

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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DATE ENTERED

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

Old Capitol

AND/OR COMMON

Third Capitol of the Territory of Iowa and First of the State  
of Iowa**2 LOCATION**STREET & NUMBER Center of Pentacrest, University of Iowa, bounded by Washington,  
Madison, Jefferson and Clinton Streets NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Iowa City

VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

STATE

Iowa 52240

CODE

COUNTY

CODE

Johnson

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

(See Continuation Sheet)

STREET &amp; NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

STATE

VICINITY OF

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**COURTHOUSE, Johnson County Court House  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

STREET &amp; NUMBER

South Clinton Street

CITY, TOWN

Iowa City

STATE

Iowa 52240

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

Historic American Buildings Survey

DATE

 FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCALDEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

Library of Congress

CITY, TOWN

Washington

STATE

D.C.

## 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE <input type="checkbox"/> MOVED      DATE _____

### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The research and restoration is being carried out by Dr. Margaret Keyes, University of Iowa Foundation. She has supplied the following data:

John Francis Rague designed Old Capitol in 1839 in the Greek Revival style. The building is rectangular and measures 120 feet in length and 60 feet in width. It is constructed of the Coralville member of the Cedar Valley limestone of the Devonian period. The dominant color of this stone is a tannish-gray. The steps leading to the platform of the porticoes are of granite. The porticoes, the main cornice, and the cupola are of wood. The four fluted columns on each of the porticoes are of the Doric order and are constructed of wood which has been sanded to simulate stone.

The height of the building from the ground line to the ridgepole of the roof measures 60 feet. North and south tetrastyle porticoes project 12 feet from the long sides. A raised basement elevates the upper two stories over six feet above the ground level. Pilasters appear on the main facades only; thus, a peristyle temple treatment does not carry around the building. A cupola rises from the center of the roof, beginning with two square bases. Its height is 54 feet from the base to the top of the cupola. The second square base atop the first is smaller in size so that a graduated series of sections results. The lower square structure is trimmed with a balustrade and the one above with a heavy cornice and pilasters at the corners. The octagonal lantern encircled by 16 engaged Corinthian columns and punctured by a window in each facet of the octagon is capped with a ribbed dome.

To date, Rague's original plans for Old Capitol have not been located. However, they were described as follows in the Journal of the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Iowa (1841): "...the basement story is entered by two doors in the opposite ends, both opening into a hall seven feet wide, which runs directly through the building north and south, dividing it into two equal parts. There are four rooms on each side about twenty feet square, designed for committee rooms. There is also a large and convenient wood-room, and a fire-proof vault, arched with brick, and covered with grouted masonry, more than three feet thick, for the safety of public documents. On the next floor there is the same division north and south, and a broad hall or vestibule east and west, entered from the porticoes on each side of the building. North of the vestibule, east side, is a room forty-three by twenty-two and a half feet, designed for the supreme court; a corresponding room of the same size on the south of the vestibule, is designed for the use of the Secretary of the Territory. West of the north and south hall are four rooms, equal in size, designed for the use of the Governor, Auditor, Treasurer, and the Library. On the upper floor the north and south hall is omitted. In the south wing is the Representatives hall, fifty-two by forty-three in the clear. In the north wing are the Council chamber and three small committee rooms, cut off from the west of it."

(Continued)

## 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW				
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)	
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION			

SPECIFIC DATES 1842-1846

BUILDER/ARCHITECT John Francis Rague

### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The "Old Capitol" building at the center of the University of Iowa (Iowa City) was Iowa's first permanent capitol (1846-1857) although it was built as the Third Territorial Capitol of Iowa (1842-1846) and was taken over by the University of Iowa when the legislature moved to Des Moines in 1857. The building in the Greek Revival style was designed by John Francis Rague who had won the competition to design the first Illinois Capitol at Springfield (1837).

Rague was the New Jersey born son of a French surgeon who had served with Lafayette during the American Revolution. He studied with Minard LaFever in New York City and practiced there before emigrating to Illinois. He won the \$200 prize in the Illinois Capitol competition and shortly thereafter submitted plans (1839) for Iowa's Capitol. The cornerstone was laid July 4, 1840--nine days later Rague resigned probably because of financial uncertainty--later he finished the Springfield building (1844), practised in Milwaukee and finally in Dubuque where he died in 1877.

