

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

For NPS use only

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

received **APR 19 1985**  
date entered **JUL 29 1985**

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

**1. Name**

historic Hamilton County Courthouse (HM01-1)

and/or common N/A

**2. Location**

street & number Courthouse Square N/A not for publication

city, town Aurora N/A vicinity of

state Nebraska code 031 county Hamilton code 081

**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"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>N/A</u> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

**4. Owner of Property**

name Board of County Commissioners

street & number Courthouse Square

city, town Aurora N/A vicinity of state Nebraska

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Register of Deeds, Hamilton County Courthouse

street & number Block 18 Original Town, Aurora

city, town Aurora state Nebraska

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title Nebraska Historic Buildings Survey has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date On-going  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Nebraska State Historical Society

city, town Lincoln state Nebraska

*Recd 7/8/85*

# 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		date <u>NA</u>

## Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Hamilton County Courthouse is a large masonry structure, rectangular in overall shape and cross-axial in form with pavilions in each corner and a tall central tower rising from the crossing. The courthouse is symmetrical on all four facades, and is designed in a High Victorian rendition of Richardson's Romanesque style.

Hamilton County Courthouse was built in 1894 by Architect William Gray. This was the last of five courthouses in Nebraska designed by him. The brick and stone courthouse has had few alterations.

The Courthouse is located on a square block in the center of Aurora's main business district. The spired structure stands proudly today surrounded by beautiful trees and a green lawn as it did 90 years ago. The visual impact of a landmark like the courthouse is especially important in a prairie town like Aurora. It is visible from various vantage points in town as well as from several miles out in the surrounding countryside.

The three-story courthouse is constructed of masonry bearing walls with wooden floor framing. The exterior reveals the pressed brick wall with Colorado red stone at the base of the structure. The courthouse, measuring 102'-0" x 74'-5", is symmetrically arranged with a tower at each corner and a central tower of approximately 150 feet high. Each tower has a galvanized finial cap at the peak. The North and South facades have a central bay, while the East and West facades mark the entrances with a protruded gable end, Palladian windows and terra cotta accent at the corners. The round arched entries are of cut stone, supported on either side by clusters of seven cut stone Byzantine columns. The raised basement of the courthouse is identified by the rusticated base of Colorado red sandstone capped by a corbelled course of the same material. The terra cotta was used generously throughout the structure for decorative gables, keystones, corner accents, roof edge moldings and parapet caps, as well as accent ovolo molding bands around the building and towers. The high pitched roof, (approximately 12 in 12, and 24 in 12 on the towers) was originally Bangor Black Pennsylvania slate, but is now black cement asbestos shingles, (reroofing occurred in 1947-48 by Architect Frank McNett).

The interior has had few alterations. A large hallway runs through the center of the building in an East-West direction and crosses with a secondary hall under the central tower. The flooring in the hallway and vestibule is encoustic tile. The rest of the flooring throughout the building is of hard maple. The ornate woodwork of white oak in its original stained and varnished condition appears on the doors, windows, casings, wainscot, stair railings and trim throughout the entire building.

The courthouse is organized with the Executive Offices, Treasurer, Clerk, Assessor, Sheriff, and the Commissioners Hearing Room on first floor. The second floor is reserved for judicial purposes and is the location of the

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only

received 4/9/85

date entered

Continuation sheet

Description

Item number 7

Page 2

Courtroom, Judges Chamber, Law Library and Anterooms. The caretaker's residence, restrooms and housekeeping facilities are restricted to the ground floor (basement level).

The courthouse was designed by Architect William Gray of Lincoln, Nebraska in the Richardsonian Romanesque style. The style takes its name from Henry Hobson Richardson, considered to be one of America's three greatest native-born nineteenth century architects (along with Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright).

The boiler plant is located on the North-East corner of the courthouse square and is still in use. Originally there was a bandstand on top that was removed in the 1970's.

