



**6. Function or Use**

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Government/courthouse

Government/correctional facilities

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Government/courthouse

Government/correctional facility

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**7. Description**

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Renaissance

Other: Second Renaissance Revival

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation brick

walls brick

roof ceramic tile

other terra cotta

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

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Person

N/A

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Period of Significance

Significant Dates

1904-39

1904-05

1930

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Architect/Builder

Fisher, George L. (Fisher & Lawrie)

Lawrie, Harry (Fisher & Lawrie)

\_\_\_\_\_

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.

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**9. Major Bibliographical References**

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[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: \_\_\_\_\_

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**10. Geographical Data**

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Acreage of property 1.4 acres

UTM References

|   |             |                        |                            |   |             |             |             |
|---|-------------|------------------------|----------------------------|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| A | <u>1 4</u>  | <u>6 9 10 12 19 10</u> | <u>4 15 16 14 15 14 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.

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Verbal Boundary Description

[X] See continuation sheet, section 10, page 1.

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Boundary Justification

[X] See continuation sheet, section 10, page 1.

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**11. Form Prepared By**

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|                 |                                 |           |                  |          |       |
|-----------------|---------------------------------|-----------|------------------|----------|-------|
| 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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The Saunders County Courthouse is an excellent, unaltered example of the Property Type, County Capitol. It represents the shift from Victorian and Romanesque Revival styles to classically-derived stylistic influences, in this case, the Second Renaissance Revival applied to the County Capitol. The building is one of 18 extant examples of the County Capitol in Nebraska, five of which are individually listed on the National Register. Identifying features include: corner towers and central dome, permanent costly materials, elaborate ornamentation, Second Renaissance Revival stylistic influence, and impression of a government building of permanence and solidity. The Saunders County Courthouse is among a handful of Nebraska courthouses to have original murals and stenciling in its interior as well as considerable ornamentation in glass, plaster, and wood. A distinctive variety of materials are also used for the exterior, including notable application of terra cotta detail.

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Built in 1904-05, the Saunders County Courthouse in Wahoo is two stories on a raised basement. Shades of tan and russet from the tan brick, lighter stone and terra cotta trim, and russet clay roof tiles combine effectively.

An important characteristic are the four corner towers that anchor the design and the lofty central dome placed astride the hipped roof. Three-part bays with steeply pitched polygonal roofs call attention to the secondary entrances on the north and south facades and further contribute to the changing outline of the essentially rectangular building. The main entrance projects only slightly but has a prominent small gabled dormer above it as well as extensive terra cotta around its tall round-arched entrance to draw the eye. The courthouse is symmetric, with regularly spaced bays and towers and three entrances.

The building exhibits elements of the Second Renaissance Revival style, including a rusticated ground floor (here executed in brick and extending very high) and horizontal divisions separating the stories. Moulded belt and string courses and cornices of varying size and complexity contribute to the horizontality. Like other buildings executed in this style, window treatments on the courthouse vary and include long radiating voussoirs, deeply recessed narrow slits grouped in three's, straight-headed lintels with consoles, and round-arched lintels.

Terra cotta detail is an important feature of the courthouse. On the corner towers there are terra cotta pediments with dentils, consoles, a small moulded bull's-eye window, and foliated detail. Below the pediments are a moulded cornice, elaborate shields on corner pilasters,

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and on the centered round arches large foliated keystones, more moulding, a lunette, and egg-and-dart courses. Even more ornamentation is concentrated about the main entrance and features two eagles with wings spread and a mass of foliated patterns. The effect is rich and pleasing.

The floorplan of the 75x100' courthouse is as regularly laid out as the exterior. On the first floor four county offices run along the long central hallway, and the commissioners' meeting room is placed at the south end (over the basement level entrance). Vaults are located in each of the four corners of the first floor.

The high site is not level and therefore the south entrance opens directly onto the basement level. The main (east) entrance on Chestnut Street and the other entrance on the north facade had steps that lead up to the first floor. A steep and narrow 25' staircase leads directly from the east entrance to the central hallway and is adorned with distinctive murals and stencils.

