National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

1. Name of Property

Historic name: Elk County Courthouse
Other name/site number: 049-2570-0002

2. Location

Street & number: 127 North Pine
City or town: Howard
State: Kansas
Code: KS
County: Elk
Code: 049
Zip code: 67349

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this X 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
X 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.)

Patrick Zollner, Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer
Date: 2-27-09
Kansas State Historical Society

State or Federal agency and bureau

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

Signature of commenting official/Title
Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is

☐ entered in the National Register.
☐ determined eligible for the National Register.
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register.
☐ removed from the National Register.
☐ other, (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper
Date of Action
5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)
- [ ] private
- [x] public-local
- [ ] public-State
- [ ] public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)
- [x] building(s)
- [ ] district
- [ ] site
- [ ] structure
- [ ] object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)
Contributing: 1  Noncontributing: 1
buildings  sites
sites  structures
structures  objects
1 1 total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register
0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter Categories from instructions)
- Government: County Courthouse

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)
- Government: County Courthouse

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)
- Late 19th & Early 20th Century: Italian Renaissance

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)
- Foundation: Stone: limestone
- Walls: Brick over concrete
- Roof: Ceramic tile/metal
- Other:

Narrative Description
(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)
8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria
(Mark "X" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register)

- [X] 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.

- [X] 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 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.)

Areas of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions)

- Politics/Government
- Architecture

Period of Significance
1907-1958

Significant Dates
1907

Significant Person
(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)
N/A

Cultural Affiliation
N/A

Architect/Builder
McDonald, George E.
Morse Contracting, Topeka

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

Primary location of additional data:
- [X] State Historic Preservation Office
- [ ] Other State agency
- [ ] Federal agency
- [ ] Local government
- [ ] University
- [ ] Other

Name of repository:
KSHS
Elk County Courthouse

Name of Property

Elk County, Kansas

County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: approximately 1 acre

UTM References
(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

Zone 1
Eastings: 742200
Nortings: 4150260

Zone 2

3 Zone
Eastings: 00
Nortings: 00

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: Michael L. West, Program Manager

Organization: SCKEDD
Date: November 7, 2008

Street & number: 209 East William, Suite 300
Telephone: 1 (316) 262-7035

City or town: Wichita
State: KS
Zip code: 67202

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
(Consult SHPO or FPA for any additional items)

Property Owner

Name: Elk County Commissioners

Street & number: 127 North Pine
Telephone: 1 (620) 374-2490

City or town: Howard
State: KS
Zip code: 67349

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 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 Reduction Projects (1624-0018), Washington, DC 20503
NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

The Elk County Courthouse was designed by architect George E. McDonald and constructed by Morse Contracting of Topeka in 1907. The two-story (with raised basement) brick building is a combination of popular late 19th and early 20th-century architectural styles including Richardsonian Romanesque and Italian Renaissance. It occupies the central portion of a full square block that is one street east of the main business district in Howard, Kansas. Pine Street is to the west of the courthouse, Washington Street is to the north, Cedar Street is to the east, and Randolph Street is on the south. There is a 1959 freestanding jail building (non-contributing) located east of the courthouse along Cedar Street.

Exterior

The rectangular building measures approximately 89’ x 74’ and features a yellow/buff-color brick exterior with red-tinted mortar. The bottom level – defined by a rusticated limestone finish – extends six feet below grade. The concrete floor of the lowest level is atop an area filled and tamped solid with broken stone and earth. There are solid concrete footings at each corner. This bottom level features double-hung windows that are defined by limestone quoins, sills and lintels.

The upper two stories feature buff-color brick with limestone sills and lintels around each of the rectangular double-hung window openings. The arched window openings on the third floor have crowned arches of brick construction. With the exception of a few infilled openings on the ground level, the original fenestration remains intact. Metal storm windows were installed on all the double-hung windows in the 1960s and there are several window air conditioners in use.

The building features a main hipped roof with two intersecting hipped roofs on the north and south. There are three areas with flat roofs. The hipped roof was originally constructed using red clay tile, which it retains. The lower level flat rooftops were covered with tin, according to the original plans. These sections were replaced with red standing seam metal roof approximately fifteen years ago.

