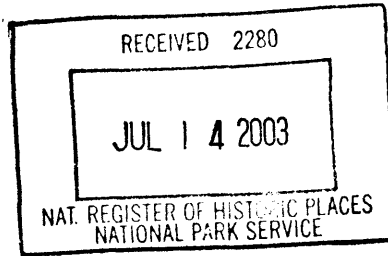


JUL 10 2003

NPS Form 10-900  
(Oct. 1990)

OMB No. 10024-0018

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service



National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "X" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

Name of Property

historic name Des Moines County Court House

other names/site number P.W.A. Docket IA 1529-F

2. Location

street & number 513 N. Main Street N/A  not for publication

city or town Burlington N/A  vicinity

state Iowa code IA county Des Moines code 057 zip code 52601

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. ( see continuation sheet for additional comments).

Rowell G. Sorke July 10, 2003  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date  
**STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA**

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Date  
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the 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:) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Entered in the National Register  
Signature of the Keeper AUG 28 2003 Date of Action

**5. Classification**

<b>Ownership of Property</b> (Check as many boxes as apply)		<b>Category of Property</b> (Check only one box)		<b>Number of Resources within Property</b> (Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)		
<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> district	Contributing	Noncontributing	
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> site	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	buildings
		<input type="checkbox"/> object		<u>1</u>		sites
						structures
					<u>2</u>	objects
				<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	Total

**Name of related multiple property listing**  
Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)  
PWA-Era County Courthouses of Iowa MPD

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**  
0

**6. Function or Use**

<b>Historic Functions</b> (Enter categories from instructions)	<b>Current Functions</b> (Enter categories from instructions)
<u>GOVERNMENT/courthouse</u>	<u>GOVERNMENT/courthouse</u>
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

**7. Description**

<b>Architectural Classification</b> (Enter categories from instructions)	<b>Materials</b> (Enter categories from instructions)
<u>OTHER/PWA Moderne</u>	foundation <u>STONE/limestone</u>
_____	walls <u>BRICK</u>
_____	<u>STONE</u>
	roof <u>ASPHALT</u>
	other _____
	_____

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

**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 # \_\_\_\_\_

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

- ARCHITECTURE
- GOVERNMENT
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1940 - 1953

**Significant Dates**

1940

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Keffer & Jones

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

Des Moines County Auditor's Office

Des Moines County Court House  
Name of Property

Des Moines County, IA  
County and State

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreeage of Property** Less than 5 acres

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 [15] [616]021810 [415]11931810      2 [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]  
Zone      Easting      Northing      Zone      Easting      Northing

3 [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]      4 [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]  
Zone      Easting      Northing      Zone      Easting      Northing

See continuation sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description**  
(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

**Boundary Justification**  
(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Mariys A. Svendsen, Svendsen Tyler, Inc.

organization for State Historical Society of Iowa      date January 2003

street & number N3834 Deep Lake Road      telephone 715/469-3300

city or town Sarona      state WI      zip code 54870

**Additional Documentation**  
Submit the following items with the complete form:

**Continuation Sheets**

**Maps**

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs**

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

**Additional items**  
(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

**Property Owner**  
(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Des Moines County, c/o Carol Copeland, Auditor

street & number 513 N. Main Street      telephone 319/753-8203

city or town Burlington      state IA      zip code 52601

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
Continuation Sheet

Section Number 7

Page 1

Des Moines County Court House  
Name of Property

Des Moines County, IA  
County and State

**7. Description**

**Site:** The Des Moines County Court House (contributing) was built in 1939-1940 on a quarter-block site at the southwest corner of North Main and Court streets just north of the downtown in Burlington, Iowa. Main Street parallels the Mississippi River and the gently sloping hillside site occupied by the courthouse offers dramatic views of the river and the Great River Bridge (U.S. Highway 34) to the northeast. The courthouse site (contributing) occupies a hillside that drops approximately ten feet from northwest to southeast. The building is set back from the front sidewalk approximately 25 feet. An asphalt paved parking area extends along the rear of the building adjacent to the alley, which is officially denoted as "Blackstone Alley." In the years since the courthouse was constructed, an additional parking lot has been established on a cleared site south of the building. A small freestanding building (non-contributing) used for transporting county prisoners was installed after the jail was removed from the courthouse in 1997. It is located adjacent to the northwest corner of the building.

A small commemorative monument (non-contributing) is located north of the front entrance walk on the east side of the building. It contains a section of exterior stone base relief trim taken from a pediment on the original courthouse that stood a half block south of the present building. The stone piece was discovered in storage in the 1960s and placed in the present brick and stone monument in 1972. The stone piece includes a profile of Chief Black Hawk who was the namesake of the Black Hawk Treaty that opened this section of Iowa to Euro-American settlement in 1832.<sup>1</sup> A non-original flagpole (non-contributing) is installed south of the sidewalk leading to the main entrance.

Burlington's central business district extends along and either side of Jefferson Street, which parallels Court Street, two blocks south of the courthouse. The blocks immediately surrounding the courthouse include a former hospital, a church, a library, commercial buildings, and residences. The block immediately to the north formerly contained the Burlington Hospital and has recently been cleared. A four-lane highway built in the 1970s to carry U.S. 34 extends along an east-west route several blocks north of the courthouse.

**Exterior:** The Des Moines County Court House is one of ten courthouses built in Iowa during the federal Public Works Administration (PWA) program's operation in the 1930s. It has a rectangular footprint measuring approximately 126 feet by 70 feet with the front oriented toward the east. The courthouse is constructed of poured concrete with a two-tone brick and stone facing. The foundation is clad in Bedford limestone while the walls are faced in mottled tan and light brown-colored brick set in a light gray-colored mortar. Decorative cut stone is also Bedford limestone.

**Front elevation:** On the front or east elevation, the building's central section is eleven bays wide with a height of 4 stories or approximately 48 feet. A 1-story addition built in the 1970s is located at

---

<sup>1</sup>"Stone Indian Is Gathering Dust," *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, (Burlington, Iowa), April 2, 1964; "Chief Black Hawk returned to the Des Moines county courthouse (photo caption)," *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, (Burlington, Iowa), June 14, 1972.

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
Continuation Sheet

Section Number 7

Page 2

Des Moines County Court House  
Name of Property

Des Moines County, IA  
County and State

the north end of the building. The levels were originally designated as ground, first, second and third with a basement level extending beneath the entire building. The raised foundation is clad in brick with a limestone watertable separating the ground level and first floor. The central section's seven bays set forward approximately 4 feet and the parapet height is approximately 2 feet higher than the two-bay north and south sections. The center five bays are set off by vertical cut stone trim and the darker toned brick for the recessed brick panels separating the windows. Octagonal stone pieces are set between the ground floor windows and the first floor windows. Cut limestone is used elsewhere on the front façade for the entrance surround, the solid blocks that form the balustrade for the entrance steps, all window sills, the beltcourse between the ground level and first floor, a lintel band over the third floor windows, and coping. Cast bronze lettering mounted on the brick wall above the five center bays reads "Des Moines County Court House." The building's original flat roof was augmented with the installation of a low-pitched hipped roof in the mid-1990s. The roof is not visible from Main Street.

The concrete entrance steps are centered on the front elevation between the stone block balustrades. The front entrance surround consists of large cut-stone pieces laid on both sides of the door and over the transom. The vertical edges of the stone pieces facing the entrance doors are curved. The beltcourse between the ground and first floor ties into the stone surround. The transom above the door originally had an elaborate metal grillwork design. This was removed and replaced with a clear glass transom in ca. 1976 when all of the windows were replaced and again in 1997. The new windows in the balance of the building are fabricated of metal with a combination of operable casement sash and fixed metal infill panels.

**Side elevations:** On the south and north elevations, the courthouse has eight narrow bays with a height of four stories on the south and three stories on the north due to changes in elevation. An at-grade entrance is located along the south façade with approaches from both the south parking lot and Main Street, the latter created by removal of steps and construction of a concrete ramp. Mechanical equipment for the building's ventilating and air conditioning system is located on a metal deck at the southwest corner of the building. When the building had a new roof installed in the mid-1990s a new sheet metal gutter was installed along the parapet. It has a dentiled design and is painted dark brown. The low pitch of the building's current hipped roof is not visible from the south parking lot.

In addition to the elevation differences between the north and south façades, the north façade has a one-story addition added in the late 1970s. A three-story addition at the northwest corner of the building originally contained a garage in the ground level and storage areas on the first and second floors. Construction of the addition eliminated the garage approach from Main Street placing two levels of offices in its place. The walls are tan-colored brick with stone trim that may have been relocated from the original building's beltcourse when the new space was created. New windows are stair stepped along the steeply sloping wall of the addition. Window arrangements in the upper levels match the south elevation. A similar dentiled gutter is installed for roof drainage. Additional air handling equipment is located on the roof of the addition.

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
Continuation Sheet

Section Number 7

Page 3

Des Moines County Court House  
Name of Property

Des Moines County, IA  
County and State

---

**Rear elevation:** The rear or west elevation faces Blackstone Alley. Brick walls and stone trim match that of the balance of the building. The location of a three-story garage/office addition at the northwest corner of the building reduces the façade's symmetry. The building's original rear entrance is centered on the west façade. A stone surround frames the opening with the original painted metal double doors, each with four horizontal lights, set beneath the multilight transom. A dentiled gutter installed when the low-pitched hipped roof was constructed in the 1990s extends along the rear parapet. The roof is not visible from the alley level but can be seen from certain vantage points a half-block to the west along North 3<sup>rd</sup> Street. New windows installed in the rear elevation are of a similar design to others replaced in 1997.

