

Site Inventory Form
State Historical Society of Iowa
 (December 1, 1999)

State Inventory No. 70-00195 New Supplemental
 Part of a district with known boundaries (enter inventory no.) _____
 Relationship: Contributing Noncontributing
 Contributes to a potential district with yet unknown boundaries
 National Register Status: (any that apply) Listed De-listed NHL DOE
 Review & Compliance No. _____
 Non-Extant (enter year) _____

1. Name of Property

historic name Muscatine County Courthouse
 other names/site number Field Site #: FS-122

2. Location

street & number 401 E. Third Street
 city or town Muscatine vicinity, county Muscatine
 Legal Description: (If Rural) Township Name _____ Township No. _____ Range No. _____ Section _____ Quarter of Quarter _____
 (If Urban) Subdivision Original Town Block(s) 59 Lot(s) _____

3. State/Federal Agency Certification [Skip this Section]

4. National Park Service Certification [Skip this Section]

5. Classification

| Category of Property (Check only one box) | Number of Resources within Property | |
|---|-------------------------------------|--|
| | If Non-Eligible Property | If Eligible Property, enter number of: |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s) | _____ | Contributing _____ Noncontributing _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> district | _____ | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> site | _____ | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> structure | _____ | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> object | _____ | _____ |
| | _____ buildings | <u>1</u> buildings |
| | _____ sites | _____ sites |
| | _____ structures | _____ structures |
| | _____ objects | _____ objects |
| | _____ Total | <u>1</u> Total |

Name of related project report or multiple property study (Enter "N/A" if the property is not part of a multiple property examination).
 Title _____ Historical Architectural Data Base Number _____

Historical and Architectural Survey and Evaluation of the Downtown Commercial District 70-013

6. Function or Use

| | |
|--|---|
| Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions) | Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions) |
| <u>04J01: Government/Courthouse/County Courthouse</u> | <u>04J011: Government/Courthouse/County Courthouse</u> |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |

7. Description

| | |
|--|---|
| Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions) | Materials (Enter categories from instructions) |
| <u>06A: Late 19th & 20th Century Revivals/Beaux Arts</u> | foundation <u>10B: Concrete/Poured</u> |
| _____ | walls <u>04C: Limestone</u> |
| _____ | roof <u>15C: Rubber & 08A: Asphalt/Shingle</u> |
| _____ | other _____ |

Narrative Description (SEE CONTINUATION SHEETS, WHICH MUST BE COMPLETED)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "x" representing your opinion of eligibility after applying relevant National Register criteria)

| | |
|--|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> More Research Recommended | A Property is associated with significant events. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> More Research Recommended | B Property is associated with the lives of significant persons. |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> More Research Recommended | C Property has distinctive architectural characteristics. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> More Research Recommended | D Property yields significant information in archaeology or history. |

County Muscatine Address 401 E. 3rd Street Site Number 70-00195
City Muscatine District Number _____

Criteria Considerations

- 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.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

02: Architecture
026: Politics/Government

Significant Dates

Construction date 1908-09 check if circa or estimated date
Other dates _____

Significant Person

(Complete if National Register Criterion B is marked above)

Architect/Builder

Architect J.E. Mills, Detroit
Builder J.W. McAlpine, Dixon, IL

Narrative Statement of Significance (SEE CONTINUATION SHEETS, WHICH MUST BE COMPLETED)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography See continuation sheet for citations of the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form

10. Geographic Data

UTM References (OPTIONAL)

| Zone | Easting | Northing | Zone | Easting | Northing |
|------|---------|----------|------|---------|----------|
| 1 | _____ | _____ | 2 | _____ | _____ |
| 3 | _____ | _____ | 4 | _____ | _____ |

See continuation sheet for additional UTM references or comments

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Jim Rudisill, Planning & Community Development Coordinator (R.L. McCarley, Consultant)
organization City of Muscatine date January 31, 2005
street & number 215 Sycamore telephone 563-264-1554
city or town Muscatine state Iowa zip code 52761

ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION (Submit the following items with the completed form)

FOR ALL PROPERTIES

- Map:** showing the property's location in a town/city or township.
- Site plan:** showing position of buildings and structures on the site in relation to public road(s).
- Photographs:** representative black and white photos. If the photos are taken as part of a survey for which the Society is to be curator of the negatives or color slides, a photo/catalog sheet needs to be included with the negatives/slides and the following needs to be provided below on this particular inventory site:

Roll/slide sheet # _____ Frame/slot # _____ Date Taken _____
Roll/slide sheet # _____ Frame/slot # _____ Date Taken _____
Roll/slide sheet # _____ Frame/slot # _____ Date Taken _____

- See continuation sheet or attached **photo & slide catalog sheet** for list of photo roll or slide entries.
- Photos/illustrations without negatives are also in this site inventory file.

