

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

2243
NOV 28 1989

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 Nehama County Courthouse
other names/site number NH01-85

2. Location

street & number 1824 N St N/A not for publication
city, town Auburn N/A vicinity
state Nebraska code NE county Nemaha code 127 zip code 68305

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> </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 L. Hanson Signature of certifying official November 17, 1989 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 Andrews 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): _____

Joh 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)

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

Romanesque
Other: Richardsonian Romanesque

foundation stone
walls stone
roof asphalt
other N/A

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)

Period of Significance

Significant Dates

Architecture
Politics/government

1899-1939

1899-1900

Cultural Affiliation
N/A

Significant Person
N/A

Architect/Builder
Berlinghof, George A.

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:

[x] State historic preservation office

[] Other state agency

[] Federal agency

[] Local government

[] University

[] Other

Specify repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of property 2 acres

UTM References

A	<u>11</u> <u>15</u> <u>2</u> <u>15</u> <u>18</u> <u>15</u> <u>4</u> <u>10</u> <u>4</u> <u>14</u> <u>17</u> <u>14</u> <u>12</u> <u>12</u> <u>10</u>	B	<u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u>
	Zone Easting Northing		Zone Easting Northing
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	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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Built in 1899-1900, the Nemaha County Courthouse is an excellent, unaltered example of the Property Type, County Capitol, executed in the Richardsonian Romanesque style. Identifying features of the Property Type include: towers, permanent costly materials, elaborate ornamentation, Richardsonian Romanesque stylistic influence, and the impression of a government building of permanence and solidity. Still the center for county government, the largely unaltered building is among Nebraska's best examples of a Richardsonian Romanesque courthouse. In a recent book about the influence of architect H.H. Richardson on Midwest building, the Nemaha County Courthouse is mentioned and illustrated for its "powerful corner pavilions."¹ The courthouse square, which has a street ending at its center and thus offers a fine view of the courthouse, is a rare Nebraska example of what Edward Price has identified as the "Harrisonburg Square" (see Multiple Property Submission, County Courthouses of Nebraska).

Noteworthy is the use of Nemaha County stone, rock-faced cut to create a monumental mass wedded to the courthouse square. Carved round arches, rough and smooth stone squares in a checkerboard pattern, and limited organic carving contrast with the bulk of the essentially rectangular shape with polygonal bays. Small corner turrets rest upon a smooth stone course and seem to hold these hipped pavilion roofs in place. This horizontal course is a unifying feature in the design of the two-story building with raised basement, for it acts as a sill for various openings throughout the composition.

Deeply recessed windows appear to be punched into the massive stone surface of the 80x90' building. Notable are the round-arched windows grouped in three's over the massive round-arched entries. Other hallmarks of the Richardsonian Romanesque style include the uniform rock-faced finish, gabled dormers, short towers at the corner pavilions, broad hipped roof planes, transomed windows arranged in groups, a feeling of solidity and simplicity, and restrained use of carved detail. The latter is limited to the entries and features a smooth panel with "Nemaha County," alternating smooth and rough cut stone squares in the spandrels, and a particularly impressive round arch. At one end of the arch is a carved lion's head surrounded by foliated designs.

¹See Richard Longstreth, "Richardsonian Architecture in Kansas," in The Spirit of H.H. Richardson on the Midland Prairies, ed. Paul Clifford Larson (Ames: Iowa State Univ. Press, 1988), p. 39.

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Access to the symmetrically designed building is through entrances on the east and west facades that open to a central hallway plan. These gabled entries are aligned with 19th Street, which empties into the midst of the courthouse square, the "Harrisonburg Square." On the first floor, doorways of county offices are set at an angle off the central hallway. Small foyers having five steps up to the main hall or down to the raised basement are located at the entry doors. Narrower halls lead off the main hall to rooms at the north and south ends of the compact plan.

Original interior features include simple unpainted oak woodwork throughout, clear glass transoms over doors with the name of the office painted on them, rust and tan floor tile in an attractive geometric pattern, plaster capitals on courtroom pilasters, and pressed metal ceilings. The rather simple interior has seen limited alteration: fluorescent lights and a district courtroom that has been diminished in size.

Exterior alterations are also minor, sensitively handled, and expected: an unobtrusive concrete ramp for handicapped access at the west facade, modern replacement windows, new double doors, asphalt roofing, and transoms covered over. A photograph at the local historical society dated January 6, 1915, shows lion's heads on both sides of the entry arches but there is only one lion on each archway now.

