

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

2236

NOV 23 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 Dawson County Courthouse
other names/site number DS07-30

2. Location

street & number Washington St bet 7th & 8th Sts N/A not for publication
city, town Lexington N/A vicinity
state Nebraska code NE county Dawson code 047 zip code 68850

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>1</u>	<u> </u> objects
		<u>2</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 November 17, 1989
Signature of certifying official 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 Andrus 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 stone walls brick roof other other stone metal

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 1913-39 Significant Dates 1913-14 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 2 acres

UTM References

A	1 4	4 3 7 5 4 0	4 5 1 4 4 3 0	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	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 1913-14, the Dawson County Courthouse is an excellent, largely unaltered 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, simplicity, strength, and prosperity. In addition, the courthouse has other County Citadel characteristics: flat roof, prominent raised basement, and designed by an architect. The property is an important example one of the ten Nebraska courthouses William F. Gernandt designed during an unusually productive period, between 1910 and 1923. It shares certain design characteristics with the Webster County Courthouse built in 1914, as well as some elements of the slightly earlier Merrick and Pawnee County Courthouses, and thus illustrates the evolution of Gernandt's courthouse designs. With its highly distinctive design and standing as the second of six courthouses Gernandt designed having a Beaux-Arts stylistic influence, the building is of Statewide Significance.

The Dawson County Courthouse in Lexington is rectangular and consists of two stories upon a prominent raised basement. This basement is rusticated Bedford limestone, and it has a its own low base-within-a-base of slightly projecting stone ("Missouri marble," from Carthage, Missouri), which also forms a continuous sill for the basement windows. Limestone is used effectively for trim, and a metal cornice is painted to resemble the stone. The wall surface is brownish brick which contrasts nicely with the trim.

An important feature are the elaborate pavilions centered on the north, south, and west facades. The primary or west facade is by far the most embellished and features paired smooth stone engaged columns resting on very high rusticated stone pedestals. The columns support a unique and heavy cornice that undulates between the pairs of columns. Outsized mutules and dentils below them accentuate these curves. Just above the columns are brackets with guttae. Above the cornice is a heavily decorated parapet: stone coping and balusters, large decorated knobs on brick pedestals, and at the ends, large stone moulded pedestals for the statues are decorated with an egg-and-dart course.

Also on the west facade, a large round-arched window effectively highlights the entrance and lights the staircase inside. Stone hood molds or surrounds with keystones as well as smooth sills, some with brackets, call attention to the five sets of windows on the west pavilion. Original light fixtures with Art Nouveau metal bases and stone

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 2

shafts rest on relatively small stone pedestals that, in turn, frame the short set of steps to the main entrance. Overlooking this entry from above are two metal statues, the Goddesses of Liberty and of Justice. Such statuary are rare on Nebraska courthouses.

North and south pavilions continue elements and the general exuberance of the west facade, especially at the cornice and parapet levels. A notable addition are the round-arched brick arcades trimmed in stone that spring between relatively simple brick pilasters. Larger pilasters with fanciful capitals frame the four sets of windows between the arcade.

Corner treatment is more restrained. Large stone surrounds outline rectangular double-hung windows, and brick laid with six rows recessed, then three rows that are not achieves a rusticated effect. The moulded cornice and unadorned parapet are quite plain at the corners.

The courthouse exhibits features of the Beaux-Arts style, including a wealth of classical detail, pronounced cornice with a tall parapet and balustrade, immense grouped columns, rusticated raised basement, projecting pavilions, statuary, enriched surfaces, and a grandiose quality. Unlike some more delicate Beaux-Arts designs, the Dawson County Courthouse displays crisp bold shapes, especially at the pavilions. The architect has played with and expanded upon forms he used for his Merrick and Pawnee County Courthouses. In this example, the pedestals for columns are even more elongated, the parapet more adorned. Mutules have been added to the dentils, windows surrounds are now stone and more prominent, and pilasters now have arcades between them. For the Webster County Courthouse the arcades become the dominant design feature.

