

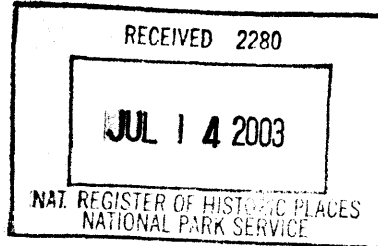
JUL 10 2003

NPS Form 10-900  
(Oct. 1990)

OMB No. 10024-0018

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

870



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 Buchanan County Court House

other names/site number P.W.A. Docket IA 1447-F

2. Location

street & number 216 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue N/A  not for publication

city or town Independence N/A  vicinity

state Iowa code IA county Buchanan code 019 zip code 50644

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).

Ronell G. Drake 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.

~~Entered in the~~  
~~National Register~~

Signature of the Keeper

AUG 28 2003

Date of Action

determined eligible for the National Register.  
 See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the National Register.

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

**Category of Property**  
(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
1		sites
	1	structures
2		objects
4	1	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**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

GOVERNMENT/courthouse

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

GOVERNMENT/courthouse

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions)

OTHER/PWA Moderne

**Materials**

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE

walls BRICK

STONE/limestone

roof ASPHALT

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.

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

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

**Period of Significance**

1940 - 1953

**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.

**Significant Dates**

1940

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Dougher, Rich and Woodburn

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

**Primary location of additional data:**

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

Name of repository:

Buchanan County Auditor's Office

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of Property Less than 5 acres

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	[115]	[5191131210]	[471012141210]	2	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing				
3	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing				
					<input type="checkbox"/>	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 Marilyn 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 Buchanan County, c/o Cindy Witt, Auditor

street & number P.O. Box 317 telephone 319/334-4109

city or town Independence state IA zip code 50644

**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.

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**7. Description**

**Site:** The Buchanan County Court House (contributing) was built in 1938-1940 on the expanded courthouse square in Independence, Iowa located between 3<sup>rd</sup> Street N.E. on the north, 2<sup>nd</sup> Street N.E. on the south, 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue N.E. on the west, and 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue N.E. on the east. The courthouse site (contributing) is located immediately west of a square block park known alternately as the "First Ward Park" and "Tourists Park" at the time the building was erected. State Road 150 extends along 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue N.E. along the west side of the square. The courthouse square is slightly elevated with terraced slopes extending from building to the west. The courthouse is set back from the front sidewalk approximately 130 feet. A sidewalk extends along the front of the building with steps leading down a terraced slope. Curved 5-foot wide sidewalks connect the front entrance to 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue N.E. The original flagpole (contributing) is placed in a circular planter approximately 50 feet from the building's front entrance. The previous county courthouse and related buildings stood on this site but no historic archeological investigation was made to determine the presence of foundations or other building remains.

Mature deciduous and coniferous trees planted when the courthouse was complete are scattered across the west side of the square. An asphalt paved parking lot extends along the rear of the building facing the park. A freestanding communications tower (non-contributing) installed in the past 25 years is used by the county sheriff's department and located at the northeast corner of the building. A scale model of the Statue of Liberty (contributing) is located southwest of the front entrance. It has a copper finish and was installed in 1950 upon the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Boy Scouts of America. The 8 foot 4 inch statue is set on a concrete pedestal for a total height of approximately 13 feet. The commemorative placard on the statue reads "Crusade to Strengthen the Arm of Liberty." Identical statues are installed on the grounds of another PWA-Era courthouse, the Bremer County Court House in Waverly, and the Iowa Capitol in Des Moines. Other statues were erected in 1950-1951 throughout the United States and its territories as part of a patriotic campaign. Newspaper accounts elsewhere around the country describe the replicas as being constructed of stamped sheet copper in 47 different pieces and then brazed together.

5<sup>th</sup> Avenue N.E. serves as the principal entrance route into Independence from the north. It intersects with Independence's main retail street, 1<sup>st</sup> Street, which is located one block to the south. The Wapsipinicon River passes through Independence on a generally north-south course about four blocks to the west of the courthouse. The facing blocks surrounding the courthouse include St. John's Catholic Church to the west, a series of low-rise office buildings on the south side of 2<sup>nd</sup> Street at 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, and a collection of one and two-story single family residences along the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> streets. The park to the east contains a mixture of trees, playground equipment, and picnic shelters. The most important landmark in the immediate area is the steel water tower located at the southeast corner of the park.

**Exterior:** The Buchanan 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

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footprint with the original building erected in 1938-1940 measuring 147 feet by 80 feet according to the original drawings and a correctional facility wing added at the north end in 1976 measuring approximately 53 feet by 63 feet. The front of the courthouse faces west. The courthouse has a poured concrete structure with a brick and stone facing. The foundation and upper walls are clad in glazed tan-colored brick set in a tan/gray-colored mortar. Bedford limestone is used for various trim elements identified in the elevation descriptions below.

**Front elevation:** On the front or west elevation, the building's central section is nine bays wide with a height of 3½-stories or approximately 40 feet. Original 1½-story subsidiary wings, less than half the height of the central section, are located at the north and south ends of the building. These wings project forward from the central section six feet. The five centermost bays have a slightly lower straight roof edge while the outer two bays have stepped parapets. Each of the subsidiary wings also has a stepped parapet. A raised basement extends beneath the entire building. The Buchanan-Independence Public Safety Center wing at the north end of the courthouse was constructed in 1976. It has one level that lines up with the basement level of the original building. The central section's wide bays are separated by brick pilasters that extend from the continuous stone window sill of the first floor windows to the decorative stone lintels of the courtroom windows on the third floor. Brick pilasters also frame the windows in the outer two bays of the center section. Cast-bronze lettering over the five center bays reads "Buchanan County Court House." The dominant design elements of the front elevation are the elaborate metal grills that create geometric patterns on the two-story windows of the courtroom located on the second and third floors of the center section.

Cut-stone designs in Classical or Art Deco patterns are incorporated in many of the trim elements. These include the dentiled window lintels above the first floor windows, a dentiled and fluted canopy above the entrance doors, fluted lintels above the courtroom windows, the cornice with its rounded horizontal bands and widely spaced square blocks containing simple floral designs, the stone bands with circular floral medallions above the third floor windows in the outer bays of the center section, the stepped parapet with cut half-moon designs above medallions, and the stone panels incorporated into the cornices of the subsidiary wings that have incised lily designs matching the window grillwork above the entrance doors.

The entrance steps are constructed of gray granite and are centered on the front elevation between solid cut-stone balustrades 54 inches high. A metal handrail extends down the center of the steps. The building's original light sconces hang on the walls to either side of the entrance and remain functional. They have an Art Deco design that incorporates a leaf pattern in bronze metal work over a white opaque glass shade.

The original double doors have a bronze and copper finish and are set in a deeply recessed entrance opening. A curved canopy projects slightly from the wall face over the opening with a dentiled border and wide fluted band along its front edge. The doors are set beneath a clear glass transom that has its original Art Deco patterned grillwork that features a lily design, also constructed

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with a bronze finish. The stone slabs that face the entrance passage have a fluted finish.

All of the courthouse's windows except for the five tall windows in the center five bays are replacement sash. The new sash were installed in the mid-1990s and are fabricated of aluminum with a brown finish. The replacement units are configured with either a transom or infill panel in the top and a pair of casement windows in the lower half to two-thirds or no transoms depending on the height of the opening. Because the building has central air conditioning, no window AC units are present in the openings.

