

# IOWA SITE INVENTORY

Division of Historic Preservation  
Iowa State Historical Department  
26 E. Market St., Iowa City, Iowa 52240

MAY 29 1981

Site Number 45-006-001  
District Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Map Reference # 45-006-001  
Topo Map Mason City NK 1:250,000

## IDENTIFICATION

1. Site Name Howard County Courthouse  
2. Village/Town/City Cresco Township \_\_\_\_\_ County Howard  
3. Street Address Elm St. between N. Park Place and S. Park Place  
4. Legal Location OT Park Addn \_\_\_\_\_ Courthouse Square \_\_\_\_\_  
Urban: \_\_\_\_\_ subdivision \_\_\_\_\_ block \_\_\_\_\_ parcel \_\_\_\_\_  
Rural: \_\_\_\_\_ township \_\_\_\_\_ range \_\_\_\_\_ section \_\_\_\_\_  
5. UTM Location: zone 15 easting 571500 northing 4402500; Acreage less than 1 acre  
6. Owner(s) Name Howard County Board of Supervisors  
7. Owner(s) Address Cresco Iowa 52136  
(Street address) (City) (State) (Zip)  
8. Use: present Courthouse original Courthouse

## DESCRIPTION

9. Date of Construction 1879-1880 Architect/Builder B.D. Everingham & J.L. Harlow, Arch.  
10. Building Type: ☐ single family dwelling ☐ multiple family dwelling ☐ commercial  
☐ industrial ☐ educational ☐ other institutional ☒ public ☐ religious ☐ agricultural  
11. Exterior Walls: ☐ clapboard ☐ stone ☒ brick ☐ board & batten ☐ shingles ☐ stucco  
☐ other \_\_\_\_\_  
12. Structural System: ☐ wood frame with interlocking joints  
☐ wood frame with light members (balloon frame) ☐ masonry load-bearing walls  
☐ iron frame ☐ steel frame with curtain walls ☐ reinforced concrete  
☐ other \_\_\_\_\_  
13. Condition: ☐ excellent ☐ good ☒ fair ☐ deteriorated  
14. Integrity: ☒ original site ☐ moved-if so, when? \_\_\_\_\_  
Notes on alterations, additions (with dates and architect, if known) and any other notable features of building and site: There are two additions to the original building - no date. One completely surrounds one side, the other fills in a corner - Interior extensively altered.  
15. Related Outbuildings and Property: ☐ barn ☐ other farm structures  
☐ carriage house ☐ garage ☐ privy ☐ other \_\_\_\_\_  
16. Is the building endangered? ☒ no ☐ yes-if so, why? \_\_\_\_\_  
17. Surroundings of the building: ☐ open land ☐ woodland ☐ scattered outbuildings  
☐ densely built-up ☐ commercial ☐ industrial ☐ residential ☐ other \_\_\_\_\_  
18. Map \_\_\_\_\_  
19. Photo  
Roll \_\_\_\_\_ Frame \_\_\_\_\_ View \_\_\_\_\_

**SIGNIFICANCE** (Indicate sources of information for all statements)

**20. Architectural Significance**

- ☒ a. Key structure/individually may qualify for the National Register  
☐ b. Contributing structure ☐ c. Not eligible/intrusion

One of Iowa's few remaining courthouses in the Italianate tradition, although compromised with unfortunate additions.

**21. Historical Significance**

Theme(s) Politics/Government

- ☒ a. Key structure/individually may qualify for the National Register  
☐ b. Contributing structure ☐ c. Not eligible/intrusion

This courthouse is locally significant as the historical focus of county government, and of the political power and prestige derived from the community's status as the county seat. As center of county government, an Iowa town was reasonably assured of economic and population growth, and a prominent role in local social and political life. The county courthouse represents a significant public investment in a structure built not simply for utilitarian purposes, but also as a monument associated with the historical importance of county organization and development.

See Continuation Sheet

**22. Sources** (for primary and secondary sources, give complete facts of publication: author, title, place of publication, date, etc.):

Andreas, A.T. Illustrated Historical Atlas of Iowa. Chicago: Andreas Atlas Co., 1875.

