

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

1-10-90

89002211

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 Merrick County Courthouse
other names/site number MK02-3

2. Location

street & number 18th St bet 15th & 16th Aves N/A not for publication
city, town Central City N/A vicinity
state Nebraska code NE county Merrick code 121 zip code 68826

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>1</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>11</u>	<u> </u>	objects
		<u>12</u>	<u>1</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 A. Bonism
Signature of certifying official

November 17, 1989
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) Classical Revival Materials (enter categories from instructions) foundation stone walls brick roof other other stone

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 1911-39 Significant Dates N/A 1911-13

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.

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Built in 1911-13, the Merrick County Courthouse is a good, 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 impression of a government building representing modernity, simplicity, strength, and prosperity. In addition, the courthouse has other County Citadel characteristics: flat roof, raised basement, and designed by an architect. The property is an early example of the ten courthouses Nebraska architect William F. Gernandt designed in an unusually productive period, between 1910 and 1923. It shares certain design characteristics with the Pawnee County Courthouse, built in 1911, and thus illustrates the evolution of Gernandt's courthouses designs.

The Merrick County Courthouse is rectangular and consists of two stories upon a raised basement. A partial attic story is tucked behind the unusually tall brick parapet; attic windows in the entablature of the rear or south facade reveal the presence of this partial story. The basement is ashlar limestone and granite, and limestone is also used for the massive columns and other trim, including smooth sills. At the ground level the raised basement projects slightly to form a solid granite base for the limestone basement; a moulded water table separates the stone from tan brick above.

An important feature are the four colossal stone columns ranged along the principal (north) facade and the massive stone steps leading up to them and the main entrance. The columns are ringed in the lower half and smooth above; capitals are bold assemblages of geometric shapes. Equally bold are the large dentils and triglyphs with guttae. The triglyphs are placed directly above the columns, at the corners of pediments (on the corner bays) and above squared brick pilasters. The pilasters are placed between six windows on the east and west facades. Like the stone columns, these brick pilasters are "ringed" (using brick) at the lower portion (at the first floor windows) and smooth above. The ringed effect is thus echoed in the composition on columns, pilasters, and also for the corner quoins of the corner bays.

The design of the corner bays of the north facade effectively frames the massive columns between them. Notable are the brick quoins of two lengths (also seen on Gernandt's 1910-11 Phelps County Courthouse) and large pediments with dentils. Three bays of paired windows occur between the entry columns and have moulded stone lintels with attractive small consoles and, like windows on the other three facades, simple smooth

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stone sills.

The courthouses exhibits features of the Classical Revival style, such as symmetric arrangement, monumental shapes, smooth surface finish (the raised basement), a relatively simple parapet and unadorned roofline, pedimented bays, and colossal columns.

The 66x85' building was designed to have one primary entrance on the north facade, and a secondary entrance on the south, which is more than a utilitarian entrance. Both have steps up to them, although the north steps are much more elaborate and imposing. It is possible that the south entrance and facade was somewhat more embellished because it was the access point to the jail building on the grounds. Also, the courthouse occupies a full block and is thus visible from all sides. The south facade continues the materials and treatment of the other facades but in a simplified manner. Missing are the dentils, triglyphs, and pilasters or columns.

The central hallway on the first floor is cross-shaped. East and west halls are short stubs with three doors to offices off them. On the north is a large vestibule separated from the hall by double doors, and on the south are stairs to the upper floors and down to the south door and thence to the basement level. The district courtroom is located on the second floor, and a small "gallery," as it was originally labeled, is located on the partial top floor and now used for storage.

Original interior features include hexagonal floor tile with a regularly spaced pattern in black, tan, rust, and ocher and a border pattern, a favorite of Gernandt's (see Polk County Courthouse). Also original is the light fixture hanging from the center of the mail hall; it is metal and has eight globes. Grey mottled marble is used for wainscoting and stair treads, dark wood for counters, transoms, office doors with a single pane, large top and side lights for some doors, and beveled glass for the double entry doors.

Interior alterations are few; offices have dropped ceilings and fluorescent lighting. Counters with sliding doors above them probably replaced doorways for the public to enter the clerk and treasurer offices in order to eliminate public space within the offices and therefore provide more office space. The district courtroom has also been modernized.

On the exterior, windows with opaque transoms replace the originals, and in the mid-1970s new entry steps were built. Unlike the originals, these are split to offer access for the handicapped to the ground floor. The

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design is sympathetic to the building and similar to the original steps. The impressive size, mass, siting, and ornamentation of the courthouse work together to mitigate the effect of alterations. Coincidentally, the new steps are remarkably like those Gernandt designed for the Pawnee County Courthouse.

The Merrick County Courthouse exhibits features that reveal its kinship with the contemporary Pawnee County Courthouse, also a William F. Gernandt design. These include: Classical Revival stylistic influence, pilaster and window treatment of the east and west facades, the base-within-a-base of the raised basement, prominent entry stairs, use of triglyphs and dentils, prominent columns, high parapet to conceal an additional story, floorplan, and use of such interior elements as ceramic tile, marble detail, and metal staircases.