FOR CERTAIN KINDS OF PROPERTIES, INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING AS WELL

- Farmstead & District:** (List of structures and buildings, known or estimated year built, and contributing or non-contributing status)
- Barn:**
 - A sketch of the frame/truss configuration in the form of drawing a typical middle bent of the barn.
 - A photograph of the loft showing the frame configuration along one side.
 - A sketch floor plan of the interior space arrangements along with the barn's exterior dimensions in feet.

State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) Use Only Below This Line

Concur with above survey opinion on National Register eligibility: Yes No More Research Recommended
 This is a locally designated property or part of a locally designated district.

Comments: _____

Evaluated by (name/title): _____ Date: _____

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| <u>Muscatine County Courthouse</u> | <u>Muscatine</u> |
| Name of Property | County |
| <u>401 E. 3rd Street</u> | <u>Muscatine</u> |
| Address | City |

7. Narrative Description

The Muscatine County Courthouse is centrally located on Block 59 of the Original Town. This block was reserved for government function in the early days of Muscatine. The current courthouse built in 1907-1909 replaced an earlier courthouse on the site. The Beaux Arts limestone courthouse is three stories in height with a central tower. The symmetrical design and decorative features are characteristic of the style.

Soon after the completion of the courthouse, Richman described it in 1911: "The building is located in the center of the square. It has ground dimensions of 88x120 feet and extreme height above foundation is 124 feet. Foundation, including all cross walls, is of concrete. Superstructure is of No. 1 Bedford limestone, cut stone exterior, fireproof construction throughout, all floors of concrete and partition walls of fireproof brick, all posts, girders, plates and rafters are of steel or iron, no wood material, with exception of doors and window frames, to be found in the building. It has three floors. The first or ground floor is divided into fireproof storage rooms, offices, memorial and rest rooms. The second floor is arranged as quarters for the five principal county officials and also apartments for the board of supervisors. The third floor is devoted to the use of the district court and is divided into apartments and arranged in an ideal manner for the use for which it is intended. In the interior decorations and furniture, the idea of beauty, convenience and above all, durability, has been the paramount object sought to be attained. Steel furniture of the most improved designs has been provided for all the offices, to contain valuable books and papers. The building is well lighted and ventilated. The decorating, fixtures and furniture for the building were let in separate contracts, specifications for the various items being prepared and bids received therefore (Richman 1911, Vol 1: 101-102).

The north and south facades are five bays in width, consisting of a three-bay recessed center section with entry portico and slightly projected end bays. The lower level stonework is rusticated, while it is smooth on the upper floors, emphasizing the height of the building. Three-story projecting porticos with pediments define the entries on the north and south elevations of the building. On the south (front) side, columns of the Corinthian order flank the entrance, while on the north side, pilasters of the Doris order are used. Fanlights over the doors and windows are arched. On either side of the portico is a recessed section consisting of three windows on each story. Each opening is simply cut into the stone, and a stone stringcourse extends around the building at the level of the sills of the second and third story windows. The windows, which appear to be original, have single-over-single-light double-hung wood sashes with transom windows. The basement windows don't have transoms. The end bays are slightly projected with three windows of the same style on each story as well. The ends are emphasized by stone quoins. Above the third story windows are circular attic windows with stone detailing. The entablature is typical of the Beaux Arts style, with a wide frieze, stone dentils and brackets, and a projecting cornice line.

The east and west ends of the structure are identical. Each elevation contains three bays. The center bay of each elevation projects out from the building. The rusticated stonework of the ground floor, the quoins, belt courses, and windows are carried through from the north and south elevations. The windows on the two outside bays are identical. The first floor contains a single row of three windows, while the

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second and third floor windows each contain a fixed transom window above each unit. The third floor windows also include an ocular window above each transom window. The center bay has the same fenestration, but contain half moon windows above the transom windows on the third floor.

The cupola of the courthouse includes a two-tiered tower. Each of the four corners of the square-supporting tower is adorned with three pilasters of the Doric order. The arcading of the first tier of the tower supports slender Doric columns in the second tier. Thus, the upper section appears lighter and more open, while the lower section gives a feeling of solidity and support.

The interior of the building is dominated by a central atrium that extends from the ground floor to the skylight located in the lower tier of the courthouse tower. A brass railing encircles the atrium on the second and third floors. Brass balustrades also line the central marble stairways that are located at each entrance and extend to the top floor. A circular mural of classical figures encircle the atrium dome. Other interior ornamentation includes floral wood trim on corners, doorways and recessed display areas where the east and west wings of the building meet the atrium. The current layout has changed little from its original design. The third floor continues to provide space for courtrooms and offices, while the two lower floors are used for the primary county offices. With the exception of the elevator, which was installed in the early-1970s, there does not appear to have been any major change in the floor plan of the building, although the various offices have been relocated from previous years.

