

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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RECEIVED FEB 27 1980  
DATE ENTERED JUL 28 1980

**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  
Racine County Courthouse  
AND/OR COMMON

**LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER  
730 Wisconsin Avenue  
CITY, TOWN  
Racine  
STATE  
Wisconsin  
VICINITY OF  
First  
COUNTY  
Racine  
CODE  
55  
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT  
First  
CODE  
101  
NOT FOR PUBLICATION

**CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT
			<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL
			<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY
			<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
			<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
			<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
			<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
			<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

**OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME  
Racine County  
STREET & NUMBER  
730 Wisconsin Avenue  
CITY, TOWN  
Racine  
STATE  
Wisconsin  
VICINITY OF  
53403

**LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.  
Register of Deeds, Racine County Courthouse  
STREET & NUMBER  
730 Wisconsin Avenue  
CITY, TOWN  
Racine  
STATE  
Wisconsin  
VICINITY OF  
53403

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE  
Wisconsin Inventory of Historic Places  
DATE  
1971; 1975  
DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS  
State Historical Society of Wisconsin  
CITY, TOWN  
Madison  
STATE  
Wisconsin  
VICINITY OF  
53706  
FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

# 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input 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 Racine County Courthouse and its grounds occupy the city block lying between Wisconsin Avenue (on the east) and College Avenue (west), and Seventh Street (north) and Eighth Street (south). The prominent site is located in central Racine in a commercial-residential neighborhood, and affords the building a visual dominance over most of the architecture in the city. Rising to a height of 157 1/2 feet in eleven stories, the Courthouse is Modernistic-Art Deco in style. The bold exterior is faced with Bedford limestone, cut by vertical columns of steel-framed plate glass windows. The structural system is steel frame, with floors of poured concrete, and foundation of concrete on hard clay. Roofs are flat and most are well-flashed with sheet copper and have cement-finished promenades. Like other skyscrapers of the firm of Holabird and Root, the building is a "...cliff-like block of cubistic forms, massive, almost monolithic..." Setbacks above the first fourth, and tenth floors taper the building, augmenting the vertical emphasis; incised bands of a stylized leaf-and-shield pattern provide a subtle decorative accent atop the first and tenth floor setbacks and around the top of the building, and above the north and south side projecting masses between the tenth and eleventh stories. A pair of flat piers in the center of each facade rise to the roof level, where carved stone ornament forms modern capitals. Rectangular spandrels between the "columns" of recessed windows are cut by a stylized grain design. Entrances on the east and west sides are deeply recessed. Jambs are filled with sculpture in low relief, depicting men and women in activities characteristic of various stages of life. The building name is inscribed over the entrances on the west, while in the corresponding space on the east is the figure of Justice holding his scales in one hand and conferring a benediction with the other. Above these lintels on both sides are reliefs depicting man's relationship to the elements of nature.

Great cost and attention were given to the decoration of the interior. The lobby walls are faced with Chiaro marble above Belgian Black marble "wainscoting" and Champville marble floors. Statuary bronze doors on the elevators manufactured by Art Metal Company of Jamestown, New York<sup>2</sup> bear figures representing Agriculture and Industry. Bronze medallions set with scales of justice decorate each pair of elevator doors from the second through seventh stories. Images of animals and wheat trim swinging doors at the entrance. A variety of rich woods finish the court rooms on the first floor: Austrian Oak and African Mahogany in the Circuit Court, American Walnut in the County Court, Mexican Mahogany in the Judges' rooms, English Oak and California Walnut in the County Board Room, Butternut in the Municipal Court, and Walnut wainscoting in the Information Booth.

Administrative offices fill the middle stories of the Courthouse, the Sheriff's Department the basement, and the jail with its office, cell blocks, infirmary, kitchen, and other services the eighth throughout the eleventh floors. An article in the Architectural Forum of February, 1932 praised the modernity of the design, saying "The plan shows clearly the effect of a changed tempo of living. The sweeping staircases and long, dimly-lighted halls of the 1890s have been replaced by fast elevators and compact, efficient corridors. The working space takes on less the semblance of a palace of justice and becomes a compact, cleanly planned office for administration..."

The 182' x 118' ground floor is set on a 462' x 283' block, with plazas before the east and west entrances. Easy flights of blue limestone give access to walled-in seats cut into solid stone. Short flights of art granite steps rise to the entrances, cut from the same Conway pink New Hampshire granite that lines the walls and ceilings of the recessed vestibules.