**Side elevations:** The east and west elevations were originally identical but differ since the addition of the Public Safety Center (emergency operating center) in 1976. The 3½-story and 1½-story wing sections of the building remain unaltered. The 3½-story façades each have seven narrow windows separated by slightly projecting brick walls with brick pilasters at each end. The horizontal stone banded cornice with its floral blocks is the only decoration. The footprints of the 1½-story wings are wider by 12 feet in the side elevations than the center block. As a result, each side elevation has nine bays of windows instead of seven on each of two levels.

In 1974-76 the Public Safety Center was added to the north end of the courthouse. It is constructed of matching glazed tan/gray-colored brick and Bedford stone, has a flat roof, and its single story aligns with the basement level. Its outer walls consist of a series of deep, tiered planter boxes, each filled with coniferous shrubs that nearly hide the building's profile. The public entrance is recessed along the west side of the wing.

**Rear elevation:** The rear or east elevation is a less formal, more functional version of the front façade. The central section has a wide center bay the projects slightly from the wall with four bays to either side. Brick and stone work matches the balance of the building. The center bay has a canopied entrance at ground level. A pair of tall window openings above the canopy are set at the landing height of the main staircase. Three shorter window openings are located on the third floor. Windows on the balance of the rear façade are set in slightly recessed openings leaving the walls in between with a pilaster appearance. A set of window openings in the north half that are out of alignment with the other windows provide light in the service stairs. An exit from this stairwell opens into the rear sidewalk through an original wood door with a four-light sash over two horizontal panels. An identical wood door is included for a service stairs in the south half of the building. A double width opening into the basement in the south half of the central section has an overhead fiberglass door (non-original). Wrought iron balustrades line the concrete retaining walls along the driveway approach.

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The rear façades of the subsidiary wings are configured as those on the front façade with the same projecting footprint. The principal difference is the lack of stone carving in the stepped parapet panels of these wings. A wood picket fence is located along the edge of the parking lot to screen mechanical equipment.

***Interior floor plan:*** The Buchanan 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 level and the first floor. On the interior, these vestibules are set perpendicular to the central corridor, which runs the full length of the building. Individual county offices outfitted to meet the needs of specific county functions open onto the public corridor. Circulation between floors in the courthouse is via the central staircase located opposite the front entrance vestibule and the secondary staircases located in the southeast and northwest corners of the building. An elevator shaft was designed in the original plan and installed at the time of initial construction. The elevator is located adjacent to the central staircase in the north corridor. The district courtroom is located on the second floor and the county jail was originally located on the third floor. It is currently housed in the north end of the basement and in the Public Safety Center wing. 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 levels with the floor and steps covered in a pinkish gray marble. The walls are covered from floor to ceiling in polished Anamosa limestone squares. Fluted polished stone pilasters are located to either side of the front entrance doors. The radiators are recessed behind metal grills located near the entrance. They have a pattern of Os and +s set in small squares with a black painted finish. The commemorative information is inscribed directly in the stone walls rather than mounted on a separate plaque. A boxed cornice has the original decorative plaster design including a fan and half diamond band set between Greek key and semi-circle courses. The original ceiling light, a diamond shaped pendant light with brass metal work and an etched white glass shade, remains in use. The outer doors have a bronze finish and the inner doors are constructed of wood.

The rear vestibule opens into the building midway between the basement and first floor levels. The floors are black terrazzo with a recessed area in the center designed to hold a rubber floor pad. Walls are finished with a textured plaster above polished Anamosa stone wainscoting. The ceiling has a stepped cornice with a plaster dentil design. The entrance light fixture matches that above the staircase landing between the first and second floor except that it is ceiling mounted rather than pendant mounted. The inner west wall has separate single doors flanking a wide horizontal window with 15 lights; these doors lead to the rear side of the central staircase. Two stair runs along the side walls lead up to the first floor and a double-wide run in the center leads down to the basement. Handrails and balustrades match those of the central staircase described below. The pinkish-gray marble used in the front vestibule for steps is used here leading to the basement but the polished stone wainscoting is replaced by textured plaster and a wood mid-rail.



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**Public corridors:** The first floor corridor has a terrazzo floor in four colors. The border is a mix of black, dark gray and pink and the center field includes a geometric pattern of squares and rectangles in a terra cotta mix, dark gray/green mix, and dark red mix. The walls are clad in polished Anamosa stone for the wainscoting and a rough textured plaster surface similar to that found in the Cass County Court House. The stone wainscoting has curved corners at the intersection of the west entrance corridor with the central corridor. A decorative plaster cornice consists of rows of dentils, a Greek key course, and a crown molding. The central sections of the ceiling in the public corridor are clad in the original "Celotex" acoustic tile (12 inch squares) used elsewhere in the building as well as other PWA-Era courthouse projects. Pairs of fluorescent tubes (non-original) extend along the center of the ceiling in both directions. All office doors opening onto the corridor are wood with full-length glass panels and bronze or brass hardware. Fixed transoms are overhead and sidelights appear at most entrances. The original lettering for the doors has been retained for many of the offices. The trim is painted metal and the recessed radiator covers are identical to the patterned grills in the front entrance vestibule. The original marble alcove around the water fountain has also been retained.

The second floor corridor is finished in a similar manner as the first floor including terrazzo floors, acoustic tile, a decorative plaster cornice, tubular fluorescent ceiling lights, and textured plaster walls. The offices at the south end of the corridor are accessed through a pair of doors while those at the north end are accessed through a small anteroom. Those at the south end of the corridor include the judge's chambers, law library, and jury rooms. Those at the north include the office for the county attorney.

The basement level's central corridor has a lower ceiling height with an acoustic tile covering. Terrazzo floors are used here as on the other floors. A pattern at the foot of the basement stairs contains a series of inset rectangles in black, terra cotta and dark red with a dark gray/green diamond at the center. The balance of the corridor is finished in larger pieces in red and gray terrazzo. The walls are finished in smooth plaster without polished stone wainscoting. The radiator grills match those on the first floor. In addition to mechanical rooms and several offices, Diebold storage vaults open into the basement corridor.

**County offices and public rooms:** Each of the county offices contains a service counter at which public business is transacted, a public lobby in front of the counter, a staff work area to the rear of the counter, one or more private offices, and a work vault for storage of records. Walls are plastered with wood chair rails. Flooring is a combination of patterned asphalt tile in the public areas and asphalt tile and carpeting (non-original) in the non-public areas.

In addition to county offices, the first floor contains the board of supervisors' room located south of the central staircase along the east wall. The room has its original asphalt tile floor. The pattern includes a black border, dark red band with a center field of black and gray 12 inch squares. Five rows of pew-style benches matching those in the courtroom face south. A wood wainscoting and

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textured plaster cover the walls. A stepped wood molding runs along the perimeter of the ceiling with acoustic tile in the center area.

Another well-preserved space in the building is the original assembly room located in the southwest corner of the ground level or basement. It was apparently converted from office to assembly room space before construction was completed as it is not depicted in the original plans but was mentioned in newspaper articles at the time the building was dedicated. It retains its original slate black board and bulletin boards at the front of the room. Side walls are plastered with the original dark stain on the birch doors. The only change is the carpeting installed over the original asphalt tile floor.

