

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number \_\_\_\_\_ Page \_\_\_\_\_

SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 92001855 Date Listed: 2/10/93

Aurora County Courthouse Aurora SOUTH DAKOTA  
Property Name: County: State:

County Courthouses of South Dakota MPS  
Multiple Name

-----  
This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.

*for* *Rutwidge Lee* 2/23/93  
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

=====

Amended Items in Nomination:

No level of significance was indicated in the state/federal agency certification section. In consultation with the South Dakota SHPO, locally has been checked as the level of significance.

The nomination is officially amended to include this information.

DISTRIBUTION:

- National Register property file
- Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)

1855

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

DEC 20 1992

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (Form 10-900-a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: AURORA COUNTY COURTHOUSE

Other names/site number: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Location

Street & number: MAIN STREET  not for publication

City or town: PLANKINTON  vicinity

State: SOUTH DAKOTA Code: SD County: AURORA Code: 003 Zip code: 57368

3. 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. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature and title of certifying official: [Signature] Date: 12/17/92

State or Federal agency and bureau: South Dakota SHPO

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. (  See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

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

State or Federal agency and bureau: \_\_\_\_\_

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> entered in the National Register <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	Signature of the Keeper: <u>Natuck Anderson</u>	Date of Action: <u>2/10/93</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> determined eligible for the National Register <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined not eligible for the National Register.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> removed from the National Register.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> other, (explain): _____	_____	_____

AURORA COUNTY COURTHOUSE  
Name of Property

AURORA COUNTY, S.D.  
County and State

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public - local
- public - State
- public - Federal

**Category of Property**  
(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	buildings
_____	_____	sites
_____	_____	structures
_____	_____	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	Total

**Name of related multiple property listing**  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

COUNTY COURTHOUSES OF S.D.

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

0

**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  
MODERNE  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation CONCRETE  
walls CONCRETE  
roof ASPHALT  
other \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

AURORA COUNTY COURTHOUSE  
Name of Property

AURORA COUNTY, S.D.  
County and State

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

**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 # \_\_\_\_\_

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

POLITICS/GOVERNMENT

ARCHITECTURE

**Period of Significance**

1939-40

**Significant Dates**

1939

1940

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Architect: Kings & Dixon

Builder: Aurora County

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

\_\_\_\_\_

AURORA COUNTY COURTHOUSE  
Name of Property

AURORA COUNTY, S.D.  
County and State

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of Property Less than one acre.

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	<u>1</u> <u>4</u>	<u>5</u> <u>4</u> <u>1</u> <u>4</u> <u>8</u> <u>0</u>	<u>4</u> <u>8</u> <u>4</u> <u>0</u> <u>4</u> <u>3</u> <u>0</u>	2	<u> </u> <u> </u>	<u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u>	<u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
3	<u> </u> <u> </u>	<u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u>	<u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u>	4	<u> </u> <u> </u>	<u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u>	<u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u>

See continuation sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description**

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

**Boundary Justification**

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

**11. Form Prepared by**

Name/Title: Mark Hufstetler/Lon Johnson  
Organization: Renewable Technologies, Incorporated Date: September 1, 1992  
Street & Number: 511 Metals Bank Building Telephone: (406) 782-0494  
City or Town: Butte State: Montana Zip code: 59701

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets**

**Maps**

- A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs**

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

**Additional items**

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

**Property Owner**

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

Name: Aurora County  
Street & Number: Courthouse Telephone: (605) 942-7161  
City or Town: Plankinton State: South Dakota Zip code: 57368

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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**Narrative Description:**

The Aurora County Courthouse stands in the center of a square block in Plankinton, South Dakota. The site is located just to the north of the main commercial district. The building faces east onto Main Street and is placed in the center of a terrace created by a concrete curb encircling the building. Many mature deciduous and evergreen trees landscape the courthouse square.

The Aurora County Courthouse exhibits the design features of the Art Deco style which enjoyed widespread use for public and commercial buildings in the United States between 1925 and 1940. The smooth concrete construction juxtaposed against low-relief ornamentation, the vertical emphasis of the facade created by the strips of windows with spandrel panels, and the stylized geometric motif at the parapet are all defining features of the style.

