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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NOV 28 1989

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Gage County Courthouse
other names/site number GA03-1

2. Location

street & number 612 Grant St N/A not for publication
city, town Beatrice N/A vicinity
state Nebraska code NE county Gage code 067 zip code 68310

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> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-state	<input type="checkbox"/> site	<u> </u>	<u> </u> sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<u> </u>	<u> </u> structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>1</u>	<u> </u> objects
		<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 November 17, 1989
Signature of certifying official 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. Patrick Andrews 1/10/90
 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:)

✓ 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)

Romanesque Revival

Other: Richardsonian Romanesque

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation stone

walls stone

roof asphalt

other N/A

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

Significant Dates

1890-1939

1890-92

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Gunn and Curtis

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

Acreege of property Approximately 3 acres.

UTM References

A	<u>1 4</u>	<u>16 9 11 16 17 10</u>	<u>4 4 16 10 10 18 10</u>	B	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
C	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	D	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing

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

Verbal Boundary Description

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

Boundary Justification

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

11. Form Prepared By

name/title	Barbara Beving Long, consultant		
organization	Four Mile Research Co.	date	November 8, 1989
street & number	3140 Easton Boulevard	telephone	(515) 266-4964
city or town	Des Moines	state	Iowa zip code 50317

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The Gage County Courthouse is an excellent example of the Property Type, County Capitol executed in the Richardsonian Romanesque style. Identifying features of the County Capitol Property Type present on the Gage County Courthouse include: a tower, permanent costly materials, elaborate ornamentation, Richardsonian Romanesque stylistic influence, four entrances, and impression of a government building of permanence and solidity. The courthouse is a good example of the work of a regional architectural firm, Gunn & Curtis. Exterior alterations, such as replacement windows, do not detract from the building's appearance. The interior was modernized following a fire in 1961. Located on the courthouse square are the courthouse (contributing building) and a cannon (contributing object).

The two-story courthouse sits on a raised basement of stone from Gage County, while the walls above are faced with nonlocal limestone.¹ The imposing mass, especially the prominent center tower and the swelling volume of the polygonal bays that flank it, make the courthouse a striking and stately sight. The clock tower seems to have grown naturally from this massing.

The Gage County Courthouse is a fine example of the Richardsonian Romanesque style. Hallmarks of the style include the rock-faced finish, towers at corners, broad hipped roof planes with cross gables, transomed windows, a feeling of solidity and simplicity, and restrained but effective use of carved detail. Also, the groupings of round-arched windows, clusters of smooth slender columns with enriched capitals, and compound round arched entries. The design carries a wealth of detail. Even the four chimneys continue Romanesque motifs: colonettes and moulding.

The additional gables are particularly fine elements. The bold triangular shape encompasses a squat arcade of five windows, three deeply recessed window slits, and a checkerboard pattern at the apex, then ends at the corners with elegant carved foliate detail.

The stonework treatment effectively divides the composition into three sections. The lighter local stone is rock-faced that forms the raised basement. A moulded course separates it from the less rough but still

¹WPA records state the stone was from Bedford, Indiana, despite its golden hue. County commissioner records state they chose Rawlins or Rawlings stone rather than Warrensburg stone.

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rock-faced rusticated ashlar of the first floor, and another course separates that treatment from the smooth stone with flush joints above.

The plan is long and rectangular (140x82'), with primary emphasis on the south facade. However, there are public entrances on all four sides, a typical feature of the County Capitol subtype. Access to the building originally required climbing steps at all entrances. However, steps at the south side have been removed, and entry there now opens onto the basement level. The north facade continues the materials and designs of the front but in a simplified manner, including absence of polygonal bays.

In addition to removal of the front steps, there have been other changes to the exterior over the years. Five small dormers have been removed along the roofline and from the clock tower, probably when the roof was redone. Two-story round-arched windows have been partially filled with beige panels as have the transom lights, likely after the 1961 fire and related remodeling. Also enclosed is the small arcaded opening of the tower. A small wood enclosed entrance for the handicapped has been unobtrusively added to a corner of the east facade. Some interior walls have been changed and stairs moved, and few original interior elements remain.

The Gage County Courthouse occupies the center of the courthouse square. Concrete walks lead to all four entrances, and there are also concrete walks from the corners of the square to the building. The sole prominent object is a cannon mounted on a tall limestone pedestal. Centered dramatically on the south facade, the cannon has a metal eagle sculpture resting on it. The names of soldiers from the Civil War are inscribed on three sides and from the Spanish-American War on the fourth side of the stone pedestal.

A residential area of mixed construction dates overlooks the courthouse on two sides. The west side is a highway and has modern commercial use. The jail (built in 1918 and not part of this nomination because it is not located on the courthouse square and was built much later than the courthouse) looks on the north facade of the courthouse from across the street. The main commercial area of Beatrice is several blocks from the courthouse square.

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The Gage 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 Gage County. It is a notable example of public architecture in the community and contains good examples of design features and facilities distinctive to its design and use as a courthouse. In addition, the courthouse is a fine example of the work of a regional architectural firm, Gunn & Curtis.

