

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

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NOV 28 1989

### National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

#### 1. Name of Property

historic name Platte County Courthouse  
other names/site number PT01-1

#### 2. Location

street & number 2610 14th St N/A not for publication  
city, town Columbus N/A vicinity  
state Nebraska code NE county Platte code 141 zip code 68601

#### 3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>1</u>	_____ buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-state	<input type="checkbox"/> site	_____	_____ sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	_____	_____ structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	_____	_____ objects
		<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing: County Courthouses of Nebraska  
Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

#### 4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.

James A. Harrison Signature of certifying official  
November 7, 1989 Date

State or Federal agency and bureau \_\_\_\_\_  
In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See cont. sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

State or Federal agency and bureau \_\_\_\_\_

#### 5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:  
 entered in the National Register.  
 See continuation sheet  
 determined eligible for the National Register.  See continuation sheet.  
 determined not eligible for the National Register.  
 removed from the National Register.  
 other, (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

Patrick Andrews Signature of the Keeper  
1/10/90 Date of Action

**6. Function or Use**

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions) Government/courthouse Current Functions (enter categories from instructions) Government/courthouse

**7. Description**

Architectural Classification (enter categories from instructions) Classical Revival Materials (enter categories from instructions) foundation stone walls stone roof other other \_\_\_\_\_

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

[X] See continuation sheet, section 7, page 1.

**8. Statement of Significance**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: [ ] nationally [ ] statewide [x] locally

Applicable National Register Criteria [x] A [ ] B [x] C [ ] D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) [ ] A [ ] B [ ] C [ ] D [ ] E [ ] F [ ] G

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions) Politics/government Architecture Period of Significance 1920-39 Significant Dates N/A 1920-22

Cultural Affiliation N/A

Significant Person N/A Architect/Builder Wurdeman, Charles

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

[X] See continuation sheet, section 8, page 1.

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**9. Major Bibliographical References**

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[X] See continuation sheet, section 9, page 1.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing  
(36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings  
Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering  
Record # \_\_\_\_\_

- Primary location of additional data:
- State historic preservation office
  - Other state agency
  - Federal agency
  - Local government
  - University
  - Other
- Specify repository: \_\_\_\_\_

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**10. Geographical Data**

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Acreage of property less than 1 acre

UTM References

A	<u>1 4</u>	<u>6 3 17 10 17 10</u>	<u>4 15 18 17 16 15 10</u>	B	<u>    </u>	<u>    </u>	<u>    </u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
C	<u>    </u>	<u>    </u>	<u>    </u>	D	<u>    </u>	<u>    </u>	<u>    </u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing

[ ] See continuation sheet, section 10, page 1.

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Verbal Boundary Description

[X] See continuation sheet, section 10, page 1.

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Boundary Justification

[X] See continuation sheet, section 10, page 1.

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**11. Form Prepared By**

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name/title	Barbara Beving Long, consultant		
organization	Four Mile Research Co.	date	November 8, 1989
street & number	3140 Easton Boulevard	telephone	(515) 266-4964
city or town	Des Moines	state	Iowa
		zip code	50317

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Built in 1920-22, the Platte County Courthouse is a good, relatively unaltered example of the Property Type, County Citadel. Identifying features include: rectangular shape, centered entrance, costly materials, distinctive ornamentation, Classical Revival stylistic influence, provision for fireproof storage, and impression of a government building representing modernity, simplicity, strength, and prosperity. In addition, the courthouse has other County Citadel characteristics: flat roof, ground floor entry with effect of a raised basement, and designed by an architect. It is the second of six entirely stone-faced County Citadels built between 1917 and 1930 across the state, an important subgroup of the property type. The impressive size, mass, and materials of the courthouse work together to mitigate the effect of alterations.

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The Platte County Courthouse is a three-story rectangular building that also has partial attic space tucked behind the parapet. Access from the two entrances on the south and east facades is directly into the first floor, although the rusticated stonework gives the impression of a raised basement. The rear or north facade continues the materials of the other sides but lacks the ornamentation and was intended to be the back of the building. The building is faced with Bedford limestone.

