

**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For HCRS use only

received JAN 29 1980

date entered APR 3 1980

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

**1. Name**

historic Presque Isle County Courthouse in Onaway

and/or common Onaway County Courthouse

**2. Location**

street & number Northwest corner of State and Maple Streets  not for publication

city, town Onaway  vicinity of congressional district 11th District

state Michigan code 26 county Presque Isle code 141

**3. Classification**

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use (As of June, 1980)	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object		<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:
		<input type="checkbox"/> no		

**4. Owner of Property**

name City of Onaway

street & number City Clerk's Office, State Street

city, town Onaway  vicinity of state Michigan 49765

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Registry of Deeds

street & number Presque Isle County Courthouse

city, town Rogers City  vicinity of state Michigan 49779

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

Michigan Inventory of Historic Resources and  
title Michigan State Register of Hist. Sites has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 5/17/78  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Michigan History Division, Michigan Department of State

city, town Lansing  vicinity of state Michigan 48918

## 7. Description

### Condition

excellent

good

fair

deteriorated

ruins

unexposed

### Check one

unaltered

altered

### Check one

original site

moved date \_\_\_\_\_

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Presque Isle County Courthouse in Onaway, Michigan (PHOTOS #1, #2, and #3) is an asymmetrically massed two story, poured concrete block building on a high, random ashlar fieldstone base. Its design is curiously eclectic with elements of the Italian Villa, Romanesque, and Renaissance Revival styles liberally interpreted and blended in the best of vernacular traditions. The courthouse stands on a large property encircled by trees and serves as the major architectural highlight of Onaway's downtown streetscape.

The Italian Villa influence is the most evident in the building's overall design. On its front facade, the courthouse features the typical asymmetrical massing and fenestration of the style as well as the traditional tower that stands off center and breaks the eavesline of the low-pitched hipped roof. The courthouse's wall surfaces above the foundation are smooth; the windows piercing the walls are simple apertures in rounded-arch or trabeated enframements and are occasionally grouped in twos. Above, the eavesline projects well beyond the front facade's surface and is supported by modest paired brackets and a dentilated fascia. While greater symmetry of massing and fenestration marks the side and back facades of the Courthouse, the overhanging eavesline and hipped roof continue to reflect the picturesque Italian Villa influence emphasized on the front facade.

The Romanesque influence on the courthouse's design, while minor, is still evident in the general weightiness and simplicity of the structure's form. Indeed, the rounded-arch front entryway with its deeply shadowed reveal emphasizes the massiveness of the building. Other elements such as the deep-set rounded-arch windows in the tower, the square tower itself with its pyramidal roof, and the squat, plainly treated chimneys provide additional evidence of a Romanesque influence on the building's style.

The Renaissance Revival influence, while also minor, is still evident in several components of the structure's design. For example, the vertical organization of the structure's floors reflects a Renaissance Revival inspiration with its slightly splayed rusticated ground floor, a tall main story reminiscent of the piano nobile of the Italian city palace, and a low top floor that tucks neatly below the bracketed corniceline of the roof. Secondly, the heavy concrete bandcourses that encircle the entire building at both the first and second floor levels provide a strong horizontal orientation typical of Renaissance Revival designs. Lastly, the widely spaced windows in their simple trabeated enframements on all facades of the courthouse and the simple balcony capped by a pediment on the entry block of the front facade reflect the Revival influence on this curiously eclectic public building.

Inside the Presque Isle County Courthouse, the finishes are simple and reflect no particular style. The basement is unfinished today, but, due to its large windows and high ceilings, is an area that could offer useable floorspace. At the first floor level, the courtroom located at the north end of the building serves as the major interior focus. The room is the equivalent of one-and-one-half stories in height and displays simple hardwood floors, tongue-and-groove wainscoting that reaches five feet up from the floor, plaster and composition board walls decoratively braced with narrow strips of stained wood, and a balcony along its southern wall that serves as a visitors' gallery. Inside the tower, the main staircase reaching from the first to the second floors adds a note of ornamentation to the courthouse's relatively austere interior. The stairway

(continued)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

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## NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

CONTINUATION SHEET

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is of dog-leg construction with a simple, squared wood newelpost, flat jig-sawed balusters, and the paired rounded-arch windows noted on the exterior of the tower highlighting its first landing. At the second story level, the various offices and work cubicles display the same plaster and wainscoting wall treatments seen elsewhere in the courthouse.