**Interior Floor Plan:** The Des Moines County Court House has a central corridor plan similar to those of the other nine PWA-Era Courthouses in Iowa. The front and rear entrances located midway along the west and east façades open into entrance vestibules set between the basement and ground level on the east façade and the ground level and first floor on the west façade. On the interior, these vestibules are set perpendicular to the central corridor that runs the full length of the building. Individual county offices outfitted to meet the needs of specific county functions open onto the public corridors on the ground and first floors. Circulation between floors in the courthouse is via the central staircase located opposite the front entrance vestibule and the secondary staircases located in the northwest and southeast corners of the building. An elevator was included in the original plan and is located adjacent to the central stairwell in the north end of the central corridor. The district courtroom and related judicial services are located on the second floor and the county jail was originally located on the third floor. This space was vacated after construction of a new law enforcement center in 1997. Design elements and finishes for the most important spaces in the courthouse are discussed in greater detail below.

**Entrance vestibules:** The front entrance vestibule has two-tone terrazzo floors, a 4 foot gray marble wainscot, plastered walls, and original acoustic tile or fiber board ceilings. A set of stairs leads to an upper landing. Here a single door leads to the Assembly Room and a pair of original doors leads to the central corridor on the ground floor. These doors are metal with a dark brown grained finish, bronze hardware, and five horizontal lights. Each of the sidelights and the transom are configured with have five lights.

The rear entrance vestibule doors for both the exterior double-door opening and the two interior openings are original, each constructed of metal and containing horizontal lights. An 8-light transom is over the exterior doors and 4-light transoms are over the inner doors.

**Public corridors:** The ground floor's central corridor has a two-tone terrazzo floor (light gray and dark gray) and base (dark gray). Gray marble wainscoting measures 42 inches and is set on a 6-inch terrazzo base with textured plaster covering the walls. The wainscoting on the east wall of the central corridor was custom built to hold two large plaques containing honor rolls of veterans from the Mexican War, Civil War, Spanish-American War, and World War I. It is likely that these were

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
Continuation Sheet

Section Number 7

Page 4

Des Moines County Court House  
Name of Property

Des Moines County, IA  
County and State

originally installed in the old courthouse. A bronze tablet citing the Federal Works Administration (successor to the PWA) as the funding source for the courthouse and giving the construction date of 1939 hangs next to one veterans plaque. A similarly styled commemorative tablet listing the names of the supervisors, county auditor, architect, and various contractors is mounted next to the other veterans plaque. A newer plaque installed adjacent to the elevator commemorates the American Bicentennial listing the names of Revolutionary War veterans buried in Des Moines County

Marble clad columns are located adjacent to the central stairs along the west wall of the corridor. In 1979 firewall enclosures were installed at each level surrounding the central staircase using wire glass doors and walls, in this case connected to the columns. The central sections of the ceiling in the public corridor are clad in the original acoustic tile used elsewhere in the building and other Keffer and Jones courthouse designs. A strip of fluorescent lights (non-original) extends down the center of the ceiling in both directions. New air conditioning distribution units are located at the ends of the corridor.

Openings onto the corridor are a mix of original and new configurations. The south end of the corridor has the original double door entrance with glass block sidelights. Openings for a public telephone booth and drinking fountain retain their original metal folding doors and marble surround, respectively. Restrooms were modified to accommodate accessibility requirements in the 1980s. For example, the women's restroom was modified from three to two stalls but original finishes such as two tone terrazzo floors, exposed radiators, 6 foot marble cladding on walls, and wall-hung sinks remain. The original public elevator opening is located along the west wall in the north end of the corridor. Wooden chairs acquired as part of the new equipment to furnish the courthouse in 1940 line the walls.

The first and second floor corridors are finished in a similar manner as the ground floor with a few exceptions. On these levels the original configuration of county offices with the original glass blocked entrance openings, clear glass transoms, and metal doors opening onto the central corridor replaced with new public counters and retractable metal service window closures.

**County offices:** As noted above, each of the offices originally contained a service counter at which public business was transacted. This was located inside the office with a public lobby in front of the counter and a staff work area to the rear of the counter. To gain more staff desk space in the offices these interior counters have been removed and one or more private offices added. The vault spaces for storage of records remain in each of the offices although the fireproof aspects of these areas (exterior window closures and operable doors) are not always in use. In some cases, internal circulation hallways, restrooms, meeting rooms, conference rooms, and storage areas are also included in the county offices. Staircases located in the northwest and southeast corners of the building are designed for employee use. A second elevator for freight and prisoner transfers is located adjacent to the northwest staircase. Walls throughout the office areas are plastered with original oak chair rail present in some cases. Flooring is a combination of original asphalt tile and carpeting (non-original). A number of ceilings have been lowered with acoustic tile panels and



**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
Continuation Sheet

Section Number 7

Page 5

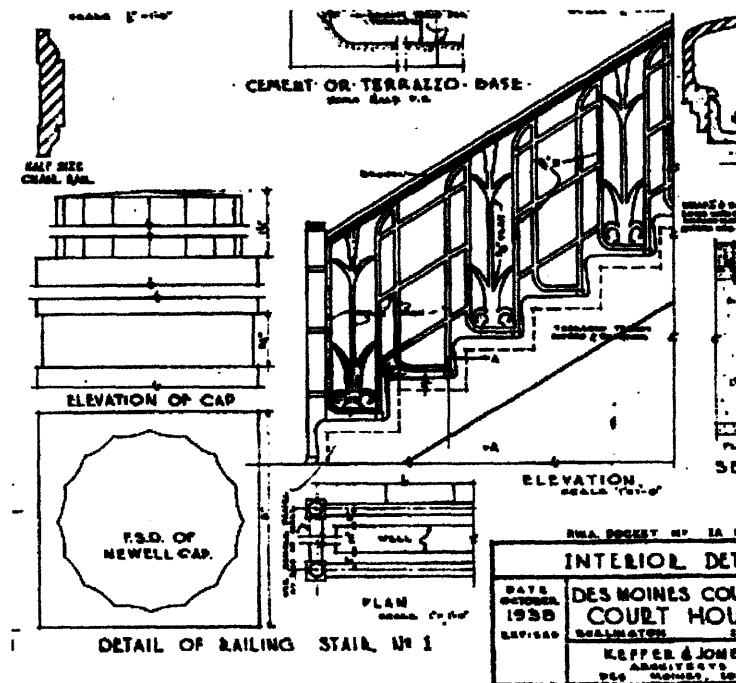
Des Moines County Court House  
Name of Property

Des Moines County, IA  
County and State

recessed fluorescent light fixtures. The board of supervisors' room on the first floor has its original chairs.

**Central staircase:** The central staircase is located just inside the rear entrance opposite the front entrance. Firewall enclosures consisting of wire glass walls and doors were installed to separate the stairwell from the balance of the building in 1979. These were installed in a manner that left the design of the original staircase intact. It features left-hand runs leading up to a wide landings between flights. The steps are made of dark gray terrazzo and the cast iron balustrade has a brass handrail. The design for the balustrade by Keffer and Jones incorporated stylized flowers and geometric shapes in the pattern. Oak handrails are mounted on the marble wainscoting along the stairwell walls. Oversize windows at the landings provide abundant light for the main corridors at each level. Keffer and Jones' drawing for the stairwell appears below. An examination of the existing newel cap and balustrade patternwork indicates that it was executed as planned.

**Central Staircase Detail<sup>2</sup>**



**Courtroom:** The most important space aesthetically and functionally in a courthouse is frequently the courtroom. The Des Moines County Court House courtroom is located on the second floor facing the front of the building (east). This room has its original dimensions including its two-story ceiling height and most of its original finishes and furnishings. Floors are carpeted over the original

<sup>2</sup>Interior Details," architectural plans and drawings for Des Moines County Court House, prepared by Keffer & Jones, Des Moines, Iowa, October 1938

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
Continuation Sheet

Section Number 7

Page 6

Des Moines County Court House  
Name of Property

Des Moines County, IA  
County and State

asphalt tile specified for this space. A 5-foot tall oak veneer wainscoting has large squares set between shallow pilasters. The wainscoting likely originally had a dark stained finish but currently has a bleached "blond" finish, as do all other wood elements in the room. The upper wall areas have their original finish, which includes alternating sections of acoustic tiles and plaster. The ceiling has a new acoustic tile ceiling with recessed high-pressure sodium bulbs for the lighting. A simple plaster cornice with vertical cuts was covered when the dropped ceiling was installed. The window openings have been infilled in the top sections with concrete block.

The courtroom seating is organized in theater style with a center aisle and two side aisles. The judge's bench is at the south end, the jury box along the west wall, counsel tables in front of the windows, and audience seating in the north half of the room. Bleached oak is the wood species used for all wood elements in the courtroom including paneled finishes for the raised jury box, judge's bench, and witness stand, counsel tables and chairs, and seven rows of pews in the audience seating area. Juror chairs have cast iron pedestal bases with upholstered seats and brass foot rails. The judge's bench is centered beneath an acoustic tile wall and its finishes match those of the jury box and wainscoting. All horizontal moldings have convex curve profiles and all perpendicular corners have curved edges.

The judge's chambers, court reporter office, law library, jury room, and other related offices are located off an inner corridor along the south end of the second floor and are accessed through doors located to either side of the judge's bench. The doors leading to these areas have a dark grained finish with a plain wide oak trim molding. A second set of doors opens into the inner corridor from the central corridor.

**Floor plan:** As originally conceived, the principal county offices for the Des Moines County Court House were to be located on the ground and second floors with unassigned space on the ground floor reserved for expansion. The ground floor included an assembly room, an office and examination room for the county superintendent, offices for the county treasurer, and an office and laboratory for the "health unit." The first floor included a room for the board of supervisors, the auditor, county engineer, and recorder. The second floor contained the clerk's office, courtroom, law library, judge's chambers, court reporter office, jury room, witness room, sheriff's office, and storage vaults. The third floor originally contained the sheriff's apartment, juvenile and women's cell rooms, isolation cells, men's cells, day room for prisoners, jury room, and sleeping rooms for jurors.

