

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

NATIONAL REGISTER

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 Knox County Courthouse
other names/site number KX03-010

2. Location

street & number Main St bet Brazile & Bridge Sts N/A not for publication
city, town Center N/A vicinity
state Nebraska code NE county Knox code 107 zip code 68724

3. Classification

| Ownership of Property | Category of Property | Number of Resources within Property | |
|--|--|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| | | Contributing | Noncontributing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> private | <input type="checkbox"/> building(s) | <u>2</u> | <u>1</u> buildings |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public-local | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> district | <u> </u> | <u> </u> sites |
| <input type="checkbox"/> public-state | <input type="checkbox"/> site | <u> </u> | <u> </u> structures |
| <input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal | <input type="checkbox"/> structure | <u>1</u> | <u> </u> objects |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> object | <u>3</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. Hanman
Signature of certifying official
Nebraska State Historical Society

May 14, 1990
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:)

Beth Boland

7/5/90

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) Modern movement 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 Period of Significance 1934-40 Significant Dates N/A

Cultural Affiliation N/A

Significant Person N/A Architect/Builder Watson, E.B.

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 1934, the Knox County Courthouse is a good, relatively unaltered example of the Property Type, County Citadel. Identifying features include: rectangular shape, centered entrance, permanent materials, provision for fireproof storage, and the impression of a government building representing modernity, simplicity, and strength. In addition, the courthouse has other County Citadel characteristics: flat roof and designed by an architect. The courthouse, old jail, new jail, and veterans memorial are considered a district for this nomination; the new jail is the only noncontributing resource.

The courthouse is rectangular and consists of two stories set upon a raised basement. Different window treatment calls attention to the centered entrance on the east facade, the only public entrance. (On the rear or west facade are two nonpublic basement entrances.) Attention is focused on the centered entrance by means of three white painted concrete panels at the cornice, with large six-light staircase windows below. Patterned brick vertical panels frame the entrance, and the panels are repeated at the corners of the design. A simple metal canopy with "Knox County Court House" protects the double doors, which have large side lights and transoms peeking over the canopy.

The wall surface is dark red-brown face brick, and concrete trim painted white provides contrasting trim. Concrete is used for the foundation, sills, and three centered cornice panels. Patterned brickwork is subtly used on the vertical panels and also for panels between the windows.

Attractively proportioned bays consist of three grouped double-hung windows with single windows on either side of them. This window arrangement is repeated for the basement as well as the two upper stories and flanks the centered entrance bay. Secondary facades on the north and south are also divided into bays with vertical panels, but has pairs of windows in the center and single windows occupying their own bays. The west facade is divided into bays by six plain brick vertical panels, and window arrangement is variable and functional on this, the rear, of the building.

The floorplan is a T-shape, with steps up from the entry vestibule occupying the stub of the "T" of the 100x68' building. County offices, including the county courtroom and county judge's office, were designed for the first floor, and there are large vaults in all four corners. The second floor district courtroom runs virtually the length of the west end of the building and is generally unaltered, except for unobtrusive acoustical panels, a new ceiling and replacement lights.

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Courtroom furnishings are excellent golden oak Art Deco woodwork with grooved vertical detail. Spectator seating, the bar, jury box, judge's bench, attorneys' tables, even the court stenographer's desk, all match. Especially notable is the judge's bench. Behind it is a gabled and stepped wood screen with long vertical grooves and carved rosettes. Courses consisting of a small vertical pattern adorn the desk, a motif repeated on other judicial furnishings in the room.

The interior is quite simple and relatively unaltered, with original wood doors, chair railings, and frames and terrazzo flooring. Staircases have rounded concrete newels with wood caps, an unusual feature. Original counters for some offices open directly onto the hallway, a feature not found on earlier courthouse designs. The arrangement allows the public to transact business without having to enter these offices, which then have more space for operations.

Interior modifications include replacement lighting in hallways and offices (although some original globes remain in halls), sheet metal heating units in the halls, and an unobtrusive mechanical seat that provides access for the handicapped to the second floor. The exterior appears to be unaltered, save replacement windows with white opaque tops and an air conditioning unit on the north facade. An historic photograph at the Nebraska State Historical Society reveals how little the building has changed.