The Presque Isle County Courthouse in Onaway has been the center of controversy in the city for the past three years. After a developer unsuccessfully threatened to buy the empty structure and tear it down, an active citizens' group took control of the building for the city of Onaway and began planning for its revitalization. With assistance from the City Council, from Onaway's citizenry, and from the State Historic Preservation Grant-in-Aid Program, the "Save the Courthouse Committee" has made basic improvements to the building that make it more marketable as rental space for governmental and private agencies coming into the area. With careful planning and promotion, the community hopes to make the courthouse a viable part of its downtown economy once again.

# 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400–1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500–1599	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600–1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> industry	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

**Specific dates Built:** 1908      **Builder/Architect** Unknown

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)**

The significance possessed by the Presque Isle County Courthouse in Onaway, Michigan stems from three sources. First, the courthouse is associated with the life of a person significant to northern Michigan's past; it was built by Merritt Chandler who opened Presque Isle County to development through his construction of state roads and incorporated the City of Onaway. Second, the courthouse is associated with events that made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of the area's history because it served as the figurehead for Chandler's attempts to "steal" the county seat from Rogers City and establish it in Onaway. And third, as a poured concrete block structure executed in a wildly eclectic style, the courthouse embodies the distinctive characteristics of a construction type that is purely vernacular in style and commonplace to the upper reaches of Michigan's Lower Peninsula.

(Note: An Expansion of the Statement of Significance can be found on Continuation Sheets #8-2 through #8-3)

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

Anderson, Harriette, Ima Post, and Sallie Beatty. Onaway Jubilee Edition. Onaway, Michigan: Jubilee Book Committee, 1974.

(continued)

# 10. Geographical Data

**UTM NOT VERIFIED**

Acreeage of nominated property Approximately 4 acres

**ACREAGE NOT VERIFIED**  
Quadrangle scale 1:62 500

Quadrangle name Onaway Quadrangle

**UMT References**

A 

1	6	7	1	6	9	7	5	5	0	2	6	2	2	5
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

C 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

D 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

E 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

F 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

G 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

H 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

**Verbal boundary description and justification**

The Presque Isle County Courthouse Property in Onaway occupies the southern half of the two block area bounded by Spruce Street on the north, Maple Street on the east, (continued)

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

state N/A code county code

state N/A code county code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Janet L. Kreger, Regional Preservation Coordinator

organization Michigan History Division date 11/26/79

street & number 208 N. Capitol Avenue telephone 571-373-0510

city or town Lansing state Michigan 48918

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation 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 Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature Martha M. Bigelow

title Director, Michigan History Division date 1/11/80

**For HCERS use only**  
I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

Sally G. Deleh date 4/3/80  
Keeper of the National Register

Attest: Emma Jane Saye date 4-2-80  
Chief of Registration Regional Coordinator

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## NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

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Thomas and Jane Merritt Chandler were living near the small city of Adrian, Michigan in Lenawee County when their son, Merritt, was born on November 29, 1843. Merritt attended the Raisin Valley Seminary near Adrian, a well-known Quaker institution in southern Michigan, and lived a strict Quaker existence in his parents' home until the age of twenty-six. In 1869, Merritt began his migration northward to the lumbering areas of Michigan. First, he worked in Cass County gaining experience as a lumberman and investing his capital in stands of hardwood and in lumbering equipment. In 1874, he transferred his operations to Cheboygan where, with the State's assistance, he learned how he could make his fortune.

Settlement of northern Lower Michigan began on the shores of the Great Lakes where, by 1873, the villages of Cheboygan, Traverse City, Petoskey, Alpena, Rogers City, and Presque Isle were thriving. Both the federal and state governments, however, were committed to the further development of northern Michigan and the establishment of inland settlement areas. Thus, the Michigan legislature passed an act that provided payments of state-owned "swamp lands" to the builders of Michigan roads. Because these swamp lands generally included vast tracts of richly forested land and good agricultural acreage, road contractors immediately recognized the benefits available through the act's method of payments and exploited their opportunities.

Merritt Chandler was interested in the possibilities of the Swamp Lands Act. While he was not a road builder, he did have the equipment and the expertise needed to clear heavily forested road beds. Thus, he jumped at the opportunity to bid on a project when in 1873, the Swamp Land Board of Control recommended construction of the Presque Isle and Little Traverse State Road from Petoskey to the Harbor of Presque Isle. Chandler's first bid of \$775 per mile met defeat when another contractor offered to do the same work for five dollars less. Two years later, however, after the first builder's contracts were rescinded for failure to complete construction obligations on time, Chandler won a contract for construction of the eastern twenty-three miles of the road. He received 40,000 acres of timber and agricultural lands in payment for his work, most of the acreage being located around the small inland settlement of Onaway.

