad, and two-story brick commercial buildings replaced earlier buildings.3

Although the lumber industry was waning by the 1910s due to depletion of the region’s pine forests, Thief River Falls served as a shipping point for Red River Valley produce, including wheat, barley, oats, and hay, as well as livestock and dairy products. During this decade, Thief River Falls continued growing, reaching a population of 4,685 by 1920. Notable buildings from this time include a substantial brick passenger depot, built by the Soo Line in 1913 (National Register listed), and two-story brick commercial blocks at the intersection of LaBree Avenue and 3rd Street.4

During the 1910s, Thief River Falls took on another new role, county seat. When Pennington County split from Red Lake County in 1910, Thief River Falls became the county seat of the new county.

---

During the 1910s, a civic center began to develop in Thief River Falls in the area south of 2nd Street and west of Labree Avenue. The first City building, built after incorporation in 1896 as a fire hall and offices, was at the corner of Main Avenue and 1st Street. In 1910, this building was converted into the first Pennington County Courthouse (later demolished in 1955 to accommodate the current Court Administration building). Also, in 1910, the City built an armory with an auditorium and to accommodate the new county offices. However, within a few years, had moved the city offices into the new city building. This was the first city auditorium, and it was located on the site of the current Auditorium Building. In addition, the Thief River Falls Carnegie Library (National Register listed) was built in 1914 on the corner of Main Avenue and 1st Street.5

When the agricultural economy turned downward in the 1920s, growth slowed in Thief River Falls. When the high agricultural production spurred by World War I met reduced demand in the early 1920s, prices declined precipitously, and farmers throughout Minnesota went bankrupt. These conditions rippled through the local economy, and two of the four banks in Thief River Falls failed in 1924. Farm prices remained low through the decade, and by 1930, the population of Thief River Falls had declined to 4,268.6 When the national stock market crashed in 1929, the ensuing panic ushered in the economic depression of the 1930s.

Over the next few decades, Thief River Falls grew slightly but did not experience the boom of its early years. The city continued to ship large quantities of grain, hay, potatoes, livestock, poultry, and dairy products throughout the state. Industrial activities included a creamery and a poultry-packing plant.7 Land O’ Lakes opened a processing plant in the city in 1929 and was a major employer for the area.8 By 1940 the city had grown to a population of 6,019.9 By the mid-1940s the city had its own airport and by 1954 a new county courthouse.10 The economy in the 1950s was based on diversified agriculture; primarily dairy, as well as small grains, poultry, and beef cattle.11 The population reached 6,926 in 1950 and 7,151 in 1960.12

Construction History

By the early 1930s, the first auditorium and municipal building had “served as a community center in Thief River Falls since its erection in 1910.”13 The building housed all city offices, some county offices, the local Red Cross chapter, the telephone company, and the Civic and Commerce association (chamber

---

5 Swantek and Dee 1996, 14-15; Sanborn Map Company 1912.
7 Polk & Company 1932, 12.
8 Swantek and Dee 1996, 28.
10 Swantek and Dee 1996, 28.
11 Polk & Company 1957, 12.
13 “Auditorium is Razed in $150,000 Blaze,” Thief River Falls Times, February 9, 1933.
of commerce). On February 7, 1933, a fire gutted the auditorium building and caused one wall to collapse, destroying the building.

One measure of the importance of the first auditorium building to the community was that, in less than one month after the fire, the City had begun planning for a new building. By late February, local contractor Bert Norby was hired to oversee demolition of the remaining walls and for site clearance. At its February 28, 1933 meeting, the City Council solicited input from the community, asking civic, fraternal, and other organizations to make suggestions regarding a new municipal building.14 In early April, the City Council commissioned the architectural firm A. F. and Ray R. Gauger, represented by Ray Gauger, to design the new building and oversee construction.15 Founded by Augustus Gauger in 1878, this was a respected and well-established Minnesota architectural firm (see additional discussion under Criterion C below). Gauger proceeded with design work and, by late June 1933, submitted designs for three options, which included an auditorium of varying sizes as well as offices and meeting rooms.16 Not deterred by the additional cost, the City Council selected the design with the largest auditorium. Bert Norby was then hired as the general contractor for construction of the Auditorium Building.17