**Central staircase:** The central staircase is located midway along the east wall of the central corridor opposite the front entrance. The staircase features a central, double-wide run leading up to a wide landing between flights with return runs along the walls leading from the main landing to the second floor. From the first floor, the runs along the walls lead down to a landing and the rear vestibule. From here separate runs extend down into the basement level. The stair treads and risers are constructed of a pinkish gray marble and the closed balustrade is made of polished Anamosa stone to match the wainscoting in the stairwell and other public corridors. The handrail sits on top of the stone balustrade and consists of several parallel members in a combination of brass and bronze finishes. The stairwell walls continue the textured plaster of the first and second floor corridors. A pair of plaster brackets frames the stairwell opening on both the first and second floors. The plaster cornice at the top of the stairwell matches that of the second floor including a dentil course beneath a band of squares. A pair of oversize windows at the landing are set between receding stepped plaster moldings that extend from the stone window stools to the cornice. They provide abundant light for both the first floor and second floor corridors. They are clearly present from the entrance doors and first floor corridor as is the original Art Deco style ceiling light suspended over the stairwell. It is similar to the fixtures designed for use in the courthouse in Audubon County designed by Keffer and Jones. It consists of a circular white glass globe surrounded by three brass disks.

**Courtroom:** The most important space aesthetically and functionally in a courthouse is usually the courtroom. The Buchanan County Court House's district courtroom is located on the second floor facing the front of the building (west). It has a two-story ceiling height that extends into the third floor with original floor dimensions of 52 feet by 31 feet. The judge's bench, witness stand, clerk's desk, and reporter's desk are located in the south end of the room. The jury box is on the right or west side with the room's windows along the back of the jury box. Spectator seating in the north half of the room consists of five rows of pew-style benches arranged theater style with a center aisle and two pews set against the rear wall. The benches and all other wood elements in the courtroom are likely American walnut, a frequent choice in courtrooms designed by Dougher, Rich & Woodburn. The original aluminum gate and end pieces have a geometric Art Deco style pattern and are attached to the front row of pew benches rather than a separate bar.

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A 5-foot tall wood paneled wainscoting set on a dark marble baseboard extends around the perimeter of the room. Above the wainscoting along the west side, the walls are finished with wide vertical strips of textured plaster painted dark red alternating with acoustic tile laid in wide vertical panels. The age of the tile is evidenced by soiling. It has been set with a rectilinear pattern and a simple geometric design stenciled in dark red along the upper edges. In 2000 following a major roof leak, the walls were repainted off-white with the alternating vertical strips of grained paneling retained. Along the north wall three large window openings originally brought significant natural light into the courtroom. Glazed textured plaster filled the spaces between the windows. In 2000, these openings were filled with insulation and covered with gypsum board. The openings were then painted with a grained finish to match the faux wood paneling on the opposite wall.

The ceiling is covered with acoustic tile that also appears to be original "Celotex" tile. A boxed cornice extends around the perimeter of the ceiling with a course of dentils along the lower edge. Eight matching original light fixtures are suspended from the ceiling, each centered on octagonal cut tile medallions. The fixtures are rendered in an Art Deco design, each consisting of a short but broad metal cylinder to cover the bulbs and an outer edge covered with a band of convex ridges. A web-like pattern of cut metal work covers the white glass under shade. The fixtures continue and use and because of the abundant natural light in the courtroom remain adequate.

The front wall of the courtroom behind the judge's bench has a dramatic finish consisting of matched veneer wood panels extending from the marble baseboard to the ceiling cornice. Individual elements in this wall include matching flush panel doors to either side of the judge's bench, each with Art Deco motifs in small panels; a medallion containing an Art Deco design centered above the judge's bench; stepped wood pilasters to either side of a shallow recessed "niche" behind the judge's bench; and a pair of matching carved wood panels to either side of a ventilation grill centered on the wall.

Wood paneling set on a brown marble base is used to form the jury box, judge's bench, witness stand, and desks for the clerk and reporter at the front of the courtroom. Corners are a combination of angles and curves with a common finish molding featuring horizontal convex bands used along the top of all of these stationary parts. The original jury seats, counsel tables, and chairs remain in use. The pew seating has a similar finish molding and is fashioned of matching wood. The principal change to the courtroom is the installation of carpeting sometime in the 1990s.

The judge's chambers, law library, jury room, and other related offices are located along the south end of the second floor. They are accessed through doors located to either side of the judge's bench or through a separate access at the end of the central corridor.

**Floor plan:** As originally conceived, the principal county offices for the Buchanan County Court House were to be located on the first and second floors with additional storage vaults and a few offices in the ground or basement floor. The first floor included offices for the board of supervisors, the auditor, treasurer, recorder, clerk, and sheriff. The second floor contained the courtroom,

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judge's chambers, law library, jury deliberation room, grand jury room, county attorney's office, and county superintendent's office. The third floor contained the sheriff's residence, dormitory rooms for women and men jurors, a laundry, and the jail. The jail included a women's and juvenile's cell along with a dormitory style sleeping room/cell for male prisoners and a day room. The basement contained additional storage vaults, the social worker's office, and space for the county engineer. Before the project was completed unassigned office space had been converted to a large assembly room.

During the past several decades in a series of small to medium sized, phased remodelings the original allocation of space in the courthouse has been altered somewhat. Changes were based on the obsolescence of certain offices (county school superintendent) and specific functions (sheriff's residence and dormitory space for jurors). In other instances, the expanded needs of specific offices were accommodated by the allocation of vacant areas (assessor's office, zoning office, public health nurse). Changes made to meet access requirements were done within the original space allocations (ADA rest rooms) or through sensitive alterations (addition of sidewalk ramps). Construction of a new addition to house the jail in 1976 was done using appropriate materials (similar brick and Bedford limestone trim) and design treatments (location on a non-principal façade, modest scale, proper setback, and screening with plantings).

***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 Buildings: courthouse
- 1 Non-contributing Structure: communications tower
- 1 Contributing Site: courthouse square
- 2 Contributing Objects: flagpole, scale model of Statue of Liberty

***Summary of alterations and their impact on the building's integrity:***

- Remodeling of north end of basement for sheriff's department; construction of public safety center wing, 1974-1976
- Remodeling of various offices and rest rooms, 1980s and 1990s
- New metal windows, mid-1990s
- Carpeting in the courtroom, 1990s

The changes made to the Buchanan County Court House are consistent with the registration

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requirements set forth under Section F.iv.c of the "PWA-Era County Courthouses of Iowa" MPD, pp. F45-F48. These requirements stipulate that additions such as that made to the Cass County Court House be completed on non-principal façades and that choices for materials, design elements, scale and setback be consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Historic Buildings. The 1976 of public safety center wing meets all of these criteria. Location on the north façade of the courthouse, a low profile, and careful screening with foundation plantings makes it nearly invisible from the front of the building. The introduction of new windows is also consistent with the registration requirements. All of the openings have retained their original size with replacement sash incorporating metal transoms where reduced size sash have been installed. The most important windows – the five courtroom windows and the transom above the front entrance – all retain their original sash and decorative metal grills.