<sup>1</sup>Burchard, John, and Bush-Brown, Albert, The Architecture of America: A Social and Cultural History, Victor Gallancz Ltd., London, 1967, p. 285.

<sup>2</sup>Racine County Courthouse records.

# 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 checked="" 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 1930-31<sup>1</sup>

BUILDER/ARCHITECT John A. Holabird & John Wellborn Root, Jr.<sup>2</sup>

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Racine County Courthouse is architecturally significant as an outstanding work by the Chicago School firm of Holabird & Root. In addition, it is a distinctly successful work of decoration and design, with notable sculpture by Carl Milles, and high-quality appointments and fixtures throughout. As an important civic structure, for nearly 50 years the building has played a part in the political structure of the county and in the daily lives of Racine County people.

### Architecture

This 1930-31 building is Racine County's third courthouse, the first having been a Greek Revival structure of 1839, and the second a Second Empire edifice of 1876; neither of the older courthouses remains. In the latter part of 1928, Racine County bought the block for a new courthouse, and early in 1929 selected Holabird & Root as architects. The partnership was a second-generation Chicago School firm, headed then by John A. Holabird (son of William Holabird of Holabird & Roche) and John Wellborn Root, Jr. (son of John Wellborn Root of Burnam & Root). Formed in 1928, the partnership became a "highly successful firm" responsible for "some of Chicago's best-known skyscrapers."<sup>3</sup>

The Chicago School had given the world the tall building or skyscraper, and it seems natural that Holabird and Root sought a solution for Racine County in that genre. In fact, at that point they were the avant-guard among skyscraper designers. At the end of the 1920s Holabird & Root took the "decisive step in breaking with the past and reintroducing to Chicago the modern skyscraper that Sullivan had developed years before."<sup>4</sup> The best known examples of this new and essential development of the late 1920s are Holabird & Root's 333 North Michigan Avenue building of 1927-28, the Daily News Building (now the Riverside Plaza building) of 1929, and their Palmolive (now Playboy) Building of 1929-30, all in Chicago. Although smaller in size, their Racine County Courthouse merits recognition for the success with which the architects have solved the variety of problems posed by the building's needs. Doubtless credit is due in part to Frank ("Pop") Long, a member of the architectural firm who was an expert in the design of courthouses and had worked closely with the county's building committee.

The structure's relationship to its site contributes to the monumentality of the design. The location of the building in the center of the block contributes to its "emphatic symmetry." The series of plazas, steps, and seating areas surrounding the building make the whole seem like an architectural outgrowth of the land. Interior ornamentation derives largely from the architects' imaginative use of materials and sense of restraint in designing and choosing rich, integral elements such as walls and floors, fixtures and furniture. The Architectural Forum praised this approach: "The simplicity of the exterior treatment has been held admirably throughout the interior, and an effort has been made to keep the decorative effect of the spaces as far as practical within the limitations of the materials used."<sup>5</sup>

Recognized in the press and professional journals at the time of its construction as a step forward in architectural design and functional efficiency, the Racine County Courthouse is even more today a monument to an age of American architectural spender, and a legacy from

**9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

The Architectural Forum, Volume 36 (February, 1932), pp. 151-160, 188-191.  
 The Architectural Record, Volume 71 (February, 1932), pp. 89-98.  
Official Journal of the Proceedings of the Board of Supervisors, Racine County, Wisconsin, 1928 and 1929.  
Racine Journal-News, 15 July 1931, supplement.

**UTM NOT VERIFIED**

**10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

**ACREAGE NOT VERIFIED**

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 2.64 Quadrangle Name Racine South, Wis.  
 UTM REFERENCES Quadrangle Scale 1:24000

A	<u>16</u>	<u>435790</u>	<u>4730370</u>	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

**VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION**

Blk. 4. School Section.

