

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

PHO 677892

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RECEIVED MAR 26 1979
APR 30 1979
DATE ENTERED

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

Polk County Courthouse

AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

6th and Mulberry Sts.

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Des Moines

VICINITY OF
CODE

Fourth

STATE

Iowa

COUNTY
Polk

CODE

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

- DISTRICT
- BUILDING(S)
- STRUCTURE
- SITE
- OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

- PUBLIC
- PRIVATE
- BOTH
- PUBLIC ACQUISITION**
- IN PROCESS
- BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

- OCCUPIED
- UNOCCUPIED
- WORK IN PROGRESS
- ACCESSIBLE**
- YES: RESTRICTED
- YES: UNRESTRICTED
- NO

PRESENT USE

- AGRICULTURE
- COMMERCIAL
- EDUCATIONAL
- ENTERTAINMENT
- GOVERNMENT
- INDUSTRIAL
- MILITARY
- MUSEUM
- PARK
- PRIVATE RESIDENCE
- RELIGIOUS
- SCIENTIFIC
- TRANSPORTATION
- OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Polk County

STREET & NUMBER

6th and Mulberry

CITY, TOWN

Des Moines

VICINITY OF

STATE

Iowa 50309

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Polk County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

6th and Mulberry

CITY, TOWN

Des Moines

STATE

Iowa

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

DATE

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

EXCELLENT DETERIORATED
 GOOD RUINS
 FAIR UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

UNALTERED
 ALTERED

CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE
 MOVED DATE _____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Polk County Courthouse, completed in 1906, is an imposing public building in the Beaux Arts style. It is located on the southern edge of Des Moines' financial and retail district, between this and an area of late 19th century industrial development to the south. It stands on a full block of land traditionally known as the courthouse square (but which seems little like a square as it is quite fully occupied by the building). The courthouse stands at the western end of Court Avenue, and, visible from far across the river, it serves as an ornamental terminus to one of Des Moines' major cross-town streets.

The building is rectangular in shape, of approximate dimensions 242' by 132'. The principal facades (east and west) are five part, with advanced center and end pavilions, of five bays and one bay respectively. The end facades (north and south) are three-part, with five-bay center pavilions which correspond in form to those of the principal facades.

The building is of four stories, and divided into two stages. The lower two stories are subsumed under a high rusticated basement, itself divided in half by a prominent cornice molding at second floor level. The windows are arched, those of the first floor segmental, those of the second round, with Gibbs surrounds. Above this high basement is the main stage, defined by a giant order of Corinthian columns and pilasters with a full entablature running around the entire building.

On the hyphens of east and west facades the zones of the two-story courtrooms on the third floor are defined by giant arcades, the openings fully occupied with small-paned windows. The windows of the center and end pavilions (including all windows of the north and south facades) are rectangular, those of the third floor finished with flat and triangular pediments supported on console brackets.

The center pavilions are of the loggia type. That of the east facade is set apart from the other three, as the principal entrance, and is correspondingly varied in detail. While the other three have pedimented doorways on the ground floor and engaged colonnades in antis on the main stage, the east pavilion has arched doorways and a free-standing colonnade of coupled columns sheltering a narrow gallery.

The building exhibits much of the highly-modeled plasticity characteristic of the Beaux Arts style, with multiplied salient and re-entrant angles, a carefully controlled variation in the height of the parapet, and touches of sculpted ornament everywhere -- keystones carved with grotesque faces, relief sculpture spilling from the tympana of pediments, voluptuous console brackets supporting the third floor balconies, frieze panels and medallions joined by florals swags, and (not least) a profusion of acrotaria enlivening the silhouette of the building.

See continuation sheet

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES	completed 1906	BUILDER/ARCHITECT	W.T. Proudfoot and G.W. Bird, Des Moines
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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Polk County Courthouse is one of the largest courthouses in Iowa, and also one of the most noteworthy architecturally. Of the handful of Beaux Arts courthouses remaining in the state, the Polk County Courthouse most clearly exhibits the stylistic characteristics of this turn-of-the-century form. Its singularity was increased in 1977, when a magnificent Renaissance Revival courthouse in Council Bluffs was demolished.

