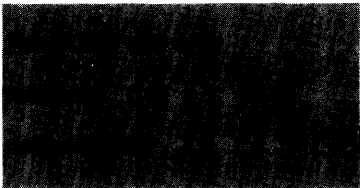


**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**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 Thurston County Courthouse

and/or common Old Thurston County Courthouse

**2. Location**

street & number Capitol Way \_\_\_ not for publication

city, town Olympia \_\_\_ vicinity of congressional district 3rd ← Donald L. Bonker

state Washington code 053 county Thurston code 067

**3. Classification**

<b>Category</b> ___ district <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s) ___ structure ___ site ___ object	<b>Ownership</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public ___ private ___ both <b>Public Acquisition</b> ___ in process ___ being considered	<b>Status</b> ___ occupied <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied ___ work in progress <b>Accessible</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted ___ yes: unrestricted ___ no	<b>Present Use</b> ___ agriculture ___ commercial ___ educational ___ entertainment <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> government ___ industrial ___ military	___ museum ___ park ___ private residence ___ religious ___ scientific ___ transportation <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: Vacant
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**4. Owner of Property**

name State of Washington Department of General Administration

street & number General Administration Building

city, town Olympia \_\_\_ vicinity of state Washington 98504

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Thurston County Courthouse

street & number 2000 Lakeridge Drive, Southwest

city, town Olympia state Washington 98504

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title none has this property been determined eligible? \_\_\_ yes  no

date \_\_\_ federal \_\_\_ state \_\_\_ county \_\_\_ local

depository for survey records

city, town state

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## 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 old Thurston County Courthouse, facing west on the principal thoroughfare of downtown Olympia across from the Washington State Capitol, is an H-shaped building with raised basement, four-story central block surmounted by a rectangular tower, and two-story projecting wings. Landscaping and a circular drive in front of the building have been replaced by a parking area. The structure is 184 feet 6 inches by 84 feet and contains 50,000 square feet of floor space. The basic construction material is concrete reinforced with 69 tons of steel, and the surface area is faced with 28,000 square feet of 4-inch thick sandstone. Sheet metal was originally used for roofing, ventilators, and fittings around skylights. Two of three original oak doors are still in place on the facade, flanking a newer one of metal and glass, and wooden sash and casement windows remain. Other exterior architectural elements are set-back massing to emphasize the geometric form; hard-edge angular pilasters; low relief in bands around the top of the building and the main doors and in several decorative panels; and stylized sculptures of eagles mounted at the entrance.

The original interior finish of the courthouse included a paint scheme in flat-tone grays and pinks, lacquered hardwood trim, and enameled fir woodwork. All office floors, including those in the basement, were covered with heavy inlaid linoleum at a cost of \$7,500. The original furnishings were both wood and steel, costing \$50,000, and the second-floor court chambers had mahogany or mahogany-enameled furnishings. At the time the building was completed, it had the latest in telephone switchboard equipment and elevator service from the basement to the third floor.

Existing interior features include plaster eagle sculptures in the foyer, octagonal lamp lighting fixtures, obscure glass and wooden frame office partitions, and boxed ceiling beams and pilasters with carved pendants in the courtrooms. Ornamentation is chiefly expressed in the use of Alaska marble for hallway floors, wainscoting, and stairway. The latter has a molded wooden handrail and wrought-iron balustrade. The basement and first floor of the building were formerly occupied by county offices, the second floor contained courtrooms, and the third and fourth floors housed prison cells and support facilities. At present the only occupant is the Washington State Archives, which has several offices in the basement.

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

**Specific dates** 1929-30

**Builder/Architect** Joseph Wohleb

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The old Thurston County Courthouse in Olympia was at the center of the county's political and governmental life for nearly fifty years. It also derived a larger role from its location in the capital city, which made it the setting for Superior Court cases in which the State of Washington was a participant. The structure is of architectural interest as the work of Joseph Wohleb, a leading regional architect of his time.

The cost of construction and furnishing the courthouse, including labor, came to \$350,000. The contractor was Walter Boyer of Yakima. Much of the labor was hired through the local trades council and many of the building materials were also local in origin, most notably Tenino sandstone from the south end of the county. The completed structure was praised as follows in the September 13, 1930, issue of The Daily Olympian.

The new courthouse is a monument to the progress and prosperity of this county. Erected opposite the state capitol group it fits into the picture perfectly. In fact, the new courthouse is as gracious in design and as beautiful in its lines as any of the capitol group. Joe Wohleb did a splendid job as architect and the building will long stand as a monument to him as well as the county.