As an important example of the County Capitol, the courthouse contains design features and facilities distinctive to its design and use (such as fireproof vaults), has a tower, costly materials, and elaborate ornamentation. Elements of the design combine to convey an impression of a government building of permanence and solidity, another feature of the County Capitol. The Period of Significance is 1890, when construction began, to 1939, when the "fifty year rule" takes effect. The Gage County Courthouse is being nominated as an example of the Property Type, County Courthouses of Nebraska (County Capitol) of the Context, County Government in Nebraska, 1854-1941, from the Multiple Property Submission, County Courthouses of Nebraska.

Gage County is located in the southeast corner of Nebraska. The founding of Beatrice occurred because a steamboat was stranded on a Missouri River sand bar in 1857. On the steamboat Hannibal were people interested in settling in the western frontier. They became acquainted on the slow river journey, according to a 1918 county history. While waiting on the sand bar, 35 men held a meeting and wrote a pledge to establish a colony in the new territory of Nebraska. Among them were six lawyers, four physicians, three merchants, a mason and a bricklayer, and an engineer and a surveyor. An advance party located the Beatrice site, reported on its advantages: the "wide sweep of rolling plain," two streams, woodlands, and good mill sites, and the colony settled in Beatrice.

Despite this early beginning and the community's standing as county seat, a courthouse and jail were lacking as late as 1870. County offices were lodged separately in rented quarters around Beatrice. In 1870 the county commissioners finally decided to build a courthouse. The Original Town Plat contained a block intended for county use. But A.J. Cropsey, who had laid out an addition just north of the Original Town, offered to donate one block for a courthouse and a half-block for a jail (as well as other unspecified inducements), and the county board accepted his

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offer. The first courthouse was used until 1889 when it was in such a deteriorated state that district court had to held in an old wood frame opera house, and the facility was essentially abandoned.

The present courthouse is located on the site of the first Gage County Courthouse. On June 18, 1889, voters passed a \$100,000 bond issue for its construction. The following November supervisors heard 30-minute presentations from 14 architects. In what may be a Nebraska record they took no less than 19 ballots over five straight days before selecting the Kansas City firm of Gunn & Curtis.

The county had switched in 1887 from the commissioner system to the supervisor system, which had more members (30). In addition, each supervisor could place from one to seven votes, making for a complicated and time-consuming method for architect selection. The high cost of the building may have been a factor in the high architect interest in the commission. Known bond issues in the 1880s and 1890s typically ranged between \$20,000 and \$40,000.

Gunn & Curtis practiced out of Kansas City, Missouri, from 1890 until 1899. Frederick C. Gunn (1865-1959) and Louis S. Curtis (or Curtiss) (1865-1924) were the partners. The firm is listed among the "Prairie Richardsonian" architects in The Spirit of H.H. Richardson on the Midland Prairies. Among the firm's commissions were the Missouri State Building for the 1893 World Columbian Exposition and the Church and Soldier's Home in Leavenworth, Kansas.

By 1902 Gunn was practicing in Topeka as Haskell & Gunn, when the firm designed the Richardsonian Romanesque Douglas County Courthouse in Lawrence, Kansas. Curtis remained in Kansas City. His 1908 design of the Boley Building was reportedly one of the earliest metal and glass curtain wall designs undertaken.

On March 5, 1890, the county board selected the general contractor for the Gage County Courthouse from among a dozen bidders. M.T. Murphy was the winner with a bid \$90,500. The board also decided to use Rawlins or Rawlings stone rather than Warrensburg, Missouri sandstone. The Gage County commissioners were actively involved in courthouse construction, voting on the siting of the building, getting samples of stone, deciding not to wire the building for electricity. Construction continued from the spring of 1890 and into the summer of 1891, when the board said the contractor should be required to conform to contract terms regarding a fireproof building.

In February 1892 Gunn & Curtis notified the board:

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We have examined the Gage County Court house and believe it to be completed according to the true meaning of the plans and specifications and further believe it to be in a proper condition for acceptance by your honorable body, with such minor repairs as are necessary to be made as recommended by the Superintendent.

Apparently the roof leaked which required its replacement (in July of 1893) as well as new plaster on the top floor. Contractor Murphy disputed the final bills due him for extras not in the original contract. The board made a final demand of the keys from Murphy, but he refused to hand them over. Unable to reach an agreement, a committee of the county board turned over the matter to the county attorney for settlement. It appears that the courthouse was essentially completed in 1892 when the county ordered furnishings and went about the final steps for moving into the present Gage County Courthouse.

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Gage County. Supervisors' Records. Books 4 and 5.
Beatrice, Nebraska. Sanborn Fire Insurance Map. 1913.
Dobbs, Hugh. History of Gage County, Nebraska. Lincoln: Western Publishing and Engraving Co., 1918.
Works Progress Administration. Survey of County Courthouse Records. 1936. NeSHS Archives. Gage County.
Gage County Courthouse. Tracings. Gunn & Curtis. Gage County Clerk's office.
Larson, Paul C. and Brown, Susan M. The Spirit of H.H. Richardson on the Midland Prairies. Ames: ISU Press, 1988.
Architects Files. Missouri SHPO Office.

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Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property, Gage County Courthouse, occupies all lots (1-16) in Block 24 of Cropsey's Addition in Beatrice.

Boundary Justification

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