The courthouse is a compact design lacking strongly projecting pavilions. Instead, four (or two) colossal fluted engaged columns in colonnades provide an important design feature. The relatively unadorned roofline features attic windows and along the south facade "PLATTE COUNTY COURTHOUSE" and "ERECTED BY THE PEOPLE OF THE COUNTY ANNO DOM. 1920" are incised in the stone. Below a rather broad but simple moulded cornice is a frieze with pairs of cutout starburst patterns alternating with circles. The frieze detail highlights the fluted engaged columns and their Ionic capitals.

Five sets of long narrow windows alternate with the engaged columns on the south, a number that is reduced to three sets of windows and two engaged columns on the narrower sides of the 71x107' building. Between the second and third story windows on these three facades are simple stone panels with the names of pioneers and May 28, 1856 incised on them.

Entrances are centered on the facades; small but rather elaborate pediments highlight them and have long consoles and acroteria (on east facade) and an eagle (on the south). "EQUALITY BEFORE THE LAW" is carved over the south entry. Original wood double doors have transoms with a

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starburst pattern in them similar to that of the entablature.

Elements of the Classical Revival style displayed here include the symmetrical arrangement, monumental proportions, smooth stone surface, large Ionic engaged columns, unadorned parapets, simple entablature, and both rusticated and ashlar finish.

On the first floor two corridors cross at the center of the building. Directly across from the south entrance, in the north corridor, are stairs up to the second floor. County offices such as the treasurer's and clerk's offices are on the first floor. The supervisors' meeting room and other less frequently visited offices are located on the second story where there is no south corridor (unlike on the first floor). The 38x70' district courtroom occupies most of the south end of the third floor, and the long east-west corridor is placed farther north in the floorplan than on other floors.

The architect has designed the interior in a modern manner to accommodate the specific functional needs of each floor and thus he varied the corridors as necessary. Another unusual feature is the absence of separate vault space. The offices of the clerk, treasurer, and others with valuable records double as the vault. These offices have heavy metal doors commonly associated with vaults opening onto the corridors. Metal storage units line the vault/offices.

Exterior alterations consist of replacement windows that have long opaque transoms and the Platte County Hall of Justice addition. This two-story addition is connected to the courthouse by a portion that is offset from the main facade and runs along the west side of the building. The approximately 56x133' addition is faced with rough concrete panels, some of which contain narrow windows, and there is an entrance on the west facade. The addition is similar in color, of smaller scale, and offset from the courthouse so that it does not intrude visually on the significant features of the courthouse.

Built in 1974-77 to meet changing law enforcement requirements, the addition contains the jail, city and county law enforcement facilities, and courts for the county. In the courthouse the former district courtroom has been changed: new ceilings, lighting, and wall coverings. However, original stenciling and elaborate della Robia plaster ceiling detail remain behind these changes. Offices have fluorescent lighting, and there are new wall coverings and doors on the second and third floors. Original interior features include oak counters (with new tops), marble mopboards, stairs and simple banisters, and wainscoting, some light fixtures in halls, and ornamental plasterwork in several patterns.

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The courthouse is located on a half-block site just north of the principal commercial street of Columbus. The courthouse occupies the east half of the site, and the jail addition covers the other half, formerly site of the YMCA. An alley runs along the north or rear side of the site. Commercial and other public use, including a fire station and a church, surround the courthouse. No objects other than a simple flagpole (not counted for this nomination) occupy the site. Concrete walks lead directly to the two entrances. On the block just south of the courthouse is Frankfort Park. The attractive open space has numerous trees and centered in it is a statue in memory of Civil War veterans.

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The Platte County Courthouse is architecturally significant (Criterion C) and also historically significant (Criterion A) for its association with politics and local government. The property derives its historic significance as the focal point for the administration of local government and institutions in Platte County. It is a good example of public architecture in the community and contains good examples of design features and facilities distinctive to its design and use as a courthouse.

