



**6. Function or Use**

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)  
Government/courthouse

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)  
Government/courthouse

**7. Description**

Architectural Classification  
(enter categories from instructions)

Classical Revival

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation stone

walls brick

roof asphalt

other stone

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

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

**8. Statement of Significance**

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

nationally  statewide  locally

Applicable National Register Criteria  A  B  C  D

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

Areas of Significance  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Politics/government

Architecture

Period of Significance

1920-39

Significant Dates

N/A

1920-21

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Bowman, William N.

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.

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**9. Major Bibliographical References**

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[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: \_\_\_\_\_

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**10. Geographical Data**

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Acreeage of property 2 acres

UTM References

A	<u>1</u> <u>3</u>	<u>6</u> <u>1</u> <u>1</u> <u>2</u> <u>5</u> <u>0</u>	<u>4</u> <u>6</u> <u>3</u> <u>1</u> <u>1</u> <u>5</u> <u>0</u>	B	<u>  </u> <u>  </u>	<u>  </u> <u>  </u> <u>  </u> <u>  </u> <u>  </u> <u>  </u>	<u>  </u> <u>  </u> <u>  </u> <u>  </u> <u>  </u> <u>  </u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
C	<u>  </u> <u>  </u>	<u>  </u> <u>  </u> <u>  </u> <u>  </u> <u>  </u> <u>  </u>	<u>  </u> <u>  </u> <u>  </u> <u>  </u> <u>  </u> <u>  </u>	D	<u>  </u> <u>  </u>	<u>  </u> <u>  </u> <u>  </u> <u>  </u> <u>  </u> <u>  </u>	<u>  </u> <u>  </u> <u>  </u> <u>  </u> <u>  </u> <u>  </u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing

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

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Verbal Boundary Description

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

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Boundary Justification

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

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**11. Form Prepared By**

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name/title	Barbara Beving Long, consultant				
organization	Four Mile Research Co.	date	November 12, 1989		
street & number	3140 Easton Boulevard	telephone	(515) 266-4964		
city or town	Des Moines	state	Iowa	zip code	50317

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Built in 1920-21, the Scotts Bluff County Courthouse is an excellent, largely unaltered example of the Property Type, County Citadel. Identifying features include: rectangular shape, centered entrance, costly materials, distinctive ornamentation, Classical Revival stylistic influence, provision for fireproof storage, and impression of a government building representing modernity, simplicity, strength, and prosperity. The Scotts Bluff County Courthouse is unusual in Nebraska, for it has a hipped roof and a prominent portico with columns rising over three stories, and is quite large.

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The Scotts Bluff County Courthouse is rectangular and consists of three stories set upon a raised basement. Unlike the typical courthouse, however, the raised basement is not differentiated by different materials or wall surface patterns; the entire wall surface is faced with tan brick.

The long and narrow building (70x127') has four bays of simple rectangular windows on either side of the principal (east) entrance. On the north and south facades three-bay pavilions rise above the shallowly hipped roofline and have secondary entrances. A single bay of windows flanks these pavilions. The rear or west facade also has an entrance and continues the materials and ornamentation of the other facades.

A prominent feature is the east portico. Six colossal Tuscan limestone columns support a shallow entablature, also limestone. A notable parapet has an openwork grill with a starburst pattern and an attractive round clock centered above the entrance. Three-part windows are placed above the entrance, and the second story window has a wrought iron balcony with simple stone consoles. The distinctive round-arched entrance concludes the composition. The arch is paneled and has a keystone. Starburst mullions of the top and side lights echo the pattern of the parapet, an unusual and effective feature. North and south pavilions have simpler stone-framed squared entrances with moulded lintels and panels.

The courthouse exhibits features of the Classical Revival style, such as symmetric arrangement, monumental shapes, smooth surface finish, a relatively simple entablature, and colossal columns.

The central hallway on the first floor is cross-shaped and open at the center from the first to third floors, another uncommon feature. Access from the east entry is by stairs up from a landing to the first floor or down to the ground floor. County offices occur off the first floor corridors. Vault placement is variable.

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Original interior features include the woodwork, white hexagonal floor tile (with a border of dark and light grey, dark and light green), white marble wainscoting, and attractive metal stair railings having an open geometric pattern.

In 1980 the interior was substantially modified (Hinde & Nelson, North Platte architects) to accommodate all judicial and related uses. County administrative offices were moved to the nearby administrative office building completed in 1978 (not part of this nomination). Changes include an elevator, additional courtrooms created out of former office space, and new ceilings and lighting. Despite these changes in use and design, considerable original materials remain. In light of the jail addition built in 1967 to the rear of the courthouse, the conversion to a complete judicial facility was sensible.

Exterior alterations are limited to replacement windows which have tan opaque transoms and an elevator bay at the rear facade. The flat-roofed rectangular two-story jail addition is offset from the courthouse by a second-story covered walkway. The addition is faced with smooth concrete vertical panels that alternate with tan brick. With its location at the back of the courthouse, brick facing, and offset connection, the addition is sympathetically sited and does not visually intrude upon the significant features of the courthouse.