The building’s main front-facing elevation is located on the west side facing Pine Street and is defined by a central clock tower that rises 40 feet above the building. Originally, the building had three public entrances. In addition to the one on the west with a formal interior staircase rising to the second floor, there were entrances on the north and south sides with interior staircases for access to all three levels. In 1977, the interior staircase at the west entrance was modified to accompany a new elevator shaft.

The **west (front) elevation** features a central entrance located at the base of the clock tower. It includes a large round-arch opening with a modern glass vestibule and topped by a short limestone projection. Above the entrance on the upper floor is a pair of one-over-one, double-hung windows set within a single raised brick round-arch opening. Projecting above the roof, the lower half of the tower includes a recently installed electric clock with four faces. Each of the four sides of the upper half of the tower includes a single round-arch opening where a bell or chimes would have been located. However, when the
courthouse was erected in 1907, there were not sufficient funds to purchase a clock. The county waited nearly 100 years before installing a clock in 2006.

The tower is set within a two-story section of the building that is flanked by identical one-story, flat-roof bays at the corners. This west elevation is symmetrical and includes four one-over-one, double-hung windows set within round-arch openings on the second floor and six one-over-one, double-hung windows with limestone lintels and sills on the first. A raised limestone belt-course separates the two stories. The raised basement level originally featured six double-hung windows, but two openings have been filled in with concrete block.

The south (side) elevation is mostly comprised of a two-story, three-bay block with a hipped roof that intersects the main hipped roof. It features a central entrance with a large round-arch opening that is similar (but not identical) to the west entrance. There is a recessed double-door entrance that contains two multi-paneled doors with modern glass sidelights and transoms. This elevation is also symmetrical. There are four one-over-one, double-hung windows with limestone lintels and sills on the first floor. The raised basement level contains four double-hung windows. Above the central entrance on the upper story is a pair of one-over-one, double-hung windows with a single limestone lintel. The upper story also features four one-over-one, double-hung windows set within round-arch openings. A raised limestone belt-course separates the two stories. There is a small, central hipped dormer with a single horizontal window.

Like the south elevation, the north (side) elevation is mostly comprised of a two-story, three-bay block with a hipped roof that intersects the main hipped roof. It features a central entrance with a large round-arch opening that is identical to that of the south entrance. There is a recessed double-door entrance that contains two multi-paneled doors with modern glass sidelights and transoms. There are four one-over-one, double-hung windows with limestone lintels and sills on the first floor. The raised basement level contains four double-hung windows. Above the central entrance on the upper story is a pair of one-over-one, double-hung windows with a single limestone lintel. The upper story also features four one-over-one, double-hung windows set within round-arch openings. A raised limestone belt-course separates the two stories. There is a small, central hipped dormer with a single horizontal window.

The east (rear) elevation primarily includes a central two-story section, but there is also a one-story flat roof section at the southeast corner. The first floor contains three pairs of one-over-one, double-hung windows with limestone lintels and segmental brick arches. There are three pairs of one-over-one, double-hung windows set within raised-brick round arches. The raised basement also features three pairs of one-over-one, double-hung windows set within brick segmental arches.

**Interior**

The building’s floor plan and use are typical of early 20th-century courthouses constructed in this style. The basement level was designated for use by the sheriff, the superintendent (supervisor over land surveying), and the surveyors. A “farmers’ assembly room” was included, along with the boiler room and a fuel room (for coal). The first level included the recorder (register of deeds), the county clerk, the
county treasurer, the probate judge and the commissioner’s meeting room. The second level was set aside for the courtroom, two jury rooms, and a space for the court clerk and an office for the county attorney. Today the sheriff’s office is located in a separate jail building on the courthouse grounds and the appraiser and appraisal staff now uses the farmers’ assembly room. The first level still includes the same services as in 1907, but the clerk of the district court now uses the probate court office. On the second level, although the remodeling changed the layout of the rooms, the courtroom and court services still predominate. The Elk County Emergency Management Director occupies one office on the second floor.