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**8. Statement of Significance**

***Architect/Builder:*** (continued)

C.C. Larsen & Sons, Council Bluffs, general contractor  
Wheatland Heating & Plumbing, Cedar Rapids  
Capital City Electric Company, Des Moines

***Introduction:***

The Buchanan County Court House is significant under Criteria A and C as one of ten county courthouses built or planned 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 during a time when the economy was pressed by the effects of the Great Depression. Designed by Dougher, Rich & Woodburn of Des Moines, an important Iowa architectural firm responsible for the design of numerous PWA funded public buildings, it is a well-preserved 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 Buchanan County Court House is consistent with the registration requirements set forth in 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.

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>1</sup> He appointed his good friend Harry Hopkins to head the newly established Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) and Civil Works

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<sup>1</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.

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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>2</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.

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

<sup>2</sup>Jack F. Isakoff, "The Public Works Administration," *University of Illinois Bulletin*, Volume XXXVI, (November 18, 1938), p. 36.

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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>3</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 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.

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<sup>3</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.



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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). Both directly employed workers.

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>4</sup> Based on the 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

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<sup>4</sup>P.F. Hopkins' familial relationship, if any, to PWA Administrator Harry Hopkins is unknown.

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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>5</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:

- 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

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<sup>5</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.

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- 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>6</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>7</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 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

<sup>6</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>7</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.

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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>8</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>9</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>10</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>11</sup>

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

<sup>8</sup>"Women's Clubs Talk Building a Courthouse," *Indianola Record*, July, 1936.

<sup>9</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>10</sup>"PWA Grant for Court House is Asked by Board," *The Advocate-Republican*, August 4, 1938.

<sup>11</sup>"County Board Reserves Right to Reject Any and All Architectural Plans for Courthouse," *Indianola Tribune*, August 3, 1938.

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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 below. 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 in Iowa, 1934-1941**

<b>County/City Federal Project #</b>	<b>Year Completed</b>	<b>Architect</b>	<b>General Contractor</b>	<b>Original Cost<sup>12</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	\$119,000
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
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
Audubon Co., Audubon P.W.A. Docket IA 1586-F	1939	Keffer & Jones, Des Moines, Iowa	J.C. Mayer, Clarion, Iowa	\$133,000
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

**iii. Building the Buchanan County Court House:**

Independence was established as the county seat of Buchanan County in 1847 as the county's first and only county seat. County offices were first located in a frame courthouse completed the same year. A decade later this building was replaced by a larger brick building on the east half of

<sup>12</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.

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the present courthouse square.<sup>13</sup> By 1880 the second courthouse was proving too small and voters approved a new building that was completed the following year.

Over the next 60 years population in Buchanan County grew from 18,546 in 1880 to a peak of 21,427 in 1900. By 1930 population had dropped to 19,550, a pattern of decline that was reversed during the subsequent decade despite the impact of the Great Depression.

Plans for construction a new Buchanan County courthouse had been in the air for sometime when in the spring of 1938 the board of supervisors passed a resolution putting the issue before voters at the June election. The contract for designing the building was awarded to Dougher, Rich & Woodburn of Des Moines on May 11, 1938. In the weeks leading up to the election, *The Independence Conservative* published front page articles in support of the referendum. On May 25<sup>th</sup> the paper included an architect's drawing showing what a courthouse for Buchanan County might look like. The article was careful to point out that the drawings, plans and estimates completed to date by the architects were at no expense to the county. A clear summary of the cost of such a building was laid out along with a description of the building's interior spaces. The funding sources for the courthouse were explained with the PWA grant that was to be applied for characterized as an "outright gift" of \$90,000 from the federal government.

Six days later on June 1 another front page article spelled out the need for a courthouse in even stronger terms. The article began with an appeal to farmers to see that just as a farm was judged by its buildings, a county was judged by its courthouse. *The Conservative* weight to its opinion in favor of the courthouse by quoting an article from the *Denison Bulletin*. Under the headline "Wake Up, Buchanan" the article chided Independence residents with having "one of the poorest excuses of a court house" noting that it was "neither safe nor convenient and long ago served its day." The *Conservative's* lengthy article continued with a series of questions and responses about why a courthouse should be approved. It asked "Why build a new court house?" and then responded with a series of statements that described the need to protect county records, the opportunity to provide for a more economic operation of county government, the fact that a PWA grant represented a "once in a lifetime" opportunity, and important role a new building would play in better serving the public's convenience. Together, these reasons gave the *Conservative* reason to ask the citizens of Buchanan County to vote "yes." And that's exactly what they did five days later on June 6<sup>th</sup> with an affirmative vote of 2,665 to 1,756.<sup>14</sup>

Within a few weeks of the election the PWA application was completed by the board of supervisors and submitted to the regional office in Omaha. Work on acquisition of the balance of the block west of the old courthouse, jail, and records building began in earnest with six homes and two vacant lots acquired by the end of July. Approval of the PWA grant had also been received by

<sup>13</sup>This courthouse experienced an infamous robbery in 1864 when \$26,000 was stolen from the treasurer's safe. One of the convicted robbers later went on to become a Kansas legislator.

<sup>14</sup>"Architects Drawing of Proposed Court House," *The Independence Conservative*, May 25, 1938; "New Court House Is Badly Needed," June 1, 1936; and "Vote Approval of New Court House, June 6, 1938.

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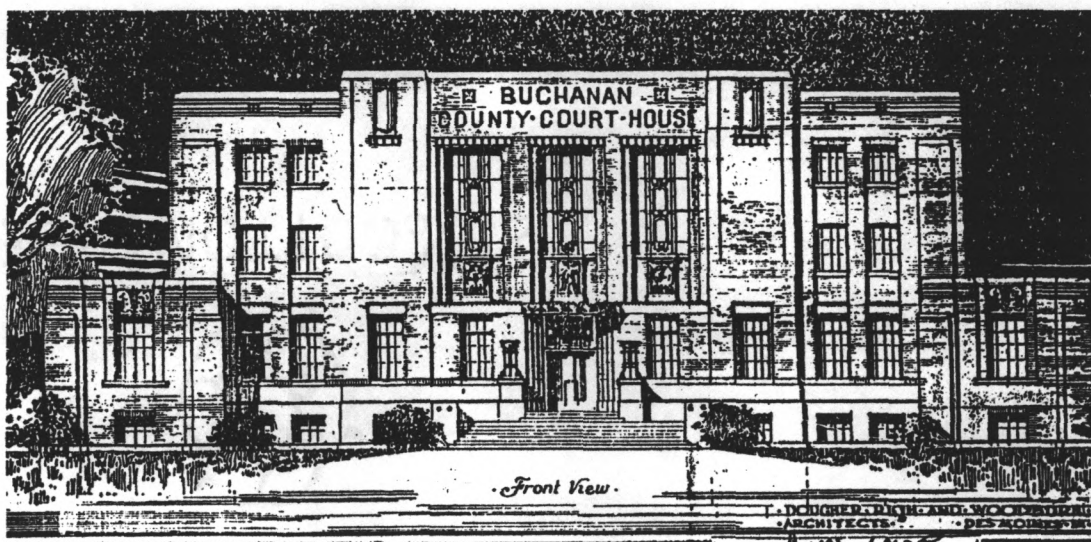
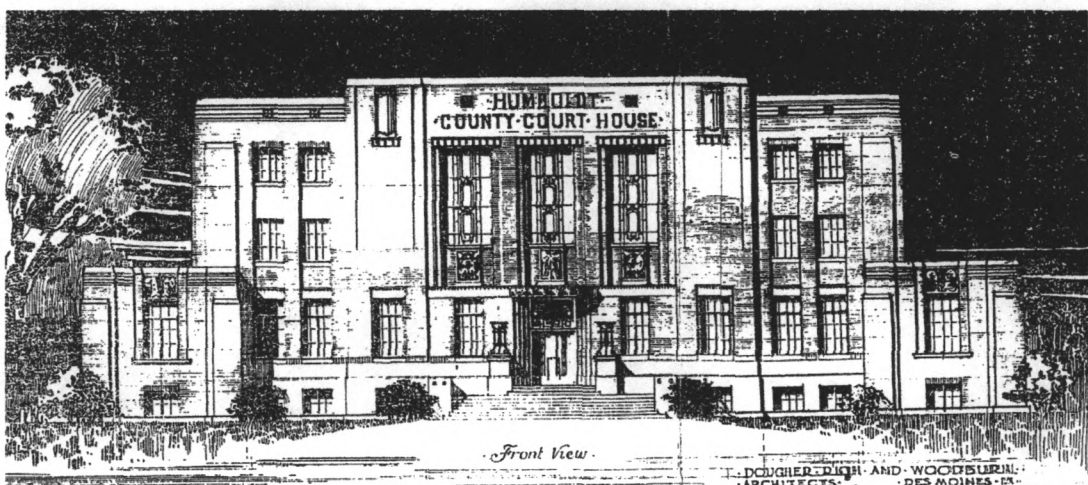
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then and the project had been officially designated as "P.W.A. Docket IA 1447-F." Dougher, Rich and Woodburn's preparation of plans and drawings continued during this period under the supervision of James Dougher. This was to be the firm's fourth federally funded courthouse projects in Iowa during the 1930s. By September 1938 the plans were finalized and revised estimates prepared. The PWA was petitioned to amend the grant to cover several project increases and on October 7, 1938 federal funding totaling \$105,975 was approved by the agency. This was later raised to \$114,264.