During the sixty-year life of the courthouse, a series of small to medium sized, phased remodelings have taken place. Unassigned spaces reserved on each floor have been taken over by new and expanded county offices. A number of changes were based on the obsolescence of certain offices (county school superintendent) and functions (sheriff's residence and dormitory space for jurors). In other instances, the expanded needs of specific offices were accommodated by the allocation of unassigned areas (assessor's office) or removal to office locations outside of the courthouse (county engineer). Changes made to meet access requirements were done within the original space allocations (ADA rest rooms). Removal of the jail and sheriff's department in 1997 has

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

Continuation Sheet

Section Number 7

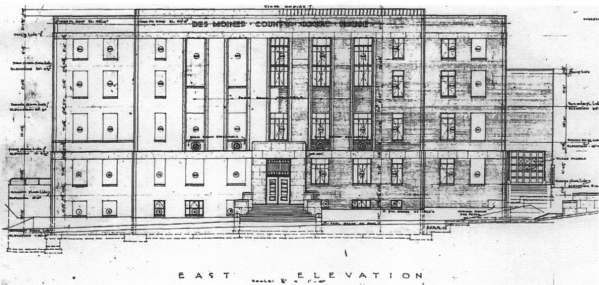
Page 7

Des Moines County Court House  
Name of Property

Des Moines County, IA  
County and State

created a vacant area on the third floor. Plans are currently being prepared by architects Metzger Johnson of Burlington for adjustments in offices on the second floor and a reassignment of vacant space on the third floor. Selected floor plans and drawings for the courthouse appear below.<sup>3</sup>

**Des Moines County Court House, Front or East Elevation (1938)**



<sup>3</sup>Architectural plans and drawings for Des Moines County Court House, prepared by Keffer & Jones, Des Moines, Iowa, October 1938. The original sources for plans and drawings reproduced in this and other PWA-Era Courthouse nominations came in various sized formats from original documents, old newspaper clippings, microfilmed newspaper articles, old photo copies, and reverse print images, all of varying quality. The purpose of including images here is to provide a sense of the overall form and delineation of space in the building's principal unaltered floors.

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
Continuation Sheet

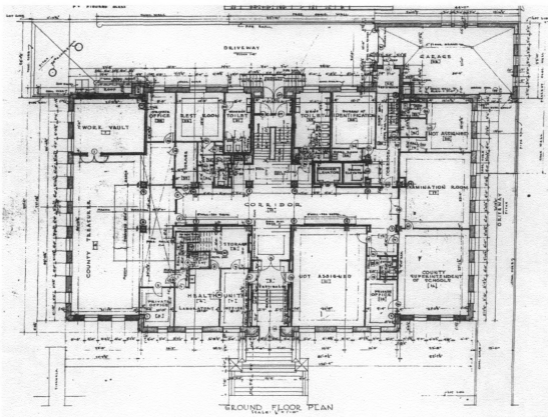
Section Number 7

Page 8

Des Moines County Court House  
Name of Property

Des Moines County, IA  
County and State

→  
N  
**Des Moines County Court House, Ground Floor Plan (1938)**



NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
Continuation Sheet

Section Number 7

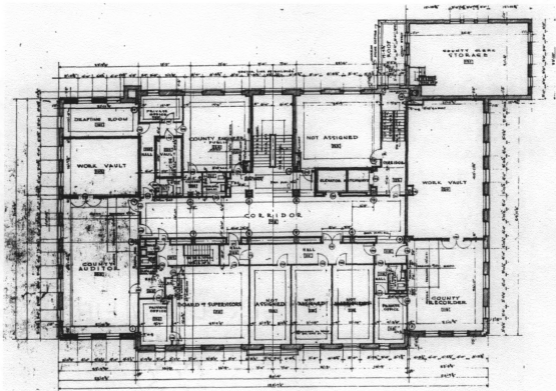
Page 9

Des Moines County Court House  
Name of Property

Des Moines County, IA  
County and State

→  
N

Des Moines County Court House, First Floor Plan (1938)



FIRST FLOOR PLAN  
SCALE 1/8" = 1'-0"

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**

Continuation Sheet

Section Number 7

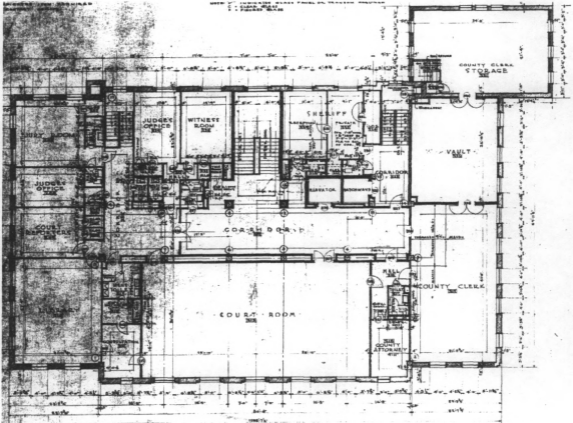
Page 10

Des Moines County Court House  
Name of Property

Des Moines County, IA  
County and State

N

**Des Moines County Court House, Second Floor Plan (1938)**



SECOND FLOOR PLAN  
SCALE 1/8" = 1'-0"

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
Continuation Sheet

Section Number 7

Page 11

Des Moines County Court House  
Name of Property

Des Moines County, IA  
County and State

---

***Summary of contributing and non-contributing resources:***

All historic resources associated with the courthouse were evaluated according to rules set forth in *National Register Bulletin 16A, How to Complete the National Register Registration Form (1991)*. The evaluation was made according to procedures further specified in Section F.v. "Individually Eligible Properties," p. 47 of the PWA-Era County Courthouses of Iowa MPD. A summary follows.

- 1 Contributing Building: courthouse
- 1 Non-contributing Building: prisoner transporting shelter
- 1 Contributing Site: courthouse square
- 2 Non-contributing Objects: flagpole, Black Hawk Memorial

***Summary of alterations:***

- Ventilation changes for courtroom, 1945
- Central air conditioning and electrical revisions, 1967, 1968, 1975 and 1976
- New boiler, 1970
- Basement level vault converted to offices, early 1970s
- Installation of Chief Black Hawk bas relief in exterior memorial, 1972
- Bleaching of finishes of courtroom's wood components, date unknown
- Central stairwell firewalls added, 1979
- Public service counters moved to corridors, county offices remodeled, late 1970s
- Front steps replaced and handrails added, 1979
- New windows, 1976 and 1997
- Office alterations, ground and first floors; added second courtroom on second floor, 1983
- New asphalt shingled hipped roof and gutters added, ca.1995
- Third floor jail areas vacated, 1997

The changes made to the Des Moines County Court House are consistent with the registration requirements set forth under Section F.iv.c of the "PWA-Era County Courthouses of Iowa" MPD, pp. F45-F48. All of the window openings have retained their original size with replacement sash incorporating metal transoms where reduced size sash have been installed. The current set of windows is an improvement in design over the first window replacement, which included glass block in the openings. One of the more significant changes in terms of potential for impact was the installation of a new hipped roof. Because of the siting of the building on a steeply sloped site, the new low-pitched roof is invisible from the front and side façades. Visual examinations made from various site angles along the rear determined that the effect of the roof change is minimal and not sufficient to keep this building from meeting National Register integrity requirements.

The most important interior changes in the Des Moines County Court House involve enclosure of

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
Continuation Sheet

Section Number 7, 8

Page 12

Des Moines County Court House  
Name of Property

Des Moines County, IA  
County and State

the central stairwell with glass firewalls and the relocation of public service counters along the central corridors. The design used for the firewalls is similar to that of the original vestibule separation walls. The new stairwell enclosures do not interfere with important elements of the staircase and are, therefore, considered acceptable. The addition of counter spaces was more problematic. The retention of a majority of the original corridor openings lessens the impact of the counter space changes. Other floor plan and mechanical changes were considered acceptable because of their minimal impact on the more public spaces in the courthouse.

The change made in courtroom wood finish from dark to light has had an important effect on the courtroom's aesthetics. This change remains relatively minor, however, because of its easy reversibility. Like many other PWA-Era courthouses, the relocation of the county jail outside of the building has left the top floor available for remodeling as offices. At the time of nomination this work was still in the planning stages with former cell blocks, day rooms, support facilities, and various offices spaces scheduled for reuse as a law library, county attorney offices, and meeting rooms.

## **8. Statement of Significance**

The Des Moines County Court House is significant under Criteria A and C as one of ten county courthouses built in Iowa during the New Deal Era as part of the federal Public Works Administration and its successor agencies. Its construction represented a significant public investment of federal and local dollars by voters in a county that was hard pressed by the effects of the Great Depression. Designed by Keffer and Jones of Des Moines, an important Iowa architectural firm responsible for the design of numerous PWA funded public buildings, it is an example of the PWA Moderne style of public building architecture developed during the 1930s and early 1940s. Its design blends Art Deco and Moderne style elements with the utilitarian advantages of modern office building construction. Nomination of the Des Moines County Court House is consistent with the registration requirements set forth in the Section F of the "PWA-Era County Courthouses of Iowa" MPD.

### ***Historical Background:***

#### ***i. New Deal Era and the Public Works Administration:***

In June 1933 near the end of Franklin Roosevelt's first one hundred days in office, Congress passed the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) creating two important federal initiatives designed to combat the Depression. The National Recovery Administration or NRA was established to set up code agreements with private industries that would encourage greater employment and at the same time, regulate wages and affirm union organizing. The other new agency was intended to serve an emergency role hence the name, Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works. A short time later, President Franklin Roosevelt appointed General Hugh Johnson to head the NRA. During the next two years it would have a fractious history until the Supreme Court struck it down in May 1935.



