

MAY 29 1981

JUL - 2 1981

# IOWA SITE INVENTORY

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

Site Number 80-020-001  
District Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Map Reference # 80-020-001  
Topo Map Neb. City NK 1:250,000

## IDENTIFICATION

1. Site Name Ringgold County Courthouse
2. Village/Town/City Mt. Ayr Township                      County Ringgold
3. Street Address Madison between Filmore and Taylor
4. Legal Location OT Courthouse Square  
Urban: subdivision block parcel subparcel  
Rural: township range section 1/4 section-1/4 section
5. UTM Location: zone 15 easting 395200 northing 4507400; Acreage less than 1 ac
6. Owner(s) Name Ringgold County Board of Supervisors
7. Owner(s) Address Courthouse Mt. Ayr Iowa 50857  
(Street address) (City) (State) (Zip)
8. Use: present Courthouse original Courthouse

## DESCRIPTION

9. Date of Construction 1926-27 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 Concrete
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: Upper portion of windows filled in - aluminum windows and doors.
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 courthouse, while fairly well-preserved, is not eligible for the National Register on architectural grounds. It is prominently sited on a public square, but does not approach the architectural distinction of most Iowa courthouses. It is a "budget classical" building in which design elements of the Beaux Arts and neoclassical have been stripped to minimal forms: not in itself a bad form of architecture, but in this building very utilitarian and unimaginatively expressed.

**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**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <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 _____                    |

**2. SUBJECT TRACES**

**3. PHOTO IMAGES**

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

# CONTINUATION SHEET

Item Number(s)

## RINGGOLD COUNTY

The county judge, in the spring of 1856, ordered the erection of a hewed-log courthouse in Mount Ayr. It was built with a square base 14 feet on a side and was occupied by the county judge, clerk, recorder-treasurer, surveyor, and a physician. During a session of court on June 8, 1858, a cyclone blew down the courthouse. Many of the old county records were never recovered, while others were found on the prairie weeks afterwards. The logs were salvaged for use in a private residence.

For a cost of \$3,500, raised by the sale of town lots, a new frame courthouse was constructed. It was built of native lumber, was two stories high, and measured about 20 feet by 60 feet. The janitor slept in the treasurer's office and doubled as a watchman to guard the county's property. His bed raised out of the way during the day so that business could be conducted. This courthouse was burned to the ground on Thanksgiving Day, 1889.

The third courthouse was started in the Spring of 1883. The construction contract authorized the spending of \$36,455. By the spring of 1884, the brick and stone building had been completed. It was about 77 feet wide and 98 feet long. The top of the roof sat 50 feet above the ground and the tower reached up 102 feet. Unfortunately, no drain tiles had been placed around the foundation. Hydraulic pressure caused great cracks to propagate up the east and south walls. In 1921 the building was condemned and given, along with \$500 in cash, to a house wrecker to be torn down and moved away.

A bond issue was put to the voters three times for the construction of a new courthouse while the county business was conducted in a garage. Finally, in 1926, the voters approved the measure and the cornerstone was laid November 11, 1926. This present courthouse measures approximately 86 feet by 91 feet, is made of brick, three stories tall, and cost a total of \$132,533.

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