Proposed Humboldt County Court House (top); Proposed Buchanan County Court House (below)<sup>15</sup>



<sup>15</sup>"To Lay Cornerstone of Court House," *The Humboldt Republican*, April 29, 1938; "Architects Drawing of Proposed Court House," *Independence Conservative*, May 25, 1938.

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Competition for the courthouse contracts was brisk. Ten large general contractors submitted bids by the October 25<sup>th</sup> deadline along with nine mechanical contractors for the plumbing, heating and electrical work. An estimated 125 people attended the bid opening representing various contractors. After tabling the bids for consideration, the general contract was awarded to the C.C. Larsen Company of Council Bluffs, Iowa for \$148,500, later reduced to \$147,100. This was the third PWA courthouse erected by this firm with others completed in Atlantic and Anamosa. Contracts were won by Wheatland Heating & Plumbing of Cedar Rapids, Iowa for the plumbing and heating work and by Capitol City Electric Co. of Des Moines for electrical work.

Interest in the bonds was also strong with ten bidders. The Leo Mak Co. of Waterloo was the successful bidder offering a favorable interest rate of 1¾ percent. Construction commenced about a week later with the first shovel full of dirt turned on November 1, 1938. Excavation proceeded for the next month with the first cement poured on December 6<sup>th</sup>.

Throughout the course of construction, the federal government 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. For the Buchanan County Court House project, several dozen trades were represented in the workforce. Wages ranged from 50 cents per hour for common laborers to \$1.50 per hour for skilled workers. Based on other courthouse projects, it is likely that the highest paid workers were structural ironworkers. Their rates were followed by bricklayers, plumbers, steam fitters, sheetmetal workers, asbestos workers, plasters, and terrazzo workers. Making slightly less were carpenters, electricians, glaziers, painters, roofers, cement finishers, and hoist operators. The poorest paid workers were likely truck drivers, teamsters, and helpers for various trades.<sup>16</sup>

The courthouse was not the only PWA project underway in Independence. A major sewer project for the municipality was also under contract. As a result of the simultaneous timing of these two large projects, the regional PWA office appointed a resident engineer inspector, T.F. Matson. He was responsible for general oversight and keeping the projects moving promptly. Though not a PWA project, federal funding was used to complete a new post office in Independence shortly before the courthouse project was begun.

As construction continued on the courthouse, supervisors were kept busy reviewing equipment plans and bids for the jail, offices, and courtroom. In February members of the board traveled to Dakota City for the dedication of the Humboldt County Court House, also designed by Dougher, Rich & Woodburn. Upon their return the men noted that the Humboldt County Court House's interior was similar to that planned for Buchanan County, but "our building will be even nicer."<sup>17</sup>

As spring approached the private residences on the west half of the courthouse square were moved

<sup>16</sup>"Schedule of Minimum Hourly Wage Rates, Court House Building, Audubon, Iowa," November 10, 1938.

<sup>17</sup>"See Humboldt Building," *Independence Conservative*, February 1939.



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to vacant lots in other parts of Independence. Construction continued on a steady course with terracing of the courthouse square commenced during the summer. Plans were set for the laying of the cornerstone at ceremonies on September 20, 1939. Work on the interior continued into early 1939 with purchases made for equipment and furniture finalized. By late March 1940 the work on all contracts was completed except the landscaping and the board of supervisors accepted the building from the contractors. County offices were moved a short time later.

Dedication plans were set for May 22, 1940 with the primary speaker scheduled to be Admiral H.E. Yarnell, retired U.S. Navy and formerly of Buchanan County. The celebration included a large parade, flag raising, Yarnell's address, and music provided by groups from throughout the county. Nearly 5,000 spectators attended the event.

Work at the new courthouse did not end with the dedication, however. The spring and summer months saw negotiations between the board of supervisors and district representatives of the WPA conclude with approval of a new WPA project for work on the courthouse grounds. More than 100 men were employed on seven WPA projects in the county that spring. The total spent on WPA projects between October 1935 and March 1939 had been more than \$254,000 according to a report issued by the state WPA office. For the new courthouse project, the board of supervisors authorized an expenditure of \$3,883 for materials and the WPA approved a grant of \$11,649 to pay the wages for up to 40 workers. The project included demolition of the old courthouse buildings, removal of old sidewalks and construction of new walks, widening of 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue to make way for parking, grading for a parking lot along the east side of the building, landscaping, and curb and gutter work. Work was completed in mid-October.

Sanborn maps appear on the following pages showing the site before and after construction of the new courthouse.

