

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

2234  
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 Kearney County Courthouse  
other names/site number KN 04-1

#### 2. Location

street & number 5th St bet Colorado & Minden Aves N/A not for publication  
city, town Minden N/A vicinity  
state Nebraska code NE county Kearney code 099 zip code 68859

#### 3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> district	<u>1</u>	<u>        </u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-state	<input type="checkbox"/> site	<u>        </u>	<u>        </u> sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<u>        </u>	<u>        </u> structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>3</u>	<u>        </u> objects
		<u>4</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. Hanson  
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.

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

1/10/90

[Signature] 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)

Classical Revival

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation stone

walls stone

roof asphalt

other stone

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  locally

Applicable National Register Criteria  A  B  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

1906-39

Significant Dates

1906-07

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Berlinghof, George A.

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 less than 1 acre

UTM References

A	<u>1 4</u>	<u>5 10 14 14 11 10</u>	<u>4 4 18 12 19 13 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.

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

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Built in 1906-07, the Kearney County Courthouse is an excellent, largely unaltered example of the Property Type, County Capitol. It is the last of 18 extant examples built in Nebraska, five of which are individually listed on the National Register. Identifying features include: corner towers and central dome, four entrances, permanent costly materials, Classical Revival stylistic influence, and impression of a government building of permanence and solidity. Clearly patterned on the 1905-07 Seward County Courthouse, the courthouse in Minden is a good example of an important Nebraska architect, George A. Berlinghof; his use of the Classical Revival shows his ability to adapt to changing stylistic preferences. The Seward and Kearney County Courthouses are two among the eight courthouses Berlinghof designed in Nebraska.

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The Kearney County Courthouse has three stories, although the smooth, rusticated stone of the ground level gives the appearance of a raised basement. In addition, there is limited attic space on an incomplete fourth floor that was used for two small jury rooms and a jail facility. Access onto the ground floor is via several steps down on the west facade, although the entries are at grade for the other facades.

Pavilions with squared tops and pediments are centered on all four sides of the 80x80' square building. The east and west facades both have large single round-arched entries that extend above a smooth broad water table. The west facade was intended to be the primary entrance since it has steps that lead up to county offices on the first floor. North and south entrances have three small archways that form an arcade. An important design characteristic are the four corner towers with a stone paneled parapet and low bulbous domes and the lofty ribbed center dome (with cupola) that rises from a tall drum. The drum is decorated with pediments and smooth and squared engaged columns.

The flat-roofed building is faced with smooth limestone, a hallmark of the Classical Revival style. Other Classical Revival elements include: symmetrical arrangement, monumental proportions (especially the large smooth squared pilasters), pedimented pavilions, smooth surface, and unadorned parapet. Other notable features are the attractive round-arched entries with keystones, squared pilasters (at corners and pavilions), ground floor arcades, and the mighty central dome resting on its octagonal drum. Rectangular windows have transoms and lack special lintel or sill treatment. In contrast with Berlinghof's slightly earlier Seward County Courthouse design, this building is more simplified and restrained.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 2

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According to supervisors' records, the county board voted that their courthouse was to have the Thayer County Courthouse floorplan<sup>1</sup> and an "exterior design...similar to the Seward County Court House," but with 80-foot square dimensions. A 1906 newspaper issue showed a drawing of the Seward County Courthouse as "Kearney County's new \$78,000 Court House, soon to be under construction," further evidence of the intended similarity between the two buildings.

The floorplan is compact, and county offices are located off an unusually small (approximately 16-foot square) interior hallway on the first floor, compared to earlier County Capitol floorplans. The sole staircase is located at the center of the west facade directly across from the entry at the ground level. Four vaults are located next to the corner tower spaces. An unusual feature was that the south door was intended to give direct access to the ground floor ladies' restroom. A large assembly room and library were also on the ground floor, on the east side; each had its own entrance.

Exterior alterations are minimal and expected: replacement metal and glass doors and modern windows. The latter appear to be similar to the originals. Some original features remain, including pressed tin ceilings and light fixtures.

The courthouse is centered on a courthouse square which has a host of mature trees (making photographing difficult). Commercial buildings surround it on all sides. The building's 100' dome is visible from a distance as it towers over the tree canopy of Minden, an arresting site.

The symmetry continues with sidewalk arrangement. Cement walks (a driveway on the north side) lead to all four entrances, around the building, and also from each of the four corners. Benches dot the site, making it an inviting spot. On the south facade, a simple granite pointed arch slab was dedicated in 1933 "to the pioneers of Kearney County, Nebraska." Nearby is a very small, low, granite "50-year time capsule" that was buried in 1977.