Pratt, LeRoy G. The Counties and Courthouses of Iowa. Mason City, Iowa: Klipto Printing and Office Supply Co., 1977.

Stanek, Edward and Jacqueline. Iowa's Magnificent County Courthouses. Des Moines: Wallace-Homestead Book Co., 1976.

Prepared by \_\_\_\_\_ Date January, 1980

Address \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

Organization DHP

**FOR DIVISION OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION USE ONLY**

**1. OFFICE INFORMATION SOURCES ON THIS PROPERTY**

- ☐ COUNTY RESOURCE FILE  
☐ WINDSHIELD SURVEY  
☐ NATIONAL REGISTER  
☐ GRANTS-IN-AID: \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ DETERMINATION OF ELIGIBILITY

**REVIEW AND COMPLIANCE PROJECT:**

- ☐ OTHER \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ OTHER \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ OTHER \_\_\_\_\_

**2. SUBJECT TRACES**

- a. \_\_\_\_\_  
b. \_\_\_\_\_  
c. \_\_\_\_\_  
d. \_\_\_\_\_  
e. \_\_\_\_\_

**3. PHOTO IMAGES** 323/20A-23A  
327/24-25

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## CONTINUATION SHEET

Item Number(s) \_\_\_\_\_

## HOWARD COUNTY

In the middle of the nineteenth century, a stranger in Howard County asking for directions to the county seat, may have been answered by fingers pointing in every direction. Although it was not the majority opinion of citizens of Chickasaw County, five or six people petitioned the county judge for the organization of Howard County. Because the judge did not know the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, he ordered an election to consider this request on July 17, 1855. The organization of Howard County was quietly accepted, officers were elected, and the location of a county courthouse became the question of the day. In 1856, the county judge decided that Vernon Springs, just two miles southwest of Cresco, would be the best location. However, later that year the same judge ordered that all the county records and courts be moved to Howard Center, which was five miles directly west of Cresco.

But the community of New Oregon had sprung up two miles down the Turkey River from Vernon Springs and decided unilaterally that it would be the best site for the courthouse. A committee was appointed to consider all prospective sites. The committee traveled to New Oregon to inform the residents of that town that they had won the decision, but a determined Vernon Springs delegation met the committee before the announcement was made. Being strong-minded and determined, the committee irrevocably decided to locate the county seat at a place called Pikes Peak, a bluff half way between Vernon Springs and New Oregon. Both cities accepted this decision and cooperated in building a courthouse at Pikes Peak, in February, 1859.

By 1865, the structure had become unfit to house county offices and Vernon Springs and New Oregon again offered and counter-offered to build courthouses within their limits. Meanwhile, the railroad town of Cresco had grown rapidly and made a bid to build a courthouse which the board of supervisors accepted. For Cresco to be legally declared the county seat, an election had to be held. Although 1,000 people signed a petition favoring Cresco, the measure lost in the election of 1876 by a vote of 969 to 800. Back in Cresco, the newly constructed courthouse burned down. The Iowa legislature, meanwhile, passed a law authorizing towns to annex adjacent territory within a two-mile radius. Cresco took advantage of this, annexed Pikes Peak, and rebuilt the courthouse in 1879, in the center of town, to become the permanent home of county government.

--from Stanek, Edward, and Jacqueline Stanek,  
Iowa's Magnificent County Courthouses. Des  
Moines: Wallace-Homestead Book Co., 1976.