The Courthouse is three stories in height and constructed of poured in-place concrete. The square massing of the building provides an appearance that "looks massive and handsome, as if hewn from solid rock."<sup>1</sup> All facades are symmetrical around the center bays--seven bays on the front and back and five bays on the sides. The flat roof is hidden behind parapet walls.

The ground floor design treatment provides an appearance that the upper two floors of the building rest on a raised foundation or pedestal (the building has a true basement). The concrete at the this floor is articulated by incised mortar joints bestowing a look of smooth, ashlar-faced stone. The front and rear entries are located at this level. The front entry is enframed by slightly projecting, fluted piers. Bronze letters reading "19 COURTHOUSE 39" are located on the smooth fascia. The exterior stairs rise between projecting concrete rails. Battered concrete lamp standards with recessed panels rise from the rail. A small concrete block addition covers the rear entry.

The second and third floor window openings are enframed in a surround of concrete arranged in a series of three slightly forward projections. The surround is articulated with horizontal vee joints at window head and sill levels. A low-relief, stylized geometric motif extends the width of the window openings near the parapet. Bronze letters located below the geometric course on the front facade spell out: "Aurora County." Second and third floor window openings are separated vertically by fluted piers and horizontally by cast concrete spandrel panels. All windows are the original steel sash. The paired front entry doors are new anodized bronze units.

The interior of the courthouse is laid out in a cruciform plan. The east leg of the cross houses the entrance vestibule, the west leg houses the double

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return stair, and the north and south legs access the offices of the major county functions--located at each corner of the building.

Interior finishes throughout the building are simple and austere. Floors are terrazzo, walls plastered, and ceilings covered with historic acoustical tile. Interior doors are oak with three recessed panels and without trim; door hardware displays an art deco motif. Historic wall mounted, stainless steel light fixtures remain in the stairways.

The courtroom, which occupies the southern half of the third floor, is finished similarly to the remainder of the building. The historic art deco-style furnishings, however, impart a perception of formality to the space. The finely designed and crafted pieces are constructed of two contrasting woods. The lighter wood is used as a band of fluting to top the furnishings and also to highlight other surfaces.

The replacement of the front doors and the small concrete block addition on the rear are the only alterations to the building. The retention of the building's original windows is unusual.

One non-contributing building exists on the site. The local historical society recently moved a 1917 wood-frame Farmers' Union Hall onto the southeast corner of the courthouse square.

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### **Narrative Statement of Significance:**

The Aurora County Courthouse is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places with local significance under Criteria "A" and "C." The building is historically significant for its role as the symbolic and functional seat of government for Aurora County. Since the building's construction, it has housed virtually all of the county's administrative, operational, and judicial functions, while simultaneously serving as the official repository for county records. The courthouse is the most important single physical element in the historic and contemporary governance of Aurora County, and is an important local visual reminder of the importance of county government.

The Aurora County courthouse is architecturally significant as a representative example of twentieth-century public and institutional architecture in South Dakota. The building's utilization of Art Deco and Moderne design elements is typical of state courthouses constructed during the 1930s. While the building's level of architectural detail is not unusually high, the courthouse remains among the largest and most visually striking examples of architecture in Plankinton and Aurora County.

### *Historical Narrative:*

Aurora County was established by the 1879 Dakota Territorial Legislature, and organized in August, 1881. The town of Plankinton was named the temporary county seat on August 29, 1881, and it won the permanent seat in a November, 1882 election. Planning for the county's first permanent courthouse began the following year; the County Commissioner's minute book for May 5, 1883 noted that "a large number of citizens of Plankinton and vicinity came before the commissioners and urged the necessity of building a Court-house at once."<sup>2</sup>

Planning for the new building continued throughout the summer. Site selection for the courthouse proved to be a matter of considerable local interest. Two platted blocks were in contention for the honor, one in the original portion of town and another in "Miracle & Clark's Addition," several blocks to the north. The county was offered either site for free, but when the commissioners insisted that the chosen site be "suitably graded and ornamented by the planting of trees" without cost to the county, the owner of the Original Townsite block backed out. Consequently, Plankinton's courthouse block was developed well north of the community's business district.<sup>3</sup>