The courthouse is centered on a full block several blocks from the commercial sector of Central City. Dwellings front on the courthouse square on three sides, and the high school occupies the block directly east of it. Just north of the courthouse square is the Patterson Law Office, a National Register-listed property built in 1872, that offered convenient access to the courts for lawyer John Patterson.

A number of deciduous trees dot the courthouse square, and eleven attractive period street lights (fluted metal shaft on rectangular base, single globe) surround the courthouse square. The name of the manufacturer, King Foundry Company of St. Joseph, Missouri, is stamped on the light poles. Two very small memorials and a simple flagpole are the only other objects on the site and were not counted in this nomination. Because of their attractiveness and prominent location outlining the site, the eleven light posts are contributing objects.

Also on the courthouse square, directly south of the courthouse is the jail, which is also the sheriff's house. The building's light tan brick matches that of the courthouse. The jail is one-story, flat-roofed and rectangular. It is of small scale and unobtrusively located on the site. Due to its recent construction date (c.1960), the jail is a noncontributing building for this nomination.

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The Merrick 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 the focal point for the administration of local government and institutions in Merrick County. It is a good example of public architecture in the community and contains good examples of design features and facilities distinctive to its design and use as a courthouse. The impressive size, mass, siting, and ornamentation of the courthouse work together to mitigate the effect of alterations.

As a good example of the County Citadel, 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, strength, and prosperity, also features of the County Citadel. The property is an early example of the ten courthouses Nebraska architect William F. Gernandt designed in an unusually productive period, between 1910 and 1923. It shares certain design characteristics with the Pawnee County Courthouse, built in 1911, and thus illustrates the evolution of Gernandt's courthouses designs.

The Period of Significance is 1911, when construction began, to 1939, when the "fifty year rule" takes effect. The Merrick 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.

The Platte River forms the south boundary of Merrick County, and the area saw early use as waves of settlers and gold seekers traversed the area. The Lone Tree, an immense poplar on the Platte in the county, was a well known landmark for Indians, migrants, and explorers.

Located in east central Nebraska, the county was among the early counties to be established, in 1858. Its boundaries included present Nance County. Despite its place of prominence along the Platte, permanent settlement remained relatively sparse. For example, it was not until 1861 that the first post office was established, and only twelve men in the county were subject to military duty during the Civil War.

At the time of organization, the nonexistent town of Elvira was

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designated temporary county seat. In 1863 the county was officially organized at the local level, and county officials were first elected the following year. In 1866 the Union Pacific Railroad crossed the county and established rail stops along the line, an important impetus to settlement.

A small settlement and stagecoach stop developed near the Lone Tree and was therefore known by that name. When the railroad platted a stop five miles away, it too adopted the name. But in 1875 residents changed Lone Tree to Central City, reportedly fearing that potential settlers would assume the county had few trees. In 1880 the community gained a second railroad, and enjoyed a boom period in the following decade. Central City has always been the county seat of Merrick County.

Passage of the Kinkaid Act in 1904 further stimulated settlement in Merrick County and brought a measure prosperity to the county as new settlers arrived to homestead on their 640 acres. County voters approved a \$100,000 bond issue on May 31, 1911. The first courthouse, a two-story brick building on the courthouse square, was built in 1871. By 1909 all its walls were "badly cracked," according to a Sanborn Fire Insurance Map.

County records are very incomplete, but it appears that construction was underway in 1911. The architect's (William F. Gernandt of Fairbury, Nebraska) blueprints are dated April 1911. The contractor is not known. On May 22, 1912, cornerstone laying ceremonies were held under the direction of the Masonic Lodge. The courthouse was formally dedicated April 24, 1913, and on February 18, 1913, a janitor was selected for the courthouse, further evidence of its completion.

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 1.7 acres

UTM References

A	<u>1</u> <u>4</u> <u>5</u> <u>8</u> <u>4</u> <u>0</u> <u>2</u> <u>0</u> <u>4</u> <u>5</u> <u>5</u> <u>1</u> <u>6</u> <u>6</u> <u>0</u>	B	<u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u>
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	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 November 8, 1989
street & number	3140 Easton Boulevard telephone (515) 266-4964
city or town	Des Moines state Iowa zip code 50317

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Long, Barbara Beving. "County Courthouses of Nebraska." Multiple Property Submission. 1989.

Merrick County. Supervisors' Records. Book 5.

Nebraska State Historical Society. Photo Collection. #M281-1019.

Central City, Nebraska. Sanborn Fire Insurance Map. 1909, 1922.

Merrick County History Book Committee. History of Merrick County, Nebraska. 1981.

Merrick County's 100th Year. 1958.

Tracings. Merrick County Courthouse. William F. Gernandt. April 1911. Clerk's office.

Undated Historic Photographs. Merrick County Courthouse. Clerk's office.

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Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property, Merrick County Courthouse, occupies all of Block 10 of County Addition in Central City and is roughly 275x275' in size.

Boundary Justification

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



NSHS – H673.5-4106



NSHS – H673.5-4108



NSHS – H673.5-4107