

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

For NPS use only

received **OCT 30 1985**

date entered

**DEC 2 1985**

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

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

**1. Name**

historic Geiger Building/Old Polk County Courthouse

and/or common same

**2. Location**

street & number 201 Cascade Street not for publication

city, town Osceola vicinity of

state Wisconsin code 55 county Polk code 095

**3. Classification**

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" 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	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
	<u>N.A.</u>	<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 Dale L. Morrill, John G. Morrill, and Steven D. Morrill

street & number 15851 Afton Hills Drive

city, town Afton vicinity of state Minnesota 55001

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Polk County Courthouse

street & number

city, town Balsam Lake state Wisconsin

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title Wisconsin Inventory of Historic Places has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1985  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records State Historical Society of Wisconsin

city, town Madison state Wisconsin

## 7. Description

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

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

The Geiger Building/Old Polk County Courthouse is a two-story stone commercial structure located on a prominent corner in the heart of Osceola's business district. Situated on a sloping site, the basement level is exposed on the south and west (rear) facades. The building was constructed of locally quarried stone in two phases: the basement and first story in 1874-75, and the second story in 1880.

The east facade features a cast iron front with a recessed entrance flanked by large windows on the street level; a second entrance on the north end of the east facade provides access to the second level. The second level contains a central doorway with decorative shutters opening onto a small balcony. A single double-hung window with stone sill and pedimented window head is located on each side of the door. The front facade is capped by a simple stone parapet and cornice.

The coursed ashlar on the south facade is broken by a series of four evenly-spaced windows on all three levels (a door is located in one of the basement openings). Windows have stone sills and pedimented window heads on the first and second levels; stone lintels are found on the basement level. The building's flat roof, which slopes gently to the rear of the structure, is penetrated by three brick chimneys.

Alterations include a three story frame addition to the rear of the structure and replacement of the original six-over-six double-hung windows. (NOTE: The owner plans to eventually replace the windows with windows of the original design.)

Between 1882 and 1898 when Polk County leased the structure, the basement housed the county jail, the first level housed all county offices, and the third level contained apartments for the county sheriff and judge. The building has housed a variety of commercial establishments since 1899.

The first floor ceiling features an original pressed tin detailing in a diamond design.

# 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 type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

**Specific dates** 1874-75; 1880<sup>1</sup> **Builder/Architect** —

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)** Period of significance: 1882–1899

The Geiger Building/Old Polk County Courthouse is significant as the only surviving structure associated with county government during the 45 years that Osceola was the county seat of Polk County. As the community's first non-frame commercial building,<sup>1</sup> it also represents the shift from frame to masonry construction which followed the initial settlement phase in communities throughout the region.

Osceola became the county seat shortly after the Wisconsin Legislature created Polk County in 1853. At the time, settlement was concentrated in the St. Croix River Valley where logging and lumbering activity flourished. The county offices were initially located in the homes of the various county officials. Later, between 1861 and 1882, they were located in a two story frame building known as the "Seminary" (destroyed by fire in 1898).<sup>2</sup> Concerned about inadequate office space, poor jail facilities, and the need for a safe place to store county records, the County Board of Supervisors decided to lease the Geiger Building in 1882.<sup>3</sup>

Veit Geiger, a German immigrant who operated a brewery in Osceola from 1867 to 1881, built the stone structure in 1874-75 as a saloon. In January 1882, shortly after the brewery ceased operations, Geiger agreed to lease the building to the county.

Settlement of Polk County expanded eastward from the river communities during the last decades of the nineteenth century. Between 1870 and 1900, the county's population swelled from 3,422 to 17,801, and the number of farms increased from 447 to 2,907.<sup>4</sup> Osceola, located in the southwestern corner of the county, was a considerable distance from settlers in northern and eastern Polk County.