**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
Continuation Sheet

Section Number 8

Page 13

Des Moines County Court House  
Name of Property

Des Moines County, IA  
County and State

---

Roosevelt's second initiative on behalf of industrial workers was intended to serve as an emergency program that would soon outlive its useful life.<sup>4</sup> He appointed his good friend Harry Hopkins to head the newly established Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) and Civil Works Administration (CWA). Responsibilities for the new Public Works Administration (PWA) were assigned to Harold Ickes, Roosevelt's fiscally conservative Secretary of the Interior. The following year the CWA efforts were also transferred to Ickes. Under their direction a series of federal undertakings were given form and substance. Management structures were created, distribution systems organized, administrative practices reorganized, and funding set in motion. By June 1934, Ickes had overseen expenditure of \$3.3 billion to 13,266 federal projects and 2,407 non-federal projects. The popular federal program would see a series of successive appropriations continue for nearly a decade until the PWA was dismantled in 1943. It is this aspect of the NIRA that comprises the balance of this discussion.

It is not surprising that the first public works projects to be funded through the FERA were for federal agencies. The Federal Employment Stabilization Board created in 1931 was responsible for establishing a six-year program of federal construction projects. However, under President Hoover's administration that was as far as the planning had gone. Now, with federal funding in place, many of these construction initiatives were ready to move forward. As a result, Washington, D.C. was among the first cities to benefit from the demand for both skilled and unskilled workers created by these federal programs.

The other part of the NIRA was intended to stimulate non-federal projects where the national government would serve as a partner with states, local communities, schools, and other non-governmental groups. For these projects to get off the ground, considerable planning would have to take place first. Soon after FERA was established, each state was asked to establish an advisory board with three members. Their purpose would be to stimulate applications for the non-federal funds, forward reports to Washington, and handle requests for funds once they were received. These boards were criticized and by February 1934 were discontinued.<sup>5</sup>

State level offices staffed by federal employees soon replaced the state boards. These offices were headed by "state engineers" and despite their titles, their responsibility was to the federal government. In a major effort at decentralization, legal, engineering, and financing experts were transferred from Washington to the State Engineer offices. Over time, there were problems with these offices as well. Their titles lead to confusion as local officials sought to learn how to apply for federal assistance and were unclear as to whether the "State Engineer" was a promoter or administrator.

---

<sup>4</sup>Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Roosevelt: The Coming of the New Deal* (Boston, 1959), p. 104 as quoted in Lisa B. Reitzes, "Moderately Modern: Interpreting the Architecture of the Public Works Administration, Volume II," Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Delaware, May 1989, p. 370.

<sup>5</sup>Jack F. Isakoff, "The Public Works Administration," *University of Illinois Bulletin*, Volume XXXVI, (November 18, 1938), p. 36.

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
**Continuation Sheet**

Section Number 8

Page 14

Des Moines County Court House  
Name of Property

Des Moines County, IA  
County and State

---

Despite these problems, Congressional appropriations continued annually, each year accompanied by mandated changes in the operation of the PWA program. Among the most important were provisions in the Relief Appropriation Act of 1935 that allowed the federal share of PWA projects to be increased from 30 percent to 45 percent. Another provision allowed the grants to cover the cost of architects and engineers, acquisition of necessary land, legal fees, and administrative costs. By including these costs, more localities were able to participate and the quality of projects was enhanced. An executive order issued by President Roosevelt added the requirement that prevailing wage rates be observed on PWA projects.

When the 1936 appropriation bill came up the following year, Congress expressed its continuing concern for the large numbers of unemployed Americans by enacting new measures in the PWA designed to accelerate the expenditure of PWA funds. Historian Lisa Reitzes summarized the conflict:

...it was widely agreed that, for the PWA to have a visible effect on unemployment and poverty, it needed to move quickly on labor-intensive projects; but Ickes insisted that to produce permanent useful public works whose execution would be economical and free from scandal, the PWA had to move slowly and apply strict standards for inclusion in the program...many in the government believed that the PWA needed to dictate what and where projects were undertaken; however, to enlist local support and ensure the "usefulness" of public works projects, many felt that distribution of PWA funds and designation of construction priorities needed to be guided by local decisions.<sup>6</sup>

In the end, Congress prevailed seeking to increase the ranks of the employed by speeding up spending on PWA projects. Setting an aggressive timetable for completion of projects did this.

The following year, Congressional sentiment shifted again. Funding under the PWA Extension Act of 1937 was drastically cut and July 1, 1939 set as the date for completion of all projects. The PWA's administrative staff was cut as it moved towards "liquidation" with state offices among the first to be shut down. Although seven regional offices, each with three or more states, had been in place since early in the life of the PWA, they had not had major responsibilities for project oversight.

This changed in the fall of 1937 as the state PWA offices closed. Thereafter, all grant applications, approvals, bidding and contracting, monitoring of wage scales, correspondence, payments, and auditing would flow through the regional offices. Though final authority remained in Washington, the day-to-day management of the PWA shifted to the regional offices. Iowa was one of eight states included in Region No. 4 headquartered in Omaha. Other states in Region No. 4 included Montana, Wyoming, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Minnesota, and Missouri. The other

---

<sup>6</sup>Lisa B. Reitzes, "Moderately Modern: Interpreting the Architecture of the Public Works Administration, Volume II," Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Delaware, May 1989, p.372-373.

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
Continuation Sheet

Section Number 8

Page 15

Des Moines County Court House  
Name of Property

Des Moines County, IA  
County and State

regional offices were headquartered in New York, Atlanta, Chicago, Fort Worth, San Francisco, and Portland.

By June 1938 with liquidation measures well underway, Congress reversed itself again. Measures to shut down the PWA were temporarily halted and a new appropriation of nearly \$1 billion was authorized. To keep the money flowing as quickly as possible, the appropriation law specified that new projects must be completed by July 1940.

In early 1939 a series of government publications appeared describing the story of the PWA. Some were designed to respond to criticism of the PWA and others were published to document for posterity the success of this experiment in public works construction. *The Story of PWA* came out in the spring of 1939, the lengthy *Public Buildings: A Survey of Architecture of Projects Constructed by Federal and other Governmental Bodies between the Years 1933 and 1939 with the Assistance of the Public Works Administration* came out later that year, and *America Builds the Record of PWA* came out before year's end.

The PWA officially ended in July 1939 as the focus of the Administration began to shift toward readying for war. President Roosevelt's reorganization plan consolidated the efforts of a number of the "alphabet agencies" under the umbrella of the Federal Works Agency (FWA). It absorbed not only the PWA but also the Works Progress Administration (WPA), the Supervising Architect's Office in the Treasury Department (responsible for post office construction), and the U.S. Housing Authority. John M. Carmody was selected to head the new agency. The regional offices continued to operate until 1943 with Iowa projects still in the pipeline managed through the Omaha office through 1941.

**ii. *The PWA at Work in Iowa: County Courthouse Building (1934-1941):***

Establishment of the Public Works Administration in June 1933 prompted formation of a network of 48 state PWA offices. There was no precedent to guide the federal-state-local partnership resulting in considerable time spent during the first months in simply setting up the state offices. Communities were not prepared to respond quickly to a call for PWA projects and as a result, the federal government turned to two other programs to speed federal money into the pipeline – the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and the short-lived Civil Works Administration (CWA).

Meanwhile it became clear that antiquated municipal and county laws governing public building and the poor credit ratings of many cities and counties in the wake of bond failures would further prohibit a prompt set of applications. The PWA responded by sending financing and legal experts to states to assist in drafting new state enabling legislation and arranging for federal loan guarantees. Although no history of Iowa's State PWA Office has been written, it is likely that similar problems and responses were experienced there. The acting state director of Iowa's PWA Office by the time the first county courthouse was being planned in Cass County was P.F. Hopkins.<sup>7</sup> Based on the

<sup>7</sup>P.F. Hopkins' familial relationship, if any, to PWA Administrator Harry Hopkins is unknown.

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
**Continuation Sheet**

Section Number 8

Page 16

Des Moines County Court House  
Name of Property

Des Moines County, IA  
County and State

correspondence record from that office, it appears that he continued in that capacity throughout the office's life.

The process of selecting PWA projects would be the same in Iowa as in other states. Initially applicants would be able to apply for grants amounting to up to 30 percent of the project's costs. Funding could be used for labor and materials but not for project management, architectural and engineering fees, and land acquisition. There would be five "yardsticks" by which local projects would be measured:

1. The social desirability of the project and its relation to coordinated planning.
2. The economic desirability; that is its relation to unemployment and the revival of industry.
3. The soundness of the project from engineering and technical standpoints.
4. The financial ability of the applicant to complete the work and "reasonably secure" any loans by the United States.
5. The legal collectibility of the securities to be purchased or the enforceability of any lease entered into.<sup>8</sup>

In the case of county courthouses, the application would need to be submitted by the county board of supervisors with the actual applications usually prepared by the county auditor. In some Iowa counties, courthouses had been under discussion for years. In the case of Jones County, space for county offices and a courtroom was maintained in rented quarters for more than six decades prior to the completion of the new Jones County Court House in 1937. In Bremer County, the county offices and courtroom were housed in seven buildings including the 1857 courthouse, three banks, and above a hardware store. In the case of three counties, multiple referenda were held to consider building a new courthouse. One unique example involved the Cass County Court House in Atlantic. After a fire destroyed the old courthouse in 1932, a referendum vote was scheduled two months later. Faced with grim economic conditions voters turned down the referendum by a substantial margin. By the time the second vote was held, a citizens group had prompted the board of supervisors to apply for a PWA grant to underwrite a portion of the costs. After the second referendum was held year later, local officials were certain that the availability of a PWA grant had contributed to its passage. In several cases in Iowa when courthouse referenda votes were held in conjunction with a general election they failed. Passage appears to have been more likely when scheduled as part of a special election.

It was necessary for a PWA applicant to provide considerable information about their intended project. The only surviving application for a county courthouse in Iowa is believed to be the application prepared for the Jones County Court House in Anamosa in 1935. It is likely that it was typical of other applications filed. It contained the following:

---

<sup>8</sup>*America Builds. The Record of PWA. Public Works Administration.* Prepared in the Division of Information by the United States, Public Works Administration. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1939.

