

IOWA SITE INVENTORY

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

MAY 29 1981

Site Number 45-006-001
District Name _____
Map Reference # 45-006-001
Topo Map Mason City NK 1:250,000

IDENTIFICATION

1. Site Name Howard County Courthouse
2. Village/Town/City Cresco Township _____ County Howard
3. Street Address Elm St. between N. Park Place and S. Park Place
4. Legal Location OT Park Addn Courthouse Square
Urban: subdivision block parcel
Rural: township range section 1/4 section-1/4 section
5. UTM Location: zone 15 easting 571500 northing 4902500; Acreage less than 1 ac
6. Owner(s) Name Howard County Board of Supervisors
7. Owner(s) Address Cresco Iowa 52136
(Street address) (City) (State) (Zip)
8. Use: present Courthouse original Courthouse

DESCRIPTION

9. Date of Construction 1879-1880 Architect/Builder B.D. Everingham & J.L. Harlow, Arch
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 _____
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: There are two additions to the original building - no date. One completely surrounds one side, the other fills in a corner - Interior extensively altered.
15. Related Outbuildings and Property: barn other farm structures
 carriage house garage priyy 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

One of Iowa's few remaining courthouses in the Italianate tradition, although compromised with unfortunate additions.

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	
1. OFFICE INFORMATION SOURCES ON THIS PROPERTY	
<input type="checkbox"/> COUNTY RESOURCE FILE	<input type="checkbox"/> REVIEW AND COMPLIANCE PROJECT:
<input type="checkbox"/> WINDSHIELD SURVEY	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> NATIONAL REGISTER	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER _____
<input type="checkbox"/> GRANTS-IN-AID: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER _____
<input type="checkbox"/> DETERMINATION OF ELIGIBILITY	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER _____
2. SUBJECT TRACES	3. PHOTO IMAGES <u>323/20A-23A</u>
a. _____	<u>327/24-25</u>
b. _____	_____
c. _____	_____
d. _____	_____
e. _____	_____

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CONTINUATION SHEET

Item Number(s) _____

HOWARD COUNTY

In the middle of the nineteenth century, a stranger in Howard County asking for directions to the county seat, may have been answered by fingers pointing in every direction. Although it was not the majority opinion of citizens of Chickasaw County, five or six people petitioned the county judge for the organization of Howard County. Because the judge did not know the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, he ordered an election to consider this request on July 17, 1855. The organization of Howard County was quietly accepted, officers were elected, and the location of a county courthouse became the question of the day. In 1856, the county judge decided that Vernon Springs, just two miles southwest of Cresco, would be the best location. However, later that year the same judge ordered that all the county records and courts be moved to Howard Center, which was five miles directly west of Cresco.

But the community of New Oregon had sprung up two miles down the Turkey River from Vernon Springs and decided unilaterally that it would be the best site for the courthouse. A committee was appointed to consider all prospective sites. The committee traveled to New Oregon to inform the residents of that town that they had won the decision, but a determined Vernon Springs delegation met the committee before the announcement was made. Being strong-minded and determined, the committee irrevocably decided to locate the county seat at a place called Pikes Peak, a bluff half way between Vernon Springs and New Oregon. Both cities accepted this decision and cooperated in building a courthouse at Pikes Peak, in February, 1859.

By 1865, the structure had become unfit to house county offices and Vernon Springs and New Oregon again offered and counter-offered to build courthouses within their limits. Meanwhile, the railroad town of Cresco had grown rapidly and made a bid to build a courthouse which the board of supervisors accepted. For Cresco to be legally declared the county seat, an election had to be held. Although 1,000 people signed a petition favoring Cresco, the measure lost in the election of 1876 by a vote of 969 to 800. Back in Cresco, the newly constructed courthouse burned down. The Iowa legislature, meanwhile, passed a law authorizing towns to annex adjacent territory within a two-mile radius. Cresco took advantage of this, annexed Pikes Peak, and rebuilt the courthouse in 1879, in the center of town, to become the permanent home of county government.

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