Like the rest of the country in 1933, Pennington County was in the depths of the economic depression of the 1930s. Sensitive to the high unemployment in the community, the City ensured that the demolition and construction were run like relief projects. For example, hiring was limited to local men and was coordinated by the County Poor Overseer. Those employed were given a standard wage and were given a limited number of shifts in order to maximize the number of unemployed who would benefit. Although Governor Floyd B. Olson included the Thief River Falls Auditorium Building in his 1933 request for federal public works funds for Minnesota, there is no record that federal funding for the Auditorium Building was received.18

Construction of the Auditorium Building progressed steadily through the fall of 1933, and the exterior work was completed by mid-November.19 Interior work on the building continued through that winter. On February 26, 1934, just over a year after the old auditorium burned down, the new building was dedicated. Schools and most businesses closed during the afternoon ceremony, and related events continued through the week. The total cost of the building was just over $75,000.20

15 “Architect for Auditorium is Picked Monday,” Thief River Falls Times, April 6, 1933.
17 “Auditorium Job Is Awarded to Norby; To Be 75 Feet Wide,” Thief River Falls Times, July 27, 1933.
18 “Governor Asks Federal O.K. for Work Here,” Thief River Falls Times, August 10, 1933. Although the Times provided nearly weekly reports in 1933 on the Auditorium Building’s progress, federal funding is not mentioned after the request noted in the August article. In addition, the website The Living New Deal, which is dedicated to documenting federal relief buildings and structures, lists many arenas, armories, auditoriums, city halls, community centers, and park buildings in Minnesota, including the Thief River Falls Arena from 1938. It does not, however, list the Auditorium Building.
Civic and Community Center

The new Auditorium Building provided a spacious auditorium/gymnasium, offices, and meeting rooms. From its opening in 1934 and for the next several decades, the building was the site of most city functions. City offices in the building included: the City Clerk, with a public service desk; the Municipal Court, including a courtroom and judge’s chambers; and the Police Department, which had an office and jail cells. In addition to housing city offices, the Auditorium Building hosted the meetings of the City Council twice a month, as well as monthly meetings for the Board of Health, Greenwood Cemetery Commission, the city Park Board, and other civic groups. Several of the civic groups had dedicated meeting space in the building, including a veterans’ room for the American Legion post, a large community room for the Civic and Commerce Association, and a room for the Women’s Club. In 1936, the Auditorium Building was designated as the polling place for all four city wards.

City records from the 1930s show that the Auditorium Building was frequently rented for events by community groups, starting as soon as it was dedicated in 1934. For example, in February of 1934, the high school and independent league basketball teams began using the Auditorium Building for games and practices. The high school would continue using the city building for basketball, school plays, and other activities until the new Lincoln High School was built in 1938. The municipal band rehearsed and performed in the auditorium and stored its instruments in the building. During the 1930s, dances were regularly held in the auditorium, sponsored by a variety of organizations, including the American Legion post, the Order of Eagles, the Fire Department, Sons of Norway, and the Junior Civic and Commerce Association. In addition, the local 4-H, Boy Scouts, and Girl Scouts all held special events in the auditorium. Expositions and conventions were also held in the Auditorium Building, including in 1934 alone the annual Auto and Style Show, the Northwest Poultry Show, the Farmer’s Union, the Ninth District Grocery Men Association, and Land O’Lakes district meetings.

During World War II, the Auditorium was used as a local registration center for the selective service and for ceremonies for men entering military service. The Pennington County women’s civilian defense also held trainings at the Auditorium during the war. Beyond wartime activities during the 1940s, the Auditorium continued to be used by community groups, including for dances, plays, and banquets.