Multiple Resource Area  
Thematic Group

dnr-11

Name \_\_\_\_\_ County Courthouses in Iowa Thematic Resources  
State IA

| Nomination                       | Type of Review                        | Decision                          |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 25. Hardin County Courthouse     | - Entered in the<br>National Register | <u>Delores Byers 7.2.81</u>       |
| 26. Harrison County Courthouse   | - Entered in the<br>National Register | <u>Delores Byers 7.2.81</u>       |
| 27. Henry County Courthouse      | - Entered in the<br>National Register | <u>Delores Byers 7.2.81</u>       |
| 28. Howard County Courthouse     | - Entered in the<br>National Register | <u>Delores Byers 7.2.81</u>       |
| 29. Ida County Courthouse        | -                                     | <u>Previously listed 3.15.74</u>  |
| 30. Iowa County Courthouse       | - Substantive Review                  | <u>William H. Bratnam 7.2.81</u>  |
| 31. Jackson County Courthouse    | - Entered in the<br>National Register | <u>Delores Byers 7.2.81</u>       |
| 32. Jasper County Courthouse     | - Entered in the<br>National Register | <u>Delores Byers 7.2.81</u>       |
| 33. Jefferson County Courthouse  | - Entered in the<br>National Register | <u>Delores Byers 7.2.81</u>       |
| 34. Johnson County Courthouse    | -                                     | <u>Previously listed 3.27.75</u>  |
| 35. Keokuk County Courthouse     | - Entered in the<br>National Register | <u>Delores Byers 7.2.81</u>       |
| 36. Lee County Courthouse        | -                                     | <u>Previously listed 9.30.76</u>  |
| 37. Louisa County Courthouse     | - Substantive Review                  | <u>William H. Bratnam 7.2.81</u>  |
| 38. Lucas County Courthouse      | - Entered in the<br>National Register | <u>Delores Byers 7.2.81</u>       |
| 39. Lyon County Courthouse       | -                                     | <u>Previously listed 10.1.79</u>  |
| 40. Madison County Courthouse    | -                                     | <u>Previously listed 8.13.76</u>  |
| 41. Mahaska County Courthouse    | - Entered in the<br>National Register | <u>Delores Byers 7.2.81</u>       |
| 42. Marion County Courthouse     | - Entered in the<br>National Register | <u>Delores Byers 7.2.81</u>       |
| 43. Marshall County Courthouse   | -                                     | <u>Previously listed 11.21.72</u> |
| 44. Mitchell County Courthouse   | -                                     | <u>Previously listed 8.29.77</u>  |
| 45. Monona County Courthouse     | - Entered in the<br>National Register | <u>Delores Byers 7.2.81</u>       |
| 46. Monroe County Courthouse     | - Substantive Review                  | <u>William H. Bratnam 7.2.81</u>  |
| 47. Montgomery County Courthouse | - Entered in the<br>National Register | <u>Delores Byers 7.2.81</u>       |
| 48. Muscatine County Courthouse  | - Entered in the<br>National Register | <u>Delores Byers 7.2.81</u>       |

DUE 6/24/81 - dnr-3 7/13/81

Name Howard County Courthouse  
State, County PA Howard  
Working Number 5.29.81.72

Fed Nom or Request-Agency \_\_\_\_\_  
Federal Register Date 2.2.82

☒ Nomination  
☐ Determination of Eligibility  
☐ On Nomination Form

☒ Bldg(s)  
☐ Site  
☐ Object  
☐ Structure  
☐ District

Within:  
☐ Multiple Resource Area  
☒ Thematic Group

Maps /  
Photos /

Nomination prepared by:  
☒ State Staff  
☐ Local  
☐ Other

Entered in the  
Action: National Register  
☒ ACCEPT 7.2.81  
☐ RETURN \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ REJECT \_\_\_\_\_

Check if Appropriate:  
☐ State Request for Review  
☐ Keeper's Decision to Review  
☐ 2nd Return

I. Evaluation of Resource (cont. on back if necessary)

II. Evaluation of Nomination

|                                                                                                    | Good | Adequate | Poor | Comments |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|----------|------|----------|
| 1. Descriptive Statement<br>Short Format <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No  |      |          |      |          |
| 2. Significance Statement<br>Short Format <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |      |          |      |          |
| 3. Concepts/Integrity                                                                              |      |          |      |          |
| 4. Concepts/Criteria                                                                               |      |          |      |          |
| 5. Concepts/Boundaries                                                                             |      |          |      |          |
| 6. Contextual Evaluation                                                                           |      |          |      |          |

General Comments (cont. on back if necessary):

Reviewer/Date \_\_\_\_\_

See Attached \_\_\_\_\_



MAY 29 1981

Howard Co. Courthouse

(C. Courthouse in 1A  
Item. Res.)