Important objects that contribute well to the atmosphere of the courthouse square are centered on the east and west facades in the midst of the concrete walkway. On the east is a G.A.R. stone statue of a Union Army veteran. It is set upon a rather high stone decorated shaft that tapers to a rectangular base. The monument was erected in 1913 as a

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<sup>1</sup>Floorplan not available for comparison.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number   7   Page   3  

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memorial to Civil War and Spanish-American veterans in the county. Just south of it is an unusual stone bench whose arms and legs have been carved to resemble a tree trunk. Two large Gatling guns and/or perhaps "brass cannons" (mention made in 1912 newspaper article) likely once graced the circular concrete pad by the G.A.R. monument.

Centered on the west facade is a distinctive granite fountain dedicated in November 1924. Small metal medallions of the various armed services branches are embedded around a large circular fountain; a rectangular shaft rises from it and has metal plaques on all four sides listing World War I veterans. Atop the shaft is a stone globe with a large metal eagle sculpture guarding it.

For this nomination, small objects were not counted, and the pioneer monument, G.A.R. statue, and World War I fountain are all contributing objects due to their age and appropriate appearance.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number   8   Page   1  

---

The Kearney 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 Kearney County. It is an exceptional 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. In addition, the courthouse is a fine example of the work of an important Nebraska architect, George A. Berlinghof. With its standing as apparently the last example of the County Capitol built in Nebraska and as one of eight courthouse designs by Berlinghof (or his firm), the Kearney County Courthouse is of Statewide Significance.

As an important example of the County Capitol, the courthouse contains design features and facilities distinctive to its design and use (such as fireproof vaults), has corner towers and a dome, costly materials, Classical Revival stylistic influence, and distinctive ornamentation. Elements of the design combine effectively to convey an impression of a government building of permanence and solidity, another feature of the County Capitol. The Period of Significance is 1906, when construction began, to 1939, when the "fifty year rule" takes effect. The Kearney County Courthouse is being nominated as an example of the Property Type, County Courthouses of Nebraska (County Capitol) of the Context, County Government in Nebraska, 1854-1941, from the Multiple Property Submission, County Courthouses of Nebraska.

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Located in south central Nebraska, Kearney County has for its north border the Platte River (and Interstate-80). The countryside is prosperous and much of it is planted in corn. The area enjoyed a good location along the Platte River and across the river from Fort Kearney (established 1848). Kearney County was organized in 1872 during a period of intense settlement across the state. An election was duly held to determine the county seat, and Lowell won over Kearney City, the temporary county seat, 23 votes to just five. Both were located in the northern edge of the county.

County officials soon built a brick courthouse to solidify Lowell's standing as county seat. When the railroad arrived the summer of 1872 in Lowell, its prospects increased accordingly. However, settlers who chose the southern part of the county over the more expensive land near the Platte in the north began to agitate for a more centrally located county seat. On November 21, 1876, a county seat election decided the matter, and Minden in the center of Kearney County emerged as the new and

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number   8   Page   2  

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permanent winner in the county government sweepstakes.

It was not until 1878 that the county officially moved to Minden. County officials initially used a modest frame building for the courthouse. In 1879 a more substantial courthouse was built on the present courthouse square. By the turn of the century, the county was sufficiently prosperous to consider a new, more commodious monument to county government. In 1904, county records show that citizens presented a petition to the county board, asking them:

to erect and complete a good and substantial building, with sufficient capacity to amply and economically provide for the safekeeping of records and all the interests of the county, incident to a well equipped Court House.

The county board agreed, for this statement well summarized the statutory provision that county officials had a duty to provide a suitable courthouse. A majority of county voters did not agree that the county should issue \$60,000 in bonds to build a courthouse and voted down the proposal on December 20, 1904. County records are unclear, but on November 7, 1905, county voters did approve a bond issue, this one for \$80,000.

Despite the November 1904 setback, the county board went ahead with courthouse plans. In August 1905 a building committee was appointed. They promptly visited courthouses in three Nebraska counties having relatively recent courthouses. The committee felt that the Red Willow Courthouse was "very poorly arranged and a cheaply constructed building." They also did not like the arrangement of the Fillmore County courthouse and felt the vaults were too small and poorly lighted. The Thayer County Courthouse, in contrast, was "just what we wanted in most respects." It was built of Bedford limestone, had steps of marble supported by a steel framework (and therefore fireproof), and "nicely arranged" offices with ample vaults. Fireproof considerations were important to the building committee, and they also wanted a building that was attractive.

