

**BUILDING-STRUCTURE INVENTORY FORM**  
DIVISION FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION  
NEW YORK STATE PARKS AND RECREATION  
(518) 474-0479

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY:  
UNIQUE SITE NO.:  
QUAD:  
SERIES:  
NEG. NO.:

YOUR NAME: Allison Rachleff  
YOUR ADDRESS: 106 W. Sibley Hall, Ithaca, NY

DATE: May 15, 1992  
TELEPHONE: (607) 255-6851

ORGANIZATION (if any): Cornell University

\*\*\*\*\* IDENTIFICATION \*\*\*\*\*

- 1. BUILDING NAME(S): Steuben County Courthouse
- 2. COUNTY: Steuben TOWN/CITY: Corning VILLAGE:
- 3. STREET LOCATION: 10 West First Street
- 4. OWNERSHIP: a. public  b. private
- 5. PRESENT OWNER: Steuben County ADDRESS: 10 West First Street
- 6. USE: Original: Courthouse Present: County Office Space
- 7. ACCESSIBILITY TO PUBLIC: Exterior visible from public road: Yes  No   
Interior accessible: Yes  No  Explain: Enclosed office space & medical clinic  
although the courtroom remains intact.

DESCRIPTION

- 8. BUILDING MATERIAL a. clapboard  b. stone  c. brick  d. board & batten   
e. cobblestone  f. shingles  g. stucco  other:
- 9. STRUCTURAL SYSTEM:
  - a. wood frame with interlocking joints
  - b. wood frame with light members
  - c. masonry load bearing walls
  - d. metal (explain)
  - e. other
- 10. CONDITION: a. excellent  b. good  c. fair  d. deteriorated
- 11. INTEGRITY: a. original site  b. moved  if so, when?  
c. list major alterations and dates (if known): Converted into county office space in the  
1980s.
- 12. PHOTO:
- 13. MAP:

14. THREATS TO BUILDING:

- a. none known [ ] b. zoning [ ] c. roads [ ]  
d. developers [ ] e. deterioration [ ]  
f. other:

15. RELATED OUT BUILDINGS AND PROPERTY:

- a. barn [ ] b. carriage house [ ] c. garage [ ]  
d. privy [ ] e. shed [ ] f. greenhouse [ ]  
g. shop [ ] h. gardens [ ]  
i. landscape features  
j. other:

16. SURROUNDINGS OF THE BUILDING (CHECK MORE THAN ONE IF NECESSARY)

- a. open land [ X ] b. woodland [ ]  
c. scattered buildings [ ]  
d. densely built-up [ X ] e. commercial [ X ]  
f. industrial [ ] g. residential [ X ]  
h. other: Situated within public park

17. INTERRELATIONSHIP OF BUILDINGS AND SURROUNDINGS:

(Indicate if building or structure is in an historic district)  
See Continuation Sheet

18. OTHER NOTABLE FEATURES OF BUILDING AND SITE:

(Including interior features if known):  
See Continuation Sheet

**SIGNIFICANCE**

19. DATE OF INITIAL CONSTRUCTION: 1903

ARCHITECT: J. Foster Warner; Drainage plan of 1906: Pierce & Bickford

BUILDER: Drake & Company

20. HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL IMPORTANCE:

See Continuation Sheet

21. SOURCES:

See Continuation Sheet

22. THEME:

11c. MAJOR ALTERATIONS AND DATES

The Steuben County Courthouse is located in a public park known locally as Courthouse Park. Recently, the integrity of the side east facade of the structure was compromised by the addition of a parking lot for county employees. This lot obstructs the balance symmetry of the structure while also encroaching on the open space formerly associated with the park. In addition, the structure ceased functioning as a courthouse in the late 1980s when the county began using the space to house the County Sheriff, Public Assistance and Child Support offices.

17. INTERRELATIONSHIP OF BUILDING AND SURROUNDINGS:

See Continuation sheet.