The present courthouse is the third courthouse to have housed the governmental functions of Polk County. It replaced a small brick courthouse erected in 1848 on Cherry Street, just south of the courthouse square, and a second courthouse erected on the present courthouse site in 1858-62. The latter was designed by J.C. Farrand, an early Des Moines architect, in an Italianate (Palladian) style with a mansard roof over the center portion and a high, multi-stage tower not dissimilar in proportion and effect to that of the present building.

The present courthouse was designed by the Des Moines firm of William T. Proudfoot and George W. Bird around 1900* and construction was completed in 1906. Proudfoot and Bird were perhaps Iowa's most well-known and prolific firm in the first two decades of the century, and were responsible for numerous public buildings around the state. Other courthouses of theirs are: the Dallas County Courthouse in Adel, 1901-2, in a French Chateau style; the Jasper County Courthouse in Newton, 1909-11, a neoclassical building; the Greene County Courthouse in Jefferson, 1917, also neoclassical. These courthouses are among the finest in the state -rom an architectural point of view.

*A complete set of drawings on linen is in the possession of the firm of Brooks, Borg and Skiles, Architects, of Des Moines.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Des Moines Register and Leader, November 1, 1906.
 Pratt, LeRoy S. The Counties and Courthouses of Iowa. Mason City: Klipto Printing and Office Supply Co., 1977, pp. 261-271.
 Iowa Historical Records Survey, Works Progress Administration.
Inventory of the County Archives of Iowa. Des Moines: Iowa Records Survey, January, 1942, pp. 47-59.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY approx. 2 acres

QUADRANGLE NAME Des Moines SE, Iowa

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:24,000

UTM REFERENCES

A 15 448080 4603690

B 15 448110 4603600

C 15 448020 4603580

D 15 448010 4603670

E

F

G

H

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Public Square, Fort Des Moines Addition to the City of Des Moines. Bounded by Mulberry St., 5th Avenue, Cherry St., and 6th Avenue.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

S.J. Klingensmith, Architectural Historian

ORGANIZATION

Division of Historic Preservation

DATE

December 1978

STREET & NUMBER

26 East Market Street

TELEPHONE

319/353-6949

CITY OR TOWN

Iowa City

STATE

Iowa 52240

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE X

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

Adrian D. Anderson

TITLE

Director, Division of Historic Preservation

DATE

5/19/79

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

for Charles A. ...

DATE

4.30.79

ATTEST:

William H. ...

4.9.79

DATE

CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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Polk County Courthouse, Des Moines, Polk County, Iowa

CONTINUATION SHEET

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The building is surmounted in the center by an enormously high tower, which is divided into three stages. The first is a square colonnaded base, which like the center pavilions of the building below is arranged into a loggia-ed configuration of five bays. Windows in the center 3 bays are round arched, while the corner bays are pierced by round arched semicircular niches. The second stage is a square, mausoleum-like block of rusticated masonry with massive engaged corner columns and a large clock face on each of the four sides. The crowning stage is an open tempietto which shelters a bell, and is surmounted by a dome and bulbous finial.

The interior features a domed rotunda in the center of the building, open from the second floor level, which connects with large stairhalls to the north and south. These stairhalls form large open spaces on the third and fourth floors, the fourth floors being galleries around their perimeters, and are roofed with shallow elliptical barrel vaults.

On the first floor are the rooms of minor county offices, on the second the offices of Auditor, Treasurer, Recorder, Sheriff, and the board room of the Board of Supervisors. On the third floor there are five courtrooms and the offices of the Clerk of the District Court, and on the fourth is the Juvenile Court Room, as well as various storage areas. Also on the fourth floor are murals set in the tympana of arches, which depict scenes from the history of Iowa. These were painted by various artists. The dome contains stained glass and the plaster surfaces in the rotunda are brightly painted (blue, green and pink), and feature much plaster relief work. Columns, piers and wainscoting throughout the building are either marble-faced or of scagliola.