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7⁻ DESCRIPTION

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DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The nominated property includes the Lincoln County Courthouse proper and its courthouse square. The square comprises a complete block in the City of Merrill bounded by East Main, First and Court streets and Center Avenue. The main facade of the building faces approximately 162°. The courthouse square was acquired in 1899 and the building was constructed in 1902 and 1903.

The courthouse is a two-and-one-half story building with a mansard roof and 156-foothigh six-story central square clock tower. Its base is native Wisconsin brownstone; its first story is light-brown brick; and its second story and tower are salmoncolored brick. A mansard roof masks an interior octagonal dome and skylight. Pilasters with Ionic capitals separate arched windows on the second story of the main (south) facade, and ornate brackets support eaves above. Alternating semi-circular and triangular pediments cover third-level dormer windows. In general, second-story window openings are arched, and other levels have flat lintels. The tower has a silver-painted, eight-sided dome over four semi-circular arches framing four clock faces facing the cardinal points. A small arcade is located beneath each clock face. A one-ton, 48-inch bell tolls the time.

The interior is conventional for an early-twentieth-century courthouse of modest size. A central three-story light well is surrounded by offices and courtroom. The elaborate octagonal dome and skylight looms over this central space supported on an octagonal arcade. Natural-wood fluted Ionic columns support beams in the central stairway, which has cast iron railings and stairs. The floor under the dome has an elaborate floral pattern in the tiles. Unusual for such buildings is the mosaic panel to the right inside the main entrance that names the building committee, the architects, the contractor and the date of construction.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The courthouse is eligible for entry on the National Register in that it embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type and period of construction, and in that it has served as the seat of county government, and therefore civic identity, for threequarters of a century. While its governmental significance is local, its architectural importance merits nomination at the state level.

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Architecture.

The Lincoln County Courthouse is one of the most imposing and handsome small courthouses in Wisconsin and is the most striking building in Lincoln County. Its monumental tower is visible for miles as one approaches Merrill. The building was designed by the prolific Milwaukee firm of Van Ryn and De Gelleke, which was responsible for numerous institutional buildings in small cities throughout Wisconsin. Stylistically, it belongs to the body of eclectic architecture popular in the first decades of the twentieth century showing influences of Beaux-Arts Classicism. In color, however, it breaks out of the usual mold resulting from Chicago's "White City" of 1893 and employs warm, earth-tone brick and native northern Wisconsin brownstone.

Government.

This building is the second courthouse built for Lincoln County, but the only one built on this site. The first was built in 1876 and was quickly outmoded. In 1899 the county board resolved to build a new courthouse and acquired the present site. An original contract called for a 1902 completion, but nationwide construction strikes delayed the project into 1903. In 1911 a new county jail was built across First Street to the north, behind the courthouse.

¹ Mosaic panel inside main entrance; Jones, et al, <u>History of Lincoln...</u> ²Mosaic panel; original architectural drawings

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9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Original architectural plans are on file at the Milwaukee Public Library.

Jones, George O., and Norman S. McVean, et al. <u>History of Lincoln, Oneida</u> <u>and Vilas Counties, Wisconsin</u>. Minneapolis: H. C. Cooper, 1924. Page 25 (Cutter clas. F902L6.J77.2)

10GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The nomination includes the courthouse and its setting, the courthouse square. This square is bounded by East Main Street on the south, First Street and Highway 64 on the north, Center Avenue on the east and Court Street on the west.

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