



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

NATIONAL REGISTER

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 Rock County Courthouse
other names/site number RO01-003

2. Location

street & number State St. bet Caroline & Bertha Sts. N/A not for publication
city, town Bassett N/A vicinity
state Nebraska code NE county Rock code 149 zip code 68714

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>2</u>	_____ buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-state	<input type="checkbox"/> site	_____	_____ sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	_____	_____ structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	_____	_____ objects
		<u>2</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.

Signature of certifying official *James A. Hanson* Date May 14, 1990

Nebraska State Historical Society
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. *Beth Boland* 7/5/90
 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:) _____

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)

Art Deco

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation concrete

walls concrete

roof asphalt

other _____

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 [x] locally

Applicable National Register Criteria [x] A [] B [x] C [] D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) [] A [] B [] C [] D [] E [] F [] G

Areas of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions)

Politics/government

Architecture

Period of Significance

1939-40

Significant Dates

1939-40

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Watson, E.B.

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.

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Built in 1939-40, the Rock County Courthouse is a good, relatively unaltered example of the Property Type, County Citadel. Identifying features include: rectangular shape, centered entrance, permanent materials, distinctive ornamentation, provision for fireproof storage, Art Deco stylistic influence, and the impression of a government building representing modernity, simplicity, and strength. In addition, the courthouse has other County Citadel characteristics: flat roof and designed by an architect. The courthouse and county utility or storage building are considered one property since they constitute a "small group of functionally and historically related buildings." Two small sheds were not counted as part of this nomination.

The courthouse is rectangular and consists of two stories set upon a raised basement. A prominent entry pavilion on the west facade identifies the slightly projecting public entrance, and there is a nonpublic entrance to the basement at the east end of the south facade. Attention is focused on the centered entrance by means of its raised facade, steps up to it, recessed doorway, and different window treatment.

The wall surface is concrete painted white. The entry pavilion features a panel near the top with "Rock County Court House" incised on it, a three-part window with tall transoms that lights the staircase, and three decorative geometric panels over the original wood double doors with multiple pane transom. Single windows at the entry pavilion flank the slightly recessed center portion. An attractive cornice consists of panels with chevrons and other detail.

Three attractively proportioned bays consisting of rectangular windows flank the entry pavilion of the 78x53' building. The windows on all facades have simple recessed panels between the first and second stories, a unifying feature. The window treatment of the main facade is repeated on the other sides (but in pairs) as is the raised parapet, creating a compact, unified design.

The plan of the building is T-shaped, with entry stairs at the stub of the "T". Rectangular vaults that run east-west flank this interior staircase, and two more are placed side-by-side opposite the stairs on the west wall. County offices occupy the first floor with district court uses on the second floor. The jail is located in the southwest corner of the basement, and windows are therefore protected.

Courtroom furnishings in the simple district courtroom are original and display Art Deco patterns, notably pilasters and courses with vertical

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decoration. Spectator seats are inexpensive fold-down wood theater seats. The concrete ceilings are divided by simple concrete beams and have simple hanging globes. Other original interior features include metal counters, terrazzo flooring, concrete ceilings (some have been covered), long wood benches in halls, and simple light fixtures and woodwork.

Interior alterations are minor and include ceiling fans, acoustical ceiling tile in the courtroom, and a leak that has harmed the district courtroom plaster wall behind the judge's bench. Windows are now divided into four parts, unlike the multiple panes shown on the blueprints and still on the double doors.

The courthouse is a good, if rather modest example of the County Citadel courthouse exhibiting Art Deco stylistic elements. These include a linear, hard-edge composition with vertical emphases, stylized decoration including geometric designs, raised parapets, low relief, and smooth wall surface.

The Rock County Courthouse is located on the west half of the courthouse block. The site is in a residential area a few blocks from the small commercial main street of Bassett. Residences surround the site, and there is also a school and new library nearby.

Steep steps lead up to the courthouse from State Street directly to the entrance, and a diagonal walk also runs to the building from the northwest corner. No objects are placed on the site, and mature pines dot the site. Most of the east or back of the site is given over to parking.

The courthouse shares the site with a long (30x84') utility or storage building located behind the northeast corner of the courthouse. The essentially unaltered one-story gabled building is stucco and has an asphalt shingle roof and multiple window panes in double-hung windows. Both courthouse and utility building were designed by E.B. Watson.