Howard

JUL - 2 1981

327/24



MAY 29 1981

HOWARD COUNTY COURTHOUSE  
CRESCO, HOWARD CO., IOWA

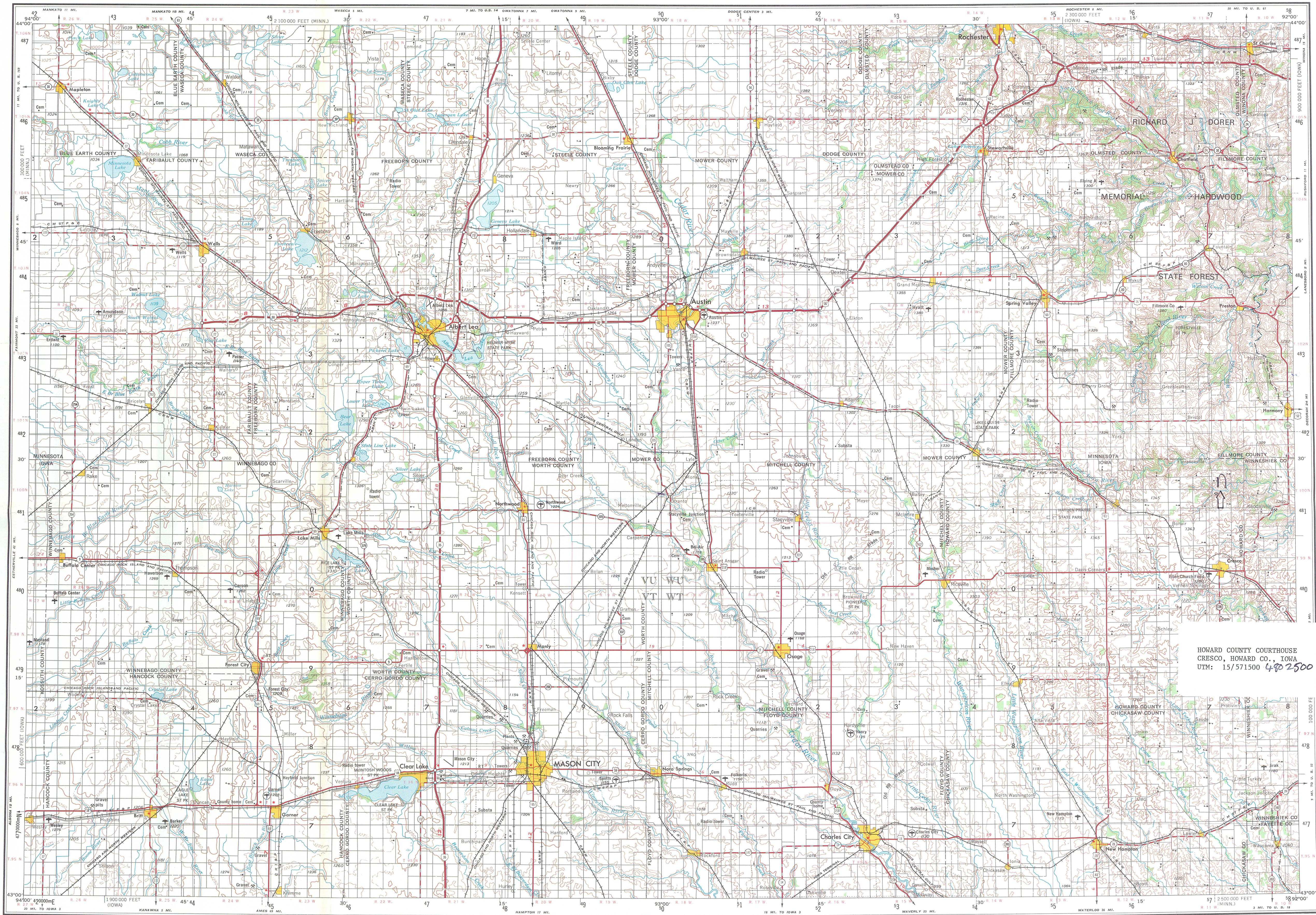
PHOTO BY: HANS MUESSIG &  
SARAH DENNETT 1978  
NORTH ELEVATION &  
SOUTH & EAST ELEVATION

