

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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 Former Wheeler County Courthouse
other names/site number WH01-22

2. Location

street & number Maine St between 2d & 3d Sts N/A not for publication
city, town Bartlett N/A vicinity
state Nebraska code NE county Wheeler code 183 zip code 68622

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>2</u>	<u>1</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>2</u>	<u>1</u> objects
			<u> </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 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)
Recreation/museum

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)

Mission Revival

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation concrete

walls stucco

roof other

other wood

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)

Politics/government

Architecture

Period of Significance

1918-39

Significant Dates

N/A

1918

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Foster, Sidney H.

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:

- [x] State historic preservation office
- [] Other state agency
- [] Federal agency
- [] Local government
- [] University
- [] Other

Specify repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property 1.5 acres

UTM References

A	1 4	5 3 7 1 9 10	4 6 3 6 7 8 5	B			
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
C				D			
	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	July 31, 1989
street & number	3140 Easton Boulevard	telephone	(515) 266-4964
city or town	Des Moines	state	Iowa zip code 50317

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The Wheeler County Courthouse is one of four known examples of the Property Type, County Stronghold, identified in an intensive level survey of Nebraska county courthouses. Identifying physical features include the limited use of ornament, hipped roof, inexpensive building materials, and efforts at providing fireproof storage. The courthouse was designed and built to convey its standing as a public building. Other features of the subtype exhibited are the compact, boxy shape, two-story height (plus raised basement), limited special treatment at the entrance, and use of local construction materials (stucco). The building is essentially unaltered and is recognizable as an example of the County Stronghold Property Type. It is the only known example of a Nebraska courthouse displaying elements, albeit diluted, of the Mission Revival style.

Built in 1918, the former Wheeler County Courthouse is rectangular, has a hipped roof with a broad overhang, and consists of two stories atop a raised basement. A simple concrete water table separates the basement from upper floors. The original wood frame double-hung windows are regularly spaced and grouped in two's at the front and back and in three's on the sides.

A notable feature is a Palladian window in the centered slightly projecting front entrance bay. Below it are the double entry doors, which have a small bracketed canopy above them and also top and side lights. Elements of the Mission Revival style include the massing, materials, simplicity of form, broad eaves, and long slender pairs of brackets. The brackets adorn pilasters at the corners and also the entrance.

A further Mission Revival feature was the red tile roof (shown in an historic photograph), which has been replaced with composition shingles. Other alterations are storm windows and two small one-story gabled additions to the south and east facades. These utilitarian additions (of concrete and of corrugated metal) occur on the back and at the side that faces an open unused space and are not intrusive.

The approximately 42x55' courthouse is arranged symmetrically with county offices off a central hallway on the first floor. The centered and rather steep staircase splits at the small entry foyer. Vaults for the clerk and treasurer are set back-to-back at the south end of the plan. As is typical, the district courtroom is on the second floor, and it spans the length of the south facade.

Interior elements are simple and unaltered. Wood chair rails, base-

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boards, floors, window frames, plain newels, and doors without transoms are executed simply.

Now used as a museum to commemorate county government and pioneer life in Wheeler County, the former courthouse enjoys a high site on a full block overlooking the nearby modest commercial area of the county seat of Bartlett. Although platted with commercial lots ringing the courthouse square, commercial development was not as extensive as envisioned, and open ground, modest houses, and scattered freestanding commercial buildings occupy sites round the courthouse.

The steep site has two buildings in addition to the former courthouse: the present courthouse built in 1982 and a small concrete block garage. The garage fronts on Maine Street, and its barrel arched mass is built into the hillside. A parapeted front with double wood doors has concrete coping. The new courthouse is rectangular with a flat roof, faced with striated white concrete panels, and, like the garage, is built into the hillside. It occupies the southeast corner of the courthouse square, while the former courthouse commands the slightly off-center eminence of the hill. Because of the recent construction date, the present courthouse is a noncontributing element. The small size and complementary materials and date of the garage (approximately 1920) render it a contributing element.

Landscaping is concentrated around the new courthouse and includes rows of low-scale deciduous and evergreen plantings as well as flower beds. Mature deciduous trees dot the lawn in front of the former courthouse, which may be reached by steep steps from Maine Street or from a long inclined walk beginning at the northwest corner of the site.

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The Wheeler County Courthouse is architecturally significant (Criterion C) and 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 Wheeler County. It also represents the "county seat wars" that characterized important chapters in the county's political history. In addition, the courthouse is the only known example of a Nebraska courthouse displaying elements of the Mission Revival style.

As one of four known examples of the Property Type, County Stronghold, the courthouse possesses such identifying physical features as the limited use of ornament, hipped roof, and efforts at providing fireproof storage. The Period of Significance is 1918, when the courthouse was constructed and occupied, to 1939, when the "fifty year rule" takes effect. The former Wheeler County Courthouse is an example of the Property Type, County Courthouses of Nebraska (County Stronghold) of the Context, County Government in Nebraska, 1854-1941, from the Multiple Property Submission, County Courthouses of Nebraska.

Located in the Sand Hills, Wheeler County was not established until 1881 when that area became known as a good place for cattle raising. Cedar City was named temporary county seat, but controversy immediately developed regarding the location of the county seat. When Garfield County was formed out of Wheeler's western portion in 1884, Cedar City no longer enjoyed a central location in Wheeler County, putting its status in further jeopardy. Between 1881 and 1886, five elections were held on the question, but no place received a sufficient number of votes to allow removal from Cedar City. Settlement was apparently rather well spread across the country, so no area easily prevailed.