18. OTHER NOTABLE FEATURES OF BUILDING AND SITE

See Continuation sheet.

20. HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL IMPORTANCE

See Continuation Sheet.

21. SOURCES

See Continuation sheet.

Continuation Sheet, Page 1  
Steuben County Courthouse  
Corning, New York

#### **17. INTERRELATIONSHIP OF BUILDING AND SURROUNDINGS:**

The Steuben County Courthouse is located on the southwest corner of Pine and West First streets, set back roughly eighty feet from the intersection. A long cement stairway extending from the sidewalk places the visitor on axis with the main entry. Because the building is situated within Courthouse Park, it is surrounded by open space characterized by the gently sloping hills common to the Southside neighborhood. While the west and south facades face the public park, the north facade looks out onto First Street and the business district which extends northward toward the Chemung River. In addition, the open space once present on its east facade has been paved to accommodate parking and greatly reduces the former spaciousness once evident in this area. In contrast to its southern neighbors, the Courthouse is a monumental public building which adds a civic air to this residential neighborhood. Nevertheless, the public and commercial structures to its north visually unite the structure to its surroundings.

#### **18. OTHER NOTABLE FEATURES OF BUILDING & SITE**

The Steuben County Courthouse is an excellent example of a public building built in the Neoclassical Style which was popular in New York between 1890-1940. This style is derived from the classical architecture of Greece and Rome and is closely related to the Colonial and Greek Revival Styles. According to McAlester's *Field Guide to American Houses*, the principal facade of Neoclassical structures are dominated by full-height colossal columns which typically have Ionic or Corinthian capitals. Symmetry is the organizing principle, as each facade is defined by a strict rhythmic pattern, bereft of



irregularities. This pattern is often established by bays, strictly divided by classical embellishments of engaged columns or pilaster strips.

Based on a rectangular plan common to Greek temples, the north or main facade of the Courthouse is five bays wide with the three center bays forming the primary mass of the building under the gable roof, accentuated by a classical pediment. The flanking wings are one bay wide, capped by a flat roof which is a half story below the central three bays. The facade is clearly articulated by two engaged Ionic columns surrounding the entry. Pilaster strips with a capital combining egg and dart molding over a strip of acanthus leaves adorn the remaining bays. The first and second stories are differentiated from each other by dentil molding set off from the tawny brick by its light masonry color. Each six-over-six sash window is crowned by a segmental arch with a lightly colored masonry keystone. The columns support a classical entablature with dentil blocks common to the Ionic order. The pediment above contains these same features in addition to the acroteria which occur on the ridge line and to either side as well. The double leaf sash door with a transom is also crowned by a pediment with acroteria, supported by modillions below.

The east and west facades are divided into two parts principally defined by the flanking wing, annexed to the body of the building. The wings themselves are five bays wide, defined by the same pilasters and six-over-six sash found on the north facade. A strip of dentil blocks serve to delineate the first from the second floor. The entire wing is capped by a full entablature featuring dentil blocks below the cornice line. A two bay addition projects from the main mass of the building toward the southwest corner but does not contain the same decorative scheme evident on the wing. The full entablature wraps around the upper portion of the building, divided by pilaster strips into the standard five bays established on the main facade. Metal grillwork with a rectilinear design is placed

Continuation Sheet, Page 2  
Steuben County Courthouse  
Corning, New York

#### **18. OTHER NOTABLE FEATURES OF BUILDING AND SITE (con't.):**

between these pilaster capitals and serves to unify the four rear bays of the main building into an overall decorative scheme. The primary difference between the east and west facades is the parking lot located near the southeast corner which visually interrupts the rhythmic symmetry formerly present.

The south or rear facade is two bays wide and contains colored glass windows on the second story. The bays themselves are divided by a colossal end wall chimney with a raised metal hood. The gable end of the structure is also adorned with a pediment. The roof itself is covered in asphalt and the building rests on a concrete foundation.

