

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 of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Dixon County Courthouse
other names/site number DX08-40

2. Location

street & number SW corner 3rd & Iowa Sts N/A not for publication
city, town Ponca N/A vicinity
state Nebraska code NE county Dixon code 051 zip code 68770

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>1</u>	<u> </u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-state	<input type="checkbox"/> site	<u> </u>	<u> </u> sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<u> </u>	<u> </u> structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u> </u>	<u> </u> objects
		<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing: County Courthouses of Nebraska
Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 1

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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. See continuation sheet.

James A. Hansen November 17, 1989
Signature of certifying official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau
In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See cont. sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:
 entered in the National Register.
 See continuation sheet
 determined eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet.
 determined not eligible for the National Register.
 removed from the National Register.
 other, (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions) Government/courthouse Current Functions (enter categories from instructions) Government/courthouse

7. Description

Architectural Classification (enter categories from instructions) Italianate
Art Deco Materials (enter categories from instructions)
foundation concrete
walls brick
roof asphalt
other concrete

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

[X] See continuation sheet, section 7, page 1.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:
 nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions) Politics/government
Architecture Period of Significance c.1883-1940 Significant Dates N/A
1939-40

Cultural Affiliation N/A

Significant Person N/A Architect/Builder Reynolds, J.R.

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

[X] See continuation sheet, section 8, page 1.

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Built in c. 1883-4 with a significant 1939-40 addition, the Dixon County Courthouse is the oldest of four known examples of the Property Type, County Stronghold, identified in an intensive level survey of Nebraska county courthouses. Identifying physical features include the limited use of ornament, hipped roof, and efforts at providing fireproof storage and other features distinctive to its design and use as a courthouse. In addition, the courthouse was designed and built to convey its standing as a public building. Other features of the subtype exhibited are the compact, boxy shape, two-story height, use of local brick, and Italianate stylistic influence. The large three-story addition was the only such WPA-sponsored addition in the state and illustrates changes in courthouse design. Original exterior materials and elements remain in sufficient degree to make the original portion recognizable as an example of the County Stronghold Property Type, while the addition displays characteristics of the County Citadel Property Type. Alterations are acceptable and include replacement windows and changes between 1892 and 1909 (shown on Sanborn maps) to the rear of the older portion. The Dixon County Courthouse is part of the National Register historic district, Ponca Historic District.

The Dixon County Courthouse consists of the original two-story hipped roof red brick section built in c. 1883-4 (the "courthouse") and a large flat-roofed three-story addition constructed in 1939-40 (the "addition"). The 42x70' courthouse exhibits some limited features of the Italianate style: shallow hipped roof, brick segmental window hoods, and rather narrow windows.

An historic photo reveals that the windows originally had a 2/2 pane configuration, another Italianate stylistic element. Sanborn fire insurance maps show that in 1892 the courthouse was square, but by 1899 a small one-story rear extension had been added to the rear. By 1909 the east facade had also been extended to the rear to form the present roughly rectangular shape. Windows in this two-story extension are similar to those of the original but sufficiently different to identify it as an addition. The former double door, now a rectangular window, was centered on the north facade, which is five bays wide. The concrete foundation, cornice, and former chimneys (on the east facade) have been painted white, which helps unify the courthouse with the addition and its white trim.

Although divided into only three bays across, the three-story mottled brown brick addition is 51' across and 66' long. It is set back slightly from the original courthouse. White painted concrete trim contrasts

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boldly with the brick and is used for the foundation, water table, simple sills, pilasters between Chicago Style three-part windows, and the broad cornice. The Art Deco stylistic influence is apparent in the hard-edge low relief of the geometric patterns that form the cornice and also the flat smooth pilasters. These and other features are continued on the west and south facades. The addition displays such features of the County Citadel property type as rectangular shape with flat roof, 20th century construction date, and multiple stories.

