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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NOV 28 1989

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 Cass County Courthouse
other names/site number CC14-109

2. Location

street & number Main St bet 3d & 4th Sts N/A not for publication
city, town Plattsmouth N/A vicinity
state Nebraska code NE county Cass code 025 zip code 68048

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>2</u>	_____ buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-state	<input type="checkbox"/> site	_____	_____ sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	_____	_____ structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	_____	_____ objects
		<u>2</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 2

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. Patrick Andrus 1/10/90
 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:)

for 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)

Romanesque

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation stone

walls brick

roof asphalt

other stone

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

1891-1939

1891-92
N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Gray, William

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.

9. Major Bibliographical References

[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: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property less than 1 acre

UTM References

A	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	B	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
C	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	D	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing

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

Verbal Boundary Description

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

Boundary Justification

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

11. Form Prepared By

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 Cass County Courthouse in Plattsmouth is an excellent, relatively unaltered example of the Property Type, County Capitol. Identifying features include: corner towers and central dome, permanent costly materials, elaborate ornamentation, Romanesque Revival stylistic influence, and impression of a government building of permanence and solidity. Eighteen extant County Capitols were built between 1888 and 1907 across Nebraska. With its 1891-2 construction date, the Cass County Courthouse is among the earlier examples. It is also a good example of the work of an important Nebraska architect, William Gray. The Cass County Courthouse and also the jail building are part of the Plattsmouth Main Street Historic District.

The imposing size (80x102') and rectangular form of the Cass County Courthouse epitomize conceptions of the County Capitol. Notable features include the massing (corner towers and massive central clock tower), fine materials (brick, terra cotta, and stone), and profusion of distinctive decoration (checkerboard patterns, round arches, and foliated detail).

The 2-story composition rests on a sturdy raised basement of rock-faced cut reddish sandstone. Gabled pavilions are centered on all four facades, but only two have entries. Corner towers having steeply hipped roofs at all corners of the main hipped roof body of the building further enliven the outline. A soaring (135') clock tower is similar to the corner towers (steeply pitched hipped roof, additional gables or dormers, and rich ornamentation).

The typical County Capitol often had entrances on each facade or at either end and was symmetrically designed for placement in the middle of a courthouse square ringed by commercial buildings. Despite the expectations raised by the symmetrical placement of corner towers and central pavilions, the Cass County Courthouse has an L-shape plan; entrances are limited to two sides since the courthouse occupies only a half block.

Romanesque Revival ornamentation is as rich as the outline of the edifice. All surfaces seem to be decorated. For example, the apex of the gable of the centered pavilions has a fine foliated terra cotta panel that contrasts well with the rough stone course immediately below it. Small terra cotta buttresses with fanciful foliated tops and "quilted" shafts anchor the gable ends. This quilted texture is continued on the pavilion's wall surface to the three-part round-arched transomed windows. A large round-arched entry outlined in stone directs attention to the

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slightly projecting entrance. Stone panels consist of rough and smooth stone in two colors and form a checkerboard pattern that differs effectively from the brick of the main wall surface.

Corner towers carry on Romanesque Revival motifs, notably the checkerboard panels, round arches, clusters of slender columns, and terra cotta patterns. These features, especially the polychrome effect, semi-circular and round arches, rich textures, and foliated forms, are typical elements of the style.

The relatively simple interior (at least in contrast with the sumptuousness of the exterior) retains important original elements, notably original wood shutters (slide up and down) in some rooms. Also original are the attractive tile flooring (a large geometric pattern), oak woodwork, and 13' high ceilings. It appears that more attention and cost was lavished on the exterior than the interior. Some rooms now have dropped ceilings and fluorescent lighting, and the courtroom has been modernized.

Exterior alterations are minimal, especially when contrasted with the care with which so many details have been maintained. (Even the Seth Thomas clock still operates.) Unobtrusive metal and glass entries replace the originals, and window transoms have been covered over with panels, a reflection of the lowered ceilings in some rooms. Although roofing for the corner towers is slate, the main body is now asphalt shingle. The impressive size, mass, and ornamentation of the courthouse work together to mitigate the effect of alterations.

The courthouse occupies a rather steep half-block site that slopes toward Main Street, the main commercial street of Plattsburgh. Unlike adjacent commercial storefronts, the courthouse is set back from the street. Visitors climb a straight concrete walkway to reach the Main Street entrance. Sharing the site are a few trees, a flagpole, and a plaque on a small rock, which commemorates the site of the first courthouse (not counted for this nomination).