Following World War II, downtown Thief River Falls was an economic hub for the region, as the city expanded its role in agricultural processing, retail sales, wholesaling, and transportation. By 1950, there were 26 wholesale operations and 116 retail stores in the city. In addition, Thief River Falls was home to a Land O’Lakes processing plant, and 14 dairy processing plants were within a 25-mile radius. The Soo Line provided rail transport, and with its division headquarters and maintenance yard, it was the city’s largest employer. The population of Thief River Falls, which had grown to 6,019 in 1940, continued

22 Here and below, information regarding use of the Auditorium Building was gleaned through sampling of Thief River Falls City Clerk’s records and newspaper reports in the Thief River Falls Times from 1934, 1942, and 1955. In addition, personal memories of long-time residents of Thief River Falls Faye Auchenpaugh and Darlene Kelley offered information regarding the 1960s.
growing during the postwar years and reached 6,926 in 1950 and then 7,151 in 1960. Although railroad transportation declined in importance during the 1950s and 1960s, U.S. Highway 59 passed through the heart of downtown on 3rd Street, providing Thief River Falls with transportation connections. In addition, establishment in 1949 of the Thief River Falls Area Vocational Institute and in 1965 a State Junior College (later combined as Northland Community and Technical College) added regional post-secondary education options as well as employment.

During the post-World War II era, just as downtown Thief River Falls was an economic center, the Auditorium Building continued in its role as a community center within downtown. For example, every edition of the weekly *Thief River Falls Times* in 1955 lists at least one community event at the Auditorium. Although the high school had its own auditorium and gymnasium by this time various groups held events at the Auditorium Building, including dances, fundraising drives, banquets, and conventions. Long-time residents of Thief River Falls confirm that the Auditorium Building continued to be used for dances and other community events through the 1960s.

By the 1970s, use of the Auditorium Building was declining. Other entertainment and event venues were available by this time, including at Lincoln High School, the Armory, the Huck Olson Memorial Civic Center, and Northland Community College. During the first six months of 1975, for example, only one event was held in the auditorium, an agricultural association meeting. The Police Department moved into a new dedicated building in 1975. Other city offices moved to the restored former Soo Line Depot in 1998. Although a credit union utilized some offices for a time, the offices in the Auditorium Building are currently vacant. The auditorium is currently used as a gymnasium by St. Bernard’s school and for league volleyball games, and the local hockey association stores equipment in the basement.

**Summary of Significance under Criterion A**

The Auditorium Building is associated at the local level with Politics/Government for its role as City Hall in Thief River Falls from 1934 through the 1960s. As such, this building is where residents interacted with city government at the City Clerk’s office, the Police Department, and the Municipal Court, and at the meetings of various civic boards. In addition, the Auditorium Building is associated with entertainment/Recreation in Thief River Falls for its role as an event space. The auditorium was regularly used for basketball, theater performances, dances, banquets, and conventions. It was the only space of its kind in the city until the new high school opened in 1938, and it remained the primary indoor venue for non-school functions through the 1960s.

---

24 Personal communications with Faye Auchenpaugh and Darlene Kelley.
Architectural Significance under Criterion C

The Auditorium Building is a fine example of a public building that represents the distinctive characteristics of the Classical Moderne style. Evolving from the revival styles of the late-nineteenth century, classically inspired architecture shifted away from the perceived excesses of High Victorian styles to more formal symmetrical compositions. In the wake of the 1892 Chicago Exposition and in no small measure due to Progressive Era preferences for orderliness, the Neo-Classical, Beaux Arts, and Second Renaissance Revival styles, were preferred for public buildings in Minnesota from 1900 through the 1920s. During the 1920s, architects began developing the Art Deco style, usually categorized in three modes, Zigzag Moderne, Streamline Moderne, and Classical Moderne. Beginning in the 1920s, Zigzag Moderne designs typically utilized smooth wall surfaces, polychromatic materials, limited use of ornamentation that often consisted of geometric patterns such as zigzags and chevrons, and vertical emphasis in widows, pilasters and towers. This style was most commonly used in commercial buildings, especially for skyscrapers, and occasionally in public buildings.