C. Courthouse in  
IDA Her. Pers.

Howard

JUL - 2 1981

327/25



HOWARD COUNTY COURTHOUSE  
CRESCO, HOWARD CO., IOWA  
UTM: 15/571500 4802500

Prepared by the Defense Mapping Agency Topographic Center (TPCS),  
Washington, D.C. Compiled in 1953 from aerial photographs taken 1949-1950  
and from U.S. quadrangles 1947-1950. Field checked 1954. Revised in 1976  
by the U.S. Geological Survey from aerial photographs taken 1973-1974.  
100,000-foot grid based on Iowa coordinate system north zone, and Minnesota  
coordinate system south zone.  
Location of geodetic control established by government agencies is shown  
on corresponding Geodetic Control Diagram

**LEGEND**

Figures in red denote approximate distances in miles between stars

**POPULATED PLACES**

Over 500,000  
100,000 to 500,000  
25,000 to 100,000  
5,000 to 25,000  
1,000 to 5,000  
Less than 1,000

**RAILROADS**

Standard gauge  
Narrow gauge  
Interlocking  
County  
Park or reservation

**BOUNDARIES**

State  
County  
Park or reservation

**Landmark: School; Church; Other, etc.**

**Other**

Landplane airport  
Landing area  
Seaplane airport  
Seaplane anchorage  
Woods-brushwood  
Power line

**Scale 1:250,000**

CONTOUR INTERVAL 50 FEET  
WITH SUPPLEMENTARY CONTOURS AT 25 FOOT INTERVALS  
TRANSVERSE MERCATOR PROJECTION

BLACK NUMBERED LINES INDICATE THE 10,000-METER UNIVERSAL TRANSVERSE MERCATOR GRID, ZONE 15

1975 MAGNETIC DECLINATION FROM TRUE NORTH VARIES FROM 30' (100 MILES) EASTERLY FOR THE CENTER OF THE WEST EDGE TO 4' (20 MILES) WESTERLY FOR THE CENTER OF THE EAST EDGE

FOR SALE BY U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, DENVER, COLORADO 80225, OR RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092

RECEIVED  
MAY 29 1961  
NATIONAL REGISTER

**LOCATION DIAGRAM**

TO GIVE A STANDARD REFERENCE TO THIS SHEET TO NEAREST 100 METERS

GRID ZONE DESIGNATION: 15T

100,000 M. SQUARE IDENTIFICATION

SAMPLE POINT: GORDONVILLE

1. Read letters identifying 100,000 meter square in which the point lies.

2. Locate first VERTICAL letter and line to LEFT of point and read LARGE figure labeling the line within the top or bottom margin, or on the line itself.

3. Estimate tenths from grid line to point.

4. Locate first HORIZONTAL letter and line to RIGHT of point and read LARGE figure labeling the line within the left or right margin, or on the line itself.

5. Estimate tenths from grid line to point.

SAMPLE REFERENCE: 15T 1500 4802500

1. If reporting beyond 30" in any direction, prefix Grid Zone Designation, as:

15T 1500 4802500

**SECTIONIZED TOWNSHIP**

|    |    |    |    |    |    |
|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| 6  | 5  | 4  | 3  | 2  | 1  |
| 7  | 8  | 9  | 10 | 11 | 12 |
| 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 |
| 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 |
| 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 |
| 31 | 32 | 33 | 34 | 35 | 36 |

**TOWNSHIP OR RANGE LINE**

**LAND GRANT BOUNDARY**

MASON CITY, IOWA; MINNESOTA  
1954  
REVISED 1976