As a fine example of the County Citadel, the courthouse contains design features and facilities distinctive to its design and use (such as fireproof vaults), has a rectangular shape, centered entrance, costly materials, distinctive ornamentation, and Classical Revival stylistic influence. Elements of the design combine effectively to convey the impression of a government building representing modernity, simplicity, strength, and prosperity, also features of the County Citadel. It is the second of six entirely stone-faced County Citadels built between 1917 and 1930 across the state, an important subgroup of the Property Type.

The Period of Significance is 1920, when construction began, to 1939, when the "fifty year rule" takes effect. The Platte County Courthouse is being nominated as an example of the Property Type, County Courthouses of Nebraska (County Citadel) of the Context, County Government in Nebraska, 1854-1941, from the Multiple Property Submission, County Courthouses of Nebraska.

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Platte County is located in northeast central Nebraska, and the Platte River runs along its southern boundary. With this location along the important transportation route, the Platte River, the county was among the early settlement areas in the state. In 1855 it was created out of adjacent Dodge County.

The 1856 community of Columbus, the county seat, is located on the Platte River and thus saw considerable early economic activity as a stop along that transportation route. In the 1860s the Union Pacific Railroad arrived, further stimulating settlement and economic development.

In 1868-70 the county built its first courthouse, on the southeast quarter of Columbia Square in Columbus. By the early twentieth century, county residents wanted to replace the old courthouse and approved a \$150,000 bond issue for new courthouse construction (and later, a \$70,000 tax levy). However, controversy arose over the location of the new building within the county seat. One faction felt that Columbia Square

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was perfectly suitable. Others maintained that this area of original commercial development had become increasingly residential and that the courthouse should be nearer the principal commercial area of town. By the early twentieth century, Columbus' commercial district lay north of the railroad tracks. Columbia Square was south of the tracks.

On January 15, 1916, Columbia Square proponents filed a petition with the board favoring the old courthouse site and pointing out that the site choice would affect the architect's plans and should therefore be fixed. One year later, the board decided to get bids from architects and then chose Columbus architect Charles Wurdeman. (No other information is known about the architect.)

On March 2, 1917, the board finally responded to the January 1916 petition and agreed with the proposal. The following month the United States went to war against Germany, and the nation went on a wartime footing. Construction plans, such as the Platte County Courthouse, were delayed. Columbus residents continued to discuss the matter, however. In May 1917 the board met with local businessmen on the subject, then passed a resolution stating it was unwise to discuss courthouse location further. Clearly the businessmen sought to change the location.

The argument delayed construction for years. World War I further contributed to the delay between 1917 and 1918. On March 10, 1920, the county board opened bids from general contractors. They rejected all bids as too high, and, in a cost-saving measure, decided to act as their own general contractor. They did hire a "clerk of the work" to administer the paperwork, however. In May 1920 the board selected the present site north of the tracks, which they bought for \$20,000. (The old courthouse site was sold in 1922.)

Construction proceeded over the summer of 1920, and members of the local Masonic lodge laid the cornerstone November 30, 1920. Dedication ceremonies were held June 26, 1922. The board claimed they had saved the county \$53,239 by acting as general contractor for the project.



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Long, Barbara Beving. "County Courthouses of Nebraska." Multiple Property Submission. 1989.  
Nebraska State Historical Society. Photo Collection. #M281-955, M281-4039.  
Works Progress Administration. Survey of County Courthouse Records. 1936.  
NeSHS Archives. Platte County.  
Columbus, Nebraska. Sanborn Fire Insurance Map. 1889, 1925.  
Platte County. Supervisors' Records. Books 10 and 11.  
Platte County Clerk's Office. Bids and other information about the courthouse.  
Cornerstone. Platte County Courthouse.  
NeSHPO files. Incomplete copy of pamphlet for cornerstone ceremonies.  
November 30, 1920.

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### Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property, Platte County Courthouse, occupies Lots 5, 6, 7, 8 of Block 51 of the Original Plat of Columbus and is roughly 135x265' in size.

### Boundary Justification

The boundary includes the quarter-block that has historically been associated with the property as well as the quarter-block that the addition to the courthouse now occupies.