

MAY 29 1981

IOWA SITE INVENTORY

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

Site Number 33-042-001
District Name _____
Map Reference # 33-042-001
Topo Map Dubuque NK 1:250,000

IDENTIFICATION

1. Site Name Fayette County Courthouse
2. Village/Town/City West Union Township _____ County Fayette
3. Street Address Pine St. between Adams and Elm
4. Legal Location OT Courthouse Square
Urban: subdivision block parcel
Rural: township range section
5. UTM Location: zone 15 easting 597400 northing 4756900; Acreage less than 1 ac
6. Owner(s) Name Fayette County Board of Supervisors
7. Owner(s) Address _____
(Street address) (City) (State) (Zip)
West Union Iowa 52175
8. Use: present Courthouse original Courthouse

DESCRIPTION

9. Date of Construction 1923-24 Architect/Builder J.G. Ralston, Waterloo, 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: Original main doors (front and rear) of brass - ceramic tile floors, domed skylight - massive marble-faced piers on first floor - original lighting fixtures.
Dropped ceiling in courtroom.
15. Related Outbuildings and Property: barn other farm structures
 carriage house garage privy 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

This courthouse exhibits a somewhat simplified Beaux Arts exterior and some well-preserved interior spaces featuring extensive use of marble, plaster cornices, brass railings, and ceramic tile flooring. Courtroom features strips of wood applied to walls in angular patterns and an interesting treatment of pilasters.

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 _____
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 _____
a. _____	_____
b. _____	_____
c. _____	_____
d. _____	_____
e. _____	_____

CONTINUATION SHEET

Item Number(s) _____

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

FAYETTE COUNTY

Although the town of West Union had been chosen to be the seat of Fayette County government, years had passed without the erection of a suitable county courthouse. The southern part of the county had determinedly opposed the construction of the county building at West Union, while the town of Fayette offered to build a courthouse at no expense to the county if the seat were moved to that location. Realizing the strength of this growing pressure, the citizens of West Union contributed \$3,000 toward the building of a courthouse with the balance of funds to be supplied by the county. An agreement was reached whereby, if the county seat were removed from West Union within 10 years, the subscribers would be refunded their contributions with an interest of 10% per annum. Under these terms a two-story brick building, measuring 40 by 60 feet, was constructed in 1857 for a cost of \$8,000.

The citizens of the county, after so much hesitation on the courthouse, would not submit to the building of a jail, so a room to contain prisoners was fashioned in the northwest corner of the courthouse. On Sunday, September 15, 1872, a man named James Thompson, who was confined to the bastille, attempted to make an unauthorized exit. He did this by removing a stovepipe from the wooden wall, using matches to burn an enlargement of this hole. Once through the wooden wall, he easily knocked out a few bricks and made his escape while the courthouse burned down. Luckily, most of the county records were saved.

Several leading businessmen of West Union offered to rebuild the courthouse if the county would appropriate \$5,000 and permit them to salvage whatever they could from the charred ruins of the previous courthouse. The county seat controversy was again revived, however, and it wasn't until 1874 that the county submitted to the terms of the businessmen. As soon as the building was completed, it was realized that it was of insufficient size to accommodate the growing county business. Amid refusal by the county citizens to construct a new building, the board of supervisors embarked on a program of spending \$5,000 per year for additions and improvements. The building was remodeled in 1894, 1895, and 1896. At about noon on February 5, 1922, this courthouse met the same fate as its predecessor.

The cornerstone of the present courthouse was laid on June 21, 1923. It is of classic design and built of gray Bedford stone which rises from a base of granite. The total cost, excluding the clock which came from private contributions, was nearly \$299,000.