

# IOWA SITE INVENTORY

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

MAY 29 1981

Site Number 76-016-001  
District Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Map Reference # 76-016-001  
Topo Map Pocahontas 1:24,000

## IDENTIFICATION

1. Site Name Pocahontas County Courthouse  
2. Village/Town/City Pocahontas Township \_\_\_\_\_ County Pocahontas  
3. Street Address Court Square  
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 363400 northing 4732760; Acreage less than 1 ac  
6. Owner(s) Name Pocahontas County Board of Supervisors  
7. Owner(s) Address Courthouse Pocahontas Iowa 50574  
(Street address) (City) (State) (Zip)  
8. Use: present Courthouse original Courthouse

## DESCRIPTION

- Proudfoot, Bird & Rawson, Arch.  
9. Date of Construction 1923 Architect/Builder A.H. Neuman & Co., 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 \_\_\_\_\_  
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: Very fine main space: metal and marble staircase, panelled soffits, enriched cornices, third floor screens of piers with decorative caps - original globe lighting fixtures - coffered courtroom ceiling, decorative frieze - circular dome skylight with art glass - Alterations: new window sash & 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 \_\_\_\_\_

\* upper portion of windows blocked in.

**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

The exterior of this courthouse displays a somewhat austere neoclassicism and restrained detail. The interior is particularly noteworthy for its variety of materials and extensive and well-preserved, decorative detail.

**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) \_\_\_\_\_

**POCAHONTAS COUNTY**

The first county seat of Pocahontas County was located at Old Rolfe. Normally the first thing which a county government does after being organized is to construct a public facility in which to conduct its business. The late 1850s in Pocahontas County were lean times. The only surpluses which the settlers had were sunshine, fresh air, and swampland. Since it was difficult to sell sunshine and fresh air, the swamplands were approved for sale in September of 1859 in order to raise money for a courthouse. There were two polling places for the election, and the vote was unanimous with all 16 ballots being cast in favor of the issue.

Upon construction, the brick building with a stone foundation served a dual purpose as both a courthouse and schoolhouse. It measured 36 by 50 feet and the second story was 14 feet high. The bricks were made from local clay and all of the timber was either local oak, elm, or walnut.

The county seat was moved from Old Rolfe to Pocahontas in 1875, whereupon a \$2,600 contract was let by the board of supervisors for the construction of a new courthouse at Pocahontas. It was built on a site set aside for public use as a park, which measured 600 by 800 feet. The old courthouse at Rolfe was sold on January 2, 1877, for \$150 to be used as a church. However, for some reason, the sale was not approved, and the building was sold at public auction the next day for \$200. In July of 1882, the building was again sold to be salvaged for material used in the erection of a house in the new town of Rolfe.

The present Pocahontas County courthouse is a neatly constructed building of classical Greco-Roman design. It was built amidst lovely grounds in 1923.

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