The addition entrance is now the only main entrance and features side and top lights. It is located at the east end of the addition in order to provide a centered entry for the overall composition. Alterations are minor and include metal fire stairs and some window air conditioners.

Because of the difference in stories, access from the addition to the original courthouse is by three steps up. On the second story these steps join the district courtroom with related space in the addition. The plan (of the old and new portions) is not typical of courthouse plans because of the addition. The latter contained on the top floor the jail, jury room, and offices for the sheriff, clerk of district court, and county attorney. The district courtroom remains on the older section and has recently been completely modernized (as have other offices). The middle floor of the addition was set aside for general office space, and such offices as that of the county clerk and treasurer are housed there. On the addition's ground floor was the county court and judge and public restrooms. Interior changes are substantial and little remains of the interior fabric of the original courthouse. As befits a Depression-era public works project, the addition has limited decoration.

The Dixon County Courthouse is located in a residential area at the west end of the commercial area of the county seat of Ponca. The older portion of the courthouse was sited on the northeast half of the quarter block that comprises the courthouse site. By 1899 a sheriff's office or jail was located just west of the courthouse, now the location of the addition. Due to the large size of the addition, the entire present Dixon County Courthouse is now centered on the site, which has no objects other than a simple flagpole.

County commissioner records indicate that the present courthouse was built sometime between July 1883, when the subject of a courthouse came up and June 18, 1884, when bills related to courthouse construction were listed. No mention of the architect for the courthouse was found in the records; J.F. Reynolds, a Lincoln architect, designed the addition. No other information is available about Reynolds.

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The Dixon County Courthouse is architecturally significant (Criterion C) and historically significant (Criterion A) for its association with politics and local government. The property derives its historic significance as the focal point for the administration of local government and institutions in Dixon County. As the first courthouse in the county, it represents an early period of governmental service. In addition, the Dixon County Courthouse illustrates the county seat wars that continued even into the twentieth century and the circumstances that sometimes provoked a new round of controversy. And its large addition represents important policies in the history of federal public works programs and their effect on local communities.

As the oldest of four known examples of the Property Type, County Stronghold, the courthouse possesses such identifying physical features as the limited use of ornament, hipped roof, and efforts at providing fireproof storage and other features distinctive to its design and use as a courthouse. The later addition displays characteristics of the Property Type, County Citadel, and is an interesting and late example of that type. The Period of Significance is c. 1883-4, when the original portion of the courthouse was constructed and 1940, when the addition was completed. Original exterior materials and elements remain in sufficient degree to make the building recognizable as an example of the Property Type.

The Dixon County Courthouse, which is a contributing property in the Ponca Historic District, is being nominated individually as an example of the Property Type, County Courthouses of Nebraska (County Stronghold) of the Context, County Government in Nebraska, 1854-1941, from the Multiple Property Submission, County Courthouses of Nebraska. The building falls under Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) G, for the addition is one of exceptional importance that achieved significance within the past 50 years. The Multiple Property Submission addresses the time period for eligible properties (see Page F-5), and the period of significance for that multiple property submission is 1854 to 1941.

Dixon County is located in the extreme northeastern part of Nebraska on the Missouri River. With its riverfront location, it was an area of early settlement, and there was sufficient population (estimated at 300) to effect its establishment in 1858. Several communities in the new county competed for the county seat designation, including North Bend, Concord, Dixon (a paper town laid out between competing North Bend and Concord), and Ponca.

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In 1858 the first county election on the county seat question was held, and Ponca, which was established the previous year, won. The community enjoyed an advantageous location with a good fall for a mill. Ponca's stage of development at the election was meager--just eight buildings and around a dozen families--but that amount of settlement was the equal of Concord and North Bend combined.