#### **20. HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE:**

The Steuben County Courthouse is architecturally significant as an outstanding example of civic architecture from the turn of the century in Corning. Erected in 1904, the building involved the efforts of many of Corning's most prominent citizens at that time. Reaching beyond Steuben County, the building committee, chaired by William J. Tully, granted the commission to Rochester architect J. Foster Warner whose father, Andrew J. Warner, had designed the Romanesque Corning City Hall and Methodist Church in 1893.

Elmira-based architects Joseph Pierce and Hiram Bickford were involved in the engineering aspects of this project as well.

The courthouse is situated on the northeast corner of block 66, south of First Street between Pine and Walnut streets in Corning's Southside neighborhood. Upon the formation of the Corning Company in 1835, the land speculators led by Erastus Corning undertook the task of creating a plan for the 340 acre tract which would become the village of Corning. In their plan, the Company reserved block 66 for the formation of a public park which would become the future site of churches and government buildings. By 1848, Corning's population had grown to the point where it was able to be incorporated as a village within the Town of Painted Post. By 1853, Corning had become one of the three jury seats in Steuben County. In 1854, a brick Italianate-style courthouse was built in Courthouse Park, situated on the west side of the park, close to Walnut Street. This edifice joined the other publically oriented structures, such as the public school and the Presbyterian, Baptist and Methodist churches, already on the site. Gillette's 1857 *Atlas of Steuben County* depicts Courthouse Park with these structures lining the West First Street boundary of the block.

In the decades following the Civil War, Corning's economy transformed from one based largely on transportation, lumber and coal to one which relied more heavily on manufacturing. In 1868, the Brooklyn Flint Glass Works relocated to Corning and was later renamed the Corning Glass Works. As the glass industry expanded in Corning, it promoted large scale growth and development. On March 20, 1890, Corning became a city with a population of 10,000 through the merging of Knoxville and the village of Corning. It was in this prosperous and dynamic climate before the First World War that the Steuben County Courthouse was built in 1904.

The building's architect, J. Foster Warner (1859-1937), was a leading architect in Western New York between 1890-1910. Based in Rochester, Warner was responsible for the design of many classically inspired public, commercial, residential and educational

Continuation Sheet, Page 3  
Steuben County Courthouse  
Corning, New York

## 20. HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE (con't.):

buildings. In 1891, Warner had designed the Third Monroe County Courthouse in Rochester, modeled after an Italian palazzo. In 1910, Warner elaborated on his use of the classical language of architecture by employing the tenets of Neoclassicism in his design for the Ontario County Courthouse in Canandaigua. However, Warner is probably best known for his design for the interior of the George Eastman House in Rochester, on which he collaborated with McKim, Mead and White in 1902-05. The house itself was designed in the Colonial Revival Style and employed yellow Roman bricks similar to those used on the exterior of the Steuben County Courthouse.

It was during this period that Warner was also engaged in the building of the courthouse. Drake & Company, a local lumbering firm founded by James A. Drake, provided the labor for building. Drake himself was a prominent Corning citizen who was active in Corning's early economic development. In 1905, just after the completion of the

Courthouse, Drake & Co. merged with other local building concerns to form the Corning Building Company.

The courthouse is especially significant in Corning's history because just after its completion in 1905, the city's Common Council ordered City Engineer Robert Canfield to transform block 66 into a park with the principal edifice being the courthouse. In 1906, the Elmira firm of Pierce and Bickford were hired to develop a plan of drainage for the courthouse. Like Warner, Pierce and Bickford had an active practice in western New York, especially in the Southern Tier region. Between 1891-1931, the firm designed many public buildings and private residences in styles ranging from the Queen Anne to the Neoclassical.

Because of the role it plays in Corning's history at the turn of the century, the Steuben County Courthouse should be recognized as a building of local and state significance. Its association with Corning's leading citizens and central New York's leading architects qualify it as a significant property within the Southern Tier region and the state.