Interior treatment continues the wealth and splendor of the exterior and is among the best examples in Nebraska. Ornate, rich, dark woodwork (pediments with dentils, fluted Corinthian pilasters, paneling), stained glass (stylized organic patterns and geometric shapes), plasterwork (swags and wreaths, beams, dentils, acanthus consoles, moulding, Ionic capitals), marble in two colors (wainscoting, mopboard, stair treads), floor tile (in halls, of an elaborate pattern in six colors), brass newels (with urns and Ionic capitals) are found variously in the commissioners' room, halls, stairways, and the district courtroom.

In addition, murals and stencils adorn the district courtroom, commissioners' room, and main entry stairway. Subjects include allegorical figures (in the courtroom), scenes relating to agriculture and pioneer life, and the earlier courthouse. The staircase murals are signed by the William G. Andrews Decorating Company of Chicago.

Alterations to the courthouse are minimal and expected: an enclosed brick entry to the north facade, new metal and glass door on north facade, and metal fire stairs on the south facade. The principal changes in the interior are a line of modern lighting running down the hallways and counters cut in the hallway walls for access to some county offices.

The Saunders County Courthouse is centered on a full block that is located across the railroad tracks from and west of Wahoo's main commercial street. The site is notably high and the eminence has reportedly attracted use since Indian times when it was used as a burial

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ground.<sup>1</sup>

Access from Chestnut Street is gained from a series of concrete steps, and concrete walkways ring three sides of the courthouse. Arrayed along the east grounds, from south to north, are the following objects, which are of recent origin or small scale:

- an eternal Flame of Freedom dedicated in 1969 (noncontributing)
- Nebraska State Historical Society plaque placed in 1968 (not counted)
- simple flagpole (not counted)
- torpedo on a concrete base in memory of the USS Wahoo SS238 (submarine) sunk in 1943, dedicated in 1962 (noncontributing)
- several small architectural elements removed during north entry changes (not counted)
- small stone slab dedicated to the pioneers (not counted)

Also on the courthouse square, at the southwest corner, is the jail. Dedicated April 1930, the 36x45' building is two-story on a raised basement, faced with golden tan brick, and has a hipped tile roof. In addition to having materials similar to the courthouse, the jail has similar stone trim and classical detail (rusticated brick base, corner quoins, corbels, and dentils) that work well with the courthouse. With its 1930 construction date, function as a county jail, and complementary scale, materials, and detail, the jail is a contributing building on the courthouse square.

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<sup>1</sup>County histories describe it as a burial site but make no mention of remains or grave goods.

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The Saunders 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 Saunders 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.

As an important and virtually unaltered 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, a variety of costly materials, elaborate ornamentation, and exhibits features of the Second Renaissance Revival style. Its interior features, including stencils and murals, are notable. 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 1904, when construction began, to 1939, when the "fifty year rule" takes effect. The Saunders 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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Saunders County is situated directly west of Omaha, one tier of counties west of the Missouri River. Ashland, located in the southeast corner of the county and by the strategic Platte River, was selected to be county seat in an 1867 election. Six years later some county residents called for a more centrally located seat of government, and emotions ran high. In the fall of 1873 an election was held, pitting Wahoo, Eldred, Alvin, and Ashland against one another. Wahoo won with 617 votes, the first county seat ran last with 238 votes, and the county seat was moved to Wahoo in 1873.

Wahoo was just three years old when it captured the coveted county seat designation, although settlers arrived in the vicinity beginning in 1865. Prospects of rail connections may have spurred its founding, and in 1876 the first rail line arrived, from Valley. The following year the Union Pacific extended rail service from Omaha to Wahoo, and the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy and the Northwestern both arrived in the mid-1880s. Wahoo enjoyed an enviable situation with such bountiful rail service.

Saunders County officials immediately built a courthouse in Wahoo, which

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was completed in 1874. The two-story wood frame Italianate building was on the same high site as the present courthouse. By 1890 this first facility was deemed inadequate; some county offices had to be housed in rented quarters. Opposition surfaced, probably due to Ashland area residents with long memories as well as concerns about railroad bonds the county was still responsible for. The matter was dropped temporarily.

On August 13, 1903, county voters approved by a wide margin a proposal to issue \$85,000 in bonds to underwrite construction of a new courthouse. However, procedural errors--the announcement of the election was one day short of the required time--nullified the election. Voters again approved the proposition on November 3, 1903. Ashland area votes tended to vote against the issue.