The courthouse is located on the northeast quarter of a city block near Gering's commercial district. Numerous tall deciduous trees dominate the courthouse site, especially along the south side, making photography very difficult. There are no objects other than a simple flagpole (not counted for this nomination). A short concrete walk leads to the east entrance and around to other entrances. Much of the west end of the site is given over to parking lots (and the jail addition).

Mixed commercial and residential buildings are located south, east, and west of the courthouse square. Directly north is the 1978 county administrative offices building. A vacated street space (now lawn) separates the courthouse and this building. The administrative offices site was not historically part of the courthouse site and is therefore not included in this nomination.

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The Scotts Bluff 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 Scotts Bluff County. It is a good example of public architecture in the community and contains good examples of design features and facilities distinctive to its design and use as a courthouse.

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

The Period of Significance is 1920, when construction began, to 1939, when the "fifty year rule" takes effect. The Scotts Bluff County Courthouse is being nominated as an example of the Property Type, County Courthouses of Nebraska (County Citadel) of the Context, County Government in Nebraska, 1854-1941, from the Multiple Property Submission, County Courthouses of Nebraska.

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Scotts Bluff County is located in the western panhandle of Nebraska, and its west boundary is also the state line between Wyoming and Nebraska. The county was the scene of early white activity, for the Platte River traverses it from southeast to northwest. Mormons, gold seekers, and westward-bound settlers used the Platte River trails in earnest beginning in the late 1840s.

Despite this early use, the area comprising Scotts Bluff County was not permanently settled until the 1880s, along with the rest of the Sand Hills region. Settlers determined the area was well suited for cattle raising and, later, for farming in irrigated areas.

What is presently Scotts Bluff County began as part of Cheyenne County. With increasing settlement, area residents wanted their own county. A plan creating three new counties out of Cheyenne County was defeated in an 1887 election, but the following year a five-county proposal that included Scotts Bluff County carried.

Three sites competed for the county seat designation, one in Mitchell

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valley, another north of the Platte River, and Gering, then the only town in the county. Despite the advantages of already existing and of having a central location, Gering did not muster enough votes to be named county seat in 1888. But in February 1889 Gering won the election; a factor was the townsite company's offer to build a bridge across the Platte to connect Gering with the northeast part of the county.

After the 1889 election, county officials initially rented part of the Sayre-Gering block, the second building constructed in town. Also in 1889 the county built a log jail on a block the townsite company had donated to the county (now Legion Park). In 1891 the first courthouse was built on this site.

The courthouse served adequately, but discussion of a replacement building took place at the turn of the century. In 1900 the Burlington Railroad built the first line into the county, bringing increased prosperity. Rather than connecting with Gering, the company established its own station two miles away, Scottsbluff. With the benefit of railroad service, Scottsbluff also had hopes of becoming county seat. Gering was able to withstand this competition, especially after 1910 when the Union Pacific built a line to Gering.

Scottsbluff boosters renewed their efforts in 1913, but the county board rebuffed them. By the 1910s, however, the courthouse was becoming increasingly decrepit. To emphasize its perilous condition, the county commissioners had heavy timbers placed around the courthouse to support the walls.

On April 15, 1919, county voters approved a \$200,000 bond issue for the present courthouse. They also favored, in a nonbinding vote, changing the courthouse site from present Legion Park to a site along the main street of Gering.

After some delay in purchasing a new site (one block from the initially proposed block), construction began the end of April 1920. High materials costs and also shortages after World War I may have also been a factor in the delay. The newspaper noted the "rigid conditions surrounding building matters just now." Once underway, building proceeded rapidly, and the cornerstone was laid in early October 1920. The courthouse was completed in 1921, according to county records.

A Mr. Goodhand was general contractor on the project. William N. Bowman (1868-1944) of Denver was the architect. Bowman learned about architecture working as a carpenter's apprentice in his native New York state. In 1899 he married, and he and his journalist wife traveled the country

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to locate a place to settle. In 1910 they chose Denver and built an unusual house on a hillside, an advertisement of sorts for Bowman's architectural practice. Among his commissions were a telephone building, theater, apartment building, and public schools in Denver, college buildings in Colorado, and the Weld County Courthouse in Greeley, Colorado.

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Long, Barbara Beving. "County Courthouses of Nebraska." Multiple Property Submission. 1989.

Works Progress Administration. Survey of County Courthouse Records. 1936. NeSHS Archives. Scotts Bluff County.

Nebraska State Historical Society. Photo Collection. #M281-1058.

"Actual Work Begun on New Courthouse." Gering Courier. April 30, 1920. (Quoted.)

"Masonic Grand Lodge Lays Cornerstone of Courthouse." Gering Courier. October 12, 1920.

Cornerstone. Scotts Bluff County Courthouse.

Notes on courthouses in the county and historic photographs. To be published as part of Gering Centennial history.

Tracings. "Scott's [sic] Bluff County Court House." William N. Bowman.

"Scotts Bluff County." Who's Who in Nebraska. Lincoln: Nebraska Press Association, 1940.

Communication from Colorado Historical Society, July 3, 1989.

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Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property, Scotts Bluff County Courthouse, occupies Lots 1-12 in Block 16 of Gardner Addition of Gering and is roughly 300x300' in size.

Boundary Justification

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