## 21. SOURCES:

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Continuation Sheet, Page 4  
Steuben County Courthouse  
Corning, New York

## 21. SOURCES (con't.):

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UNIQUE SITE NO. \_\_\_\_\_  
QUAD \_\_\_\_\_  
SERIES \_\_\_\_\_  
NEG. NO. \_\_\_\_\_

YOUR NAME: Lorraine Lanmon DATE: November 10, 1988  
3 South Road  
YOUR ADDRESS: Corning, NY 14830 TELEPHONE: (607)962-8006  
ORGANIZATION (if any): Market Street Restoration Agency

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IDENTIFICATION

- 1. BUILDING NAME(S): Steuben County Courthouse
- 2. COUNTY: Steuben TOWN/CITY: Corning VILLAGE: \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. STREET LOCATION: Corner of First and Pine Streets
- 4. OWNERSHIP: a. public  b. private
- 5. PRESENT OWNER: Steuben County ADDRESS: Corning, NY
- 6. USE: Original: Courthouse Present: Same
- 7. ACCESSIBILITY TO PUBLIC: Exterior visible from public road: Yes  No   
Interior accessible: Explain Yes

DESCRIPTION

- 8. BUILDING MATERIAL: a. clapboard  b. stone  c. brick  d. board and batten   
e. cobblestone  f. shingles  g. stucco  other: timber
- 9. STRUCTURAL SYSTEM: (if known) a. wood frame with interlocking joints   
b. wood frame with light members   
c. masonry load bearing walls   
d. metal (explain) \_\_\_\_\_  
e. other \_\_\_\_\_
- 10. CONDITION: a. excellent  b. good  c. fair  d. deteriorated
- 11. INTEGRITY: a. original site  b. moved  if so, when? \_\_\_\_\_  
c. list major alterations and dates (if known): \_\_\_\_\_

12. PHOTO:

13. MAP:

14. THREATS TO BUILDING: a. none known  b. zoning  c. roads   
 d. developers  e. deterioration   
 f. other: \_\_\_\_\_
15. RELATED OUTBUILDINGS AND PROPERTY:  
 a. barn  b. carriage house  c. garage   
 d. privy  e. shed  f. greenhouse   
 g. shop  h. gardens   
 i. landscape features: One-block square park --  
 j. other: trees, shrubbery and evidence of 1906-09 landscaping
16. SURROUNDINGS OF THE BUILDING (check more than one if necessary):  
 a. open land  b. woodland   
 c. scattered buildings   
 d. densely built-up  e. commercial   
 f. industrial  g. residential   
 h. other: One-block square parkland
17. INTERRELATIONSHIP OF BUILDING AND SURROUNDINGS:  
 (Indicate if building or structure is in an historic district)  
**See Attached**

18. OTHER NOTABLE FEATURES OF BUILDING AND SITE (including interior features if known):  
**See Attached**

SIGNIFICANCE

19. DATE OF INITIAL CONSTRUCTION: 1903  
 ARCHITECT: J. Foster Warner, Rochester, New York  
 BUILDER: Drake and Company, Corning, New York

20. HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL IMPORTANCE:  
**See attached**

21. SOURCES:  
**See attached**

22. THEME:

17. Interrelationship of building and surroundings.

The Steuben County Courthouse, Corning, New York, is located on Corning's southside hill at First and Pine Streets near the northeast corner of a one-block park. It occupies three lots (nos. 6-8) owned by the county and environmentally shares a 165 foot x 189 foot portion of block no. 66 (see tax map no. 317.12-02-035), owned by the city for use as a park. The block was originally designated a public square when the city was laid out in 1835. The courthouse is oriented to the north on First Street but is accessible from the four surrounding streets: First, Second, Walnut, and Pine.

It is situated just two blocks from the center of the Market Street Historic District and is set in a residential area consisting of well maintained early nineteenth to mid-twentieth century houses of architectural merit (having historic district potential). The park is well maintained and bears mature plantings of trees and shrubbery. There remains evidence of the 1906--1909 landscape design.

