

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NOV 28 1989  
2233

### 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 Howard County Courthouse  
other names/site number HW11-38

#### 2. Location

street & number Indian St bet 6th & 7th Sts N/A not for publication  
city, town St. Paul N/A vicinity  
state Nebraska code NE county Howard code 093 zip code 68873

#### 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>          </u>
<input type="checkbox"/> public-state	<input type="checkbox"/> site	<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>1</u>	<u>          </u>
		<u>2</u>	<u>0</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 Andrews

1/10/90

for Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

**6. Function or Use**

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions) Government/courthouse Current Functions (enter categories from instructions) Government/courthouse

**7. Description**

Architectural Classification (enter categories from instructions) Classical Revival Materials (enter categories from instructions) foundation stone walls brick roof other other stone

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

[X] See continuation sheet, section 7, page 1.

**8. Statement of Significance**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:  
 nationally  statewide  locally

Applicable National Register Criteria  A  B  C  D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions)  A  B  C  D  E  F  G

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions) Architecture Politics/government Period of Significance 1912-39 Significant Dates 1912-15 N/A

Cultural Affiliation N/A

Significant Person N/A Architect/Builder Berlinghof, George A. (Berlinghof and Davis)

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**

Acreeage of property 2 acres

UTM References

A	1   4	5   4   5   5   10   10	4   5   16   2   5   4   5	B			
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
C				D			
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing

[ ] See continuation sheet, section 10, page 1.

Verbal Boundary Description

[X] See continuation sheet, section 10, page 1.

Boundary Justification

[X] See continuation sheet, section 10, page 1.

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title                      Barbara Beving Long, consultant  
organization                    Four Mile Research Co. date    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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Built in 1912-15, the Howard County Courthouse is an excellent, largely unaltered example of the Property Type, County Citadel. Identifying features include: rectangular shape, centered entrance, costly materials, distinctive ornamentation, Classical Revival stylistic influence, provision for fireproof storage, and impression of a government building representing modernity, simplicity, strength, and prosperity. In addition, the courthouse has other County Citadel characteristics: flat roof, ground level entry, and designed by an architect. The courthouse is an important example of the work of Nebraska architect George A. Berlinghof (here as Berlinghof & Davis), for features first developed here appear on two later Berlinghof courthouses (Greeley and Franklin Counties) and thus represent the evolution of his designs.

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The Howard County Courthouse in St. Paul is rectangular and consists of four stories. Four entrances open directly into the ground floor to gain maximum public access to this level. However, the building appears to have a two-part stone and brick "rusticated" raised basement, as was typical for courthouses of the period. The third or top floor was designed to house the jail, while the two-story district courtroom on the second floor extends into third floor space.

Bedford, Indiana limestone is used effectively for trim, the foundation, and most notably the immense smooth round engaged columns. The stonework contrasts effectively with brownish face brick.

All four facades have prominent recessed sections between large brick corner bays, but the south facade is the primary entrance. As such, it has somewhat more elaborate detail, including an outsized shield with large swags in the stepped parapet, the name of the building across the entablature, and an attractive flat decorated lintel with consoles at the entrance. This lintel has a shield with "H" on it and a row of upright ears of corn on either side.

Both the north and south facades have paired engaged columns while the four engaged columns are arranged singly on the east and west. Between the engaged columns are slightly recessed windows, which are grouped in three's on the north and south sides and paired on the other sides. Decoration is relatively simple at the corners and includes unusual stone openwork panels in a starburst pattern, a moulded course, and the moulded cornice.

The courthouse exhibits features of the Classical Revival style,

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including symmetrical arrangement, monumental proportions, smooth stone surfaces, huge columns, and attic story.

The 72x90' building has a staircase directly across from the entry vestibule of the principal or south entrance. The first floor includes a ladies restroom intended to be "a nice resting place and retreat for those who will come to the county seat from a distance" for their "wives and daughters" to use "without feeling that they are imposing on any one," according to the county commissioner's description of the building that appeared in the newspaper. On the second floor county offices are arranged off a short corridor. Vaults are located next to the slightly projecting corner bays of the building. A large (36x60') district courtroom is centered on the north side of the third floor and occupies most of its expanse.

The interior retains a number of important features, including marble counters, single pane transoms with the name of the office painted on them, marble stairs and balusters, and ornamental plasterwork. Hallways have original light fixtures that are metal and have frosted globes. In the entry vestibule hangs a long metal and glass canister light, also apparently original.

