Atchison County Courthouse

Location:
Southwest corner, 5th and Parallel, Atchison, Kansas 66002

Classification:
- Category: Building
- Ownership: Public
- Status: Occupied
- Present Use: Government

Owner of Property:
Atchison County

Location of Legal Description:
Register of Deeds
Atchison County Courthouse

Representation in Existing Surveys:
- Title of Survey: Historic Sites Survey
- Date of Survey: 1969
- Depository for Survey Records:
  - Kansas State Historical Society
  - 120 West 10th Street, Topeka, Kansas 66612
The Atchison County Courthouse is a rectangular three-story structure in a Romanesque-influenced style which faces east. The courthouse has both a full basement and an attic. It is located in what is basically a residential neighborhood several blocks north of Atchison's commercial district. A few feet from the northeast corner of the building is a boulder bearing a plaque commemorating a speech given at the site by Abraham Lincoln Dec. 2, 1859. The courthouse measures approximately 67 feet wide, 111 feet long and 112 feet to the top of the northeast corner clock tower. The dominant feature of the building is the clock tower which reaches seven stories in height, almost three stories higher than the towers at the other three corners. The clock has apparently been inoperative for a number of years.

The courthouse is built of gray ashlar stone supplied by the Consolidated Stone Co. of Bedford, Indiana. A smooth cut stone belt course continues all the way around the building at the first floor level. The granite cornerstone was placed at the northeast corner of the building.

The main entry on the east is covered by a large porch with a massive arched opening. The doorway is situated in a similar arched opening. A second entrance is located at the north side under a flat roofed stone porch supported by four square stone columns.

The courthouse roof is basically hip in form, but there are large intersecting gable dormers on the north, east and south sides. The four tower roofs are pyramidal and all are presently covered with asphalt shingles. The roof is separated from the walls by a deep bracketed smooth stone cornice. This same type of cornice effect is repeated one story above the roof line on all corner towers and the large dormers.

Windows of the building are slender rectangles with smooth cut stone lintels and sills. Some semicircular arched windows are found on the upper levels, and some of the small third floor windows in the court-room are of stained glass.

Attached to the courthouse on the west is a concrete areaway connecting the courthouse to the concrete jail structure.

In exterior appearance the courthouse looks very much like it did originally.
The Atchison County Courthouse at Fifth and Parallel in Atchison was built in 1896-1897 to meet the need of a growing and prospering county for a new government center.

The first Atchison courthouse was built in 1859, and by the 1880's it had been outgrown. An election held on November 6, 1888, resulted in the voters' approval for a new courthouse not to exceed $100,000. A tax was to be assessed to raise the money in a five-year period. A debate over the location of the new building delayed action for a number of years. After failing to obtain an offer of donated property in Atchison's commercial district, the county commissioners (William Bowman, I. B. Wilcox and George C. Butler) finally decided to build the new courthouse at the site of the old one.

In January, 1896, the county commissioners traveled to Ottawa, Topeka and Kansas City to view courthouses and other public buildings. The newspaper account of the tour indicated the commissioners favored a structure on the order of the Franklin County Courthouse at Ottawa. On February 7 and 8, 1896, George P. Washburn, architect of the Ottawa courthouse, met in Atchison with the county commissioners at their request, and, according to his diary, a verbal agreement was made for him to prepare the plans and specifications for four per cent of the building's cost. According to official county records Washburn was not formally employed until April 2, but it was common knowledge and reported at various times in newspapers prior to that date that he was designing the new courthouse. By April 15 his plans were filed in the county clerk's office, and bids were requested for May 4, 1896. The county commissioners received 15 bids on May 4, opened them and then adjourned until the next day when they awarded the contract to Latimer and Benning of Atchison for $61,625. The agreement between the contracting firm of F. H. Latimer and Charles W. Benning and the county commissioners was signed in mid-May. The contractors' bond was guaranteed by six wealthy Atchison businessmen, and work was to begin soon on tearing down the old courthouse and preparing the site for new construction. The commissioners also decided at this time that the building should be of gray Bedford, Indiana, stone.

A. D. Clark of Atchison was employed as superintendent of construction, and A. Semple was in charge of the stonemasonry.
8. In June temporary quarters were located for the county officials and demolition of the old building was begun. The plumbing and heating contract was let on July 6, 1896, to James Cotter of Kansas City for $6,547.

The cornerstone was laid with appropriate Masonic ceremonies on October 5, 1896. At that time the stonework had already reached the top of the first floor windows on all but the east side which had been left pending the arrival of the cornerstone. For some reason there had been a considerable delay in the preparation of the engraved granite cornerstone.

After much discussion by the public the commissioners let a supplemental contract on May 4, 1897, to raise the northeast corner tower 12 feet at a cost of $2,750. This was to permit installation of a town clock which would be readily visible in the main business area of Atchison. Later in the same month the courthouse furniture was purchased from the Art Metal Co. of St. Louis for $10,983. The building was accepted by the county commissioners on September 13, 1897, and insured for $67,000. The tower clock was installed on December 7, 1897, by the E. Howard Watch and Clock Co. of Boston for $870. The total cost of the building and fixtures was placed at $83,154.48.

The Atchison County Courthouse is significant to the history and development of Atchison county for its more than 75 years of service as the center of county government. The Romanesque-styled building is another of the Kansas courthouses designed by George P. Washburn, one of Kansas' most prominent early architects. It has been an Atchison landmark since its construction in 1896-1897.

9.


### 10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

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Approximate Acreage of Nominated Property: 1-2 acres

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries.

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### 11. FORM PREPARED BY

Name and Title: Richard D. Pankratz, Administrative Officer I, Historic Sites Survey

Organization: Kansas State Historical Society

Date: Oct. 4, 1974

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<tr>
<th>STREET AND NUMBER:</th>
<th>120 West Tenth St.</th>
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<th>CITY OR TOWN:</th>
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<td>Kansas</td>
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### 12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

As the designated State Liaison 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. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

- National [ ]
- State [ ]
- Local [x]

Name: Nyle H. Miller

Title: Executive Director, Kansas State Historical Society

Date: October 7, 1974

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

Director, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date

ATTEST:

Keeper of The National Register

Date
Historic Properties -- SELGEM Worksheet

050 Site/Building/Property Name  Atchison County Court House

054 Inventory Code  5-0260-010

060 Property Identification  Building

06201 Street Address  N. 5th, Southwest Corner 5th & Parallel

06202 Town  Atchison

064 County  Atchison

**070 Legal Description  All of Lot 1-3 Block 65 Old Atchison

**078 Register Listings  National Register & Kansas Register

080 Archaeological/Historical District Name

004 Site Condition  Excellent Good Fair Deteriorated

096 Owner's Name  Atchison County Commissioners

09701 Owner's Address  5th & Parallel

09702 Town  Atchison

09703 State  Kansas, 66022

**202 Functional Type  Governmental

208 Present Use  Court House

210 Style

**216 Exterior Materials  Stone

300 Architect/Builder  George Washburn/Latimer & Bennings

301 Date of Construction  1896

The building cost $61,625.00 to build