

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

2235  
NOV 18 1980

# 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 Valley County Courthouse  
other names/site number VY04-1

## 2. Location

street & number 16th St bet L & M Sts N/A not for publication  
city, town Ord N/A vicinity  
state Nebraska code NE county Valley code 175 zip code 68862

## 3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>1</u>	<u>0</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>    </u>	<u>    </u> objects
		<u>1</u>	<u>0</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. Hanson November 17, 1989  
Signature of certifying official 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.  
 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:)

Patrick Andrus 1/10/90  
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)

Beaux Arts

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation stone

walls brick

roof other

other terra cotta

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

Period of Significance

Significant Dates

1919-39

1919-21

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Gernandt, William F.

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:  
[x] 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	1   4	5   0   6   0   0   0	4   6   0   5   4   2   0	B			
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
C				D			
	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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Built in 1919-21, the Valley County Courthouse is an excellent, largely unaltered example of the Property Type, County Citadel. Identifying features include: rectangular shape, centered entrance, costly materials, distinctive ornamentation, Beaux Arts stylistic influence, provision for fireproof storage, and impression of a government building representing modernity, strength, and prosperity. The courthouse also has other County Citadel characteristics: flat roof, prominent raised basement, and designed by an architect. In addition, the property is an exceptionally fine example of one of the ten Nebraska courthouses William F. Gernandt designed during an unusually productive period, between 1910 and 1923. The Valley County Courthouse, with its elaborate terra cotta ornamentation, marks a departure from earlier Gernandt designs and thus illustrates the evolution of his courthouse commissions.

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The Valley County Courthouse is rectangular and consists of two stories set upon a raised basement. With its prominent entry pavilion, the west facade is the principal entrance. Lesser pavilions or bays are centered on the north and south facades, and the east pavilion has a secondary entrance that opens directly onto the ground floor.

The design is the second of three Nebraska courthouses Gernandt designed using elaborate terra cotta trim, and the cream-colored terra cotta contrasts well with the grey-tan brick. The ornate west pavilion displays a wealth of terra cotta. Particularly effective is the broad water-table which consists of a series of five patterned courses (including egg-and-dart, circles, and beads). These courses are continued on pedestals for massive fluted columns and engaged columns having enriched Ionic capitals. The ornamentation creates a visual richness unmatched on non-Gernandt Nebraska courthouses.

The opulence continues above the columns as well as along the cornice. Above the paired entry columns are seven different patterns (including dentils, foliated detail, and acanthus), and these are topped with a row of closely spaced acroteria as well. Rising above the heavy cornice at the columns are squared pedestals with even more decoration, such as shell shapes. The pedestals recall those on Gernandt's earlier Dawson and Clay County Courthouses, and the overall design and plan are quite similar to the Clay County example.

Between the paired columns are, from top to bottom, a decorated shield surrounded by cornucopia and sheaves of twisted wheat, the elaborate cornice, a pair of rectangular windows having starburst mullions, a rounded balcony with twisted balusters and decorated railings, and fan

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shape with pendant that acts as the base of the balcony. The pediment over the door is broken to allow the long pendant to hang down. Fluted squared pilasters and still more detail frame the doorway. Two sets of original metal lamp posts have four small globes around a large one and rest on brick and stone pedestals at the entry steps.

The acanthus and acroteria cornice, other patterned courses, coping, and also the water table (which is a continuous sill for first story windows) continue around all sides of the building, providing a unifying richness. Also continued is the "rusticated" brick raised basement and its stone base (which also acts as a sill for basement windows).

North and south pavilions have five brick pilasters with unusual terra cotta bases and capitals like those of the Clay County Courthouse. Rather narrow rectangular windows are placed between the pilasters. The east pavilion is simpler, wider, and flatter than on the front. An attractive pediment tops the doorway.

Double-hung windows are regularly spaced on the facades. Five sets of windows flank the west pavilion, while only one set (plus considerable wall surface) occurs on the sides. Because the entry pavilion is expanded on the east side, only four sets of windows are placed on either side of it. Ground floor windows have simple brick lintels which feature slightly projecting brick keystones. First floor lintels are the most elaborate: heavy triangular pediments with acanthus consoles and topped with prominent acroteria. Unusual swags, part of the wide cornice, highlight top story lintels.