**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 Dr. Nelson Peter Ross  
 ORGANIZATION Racine Landmark Preservation Commission DATE 2 September 1975  
 STREET & NUMBER 1242 Main Street TELEPHONE \_\_\_\_\_  
 CITY OR TOWN Racine STATE Wisconsin 53403

**12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION**

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL \_\_\_ STATE X 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 National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE Ruehmel Mewey  
 TITLE Director, State Historical Society of Wisconsin DATE 2/21/80

**FOR NPS USE ONLY**

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

Sally J. DeLor <sup>for</sup> City **KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER** DATE 7/28/80  
 DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST: Kristin O'Connell DATE 7/14/80  
~~KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER~~

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 7 & 8

PAGE 2

7. Description (continued)

Maxims inscribed in the walls above the seats and on the building walls on the plazas speak to the role of law and government in response to the people. More relief sculpture decorates the buttress-like ends of the benches facing the plaza. Scenes of industry and agriculture comprise the theme. Lawns, trees, and shrubs plazas are well-tended.

Aside from some erosion with weathering of reliefs and inscriptions, and the addition of a small, one-story glass and metal entrance (1971) on the west facade, the exterior of the Courthouse is in original condition. Interior alterations have been minimal, with adaptation of the Board of Supervisors Room and Historical Room to additional courtroom space the only significant changes. There is some likelihood that the Sheriff's Department and Jail will move to other quarters, providing space for the expansion of the courts and administrative offices.

<sup>3</sup>The Racine County Courthouse, Racine, Wisconsin: Holabird & Root, Architects," Architectural Forum, Volume 36 (February, 1932), p. 189.

8. Significance (continued)

one of the high points in the history and tradition of American architecture.

Sculpture

The building's successful ornamentation is achieved in two main ways. First, the lines and surfaces of the building's massings themselves are an integral part of its considerable aesthetic accomplishment, providing ornamentation of the entire exterior. This is true of the outlines of the base and setbacks, the indented vertical series of windows and spandrels, the chamfered corners, and the surfaces and expanses of stone facing. One critic, H. J. B. Joskins, has praised its "lines of pristine delicacy" and its "simple, almost pyramidal form of enduring beauty."<sup>6</sup> Secondly, the structure's exterior is distinguished by the reliefs of Carl Milles that greatly enhance the plazas. One of the leading sculptors of the twentieth century, Milles was brought from Sweden to Chicago in 1929 by Holabird & Root, who had so admired his work when visiting Sweden the previous year. The Racine County Courthouse reliefs, which Milles modeled in plaster in Sweden, constitute the first commission he executed in the United States. They were followed soon, also in 1930-31, by the Diana Fountain in the Michigan Square Building, Chicago, and the Triton Fountain in the Art Institute of Chicago. These three projects mark the beginning of Milles's American career, which, in the 1930s, showed "a marked increase in imaginative scope and an even greater vitality" than his earlier work in Sweden.<sup>7</sup>

Politics/Government

With its thematic sculptural program and permanent decorative integrity inside and out, the building is its own statement of its prominent place in the daily lives of the people of

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HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8&amp;11 PAGE 3

8. Significance (continued)

Racine County. Materials such as rich woods, marbles, and bronze enhance the sense of the building's importance, perhaps emphasizing such ideals as the majesty of the law, without becoming inappropriately ostentatious for the seat of a democratic government. Solidity of building materials and furnishings may suggest institutional stability, and sleek "Moderne" fixtures and polished, plain surfaces possibly prompt a feeling of efficiency in the dispatch of public business. A humanizing touch is contributed by Alvin Meyer's decorative work in the first floor public lobby. The dominant, rich wood and strong, clean lines of the still modern-appearing court rooms have provided an especially appropriate context for the hallowed traditions of the law and the prompt administration of justice.

<sup>1</sup>Inscriptions on building.

<sup>2</sup>Racine County Courthouse records; Architectural Record, February, 1932.

<sup>3</sup>Condit, Carl W., The Chicago School of Architecture, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1964, p. 177.

<sup>4</sup>Condit, Carl W., Chicago, 1910-29: Building, Planning, and Urban Technology, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1973, p. 118.

<sup>5</sup>The Architectural Forum, Volume 36, p. 154.

<sup>6</sup>Quoted in The Racine Journal-News, 15 July 1931, supplement, p. 21.

<sup>7</sup>Rogers, Meyric R., "Carl Milles in America," The American-Scandinavian Review, Volume XXIX (September, 1941), p. 199.

11. Form Prepared By (continued)

Diane H. Filipowicz  
Architectural Historian

Historic Preservation Division  
State Historical Society  
816 State Street  
Madison, Wisconsin 53706

December, 1979