Chandler's newly vested interest in the future of Onaway spurred him to begin active promotion of the settlement's success. He built a residence in 1884 and opened Onaway's first general store in several of the home's first floor rooms. By 1886, the growth of his dry-goods store warranted construction of a separate building and expansion of his operations into the Onaway Mercantile Company. Chandler's pool of capital grew as he established lumbering operations on his land, leased some of his property for agricultural use, and sold over 10,000 acres of cleared land at reduced prices to attract new settlers. With his leveraged wealth, Chandler established the Chandler House Hotel, built the town's first opera house, and organized the Onaway Dairy Products Company. By 1901, his town could offer enough economic

(continued)

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incentives and rewards to attract the Detroit and Mackinaw Railroad Company line through Onaway. Within a decade of the railroad's arrival, Onaway boasted operations for the manufacture of shingles, staves, hoops, and cooperage of all kinds; heading and planing mills, flour mills, a creamery, and foundry and machine shops also flourished.

After Merritt Chandler incorporated his village in 1899, he began to make public his plans to remove the county seat from Rogers City and establish it in Onaway. Mr. Fred'c Denny Larke, the leading political figure in Rogers City at the time, immediately drew battle lines and placed Chandler's plans under open attack. Larke had been a close associate of Albert Molitor, the founder of Rogers City who had been murdered by a group of settlers in 1875, and was heir to Molitor's prominent position. As County Clerk, Notary Public, Immigration Agent, Local Commissioner for Roads, Editor of the Presque Isle County Advance, and a prominent real estate agent in the Rogers City area, Larke had a great deal to lose if Chandler ever realized his plans. Thus, he used his newspaper's editorial section to attack Chandler's plans to incorporate Onaway as a city so that it could qualify as a county seat. Indeed, in an editorial printed on February 26, 1903, Larke declared that Onaway should "...by all means become a city if that is the only outlet for hot air and yeastly foam that seems to hover as an atmosphere above the corporate limits of the Village of Onaway, and emanate from the mouths of most of her puffed up citizens..."

Chandler angered Larke by ignoring his attacks. He proceeded to complete Onaway's incorporation as a city in 1903 and, in 1908, to build a county courthouse in Onaway that he offered without cost to the Presque Isle County Board of Commissioners. The courthouse, a grand vernacular conglomeration of Italian Villa, Romanesque Revival, and Renaissance Revival styles, was the most substantial public building in the county. No doubt the commissioners were tempted, but a close vote by the residents of Presque Isle County halted Chandler's plans and maintained the county seat in Rogers City. Chandler did not yield to Larke with this first failure, however. He rallied support for a plan to secede from Presque Isle and establish a new county unit from the western half of Presque Isle County and the eastern half of Cheboygan County. Onaway, of course, would be the county seat and would provide the newly established area with a future of strong leadership and economic growth. Unfortunately, these plans also were quashed when the Michigan legislature declared the plan illegal.

The second failure seemed to destroy Merritt Chandler's dreams for his city's political preeminence in Presque Isle County. In 1910, he deeded the courthouse to the city for use as a municipal-government building. He withdrew from public life to spend more time with his wife, Rachel, and their three adopted children and to concentrate on his business and agricultural pursuits.

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PAGE

2

Donia, Robert. "From Swampland to City: The Settlement of Onaway." Michigan History. Lansing, Michigan: Michigan Historical Commission, Vol. LIII, Winter, 1969.

Dunbar, Willis F. Michigan: A History of the Wolverine State. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965.

"Editorial." The Presque Isle County Advance. Rogers City, Michigan: February 26, 1903.

Powers, Perry F. History of Northern Michigan and Its People. Chicago, Illinois: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1912.

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
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CONTINUATION SHEET

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State Street on the south, and Poplar Street on the west.

LEGAL PROPERTY DESCRIPTION:

Chandler's First Addition to the City of Onaway, including Block 7, Lots 9 through 18 and Lots 19 through 28; and Block 8, Lots 9 through 18.

JUSTIFICATION:

These boundaries were selected because they include within them the entire property owned by the City of Onaway for the Courthouse.

Property Presque Isle County Courthouse

State Mi - Presque Isle Working Number 1-29-80 388

**TECHNICAL**

Photos 3  
Maps 1

**CONTROL**

**HISTORIAN**

2 1/2-story, poured concrete block Courthouse built in 1908 in eclectic style, with Italian villa style predominating. Architecturally signif. as example of vernacular architecture ~~with~~ which embodies ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIAN

Accept.  
Site  
4-2-80

interpretation + blending of later 19th c. architectural tastes. Also an example of a construction type common in region of upper Lower Peninsula. Historically signif. for association w/ M. Chandler ARCHEOLOGIST

whose civic role was critical to development of Presque Isle County settlement of town of Onaway.

