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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NOV 28 1989

# 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 Morrill County Courthouse  
other names/site number MO04-2

## 2. Location

street & number M St between 5th & 6th Sts N/A not for publication  
city, town Bridgeport N/A vicinity  
state Nebraska code NE county Morrill code 123 zip code 69336

## 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	_____	_____ sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	_____	_____ structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	_____	_____ objects
		<u>1</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. Hanson  
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:) \_\_\_\_\_

Patrick Ardus

1/10/90

[Signature] 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 brick

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

Settlement

Period of Significance

1909-39

1909-39

Significant Dates

N/A

1909-10

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Eisentraut, J.P.

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.

**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	<u>113</u>	<u>16 15 18 12 13 10</u>	<u>4 6 11 14 14 13 10</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    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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## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Built in 1909-10, the Morrill County Courthouse is an excellent, 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, prominent raised basement, and designed by an architect.

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The Morrill County Courthouse in Bridgeport consists of two stories set upon a raised basement. The compact rectangular building is 58x52' and thus appears to be nearly square. Slightly projecting pavilions with pediments and unadorned parapets above them are centered on three sides and further contribute to the balanced, symmetric appearance. The east facade contains the main entry, and there is a minor entry on the west. Materials and motifs continue on the rear or west facade, but without the pavilions and their columns or pilasters.

Considerable attention is focused on the centered entrance, a feature of the County Citadel. A shallowly pitched moulded pediment of metal tops the entry pavilion and continues around the building as a moulded cornice. Below the pediment of this main (east) facade are squared brick columns (with pilasters behind them) framing the double door entrance. Smooth moulded stone capitals and bases contrast well with the rock-faced pedestals of the pavilion's columns. Simple double-hung windows are paired above the door. An attractive moulded stone lintel with brackets effectively calls attention to the double doors, which are further outlined with a simple stone surround.

Rock-faced tan stone at the main pavilion is repeated for the water table and simple lintels and sills of the double-hung windows, making an effective contrast. The raised basement is reddish brick which contrasts well with the tan stone and tan brick, a warm color combination.

The courthouse is a good example of a County Citadel courthouse exhibiting Classical Revival stylistic elements, such as the symmetric arrangement, smooth surface finish (here contrasted with limited rock-faced trim), a simple parapet and unadorned roofline, pedimented pavilions, and tall pilasters or columns.

The floorplan is compact. Like many County Citadels, the Morrill County Courthouse has stairs that split in the entry foyer to provide access a

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few steps down to the raised basement and several steps up to the first floor. County offices are regularly spaced off a broad but short main hall, and there are offices in all four corners of the floor. Large vaults for the clerk and for the treasurer to use are placed back-to-back in the center of the north facade. They are the only vaults on that floor, although a matching set is repeated directly below in the basement level. Narrow metal spiral stairs provide access from the first floor vaults.

As is the norm for courthouses, the district courtroom is located on the second floor. It occupies a large space (35x43') emanating from the southwest corner of the building--perhaps two-thirds of the floor space. Offices (including one small vault room for county judicial records) and the staircase centered on the east facade ring it on two sides.

Interior details are relatively simple and unaltered. Notable features include the staircase with spindles and a paneled newel having a row of egg-and-dart pattern, large single pane transoms, original high ceilings, and simple wood coat racks with a series of metal hooks. The district courtroom contains many fine original features, including the same spindles and newels of the staircase (here used for the bar separating spectators from the court), wood pews, and the original judge's bench, which is outlined in the egg-and-dart pattern.

Interior alterations are unusually limited: replacement light fixtures and a new ceiling in the courtroom. Exterior changes are similarly few in number: small concrete block enclosed rear entry addition, two replacement light globes flanking the main entry, and metal fire stairs at the rear.

Originally the jail was located in the basement, but in the 1950s a modern facility meeting statutory requirements was constructed. The one-story hipped roof jail is faced with tan brick that matches the courthouse and has metal casement windows. It conveys the impression of a residence due to its small scale and vaguely ranch style form. The jail, a noncontributing element due to its recent construction date, is located unobtrusively on the northwest corner of the courthouse square.

The courthouse is centered on the east half of a full city block where it enjoys a spacious, tree-strewn lawn. A single concrete walk leads directly to the main entrance. A gravel parking lot (and the jail) occupy the west half of the site. The only objects are a simple flagpole and a small metal utility shed (neither were counted in this nomination).

The Morrill County Courthouse faces a main commercial street, also a

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highway, that has commercial buildings. Behind it is a residential area. South of the courthouse square is Bridgeport's commercial district, with the railroad tracks at the end of this commercial area, a typical "T-town" arrangement.

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The Morrill 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 Morrill County. It is an excellent 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. In addition, the courthouse represents factors (the railroad and passage of the Kinkaid Act) that influenced the founding and settlement of the county and, in the case of the railroad, directly led to the construction of the courthouse.

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 an impression of a government building representing modernity, simplicity, strength, and prosperity, also features of the County Citadel.