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
**Continuation Sheet**

Section Number 8

Page 17

Des Moines County Court House  
Name of Property

Des Moines County, IA  
County and State

- a general description of the project
- a statement regarding the status of drawings and specifications
- a breakdown of labor expenses by category of worker, amount, and percentage of grant allotment
- a breakdown of expenses for superintendence, architects, and engineers
- a breakdown of expense for land, materials, equipment, and contingent expenses
- a list of skilled laborers by specific trade and number to be employed
- estimated average worker yearly wage
- estimated total number of man-hours
- estimated daily average number of employees each month for term of the project
- a statement regarding source of other funds and statutory authority to undertake project
- a copy of the application resolution by the board of supervisors
- supplemental information regarding outstanding bonds, borrowing capacity, county population, and assessed valuation<sup>9</sup>

To answer these questions, an applicant-county would need to have preliminary cost estimates in hand. It would be impossible to determine the overall cost figure or any of the breakdowns required in the application without first having a general building plan in hand. To do this it appears that several architectural firms in Iowa were prepared to work for little or no fee during this first phase. In courthouses where Keffer & Jones of Des Moines were involved, the firm signed a contract stipulating that no fee would be charged until the PWA grant was approved and the bonds sold. Their services were limited to preliminary sketches until that time.<sup>10</sup>

The willingness of an architectural firm to work with a county in such a manner allowed two things. First, it enabled the county to prepare an application and respond in an educated manner to the questions posed by federal reviewers. Second, it gave the board of supervisors a building concept and design to promote during the referendum process. If the grants were awarded and the county's voters approved, the architect who had supported the local efforts was likely to secure the design services contract.

Once a PWA application was approved at the state, regional, and national levels, the board of supervisors moved to the next step – the referendum campaign. In virtually every county in the Iowa, these campaigns looked the same. A citizens committee, either formal or informal, undertook a public information campaign to persuade voters of the merits of building a courthouse with the help of a PWA grant. Presentations were given by members of the committee or the board of supervisors to civic organizations. Using the front pages of the local newspapers, articles appeared

<sup>9</sup>Application for Grant, Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works, PWA Form No. 175 for Court House for Jones County, dated July 5, 1935, on file in Auditor's Office, Jones County Court House, Anamosa, Iowa.

<sup>10</sup>Agreement between Architects and Owners, for Court House for Audubon County, dated July 29, 1938, on file in Auditor's Office, Audubon County Court House, Audubon, Iowa.

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
Continuation Sheet

Section Number 8

Page 18

Des Moines County Court House  
Name of Property

Des Moines County, IA  
County and State

regularly touting the merit of grants that would underwrite 45 percent of the cost. Voters were encouraged to think themselves fortunate to be able to get more courthouse than their tax dollars would normally buy.

An example of such a campaign was seen on the front pages of the *Indianola Record* in 1936 and 1937. During the summer of 1936 the Warren County Federated Women's Clubs had the courthouse as part of their quarterly meeting. Following the meeting the *Indianola Record* carried an extensive article with the opinions of various members, both pro and con, cited. The newspaper carried similar articles when the Indianola Chamber of Commerce considered it on its several months later. The opinions of those who favored the new courthouse were best summarized in the comments of one Warren County woman when she said that "she had always been taught to take a piece of pie when it was passed to her. She was heartily in favor of constructing a new courthouse now when the county can get a \$145,000 building for \$80,000."<sup>11</sup> The referendum vote was held in conjunction with the general election in 1936 and failed. Two years later at a special election following a continuing campaign by promoters, the measure passed.

Other pro-courthouse campaign messages stressed the need for a new courthouse to keep records safe. In Cass County, a referendum information pamphlet made the case for approval by pointing out that in Douglas County, Nebraska the county had spent nearly \$300,000 to recreate records lost or damaged in a fire. When Jones County began to make a case for its courthouse in 1935 it contacted Cass County's auditor who happily shared a copy of the information pamphlet.<sup>12</sup>

A third reason frequently given for erecting a courthouse in the midst of a national economic depression related to the cost of bonds. Architect Karl Keffer combined all of these arguments when he spoke to the Audubon Board of Supervisors in August 1938. He said that the "primary reason Audubon County should have a new courthouse is because county records are not safe in case of fire in the present building. The secondary reason is that it would be to the county's financial advantage not only to secure the government grant but to take advantage of present low interest rates county bonds carry."<sup>13</sup> Keffer's assessment of bond rates proved prophetic when the county was able to secure a favorable rate of just 1¾- percent later that year. This rate was less than half that paid four years earlier in Cass County.

Soon, the success of one PWA-funded courthouse encouraged other counties to undertake the application process. By the time Warren County voters were asked to consider approving a referendum the second time, the *Indianola Tribune* was able to feature photographs of three completed buildings – two were completed with PWA grants in Jones and Cass counties while a third, much smaller building, was erected before the PWA was available in Ringgold County.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup>"Women's Clubs Talk Building a Courthouse," *Indianola Record*, July, 1936.

<sup>12</sup>"Suggest for the New Court House for Cass County," prepared by the Board of Supervisors of Cass County, Iowa for November 8, 1932 referendum, on file in Auditor's Office, Jones County Court House, Anamosa, Iowa.

<sup>13</sup>"PWA Grant for Court House is Asked by Board," *The Advocate-Republican*, August 4, 1938.

<sup>14</sup>"County Board Reserves Right to Reject Any and All Architectural Plans for Courthouse," *Indianola Tribune*, August 3, 1938.

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
Continuation Sheet

Section Number 8

Page 19

Des Moines County Court House  
Name of Property

Des Moines County, IA  
County and State

The first county to successfully complete the application, referendum, and courthouse construction process was Cass County in southwest Iowa in 1934. Both Governor Clyde Herring and Lieutenant Governor N. C. Kraschel were on hand for the cornerstone ceremony in March 1934 when 1,200 Atlantic school children turned out to greet them. Groundbreaking ceremonies, cornerstone laying events, courtroom dedications, and courthouse openings were celebrated with parades, keynote speakers, and historical pageants. In most communities completion of the courthouses was viewed as an opportunity to pass the torch from one generation to another and the county's old settlers were given special honors. In all but the last several courthouse completions community boosters used these events to look to better times ahead.

A chronological list of PWA-Era courthouses completed between 1934 and 1941 appears on the following page. All received federal assistance except the Floyd County Court House, which was denied funding when the federal appropriation available for the state ran out.

**Figure 2: Chronological List of PWA-Era Courthouses, 1934-1941**

<b>County/City Federal Project #</b>	<b>Year Completed</b>	<b>Architect</b>	<b>General Contractor</b>	<b>Original Cost<sup>15</sup></b>
Cass Co., Atlantic Federal Public Works Project No. 1410	1934	Dougher, Rich & Woodburn, Des Moines, Iowa	C.C. Larsen Co., Council Bluffs, Iowa	\$130,000
Bremer Co., Waverly P.W.A. Docket IA 1338-R	1937	Mortimer Cleveland, Waterloo, Iowa	Drape Construction Co., Tripoli, Iowa	\$135,000
Jones Co., Anamosa P.W.A. Docket IA 1068-R	1937	Dougher, Rich & Woodburn, Des Moines, Iowa	C.C. Larsen & Sons Co., Council Bluffs, Iowa	\$200,000
Humboldt Co., Dakota City P.W.A. Docket IA 1351-DS	1939	Dougher, Rich & Woodburn, Des Moines, Iowa	Holtze Construction Co., Sioux City, Iowa	\$185,000
Warren Co., Indianola P.W.A. Docket IA 1290-F	1939	Keffer & Jones, Des Moines, Iowa	F.B. Dickinson & Co., Des Moines, Iowa	\$145,000
Audubon Co., Audubon P.W.A. Docket IA 1586-F	1939	Keffer & Jones, Des Moines, Iowa	J.C. Mayer, Clarion, Iowa	\$133,000
Buchanan Co., Independence P.W.A. Docket IA 1447-F	1940	Dougher, Rich & Woodburn, Des Moines, Iowa	C.C. Larsen & Sons Co., Council Bluffs, Iowa	\$254,000
Des Moines Co., Burlington P.W.A. Docket IA 1529-F	1940	Keffer & Jones, Des Moines, Iowa	Paul Steenberg Construction Co., St. Paul, Minnesota	\$280,000
Allamakee Co., Waukon Federal project # unknown	1940	Charles Altfillisch, Decorah, Iowa	Rye & Henkel, Mason City, Iowa	\$202,000
Floyd Co., Charles City Not funded with PWA assistance	1941	Hansen & Waggoner, Mason City, Iowa	James Thompson & Sons, Ames, Iowa	\$265,000

<sup>15</sup>Original cost figures include all expenses for completion of the courthouse including site acquisition if applicable, architectural fees, excavation, general contract, subcontracts, furnishings and equipment, and landscaping. Cost figures are rounded to the nearest thousand.

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
**Continuation Sheet**

Section Number 8

Page 20

Des Moines County Court House  
Name of Property

Des Moines County, IA  
County and State

---

**iii. Building the Des Moines County Court House:**

Burlington was established as the county seat of Des Moines County within the Wisconsin Territory in 1834. When the present day boundaries of the county were established 1838 it was designated to continue as county seat as well as the capital of the new Iowa Territory. The first county courthouse was Marion Hall, a building leased by its private owners to the county in 1850. In 1866 the county purchased Mozart Hall to serve as the courthouse. A fire destroyed it in 1873, and the courthouse returned to leased quarters in Marion Hall. Five years later, a portion of this building collapsed. Temporary repairs were made to Marion Hall while a new courthouse was constructed on the site of the former Mozart Hall at Columbia and Main streets, a half block south of the current courthouse site. Construction of this building was completed in 1879.

Population in Des Moines County grew steadily from 33,099 in 1880 to 38,162 by 1930. The next decade saw population decline to 36,804. During this period the change in national leadership in 1933 saw the creation of a series of federal programs designed to combat the Great Depression. Among the most active programs to find their way to the county level were the Public Works Administration (PWA), the Works Progress Administration (WPA), and the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). All became active in Des Moines County by the decade's end. Projects documented in the State Historical Society of Iowa's WPA Photograph Collection include work on the county home, work on Burlington municipal buildings, work at a Des Moines County quarry, park and recreation projects in Burlington, work along the Mississippi River edge in Burlington, projects at several schools in Burlington, various street improvements in Burlington, and work at the airport south of Burlington.