The county commissioners engaged Theodore Mix (possibly a local resident) to prepare building plans for the new courthouse. The building Mix designed was typical of midwestern public architecture of the period. The 2 1/2 story rectangular building was marked by flared Mansardic roof, and featured a large



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central cupola/bell tower. The building was wood-framed, had a stone foundation, and walls of brick veneer. Each elevation was visually broken into thirds by brick pilasters; hood moldings over the windows provided additional detail. The Mansard featured evenly-spaced dormers with paired Gothic windows.<sup>4</sup>

Bids for construction of the new courthouse were opened on August 23, 1883; Theodore Mix was among the six bidders. The courthouse construction contract was awarded on September 5 to Thomas Henning & Son for \$11,475.00. Most of the funds for construction were provided by a bond issue, although one of the county commissioners volunteered to raise an additional \$500.00 to finance the project. Much of the construction work apparently took place the following spring, and the finished courthouse was formally accepted by the commissioners on July 31, 1884.<sup>5</sup>

Aurora County's 1884 courthouse continued to serve the county until well into the 1930s. During the early 1930s, however, Aurora County watched as other South Dakota counties utilized Federal New Deal programs to construct new courthouse buildings relatively cheaply, and by 1935 the county had decided to pursue that option for itself. In a special meeting held on August 26, 1935, the commissioners voted to apply to the Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works for a "loan and grant of \$118,550.00" to construct a replacement courthouse building. Simultaneously, the county hired the Mitchell, S.D. firm of Kings & Dixon to prepare architectural plans for a new courthouse.<sup>6</sup>

The Kings & Dixon firm consisted of Floyd F. Kings (1893-1939) and Walter J. Dixon (1894-1976). Kings was the son of a prominent Mitchell contractor, who graduated from the University of Michigan school of architecture and began practicing locally in the late 1910s. Dixon was an Ohio native and a 1918 University of Michigan graduate; he moved to Mitchell and joined forces with Dixon in 1920. The two men, working both together and separately, worked in Mitchell throughout most of their professional careers and completed a number of major commissions. During the 1930s, Kings & Dixon jointly designed courthouses for Aurora, Davison, McCook, and Miner Counties, a group of well-executed Art Deco/Moderne designs.<sup>7</sup>

The planning process for Aurora County's new courthouse intensified during the summer of 1936, as the commissioners secured the necessary citizens' petition for a bond issue and approved the preliminary plans prepared by Kings & Dixon. The county also received word from the Public Works Administration that a federal grant of \$54,000.00 would be available for the courthouse's construction; this reduced the amount of local funding needed to \$66,000.00. When the bond election took place that September, however, the issue was rejected by Aurora County voters, 1,360 to 595.<sup>8</sup>

The courthouse construction project lay dormant for two years following the bond issue's defeat. By 1938, however, the county's offices had filled the old

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courthouse to overflowing, and the county was renting a downtown building for additional office space. The commissioners decided to renew their efforts for a new courthouse, and held a second bond election on September 6, 1938. The 1938 bond election amount was only \$22,000.00, and perhaps for that reason the issue passed easily. (County records do not reveal whether the lower bond amount reflected increased Federal support for the project, or the adoption of a more economical design for the building.) The First National Bank of Sioux Falls purchased the county's courthouse bonds on October 19, 1938.<sup>9</sup>

Although work on the new Aurora County Courthouse began soon after the bond issuance, initial progress was slow. During the first winter, gravel and rock were hauled to the courthouse site, and a nearby Catholic parish hall was remodeled for use as an interim courthouse during the construction period. (The new courthouse was constructed on the exact site of the 1884 building, and the old courthouse was razed as a Works Progress Administration [WPA] project.) Construction of the new building apparently consumed the better part of a year. Newspaper articles in support of the courthouse project had promised that the building's construction would provide "a maximum amount of hand unskilled labor . . . in form building and mixing cement, also all rock will be gathered in the vicinity and crushed on the job." In all, the project was designed to employ 97 locally-hired laborers for a period of ten months. The courthouse project was designated as Work Projects Administration project #3536.<sup>10</sup>

The courthouse was finally finished in mid-1940, and the building was formally dedicated on July 9th. Over 1,000 county residents toured the courthouse that afternoon and evening. Commenting on the finished structure, a local newspaper correspondent reported:

The new building is a credit to any county and the people who looked it over Tuesday were all more than pleased with it and surprised to find such a fine structure built with practically unskilled labor. . . . Everything about the courthouse radiates excellent workmanship, without elegance or extravagance. It was built for utility.<sup>11</sup>

The building, little-changed from 1940, continues to serve as the Aurora County courthouse in 1992.