The district courtroom, in particular, retains distinctive elements. A narrow but ornate cornice surrounds the room and features foliated motifs interspersed with plain discs. Moulded squared pilasters rest on marble wainscotting. Some pilasters occur in pairs and between their capitals are fanciful lion's heads with more foliated motifs. Broad plaster beams divide the high ceiling into nine spaces and outline heavy Art Nouveau "bosses" of florid outsized acanthus leaves. Lights consisting of six large globes are suspended from the acanthus bosses, a highly effective feature. Acoustical panels appear to have been added to the wall surface between pilasters, but a decorative course (a row of closely spaced discs) remains. Woodwork is relatively simple and original; the judge's bench has panels and fluted Corinthian corner pilasters.

Interior changes are minimal and expected: in offices, lowered ceilings with flush fluorescent lighting, some wood paneling. Exterior alterations are few: appropriately designed ramp to provide access for the handicapped at the north facade, metal replacement windows with opaque transoms, two glass block window replacements on the west facade, and new metal and glass double entry doors, which are recessed.

The Howard County Courthouse enjoys an uneven, elevated site that overlooks the back of St. Paul's principal commercial street. Attractive brick streets surround it on three sides, and there is no street on the

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fourth side, an unusual situation. The courthouse is centered at the north end of an ample courthouse square and thus enjoys a large and lush lawn. A gravel parking lot is behind its rear or north facade.

Centered on the south entrance but well forward on the lawn is a Grand Army of the Republic statue of a Union Army veteran (a contributing object for this nomination). The stone soldier stands on a tall moulded granite shaft decorated with a G.A.R. symbol and was placed on the grounds when the courthouse was built. Artillery pieces flank the statue. Concrete walkways lead from the south toward the east and west entrances, and short walkways curve off them to the principal entrance.

The Howard County Courthouse shares some similarities with the architect's County Capitol designs, reflecting his apparent nostalgia for this form. The courthouse has four entrances, despite the absence of a street to the north. The slightly projecting corner bays are reminiscent of those with towers on a County Capitol, and opposite facades are nearly the same.

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The Howard 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 Howard County. It is a good example of public architecture in the community and contains good examples of design features and facilities distinctive to its design and use as a courthouse. The courthouse is an important example of the work of Nebraska architect George A. Berlinghof (here as Berlinghof & Davis), for features first developed here appear on two later Berlinghof courthouses (Greeley and Franklin Counties) and thus represent the evolution of his designs.

As a good example of the County Citadel, the courthouse contains design features and facilities distinctive to its design and use (such as fireproof vaults), has a rectangular shape, centered entrance, costly materials, distinctive ornamentation, and Classical Revival stylistic influence. Elements of the design combine effectively to convey the impression of a government building representing modernity, simplicity, strength, and prosperity, also features of the County Citadel.

The Period of Significance is 1912, when construction began, to 1939, when the "fifty year rule" takes effect. The Howard 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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Howard County is located in central Nebraska, and the Calamus and Loup Rivers meet in the county. Immigrant groups from Denmark, Bohemia, Germany, and Poland were among the early settlers. In 1940 county population reportedly was one-third English, one-third Scandinavian, and one-third German, Bohemian, or Polish extraction. Howard County was organized in 1871.

Established and platted also in 1871, St. Paul was named the first county seat in May of that year. Recognizing the importance of having a suitable courthouse in order to retain the county seat, St. Paul residents undertook to build a courthouse beginning in 1874. To finance construction of the first court house, the county seat sold city lots. However, the community's status as county seat did not go unchallenged, and courthouse construction was delayed. Dannebrog, a Danish community, also sought the designation, and on October 13, 1874, an election was held on the question. St. Paul narrowly staved off the Dannebrog assault

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and remained county seat.

The arrival of a rail line around 1880 further spurred settlement and conversion in the area from a subsistence to a market economy. St. Paul emerged as the principal shipping point for Howard County, but also for the counties of Greeley, Valley, Sherman and part of Custer County during this period. The Howard County seat prospered with this regional transportation role, and its position of county seat was never again challenged.

In 1877 the first courthouse, which was wood frame, was built. By 1912 county officials were interested in replacing the aging building on the courthouse square with a more substantial edifice. In a May 20, 1912, resolution they noted that the courthouse is a "frame structure, old and in poor repair and not fire-proof" and that the jail "is not of sufficient strength to hold prisoners and is unhealthful and unfit for use."

Armed with that rationale, the county held a special election on June 25, 1912 on whether to issue \$75,000 in bonds for a new courthouse. County officials used the newspapers to plead their case for a new courthouse and to describe how wonderful it would be. In a lengthy article written by three county commissioners, they described the proposed building. It was "modeled in chaste and pleasing lines of architecture, free from any fanciful and needless embellishments." They appealed to the practical side of voters: "The most important and valuable feature of the building is the steel record vaults." And they tried to sway rural voters by providing special rest rooms for their use, "a nice resting place and retreat for those who will come to the county seat from a distance."