Two projects that were completed by the Des Moines County Board of Supervisors during the 1930s and early 1940s were projects that employed the architectural firm Keffer and Jones of Des Moines.<sup>16</sup> The first involved construction of the new Des Moines County courthouse (1938-1940) and the second involved rebuilding of portions of the Des Moines County Home (1941). The firm had also completed design work ten years earlier for the Louisa County Court House in Wapello located 25 miles north of Burlington. The architects were to be paid a 6 percent fee based on the total cost of construction contracts. The fee for the Des Moines County Court House was one percent higher than that charged for Keffer and Jones' work on the Audubon County Court House.<sup>17</sup>

The Des Moines County Court House formally got underway in August 1938 during meetings of the board of supervisors.<sup>18</sup> The board set September 16, 1938 for a vote on a referendum to authorize the issuance of \$154,000 of bonds. Later that month the board was formally

---

<sup>16</sup>Architectural plans and drawings prepared by Keffer and Jones for the Des Moines County Home are contained in the records of the Des Moines County Auditor's Office.

<sup>17</sup>"Agreement Between Architects and Owners," Keffer and Jones, architects, and the Audubon County Board of Supervisors, owner, dated July 29, 1938; Audubon County Auditor's Office.

<sup>3</sup>Des Moines County Board of Supervisors Minute Book, Volume 11, pp. 183 and 186.



**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
Continuation Sheet

Section Number 8

Page 21

Des Moines County Court House  
Name of Property

Des Moines County, IA  
County and State

informed by the Omaha Office of the Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works, successor of the PWA, that Des Moines County's grant covering 45 percent of the project had been approved. The following month, voters approved the referendum authorizing the sale of 20-year bonds and the levying of a tax of up to four tenths of one mill. The approval vote came one day after a similar measure was approved in Audubon County, another county where Keffer and Jones were providing design services.

The next several months saw the architects complete plans for the courthouse, the largest and most costly of the PWA-Era courthouses to be erected in Iowa. The county proceeded to assemble the remaining pieces of ground necessary for the site. A portion of the site was already owned by the county and used as the "County Yard" for storage of lumber and county vehicles. The balance of the new site contained a private dwelling.

Bidding was intense for the courthouse construction contracts. Contractors from central and eastern Iowa, Minnesota, and Ohio submitted bids. On February 25, 1939 the general construction contract was awarded to low-bidder Paul Stenberg Construction Co. of St. Paul, Minnesota for \$175,819. Mechanical contracts were awarded to Healey Plumbing & Heating Co., also of St. Paul, and Carstens Brothers (electrical work) of Ackley, Iowa. The jail equipment contract was awarded to Stewart Iron Works Co. of Cincinnati, Ohio. Local newspapers reported that the bid of a local general contractor was rejected because he was \$654 higher than the low bidder from St. Paul. The resident PWA engineer for the job was scheduled to be Earl Krell and Cyril M. Lamb served as the architect's superintendent. The PWA grant provided for 14 months to complete construction for the project, which would set the completion date at January 21, 1940.

Throughout the course of construction, the PWA required that workers be paid minimum wages based on the prevailing wages for various trades. At the national level this measure had been established to stabilize wage rates and make sure that public works contracts did not see workers suffer in a competitive environment. The highest paid workers were structural iron workers followed by bricklayers, plumbers, steam fitters, sheetmetal workers, asbestos workers, plasters, and terrazzo workers. The next group of tradesmen included carpenters, electricians, glaziers, painters, roofers, cement finishers, and hoist operators. Truck drivers, teamsters, and helpers for various trades received the lowest hourly rate.<sup>19</sup>

Work proceeded at a slow pace from the start on the courthouse project. Architects Keffer and Jones were delayed 60 days in getting the plans and specifications finished. Work commenced in late April but by August the building had only reached the 20 percent completion stage with a crew of 60 men in various trades at work. By early September 1939, a newspaper account stated that work on the courthouse was 30 percent complete. It was one of two major PWA projects underway at the time, the other being the nearly completed West Burlington elementary and junior high school.<sup>20</sup> When the county requested an extension for the completion of the project from January

<sup>19</sup> Schedule of Minimum Hourly Wage Rates, Court House Building, Audubon, Iowa, November 10, 1938.

<sup>20</sup> Architect's Drawing of New Court House Here, *Daily Hawk-Eye Gazette*, (Burlington, Iowa), August 24, 1939;

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
**Continuation Sheet**

Section Number 8

Page 22

Des Moines County Court House  
Name of Property

Des Moines County, IA  
County and State

21, 1940 to April 13, 1940 the architects' delay was one of several unavoidable delays cited. Sub-soil conditions and the resulting changes in plans had necessitated a 46-day delay. The unavailability of terrazzo workers added 28 days to the project and unspecified "trade conditions" made it impossible for equipment suppliers to complete their contracts on time adding another 35 days.<sup>21</sup> The PWA accepted these arguments, and the completion date was extended.

Another factor only indirectly suggested for the slow pace of the project was the fact that architects Keffer and Jones had another courthouse project underway at the same time. The approval for the Audubon County Court House was granted only one day earlier. The western Iowa project was smaller, had no contentious labor issues, and was located just 80 miles from Des Moines. The competing Des Moines County Court House was located twice the distance from the capital city and plagued by site problems, labor issues, and a worker shortage. All of these factors likely complicated completion of the Burlington project for the architects. Judging by the straightforward, on schedule completion of the Audubon County Court House, complications with the Des Moines County Court House did not affect the Audubon County project.

In early April 1940 with work nearly finished on the courthouse, workers in various county offices began to move into their new quarters. The *Burlington Hawk-Eye* announced the pending dedication of the new courtroom in the Des Moines County Court House. When Iowa Supreme Court Justice Oscar Hale gave his dedication remarks on April 6, 1940 he related the event to the trying times in Europe. He noted that "it is nice to think that there is an institution which wishes to continue."<sup>22</sup> There was little opportunity for a major community celebration for the conclusion of the courthouse in subsequent months with daily headlines in the *Hawk-Eye* focused on war news: "Air Battle Rages Over London," "War Flames in Mediterranean," "Conscription Plans Ready." News of the completed courthouse was removed from the front pages as Des Moines County residents followed news wire stories from abroad.

Minutes of the board of supervisors indicate that completion of the courthouse was largely completed by June 1940. In a resolution approved on June 3, 1940, it was agreed that all equipment contractors should not be held responsible for missing completion dates on their contracts due to other delays in the project. It should be noted that among the contract holders listed were two regionally important manufacturers from Burlington, the Leopold Company, manufacturers of office equipment, and the Chittenden & Eastman Company, a manufacturer of a wide range of furniture items.

Conclusion of the Des Moines County Court House project came on September 16, 1940 when the board of supervisors sold the old county courthouse including the real estate it occupied to Roy

---

"Court House 30% Complete," *Daily Hawk-Eye Gazette*, (Burlington, Iowa), September 9, 1939.

<sup>21</sup>Des Moines County Board of Supervisors Minute Book, Volume 11, pp. 353.

<sup>22</sup>"Dedication Remarks," *Daily Hawk-Eye Gazette*, (Burlington, Iowa), April 6, 1940.

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
**Continuation Sheet**

Section Number 8

Page 23

Des Moines County Court House  
Name of Property

Des Moines County, IA  
County and State

Yetter. As a sign of the times, Yetter planed to raze the building and erect a filing station on the site.<sup>23</sup>

**iv. Architectural significance:**

The Des Moines County Court House was designed by the architectural firm of Keffer and Jones with offices in Des Moines, approximately 155 miles northwest of Burlington. Karl K. Keffer (1883-1954) and Earl E. Jones (1885-1950) formed their partnership in 1916 following the death of Keffer's earlier partner, Oliver O. Smith. The new firm saw Keffer continue in the capacity of principal designer with Jones assuming the practical operations of the partnership. The firm developed a solid reputation in the state eventually receiving commissions for dozens of schools and collegiate buildings. The firm designed twelve major buildings at the Iowa State Fairgrounds between 1920 and 1936 and a number of commissions for the Des Moines School District between 1921 and 1939. Architectural historian Wesley Shank credits their work on schools to their ability to work well with school boards.<sup>24</sup>

The firm developed a similar reputation for their work on county courthouses in the state. Commissions included the O'Brien County Court House (1915-1917) in Primghar, the Ringgold County Court House (1926-27) in Mount Ayr, the Louisa County Court House (1926-1927) in Wapello just 25 miles north of Burlington, the Warren County Court House (1938-1939) in Indianola, the Audubon County Court House (1939) in Audubon, and the Des Moines County Court House (1939-1940) in Burlington. According to Shank, the firm's O'Brien County Court House was the first example of a flat-roofed rectangular block form in the state – a basic form that would be repeated in subsequent design efforts.

The three New Deal Era courthouses designed by the firm for Warren, Audubon, and Des Moines counties share a number of design attributes including basic form, floor plan, and materials. Each building has a symmetrical façade with a central section (two to four levels) flanked by slightly lower height wings at each end. In each case a central corridor extends the length of the building with vaults in the comers and county offices opening onto the corridor. Common materials include buff colored brick, Bedford limestone, multi-colored terrazzo floors, marble wainscoting, and acoustic tile. Though the courtroom designs are distinctly different, each originally used dark wood tones and simplified Art Deco ornamentation.

Burlington was also the largest of the cities to see a courthouse erected and Des Moines County the most populous of the counties to apply for a PWA courthouse grant. The Des Moines County Court House is the largest of Keffer & Jones' New Deal Era courthouses. The building has four full floors (ground, first, second, and third) for offices, jail, and courtroom areas, and a basement level for

<sup>23</sup>"Old Court House Site Sold – to be New Phillips Station," *Daily Hawk-Eye Gazette*, (Burlington, Iowa), September 7, 1940.

