

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

90000965
7-5-90

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 Richardson County Courthouse
other names/site number RH03-069

2. Location

street & number Courthouse Square N/A not for publication
city, town Falls City N/A vicinity
state Nebraska code NE county Richardson code 147 zip code 68355

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input checked="" 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>2</u> objects
		<u>1</u>	<u>2</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing: County Courthouses of Nebraska
Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

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 C. Hanson Signature of certifying official
Nebraska State Historical Society State or Federal agency and bureau
Date May 14, 1990

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)

Classical Revival

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation stone

walls brick

roof asphalt

other terra cotta

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)

Architecture

Politics/government

Period of Significance

Significant Dates

1923-40

1923-25

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Gernandt, William F.

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.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 1

Built in 1923-25, the Richardson County Courthouse is a fine, largely unaltered example of the Property Type, County Citadel. Identifying features include: rectangular shape, centered entrance, costly materials, distinctive ornamentation, Classical Revival stylistic influence, provision for fireproof storage, and the impression of a government building representing modernity, simplicity, strength, and prosperity. In addition, the courthouse has other County Citadel characteristics: flat roof and designed by an architect. The property is also a good and late example of the Nebraska courthouses William F. Gernandt designed during an unusually productive period, between 1910 and 1923. The courthouse illustrates the evolution of his courthouse commissions. The nominated property is considered a district, for there are two small noncontributing objects, a 1950 Statue of Liberty and a recent small veterans memorial commemorating war dead from three wars in addition to the contributing courthouse. A modest utility shed was not counted.

The Richardson County Courthouse occupies the highest spot in Falls City, and the principal commercial district, with brick streets intact on three sides, rings the courthouse square. The courthouse is rectangular and consists of three stories plus a small attic jail space not visible from the exterior. The use of rusticated brick and a heavy water table gives the appearance of a raised basement, but entrances are at grade.

Prominent entry pavilions on the east and west facades identify the principal entrances, but there is also access on the two other facades. The building's massing and stylistic details are very similar to the Sarpy County Courthouse, also by Gernandt and completed in 1923. But this example enjoys a full courthouse square surrounded by a well developed commercial district, and the courthouse design takes this location into account.

A series of imposing elements focus attention on the centered main entrances. These include pairs of fluted engaged columns, a broad and prominent modillioned cornice, and a particularly fine two-story round-arched window. The moulded cornice, lacking modillions, continues around the other facades, a unifying feature along with the water table and coping. Above the modillioned cornice is a raised parapet with coping, four outsized consoles resting on brick bases, vegetal swages, and a centered shield. Secondary facades on the north and south have similar, but simplified and less projecting, entry treatments.

Cream-colored terra cotta contrasts texturally with tan face brick and

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 2

is used effectively to highlight sills, lintels, water table and other courses, and at entry pavilions. Narrow windows are tucked between the engaged columns, reminiscent of earlier Gernandt designs. Above the columns is the county name as well as rosettes and delicate foliated panels. Heavy swags fall from the unusual Ionic capitals.

Four bays consisting of simple rectangular windows flank the principal centered entrances, and with two bays on the other facades of the approximately 95x65' building. The floorplan is X-shaped, which the four entrances reflect.

The courthouse is a fine example of the County Citadel courthouse exhibiting Classical Revival stylistic elements. These include the symmetric arrangement, smooth surfaces, prominent columns, and such classical elements as keystones, fluted columns, rosettes, and modillions.

Exterior alterations are minor and expected: double-pane thermal replacement windows quite similar to the originals (1981), well-designed handicapped access ramp and new fire escape, both added to the secondary north facade in the 1980s. An historic photograph at the Nebraska State Historical Society reveals how little the building and its site have changed. Interior modifications are similarly unintrusive and include some modernized and remodeled rooms, acoustical tile ceilings and fluorescent lighting. Courtroom murals were reportedly "retouched" using prison labor in the mid-1950s.

Notable interior elements include golden oak woodwork, gray marble for door surrounds, hallway wainscoting, and staircases with elegantly curved railings, and geometric mosaic floor tile in tan, black, and white. The rich materials continue in the district courtroom where there are ornate plaster consoles, four skylights with green colored squares of glass, a distinctive vaulted ceiling, and tall wood paneling with dentils.