Rival settlements exacted their revenge, however, by withholding approval for building a courthouse in Ponca for some thirty years. Commissioners records do not reveal details of construction of the original courthouse, but in July of 1883 Ponca citizens proposed that a courthouse be built. The following month, however, the county commissioners decided not to appropriate county funds for a courthouse due to "the present financial condition of the County." The commissioners no doubt referred to the approximately \$9,000 loss to the county, a combination of alleged robbery from the treasurer's safe and other shortages likely traceable to the treasurer.

These statements of the commissioners to the contrary, claims in 1884 records included charges for fixing the courthouse roof, cleaning the courthouse, purchasing office signs and a time lock, also the purchase of vault doors and for setting them, building a privy, and for moving county offices. All these charges indicate that the present courthouse was built sometime between July 1883, when the subject of a courthouse came up, and June 18, 1884, when these charges were listed. An 1896 county history states that courthouse construction began the summer of 1883. No mention of an architect was found in the records.

With or without a specially constructed courthouse in place in the county seat, Dixon County residents continued to agitate for county seat removal from Ponca. Elections on the issue were held regularly, in 1875, 1884, and 1920. And when officials of the Works Projects Administration (WPA) approached the county to discuss "the [courthouse] building and improvements" to it, county residents used plans for a substantial addition to bring up the county seat question once again in 1939.

Only the names of the competing communities changed, not the interest in being county seat. In February 1939 the county board received a petition with 2,619 signatures. The petition called for a special election on whether to move the county seat to Martinsburg. According to county records, "a large delegation of interested persons" asked that planning cease temporarily on the courthouse project, but the board took no action. (The board had signed a contract with the WPA the previous month.)

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In May 1939 the board received another petition, with some 300 signatures. It called for relocating the county seat to Allen. In a classic case of charges and countercharges, supporters of the various county seats challenged the validity of the signatures. In one gambit, a faction filed a petition of "signers of the original petition who subsequently signed withdrawal petitions and now express their design to be counted among the original signers." Eventually, the board, who clearly had no interest in moving the county seat, declared that an insufficient number of voters had signed the relevant petition and rejected the bid to move from Ponca. Completion of the addition in 1940 ended the final chapter in Dixon County's county seat wars.

9. Major Bibliographical References

[X] See continuation sheet, section 9, page 1.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of property less than one acre

UTM References

A	<u>14</u>	<u>6 8 8 10 8 10</u>	<u>4 7 1 4 5 8 5</u>	B	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
C	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	D	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing

[] See continuation sheet, section 10, page 1.

Verbal Boundary Description

[X] See continuation sheet, section 10, page 1.

Boundary Justification

[X] See continuation sheet, section 10, page 1.

11. Form Prepared By

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- Long, Barbara Beving. "County Courthouses of Nebraska." Multiple Property Submission. 1989.
- Nebraska State Historical Society. Photo Collection. #M281-953.
- Dixon County. Commissioners' Records. Books 2 and 7.
- Ponca, Nebraska. Sanborn Fire Insurance Map. 1892, 1899, 1909.
- Huse, William. History of Dixon County, Nebraska. Norfolk: Daily News, 1896; reprint ed., Carroll and Ponca: Litho Speed & Earl Hinds, 1973.
- Dixon County Book Committee. Dixon County, Nebraska. Dallas: Taylor Publishing Co., 1982.
- Reynolds, J.F. Blueprints. Jail Addition to Court House, Ponca, Nebraska. [1939.]
- CEA Design. Plans. Dixon County Courthouse Remodel. April 25, 1985.
- Ponca Historic District. National Register nomination.

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Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property occupies lots 1-3 of block 14 of the original plat of Ponca and is 150x150' in size.

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes the one-quarter city block that has historically been associated with the property.



Photo 1—Aspect: northeast. Photo by D. Murphy, 1977, NSHS (7703/10:34)



Photo 2—Aspect: north-northwest. Photo by D. Murphy, 1977, NSHS (7703/10:20)



Photo 3—Aspect: southeast. Photo by D. Murphy, 1977, NSHS (7703/14:25)