In December 1903, Fisher & Lawrie, Omaha architects, were selected to be architects for the project. Harry Lawrie was born in Scotland and came to America in the 1880s. He was a draftsman in Chicago architectural offices, including Burnham & Root. By c. 1895, he had established a practice with George L. Fisher in Omaha. Among their commissions were state university buildings at Lincoln and the YMCA in Omaha.

On March 15, 1904, the county board chose Charles Olson, a Lincoln contractor, to be general contractor. His bid was \$78,825. Cornerstone ceremonies were held June 2, 1904. Approximately one year later, on February 13, 1905, the county moved into the courthouse, although it was not quite finished. A fire in the old courthouse which caused slight damage no doubt hastened the move.

The present jail built in 1930 replaced a small heating plant and separate county jail, after state officials determined the jail was unsafe. Both are shown on a 1907 Sanborn fire insurance map. N.P. Brigham from Omaha was the architect for the jail, and the Lincoln firm of A.O. Anderson & Sons the contractor. Construction began on March 10, 1930, and the building was dedicated, with the Governor in attendance, on May 7, 1930.



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- Long, Barbara Beving. "County Courthouses of Nebraska." Multiple Property Submission. 1989.
- Works Progress Administration. Survey of County Courthouse Records. 1936. NeSHS Archives. Saunders County.
- Saunders County. Commissioners' Records. Books 1 and 5.
- Cornerstone. Saunders County Jail.
- Cornerstone. Saunders County Courthouse.
- Wahoo, Nebraska. Sanborn Fire Insurance Map. 1907, 1931.
- Perky, Charles, ed. Past and Present of Saunders County, Nebraska, 2 vols. Chicago: S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1915.
- "Wahoo's Century Round-up, 1870-1970."
- Saunders County Historical Society. Saunders County, Nebraska. Dallas: Taylor Publishing Co., 1983.
- Nebraska State Historical Society. Photo Collection. #M281-1056, M281-93, M281-94.
- Architect files. NeSHPO.
- "Fisher & Lawrie." Omaha Daily Bee. January 1, 1906.
- Wahoo Wasp. August 27, October 22, and November 3, 1903; June 2, 9, and 23, 1904; February 9, 1905; February 27, March 6, and May 1 and 8, 1930.

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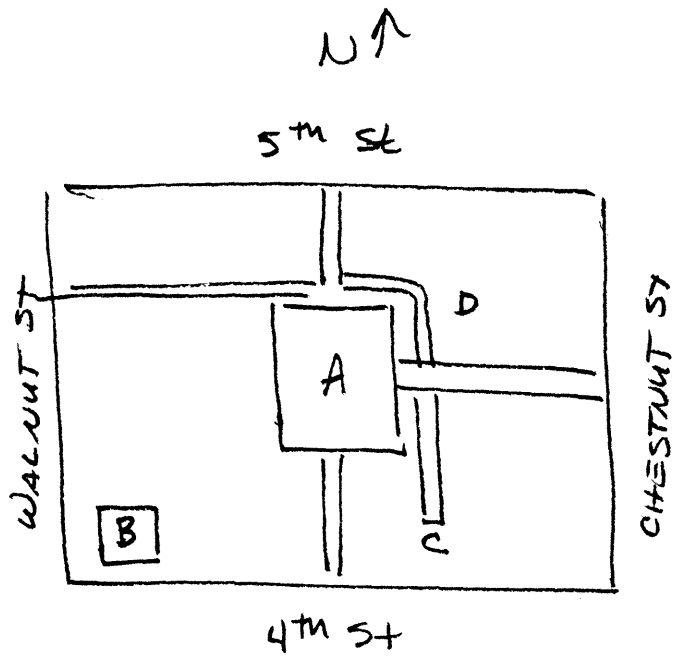
### Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property occupies all lots (1-12) in Block 4 of the Original Town of Wahoo and is roughly 250x250' in size.

### Boundary Justification

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

SAUNDERS COUNTY  
COURTHOUSE (SD16-12)  
Wahoo, NE



CONTRIBUTING BLDGS

- A - COURTHOUSE
- B - JAIL

NONCONTRIBUTING OBJECTS

- C - eternal flame
- D - torpedo