An interesting feature of the building is the lack of any heating plant within the building. Heat is provided by a boiler that is located in the basement of the old jail across Fourth Street from the courthouse (70-00246). Steam is delivered through pipes that extend through a tunnel under the street. This tunnel appears to have been constructed during the 1908-09 construction, and the old jail's use as a "heating plant" is noted on the 1912 Sanborn.

8. Narrative Statement of Significance

The Muscatine County Courthouse was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1981 as part of the "County Courthouses in Iowa" Multiple Property nomination. It was listed individually under Criterion C for its architectural significance. No precise boundary could be found within this nomination, though it appears that only the building (not the square – 70-00196) was listed. County officials report there have not been any major changes or alterations to the building since it was listed.

Though not identified at the time of the nomination, the Muscatine County Courthouse also appears to be locally significant under Criterion A for its association with the period of civic pride and accomplishment in the early 20th century in Muscatine. Several new improvements were made in town in this period, including the construction of major public buildings, including the courthouse, new jail, new post office, and City Hall. This sentiment was clearly responsible for the bond issue approval and construction of the Muscatine County Courthouse and associated jail between 1907-09. Residents viewed the county as a growing and thriving community when they approved the new county facilities. Architect J.E. Mills reflected that optimism in the strength of the county by designing formable stone buildings that promised

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to last well into the 20th century and beyond. Discussion of the construction of the new courthouse larger spurred the construction of other buildings, and the same architect was utilized for City Hall as the courthouse. The construction of this major landmark marked the high point of this period in many ways.

Additionally, if revisions to the nomination are considered, a specific boundary should be determined for the property. It may be appropriate to include the entire courthouse square as part of this boundary, or revise the nomination as a courthouse square district nomination to include a minimum of the courthouse, square, landscape elements, and monuments (70-00196). The 1909 jail (70-00969) and the neighboring old jail (70-00246), with the power plant for the new courthouse, should also be considered as potential contributing buildings in a broader Courthouse Historic District.

The Muscatine County Courthouse might also be a contributing building in a potential downtown historic district. It strongly falls within one historic context identified for the district: "Civic Pride and Accomplishment" as further noted above. Whether or not the courthouse will be within the district depends on the final boundary for the district. While it is not within the recommended boundary of the core district, but it is within a potential "governmental" expansion section, which includes the courthouse, square, old jail, and new 1909 jail.

Construction on the Muscatine County Courthouse started in 1908, following a May 7, 1907 vote by Muscatine County residents that authorized \$150,000 in bonds at four percent interest for 10 years. A Total of 3116 votes were cast on the courthouse project, which passed by 504 votes. In the same election, voters also approved a new county jail, although by a slimmer margin of 236 votes out of 2,988 that were cast ("Splendid Monuments to Muscatine's Progressiveness," December 17, 1908, 19).

The new Beaux Art-style courthouse replaced a brick structure that had been built in 1841, heavily damaged by fire on December 17, 1864, and then rebuilt. J.E. Mills, Detroit, Michigan, was unanimously selected by the county board of supervisors to be the architect on the new courthouse project. Bid proposals were opened on September 26, 1907 and ranged from \$129,870 to \$108,500. The low bid was submitted by W.J. McAlpine, Dixon, Illinois and he was awarded the contract. The building was to be "ready for furniture and fixtures by July 1, 1909" (Richman 1911).

Richman reported that the original appropriation for the courthouse complete, finished and furnished, was \$135,000, which was expended as follows:

| | |
|--|-----------------|
| W.J. McAlpine, Dixon, Illinois, general contractor for building..... | \$108,500.00 |
| Detroit Mantel & Tile Company, Detroit, Michigan, lighting fixtures. | \$2,200.00 |
| Batterson Stores, Muscatine, Iowa, wood furniture..... | \$5,042.33 |
| Odin J. Oyen, La Crosse, Wisconsin, painting and decorating..... | \$2,500.00 |
| Canton Art Metal Company, Canton, Ohio, steel furniture..... | \$5,120.90 |
| B. E. Lilly, Muscatine, Iowa, carpets, rugs, etc..... | \$2,467.74 |
| J. E. Mills, Detroit, Michigan, architect's fees..... | \$6,091.54 |
| Huttig Manufacturing Company, Muscatine, Iowa, metal screens..... | <u>\$700.00</u> |
| | \$132,622.51 |

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Over the past 90 years, the Muscatine County Courthouse has been the site for a variety of locally high profile legal cases. One case that began with a murder in 1909 and ended in 1935 with a suicide generated particularly intense public interest. The case began when the body of John Degler was discovered in his home. He had been shot twice in the head. His son Frank was charged with the crime, but before he could be apprehended, he vanished. For 12 years he remained in hiding, but in 1921 was arrested by authorities in Massachusetts. Three months after being arrested, and following a trial in the Muscatine County Courthouse, he was found guilty of second-degree murder. He received a 25-year prison sentence, but was released in 1935 after serving a little more than half of the sentence. However, a few months after his release, he was found lying face down in a fishing pond at Riverview Park. His death was ruled a suicide, closing one of the more unusual cases tied to the county courthouse (*Muscatine Journal*, various articles, 1909, 1921, 1935).

