

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NOV 28 1989 2241

### National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

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 First Arthur County Courthouse and Jail  
other names/site number AT01-4, -5

#### 2. Location

street & number Marshall St bet Fir & Elm Sts N/A not for publication  
city, town Arthur N/A vicinity  
state Nebraska code NE county Arthur code 005 zip code 69121

#### 3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
		Contributing	Noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> district	<u>2</u>	<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>2</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 A. Hanson Signature of certifying official November 18, 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.  
 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:)

Patrick Andrews 1/10/90

Jr Signature of the Keeper \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Action \_\_\_\_\_

**6. Function or Use**

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions) Government/courthouse  
Government/correctional facility  
Current Functions (enter categories from instructions) Recreation/museum

**7. Description**

Architectural Classification (enter categories from instructions) Italianate  
Materials (enter categories from instructions)  
foundation concrete  
walls wood  
roof wood  
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  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) Politics/government  
Settlement  
Architecture  
Period of Significance 1914-39  
1914-39  
Significant Dates N/A  
N/A  
1914 , 1915

Cultural Affiliation N/A

Significant Person N/A  
Architect/Builder Noll, J.S.

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:

- State historic preservation office
  - Other state agency
  - Federal agency
  - Local government
  - University
  - Other
- Specify repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreeage of property 1 acre

UTM References

A	<u>14</u>	<u>27 15 16 18 10</u>	<u>46 10 15 13 13 10</u>	B	<u>    </u>	<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
C	<u>    </u>	<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>	D	<u>    </u>	<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>
	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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The First Arthur County Courthouse is one of four known examples of the Property Type, County Stronghold, identified in an intensive level survey of Nebraska county courthouses. Identifying physical features include the limited use of ornament, hipped roof, inexpensive building materials, and efforts at providing fireproof storage. In addition, the courthouse was designed and built to convey its standing as a public building. Other features of the subtype exhibited are the compact, boxy shape, cresting (replaces original), and brackets. With minor exceptions, the building is unaltered and is recognizable as an example of the County Stronghold Property Type. The First Arthur County Courthouse and nearby jail stand as significant testimony to the late establishment of Arthur County, its sparse population, and limited financial resources.

The tiny<sup>1</sup> (26x28') two-room courthouse was built in 1914. It is one-story, sheathed in clapboard, with a truncated hipped roof of wood shingle. Despite the modest materials and size, architectural details of limited Italianate stylistic influence are present, including roof cresting (replacement), tiny brackets, an unadorned sawtooth cornice, corner pilasters, and simple moulded lintels.

The plan is also simple and limited to two rooms, each having a door to the outside. Provision for safe, fireproof storage of valuable county records was a fundamental reason for courthouse construction, and the former Arthur County Courthouse clearly reflects this need. The fireproof concrete vault was affixed to the east face of the building and projects from that wall.

Now preserved as a museum in honor of the county's establishment, the former courthouse enjoys an entire block strewn with lofty cottonwoods and evergreens. The jail was built the year after the courthouse at a spot north and east of it. Also of clapboard and one-story with a wood shingle roof, the jail is gabled and has two rooms, one of which contains three wood cells. Both courthouse and jail are essentially unaltered. An historic photograph shows that two outhouses once stood between them.

The present courthouse (1961-2) occupies a position just south of the original one. Neither is centered on the site, which allows for recreational facilities (playground equipment, tennis courts, and public restrooms) to the west, and the courthouse square doubles as a city park.

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<sup>1</sup>There are claims that it is the smallest courthouse ever built in America and, as such, was featured in Ripley's "Believe It Or Not"; certainly it is the smallest extant courthouse encountered in the Nebraska survey.

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The present courthouse is one-story, roughly T-shaped, and faced with light tan brick. The courthouse square is at the east end of Arthur's small commercial street; its many trees set it apart visually from the rest of the town. No commemorative or patriotic objects other than a simple flagpole adorn the site. Because of their recent construction dates, the present courthouse and public restrooms are noncontributing elements. The playground equipment and tennis courts were not counted in this nomination. because of their minor nature.

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The First Arthur 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 first focal point for the administration of local government and institutions in Arthur County. As the first permanent courthouse in the county, it represents an early period of governmental service. The courthouse and jail on the courthouse square represent factors (such as the Kinkaid Act) that influenced the founding and settlement of Arthur County. The construction date, modest size, materials, and design of the former courthouse illustrate the circumstances behind the late establishment of the county in a sparsely populated area of limited financial resources.

As one of four known examples of the Property Type, County Stronghold, the courthouse possesses such identifying physical features as the limited use of ornament, hipped roof, and efforts at providing fireproof storage. The Period of Significance is 1914, when the courthouse was constructed and occupied, to 1939, when the "fifty year rule" takes effect. The former Arthur County Courthouse is an example of the Property Type, County Courthouses of Nebraska (County Stronghold) of the Context, County Government in Nebraska, 1854-1941, from the Multiple Property Submission, County Courthouses of Nebraska.

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The name and boundaries of Arthur County dated from the 1886-87 legislative session in Nebraska. But the few residents in the area did not formally petition to organize the county and thus came under the jurisdiction of Logan County, then McPherson County (beginning in 1889). Settlement remained low; according to the Census, the county had only 91 people in 1890. Passage of the Kinkaid Act in 1904, however, prompted notable population increases.

With more settlement came calls for separate county status for Arthur precinct in the west half of McPherson County, or at least a more centrally located county seat. In the early 1900s residents in the east part of McPherson County bitterly resisted these efforts, contending that they had formally annexed Arthur County in 1892, but to no avail. The former courthouse illustrates the importance area residents placed on having county services near them and their willingness to fight to secede from McPherson County to gain them.

In 1913 the legislature authorized creation of Arthur County out of the west part of McPherson County. Also that year, a former federal forest reserve opened for settlement in the west half of the newly constituted

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county, further stimulating settlement. Milestones of settlement appeared rapidly in 1913: county seat site selected and platted (Arthur), post office established, and plans made for the first county fair. Arthur, which was incorporated in 1945, remains the only town in the county.

Arthur County residents also moved quickly to construct a permanent courthouse, in 1914. In June lots in Arthur were auctioned to raise funds and in August a contract was let to A.T. Geyer of Arthur County to build the courthouse with its fireproof vault for \$980. According to a 1913 newspaper account, the courthouse was to be "the neatest and nabbiest little building of its kind in the state" whose construction would ensure that "a bustling little city will spring up overnight."

J.S. Noll apparently provided the plans; in October the careful county commissioners reduced his claim of \$49 for drawing plans and specifications by \$10. Also in October of 1914 the commissioners formally accepted the new courthouse. The following year the jail was built. The courthouse and jail remained in use until 1962 when the present courthouse on the site replaced them. The Arthur County Historical Society Museum cares for both historic buildings.

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Long, Barbara Beving. "County Courthouses of Nebraska." Multiple Property Submission. 1989.  
Arthur County. Commissioners' Record. Book 1.  
Arthur County's 75 Years of History. Homesteaders and Homemakers. 1913-1988.  
n.p.: [1988].  
Schroeder, Betty, ed. McPherson County. n.p.: 1986.  
Arthur Hustler, July 10, 1913.  
Bruce, Willa. "Arthur County. The Nation's Smallest Courthouse." Report in NeSHPO files. 1987.

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### Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property occupies all of block 28 of the Original Plat for Arthur.

### Boundary Justification

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