<sup>24</sup>Shank, Wesley I., *Iowa's Historic Architects: A Biographical Dictionary* (Iowa City, Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 1999, p. 94.

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
Continuation Sheet

Section Number 8

Page 24

Des Moines County Court House  
Name of Property

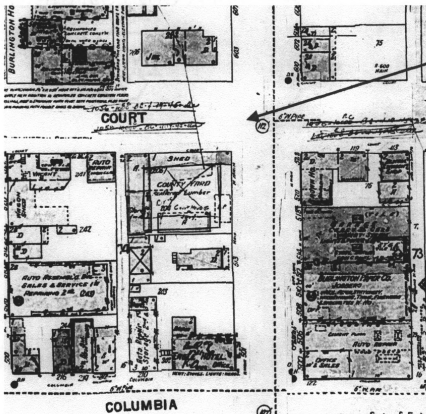
Des Moines County, IA  
County and State

storage space and service areas. Its \$280,000 price tag for site, construction, and equipment made it the most costly. The building maintains many of its original furnishings, and despite completion of several major remodeling projects, maintains its most significant features. Successful completion of the courthouse project would lead the way for Keffer and Jones to design buildings for another important county facility, the Des Moines County Home, in 1941.

Sanborn maps appear below showing the new courthouse site before and after construction.

Des Moines County Court House, 1900 updated to 1931<sup>25</sup>

N ↑



<sup>25</sup> Insurance Maps of Burlington, Iowa. (New York: The Sanborn and Perris Map Company) 1900 updated to 1931, p.40.

# NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

## Continuation Sheet

Section Number 8

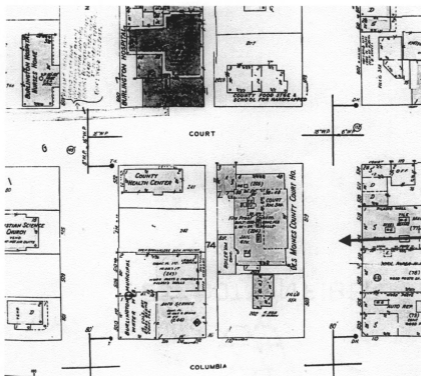
Page 25

Des Moines County Court House  
Name of Property

Des Moines County, IA  
County and State

Des Moines County Court House, 1952 updated to 1962<sup>26</sup>

N ↑



### Summary:

In summary, the Des Moines County Court House derives its significance as one of ten county courthouses built in Iowa during the New Deal Era with funding assistance from the federal Public Works Administration. Its construction represented a significant public investment of federal and local tax dollars made at a time when this rural county was hard pressed by the Great Depression. Designed by Des Moines architects Karl Keffer and Earl Jones, it is a well-preserved example of the PWA Moderne Style of public building architecture that dominated the 1930s and early 1940s.

<sup>26</sup> *Insurance Maps of Burlington, Iowa.* (New York: The Sanborn and Perris Map Company) 1952 updated to 1962, p. 40.

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**

Continuation Sheet

Section Number 8

Page 26

Des Moines County Court House  
Name of Property

Des Moines County, IA  
County and State

---

**Des Moines County Court House, 1939<sup>27</sup>**



***Acknowledgement:***

Preparation of this nomination was funded with the assistance of a matching grant-in-aid from the State Historical Society, Community Programs Bureau through the Department of the Interior, National Park Service, under the provision of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended. However, the contents and opinions do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Department of the Interior or the State Historical Society of Iowa, nor does the mention of trade names or commercial products constitute endorsement or recommendation by the Department of the Interior or the State Historical Society of Iowa.

---

<sup>27</sup> State Historical Society of Iowa Photograph Collection, Historical Library, Des Moines, Iowa.

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
Continuation Sheet

Section Number 9

Page 27

Des Moines County Court House  
Name of Property

Des Moines County, IA  
County and State

---

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Articles, atlases, books, government publications, reports, WEB sites:**

"Alphabets and Architects." *American Architect*. Volume 149, January 1936, pp. 17-23.

*America Builds. The Record of PWA. Public Works Administration.* Prepared in the Division of Information by the United States, Public Works Administration. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1939.

Armstrong, Ellis L., editor. *History of Public Works in the United States 1776 – 1976.* Chicago: American Public Works Association

"Buechner and Orth Courthouses in North Dakota." National Register of Historic Places Nomination, August 1, 1980.

Capitman, Barbara, Michael D. Kinerk, and Dennis W. Wilhelm. *Rediscovering Art Deco U.S.A.* New York: Viking Studio Books, 1994.

Cole, Cyrenus. *Iowa Through the Years.* Iowa City, Iowa: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1940.

"County Courthouses in Iowa." National Register of Historic Places Nomination. May 15, 1981.

"County Courthouses of Nebraska." National Register of Historic Places Nomination. December 12, 1989.

"County Courthouses of Wisconsin." National Register of Historic Places Nomination. August 10, 1981.

County Maps, Iowa Department of Transportation, available from:  
[http://www.msp.dot.state.ia.us/trans\\_data/dlalphabetcounty.html](http://www.msp.dot.state.ia.us/trans_data/dlalphabetcounty.html).

"A Courthouse Conservation Handbook." Washington, D.C.: Preservation Press, 1976.

Gebhard, David. *The National Trust Guide to Art Deco in America.* New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1996.

Gebhard, David and Gerald Mansheim. *Buildings of Iowa.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Greif, Martin. *Depression Modern: the Thirties Style in America.* New York: Universe Books, 1975.

Ickes, Harold L., Administrator, Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works. *PWA: The First 3 Years.* Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, ca. 1936.

*Insurance Maps of Burlington, Iowa.* (New York: The Sanborn and Perris Map Company) 1900 updated to 1931 and 1952 updated to 1962.

"Census Services," Iowa State University, Department of Sociology, available from:  
<http://www.soc.iastate.edu/census/Data/Counties/Historical%20Trends%201850-2000.pdf>.

*Iowa, Report No. 10, Volume II – State Data.* Washington, D.C. Office of Government Reports, Statistical Section, 1939.

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
**Continuation Sheet**

Section Number 9

Page 28

Des Moines County Court House  
Name of Property

Des Moines County, IA  
County and State

---

*Iowa Volume I County Reports of Federal Expenditures March 4, 1933 – June 30, 1939.* Office of Government Reports, Statistical Section, 1940.

Isakoff, Jack F. "The Public Works Administration." *University of Illinois Bulletin*, Volume XXXVI, November 18, 1938.

Lebovich, William L., Historic American Buildings Survey. *America's City Halls*. Washington, D.C.: Preservation Press, 1984.

Long, Barbara Beving, "Architects in Iowa Study." Working files prepared for State Historical Society of Iowa. Des Moines, Iowa, September 1984.

"North Dakota County Courthouses." National Register of Historic Places Nomination. October 3, 1985.

Pare, Richard, editor. *Courthouse A Photographic Document*. New York: Horizon Press, 1978.

Pratt, LeRoy G. *The Counties and Courthouses of Iowa*. Mason City, Iowa: Klipto Printing & Office Supply Company, 1976.

"Regulations Governing New P.W.A. Projects." *The Octagon*, Volume 7, July 1935, pp. 12-13.

Reitzes, Lisa B. "Moderately Modern: Interpreting the Architecture of the Public Works Administration, Volume II." Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Delaware, May 1989.

Schwieder, Dorothy. *Iowa, the Middle Land*. Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1996.

Shank, Wesley I. *Iowa's Historic Architects: A Biographical Dictionary*. Iowa City, Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 1999.

Short, C.W. and R. Stanley-Brown. *Public Buildings A Survey of Architecture of Projects Constructed by Federal and Other Governmental Bodies Between the Years 1933 and 1939 with the Assistance of the Public Works Administration*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1939.

Sitkoff, Harvard, editor. *Fifty Years Later. The New Deal Evaluated*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1985.

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

Stanek, Edward and Jacqueline Stanek Research Materials re: Iowa County Courthouses, 1 box, State Historical Society of Iowa Library, Des Moines, Iowa.

*Story of the Public Works Administration in Pictures*. Prepared by Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, May 1936.

*The Story of PWA*. Prepared by Public Works Administration. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1939.



**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
**Continuation Sheet**

Section Number 9

Page 29

Des Moines County Court House  
Name of Property

Des Moines County, IA  
County and State

---

"WPA Art History Timeline." available from <http://www.wpamurals.com/history.html>; Internet; accessed August 5, 2002.

WPA Photograph Collection, Boxes 4-10, State Historical Society of Iowa Library, Des Moines, Iowa.

**County records:** located at Auditor's Office, Des Moines County Court House, Burlington, Iowa.

Des Moines County Court House, architectural plans and drawings, prepared by Keffer & Jones, Des Moines, Iowa, October 1938.

Des Moines County Court House, correspondence with Public Works Administration, Omaha District Office, 1938-1939.

Des Moines County Board of Supervisors Minute Book, Volume 11, pp. 183, 186, 252, 253, 256, 257, 324, 353, 377, 398, and 406.

Interview, Carol Copeland, Des Moines County Auditor, October 10, 2002.

Miscellaneous correspondence between Des Moines County, architect, contractors, subcontractors, and suppliers for courthouse construction, 1938-1940.

**Newspaper articles:** from *Daily Hawk-Eye Gazette* (Burlington, Des Moines County, Iowa).

"Low Bidders Get Contracts," February 25, 1939.

"Plan Start of court House Work Monday," April 8, 1939.

"Architect's Drawing of New Court House Here," August 24, 1939.

"Court House 30% Complete," September 9, 1939.

"Accept Court House Monday," March 16, 1940.

"Dedicate New County Courtroom Friday; Announce Bar Program," April 3, 1940.

"Dedicate New Court Room with Fitting Ceremonies by Bar," April 6, 1940.

