

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

2238

NOV 2 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 Polk County Courthouse
other names/site number PK01-4

2. Location

street & number Courthouse Square N/A not for publication
city, town Osceola N/A vicinity
state Nebraska code NE county Polk code 143 zip code 68651

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. Hansen Signature of certifying official November 17, 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. Patrick Anders 1/10/90
 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:)

for Signature of the Keeper _____ 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) Beaux Arts Materials (enter categories from instructions) foundation terra cotta walls brick roof other other terra cotta

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 [x] statewide [] 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) Architecture Politics/government Period of Significance 1921-39 Significant Dates 1921-22 N/A

Cultural Affiliation N/A

Significant Person N/A Architect/Builder Gernandt, William F.

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.

9. Major Bibliographical References

[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: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property 1 acre

UTM References

A	<u>1</u> <u>4</u> <u>6</u> <u>2</u> <u>1</u> <u>8</u> <u>9</u> <u>10</u> <u>4</u> <u>5</u> <u>5</u> <u>9</u> <u>5</u> <u>7</u> <u>0</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.

Verbal Boundary Description

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

Boundary Justification

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

11. Form Prepared By

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

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 1

Built in 1921-22, the Polk County Courthouse is an excellent, essentially intact example of the Property Type, County Citadel. Identifying features include: rectangular shape, centered entrance, costly materials, distinctive ornamentation, Beaux Arts stylistic influence, provision for fireproof storage, and impression of a government building representing modernity, strength, and prosperity. The courthouse also has other County Citadel characteristics: flat roof, prominent raised basement, and designed by an architect. In addition, the property is an exceptionally fine example of one of the ten Nebraska courthouses William F. Gernandt designed during an unusually productive period, between 1910 and 1923. The Polk County Courthouse, with its elaborate terra cotta ornamentation, marks a departure from earlier Gernandt designs and thus illustrates the evolution of this courthouse commissions.

The compact rectangular Polk County Courthouse consists of two stories upon a raised basement and measures 98x68'. Entrances project on the north and south facades. A split foyer offers interior steps on either side up to county offices as well as access down to the 31x38' Community Room and rest rooms in the raised basement or ground level. County offices occur off a long corridor on the first floor.

Located in the central courthouse square in Osceola, the building is a tour de force of classically inspired ornamentation rendered in cream-colored terra cotta and contrasting tan-grey brick. A variety of rich classical detail, immense columns, pronounced cornice, and rusticated basement are hallmarks of the Beaux Arts Style exhibited on the building. In particular, the terra cotta detail is a visual delight. Acroteria and rosettes march along the top of the projecting cornice, with consoles in an acanthus pattern and an egg-and-dart course below. Shields, della Robbia wreaths, swags, and geometric patterns further adorn the facade.

American eagles stand guard above colossal fluted terra cotta columns and brick pilasters on the slightly projecting entry pavilions on the principal or south facade. The north facade, which also has an entrance, is slightly less elaborate, having squared brick pilasters and a moulded terra cotta entrance. All columns and pilasters display elaborate Corinthian composite capitals. In addition to the cornice and entry details, terra cotta is used to outline or emphasize windows, as bases for lamps and pilasters, a patterned water table course, and for the base of the building. The "rusticated" brick of the raised basement emphasizes the change between stories and, with the terra cotta base, visually anchors the building to the site.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 2

The courthouse is located at the north end of the courthouse square and thus enjoys a spacious front yard with small trees and a long straight walk to the main entrance. Commercial buildings of varying construction dates ring the square. Sanborn fire insurance maps for 1887 and 1922 show this commercial use around the courthouse square, which is located at the high point of town.

Exterior alterations to the courthouse are minimal. Metal and terra cotta light fixtures, metal double doors, metal grills, even a shoe scraper of metal at the south entrance, remain as shown on the blueprints. Since there are three steps up to the entrances, an unobtrusive concrete ramp has been added to provide access for the handicapped at the south entrance. Metal storm windows are not original. A simple new flagpole (not counted for this nomination) replaced the original in 1969. In 1974 over forty trees were removed from the ample courthouse square, casualties of Dutch elm disease, and were replaced with new plantings.