Two murals by J. Willer of Beatrice depict a Pony Express rider (symbolizing the opening of the West) and William Penn meeting Native Americans in 1671. The murals are placed in round-arched frames over the principal entrance and at the opposite end, over the judge's bench. The wooden judge's bench, the bar, jury box with chairs, and spectator seating are all original. Elaborate courtrooms are a characteristic feature of Gernandt courthouse designs.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 1

The Richardson County Courthouse is architecturally significant (Criterion C) and also historically significant (Criterion A) for its association with politics and local government. The property derives its historic significance as a focal point for the administration of local government and institutions in the county. It is a fine example of public architecture and contains good examples of design features and facilities distinctive to its design and use as a courthouse. In addition, the property is an interesting late example of the ten Nebraska courthouses William F. Gernandt designed during an unusually productive period, between 1910 and 1923. As the final example of his courthouse work, it illustrates the evolution of his commissions.

As a good example of the County Citadel Property Type, the courthouse contains design features and facilities distinctive to its design and use (such as fireproof vaults), has a rectangular shape, centered entrance, costly materials, distinctive ornamentation, and Classical Revival stylistic influence. Elements of the design combine effectively to convey the impression of a government building representing modernity, simplicity, and prosperity, also features of the County Citadel.

The Period of Significance is 1923, when construction began, to 1940, when the "fifty year rule" takes effect. The Richardson County Courthouse is being nominated as an example of the Property Type, County Courthouses of Nebraska (County Citadel) of the Context, County Government in Nebraska, 1854-1941, from the Multiple Property Submission, County Courthouses of Nebraska.

Richardson County is located along the Missouri River at the southeast tip of the state. As one of Nebraska's first eight counties established in 1854, it is among the oldest in the state. Settlers began to arrive the following year and initially selected Archer to be county seat. After it appeared that that site would fall within a tract set aside for halfbreed Indians, Archer lost its county seat status. Established in 1857, Falls City became county seat in 1860 following a spirited contest with Salem necessitating several elections, and the first courthouse was built in 1863. The frame building was replaced ten years later during a period of relative prosperity by a brick courthouse and separate stone jail (neither is extant).

The courthouse served the county well until a May 7, 1919, fire destroyed it. In July voters approved a levy to finance the courthouse construction. Insurance payments likely contributed as well. On February 21, 1922, a contract was signed with the architect, William F. Gernandt, for