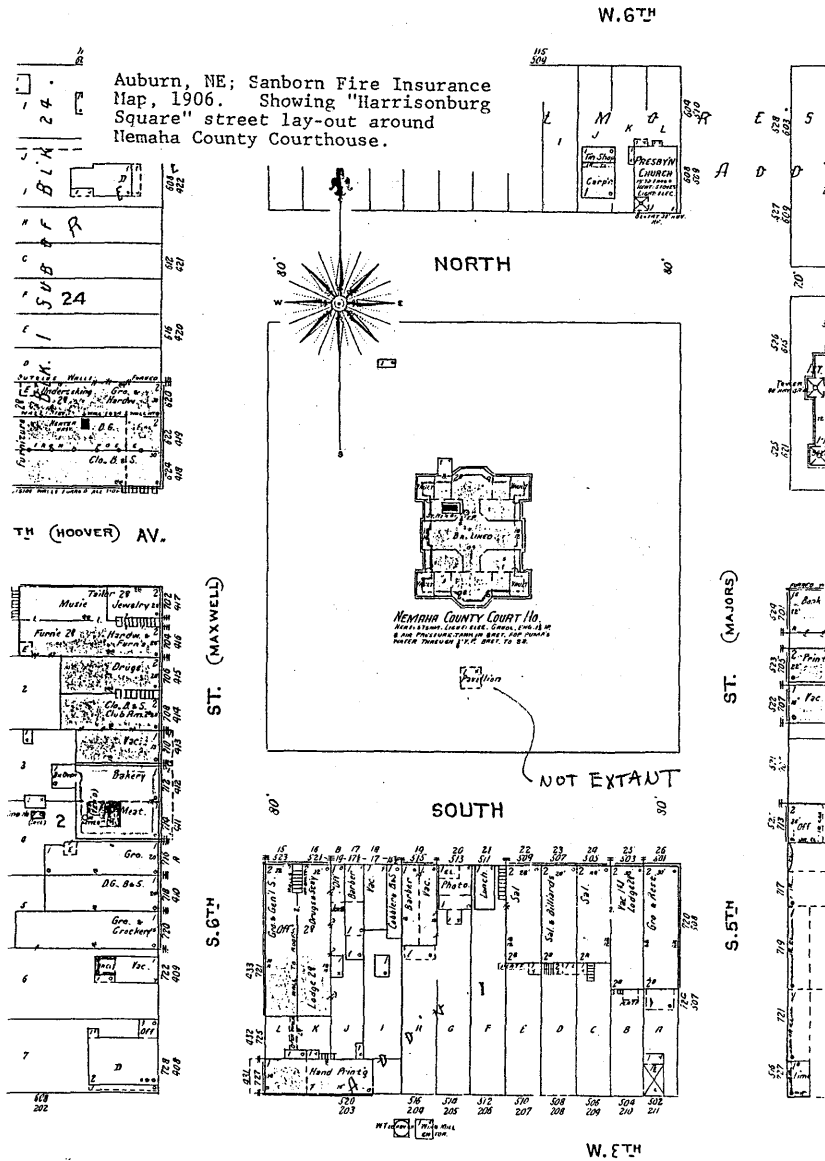
The Nemaha County Courthouse is located in Auburn, a compromise creation of two competing towns, Calvert and Sheridan. A low concrete retaining wall surrounds the courthouse square and its approximately thirty trees. There are concrete walks to entries and all four corners and around the building, a flagpole, and a simple small round concrete planter on the west side. No other objects occur on the site, and the modest, small-scale planter and flagpole were not counted as objects for this nomination. Commercial or other nonresidential buildings are located on all sides, most of them contemporary with the courthouse. Streets are paved with brick. Commercial development was never complete around the square, especially on the north end. Sanborn fire insurance maps for 1893 and 1906 show limited developed to the north, perhaps due to the presence of the county jail there.

Narrow commercial lots were platted north and south of the courthouse square. Like the square dating from perhaps as early as 1780 in Harrisonburg, Virginia, the Auburn courthouse square blocks a street, 19th Street. Such a street-blocking square provides a dramatic view for arrivals climbing the steep streets to the courthouse, and also made a courthouse with two main entrances a natural response to the Harrisonburg Square.

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The relatively unaltered Nemaha 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 Nemaha County. The courthouse 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. The courthouse square is the only known example in the state of the "Harrisonburg Square," a particularly effective street and block design for showing off a courthouse. In addition, the courthouse is a fine example of the work of an important Nebraska architect, George A. Berlinghof. With its standing as an important example of a Richardsonian Romanesque County Capitol in the state, as a rare instance of a distinctive type of courthouse square, and as one of eight Nebraska courthouse designs by Berlinghof, the Nemaha County Courthouse is of Statewide Significance.