Completion of the Soo Railroad line between Osceola and Turtle Lake, Wisconsin in 1887 led to an intense rivalry between Osceola and Amery, a new rail community sixteen miles east of Osceola. In 1889, Amery's promoters presented the first of several petitions calling for the removal of the county seat to Amery. For the next seven years, the two communities and the Board of County Supervisors engaged in a bitter struggle involving several lawsuits. Promoters of both communities made generous offers to assist the county in the building of a permanent courthouse.<sup>5</sup> The Board rejected all offers and declared all removal petitions invalid until 1895 when it recognized a valid petition and agreed to submit the removal question to the voters in 1896.

(see continuation sheet)

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

Polk County Press, 1880-1899.

Proceedings of the Polk County Board of Supervisors, 1880-1899.

Neill, Rev. Edward D., History of Washington County and the St. Croix Valley. Minneapolis: North Star Publishing Company, 1881.

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property less than one

Quadrangle name Osceola WIS MINN

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

### UTM References

A 

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

B 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

C 

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D 

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E 

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F 

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H 

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### Verbal boundary description and justification

The south 25' of Lot 12, Block 15, Village of Osceola.

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

state code county code

state code county code

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Mark Haidet/Research Historian

organization Minnesota Historical Society

date August 13, 1985

street & number 690 Cedar Street

telephone (612) 297-2849

city or town St. Paul

state Minnesota

## 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 

title DIRECTOR OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION

date OCT. 23, 1985

For NPS use only

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

Entered in the  
National Register

date

12/2/85

  
Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
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Geiger Building/Old Polk County Courthouse, Osceola, Polk County, Wisconsin  
Continuation sheet Item number 8 Page 1

Significance (continued)

In the 1896 election, voters opted to keep the county seat in Osceola by a vote of 2,123 to 1,791. One of the primary reasons for the outcome was that Osceola's supporters, apparently recognizing the futility of their efforts to keep the county seat, declared that Balsam Lake, a small community located in the center of the county, was a more appropriate location than either Amery or Osceola.<sup>6</sup> As a result of this strategy, many voters in northern Polk County voted against removal to Amery.

In 1898 voters approved relocating the county seat to Balsam Lake by a margin of 187 votes. Proponents of removal argued that Polk County had "no buildings of its own in Osceola" and that removal would be "more convenient to the masses of people." Unlike the bitter 1896 contest, Osceola did not vehemently oppose removal. The Geiger Building continued to house the county jail and the offices of county judge and sheriff until late 1899.

Today, the citizens of Osceola recognize the Geiger Building as a symbol of the community's once prominent position as the seat of county government. The Osceola Historic Sites Committee considers the structure to be the community's most significant historic building.

Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>Polk County Press, December 12, 1874; April 3, 1875; June 26, 1880.

<sup>1A</sup>Mears, Charles Edward, "Osceola Township," in Recollections of 1876: Polk County's First Written History, edited by Timothy L. Ericson, 1980, p. 61. Local historian Emily Olson has spent several years recording information on Osceola's early commercial establishments from the Polk County Press. According to her records, the Geiger Building was the first of several stone and brick commercial buildings constructed during the 1870s and 1880s.

<sup>2</sup>Polk County Press, May 14, 1898.

<sup>3</sup>Proceedings of the Polk County Board of Supervisors, Vol. 1, January 4, 1882, pp. 410-411.

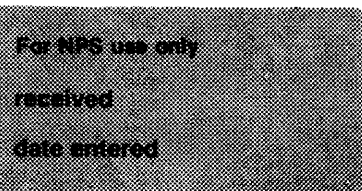
<sup>4</sup>U.S. Census Records, 1870-1900.

<sup>5</sup>Polk County Press, November 23, 1889; January 6, 1894; October 3, 1896.

<sup>6</sup>Polk County Press, October 3, 1896.

<sup>7</sup>Proceedings of the Polk County Board of Supervisors, Vol. 3, November 11, 1897, p. 73 (Petition from Balsam Lake supporters).

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Continuation sheet Geiger Building, Osceola, WI Item number 11

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