## 18. A. Building

Records indicate a general sentiment that proposed courthouses should reflect the "latest" in style and accommodations.

The Steuben County Courthouse in Corning, New York is a case in point. It is approached from the street by a concrete and stone staircase constructed in three ranks. The building is basically rectangular in plan with a small extension at the center-rear, creating a truncated T-plan. Of two stories, the five-bay (three central and one each in flanking wings) structure is built of cream-colored "roman" brick laid in common bond. The raised foundation is of stone; columns, caps, bases, and keystones of the principal windows appear to be of cast stone. The entablature and pediment are of wood; the acroteria at the apex and lower extremities of the pediment appear to be of cast stone as well (close inspection failing). The "Classical" belt-course, denoting the transition between the first and second floors, is noted with projecting, dentil-like brickwork. A single-course water table projects at the base of the building.

Both the central block and flanking wings are covered with low-hipped metal roofs. A single chimney is located in the center rear of the main block. The windows in the main



block and the wings are double-hung with six-over-six lights. They are detailed by an over-size key stone and flat arches. The foundation windows, over-door light, and court chamber windows are detailed with early twentieth-century-styled "criss-cross" grill mullions. *muntins.*

The facade bears a full Ionic entablature with fluted engaged Roman Ionic columns in antae, detailed with egg and dart, bead and reel, waterleaf, and anthemion motifs. The entrance is announced by a typical early twentieth century neo-classical Roman Ionic columned portico, surmounted by acroterion<sup>on?</sup> (possibly of cast iron) on the pediment. Glazed double entrance doors are framed by shouldered classical moldings, an over-door light with "x" and "o" *muntins* mullions, and a dentiled pediment with console scrolls, detailed with anthemion motifs. The studied, elaborate, and careful detailing of the facade indicates the high design and construction standards employed.

On the interior, architectural features display typical late neo-classical motifs of the early twentieth century. The ground floor bears fluted square posts with classically inspired moldings and capitals detailed with egg and dart and rosette motifs. An open, slightly curved balustraded stair ascends to the second floor.

The second floor vestibule is delineated with pilasters

ornamented with egg and dart and rosette bands supporting a full Ionic entablature. The entrance portico to the court room is framed with an Ionic entablature supported with pilasters. The court room is two stories high, the upper half opened to windows. Corinthian pilasters and a full dentiled entablature articulate the walls. ?

The judge's bench is framed with classical panels below and enframed behind by an architectural backdrop consisting of Roman Ionic engaged columns, pilasters, and entablature intersected by a central pediment. That pediment is supported at its returns by foliated console scrolls and decorated in the tympanum with eagle and wreath motifs. The bench wall is flanked by leaded and colored glass windows. The seats in the courtroom are later replacements. The original are probably those now in the anti-room of the courtroom.

## 18. B. Site

"The block bounded by First, Second, Pine, and Walnut streets was given to the Village of Corning for use as a public park and directed that all public buildings, including schools and churches, should be there located. The Corning Company gave the plot to the village conditioned on its being so used." [Urie Mulford, p. 181]. In fact the property was first used as the site of three churches, a schoolhouse, the first county courthouse, and later as a pasture for cows.

However, when the Christ Episcopal church sought in 1889 to build on the square, the New York state supreme court ruled that an 1840 state statute forbid village property from being used for churches. [Dimitroff and Janes, p. 99]. Again, in 1920 the Corning Common Council refused a portion of the public square to be used for a new Corning Free Academy.

On June 2, 1903 lots 6, 7, and 8 in Block 66 (Pine and First streets) were given by the city to the county as a site for the new County Court House. [Mulford, p. 389; the author finds no record of the deed].

In 1905, the Common Council, deciding that the space should be used as a park, asked City Engineer Canfield to turn Block 66 into a park. By 1906, plans included three plazas,

a bandstand, gravel walks, shade and ornamental trees, and park benches. Work proceeded slowly, but by 1909 the work was done and a concrete fountain 25 feet in diameter was built. [Dimitroff and Janes].