# 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 type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input 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 1894-95

Builder/Architect William Gray

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph):**

The Hamilton County Courthouse is significant in the area of architecture for its associations with William Gray, prominent early Nebraska courthouse architect, and for being an exceptionally fine example of the Richardsonian Romanesque style applied to the "County Capital" form. Local political significance is manifest in the buildings central role as the seat of county government since its completion in 1895, both actually and symbolically.

The Hamilton County Courthouse was built in the 19th century. It is significant both architecturally and politically to the 9,301 residents of Hamilton County.

The Hamilton County Courthouse, as we know it today, was actually the third courthouse constructed for Hamilton County. The first courthouse was built in 1870 in Orville City, the County Seat at that time.

In the fifth election, Aurora finally won the battle between the two cities for the location of the Hamilton County Seat. To make the victory certain, Aurora built one of the finest courthouses in Western Nebraska. A square block was also deeded to the county around which the town was built. The building was completed in 1877 but was destroyed by fire in January 1894. The new \$60,000 Hamilton County Courthouse was under construction before the end of the year.

The Courthouse in Aurora is locally significant as the seat of the county government for all of Hamilton County.

Architect William Gray of Lincoln, Nebraska, known for his competent courthouse architecture, was the architect for the Hamilton County Courthouse. He was also the architect for four other outstanding courthouses in Nebraska: Cass, 1891-92; Butler c. 1889-90 (non-extant); Johnson 1888-89; and York, 1885-88 (non-extant).

The courthouse in Hamilton County is an excellant representative example of the formal, symmetrical and symbolic courthouse which characterized courthouse construction during the period following the Nation's Centennial celebration through the turn of the century. This was known loosely as the County Capitol style, derived from the form of the Nation's Capitol with the exception of the tower, which does not imitate the dome in Washington but follows Richardsonian ideals in its design. The building is an excellant Nebraska example of the Richardsonian Romanesque style. A comparison could be made with Gray's other courthouses in Nebraska, two of which were "County Capitols" in style. Hamilton County's is the best of his in the Romanesque

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property approximately four

Quadrangle name Aurora West, Nebraska

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM References

A 

1	4	5	8	4	1	3	0	4	5	2	4	3	6	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

C 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

D 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

E 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

F 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

G 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

H 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

Verbal boundary description and justification

Described as all of Block 18, Original Town of Aurora, Hamilton County, Nebraska, in Section 4, T10N, R6W of the 6th Principle Meridian; and including all historically associated real estate.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state NA code county code

state code county code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Jerry L. Berggren (D. Murphy, Technical Editor)

organization Jerry L. Berggren AIA Architect & Associates (Nebraska State Historical Society) date January, 1985

street & number 333 Stuart Building (1500 R Street) telephone (402) 475-0597 (402) 471-3270

city or town Lincoln state Nebraska

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature Marvin D. Knott 4/4/85

title Director, Nebraska State Historical Society date

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

John A. Flores Byers **Entered in the National Register** date 7-29-85  
Keeper of the National Register

Attest: date

Chief of Registration

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only  
received 4/19/83  
date entered

Continuation sheet Significance

Item number 8

Page 2

vein. Being his last courthouse, the Hamilton County Courthouse is also his best in its High Victorian verticality, especially now that the York building is no longer extant. This verticality is an aspect of its design which contributes to its symbolism and Landmark status.

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only

received 4-19-85

date entered

Continuation sheet Bibliographical References Item number 9

Page 2

- Bremer, Bertha G. "Centennial History of Hamilton County," 1967, Aurora, Nebraska, Hamilton County Centennial Association, p. 70-72.
- Gray, William, "Hamilton County Courthouse Specification," 1894.
- Goeldner, Paul Kenneth, "Temples of Justice: Nineteenth Century County Courthouse in the Midwest and Texas," Ph.D. Diss., Columbia University, 1970, 302ff, 434, 469.
- Small Towns Institute, JoAnn Kimball, Project Director, "Aurora and Hamilton County, Nebraska," 1979, Lincoln, Nebraska, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, p. 35-36.