

IOWA SITE INVENTORY

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

MAY 29 1981

Site Number 87-004-002
District Name _____
Map Reference # 87-004-002
Topo Map Neb. City NK 1:250,000

IDENTIFICATION

1. Site Name Taylor County Courthouse
2. Village/Town/City Bedford Township _____ County Taylor
3. Street Address Court Avenue between Pearl and Jefferson
4. Legal Location OT Courthouse Square
Urban: subdivision block parcel
Rural: township range section
1/4 section-1/4 section
5. UTM Location: zone 15 easting 354700 northing 4503000; Acreage less than 1 ac
6. Owner(s) Name Taylor County Board of Supervisors
7. Owner(s) Address Courthouse Bedford Iowa 50833
(Street address) (City) (State) (Zip)
8. Use: present Courthouse original Courthouse

DESCRIPTION

- E.M. Ellis, Architect
9. Date of Construction 1892-93 Architect/Builder Allen H. Chaffie, Builder
 10. Building Type: single family dwelling multiple family dwelling commercial
 industrial educational other institutional public religious agricultural
 11. Exterior Walls: clapboard stone brick board & batten shingles stucco
 other _____
 12. Structural System: wood frame with interlocking joints
 wood frame with light members (balloon frame) masonry load-bearing walls
 iron frame steel frame with curtain walls reinforced concrete
 other _____
 13. Condition: excellent good fair deteriorated
 14. Integrity: original site moved-if so, when? _____
Notes on alterations, additions (with dates and architect, if known) and any other notable features of building and site: Upper portion of windows blocked from inside. Note original wooden staircase - spiral stair in clerk's office - ceramic tile first floor main space.
Aluminum and glass outer doors.
 15. Related Outbuildings and Property: barn other farm structures
 carriage house garage privy other _____
 16. Is the building endangered? no yes-if so, why? _____
 17. Surroundings of the building: open land woodland scattered outbuildings
 densely built-up commercial industrial residential other _____
 18. Map _____
 19. Photo
Roll _____ Frame _____ View _____

SIGNIFICANCE (Indicate sources of information for all statements)

20. Architectural Significance

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

This Victorian Romanesque courthouse is excellently-sited at the end of a major commercial street. A good example of its kind, with exterior of red brick trimmed with rockfaced stone, and large round-arched entrance portal. Note curious stubby engaged columns, set in niches below slablike architrave and foliated frieze which acts as an impost for the arch above.

21. Historical Significance

Theme(s) Politics/Government

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

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

See Continuation Sheet

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

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

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

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

Prepared by _____ Date January 1980
 Address _____ Telephone _____
 Organization DHP

FOR DIVISION OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION USE ONLY

1. OFFICE INFORMATION SOURCES ON THIS PROPERTY

COUNTY RESOURCE FILE

WINDSHIELD SURVEY

NATIONAL REGISTER

GRANTS-IN-AID: _____

DETERMINATION OF ELIGIBILITY

REVIEW AND COMPLIANCE PROJECT: _____

OTHER _____

OTHER _____

OTHER _____

2. SUBJECT TRACES

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

d. _____

e. _____

3. PHOTO IMAGES 82/1-2, 165/2

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CONTINUATION SHEET

Item Number(s)

TAYLOR COUNTY

The earliest records of Taylor County were made on loose slips of paper by Judge Lowe. His filing system was rather simple. He did not see the necessity for dating or specific documentation, but rather kept the loose slips in a shoebox nailed to a wall on one side of the courtroom. Needless to say, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to glean information from such a bookkeeping system. No records can even be found of the election returns for the years 1854 through 1866.

It has been ascertained that in June of 1863 the county board of supervisors considered the matter of contracting for the erection of a courthouse. Bids were let on the condition that the total cost of construction would not exceed \$2000, that the contractor post a \$5,000 bond, that the chairman of the committee on public buildings supervise the construction, and that the payments be made in installments. When completed, the courthouse was made of stone and sat on the south side of the square. It was two stories high with ceilings no higher than ordinary houses. It was acknowledged that the amount of money appropriated for the building of the courthouse was less than the sum that would normally be needed for a fire and burglar-proof vault. No record can be found, however, of how this paradox was resolved. As the county's needs expanded, additional office space was rented in town.

During the 1880s, propositions were considered to build a new courthouse but were never successful. The village of Gravity had county seat aspirations, and this fact helped convince the citizens of Bedford to push harder for a new courthouse in their town. Bedford was finally successful when it put together subscriptions for \$10,000 which would be combined with county funds raised through a tax to construct a new building. The measure won and the contract was awarded to Allan J. Chaffee of Corning for a low bid of \$38,810. The cornerstone was laid in June, 1892, and the building was completed by the following spring. The county was surprised that such a castle could be constructed for under \$50,000. They understood how when they learned that Mr. Chaffee had finished the project despite losing money. In honor of his faithfulness to the county in building this present courthouse, he was given an additional \$1,000 and a gold watch.

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