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ENDNOTES

1. "Dedication of the New Aurora County Courthouse, July 9, 1940." Program Brochure.
2. "Aurora County Commissioners Minutes," manuscript volume 1 (1881-1892), p. 35 (May 5, 1883). For a brief overview of the area's history, see Aurora County Historical Society, *Aurora County History* (Plankinton, South Dakota: the Society, 1983), especially the preface.
3. "Aurora County Commissioners Minutes," manuscript volume 1 (1881-1892), pp. 36-40 (May 8, 1883-June 18, 1883).
4. A drawing of the original Aurora County courthouse appears on p. 6 of *Aurora County History*.
5. "Aurora County Commissioners Minutes," manuscript volume 1 (1881-1892), pp. 47-78 (August 23, 1883-July 31, 1884).
6. "Aurora County Commissioners Proceedings," manuscript volume 5 (1934-1945), p. 54 (August 26, 1935).
7. Dixon's obituary is found in the *Mitchell Daily Republic*, June 19, 1976, p. 2. Additional information on the pair was obtained from Polk city directories for Mitchell for the years 1907-08, 1913, 1919, 1921, 1930-31, and 1937, and from the manuscript "Davison County, South Dakota Cemetery Index: 1870-1980," located in the Mitchell Public Library.
8. "Aurora County Commissioners Proceedings," manuscript volume 5 (1934-1945), pp. 102-114 (August 14, 1936-September 9, 1936).
9. "Aurora County Commissioners Proceedings," manuscript volume 5 (1934-1945), pp. 177-218 (January 1, 1938-October 19, 1938).
10. "Proposed Court House Project," *The South Dakota Mail* [Plankinton, South Dakota], August 25, 1938; dedicatory plaque in courthouse entry vestibule.
11. "Courthouse Dedicated," *The South Dakota Mail* [Plankinton, South Dakota], July 11, 1940.

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### Bibliography:

Aurora County Historical Society. *Aurora County History*. Plankinton, South Dakota: Aurora County Historical Society, 1983.

"Aurora County Commissioners Minutes." Manuscript volumes maintained at the County Auditor's Office, Plankinton, South Dakota.

"Courthouse Dedicated," *The South Dakota Mail* [Plankinton, South Dakota], July 11, 1940.

"Dakota's Counties," *The Wi-Iyohi: Monthly Bulletin of the South Dakota Historical Society* 13 (June, 1959): 1-16.

"Dedication of the New Aurora County Courthouse, July 9, 1940." Program Brochure.

"Proposed Court House Project," *The South Dakota Mail* [Plankinton, South Dakota], August 25, 1938.

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**Verbal Boundary Description:**

All of Block 6, Miricle & Clark's First Addition, Plankinton, South Dakota.

**Boundary Justification:**

The nominated property includes the courthouse building and the landscaped grounds immediately surrounding it. It coincides with the legal description of the tract of land historically set aside as the courthouse grounds. It does not include adjacent city streets, or the unrelated urban development surrounding the block.