Cedar City, Cumminsville, and Bartlett were the principal competitors, and none received the 3/5's vote needed until Bartlett finally won in 1886. Based on the election results, it appears that Cedar City boosters threw their support to Bartlett, which is located at the county's center. Bartlett received 193 votes, Cumminsville 90, and Cedar City, then the county seat, just one.

Ezra Bartlett Mitchell laid out the nine blocks of the town named for him around 1885. With its standing as county seat, Bartlett soon attracted commercial enterprise and professional services. By 1889, there were two doctors, two hotels (one was built by Ezra Mitchell), lumber yard, newspaper, lawyer, abstractor/realtor, loan agent, drug store, and dry goods store, among others.

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Despite this early spurt of development, Bartlett remained a small, rather isolated county seat. Lack of railroad connections undoubtedly contributed to its slow growth. Passage of the Kinkaid Act in 1904, however, spurred further settlement in the county.

In addition to its nineteenth century commercial development, Bartlett also had a two-story wood frame courthouse built in 1888 on the present courthouse square. But on August 29, 1917, the building burned, a total loss. (The fireproof vault added in 1894 protected county records.) The need to rebuilt sparked another skirmish in the county seat wars, but rival Ericson lost out in the special election held to vote on the change. Unlike Bartlett, Ericson in the southwest corner of the county, had rail connections.

Recognizing that a substantial courthouse was an important asset in the county seat wars, Bartlett precinct voters approved \$5,000 in bonds in 1918 for building the new courthouse. Other county residents were thus not assessed for the bonds. The county board also appropriated \$1500 from the general fund, and fire insurance also provided funds.

The board selected Sidney H. Foster, an architect in Gordon, Nebraska, to design the new courthouse. No other information about Foster has been found. Local sand ("one-third coarse river sand and two-thirds of the best blow-out sand possible to obtain in this vicinity") was used for the stucco, according to county board records. Sand or stucco was an apt and economical choice for a county located in the Sand Hills. Perhaps the architect chose to incorporate elements of the Mission Revival style in his design since the style is well adapted to stucco.

Construction began in the early summer of 1918. Blow-out sand (175 tons) was hauled from a site three miles from town, and coarse sand (80 tons) came from the Cedar River in the southwest part of the county. Building materials were hauled up from the rail stop of Ericson.

On October 1918 the floorplan was modified. The courtroom was placed along the south side of the building and extended its entire length. Based on incomplete entries in county board records, it appears construction began the summer of 1918 and the building was essentially complete by late that fall. However, as late as October of 1919, a bill was paid that was related to courthouse construction, for "plastering the toilet rooms."

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- Long, Barbara Beving. "County Courthouses of Nebraska." Multiple Property Submission. 1989.
- Day, Barbara and Koinzan, Karlie, eds. Wheeler County History Book. n.p., 1977.
- Nebraska State Historical Society. Photo Collection. #M281-1074.
- Wheeler County. Commissioners' Records. Books A and C.
- Save America's Heritage. Nebraska Historic Buildings Survey...Wheeler County, Nebraska. June 1, 1988.
- Pibel, E. and Westcott, S.L. "Wheeler County" in Who's Who in Nebraska. Lincoln: Nebraska Press Association, 1940.

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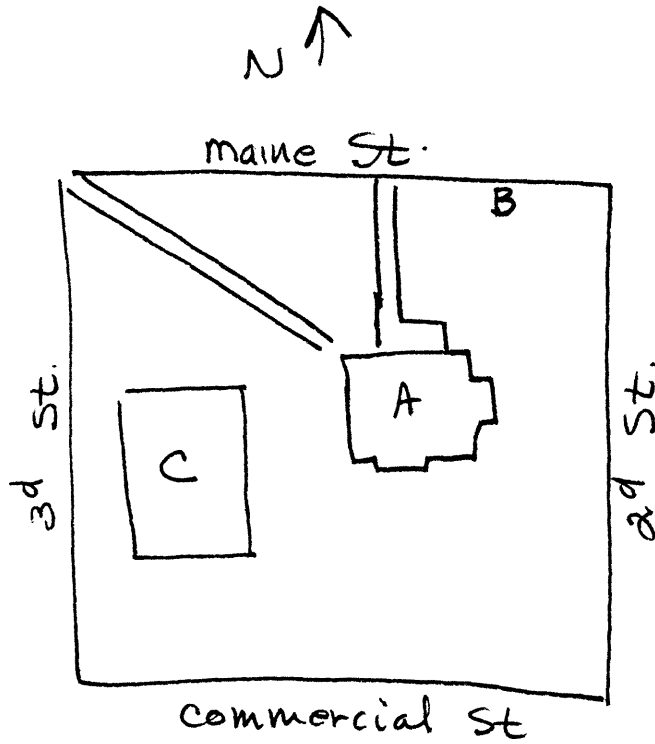
Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property occupies Block 5 in the Original Plat of Bartlett and is roughly 264x264' in size.

Boundary Justification

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

WHEELER COUNTY
COURTHOUSE WH01-22
Bartlett, NE



Contributing Bldgs

- A - old courthouse
(Photos 1 + 2)
- B - garage
(Photo 4)

Noncontributing Bldg

- c - new courthouse
(Photo 5)

Not to Scale