The interior walls, original partitions, and ceilings are of concrete construction with an applied skim coat to resemble plaster. The interior finishes are of high quality. The first floor hallway floor is covered with mosaic tile. The same tile appears in the stairwell landings between the first and second floors. All the doors and doorjambs are of oak. Each door from the hallways into the offices on the first floor has a transom above for ventilation. One transom remains on the second floor, as well. The stair system was built with oak banisters, but the treads are of pine.

Two-dozen ornamental fireplaces were installed at the time of construction, which were designed to burn coal. Oak mantels were used, along with a variety of glazed tile for the surrounds and the hearths. Several fireplaces were removed from the second floor during the courtroom remodeling in 1976-1977, but eighteen remain. The chimneys were sealed at the rooftop level. The building is heated by a boiler system that generates steam for a series of radiators located throughout the building. The system was installed at the time of the construction, and the current boiler is only the first replacement (installed 55 years ago). The building’s current boiler vents into the only chimney that remains in use.

The only major alterations to the building’s interior took place in 1976-1977 when the second floor was extensively remodeled. The courtroom orientation was moved from east-west to north-south. A lowered ceiling of gypsum board was installed in the central north-south corridor and suspended ceilings were installed in the new courtroom location and the other second-floor restrooms and offices. A ductwork system was installed between the suspended ceiling and the original ceiling to provide air conditioning for the new courtroom location. Three basement-level window openings were removed and filled with concrete blocks. The west entrance staircase was also removed to provide for an interior elevator shaft in 1977.

No changes to the original courthouse footprint were ever made. Two of the three original entrance units are intact. All first-floor doors and transoms remain. Overall, this building is an excellent example of an eclectic blend of late 19th and early 20th century architectural styles including Richardsonian Romanesque and Italian Renaissance.

The original jail building was located east of the courthouse and was replaced in 1959 with a freestanding, one-story, hipped-roof building in the same approximate location. It houses the office of the Elk County Sheriff and the jail. It is non-contributing.
STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Elk County Courthouse (1907) is nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A in the area of politics/government and under Criterion C in the area of architecture. The historic significance of the Elk County Courthouse is based on its associations with the history and development of Kansas county courthouses that are documented in the *Historic County Courthouses of Kansas* Multiple Property Documentation Form. In particular, the building has direct associations to the historic contexts established in the MPDF: *The Role of the County Courthouse in Kansas Communities 1856-1950; Twentieth Century Kansas County Courthouses and Their Changing Use 1900-1950*; and the *Architecture of Kansas Courthouses 1861-1950*.

The property reflects a courthouse plan, location, and design that are typical of early 20th-century Kansas courthouses. It has a high degree of architectural integrity and is representative of the Romanesque Revival and Italian Renaissance styles. It exemplifies the work of a master architect who designed numerous courthouses in the Midwest from 1890 to 1920.

The architectural firm of George E. McDonald developed the plans and supervised the construction of the building. This firm designed four courthouses in Missouri (Andrew, Bates, Lawrence, and Johnson Counties), as well as the Fillmore County Courthouse located in Geneva, Nebraska and the Nuckolls County Courthouse located in Nelson, Nebraska. The firm had offices in Omaha and in 1907 also had an office in Kansas City, Missouri. The contractor for the building’s construction was Morse Contracting Company.

In the *Historic County Courthouses of Kansas* MPDF, historian Sally F. Schwenk discusses architectural trends in Kansas’ courthouses:

> Financially conservative and traditional in their tastes, county decision-makers usually selected a style that was well entrenched. And, while they competed with other counties for the status of the most striking, up-to-date facility, they were more comfortable copying the designs of other courthouses than in establishing a new avant-garde approach to their own seat of justice. In Kansas, the practice of touring different counties to view new courthouses contributed to this conservative approach. Commissioners often returned home impressed by the look of a certain courthouse or the design of a particular architect.

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One result of the continued use of certain architectural styles for courthouses long after they ceased to be used in residential and commercial buildings, was the advent of stylistic hybrids that became almost a form of historic eclecticism. While architects and clients embraced certain aspects of a new emerging style, they were often reluctant to abandon references to accepted traditional styles.

