

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

2219

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 Nuckolls County Courthouse
other names/site number NU07-240

2. Location

street & number 150 S Main St N/A not for publication
city, town Nelson N/A vicinity
state Nebraska code NE county Nuckolls code 129 zip code 68961

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>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>1</u>	<u> </u> objects
		<u>2</u>	<u>1</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. Johnson 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 W. Andrews 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)

Renaissance Revival

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation stone

walls stucco

roof asphalt

other 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 [x] 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)

Politics/government
Architecture

Period of Significance

1890-1939

Significant Dates

N/A
1890

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

McDonald, George E.

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 3.67 acres

UTM References

A	1 4	5 17 19 13 15 10	4 14 15 10 16 10 10	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

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One of eighteen extant examples built between 1888 and 1907 in Nebraska, the Nuckolls County Courthouse is a good example of the Property Type, County Capitol. Identifying features include: corner towers and central dome, permanent costly materials, elaborate ornamentation, four entrances, and impression of a government building of permanence and solidity. Built in 1890, the somewhat altered Nuckolls County Courthouse is among the earlier examples. With its distinctive high setting and specialized design, the courthouse is uniquely poised to represent the role of county government in the community.

The courthouse consists of two stories set upon a raised basement, as is typical of the County Capitol. Rock-faced stone forms the relatively low basement, and rough sills are also stone. Above a smooth water table the wall surface was brick, which was covered with a stucco material by 1936. Ornamental detail is painted metal and includes prominent semi-circular windows at the corner towers, finials, unusual moulded lintels, decorated capitals, fanciful gabled dormers, and the notable clock tower. The clock tower surface has a "quilted" textural appearance because of alternating triangular and circular shapes on its metal surface.

An important identifying characteristic are the four ample square corner towers and the prominent centered clock tower. Unlike other County Capitols (see Johnson County, for example), the towers are large and squared and less strongly integrated into the wall surface. Rather, they have been affixed to the corners of the main hipped roof body of the building. Also, the roofline is more irregular in the Nuckolls County example. Its centered pavilion is higher, and there are dormers at the north and south ends which have gablets behind them with ornamental metal panels.

On the east and west facades, five-bay center pavilions contain entrances which have one-story flat-roofed entry porches. The primary entrance is on the east facade where steps lead up the steep site. Secondary entrances on the north and south also have flat-roofed porches but are half the size.

The floorplan of the 120x60' courthouse is long and rectangular. There are entrances on all four sides, and the interior hallways cross beneath the clock tower. Room arrangement lacks the symmetric nature of pure examples, however, and vault locations are also variable. Also in contrast with many County Capitol plans, staircases are long, narrow and modest. Similar to Washington County, the district courtroom (an unusual square shape, 60x60') is centered on the second floor, with access

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available from both the north and south staircases.

Stylistic influences are classically derived and may be loosely characterized as Renaissance Revival. Classical features, including the pilasters and porch columns, have been applied to the County Capitol Property Type.

In addition to the wall surface, exterior alterations include replacement windows having opaque panels in the tops (also in the round front windows), an unobtrusive lift for handicapped use, and removal of at least one statue from the roofline.¹ The interior has been remodeled with wood paneling throughout, new ceilings, and some altered room arrangements.

Located southwest of the courthouse and fronting on 2nd Street is the jail. Built in 1877-78, the two-story flat-roofed rectangular building is faced with painted brick. Italianate stylistic elements (heavy cornice and window surrounds) shown on an historic photograph have been removed, window shapes and size are also different, and there is an addition to the rear. The quality of the alterations make the jail a noncontributing element despite its early construction date and continuing function as a jail.

The Nuckolls County Courthouse enjoys one of the most effective and imposing public building sites in Nebraska. Steeped in tradition, the courthouse grounds occupies the high point of the county seat, Nelson, and overlooks a compact commercial main street south of it. The railroad tracks lie just beyond the commercial street, and the arrangement is that of a typical "T-town," as identified by Hudson. Not only is the hillside site high, a retaining wall with steps is necessary. A Grand Army of the Republic statue of a Union Army Civil War veteran is the sole object on the grounds and was placed at the south end of the east facade in 1909 "in memory of our county's defenders." The courthouse is located on the east half of the block and faces east. Landscaping and concrete walks and steps emphasize the east facade's use as the primary entrance.