The Period of Significance is 1909, when construction began, to 1939, when the "fifty year rule" takes effect. The Morrill 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.

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Morrill County is located in the western panhandle of Nebraska. It was the scene of early white activity, for the Platte River traverses it from southeast to northwest. Mormons, gold seekers, and westward-bound settlers used the Platte River trails beginning in earnest in the late 1840s. The Bridgeport area was crossroads of important pioneer trails, and nearby Courthouse Rock and Jailhouse Rock were landmarks for travelers.

Despite this early use, the area comprising Morrill County was not permanently settled until the 1880s, along with the rest of the Sand Hills region. Settlers determined the area was well suited for cattle raising as well as grain farming in irrigated areas. A further boost to settlement occurred in 1899 when the Burlington Railroad began construction of a rail line through the county. The Lincoln Land Company, the real estate arm of the Burlington Railroad, platted rail stops across the county, including Bridgeport in 1900.

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What is presently Morrill County had been a part of Cheyenne County. Morrill and Garden Counties were the last of six counties to be carved from Cheyenne County. In 1907 a group of Bridgeport area residents petitioned that county's board to hold an election on becoming a separate county. During this period, area population increased notably following passage of the Kinkaid Act in 1904 increasing the size of homestead land a farmer could claim. In addition, creation of irrigation districts along the North Platte valley attracted settlers to the area, especially after 1908.

Voters approved of the proposed division on November 3, 1908, and Morrill County was officially separated from Cheyenne County on March 9, 1909. Fittingly, the county was named for the president of the Lincoln Land Company, Charles H. Morrill. A portrait of the executive, who was also active in the Republican Party, graces the main hallway of the courthouse in recognition of his role in providing the present courthouse.

County seat contenders in the newly created county were Bridgeport and Bayard. Bridgeport was more centrally located and won the county seat election, 575 votes to 375. Feeling that a suitable courthouse was important, the county board acted quickly. On May 15, 1909, the commissioners ordered an election on whether to issued \$15,000 in bonds to underwrite courthouse construction. The Bridgeport newspaper supported the idea and was sure the bond issue would pass, for the county "is not populated by a lot of mossbacks." Rather, its residents were "energetic and progressive" and would therefore approve the measure. The bond issue indeed passed and on July 2, 1909, the newspaper announced "Bridgeport is well satisfied with the result, thank you, and compliments the voters on their good sense."

Bridgeport boosters took their quest for a fine new courthouse beyond the bond issue ballot box. In response to a request from the Bridgeport Commercial Club in 1908, the Lincoln Land Company agreed to help build the courthouse if Bridgeport was named county seat by April 1, 1909. The county received \$10,000 from the company and a courthouse site when it complied with certain stipulations. The courthouse had to be brick, cost at least \$15,000, and be completed by April 1, 1910. In addition, the company offered a courthouse site, a common railroad technique for ensuring their rail stop was also county seat.

The Morrill County Courthouse may be the only such railroad-assisted courthouse still standing in Nebraska; other counties obtained their first courthouse through railroad assistance, but it was typically a modest wood frame building intended to be replaced. The Morrill County



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Courthouse is an excellent example of the role of the railroad in initial county settlement and county seat prosperity.

On July 28, 1909, the county board discussed courthouse plans of five architects present in person and of five more who mailed their plans. On August 18, 1909, they selected J.P. Eisentraut (also referred to as the Eisentraut Company) of Kansas City to design the Morrill County Courthouse. No other information is available about Eisentraut.

The contract for general contractor was awarded to Winters and Short of Atwood, Kansas on October 5, 1909. The county board then claimed the \$10,000 from the Lincoln Land Company and deed to the courthouse site, since Bridgeport had in fact been named county seat and the courthouse was under contract to be built. The county met the conditions of the agreement in October 1909, well in advance of the April 1910 deadline, although the building was not actually completed until August 1910.

By mid-June 1910 construction was well underway, and on August 31, 1910, "the building was accepted in the name of the county, and the architect discharged," according to county records.

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- Long, Barbara Beving. "County Courthouses of Nebraska." Multiple Property Submission. 1989.
- Morrill County. Commissioners' Records. Book 1.
- "Morrill County. Pioneer Crossroads Courthouse." Report in NeSHPO files. Newspaper article quotes are from this report.
- "Morrill County." Report. County Clerk's office.
- Works Progress Administration. Survey of County Courthouse Records. 1936. NeSHS Archives. Morrill County.
- Lincoln Land Company to President, Commercial Club, Bridgeport. December 9, 1908. Letter displayed in courthouse.
- Nebraska State Historical Society. Photo Collection. #M281-1020.
- Phillips, Anna and Ball, Vilma. History of Box Butte County...and...Morrill [County]. Hemingford: by the authors, 1939.

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Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property, Morrill County Courthouse, occupies all of Block 2 of the Eighth Addition to Bridgeport and is roughly 300x300' in size.

Boundary Justification

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