The Elk County Courthouse certainly fits into this context as a hybrid or blend of several popular turn-of-the-century styles. McDonald's other courthouse designs referenced above feature a conservative Richardsonian Romanesque appearance. The Elk County Courthouse, however, was erected at a time when the Richardsonian Romanesque style was giving way to various Mediterranean Revival styles, such as Italian, Classical, and Spanish, which incorporated smoother lines with symmetry and simplicity. The two dominant styles apparent on the Elk County Courthouse are Richardsonian Romanesque and Italian Renaissance.

HISTORIC BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

Elk County is located in south central Kansas near the Oklahoma border. The county's population in 2000 according to the United States census was 3,261. The major towns located in the county are Grenola, population 274, Howard (the county seat) population 740, Longton, population 399, and Moline, population 418. The main thoroughfares through the county are Highway 160 running east and west and Highway 99 running north and south.

The following history of the creation of the county was obtained from the book entitled Elk County: A Narrative History of Elk County and its People.

Elk County, as such (in 1854), was still non-existent but was part of Godfrey County which had been named for an Indian fur trader. Godfrey County also included Chautauqua County. In 1860 the name was changed to Seward County. Then in 1861, when Kansas was made a state, it became Howard County, named in honor of Major O. O. Howard who had served in the Union Army.

The first white man to settle upon land within the confines of what is now Elk County was Richard Graves in 1856. He came and was twice driven out by hostile Indians. In 1864 he returned and established a permanent claim in the extreme northeast corner of the county.

A successful future was anticipated for Howard County but the county was destined to have a short life. Almost before its organization had been perfected, the question of the division of the

1 Sally F. Schwenk, Historic County Courthouses of Kansas Multiple Property Documentation Form (Topeka: Kansas Historical Society, 2002), E-15.
2 Elk County Historical Society, Elk County: A Narrative History of Elk County and its People (Topeka, KS: Jostens Publication Company, 1979), 9-10.
county began to be agitated with considerable force by people in various parts of the county. Some thought a county 42 miles long and 31 miles wide was too large to maintain an efficient government; some were politically ambitious and thought a division of the county would double their chances to hold a county office; and there were those who thought their town should become the county seat.

The matter was brought before the people in 1871 when R. H. Nichols was elected to the legislature on an anti-division platform. In 1872, E. S. Cummings was elected on the same platform. In 1873, James N. Young who favored the division won the election.

He laid the ground work for the division and in 1874 his successor, Edward Jaquins, completed the task. He introduced House Bill NO. 54 which called for the division of Howard County and the establishment of Elk and Chautauqua counties. The bill passed in March 1875. Two months later the papers of the state made this announcement:

Next Tuesday, June 1, the Division Bill passed by the legislature goes into effect and Howard County goes out of existence and Elk and Chautauqua come in. Howard City is named the county seat of Elk County and Sedan of Chautauqua County. There are still some questions of legality to be determined by the Supreme Court.

Elk County was given its name for the river, which runs through the county. The Indians called it Elk River because they knew that favorite feeding grounds of great herds of elk were found at the head of the river.  

Although officers had been chosen, no building had been made available for county offices so they were scattered around where vacant rooms could be found. This situation existed until 1878 when the citizens of Howard City erected a two-story building for a courthouse on Wabash Avenue. They donated this to the county in an unfinished state, as they had previously promised to do, as one of the conditions upon which the town was selected as county seat. In March 1886 the commissioners called a special election for the following April to determine if a new $40,000 courthouse and jail should be built. The proposition carried by a 332 majority. The old building on Wabash Avenue was traded to J. C. Burchfield for his 180 farm, two miles north of Howard...

The bonds for the new building were sold to Thomas Krutz of Emporia. J. S. Huntly, the contractor used a fine grade of stone from Cottonwood. The following year, 1887, the beautiful building was completed and furnished ample room for all county offices, a spacious court room and a jail.  

