

# IOWA SITE INVENTORY

Division of Historic Preservation  
Iowa State Historical Department  
26 E. Market St., Iowa City, Iowa 52240

MAY 29 1981

Site Number 94-020-023  
District Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Map Reference # 94-020-023  
Topo Map Ft. Dodge N 1:24,000

## IDENTIFICATION

1. Site Name Webster County Courthouse
2. Village/Town/City Fort Dodge Township \_\_\_\_\_ County Webster
3. Street Address 701 Central Ave.
4. Legal Location  

Urban:	subdivision	block	parcel	subparcel
Rural:	township	range	section	1/4 section-1/4 section
	<u>OT</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>1 &amp; 2</u>	
5. UTM Location: zone 15 easting 402390 northing 4706300; Acreage less than 1 a
6. Owner(s) Name Webster County Board of Supervisors
7. Owner(s) Address Courthouse Fort Dodge Iowa 50501  
(Street address) (City) (State) (Zip)
8. Use: present Courthouse original Courthouse

## DESCRIPTION

9. Date of Construction 1902 Architect/Builder H.C. Koch, Milwaukee, Arch. Northern Bldg. Co., Bldr.
10. Building Type:  single family dwelling  multiple family dwelling  commercial  
 industrial  educational  other institutional  public  religious  agricultural
11. Exterior Walls:  clapboard  stone  brick  board & batten  shingles  stucco  
 other \_\_\_\_\_
12. Structural System:  wood frame with interlocking joints  
 wood frame with light members (balloon frame)  masonry load-bearing walls  
 iron frame  steel frame with curtain walls  reinforced concrete  
 other \_\_\_\_\_
13. Condition:  excellent  good  fair  deteriorated
14. Integrity:  original site  moved-if so, when? \_\_\_\_\_  
Notes on alterations, additions (with dates and architect, if known) and any other notable features of building and site: Dropped ceilings, upper portions of windows blocked from inside - aluminum sash - new wooden main entrance doors - entrance lobby partitioned for office space-
15. Related Outbuildings and Property:  barn  other farm structures  
 carriage house  garage  privy  other \_\_\_\_\_
16. Is the building endangered?  no  yes-if so, why? \_\_\_\_\_
17. Surroundings of the building:  open land  woodland  scattered outbuildings  
 densely built-up  commercial  industrial  residential  other \_\_\_\_\_
18. Map \_\_\_\_\_
19. Photo  
Roll \_\_\_\_\_ Frame \_\_\_\_\_ View \_\_\_\_\_

**SIGNIFICANCE** (Indicate sources of information for all statements)

**20. Architectural Significance**

- a. Key structure/individually may qualify for the National Register
- b. Contributing structure  c. Not eligible/intrusion

Perhaps the most significant feature of this courthouse is the rectangular light court, covered with a white glass barrel vaulted skylight. Note also marble staircase rising within the light court, with brass balustrade and handrails. Adamesque detail in light court. Passages around perimeter of court set off by column screens of Corinthian and Ionic derivation.

The exterior form is also worth mentioning, principally because it is unusual. Its site requires the long axis of the building to be perpendicular to the main facade (unlike all other Beaux Arts/Neoclassical courthouses in Iowa), and the mansards of the corner pavilions and center frontispiece are very old-fashioned, reminding one of the Second Empire courthouse at Bloomfield (Davis County).

**21. Historical Significance**

Theme(s) Politics/Government

- a. Key structure/individually may qualify for the National Register
- b. Contributing structure  c. Not eligible/intrusion

This courthouse is locally significant as the historical focus of county government, and of the political power and prestige derived from the community's status as the county seat. As center of county government, an Iowa town was reasonably assured of economic and population growth, and a prominent role in local social and political life. The county courthouse represents a significant public investment in a structure built not simply for utilitarian purposes, but also as a monument associated with the historical importance of county organization and development.

See Continuation Sheet

**22. Sources** (for primary and secondary sources, give complete facts of publication: author, title, place of publication, date, etc.):

Andreas, A.T. Illustrated Historical Atlas of Iowa. Chicago: Andreas Atlas Co., 1875.

Pratt, LeRoy G. The Counties and Courthouses of Iowa. Mason City, Iowa: Klipto Printing and Office Supply Co., 1977.

Stanek, Edward and Jacqueline. Iowa's Magnificent County Courthouses. Des Moines: Wallace-Homestead Book Co., 1976.

Prepared by \_\_\_\_\_ Date January, 1980  
 Address \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone \_\_\_\_\_  
 Organization DHP

**FOR DIVISION OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION USE ONLY**

1. OFFICE INFORMATION SOURCES ON THIS PROPERTY

<input type="checkbox"/> COUNTY RESOURCE FILE	<input type="checkbox"/> REVIEW AND COMPLIANCE PROJECT:
<input type="checkbox"/> WINDSHIELD SURVEY	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> NATIONAL REGISTER	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER _____
<input type="checkbox"/> GRANTS-IN-AID: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER _____
<input type="checkbox"/> DETERMINATION OF ELIGIBILITY	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER _____

2. SUBJECT TRACES

a. \_\_\_\_\_

b. \_\_\_\_\_

c. \_\_\_\_\_

d. \_\_\_\_\_

e. \_\_\_\_\_

3. PHOTO IMAGES Windshield Survey

362/13-18

CONTINUATION SHEET

Item Number(s) \_\_\_\_\_

WEBSTER COUNTY

In 1856, the largest town in northwestern Iowa, named Homer, had a population of over 600 people. It had a schoolhouse, a public building, a church, several blacksmith shops, and many log cabins. Shortly after the organization of Webster County, Homer was selected as the county seat. But the aggressive villagers of the then little-known town of Fort Dodge immediately began a fight to secure the honor from Homer. An election was held on April 7, 1856, favoring Fort Dodge as the new county seat by a vote of 407 to 264.

Webster County secured the title to the first courthouse site in Fort Dodge on August 20, 1858. In the spring of 1859, county voters authorized the expenditure of up to \$50,000 for the building of a courthouse. The cornerstone was laid on May 8, 1859, and immediately construction problems commenced. The architect had designed the cupola to be nearly as large as the roof, and therefore, impracticable. The stone required by the specifications could not be furnished, and the plans for the structure were in a constant state of flux. No work had been done for eight months while the contractors were vainly trying to raise the money to remain fluid. The completion time for the building had been extended two years, and only the first story was finished. The original contractors abandoned their task and new contractors were put on the job.

A plain two-story building, measuring 50 by 100 feet, was finally turned over to the county in 1861. From that time hence, the building was constantly being remodeled and repaired. After a few years, a clock tower was added and rooms were arranged for federal court offices.

The repairs and remodeling could not keep up with the growth of the county, and the voters approved the construction of a new temple of justice on November 7, 1899. A larger tract of land was sought for the new site, but the search was abandoned when the county discovered that the courthouse property would revert back to the original owner if it ceased to be used for courthouse purposes. The old building was demolished at a cost of \$800. Materials were salvaged from the wreckage to build temporary quarters for the county officials, and the balance of the material was sold. Because of wise management, the total cost to the county of the old courthouse demolition and temporary quarters erection was \$20.40. The formal dedication of the present courthouse was held on September 12, 1902. The cost of the structure was slightly under \$100,000.

--from Stanek, Edward, and Jacqueline Stanek,  
Iowa's Magnificent County Courthouses. Des  
Moines: Wallace-Homestead Book Co., 1976.