**OTHER**

**HAER**

Inventory \_\_\_\_\_  
Review \_\_\_\_\_

**REVIEW UNIT CHIEF**

**BRANCH CHIEF**

**KEEPER**

National Register Write-up \_\_\_\_\_  
Federal Register Entry 2.3.81

Send-back \_\_\_\_\_  
Re-submit \_\_\_\_\_

Entered APR 3 1980



- 1) Presque Isle County  
Courthouse in Onaway  
State Street at Maple
- 2) Onaway, Michigan
- 3) Janet L. Kreger
- 4) May 1, 1978
- 5) Michigan History Division
- 6) Facing North
- 7) PHOTOGRAPH #1 of 3

APR

FRONT (SOUTH) FACADE

JAN 29 1980

*Presque Isle Co.*



- 1) Presque Isle County  
Courthouse in Onaway  
State Street at Maple
- 2) Onaway, Michigan
- 3) Janet L. Kreger
- 4) May 1, 1978
- 5) Michigan History Division
- 6) Facing South East
- 7) PHOTOGRAPH #2 *of 3*

SIDE (WEST) AND BACK  
(NORTH) FACADES

**JAN 29 1980**

*Presque Isle Co.*



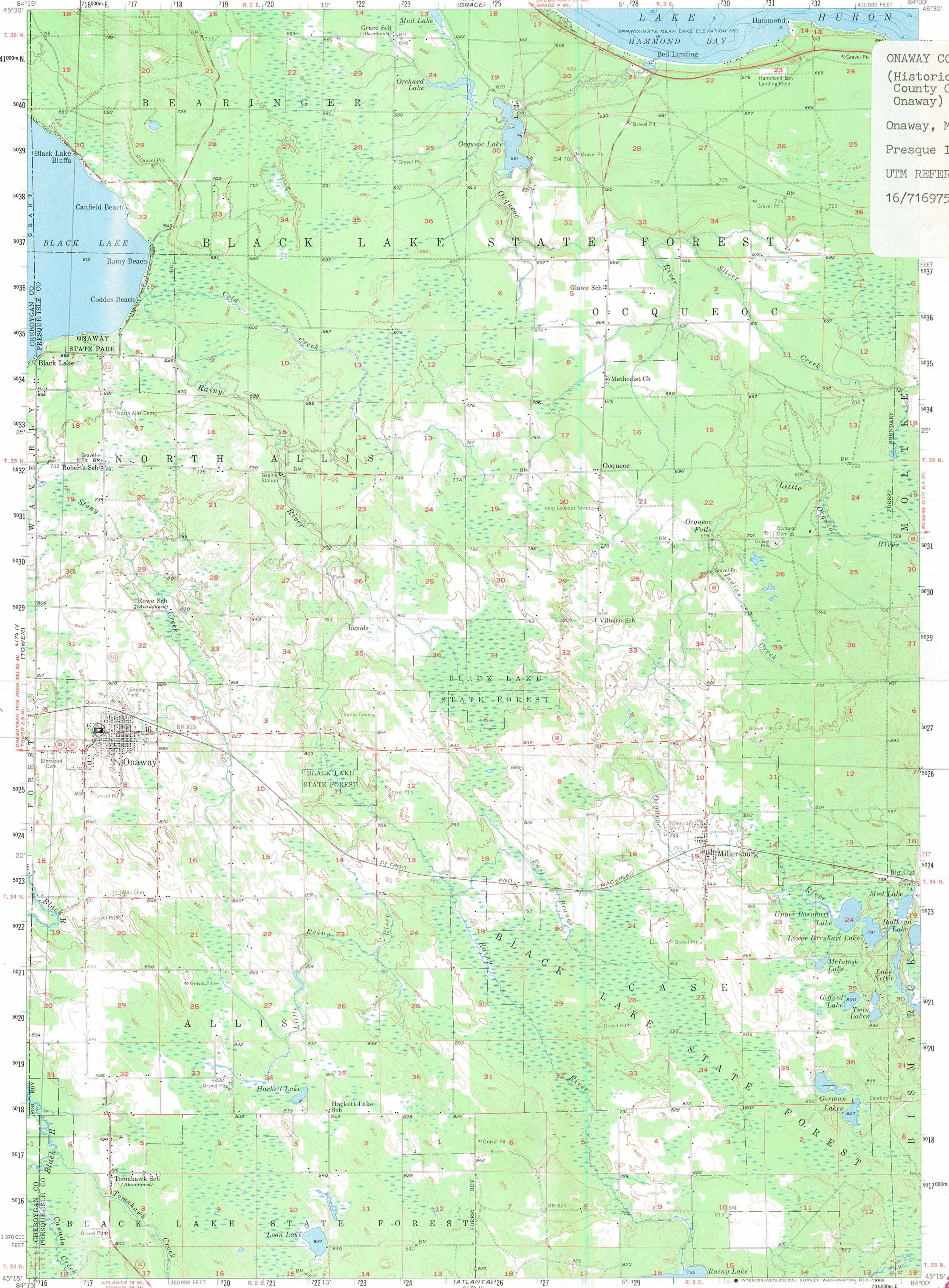
- 1) Presque Isle County  
Courthouse in Onaway  
State Street at Maple
- 2) Onaway, Michigan
- 3) Janet L. Kreger
- 4) May 1, 1978
- 5) Michigan History Division
- 6) Facing South West
- 7) PHOTOGRAPH #3 *of 3*