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5 Ibid. p. 16.
6 Ibid. p. 17.
An unfortunate incident occurred in the county October 24, 1906; the beautiful court house, which had been erected in 1887, burned. L. F. Roberts was hired to tear down the remaining wall and haul away the rubble. The building contract for a new courthouse was let to the J. D. Morse Construction Company of Topeka for $47,000. In the contract Mr. Morse agreed to use the best of stone, steel and white oak in the construction. The building was to be plumbed so that gas, wood or coal could be used for fuel. George E. McDonald an architect from Kansas City received 3% of the total cost for his building plans. The building was built on the original site of the former building, the courthouse square, located one block east of the business district of Howard, the county seat.  

HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

The Elk County Courthouse is significant under Criterion A in the area of politics/government for its association with the first- and second-generation courthouses erected in the period between statehood and the First World War. Its siting on a square block adjacent to the commercial district is typical of common practices in Kansas. Moreover, the county government functions that operate in the courthouse today are very similar to those set forth on the original blueprints. The county has continued operations from this building since 1907, representing over a century of local government activity.

The Elk County Courthouse is architecturally significant as an excellent example of several popular turn-of-the-century styles including Romanesque Revival and Italian Renaissance. It was designed by George E. McDonald of Omaha and Kansas City, who designed several other courthouses in Missouri and Nebraska from 1890 to 1920. The Elk County Courthouse follows much the same form as some of his other buildings, but appears less elaborate with less ornamentation. The arches above the windows and doorways are both beautiful and functional. The red-tinted mortar provides a subtle contrast to the yellow / buff color brick used on the exterior, and blends nicely with the red tile roof on the upper story. The building retains its original footprint and much of its floor plan. The majority of the fireplaces are extant, although they are no longer used.

Kansas courthouses of this period generally are defined by three or more floors, and there is a distinct hierarchy of operations. The lowest level contains a boiler room, supervisory offices, and restrooms. The second floor, generally elevated several feet from grade level, contains the main county offices, such as the County Clerk, Register of Deeds, and County Treasurer. The top floor is typically reserved for the courtroom and an attorney’s office. The Elk County Courthouse closely follows that hierarchy.

With its imposing clock tower and large mature trees, the property conveys a sense of history and dominance within the community. Indeed, the structure towers over the surrounding residential and commercial neighborhoods.

7 Ibid. p. 27.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

(Accessed November 26, 2008.)


(Accessed November 26, 2008.)

(Accessed November 26, 2008.)


Schwenk, Sally F. Historic County Courthouses of Kansas MPS, 2002.
Filed at the Kansas Historical Society.


Yantis, Ethel, Editor. Elk County, a Narrative History of Elk County and its People. 1979. pp. 9, 10, 17, and 27.
VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The nominated property includes the entirety of Block 81, original town, City of Howard. The site is bordered on the north by Washington Street, on the west by Pine Street, on the east by Cedar Street, and on the south by Randolph Street.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The boundary of the nominated property is based on the entirety of Block 81 for its traditional courthouse function. Natural boundaries are provided by Washington Street, Pine Street, Cedar Street, and Randolph Street. The 1959 jail building is located within these boundaries, but is a non-contributing resource.

PHOTOGRAFIC INFORMATION

Property Name: Elk County Courthouse  
Location: 127 N Pine, Howard, Elk County, Kansas  
Photographer: Ms. Byrdee Miller, Elk County Emergency Preparedness Director  
Date: 11-04-2008

Photo 1: West (front) elevation and south (side) elevation, facing NE  
Photo 2: South (side) elevation, facing N  
Photo 3: Southwest corner of clock tower  
Photo 4: South (side) elevation and east (rear) elevation, facing NW  
Photo 5: North (side) elevation, facing S  
Photo 6: North entrance, facing S  
Photo 7: Interior, staircase leading from second story to main level, facing S  
Photo 8: Interior, south staircase, main level, facing S  
Photo 9: Interior, second story hallway, facing N  
Photo 10: Interior, basement level, facing N  
Photo 11: Interior, fireplace in second story courtroom  
Photo 12: Interior, tile floor in south stairway  
Photo 13: Interior, main courtroom
Bates County Courthouse. Butler, Missouri (ca. 1902) designed by George E. McDonald.

Fillmore County Courthouse, Fillmore, Nebraska (ca. 1894) designed by George E. McDonald.