The courthouse exhibits features of the Beaux Arts style, including a wealth of classical detail, pronounced cornice with a tall parapet, immense grouped columns, rusticated raised basement, projecting pavilions, enriched surfaces, and a grandiose quality.

The 63x97' building has prominent steps with landings (termed a "plaza" on the plans) up to the west entry foyer. From the foyer are steps down to the basement and steep steps up to the first floor corridor, and the floorplan is the same as for the Clay County Courthouse. County offices are ranged off this corridor, including the supervisors' room opposite the stairs. Vaults of different size are located in various locations. At the north end is the staircase.

On the second floor is the district courtroom and related offices. The courtroom is located at the end of the corridor, roughly the south end of the building. But it is surrounded by office space and has no windows, an unusual but efficient arrangement. The public enters the

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courtroom at its back, another unusual feature. In other courthouses, courtroom access is from the side of the room, not the back.

Like other Gernandt courthouses, this example has costly interior features. These include mosaic tile in a type of checkerboard pattern in green and white and with a marble border, marble mopboards, stairs, and trim, white marble wainscoting, black and white marble door surrounds. First floor corridor walls above the marble wainscoting are long rectangular concrete blocks laid up with wide joints and painted to resemble stone. Specifications for the courthouse note that these were to have an "imitation stone effect."

The district courtroom contains elements typical of Gernandt courtrooms, especially the bold dark woodwork. Heavy beams form a skylight that once had stained glass panels.<sup>1</sup> Other features include a heavy dentiled cornice, paneled wood wainscoting, the judge's bench, the bar, and heavy flat lintels with dentils and long consoles at the doors.

Alterations are minimal: fluorescent lighting and limited changes in the offices. Metal storm windows cover the original simple double-hung windows shown on an historic photograph. To accommodate changing legal requirements for handling prisoners, a small one-story jail addition has been built on the south side of the building. The unobtrusive flat-roofed addition is approximately 32x70' and has brick of a color that blends well with the courthouse. The 1970s jail addition does not visually intrude upon the significant features of the courthouse.

The courthouse is centered on the east end of the courthouse square with the commercial area of Ord around it. There are no objects or buildings on the site other than a small drinking fountain and a pink boulder with a small metal plaque (neither were counted for this nomination). Numerous deciduous and evergreen trees dot the lawn.

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<sup>1</sup>Part of the stained glass is now used for interior windows overlooking the hallway from the supervisors' room on the first floor.

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The Valley 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 Valley County. It is an excellent example of public architecture and contains good examples of design features and facilities distinctive to its design and use as a courthouse. In addition, the courthouse is an exceptionally fine example of the ten Nebraska courthouses William F. Gernandt designed during an unusually productive period, between 1910 and 1923. The Valley County Courthouse, with its elaborate terra cotta ornamentation, illustrates the evolution of Gernandt's courthouse commissions. With its distinctive design and standing as one of Gernandt's important terra cotta courthouses, the property is of Statewide Significance.

As a good example of the County Citadel, the courthouse contains design features and facilities distinctive to its design and use (such as fireproof vaults), has a rectangular shape, centered entrance, costly materials, distinctive ornamentation, and Beaux Arts stylistic influence. Elements of the design combine effectively to convey the impression of a government building representing modernity, simplicity, and prosperity, also features of the County Citadel.

The Period of Significance is 1919, when construction began, to 1939, when the "fifty year rule" takes effect. The Valley County Courthouse is being nominated as an example of the Property Type, County Courthouses of Nebraska (County Citadel) of the Context, County Government in Nebraska, 1854-1941, from the Multiple Property Submission, County Courthouses of Nebraska.

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Valley County is located in central Nebraska, and the Calamus and Loup Rivers cross the county. It was organized in 1873 during a period of pronounced settlement in the state. Ord, the present county seat, was elected to that position the same year. Development in the county seat was slow, and it was not until 1875 that it was platted. Settlement and prosperity increased in the 1880s and 1890s when the railroad arrived in Ord.