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

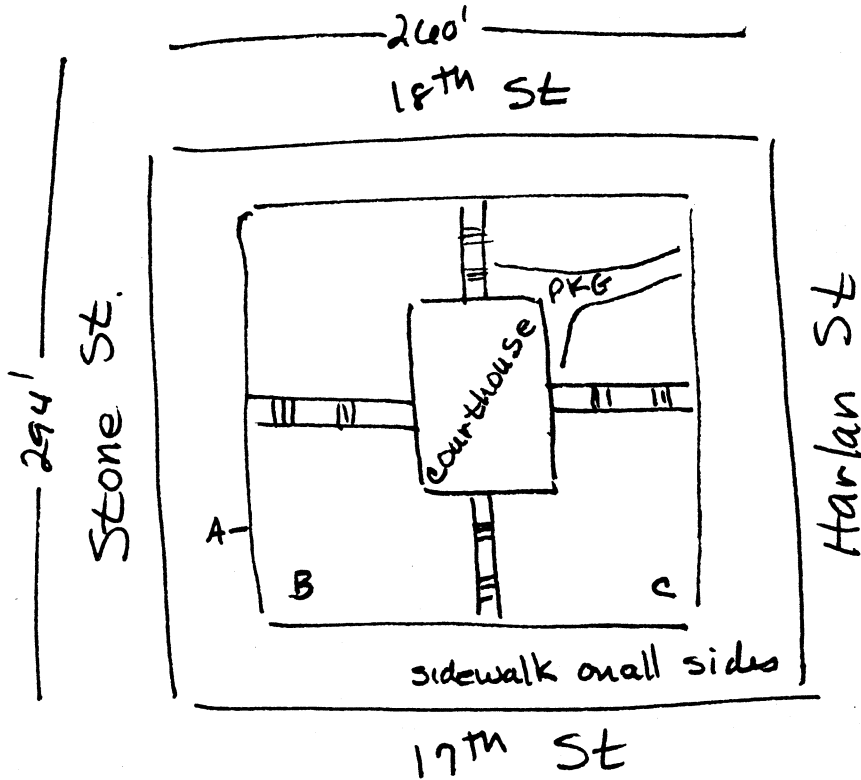
Section number 8 Page 2

the courthouse. The contractor was Henry Ohlsen and Sons of Davis City. Construction began in 1923 and continued into 1925. The cornerstone is dated 1924. Formal dedication ceremonies for the building took place on April 24, 1925 before an estimated 15,000 people.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 3



- A - low stone retaining wall (not counted)
- B - 1950 Statue of Liberty (noncontributing)
- C - modern (")

RICHARDSON COUNTY COURTHOUSE

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

Acreage of property 1.75 acres

UTM References

A	<u>115</u>	<u>2181065</u>	<u>4437700</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

name/title	Barbara Beving Long, consultant		
organization	Four Mile Research Co.	date	January 21, 1990
street & number	3140 Easton Boulevard	telephone	(515) 266-4964
city or town	Des Moines	state	Iowa zip code 50317

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 9 Page 1

Long, Barbara Beving. "County Courthouses of Nebraska." Multiple Property Submission. 1989.
Nebraska State Historical Society. Photo Collection. #M281-1046.
Tracings. Richardson County Courthouse. William F. Gernandt.
Richardson County, Nebraska, 1975.
Edwards, Lewis C. History of Richardson County, Nebraska. Indianapolis: B.F. Bowen & Co., 1917.
"Dedicate a court house." Nebraska State Journal. May 22, 1925.
"Interior views of new Falls City courthouse." Nebraska State Journal. May 28, 1925.
Sanborn Fire Insurance Map. Falls City. 1885, 1900, 1926.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 10 Page 1

Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property, the Richardson County Courthouse, occupies all of block 59 of the Original Plat of Falls City and is roughly 260x294' in size.

Boundary Justification

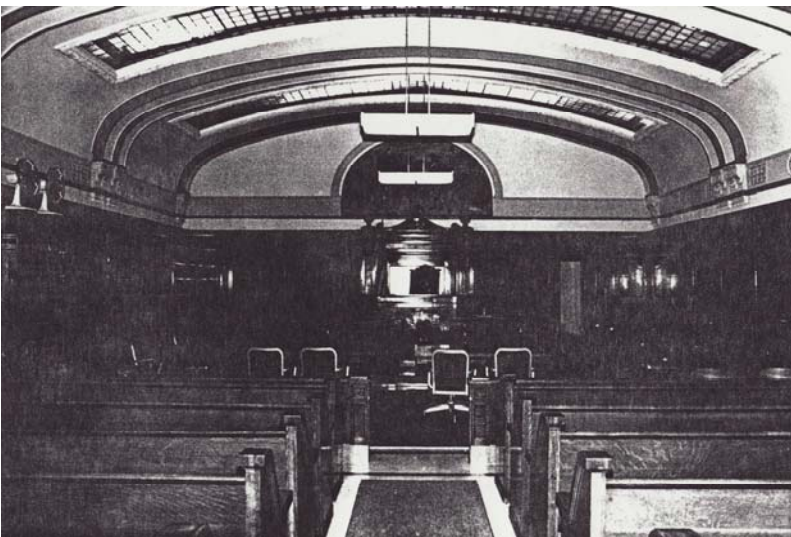
The boundary includes the entire city block that has historically been associated with the property.



Aspect: Southeast
Photo by Robert Kay
(NSHS 9210/33:21a)



Aspect: Northeast
Photo by Robert Kay
(NSHS 9210/33:22a)



District courtroom
Photo by BJB Long, Four Mile Research, 1988
(NSHS 8811/4:5)



District courtroom mural
Photo by BJB Long, Four Mile Research, 1988
(NSHS 8811/4:11)