The 67x90' building was designed to have one primary entrance on the west facade, and a utilitarian entrance on the east, which opened into the ground floor level. The east facade, now the access point to a major addition, continues the materials and treatment of the other facades, but in a simplified manner.

At the entry foyer, steps lead down to the ground floor or up to the first floor corridor. County offices are ranged off three sides of this narrow (10x38') lobby, and vaults of varying size are located in the four corners of the building. On the second floor the 32x59' district courtroom occupies much of the east end of the building.

Interior features are relatively simple and include Georgia marble wainscotting and mopboards, terrazzo flooring, metal banisters and simple newels for the stairs, large single pane transoms over doors, and two attractive large round columns in the second story hall. The large

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 3

courtroom has twelve rows of wood and metal opera seats. The golden oak bar between spectators and the court curves attractively and consists of many small spindles and paneled newels with patterned courses. The wood screen behind the judge's bench has simple vertical panels and triglyphs and guttae at the corners.

Exterior alterations are minor: a replacement door, metal storm windows over the original windows, and the statue pedestals have been slightly simplified on their front panel. Interior changes are considerable and include changes in floorplan and new ceilings, fluorescent lights, and modern wood paneling throughout. Stairs have been carpeted.

As county services grew, Dawson County officials built an addition to the courthouse in 1955-56 and again in 1980. Now 90x155', the two-story brick addition is offset with a one-story section from the back of the courthouse. The 1980 addition is essentially an extension of the earlier addition. Windows are paired or grouped and have smooth dark panels between them. McNett, Stanage & Company of Grand Island, Nebraska, designed the 1955 portion, and Gardner-Young of North Platte, Nebraska, was responsible for the 1980 extension. With its location at the back of the courthouse, brick facing, and the offset one-story connecting point, the addition is sympathetically sited and designed and does not visually intrude upon the significant features of the courthouse.

The original courthouse is centered on a rather long block at the edge of Lexington's substantial downtown district. Commercial or other nonresidential use overlooks all sides of the courthouse square. The area directly north of the original courthouse is now a parking lot, and the two-part addition takes up two-thirds of the east or rear portion of the square.

A limited number of deciduous trees adorn the courthouse lawn on the west side, and concrete walks curve from the northwest and southwest corners to the main entrance. A broad walk also leads directly to this entrance. Next to the walk is a Grand Army of the Republic statue (a contributing object for this nomination). The stone statue of a Union Army veteran rests on a stone pedestal which has a rock-faced base, and small cannons flank it. A pair of very large evergreen trees flank the broad walk (making photographing difficult).

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 1

The Dawson 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 Dawson County. It is a good 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.

As a fine 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, strength, and prosperity, also features of the County Citadel.

The property is an important example of the ten Nebraska courthouses William F. Gernandt designed during an unusually productive period, between 1910 and 1923. It shares certain design characteristics with the Webster County Courthouse built in 1914, as well as some elements of the slightly earlier Merrick and Pawnee County Courthouses, and thus illustrates the evolution of Gernandt's courthouse designs. With its distinctive design and standing as the second of six courthouses Gernandt designed having Beaux-Arts stylistic influence, the building is of Statewide Significance.

The Period of Significance is 1913, when construction began, to 1939, when the "fifty year rule" takes effect. The Dawson 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.

Dawson County is located in south central Nebraska, and the Platte River runs through the southeast corner of the county. The area saw early use in the 1840s as pioneers, gold seekers, and explorers used the river valley as a natural transportation route. However, it was the arrival of the Union Pacific Railroad in 1866 that spurred permanent settlement. In 1871 area population had reached the point that residents successfully petitioned to have Dawson County established, and the first county elections were held in July 1871. Drought and grasshopper invasions slowed development in the 1870s, but the following decade was more

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 2

prosperous. In the 1890s irrigation districts were established, which further stimulated settlement in the area.