To foster settlement and assure that Ord continued to be county seat, property owners offered the county certain inducements. They offered a total of 18 city blocks to the county, provided they built a courthouse by July 4, 1880. County officials agreed with the proposal and built a small (16x24') courthouse on the south side of the present courthouse

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square in 1875-76. In the late 1880s a larger and more pretentious courthouse replaced the original.

As early as 1915, county residents were interested in a replacement courthouse. Local newspapers engaged in a campaign to point out the problems of the old courthouse. "Find, if you can, a corner that is not cracked, warped or twisted." And "a severe wind storm endangers the lives of the occupants, and the vaults where the records of value are kept would afford but scant protection in case of fire." Despite these dire descriptions, a petition circulated in July 1915 failed to gain enough signatures for a tax levy for a new courthouse.

In December 1916 the county commissioners called a mass meeting where it became clear that voters favored a bond issue over a tax. But these plans took place amid American preparations to enter World War I. On April 2, 1917, President Woodrow Wilson declared war against Germany, and the nation went on a wartime footing. Federal agencies directed or restricted transportation and construction matters, and other vital segments of the nation's economy. Valley County put aside its construction plans.

After the Armistice in 1918, Valley County residents again turned to the question of a new courthouse. Voters overwhelmingly approved a \$100,000 bond issue on June 24, 1919. Also, the county poor farm was sold for \$44,400 and the money applied to the courthouse fund.

In September 1919 William F. Gernandt and H.P. Beers (perhaps a Gernandt associate) met with the county board to discuss courthouse plans. According to a newspaper interview with the man who was county clerk in 1920, the supervisors visited the Clay County Courthouse with Gernandt. Clearly, they liked what they saw, for the Valley County Courthouse is remarkably similar to it.

Gernandt signed a contract in the fall of 1919 which stated the building would not cost more than \$140,000. Bids from contractors revealed that figure to be too low, given the increase in construction costs following World War I. The lowest bid received was \$187,287.

The county met this problem by levying a tax after receiving a petition signed by over half the county's voters calling for such a tax. Not all residents approved of the tax, a subsequent source of difficulty for the county. Nonetheless, contracts were let in January 1920. The general contract, to Henry Ohlsen & Sons of David City, was for \$198,821; the heating and plumbing contract, to John A. Anderson Company of Omaha, was \$33,729; and the electrical contract, to William W. Berger of Omaha, was

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\$2905.

The old courthouse, which was centered on the courthouse square, remained in operation during construction. Therefore, the long entry "plaza" or prominent flight of steps was not built until the old building was razed at the end of the project in 1921. This arrangement accounts for the present building's location at the east end of the courthouse square.

Progress on the new courthouse was such that the cornerstone was laid September 22, 1920. The courthouse was essentially complete that year, but finishing touches (such as building the plaza) delayed formal acceptance of the building until September 28, 1921. A major difficulty was that the legality of the tax levy was under question. Eventually the county needed a special legalizing act from the legislature (House Roll No. 175) to declare the warrants issued for the tax levy to be legal. When completed in 1921, the courthouse cost the county over \$244,400.

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- Nebraska State Historical Society. Photo Collection. #M281-1968.
- Tracings. Valley County Courthouse. William F. Gernandt. December 1919.
- Ord, Nebraska. Sanborn Fire Insurance Map. 1912, 1924.
- Valley County. Supervisors' Records. Book 5.
- Cornerstone. Valley County Courthouse.
- "Specifications for General Construction...Valley County Courthouse....."  
William F. Gernandt. December 1919.
- Shaver, Elizabeth. "History of Valley County, Nebraska." M.A. thesis, University of Nebraska, 1935. (Extensive use newspaper clippings, some quoted here.)
- Foght, H.W. The Trail of the Loup. n.p.: 1906.
- "Courthouse Gets Admiring Glances." Undated clipping. Clerk's office.  
(Quoted.)
- "Valley County." Who's Who in Nebraska. Lincoln: Nebraska Press Association, 1940.

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Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property, Valley County Courthouse, occupies Block 20 of the Original Plat of Ord and is roughly 250x250' in size.

Boundary Justification

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