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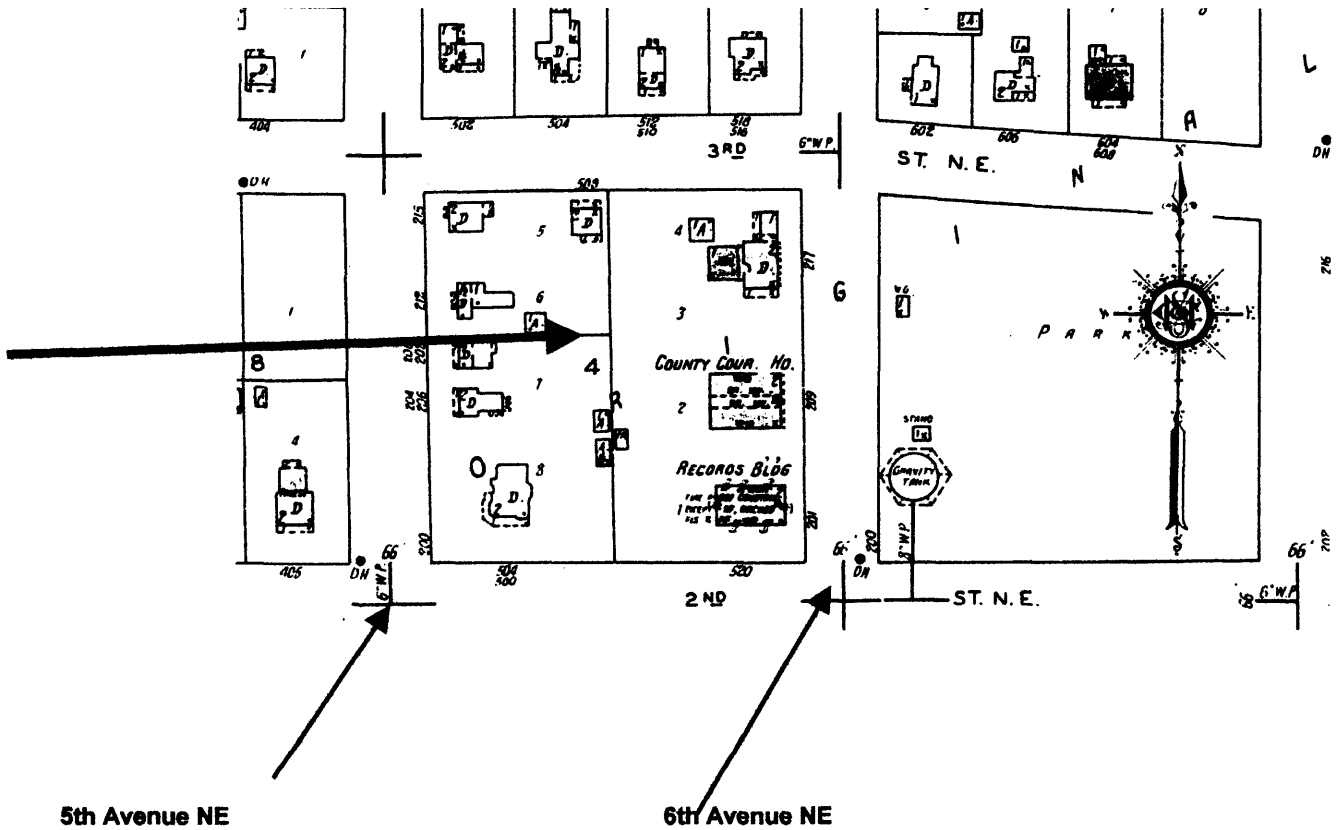
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**Buchanan County Court House, 1932<sup>18</sup>**

N ↑



<sup>18</sup>Insurance Maps of Independence, Iowa. (New York: The Sanborn and Perris Map Company) 1932, p.6.

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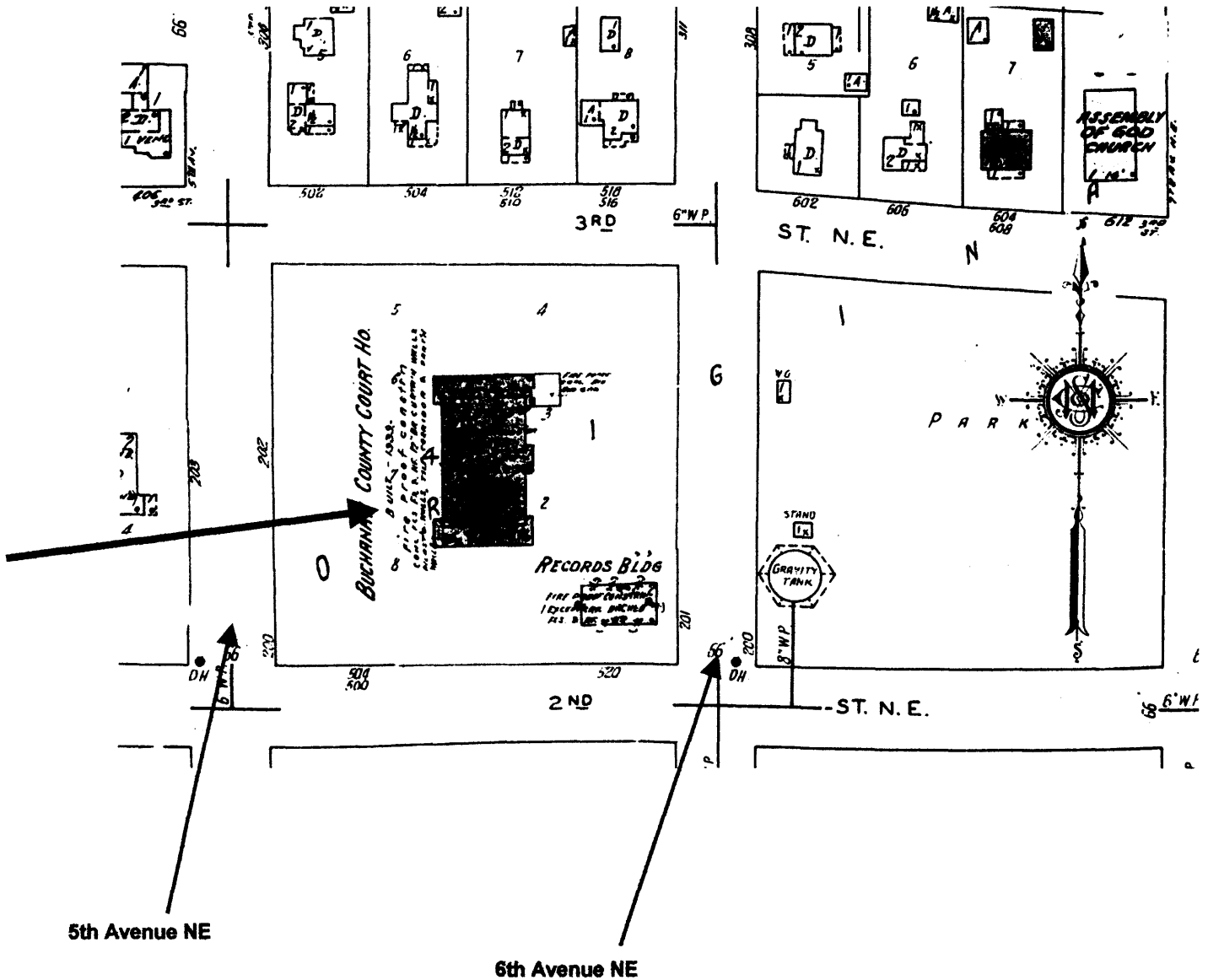
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**Buchanan County Court House, 1957<sup>19</sup>**

N ↑



<sup>19</sup>Insurance Maps of Independence, Iowa. (New York: The Sanborn and Perris Map Company) 1932 updated to 1957, p.6.