The board had already selected the architect for the project, even before the bond issued election was held. They had visited several recently built courthouses in other counties and "agreed that the one at Seward is perfectly satisfactory in every way." Thus they contacted the architect of that building, George A. Berlinghof. Located in Lincoln, he was then in partnership as Berlinghof & Davis.

George A. Berlinghof was a German immigrant who initially settled in Beatrice, Nebraska. In 1905 he moved to Lincoln where his expertise and connections resulted in his selection as architect for the State of Nebraska in 1907. Berlinghof is known to have designed courthouses in



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four other states as well as for seven other Nebraska counties.<sup>1</sup>

The bond issue passed, and the county proceeded with construction plans. After delays in the summer of 1912 in finding an acceptable person to move the old courthouse, the board extended the filing date for contractor bids to October 25, 1912. George C. Pesha was selected that October, and construction began.

Howard County officials solved the dilemma of how to proceed with county business during courthouse construction in a novel manner. They had the old courthouse moved to another spot on the courthouse grounds for use during construction, after which it was razed.

Progress was such that the cornerstone was laid June 5, 1913, amid considerable celebration (see Multiple Property Submission, County Courthouses of Nebraska).<sup>2</sup> However, problems with the contractor caused considerable delays and cost overruns. Architect Berlinghof had also experienced significant problems with another contractor on his Seward County project. In November 1913 the contractor was discharged. As of July 1913 progress on the building was such that it was ready for structural steelwork, placement of cut stone and exterior walls, and many other fundamental steps. Materials had been delivered, yet the contractor had not proceeded with the work over the summer.

After the November 1913 discharge of the contractor, the county board acted as its own general contractor for the balance of the project. By the end of April 1914, all of the cut stone had been delivered, and the board approved bills for electrical work and ornamental plastering. The following month included bills for hollow tile, structural steel, and blue vein marble from Colorado. In June the board approved contracts for window glass, marble work, and roofing.

Construction continued into August of 1914, when the county board

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<sup>1</sup>In chronological order the counties are Nemaha, Thayer, Seward, Kearney, Howard, Greeley, Lincoln, and Franklin. The Richardsonian Romanesque Thayer County Courthouse has been altered and does not appear to be eligible for the National Register, unlike the others.

<sup>2</sup>The date for the celebration conflicted with an important Danish holiday celebration that Dannebrog and Dannevirke residents observed, a reflection of the ethnic heritage of the county, but a compromise was worked out.

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adjourned for fifteen minutes and ceased all office work and "also all construction on the new court house...in due respect to Mrs. Wilson's burial" [wife of President Woodrow Wilson]. By September much of the work on the courthouse was complete, and the interior was ready to be painted. In January 1915 the board took steps to acquire a new janitor and obtain insurance on the new building, according to county records. The board accepted bids to demolish the old courthouse in February 1915, evidence that the new courthouse was complete.

Although the board had assured its constituents that the courthouse would cost only \$75,000, the amount of the bond issue, the final tally showed a cost overrun of \$28,000. Nonetheless, a newspaper article proclaimed, "It is a pleasure to visit the court house at this time and view that magnificent new building and meet with the fellows who are there looking after the county's business."

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- Long, Barbara Beving. "County Courthouses of Nebraska." Multiple Property Submission. 1989.
- Nebraska State Historical Society. Photo Collection. #M281-992.
- Howard County. Commissioners' Records. Books 4 and 5.
- St. Paul, Nebraska. Sanborn Fire Insurance Map. 1912, 1924.
- Tracings. Howard County Courthouse. Berlinghof & Davis. Clerk's office.
- "Elegant Courthouse Full of History." Grand Island Daily Independent. July 3, 1988.
- Collection of unlabeled clippings from local newspapers assembled by Howard County. "Big Doings Here June Fifth" (May 8, 1913), "Corner Stone for New Court House" (April 17, 1913), "The Proposed New Howard County Court House" (quoted), "New Court House for Howard Co.," "Old Court House Building Removed," "Corner Stone for New Court House" (June 12, 1913), "Our New County Officers" (quoted).
- Partsch, Ellen K. Howard County, the First 100 Years. [1971.]
- "Howard County." Who's Who in Nebraska. Lincoln: Nebraska Press Association, 1940.

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Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property, Howard County Courthouse, occupies Block 12 of the Original Town of St. Paul and is roughly 300x300' in size.

Boundary Justification

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

