

**IOWA SITE INVENTORY**

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

MAY 29 1981

Site Number 58-028-001  
District Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Map Reference # 58-028-001  
Topo Map Wapello 1:24,000

**IDENTIFICATION**

1. Site Name Louisa County Courthouse
2. Village/Town/City Wapello Township \_\_\_\_\_ County Louisa
3. Street Address Main Street between Franklin and Washington
4. Legal Location OT 24  
Urban: subdivision parcel  
Rural: township block range section  
subparcel 1/4 section-1/4 section
5. UTM Location: zone 15 easting 652160 northing 4559960; Acreage less than 1 ac
6. Owner(s) Name Louisa County Board of Supervisors
7. Owner(s) Address Courthouse Wapello Iowa 52653  
(Street address) (City) (State) (Zip)
8. Use: present Courthouse original Courthouse

**DESCRIPTION**

9. Date of Construction 1928 Architect/Builder \_\_\_\_\_
10. Building Type:  single family dwelling  multiple family dwelling  commercial  
 industrial  educational  other institutional  public  religious  agricultural
11. Exterior Walls:  clapboard  stone  brick  board & batten  shingles  stucco  
 other \_\_\_\_\_
12. Structural System:  wood frame with interlocking joints  
 wood frame with light members (balloon frame)  masonry load-bearing walls  
 iron frame  steel frame with curtain walls  reinforced concrete  
 other \_\_\_\_\_
13. Condition:  excellent  good  fair  deteriorated
14. Integrity:  original site  moved-if so, when? \_\_\_\_\_  
 Notes on alterations, additions (with dates and architect, if known) and any other notable features of building and site: \_\_\_\_\_
15. Related Outbuildings and Property:  barn  other farm structures  
 carriage house  garage  privy  other \_\_\_\_\_
16. Is the building endangered?  no  yes-if so, why? \_\_\_\_\_
17. Surroundings of the building:  open land  woodland  scattered outbuildings  
 densely built-up  commercial  industrial  residential  other \_\_\_\_\_
18. Map \_\_\_\_\_
19. Photo Roll \_\_\_\_\_ Frame \_\_\_\_\_ View \_\_\_\_\_

**SIGNIFICANCE** (Indicate sources of information for all statements)

**20. Architectural Significance**

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

A courthouse exhibiting a simplified Art Deco style. Symmetrical with slightly advanced end pavilions. Front facades of pavilions feature large geometric forms and large panels with stylized eagles.

**21. Historical Significance**

Theme(s) Politics/Government

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

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

See Continuation Sheet

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

- Andreas, A.T. Illustrated Historical Atlas of Iowa. Chicago: Andreas Atlas Co., 1875.
- Pratt, LeRoy G. The Counties and Courthouses of Iowa. Mason City, Iowa: Klipto Printing and Office Supply Co., 1977.
- Stanek, Edward and Jacqueline. Iowa's Magnificent County Courthouses. Des Moines: Wallace-Homestead Book Co., 1976.

Prepared by \_\_\_\_\_ Date January, 1980  
Address \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone \_\_\_\_\_  
Organization DHP

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|---|---|
| <b>FOR DIVISION OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION USE ONLY</b> |   |
| <b>1. OFFICE INFORMATION SOURCES ON THIS PROPERTY</b> |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> COUNTY RESOURCE FILE         | <input type="checkbox"/> REVIEW AND COMPLIANCE PROJECT: |
| <input type="checkbox"/> WINDSHIELD SURVEY            | _____   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> NATIONAL REGISTER            | <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER _____                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> GRANTS-IN-AID: _____         | <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER _____                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> DETERMINATION OF ELIGIBILITY | <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER _____                    |
| <b>2. SUBJECT TRACES</b>                              | <b>3. PHOTO IMAGES</b> _____                            |
| a. _____  | _____   |
| b. _____  | _____   |
| c. _____  | _____   |
| d. _____  | _____   |
| e. _____  | _____   |

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## CONTINUATION SHEET

Item Number(s) \_\_\_\_\_

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

## LOUISA COUNTY

In 1838 when the Wisconsin legislature was considering where to establish the county seat of Louisa County, the choice boiled down to Upper, Lower, and Middle Wapello. The legislature picked Lower Wapello, but later the territorial legislature of Iowa directed that an election be held in 1839 to name a county seat. The county commissioners decided that Middle Wapello was their choice, and eventually the three towns united into one.

The first courthouse was built of cottonwood logs, but was owned by private individuals. When the commissioners met at Lower Wapello on April 24, 1839, they found the courthouse locked and therefore they had no access to either room of the building. This situation was due, perhaps, to their decision to locate the county seat at Middle Wapello.

The county paid five dollars to John Rinearson for plans for the first county-built courthouse. It was a one-story, 40 by 22 foot brick building to which the commissioners had to attach a chimney because it had been forgotten in the specifications. The building was accepted on June 1, 1840, but the county lacked the money to pay for it. The county agreed to pay 20 percent interest to the contractors on the \$1,300 which was due them. This courthouse was also rented for a term of three months to be used as a schoolhouse for the sum of \$10.

By 1846, many citizens of the county felt that a better courthouse was needed. It took a while for the idea to become popular, but in 1851, bids were filed for different items of construction. Upon its completion in 1854, there was some disagreement about the final cost. The contractor insisted that he had to add some extras that were not in the contract and he also insisted that he was due some interest on money that he had to invest before the county made a settlement. The new county judge insisted that a reduction be made because of 12 different items not completed according to the contract. The final negotiated cost of the courthouse was \$9,577.69.

In 1872, the citizens of Columbus Junction, eager to attain the honor of county seat for their town, did what many aspiring towns in other counties have done. Through subscriptions, they raised \$25,000 and erected a two-story brick building to be used as a courthouse should their bid be successful. Atypical of what happened in many other counties, Columbus Junction lost the battle, and the building intended as a courthouse was used as a school.

The present Louisa County courthouse was built in 1928 on the same site as the 1854 courthouse which was torn down. The total cost of the present structure was about \$100,000.