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**iv. Architectural significance:**

The Buchanan County Court House was designed by the architectural firm of Dougher, Rich and Woodburn with offices in Des Moines, approximately 125 miles southwest of Independence. James A. Dougher (1894-1976), Herbert E. Rich (? – ca. 1949), and Chester C. Woodburn (1893-1960) formed their partnership in 1923. Both Dougher and Rich had worked for the Des Moines firm of Proudfoot, Bird and Rawson. Woodburn worked as a structural engineer for Keffer and Jones, also in Des Moines. Dougher's strength apparently lay in administration while Rich's aptitude was for design and Woodburn's interest was in engineering and the business rather than professional side of architecture according to historian Wesley Shank.<sup>20</sup>

During the 26 years that the firm practiced, the firm developed a substantial reputation in the state eventually receiving commissions for many schools, churches, and hospitals. The firm designed the Temple B'nai Jeshurun, St. Lukes Parish House, and Plymouth Congregational Church, all in Des Moines during the 1920s as well as the Presbyterian Church in Fairfield, the Methodist Church in Indianola, and the Methodist Church in Macedonia. Among their Iowa school projects were buildings in Boone, Hampton, Marshalltown, Muscatine, Marengo, Washington, Macedonia, Mt. Ayr, Dawson, Avoca, Creston, Hamburg, Keosauqua, Woodbine, Coon Rapids, Stratford, Sac City, Pomeroy, Shipley, and Altoona.<sup>21</sup>

The firm developed a solid reputation for their work on courthouses in the state as well. Commissions included the Cass County Court House (1933-1934) in Atlantic, the Jones County Court House (1936-1937) in Anamosa, the Humboldt County Court House (1938-1939) in Dakota City, and the Buchanan County Court House (1939). These four New Deal Era courthouses designed by the firm 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 lower height wings at each end. In each case a central corridor extends the length of the building and county offices opening onto the corridor. Common materials include buff colored brick, Bedford limestone, multi-colored terrazzo floors, polished stone wainscoting, and acoustic tile. Though the courtroom designs are distinctly different, each originally used dark wood tones and Art Deco ornamentation.

The Buchanan County Court House is the last of Dougher, Rich and Woodburn's PWA-Era courthouses. Though the company had arrangements to complete work on three other Iowa courthouses, the discontinuation of PWA funding and World War II saw these commissions never materialize. The Buchanan County Court House remains one of the best preserved examples of the PWA-Era Courthouses retaining its decorative window grills, plaster cornices, light fixtures, stonework, and courtroom as originally constructed.

<sup>20</sup>Shank, Wesley I., *Iowa's Historic Architects: A Biographical Dictionary* (Iowa City, Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 1999, pp. 52, 141, & 178.

<sup>21</sup>"Architect's Description of Building," *Humboldt County Republican*, Humboldt, Iowa, March 10, 1939; and Barbara Beving Long, "Architects in Iowa Study," various working files prepared for the State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines, Iowa, September 1984.

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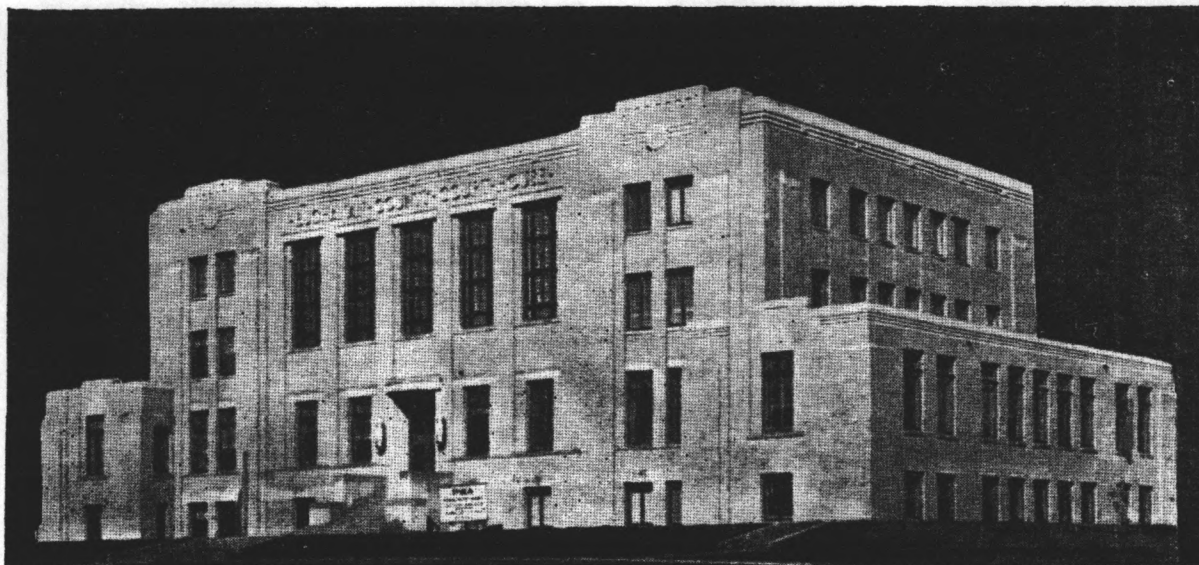
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Completed Buchanan County Court House, 1940<sup>22</sup>

# BUCHANAN COUNTY COURT HOUSE



Miller Photo

## Dedication Program, May 22, 1940

### **Summary:**

In summary, the Buchanan County Court House derives its significance as one of ten county courthouses built in Iowa during the New Deal Era, nine of which received 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 Dougher, Rich and Woodburn, it is a well-preserved example of the PWA Moderne Style of public building architecture that dominated the 1930s and early 1940s.

### **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,

<sup>22</sup>"Buchanan County Court House Dedication Program," Independence, IA: *Independence Conservative*, May 22, 1940, front cover.

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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.

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"New Court House is Badly Needed," June 1, 1938.

"Vote Approval of New Court House," June 8, 1938.

"New Building at Same Location," July 27, 1938.

"Public Opinion O.K.'s Building," August 3, 1938.



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- "Final Approval of New Project," October 12, 1938.
- "Opened Bids on Court House," October 1938.
- "Low Bidders on County Buildings," October 1938.
- "Waterloo Co. Purchaser of County Bonds," October 1938.
- "Start Friday on Demolishing of Buildings," undated, 1938.
- "Engineer is Appointed for Projects," November 9, 1938.
- "Officially Starts Operations on New Court House," November 1938.
- "Pour the First Cement on the Court House," December 15, 1938.
- "Complete Foundation for New County Building," January 25, 1939.
- "Weather Slows County Project," February 1, 1939.
- "See Humboldt Building," February 1939.
- "Auction Sale of Three Houses," March 22, 1939.
- "Work of WPA in the County is Reviewed," April 1939.
- "Work Progressing on New Court House," May 22, 1939.
- "Let More Bids on Court House," June 1939.
- "New Buchanan County Court House," (photos) August 30, 1939.
- "Parade and Program for Laying of Cornerstone," September 1939.
- "Officially Accept Court House," March 27, 1940.
- "Are Moving to New Quarters," April 1940.
- "Line Up Three Tentative jobs," March 1940.
- "Interior View of New County Court House," March 13, 1940.
- "New County Court Room Is Work of Art," March 20, 1940.
- "Buchanan County Court House is Accepted," March 22, 1940.
- "Landscaping Lawn of New Court House," April 1940.
- "Complete Plans for Dedication," May 13, 1940.
- "Colorful Ceremony Being Held for Court House," May 22, 1940.
- "Admiral Addresses Crowd at Buchanan Dedication Program," *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, undated, May 1940.
- "Court House History," May 1940.

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"Crowd Enjoyed Dedication Day," May 29, 1940.

"Complete Audit of PWA Bills," July 2, 1940.

