

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

DATA SHEET

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	JUL 16 1976
DATE ENTERED	NOV 7 1976

**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

Johnson County Court House

AND/OR COMMON

Johnson County Court House

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

76 North Main

___ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Buffalo

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

STATE

Wyoming

___ VICINITY OF

CODE
56

COUNTY

Johnson

CODE
019

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE	
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL	<input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Johnson County

STREET & NUMBER

76 North Main

CITY, TOWN

Buffalo

___ VICINITY OF

STATE

Wyoming

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Johnson County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

76 North Main

CITY, TOWN

Buffalo

STATE

Wyoming

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Wyoming Recreation Comm. Survey of Historic Sites, Markers & Monuments

DATE

1967 (1973 revised)

___ FEDERAL STATE ___ COUNTY ___ LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Wyoming Recreation Commission

CITY, TOWN

Cheyenne,

STATE

Wyoming 82001

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Johnson County Court House is a good example of the Italianate style of architecture. The stilted arch window openings with pronounced keystones and the consoles on cornices are characteristics of this style. Bricks for the Court House were made from clay soil obtained from a location which is now just south of the Buffalo City Park. Kilns at the foot of the Big Horn Mountains provided the lime for the mortar, mixed from one measure of lime and two measures of sand.

The structure has outwardly changed very little since it was built in 1884, except for the removal of the bell tower. It is two stories high, of red brick, situated above street level, and is still today an imposing structure. A border of white was painted under the eaves and an emblem of the rising sun occupies the space high above the main doorway on the east. The doorway is recessed. In the early days the grounds were unlandscaped, but about 1900 a row of cottonwood trees was planted across the front of the grounds, and large spruce trees and other plantings have been added.

In the early days, heat was provided by wood and coal stoves. A steam heating system was installed and at that time the bottom foundation of the bricks was cemented and a chimney on the north side was removed. At one time a hallway led to a door on the south side, but a vault was needed for storage so the door was closed off and the vault constructed where the hallway had been. The courtroom was remodeled somewhat following World War II. More recent remodeling (1973-74) has included an enclosed counter for use by the County Treasurer's staff which was built in the main floor hallway, and some changes in the jail facilities. The long twin stairways, one on each side at the west end of the main hall, have not been altered. These curving wood stairs with their ornamental stringers are in excellent condition. There is also wooden paneling in the main hallway which is distinctive.

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 checked="" 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 checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1884

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Edward and James Curran

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Many of the early photographs of Buffalo, Wyoming, show the Johnson County Court House, a beautiful two-story red brick building, towering over ox teams on a muddy Main Street. This is one of the oldest structures standing in the state of Wyoming, was the sixth county courthouse to be built, and is the second oldest courthouse building in the state that is still in use. It is the oldest courthouse in Wyoming retaining its original character and still used as originally designed. Four county courthouses built in Wyoming prior to 1884 have been razed.

At the time the Court House was constructed, Wyoming was still a territory. The nearest railroad was over 150 miles away. Indians were being contained on reservations and electric lights for city illumination were just beginning to be used. The next decade would see difficult times for the ranchers and cattlemen, and the "Johnson County War" would erupt between the cattlemen and the homesteaders. According to some historians of the "Invasion" of April 13, 1892, it was the intention of the planners of that invasion to march to Buffalo, seize the Court House and the arms that were then stored there, and possibly destroy the Court House with dynamite. Included on the list of names allegedly carried by the invaders, indicating those who were to be "taken care of", were the names of Sheriff Red Angus, the mayor of Buffalo, the County Commissioners, and other officials and businessmen.

Of those who died in this "war", the best known were Nate Champion and Nick Rae, and on April 16, 1892, the Coroner's Jury met in the Court House and found that the "deceased persons" came to their deaths on April 9th "by being willfully and feloniously killed and murdered" by a long list of men involved in the "invasion". Those accused were in custody at Fort McKinney except for two men who were locked up in the county jail in Sheriff Angus's charge. One of these two was George Dunning who had been recruited in his native state of Idaho for the invasion. He had hidden out in the hay in the barn loft at the T.A. Ranch until everyone else had gone, and then walked to Buffalo to give himself up. He spent the summer in Jail, writing on a document which he called "The Confession

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Minutes of meetings of Johnson County Commissioners, 1881 - 1884,
 Office of the County Clerk, Johnson County, Wyoming
 Wall, J. Tom. Crossing Old Trails to New in North Central Wyoming.
 Dorrance & Company, Philadelphia 1973
The Buffalo Bulletin, 1884 - 1894
Courthouses of Early Wyoming, compiled by the Colonial Dames

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 1

UTM REFERENCES

A	1 3	3 6 4 5 9 0	4 9 1 1 6 9 5
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C			

B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

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

James F. Dillinger, President

ORGANIZATION

Johnson County Historical Society

DATE

June 15, 1975

STREET & NUMBER

385 South Main

TELEPHONE

(307) 684-7309

CITY OR TOWN

Buffalo

STATE

Wyoming

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL X

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.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

Paul H. Sherwood

TITLE

Wyoming State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE

June 1, 1976

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

ACTING DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST

Joseph P. ...
Paul H. Sherwood

DATE

11/9/96

DATE

11/1/76

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
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of George Dunning." The other man captured by the Sheriff was R. M. Allen, manager of the Western Union Beef Company.

Sheriff Angus was ordered by Acting Governor Amos W. Barber to deliver the two men to the Commander at Fort McKinney, and according to one writer it was planned that three troops of cavalry would be sent as escort. However, the Sheriff advised that only one man be sent, to avoid bloodshed, and when the escort arrived at the Court House he was met by an army of two hundred "nesters", forming a lane from the street to the jailhouse.

President Harrison was persuaded by cattle companies to declare martial law in the county, and a Negro regiment was brought in to enforce it. Eventually the resentment of martial law exploded and the Negroes were forced to withdraw, and Johnson County government took over once again.

The town of Buffalo had been established in 1879 at the site where the old Bozeman Trail crosses Clear Creek. Nearby was Fort McKinney, one of the posts set up to protect travelers on the Bozeman Trail and to control the Indians of the area. It is remarkable that in 1884 the people of Johnson County and of Buffalo, a town still in its formative period, had the foresight to build such a large structure as the seat of their county government. To learn how this came about, we must go back to April 19, 1881, when the Territorial Governor of Wyoming appointed commissioners to establish the Johnson County government. In June the new Board of Commissioners drew up necessary papers and purchased property, including a building which had been used as a dance hall to be converted to a courthouse. By November 1883 this very large county was considered financially prosperous, and it was decided that a new courthouse and jail should be constructed, where records could be safely stored, prisoners could be kept securely, and sessions of the Court could be held with comfort and dignity. A bill was presented to the Territorial Legislature, and funds were authorized for construction of the new building.

On April 30, 1884, plans and specifications for the Court House were prepared and subsequently advertised, and on June 25 the contract was awarded to Edward and James Curran. The successful bid for the Court House and jail was \$81,650.00, and the contractors were required to file a bond in the amount of \$63,000.00. The old

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converted dance hall buildings were sold, and following their removal from the grounds the present courthouse was begun. As was typical, the cornerstone was placed at the northeast corner. The County Commissioners in 1884 were W. H. Holland, J. M. Clevinger, and J. P. Marks.

The Johnson County Court House has been in continuous use since it was constructed in 1884, and is presently the oldest courthouse in Wyoming still retaining its original character and still being used as originally designed.