In the 1930s, Classical Moderne evolved from the Zigzag Moderne. Most commonly used in public buildings, Classical Moderne is often referred to as PWA Moderne because of its frequent use in buildings constructed through federal relief programs of the 1930s. In this style, architects blended Classical and Moderne elements to bring a sense of tradition and stability to modern designs. Typical elements of the style included classically balanced and symmetrical forms; windows arranged as vertical recessed panels and separated by pilasters, providing a vertical emphasis and suggesting classical columns; smooth wall surfaces; and minimal ornamentation, typically in geometric patterns.

The Auditorium Building is a well-designed example of the Classical Moderne style that includes numerous stylistic elements. The primary façade has a symmetrical tri-part arrangement, with a recessed entrance bay flanked by projecting pavilions. The center bay is paneled in smooth limestone with Classical- and Art Deco-inspired motifs. On the north and south elevations, vertically stacked window openings with patterned dark brick spandrels alternate with the orange-brick walls. This pattern simulates solids and voids, implying a stylized colonnaded façade. The first-floor lobby and the auditorium are significant interior spaces, with Art Deco motifs, including zigzag-and-sunburst, vertical flutting, and stylized floral patterns. The walls flanking the stage are a particularly exuberant example of these motifs.

The Auditorium Building was designed by Ray Gauger of the firm A. F. and Ray R. Gauger. Augustus F. Gauger was born in Germany in 1852 and immigrated to the United States as a child. He began his architectural career in 1875 as a draftsman in the office of prominent St. Paul architect Edward Bassford. In 1878, he formed his own firm, in which he practiced for the next 50 years. One of his sons, Raymond,

would join his father’s firm. Born in 1895, Ray received a degree from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and worked as a draftsman for Immanuel Masqueray. Ray had a long career, carrying on his father’s firm and later practicing as Gauger Associates and Gauger-Parrish. He specialized in courthouse and jail architecture.28

When the Auditorium Building was constructed in 1933, it placed a well-designed building in the downtown of Thief River Falls, one block off LaBree Avenue and within an informal civic center area. At the time, the Auditorium Building was the only Moderne-style building (Zigzag, Streamline, or Classical) in Thief River Falls. Only two other buildings in downtown could be classified as Art Deco, both built after the Auditorium Building. In 1934, the U.S. Post Office building was built to a Classical Moderne design by Ray Gauger, utilizing brick and limestone wall materials similar to the Auditorium Building. Circa 1940, a Streamline Moderne store building was built on the corner of Horace Avenue N. and 2nd Street E.

The Auditorium Building is a well-designed example of the Classical Moderne style, and it was executed in high quality materials. The building reflects the prevailing architectural style for public buildings during the 1930s. Built as a municipal building in 1933 without federal relief funding or labor, the Auditorium Building is an early example of the style that is often associated with federal relief projects. The building was a visual landmark in the city at the time of its construction, and it remains so to the present day.

Thief River Falls Auditorium and Municipal Building  
Pennington, Minnesota  
County and State  
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Description of Figures

Figure 1. Thief River Falls Auditorium and Municipal Building, looking southwest, circa 1934
Figure 2. Thief River Falls Auditorium and Municipal Building, looking northwest, circa 1940
Figure 3. Thief River Falls Auditorium and Municipal Building, looking southwest, circa 1970
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section number</th>
<th>Additional Documentation</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Table: Thief River Falls Auditorium and Municipal Building

- **Name of Property:** Thief River Falls Auditorium and Municipal Building
- **Pennington, Minnesota**
- **County and State**
- **Name of multiple listing (if applicable)**

Figure 1. Thief River Falls Auditorium and Municipal Building, looking southwest, circa 1934
Thief River Falls Auditorium and Municipal Building

Name of Property: Pennington, Minnesota
County and State
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Figure 2. Thief River Falls Auditorium and Municipal Building, looking northwest, circa 1940
Thief River Falls Auditorium and Municipal Building
Pennington, Minnesota

Figure 3. Thief River Falls Auditorium and Municipal Building, looking southwest, circa 1970