

IOWA SITE INVENTORY

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

MAY 29 1981 Site Number 67-010-001
District Name _____
Map Reference # 67-010-001
Topo Map Onawa 1:24,000

IDENTIFICATION

1. Site Name Monona County Courthouse
2. Village/Town/City Onawa Township _____ County Monona
3. Street Address Iowa Avenue between 6th and 7th Streets
4. Legal Location Block 62 in the town of Onawa
Urban: subdivision block parcel subparcel
Rural: township range section 1/4 section-1/4 section
5. UTM Location: zone 15 easting 740740 northing 4656660; Acreage less than 1 ac
6. Owner(s) Name Monona County Board of Supervisors
7. Owner(s) Address Courthouse Onawa Iowa 51040
(Street address) (City) (State) (Zip)
8. Use: present Courthouse original Courthouse

DESCRIPTION

9. Date of Construction 1891-92 Architect/Builder S.E. Moxon, Architect (Onawa) P.H. Wind, Builder (Council Blvd.)
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:
 Exterior painted yellow with white trim - aluminum sash windows - one-story additions on each side - original Murton tile floor, wood staircase in main space - original railing in courtroom.
15. Related Outbuildings and Property: barn other farm structures
 carriage house garage privy other _____
16. Is the building endangered? no yes-if so, why? _____
17. Surroundings of the building: open land woodland scattered outbuildings
 densely built-up commercial industrial residential other _____
18. Map
19. Photo
 Roll _____ Frame _____ View _____

SIGNIFICANCE (Indicate sources of information for all statements)

20. Architectural Significance

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

This is one of Iowa's courthouses in the Victorian Romanesque style. It is not among the best examples, due to the additions, and particularly to the exterior paint job in a color quite foreign to the style which destroys the effect produced of brick and stone, their contrasting colors and textures.

21. Historical Significance

Theme(s) Politics/Government

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

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

See Continuation Sheet

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

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

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

FOR DIVISION OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION USE ONLY

1. OFFICE INFORMATION SOURCES ON THIS PROPERTY

- COUNTY RESOURCE FILE
- WINDSHIELD SURVEY
- NATIONAL REGISTER
- GRANTS-IN-AID: _____
- DETERMINATION OF ELIGIBILITY

- REVIEW AND COMPLIANCE PROJECT: _____
- OTHER _____
- OTHER _____
- OTHER _____

2. SUBJECT TRACES

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____
- e. _____

3. PHOTO IMAGES 107/1-2, 104/7A-9A,

- 104/14A, 416/25A-36A, 410/1-3, 10, 12 &
- 16, 411/7-9, 408/25A-33A, 407/1-8

CONTINUATION SHEET

Item Number(s) _____

MONONA COUNTY

In 1858, the county seat of Monona County was in Ashton, but a number of citizens petitioned the county judge to relocate the seat of government to Onawa. An order for an election to decide the question was issued in 1858. The arguments were emotional and the campaigning sincere. With a total of 229 ballots cast, Onawa emerged successful by a margin of 31 votes. The county offices were housed in a small edifice known as Mechanics' Hall, which was later moved away to allow the construction of a bank on the same site. The Hall's destiny was to be used as a salt shed.

In the ensuing years, Belvidere and Arcola unsuccessfully challenged Onawa for the honor of being the county seat. The summer of 1889 saw East Mapleton as the most serious challenger because its leading citizens posted a \$25,000 bond to be paid to the county if the seat were moved there. Onawa successfully put off the challenge by raising \$12,500 to be used for a new courthouse if it were to retain the county seat. An election was held resulting in Onawa continuing to hold its distinguished honor. The Monona Land Company, which owned the town, erected a courthouse valued at \$7,000 in the summer of 1858. It was a neat frame building surrounded by neatly-kept grounds.

The present courthouse was built in 1892 and is of typically late Victorian architecture. Except for its tower, the design is in every way identical to the Adair County courthouse. This building is light in color, however, while the Adair County courthouse, located in Greenfield, is made from dark red brick. The Monona County structure also has a small recent brick addition.

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