The Union Pacific platted rail stops in Dawson County, including Plum Creek on the north side of the Platte. The rail stop took its name from a telegraph and state station that was an important stop between Fort Kearny and Fort McPherson on the south side of the Platte. The county initially leased the courthouse square from the railroad and later bought it for a nominal price.

Plum Creek, now known as Lexington, was the principal commercial center of the county and was selected as the first county seat. In 1874 the first courthouse was built on the present courthouse square, the same year Plum Creek was incorporated. In 1889 residents adopted the present name, Lexington.

In February 1912, the county board scheduled an election for April 19th to vote on whether to levy annual tax of four mills over four years (1912-15) for building a new courthouse. The measure passed, and the board proceeded with building plans. In November 1912 they met with the architect, William F. Gernandt, to approve his plans for the courthouse. The following month they selected Falls City Construction Company of Louisville, Kentucky, to be general contractor, with a bid of \$90,140. Three other contractors--from Jefferson City, Indiana, Kansas City, and Ord, Nebraska--also bid on the project.

County officials had certain clear ideas of what features the new courthouse should have. Chief among them was that it should be fireproof. The courthouse was also to be truly a facility of use to its owners, the public. A contemporary newspaper article revealed some of these intentions behind the courthouse design:

It is as near fire-proof as may be. The only inflammable material in the building is the furniture and the doors and window casings. Everything else in or about the premises is absolutely fire-proof, except the consciences of the county officials, and they are smoldering all the time.

And

These [restrooms on the ground floor] are intended for the use of the citizens of the county, and anyone can avail himself of the advantages they present and afford.

County officials prepared for the construction phase. The old brick

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 3

courthouse was demolished to make way for the new. In the interim, county records were stored in bank vaults around town, and county offices house in a hall. In early May 1913 construction materials began to arrive, including several railroad cars of dressed stone and a carload of I-beams and steel rods, according to newspaper accounts. In mid-May the first layer of the concrete sub-foundation was laid, and the grounds were strewn with materials and machinery. By end of May workers had begun laying the sill course of the stone foundation.

By the end of June progress was such that cornerstone-laying ceremonies were held, on July 1, 1913. By mid-July walls were completed to the top of the first story, and by the end of the month parts of the stone columns were in place. On August 1 the newspaper reported that "the building is now so far along that one can form some idea of what it will look like when completed."

The roof was in place by the beginning of September 1913. The "copper cornice" had not yet arrived but was en route. The following month the cornice arrived and was being installed. The pedestals for the copper statues were complete, awaiting their arrival. By the end of October the statues had arrived and were duly installed. They were to be painted a "stone color," and the copper cornice was to receive three coats of paint and a coat of sand, according to the newspaper.

Courtroom seating arrived in February 1914. Also that month the board met with the contractor and architect and stated they were not ready to formally accept the courthouse since it was not completed. In early March 1914 the county commissioners formally accepted the new courthouse, which the newspaper described as "not only handsome but it is substantial and enduring and is good for a century of years and them some." The district court was able to convene its next scheduled term in the new courtroom that month.

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.
- Dawson County. Commissioners' Records. Book 5.
- Nebraska State Historical Society. Photo Collection. #M281-951.
- Lexington, Nebraska. Sanborn Fire Insurance Map. 1920.
- Tracings. Dawson County Courthouse. William F. Gernandt. (1955 copies.)
- "Dawson County." Who's Who in Nebraska. Lincoln: Nebraska Press Association, 1940.
- "Dawson County." Andreas, A.T. History of the State of Nebraska. Chicago: A.T. Andreas, 1882.
- Dawson County Pioneer. December 27, 1912, May 2, 16, 30, June 20, July 18, 25, August 1, September 9, October 10, 24, 1913, January 23 (quoted), 30, February 13, 23, 24, 27, March 13 (quoted), April 3, 1914.
- "History of County Courthouse Stretches 106 Years." Lexington Clipper. September 11, 1980.

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, Dawson County Courthouse, occupies all of Block 25 of the Original Town of Lexington and is roughly 300x300' in size.

Boundary Justification

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