"Old Court House Site Sold – to be New Phillips Station," September 7, 1940.

"Stone Indian Is Gathering Dust," *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, April 28, 1964.

"Chief Black Hawk returned to the Des Moines county court house," (photo caption), June 14, 1972.

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
**Continuation Sheet**

Section Number 10

Page 30

Des Moines County Court House  
Name of Property

Des Moines County, IA  
County and State

---

**10. Geographical Data**

**Verbal Boundary Description:**

Lots 202-205, Block 74, Original Town Plat, City of Burlington, Des Moines County, Iowa.

**Boundary Justification:**

The boundaries comprise the current site for the Des Moines County Court House. This site includes the lots held at the time the courthouse was erected and portions of two additional lots acquired to the south that now comprise the courthouse site.

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
Continuation Sheet

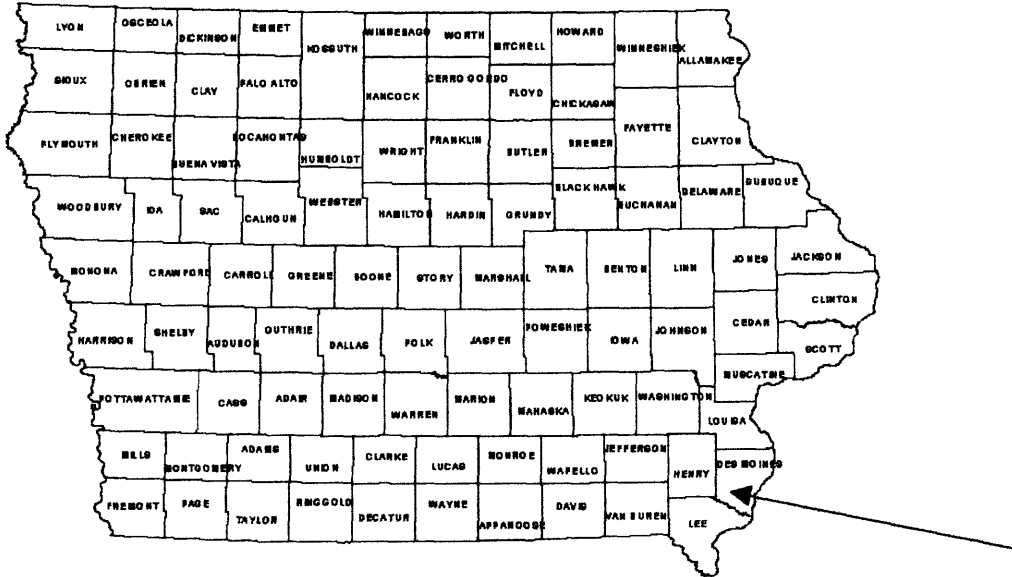
Section Number        Maps       

Page   31  

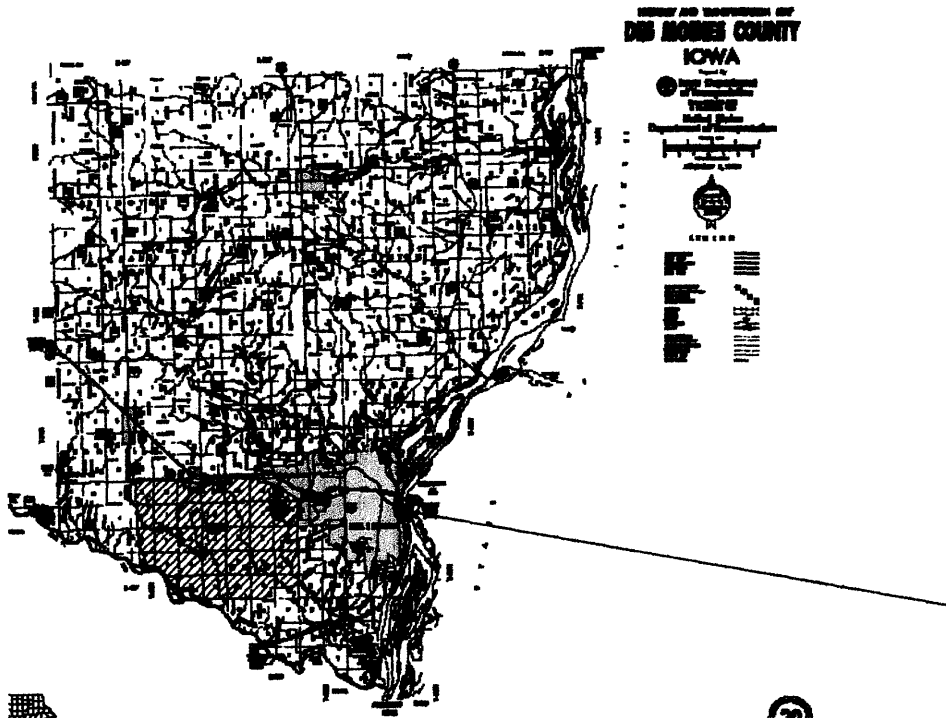
Des Moines County Court House  
Name of Property

Des Moines County, IA  
County and State

**Map: Des Moines County, Iowa**



↑  
N



**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
Continuation Sheet

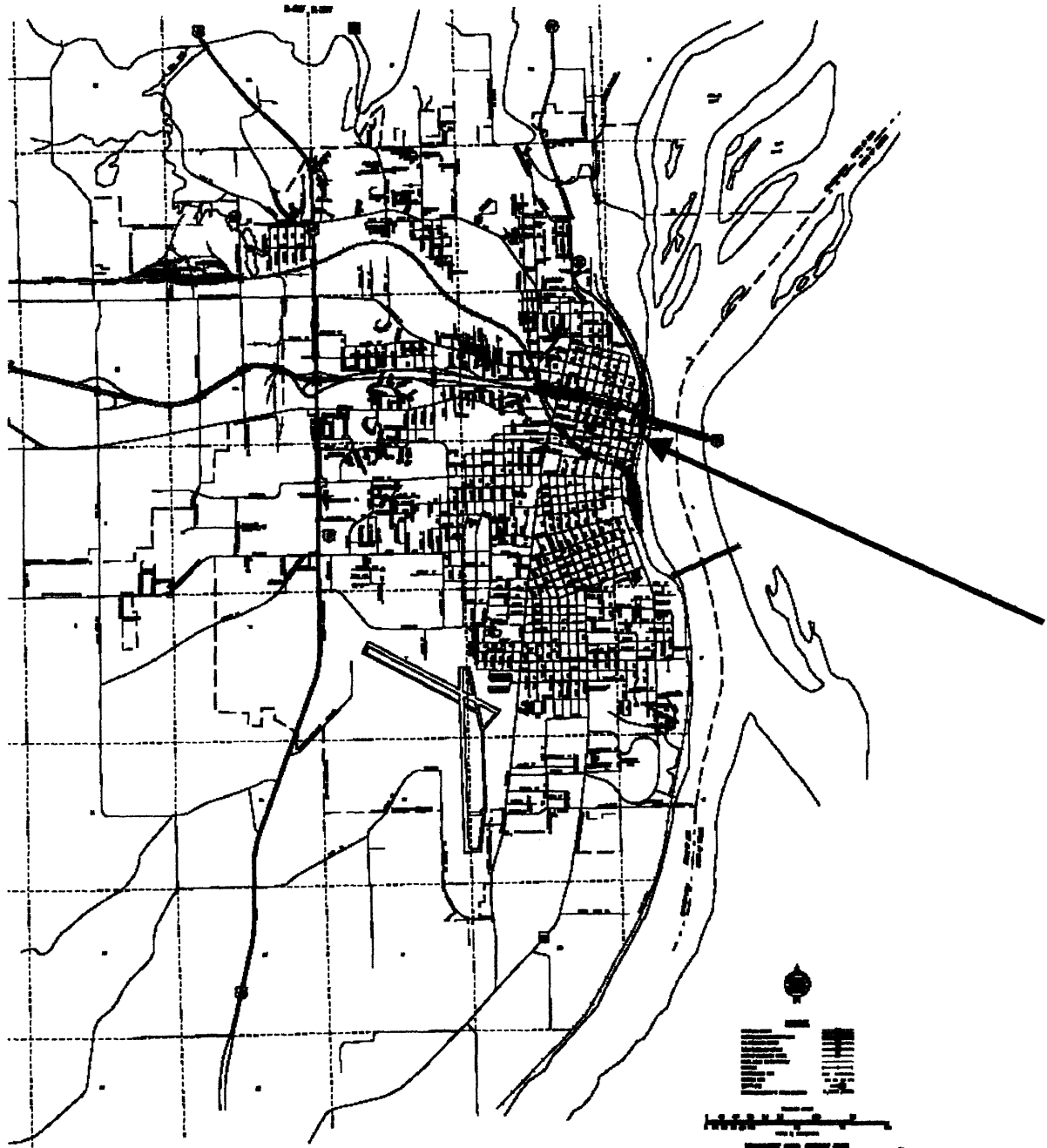
Section Number Maps

Page 32

Des Moines County Court House  
Name of Property

Des Moines County, IA  
County and State

↑  
N



Legend

Scale: 1 inch = 100 feet

**BURLINGTON**  
**IOWA**

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
Continuation Sheet

Section Number \_\_\_\_\_ Photographs \_\_\_\_\_

Page 33

Des Moines County Court House  
Name of Property

Des Moines County, IA  
County and State

---

**Photographs**

Bruce Meyer, photographer  
Date taken: October 22, 2002

1. Front & south façades, looking northwest
2. Front entrance, looking west
3. Front & north façades, looking southwest
4. South & rear façades, looking northeast
5. North & rear façades, looking southeast
6. Front entrance vestibule, looking east
7. Central corridor, ground floor, looking south
8. Central staircase, between first and second floors, looking west
9. Courtroom, towards front of room, looking south
10. Courtroom, judge's bench, looking south
11. Courtroom, jury box, looking southwest
12. Courtroom, towards rear of room, looking north