"Last Check Received on Federal Aid," August 28, 1940.

"WPA Project Work to Start About July 29," undated, 1940.

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**Verbal Boundary Description:**

Block 4, Original Town Plat, City of Independence, Buchanan County, Iowa.

**Boundary Justification:**

The boundaries comprise the original site for the Buchanan County Court House constructed in 1938-1940. This site includes all of Block 4 located between 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE, 3<sup>rd</sup> Street NE, 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE and 2<sup>nd</sup> Street NE.

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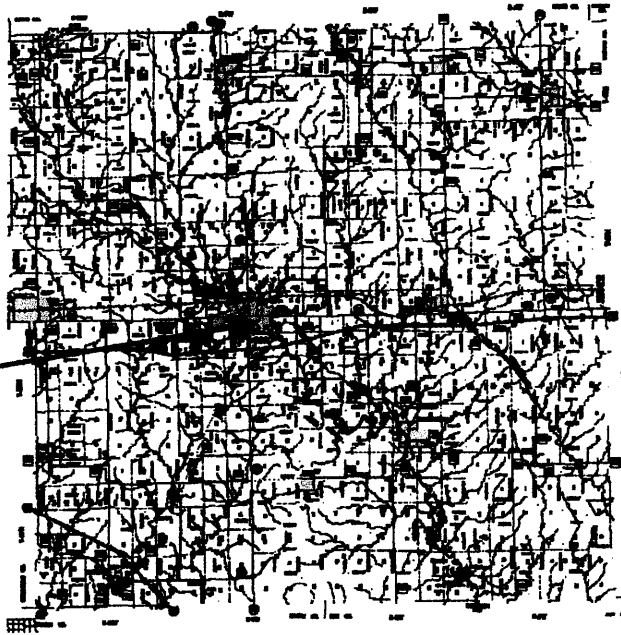
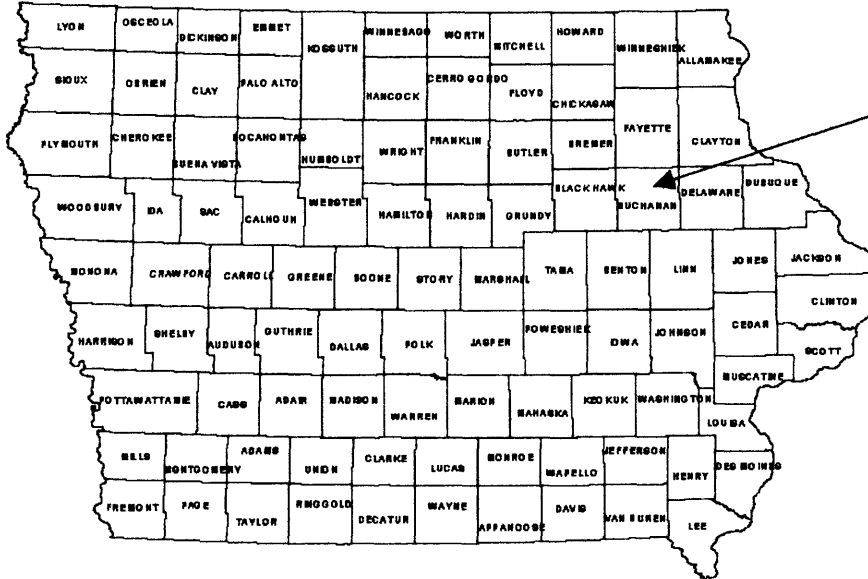
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**Map: Buchanan County, Iowa**



**THEORY AND PRACTICE OF**  
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**IOWA**  
Iowa State University  
Department of Geography  
Map Series 100  
Scale 1:50,000  
1980

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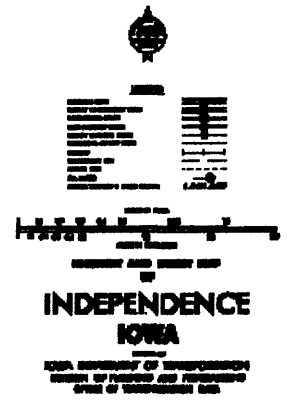
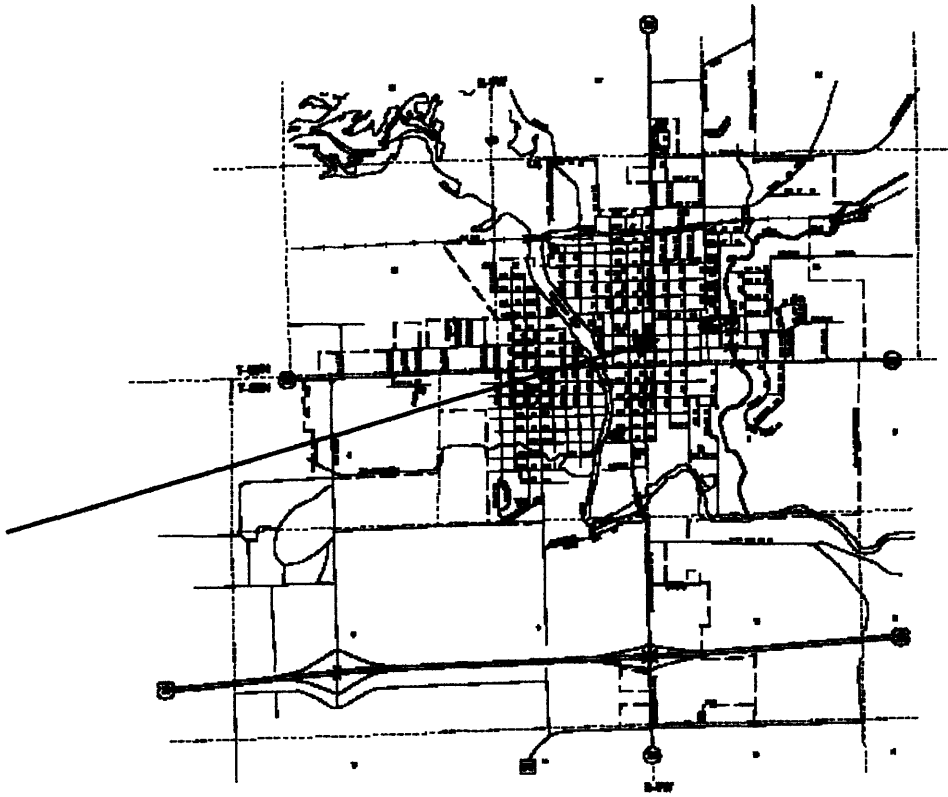
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**INDEPENDENCE**  
**IOWA**  
IOWA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION  
BUREAU OF PUBLIC AND RECREATION  
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**Photographs**

Bruce Meyer, photographer  
Date taken: October 24, 2002

1. Front façade, looking east
2. Front façade, center section, looking east
3. Front entrance, looking east
4. Rear & south façades, looking southwest
5. Rear façade, looking west
6. Front entrance vestibule, looking west
7. Central staircase, between first and second floors, looking northeast
8. Central staircase, second floor, looking northeast
9. Central corridor, second floor, looking south
10. Courtroom, towards front of room, looking south
11. Courtroom, judge's bench, looking south
12. Courtroom, jury box, looking southwest
13. Courtroom, ceiling light fixture detail
14. Courtroom, acoustic tile wall panel detail, looking east
15. Courtroom, towards rear of room, looking north