The courthouse and courthouse square provide a dramatic commentary on the importance of county government to nineteenth century Nuckolls County residents. The impressive size, mass, siting, and ornamentation of the courthouse work together to mitigate the effect of alterations.

¹In 1984 two "tin ladies" were discovered in the courthouse attic; an historic photograph shows one female statue at the apex of the principal facade's gable.

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The Nuckolls 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 Nuckolls County. It is a notable 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. With its striking setting and specialized design, the Nuckolls County Courthouse is uniquely poised to represent the role of county government in the community.

As a good example of the County Capitol, the courthouse contains design features and facilities distinctive to its design and use (such as fireproof vaults), and has corner towers and a dome, four entrances, and elaborate ornamentation. Elements of the design combine to convey an impression of a government building of permanence and solidity, another feature of the County Capitol. The Period of Significance is 1890, when construction began, to 1939, when the "fifty year rule" takes effect. The Nuckolls 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.

Nuckolls County is located in the fertile Republican River valley area south of the Platte River. Its south border is also the state line with Kansas, and the county is nearly midway between Nebraska's east and west borders. The county was organized in 1871, during a period of rapid settlement in the state. County population reached 4,235 in 1880, vaulting to 11,417 ten years later.

In 1872 the centrally located Nelson was elected county seat over Elkton and Vernon, and a modest courthouse was built the following year. In 1877-78 the county built the present jail, using plans from a Mr. Bostater of Lincoln. J.B. Randall, of Omaha, was the contractor for the \$7,459 facility.

The courthouse soon proved inadequate, and the county rented space in the Nelson opera house built in 1887. Nuckolls County was among a number of Nebraska counties who endured delays in acquiring a suitable courthouse because of county seat controversies. Hoping to gain the county seat, supporters in rival Superior objected to the rental agreement but also would not approve repeated elections on a bond issue to underwrite a new adequate courthouse. Following the arrival of the railroad in the 1880s,

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Nelson prospered and was able to withstand this assault on its county seat standing.

Two bond issues failed to pass in the 1880s, largely due to Superior opposition. Finally, on July 30, 1889, a \$35,000 bond issue passed. The county board selected George E. McDonald as architect. McDonald later designed the Fillmore County Courthouse, modeling it (though in brick) after the Gage County Courthouse.

On October 15, 1889, the board accepted the architect's final plans. They also notified the bidding contractors that the legality of the bonds had been questioned, likely another ploy by Superior supporters to gain the county seat. The matter was pending in court, which delayed construction. Despite these problems, Seeley Son & Company agreed to be general contractor.

Construction proceeded rapidly. On May 12, 1890 Seeley provided estimates of the materials required. The Governor attended cornerstone ceremonies in June. In October the board advertised for the "janitorship" of the new courthouse, as they termed it. The board formally accepted the courthouse and insured it for \$32,010 on December 6, 1890.

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Long, Barbara Beving. "County Courthouses of Nebraska." Multiple Property Submission. 1989.

Nebraska State Historical Society. Photo Collection. #M281-1025.

Nelson, Nebraska. Sanborn Fire Insurance Map. 1899.

Works Progress Administration. Survey of County Courthouse Records. 1936. NeSHS Archives. Nuckolls County.

Wilcox, V.R. "A History of Nuckolls County, Nebraska." M.A. thesis, Colorado State College - Greeley. 1935.

Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Adams, Clay, Webster and Nuckolls Counties. Chicago: Goodspeed Publishing Co., 1890.

The Wonderful Years. A History of Nuckolls County, Nebraska, 1871-1971. N.p.: Superior Express, 1971.

Nuckolls County. Two elevations. Unsigned. Clerk's Office.

"Lost Ladies found Tuesday Hidden in Nuckolls County Courthouse." Superior Express, July 29, 1984. (Refers to statuary.)

Nelson Gazette, February 5, 1976. Copy of historic photograph.

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Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property occupies all of Block 8 of the Original Town Plat for Nelson.

Boundary Justification

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