The courthouse is a good, if modest example of the County Citadel courthouse exhibiting elements from the Modern movement. These include a linear composition with vertical emphases and the use of concrete. Art Deco stylistic references are present in a limited manner on the exterior--they appear more noticeable on the elevations the architect prepared--especially the patterned brick vertical panels, entry door transoms, and flat ornament. The property falls within the general Modern category, for it clearly reflects this chronological period, despite the dearth of specific stylistic references.

The Knox County Courthouse occupies an off-center location on a spacious tree-strewn courthouse square located just south of Center's modest commercial area. The courthouse fronts on the town's commercial main street, and houses are located on the other three sides.

The courthouse shares the site with a small painted concrete block former jail built c. 1904, a new jail built in 1988, and a prominently placed veterans memorial. Now used for storage, the former jail has a flaring hipped wood shingle roof, barred windows, a centered brick chimney, and

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a small wood addition on its south facade. The new jail also has a hipped roof and, like the courthouse, is faced with dark red-brown brick. It is located well behind the courthouse in an unobtrusive spot on the northwest corner of the site.

The veterans memorial is centered on the courthouse entrance on a round concrete pad. A circular two-step concrete base serves as a pedestal for the four-sided smooth granite object. There are metal plaques on three sides listing veterans who served in World Wars I and II, and in Korea and Viet Nam. On the east face is a large metal eagle and "This memorial erected to commemorate the patriotism of those from Knox County who served our country in the world war...." The memorial is shown in the 1934 dedication program and also in an historic photograph but with a three-step pedestal, not the present two-step version. Based on the inscription, it likely dates from shortly after World War I.

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The Knox County Courthouse is 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 the county. It is a good example of public architecture in the county and contains good examples of design features and facilities distinctive to its design and use as a courthouse. In addition, Knox County is one of seven Nebraska counties to acquire a courthouse using federal work programs during the Great Depression of the 1930s and thus the courthouse is directly associated with the role of federal government assistance programs during this period.

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), a rectangular shape, centered entrance, and permanent materials. Elements of the design combine to convey the impression of a government building representing modernity and simplicity, also features of the County Citadel.

The Period of Significance is 1934, when it was built, to 1940, when the "fifty year rule" takes effect. The Knox 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.

Knox County is located in northeast Nebraska, on the border with South Dakota (the Niobrara River). Permanent settlement dated from 1856, and the county was organized in 1857 as L'Eau Qui Court County. In 1873 the county received its present, more easily pronounceable name. Despite the early settlement and organization of the county, development was slow and sparse. Beginning in 1881, railroad lines were constructed in the county, but the northwest sector of the county did not acquire rail service until 1902.

The rivertown of Niobrara was the first county seat, achieving that designation in 1857. The site suffered regularly from flooding, and the community moved to higher ground after a particularly devastating flood in 1881. The community remained county seat until 1902 when Center, the present county seat, acquired the coveted designation.

The change was not without considerable effort and controversy. Between 1887 and 1900, county residents voted no less than five times to vote

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down dividing the county into two counties and five more times on the county seat location. After three elections in 1900 alone, voters agreed to move the county seat. The actual move did not occur until 1902 after court challenges were resolved.

As might be expected by its name, Center occupies the heart of the county and was created expressly to be county seat in 1901. With its relatively late founding date and competition from communities such as Bloomfield, Center has remained quite small; the current state map lists its population at 123.

Following court decisions in 1902, county officials moved quickly to build a courthouse in Center. They elected to build it at the northeast corner of the courthouse square. According to supervisors' records, the facility was built to be a temporary expedient. In April of 1902 the county board held its first official meeting in Center in the new courthouse.

Beginning in about 1924, the county board took steps to improve county facilities. The levied a "jail building" tax and by 1931 had accumulated nearly \$49,000 in that fund. This was transferred into a courthouse fund in 1934 as the county expanded its plans in order to qualify for federal grants.