SIDE (EAST) AND BACK  
NORTH FACADES

JAN 29 1980

APR 3 1980

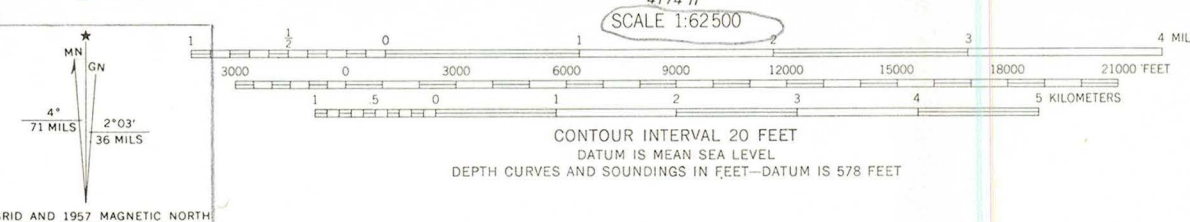
*Presque Isle Co.*



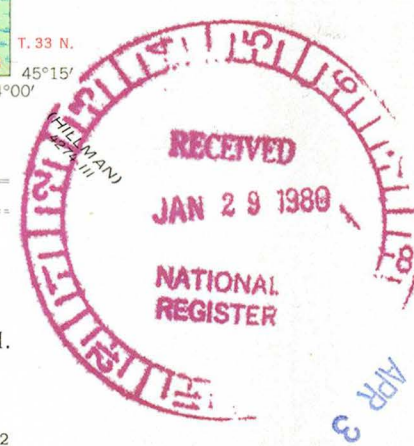
ONAWAY COUNTY COURTHOUSE  
(Historic: Presque Isle County Courthouse in Onaway)  
Onaway, Michigan  
Presque Isle County  
UTM REFERENCE:  
16/716975/5026225

ZONE: 16  
EASTING:  
716000 m  
+ 975 m  
716975 m  
NORTHING:  
5026000 m  
+ 225 m  
5026225 m

Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey  
Control by USGS and USC&GS  
Topography from aerial photographs by Kelsch plotter  
Aerial photographs taken 1953-1956. Field check 1957  
Hydrography compiled from U. S. Lake Survey chart 60 (1955)  
Polyconic projection. 1927 North American datum  
10,000-foot grid based on Michigan coordinate system, east zone  
1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks,  
zone 16, shown in blue



ROAD CLASSIFICATION  
Heavy-duty — Light-duty  
Medium-duty — Unimproved dirt  
U.S. Route — State Route



THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS  
FOR SALE BY U. S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, WASHINGTON, D. C. 20242  
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

ONAWAY, MICH.  
N4515-W8400/15  
1957  
AMS 4174 1-SERIES V762

ENTRIES IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

STATE MICHIGAN

Date Entered APR 3 1980

Name

Location

Presque Isle County Courthouse

Onaway  
Presque Isle County

Lieblein House

Hancock  
Houghton County

Longyear Hall of Pedagogy-Northern Michigan  
University

Marquette  
Marquette County

Also Notified

Honorable Carl Levin

Honorable Donald W. Riegler, Jr.  
Honorable Robert W. Davis

State Historic Preservation Officer  
Dr. Martha Bigelow  
Director  
Michigan History Division  
Department of State  
Lansing, Michigan 48918

NR Byers/bjr 4/9/80

For further information, please call the National Register at (202)343-6401.