19. Date of initial construction, Architect, Builder

The architect J. Foster Warner (1859-1937) was one of Rochester, New York's most important architects at the turn of the century. Establishing independent practice in 1889, he entered an era in architectural design dominated by "academic eclecticism"--the revival of historic styles with a measure of archeological correctness.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Warner designed imposing residences for the wealthy of Rochester in the then fashionable Romanesque, neo-classical, and Georgian Revival styles, all typical of the time for the clientele. In the neo-classical idiom were his 1892 Jesse W. Lindsay and his 1901 Colonel Henry A. Strong houses and the Georgian revival George Eastman house (with McKim Mead and White) of 1905. In the medieval mode was his 1892 Wilson Soule house.

His public works included the neo-classical Monroe County Courthouse (1894-1896). It expressed the romanticized classicism of the era inspired by the monumental models built for the World's Columbian Exposition held in Chicago in 1893, as does the 1903 courthouse in Corning, albeit in a different way--the Monroe County courthouse

being derived from the urban Renaissance Palace and the Steuben County courthouse from the Renaissance country house.

Warner's Sibley, Lindsay, and Curr Company retail store, a handsome commercial building recalling the Chicago School of commercial architecture, followed in stages--1904, 1911, and 1926. His architectural eclecticism prevailed to the end of his career, most gloriously expressed in the neo-Romanesque and Byzantine Rochester Savings Bank of 1928.

J. Foster was the son of Andrew Jackson Warner, architect of Corning's 1893 city hall. Because no public building had been built in Corning since that time, perhaps the son of A. J. Warner seemed a logical choice to author the new courthouse.

The builders, Drake and Company of Corning (which became a part of the present Corning Building Company), received the contract in 1903 to erect the courthouse at the cost of \$25,000. +  
In 1904 the Board of Supervisors voted an additional \$2500 for the project making a total of \$32,500. (County property records note a cost of \$33,482 thus an additional \$982. was subsequently added to the project). ?

## 20. Historical and Architectural Importance

The Steuben County courthouse in Corning, New York, is of local architectural significance for its distinctive quality of early twentieth century neo-classical public architecture.

The courthouse square is historically important as the original public square given to Corning by the members of its founding Corning Company in 1835, and as the site of Steuben County's second seat of government, established in 1853. It also stands as a symbol of the importance of county seats in state government

Steuben County was established in March 1796. It was divided into two jury districts in 1853, the village of Corning receiving the second, after Bath. An Italianate courthouse was built in that year high on the west side of the public square.

In 1894 Corning's 41-year-old courthouse needed extensive repairs. Many thought the courthouse was too high on the hill; thus a site at the lower east side of the square was selected for the new one. Because Corning citizens took pride in having the courthouse in their community, they felt that it should be of the latest style, designed by an important area architect, and of fine structural quality.

Thus, in 1903 J. Foster Warner, an eminent architect of Rochester, New York was retained to design the new building. It retains its original location, structural fabric, and setting in a park context. The landscape embellishments of 1906 and 1909 (gravel walks, bandstand, plazas, and a fountain) have been removed, however their visual traces are still evident.

There is nothing comparable to this building or park in Corning nor the surrounding region. The building is an outstanding example of its type--a stately courthouse in the neo-classical style of the early twentieth century. It handsomely expresses that spirit by its fine proportions and careful detailing of its many neo-classical motifs, rendered in both brick and stone. It is the only building in Corning by J. Foster Warner, a leading turn-of-the-twentieth century architect of Rochester, New York. Moreover, the park is a unique survival of an 19th century open space, even in a city given to preserving its 19th century heritage in business, private, and public architecture.