Tucked just behind the courthouse on the same half block is the jail. Built in 1914, the original red brick portion is 2-story, flat-roofed, and rectangular. Stone is used effectively for the entry, water table, courses (including one continuous sill), parapet, and corner pilasters. Several additions trail to the side or rear, including a 1-story brick section from the 1960s to the north, and have altered the original outline somewhat. Use of compatible brick and stone, and the relatively early construction date give the jail status as a contributing element.

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The courthouse half-square is located in the heart of commercial Plattsmouth and one block from the railroad tracks. Attractive late 19th century storefronts, many of them rehabilitated, line Main Street. The town consists of a series of lofty hills, with streets meandering through the valleys, and Main Street is wedged into a strip of flat land with railroad tracks at its east end.

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The Cass 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 Cass County. The courthouse also represents the "county seat wars" that characterized an important chapter in Cass County's political history. It is a notable 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. In addition, the courthouse is a fine example of the work of an important Nebraska architect, William Gray, and thus is of Statewide Significance.

Eighteen extant County Capitols were built between 1888 and 1907 across Nebraska. With its 1891-92 construction date, the Cass County Courthouse is among the earlier examples. As an important 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, costly materials, and elaborate ornamentation. 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 1889 when construction began, to 1939, when the "fifty year rule" takes effect. The Cass 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.

Located on the banks of the Missouri River in the area of initial Nebraska settlement (in the southeast corner of the state), Cass County was among the first counties organized in Nebraska, and its beginnings date from the Territorial period. In fact, Plattsmouth was one of four towns established in 1854. (One besides Plattsmouth persists today as a separate town.) During the early history of Nebraska, Plattsmouth was a bustling river town. Migrants, including Mormons and gold prospectors, used the Cass county seat as a launch point for the west.

Plattsmouth might have declined along with the steamboat, but the replacement transportation technology, the railroad, ensured its continued development. By 1870 the Burlington Railroad had established its repair shops there, and population and prosperity increased accordingly. By 1892 population stood at 10,000, and the community had not one, but three rail lines serving it.

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Increased settlement occurred throughout the county and, with it, calls for a more centrally located county seat. Repeated elections and law suits relating to the county seat location were the norm in the late 1880s in Cass County. A 1948 account characterized it as "Charge and counter-charge! Crimination and recrimination!" Plattsmouth forces countered opposition efforts by securing passage of a bond issue for a new courthouse. They hoped that a new and costly courthouse in Plattsmouth would lessen the chance that the county seat would be moved. The present courthouse was the result of that bond issue. Thus, the courthouse was constructed in response to county seat war skirmishes when Plattsmouth successfully fended off attempts to move the county seat.

On January 30, 1891, the county commissioners decided to build the new building on "the site upon which the present courthouse is situated." They examined plans from various architects and on February 4 chose William Gray of Lincoln. Also in February they selected the contractor who submitted the low bid (\$67,901), O.J. King of Omaha. Construction proceeded to such a degree that the cornerstone was laid June 29, 1891. Formal dedication occurred nearly a year later, on May 23, 1892.

William Gray (1851-1927) was among the state's important 19th century architects, as his commissions for no less than five county courthouses reflect (two have been razed, one of them designed with O.H. Placey). Like his other County Capitols, the Cass County Courthouse is an excellent example of Romanesque Revival design applied to the County Capitol Property Type. In 1898 Gray abandoned the architectural profession and turned his attention to inventing and marketing a grain grader and a pressure cooker. He is listed in a recent book among other "prairie Richardsonian" architects.

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Cass County. Commissioners' Records. Book 6.
Abbott, N.D. "That Cass County Court House--An Informal History." Nebraska History XXIX (December 1948): 339-50.
Goeldner, Paul. "Temples of Justice: 19th Century Courthouses in the Midwest and Texas." Ph.d. dissertation, Columbia University, 1971.
Larson, Paul C. and Brown, Susan M., eds., The Spirit of H.H. Richardson on the Midland Prairies. Ames: ISU Press, 1988.
Works Progress Administration. Survey of County Courthouse Records. 1936. NeSHS Archives. Box 20. Cass County.
George, Benjamin. "Soft Eclecticism in the USA." Typed manuscript, 1973. Plattsmouth Centennial 1854-1954. Plattsmouth, Nebraska, 1954.
Plattsmouth Main Street Historic District. National Register nomination.

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Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property occupies lots 4-8 and the west half of lot 9 of Block 30 of the Original Town Plat for Plattsmouth and is roughly 132x293' in size.

Boundary Justification

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