By early in 1934 the architect had been selected, E.B. Watson of Norfolk, Nebraska. Watson is known to have designed the 1938 Rock County Courthouse as well. Construction commenced on February 26, 1934 on the courthouse, which also included jail facilities. The former jail (construction date unknown but believed to date from c. 1904) was then used for storage. County prisoners made 130,000 "cement bricks" to which the face brick was applied. The county provided a construction supervisor, and it does not appear that a general contractor was used.

The building was completed late in October, and the county moved its offices from the old frame courthouse, which was then demolished. Formal dedication ceremonies were held November 13, 1934 and featured music by eight groups, including an accordion solo. Among the four speakers was the State FERA Director in charge of federal works programs for Nebraska.

The county provided \$48,935 for the building, and various government, Civil Works Administration and Federal Emergency Relief Administration funds accounted for \$13,251 for the project. A make-work project, the courthouse was built by men on relief (accounting for about 1/5 of those on relief in the county). The county furnished supervisors and skilled

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labor not available from relief rolls.

As the first courthouse constructed in the state using FERA funds, the Knox County Courthouse received attention in the press. One account concluded that

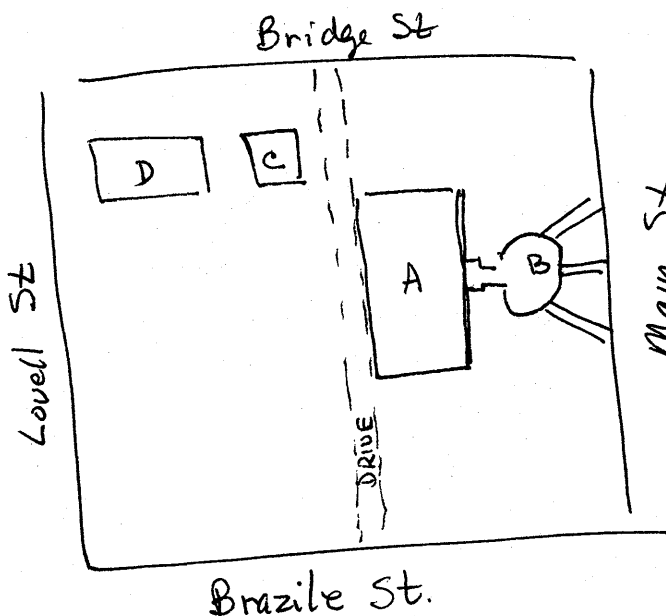
Generations after the FERA has become forgotten in Nebraska, the Center court house and hundreds of similar structures will remain to remind old timers of the tough going the Cornhusker state, and indeed, the entire nation had back in the years around 1933.....

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KNOX COUNTY COURTHOUSE



- A - courthouse (contr. bldg.)
- B - Veterans memorial (contr. object)
- C - old jail (contr. bldg.)
- D - new jail (noncontr. bldg.)

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 2 acres

UTM References

| | | | | | | | |
|---|-------|-----------------------|---------------------------|---|------|---------|----------|
| A | 1 4 | 5 9 2 1 2 0 | 4 7 1 7 7 8 0 | B | | | |
| | Zone | Easting | Northing | | Zone | Easting | Northing |
| C | | | | D | | | |
| | 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 12, 1990 |
| 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.
- Nebraska State Historical Society. Photo Collection. #M281-1003.
- Knox County. Supervisors Record. Book 4.
- Tracings. Knox County Courthouse. E.B. Watson.
- Dedication Program, new Knox County Court House and Jail. November 14, 1934.
- "FERA Accomplishments in state typified by Center court house." Lincoln Sunday Star. November 11, 1934.
- Work Relief in Nebraska. Report of the Work Division of the Nebraska Emergency Relief Administration, April 1, 1934-July 1, 1935. Lincoln: State of Nebraska, November 1935.
- Draper, Solomon. "An Historical Sketch of Knox County, Nebraska." Typed copy of speech delivered July 4, 1876. Clerk's Office.
- Luckert, Gary D. "Knox County in the Making--A History of Knox County." Typed history. Clerk's Office.
- Save America's Heritage. Nebraska Historic Buildings Survey. Reconnaissance Survey Final Report of Knox County, Nebraska. 1988.

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Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property, the Knox County Courthouse, occupies all of block 11 of the Original Plat of Center and is roughly 300x300' in size.

Boundary Justification

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