On September 29, 1905, the committee looked over courthouse plans a number of architects had submitted. Three architects were present. George A. Berlinghof was selected and signed an agreement to provide plans, noting that the bond issue might be voted down.

Further delays in addition to those related to the bond issue put the project behind schedule. In February 1906 the board rejected all three bids from general contractors "as none of the bids filed are within the amount of available funds on hand, or the amount of bonds voted." (One



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number   8   Page   3  

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of the bidders was Marxen & Rokahr, contractors later fired from the Seward County Courthouse project.) Berlinghof revised the plans (changes not specified in county records), and the board again advertised for contractors. On April 3, 1906, the board chose Shaul and Assenmacher of Seneca, Kansas, as contractors.

The former courthouse was removed from the site, and the county used rented quarters during construction. On May 10, 1906, work commenced on the foundation. Progress was sufficient to hold cornerstone laying ceremonies on July 17, 1906. There was a parade with floats and bands from four communities. Grand Lodge No. 127 of A.F. & A.M. was responsible for laying the cornerstone.

By August 7, the architect informed the board that the first story was up. By January 31, 1907, roofing was completed. By April 15, 1907, progress had been made on interior finishing, including marble work, plastering, and painting. That month, the board appointed a grounds committee to advertise for cement walks and other improvements, a reflection of progress on the courthouse. On July 9, 1907, the board learned that the following details remained to be completed: oil the floors, build sidewalks, dig an ash pit for the boiler, buy curtains, and repair a hydrant. On August 28 the board formally accepted the courthouse from the contractors and made plans to move in.

Minden's standing as "the Christmas City" dates from 1915, the first time the courthouse's lofty dome was draped with with Christmas lights. The lights had been intended to highlight the way from the depot to the courthouse square for a state convention of the Grand Army of the Republic. However, an ice storm prevented their use. Today, 10,000 bulbs are used at Christmas time and the celebration reflects local pride in the courthouse.

In addition to its standing as the seat of county government, the Kearney County Courthouse is of architectural interest. The design effectively combines the massing of the County Capitol Property Type with elements of the Classical Revival style. The Kearney County Courthouse appears to be the last example of the County Capitol Property Type built in the state.

The earliest extant County Capitol courthouse in Nebraska was built in 1888-89 in Johnson County. Construction began on the Kearney County example 18 years later, reflecting the popularity of the property type. When compared with earlier Berlinghof courthouses (see the 1899-1900 Richardsonian Romanesque Nemaha County Courthouse NR nomination, for

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number   8   Page   4  

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example), the Kearney County Courthouse shows the evolution of his designs.

George A. Berlinghof was a German immigrant who initially settled in Beatrice, Nebraska. In 1905 he moved to Lincoln where his expertise and connections resulted in his selection as architect for the State of Nebraska in 1907. Berlinghof is known to have designed courthouses in four other states as well as for seven other Nebraska counties.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>In chronological order the counties are Nemaha, Thayer, Seward, Kearney, Howard, Greeley, Lincoln, and Franklin. The Richardsonian Romanesque Thayer County Courthouse has been altered and does not appear to be eligible for the National Register, unlike the others.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number   9   Page   1  

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- Long, Barbara Beving. "County Courthouses of Nebraska." Multiple Property Submission. 1989.
- Nebraska State Historical Society. Photo Collection. #M281-76, M281-996.
- Minden, Nebraska. Sanborn Fire Insurance Map. 1899, 1909.
- Works Progress Administration. Survey of County Courthouse Records. 1936. NeSHS Archives. Kearney County.
- Kearney County. Supervisors' Records. Book 5.
- Bang, Roy T. Heroes without Medals. A Pioneer History of Kearney County, Nebraska. Minden: Warp Publishing Co., 1952.
- "Minden, Nebraska. World-Famous Christmas City." pamphlet.
- Minden Courier. December 26, 1912, October 16, July 17, , November 13, 1913.
- Kearney County Courthouse. Two undated postcards showing courthouse shortly after completion. Clerk's office.
- "Kearney County's new \$78,000 Court House soon to be under construction." Minden News-Gazette. April 13, 1906.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number   10   Page   1  

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Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property, Kearney County Courthouse, occupies all of Block 20 of the Original Town of Minden.

Boundary Justification

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

