

JUL - 2 1981

IOWA SITE INVENTORY

Division of Historic Preservation
Iowa State Historical Department
26 E. Market St., Iowa City, Iowa 52240

MAY 29 1981

Site Number 71-016-001
District Name _____
Map Reference # 71-016-001
Topo Map Primghar 1:24,000

IDENTIFICATION

1. Site Name O'Brien County Courthouse
2. Village/Town/City Primghar Township _____ County O'Brien
3. Street Address Fir Avenue between 15th and 16th streets
4. Legal Location OT Courthouse Square
Urban: subdivision block parcel subparcel
Rural: township range section 1/4 section-1/4 section
5. UTM Location: zone 15 easting 286150 northing 4773590; Acreage less than 1 ac
6. Owner(s) Name O'Brien County Board of Supervisors
7. Owner(s) Address Courthouse Primghar Iowa 51245
(Street address) (City) (State) (Zip)
8. Use: present Courthouse original Courthouse

DESCRIPTION

- Smith & Loeffler, Des Moines, Arch.
9. Date of Construction 1917 Architect/Builder J.E. Lovejoy, Builder _____
 10. Building Type: single family dwelling multiple family dwelling commercial
 industrial educational other institutional public religious agricultural
 11. Exterior Walls: clapboard stone brick board & batten shingles stucco
 other Granite and limestone
 12. Structural System: wood frame with interlocking joints
 wood frame with light members (balloon frame) masonry load-bearing walls
 iron frame steel frame with curtain walls reinforced concrete
 other _____
 13. Condition: excellent good fair deteriorated
 14. Integrity: original site moved-if so, when? _____
Notes on alterations, additions (with dates and architect, if known) and any other notable features of building and site: Aluminum sash windows and doors - ceramic tile floors, marble staircase with wood handrails and brass balustrade - county seal in tile mosaic, entrance hall - early water fountain - white glass skylight - ornate railing around rotunda on upper floors.
 15. Related Outbuildings and Property: barn other farm structures
 carriage house garage privy other _____
 16. Is the building endangered? no yes-if so, why? _____
 17. Surroundings of the building: open land woodland scattered outbuildings
 densely built-up commercial industrial residential other _____
 18. Map _____
 19. Photo
Roll _____ Frame _____ View _____

SIGNIFICANCE (Indicate sources of information for all statements)

20. Architectural Significance

- a. Key structure/individually may qualify for the National Register
 b. Contributing structure c. Not eligible/intrusion

This is a somewhat austere version of the Beaux Arts style with rather large windows. Public mainspaces well-preserved and feature rich materials; marble, tile, brass.

21. Historical Significance

Theme(s) Politics/Government

- a. Key structure/individually may qualify for the National Register
 b. Contributing structure c. Not eligible/intrusion

This courthouse is locally significant as the historical focus of county government, and of the political power and prestige derived from the community's status as the county seat. As center of county government, an Iowa town was reasonably assured of economic and population growth, and a prominent role in local social and political life. The county courthouse represents a significant public investment in a structure built not simply for utilitarian purposes, but also as a monument associated with the historical importance of county organization and development.

See Continuation Sheet

22. Sources (for primary and secondary sources, give complete facts of publication: author, title, place of publication, date, etc.):

Andreas, A.T. Illustrated Historical Atlas of Iowa. Chicago: Andreas Atlas Co., 1875.

Pratt, LeRoy G. The Counties and Courthouses of Iowa. Mason City, Iowa: Klipto Printing and Office Supply Co., 1977.

Stanek, Edward and Jacqueline. Iowa's Magnificent County Courthouses. Des Moines: Wallace-Homestead Book Co., 1976.

Prepared by _____ Date January, 1980
Address _____ Telephone _____
Organization DHP

FOR DIVISION OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION USE ONLY

I. OFFICE INFORMATION SOURCES ON THIS PROPERTY

COUNTY RESOURCE FILE

WINDSHIELD SURVEY

NATIONAL REGISTER

GRANTS-IN-AID: _____

DETERMINATION OF ELIGIBILITY

REVIEW AND COMPLIANCE PROJECT:

OTHER _____

OTHER _____

OTHER _____

2. SUBJECT TRACES

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

d. _____

e. _____

3. PHOTO IMAGES _____

CONTINUATION SHEET

Item Number(s)

O'BRIEN COUNTY

An election on February 6, 1860, resulted in the organization of O'Brien County. At about that time, a log courthouse was built on a farm for about \$2,000, and it measured 14 by 20 feet. For some reason or other, the building was disassembled, moved, and reassembled in a different rural setting. The county was trying to assemble all of its records and offices in one location, but as soon as the courthouse was reconstructed, it was needed for use as a school. In its later days, it was used as a residence, then as a blacksmith shop, and finally as a stable. The new location of this building in 1870 was called "Old O'Brien".

The second county courthouse was finished in April of 1874 at a cost of \$2000 to the county. It was about 35 feet square and housed four offices of nearly equal size, with an eight-foot-wide hallway. This courthouse was built in the new county seat of Primghar, which was established as the center of county government at the election held on November 11, 1872. While this courthouse was being constructed, the county records were stored and official meetings were held in Paine's Store.

The third county courthouse was built in 1887 at a cost of about \$6,000. It was 50 by 54 feet in size and took the place of the 1874 building, which had been condemned as not being a safe place for the public records. Since the bill amounted to \$1,000 more than the board of supervisors could legally spend without a vote of the people, a number of extraordinary measures had to be taken to pay for it. The people of Primghar helped by hauling lumber from Sanborn or Paullina, without charge to the county. An addition was added in 1902 to satisfy the county's growing needs, at a cost of \$1,400. The 1874 courthouse was sold for a little over \$400 and became a residence in Primghar.

The present courthouse was built in 1915 and 1916. It is a large structure of classic design and cost the county in excess of \$159,000.

--from Stanek, Edward, and Jacqueline Stanek,
Iowa's Magnificent County Courthouses. Des
Moines: Wallace-Homestead Book Co., 1976.