The interior of the Polk County Courthouse is also remarkably unchanged. Notable features include metal light fixtures (wall and ceiling), oak woodwork (picture rails, large moulded door frames, doors), decorated plaster capitals, showy grey-and-white mottled marble (door surrounds, balustrades, wainscotting), white marble stairs, and geometrically patterned ceramic tile floors.

The district courtroom on the second floor is quite similar to the Valley County courtroom and exhibits an array of heavy woodwork, including wainscotting, carved lintels with elaborate consoles, pedimented screen behind the judge's bench, paneled pews for spectators, ceiling mouldings, and an unusual ceiling of cork tiles between wood mouldings. Two banks of fluorescent ceiling lights have been added, but original wall fixtures remain as well.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 1

The Polk 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 Polk County. The courthouse also represents the "county seat wars" that characterized an important chapter in the county's political history. It is an excellent example of public architecture and contains good examples of design features and facilities distinctive to its design and use as a courthouse.

In addition, the courthouse is an exceptionally fine example of the ten Nebraska courthouses William F. Gernandt designed during an unusually productive period, between 1910 and 1923. The Polk County Courthouse, with its elaborate terra cotta ornamentation, illustrates the evolution of Gernandt's courthouse commissions. With its distinctive design and standing as one of Gernandt's important terra cotta courthouses, the property is of Statewide Significance.

As a good 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 Beaux Arts stylistic influence. Elements of the design combine effectively to convey the impression of a government building representing modernity, simplicity, and prosperity, also features of the County Citadel.

The Period of Significance is 1921, when construction began, to 1939, when the "fifty year rule" takes effect. The Polk 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.

Polk County was organized in 1870 during a period of pronounced settlement in Nebraska. County officers built a courthouse on the public square in Osceola, the present courthouse square, in 1871-2. With the arrival of railroad connections in 1879, settlement proceeded apace in the county. Osceola, which was named for pioneer settler Vinson Davis' earlier home of Osceola, Iowa, developed as an important center in the county in the 1870s and 1880s.

Fire destroyed the original wood frame courthouse in 1881, and the county board replaced it with a more substantial brick courthouse the following

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 2

year. By 1916, population and prosperity in the county were sufficient to foster interest in a more elaborate and up-to-date courthouse--perhaps in Stromsburg rather than Osceola. Stromsburg boosters used interest in a new courthouse as an excuse to question the location of the county seat. But on November 21, 1916, voters narrowly rejected Stromsburg's bid to be county seat.

On November 3, 1919 (delay likely due to World War I), the county board hired Omaha architect W.F. Gernandt to design the new courthouse. John L. Soderberg & Company of Omaha was the contractor. After further delays because of problems with the bonds issued to underwrite the new building, construction began on July 28, 1921.

The courthouse is centered on the north end of the courthouse square because the county continued to use the old building while its replacement was under construction. When it was no longer needed, the older, centrally sited courthouse was demolished.

Progress on the courthouse was such that the AF&AM Lodge laid the cornerstone in 1921, and formal dedication ceremonies were held October 10, 1922 for the \$203,132 building. Governor Samuel McKelvie addressed the crowd. Other activities included band and choral music, a football game between two high school teams, and "instructive moving pictures" by a university professor. Festivities wound up with a street dance with music by the "Dixie All-Star Orchestra," according to the dedication program.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 9 Page 1

Long, Barbara Beving. "County Courthouses of Nebraska." Multiple Property Submission. 1989.
Program. Dedication of the Polk County Courthouse. October 10, 1922. NeSHPO files.
Nebraska State Historical Society. Photo Collection. #M281-1040.
Gernandt, W.F. Polk County Courthouse. Blueprints. Clerk's Office.
Osceola, Nebraska. Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps. 1887, 1922.
Osceola Record, February 7, 1974, July 22, 1982.
Columbus Telegram, February 7, 1974.
"Osceola." Undated typed manuscript. NeSHPO files.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 10 Page 1

Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property, Polk County Courthouse, occupies all lots in Block 7 of the Original Town Plat for Osceola and is roughly 225x225' in size.

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes the entire city block that has historically been associated with the property.