In addition to its distinguished architecture, Old Capitol has important historic significance for the State. The site was selected in 1839--what was then an oak grove by a river later became Iowa City. This building was the Third Territorial Capitol and from the beginning there was not enough money to build quickly--it was finally finished in 1858, a year after the State had moved to a new capitol at Des Moines. However, it was in this building that Iowa inaugurated its first governor and its first six General Assemblies met here, the constitution of the State was drafted in the building and the State University was chartered here in 1847. Old Capitol was the university's first permanent building and administrative offices functioned there for 113 years until 1970 when restoration began. It is the most important campus building, a symbol of the history of both the University and the State of Iowa.

The first renovation took place in 1921 to 1924. Some of the work was necessary repair; the weakened wooden tower had four steel support columns inserted in the walls and footings and the unfinished west portico was completed (oddly, the original construction had provided a foundation for the

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Mrs. H. Rand Petersen  
Chairman, Iowa Board of Regents  
1411 Tenth Street  
Harlan, Iowa 51537  
Home telephone: 712-755-5730

Mr. Willard L. Boyd  
President  
The University of Iowa  
Iowa City, Iowa 52240  
Phone: 319-353-3120

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The Hall or vestibule is centered with a reverse spiral staircase which connects the first and second floors. Originally, the first floor and the basement were connected by a straight staircase, immediately below the spiral staircase, which extended from the north on the first floor to the south at the basement level.

Old Capitol was at first lighted with candles, later gas lamps were installed and by the mid-1870's electricity. An amendment to a resolution passed by the Senate in 1848 tells how the building was heated: "Resolved, that no person, or the stove in the lobby, be permitted to smoke, in the Senate chamber during the time the Senate is in session." A report on the installation of a steam heating system in 1878 said, "that the old apparatus was intolerable."

On site inspection of the restoration (July 1975) was extremely impressive--the research is meticulous and the hand work excellent--it will be an outstanding preservation project.

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west portico, which was not built, while the last portico was built without a foundation--both omissions were corrected). The reverse spiral stair that was beyond repair was replaced and extended to the ground floor. Gold leaf was applied to the dome.

The 1970 restoration will take Old Capitol back to Rague's original plan wherever possible adding as much of the original furniture used by the early legislators. The lower level will be museum and university offices.

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Journal of the House of Representatives of the Third Legislative Assembly  
of the Territory of Iowa (1840). Dubuque: Wm. W. Coriell, Printer, 1841.

Hamlin, Talbout. Greek Revival Architecture in America. London and New York:  
Oxford University Press, 1944.

Shambaugh, Benjamin F. Iowa City: A Contribution to the Early History of  
Iowa. Iowa City: The State Historical Society of Iowa, 1893.

Shambaugh, Benjamin F. The Old Stone Capitol Remembers. Iowa City: The  
State Historical Society of Iowa, 1939.

Woodman, Betsy H. John Francis Rague: Mid-Nineteenth Century Revivalist  
Architect (1799-1877). Unpublished Master's thesis, The University of  
Iowa, 1969.

Hilton, Robert T. Old Capitol. Brochure written by Robert Hilton and  
researched by Robert Hilton, Steven K. Dawson, and Margaret N. Keyes.

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Act of Congress, approved March 3, 1839 (U. S. Statutes at Large, Vol. 5, p. 330) grants one section of land to be selected within the territory of Iowa to said territory for the seat of government; notice of selection to be returned to the register of the land office within one year.

Act of Territorial Legislature, approved January 21, 1839, (Laws of Iowa, 1838-39, p. 435) provides for locating the seat of government in Johnson County.

Act of Territorial Legislature, approved January 21, 1839, (Laws of Iowa, 1838-39, p. 437) provides for laying out a town to be called "Iowa City," and for sale of lots therein.

Commissioner's Section of Section 10, twp. 79 north, range 6 west of the 5th p.m. reported to register of land office in Dubuque, October 12, 1839. Recorded June 30, 1920, book 128, page 108, Deed Records of Johnson County. Plat made July 4, 1839, approved July 12, 1839, recorded July 13, 1839, (copied on plat book 1, p. 116).

Laws of Iowa--Chapter 125; Acts of the 1st G. A.:

An Act to Locate and Establish a State University.

Section 1. Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Iowa, that there shall be established at Iowa City, the present seat of government of the state of Iowa, an institution to be called the "State University of Iowa," with such branches as, in the opinion of the General Assembly, the public convenience may hereafter require.

Section 2. The public buildings at Iowa City, together with the ten acres of land on which the same are situated, be, and the same are, hereby granted for the use of said University: Provided, that the sessions of the General Assembly, and the Offices of the Officers of State, shall be held in the present capitol until otherwise provided for by law.

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