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, 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 1899, when construction began, to 1939, when the "fifty year rule" takes effect. The Nemaha 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.

Brownville, the original county seat of Nemaha County beginning in 1855, was located on the Missouri River and served as an early important point for westward immigration. The county is situated in the southeast corner of the state. The growing importance of railroad transportation and increasing county settlement inland threatened and eventually overturned Brownville's standing as county seat.

The citizens of Calvert and Sheridan, inland rail stops, so wanted the county seat that they put aside rivalries and merged to form the new town of Auburn in 1882. A factor in their decision involved railroad service. The two rail lines that individually served these towns beginning in the early 1880s crossed three miles away, providing another obvious and centrally located potential county seat site and a threat to their plans. Calvert and Sheridan residents worked together and established Auburn,

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with a courthouse square located between the formerly separate communities.

After a series of elections and other maneuvers, the county seat was formally moved to Auburn in 1885. Between 1885 and 1900 the county rented the first courthouse on the present courthouse square, a modest wood frame building. Sanborn fire insurance maps show that it was centered on 19th Street, but at the east end of the square. This off-center location was likely in preparation for a more permanent and costly courthouse to be built later in the center of the square.

The location of the courthouse within Auburn graphically reflects the merging of two competing communities. Plat maps show Calvert's narrow commercial lots along the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad tracks at the south end of Auburn. At the north end of Auburn is the former Sheridan commercial district (also the present principal business district), with the former Missouri Pacific Railroad tracks directly northeast. (The rail lines arrived in 1881 and 1882, respectively.) Approximately midway between these plats on a high site is the courthouse square ringed with narrow commercial lots. Courthouse Avenue cuts a diagonal swath between 13th Street (in Sheridan) to 19th Street, the only diagonal street in town. Sheridan dated from 1868 and began as a convenient stopping place on the road between Brownville and Beatrice.

By 1899 county residents were prepared to replace the insubstantial frame courthouse and approved the issuance of \$40,000 in courthouse bonds. In June of that year five architectural firms presented plans, and George A. Berlinghof, then of nearby Beatrice, was selected the following month, according to commissioners' records.

At the end of August, the contractor was chosen, W.M. Rowles & Company² of Omaha, with a bid \$37,947. To save money, the commissioners revised the original plans, reducing the height of the first and second stories each by one foot and narrowing the building by 6" all around. They also chose "encaustic floor tile" in place of marble flooring and replaced other interior materials with less costly ones.

Construction apparently began immediately, but in March of 1900 the contractor reported to the commissioners that he was unable to resume work since the necessary stone was not immediately available. Nonetheless, the county was able to move into its new courthouse on December 22, 1900.

²Shown as Rowles & Bailey on the cornerstone.

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The architect for the Nemaha County Courthouse, George A. Berlinghof, was a German immigrant. He initially settled in Beatrice, just 52 miles from Auburn and home to another fine Richardsonian Romanesque courthouse. In 1905 he moved to Lincoln where his expertise and connections resulted in his selection as architect for the State of Nebraska in 1907. Berlinghof is known to have designed courthouses in four other states as well as for seven other Nebraska counties.

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- Long, Barbara Beving. "County Courthouses of Nebraska." Multiple Property Submission. 1989.
- Works Progress Administration. Survey of County Courthouse Records. 1936. NeSHS Archives. Nemaha County.
- Nemaha County. Commissioners' Records. Book 4. Nemaha County Courthouse. Nebraska State Historical Society. Photo Collection. #M281-84.
- Undated photograph. Laying cornerstone, Nemaha County Courthouse. County Clerk's Office.
- Photograph. Nemaha County Courthouse, January 6, 1915. Nemaha County Historical Society, Auburn.
- "Nemaha County." NACO County Line, March 1980, pp. 6-7.
- Souvenir Program. Nemaha County Centennial. August 16-19, 1955.
- "An Informal History of Nemaha County. 1854-1967."
- Small Towns Institute. Auburn and Southeastern Nebraska.
- Granger History of Nemaha County. Auburn: J.H. Dundas and Son, 1902. Auburn, Nebraska. Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps. 1887, 1922.
- The Spirit of H.H. Richardson on the Midland Prairies, ed. Paul Clifford Larson. Ames: Iowa State Univ. Press, 1988.
- Price, Edward T. "The Central Courthouse Square in the American County Seat." Geographical Review 58 (January 1968): 29-60.

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Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property occupies what is described in the plat for Courthouse Addition as "Courthouse Square" and is roughly 300x300' in size.

Boundary Justification

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