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**Index to Photographs**

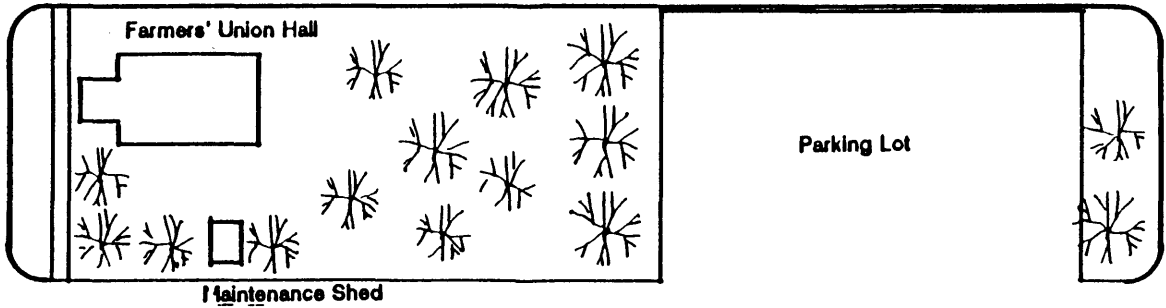
Photographer: Lon Johnson

Date: January 13, 1992

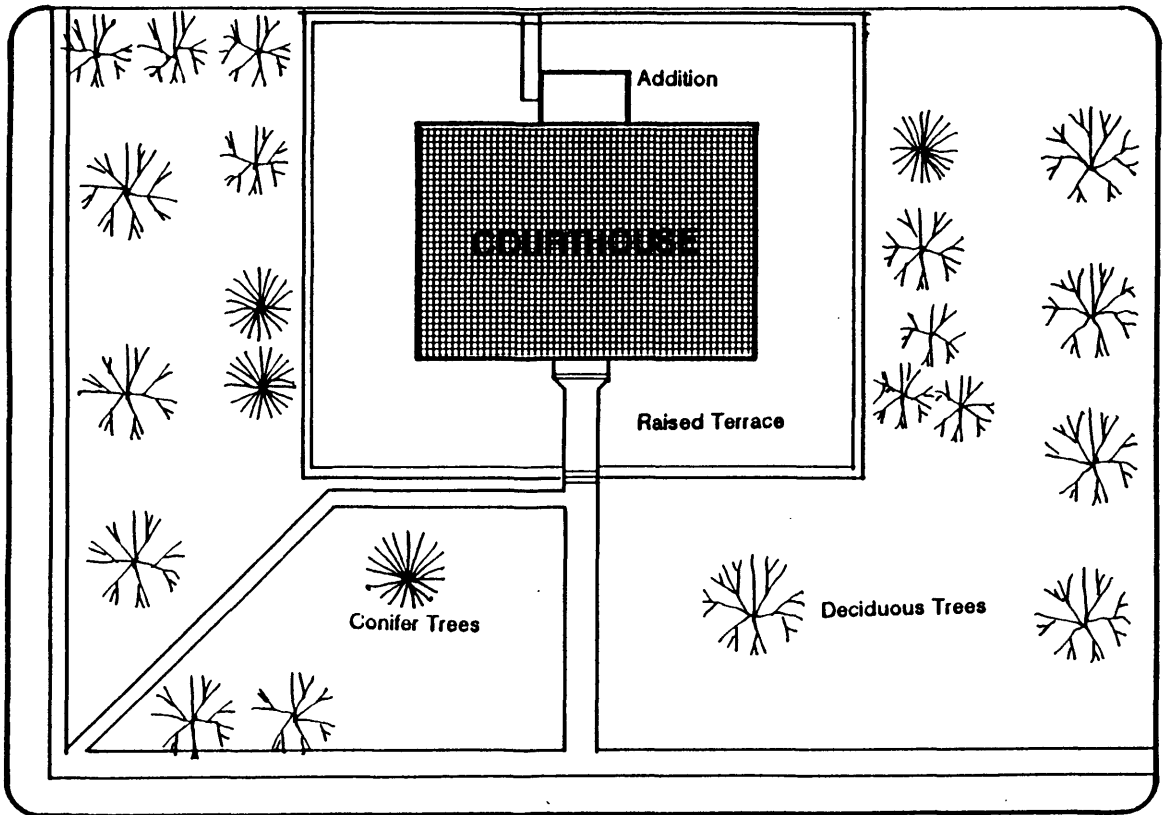
Location of original negatives: South Dakota State Historical Preservation  
Center, Vermillion, South Dakota

Photograph Number	Description	Direction of View
1	East (primary) exterior elevation	West
2	West and south exterior elevations	Northeast
3	North exterior elevation	South
4	Detail of east (primary) entry	Northwest
5	Interior hallway and stairwell	
6	Courtroom interior	
7	Farmers Union Hall building: west and south elevations	Northeast

Lawlwer Street



Fourth Street



Fifth Street

Main Street



Scale: 1" = 50'

**AURORA COUNTY COURTHOUSE**  
Plankinton, South Dakota

All of Block 6 - Miracle and Clark's First Addition