The Muscatine County Courthouse continues to be the primary site for most county government offices and services. Local court services, including district and magistrate courtrooms, judges' chambers and court administrative offices are also located in the building. Because of space limitations, some auxiliary county offices have been moved from the courthouse to other county office buildings, both around the courthouse square and in other parts of the community.

9. Major Bibliographical References

City Directories, Muscatine. Various publishers, 1856-present. Available at the Musser Public Library.

"Frank Degler Found Guilty Of Slaying," *Muscatine Journal*, December 12, 1921, 1.

"Fugitive Is Held," *Muscatine Journal*, September 12, 1921, 1.

Hughes, Kathleen. "The Muscatine County Courthouse." unpublished class essay, Muscatine County Courthouse folder, Musser Public Library, M

"Muscatine County Courthouse," Division of Historic Preservation. *Iowa State Inventory Form*. 1980.

Richman, Irving B. *History of Muscatine County, Iowa*. Chicago: S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1911.

Sanborn Map Company. "Muscatine, Iowa," Sanborn fire insurance maps. Pelham, NY: Sanborn Map Company, 1883, 1888, 1892, 1899, 1905, 1912, 1919, 1928, 1946. Accessed online at: <http://www.sanborn.umi.com>.

"Son Charged With Crime By Warrant," *Muscatine Journal*, November 5, 1909, 1.

"Splendid Monuments to Muscatine's Progressiveness," *Muscatine Journal Building Section (Part 2)*, December 17, 1908, 19.

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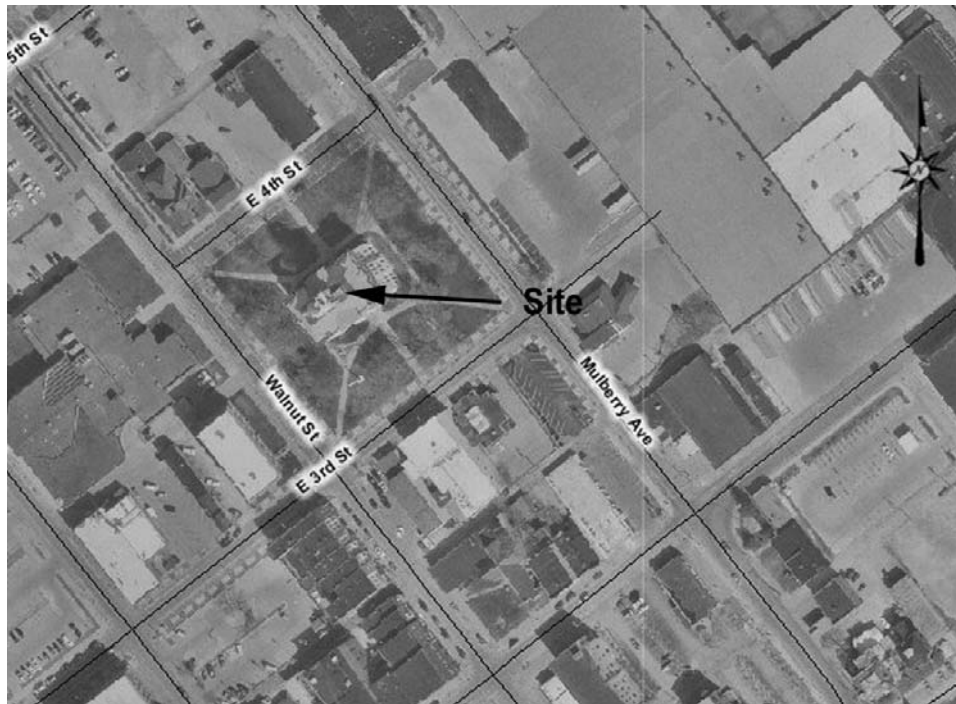
Muscatine County Courthouse
Name of Property

Muscatine
County

401 E. 3rd Street
Address

Muscatine
City

Location Map



Plan



(3rd Street)

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Muscatine County Courthouse
Name of Property

Muscatine
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401 E. 3rd Street
Address

Muscatine
City

Photograph of structure (digital image)