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The Rock County Courthouse is architecturally significant (Criterion C) and 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 the county. It is a good example of public architecture in the county and contains good examples of design features and facilities distinctive to its design and use as a courthouse. In addition, Rock County is one of seven Nebraska counties to acquire a courthouse using federal work programs during the Great Depression of the 1930s and thus the courthouse is directly associated with the role of federal government assistance programs during this period.

As a good example of the County Citadel Property Type, the courthouse contains design features and facilities distinctive to its design and use (such as fireproof vaults), a rectangular shape, centered entrance, Art Deco stylistic influence, and permanent materials. Elements of the design combine to convey the impression of a government building representing modernity and simplicity, also features of the County Citadel.

The Period of Significance is 1939, when construction began, to 1940, when the "fifty year rule" takes effect. The Rock County Courthouse is being nominated as an example of the Property Type, County Courthouses of Nebraska (County Citadel) of the Context, County Government in Nebraska, 1854-1941, from the Multiple Property Submission, County Courthouses of Nebraska.

Rock County is located in north central Nebraska, near the state line with South Dakota. Settlement dating from 1870 had reached the point by 1884 that residents sought their own county, but it took until 1888 to be separated from Brown County because Long Pine residents resisted the division.

The present county seat, Bassett, was incorporated in 1887. The following year Bassett, Newport, Rock Center, Thurman, and Tracy all competed for the county seat designation. When none received a majority vote, the top vote getter, Bassett, was named temporary county seat. One month later, at the second election, the designation was made permanent.

The first courthouse in Rock County was authorized in 1889 after voters approved the issuance of \$5,000 in courthouse bonds to underwrite

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construction of a frame building. When the building burned in 1897, rival Newport attempted to wrest the county seat from Bassett, but without success.

The second courthouse served the county until the 1930s. In the fall of 1938 area businessmen appeared before the county board to request a special courthouse bond election. The election on whether to issue \$17,000 in courthouse bonds was held October 18, 1938 and passed. The federal Works Projects Administration provided \$33,000 in government funds.

Shortly after the bond election, the county board entered into a contract with Norfolk architect E.B. Watson to design the building. On January 27, 1939, they decided to place the new courthouse directly west of the existing one, facing west.

Construction proceeded during 1939, although there was a delay when materials did not arrive. It appears the county acted as its own general contractor. By November 16, 1939, progress was substantial, and work had begun on pouring the concrete ceilings. Interior finishing continued through the winter of 1939-40, including a contract for the terrazzo flooring let on April 1st.

County offices began to move into the new building in May of 1940. Formal dedication ceremonies were scheduled for May 7 but postponed when WPA officials felt the building was not sufficiently complete. Following the delay, the local newspaper made no mention of a dedication ever being held, but it is clear that the courthouse was completed in 1940. The janitorship was awarded in September of that year; eighteen men applied for the position. Also, the county cancelled its insurance policy on the old courthouse on October 1, 1940, an indication that it was no longer in use or had been razed.

In 1940 the county received additional WPA grants, for \$3,690 to raze the old courthouse and landscape and grade the grounds and \$6,449 to construct the stucco utility or storage building on the site. The county commissioners records suggest that unspecified materials from the old courthouse were re-used for the utility building.

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41° 39' 49" Latitude

99° 9' 49" Longitude

Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property, the Rock County Courthouse, occupies the entire block designated the "Courthouse Block" of the Original Town Plat of Bassett and is roughly 250x300' in size.

Boundary Justification

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

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Section number 9 Page 1

Long, Barbara Beving. "County Courthouses of Nebraska." Multiple Property Submission. 1989.

Rock County. Commissioners Record. Book E.

Tracings. Rock County Courthouse. E.B. Watson.

"Bond issue was accepted by Rock county patrons 50 years ago for new courthouse." Rock County Leader. October 20, 1988.

Tubbs, Verna Lee. "Settlement and Development of the Northeast Sandhills." M.A. thesis. University of Nebraska, 1957.

Centennial Book Committee. Rock County, Nebraska, Centennial. 1888-1988. Marceline: Walsworth Publishing Co., 1987.

Those who came before us. A History of Rock County completed during the Bicentennial Year. 1976.