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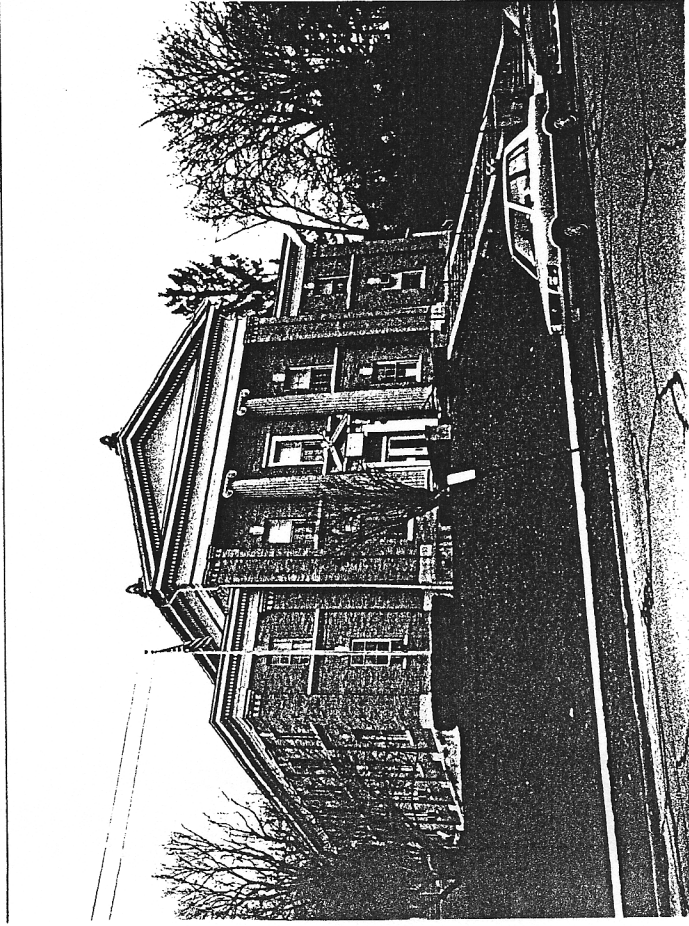
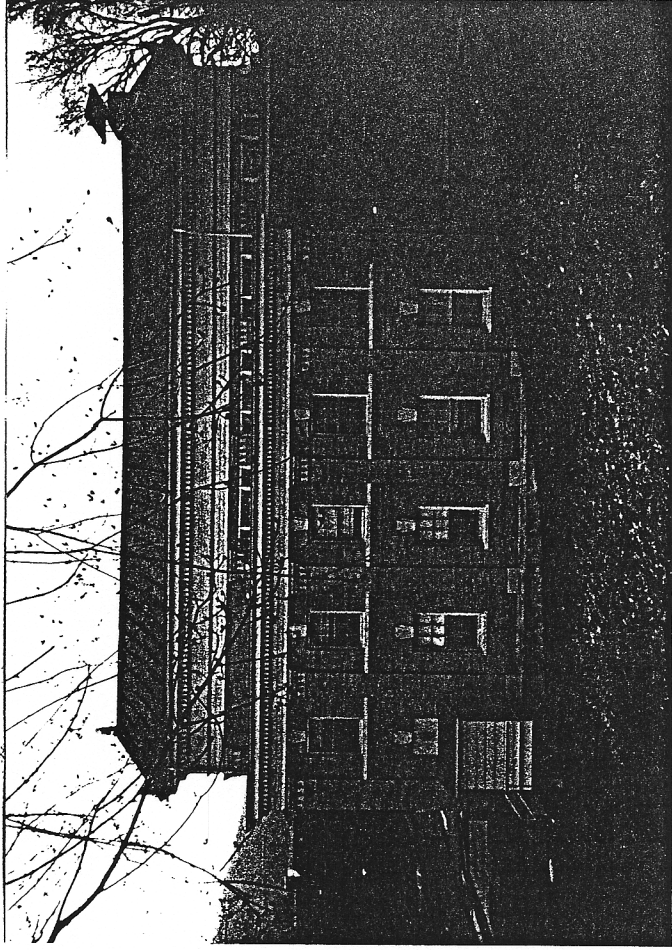
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10 West First (Steuben Co. Court House)