For almost half a century the old Thurston County Courthouse was the focus of county government. The county commissioners conducted their business there, and thousands of citizens took out wedding licenses, filed real estate transactions in the auditor's office, and dealt with the assessor or the county treasurer. The courthouse was also a center of activity on election nights when the auditor's election crew processed voting results. As a seat of justice, the courthouse had its share of typical criminal cases, as well as some extraordinary ones. Foremost among the latter were the Baker-Berry kidnapping trial, which generated international publicity in 1938, and the Dick Gregory/Indian fishing rights case of 1966-67. Because the government of the state is located in Thurston County, the courthouse, perhaps more so than any other in Washington, has been the scene of Superior Court cases in which the state either brought suit or was sued. Some of the more notable cases in this category included:

1. Lemon V. Nalgren, regarding the location of state agencies at the seat of government (1953)
2. Judge Frank Baker's hearing on the constitutionality of the state's public disclosure law (1973)
3. The Doran decision on full state funding for basic education (1977)

The architect of the old Thurston County Courthouse, Joseph Wohleb (1887-1958), was a native of Waterbury, Connecticut, and came west at a young age. He studied architecture

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

Battersby, Martin. The Decorative Twenties. 1975  
 Grief, Martin. Depression Modern. 1975  
 Loeb, Marcia. Art Deco Designs and Motifs. 1972  
 Rowe, William. Original Art Deco Designs. 1973

The Daily Olympian:  
 12 September 1930  
 13 September 1930

UTM NOT VERIFIED

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property less than one acre  
 Quadrangle name Tumwater, WA

ACREAGE NOT VERIFIED

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

### UMT References

A 

1	0	5	0	7	6	9	0	5	2	0	9	1	5	0
Zone			Easting				Northing							

B 

Zone				Easting				Northing							

C 

Zone				Easting				Northing							

D 

Zone				Easting				Northing							

E 

Zone				Easting				Northing							

F 

Zone				Easting				Northing							

G 

Zone				Easting				Northing							

H 

Zone				Easting				Northing							

### Verbal boundary description and justification

All of Block 83 and north 100 feet of Block 90, Sylvester Plat of Olympia and recorded in Volume 1 of Plats, page 14.

### 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 Delbert J. McBride and David L. Nicandri. Edited by Dawn Maddox

organization Washington State Capitol Museum date January 11, 1979

street & number 211 West 21st Avenue telephone (206) 753-2580

city or town Olympia state Washington 98504

# 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 Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

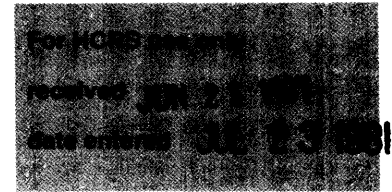
State Historic Preservation Officer signature Jacob E. Thom

title State Historic Preservation Officer date 6/16/81

For HCRS use only I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register	
<u>Anna Mae Orved</u> Keeper of the National Register	date <u>7-23-81</u>
Attest: <u>Emma Jane Saxe</u> Chief of Registration	date <u>7-23-81</u>

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at the University of California, Berkeley, and was involved in the reconstruction of San Francisco following the earthquake and fire of 1906. He worked in Nevada until 1911, whereupon he moved north to Olympia to establish a practice. His first major public building was the Carnegie Library in downtown Olympia, completed in 1914. Other commissions included the Olympia High School (1917 version, no longer standing); Lincoln, Garfield, and Unit #1 of Roosevelt elementary schools in Olympia; the Tenino High School; the Irene S. Reed School in Shelton; the Olympia, Centralia, and Bremerton Elks buildings; Centralia's Armory and Municipal Building; the Bremerton City Hall; and the new Olympia Brewery in Tumwater. Two of Wohleb's more notable residence designs in Olympia were later converted to public use. The former mansion of Clarence J. Lord (1922) now houses the Washington State Capitol Museum. Its contemporary and neighbor, once the home of the McCleary family, subsequently became a medical clinic and office building. Now known as the Farm Bureau Building, its present tenants include the Washington State Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation.

Wohleb's design for the Thurston County Courthouse represents a departure from his frequent use of Mission stylistic influences such as stucco and red tile roofs, a tendency perhaps originating in his student days in California. The courthouse, in its exterior organization and ornament, makes reference to the Modernistic style, although the interior decorative features usually associated with that mode are lacking. The building is nonetheless one of the few in Olympia which represent, even minimally, the Modernistic movement. In 1973 it was sold to the state to finance the construction of a new courthouse, and since 1978 it has been largely vacant.

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Continuation sheet

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Major Bibliographical References

Seattle Times: 11 June 1958 (Wohleb's obituary)

The Olympia News:

11 September 1930

18 September 1930

22 February 1978