

United State Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable". For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

### 1. Name of Property

historic name Notre Dame Academy and Convent

other names/site number NeHBS# DO09:0361-004

### 2. Location

street & number 3501 State Street not for publication

city or town Omaha vicinity

state Nebraska code NE county Douglas code 055 zip code 68112

### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this  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  meets  does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. (If See continuation sheet for additional comments.)



Signature of certifying official

1/26/98  
Date

Director, Nebraska State Historical Society  
State or Federal agency and bureau

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

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

### 4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register. \_\_\_\_\_

See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the National Register. \_\_\_\_\_

See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the National Register. \_\_\_\_\_

removed from the National Register. \_\_\_\_\_

other, (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

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**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

**Category of Property**  
(Check only one box)

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

- private
- public-local
- public-state
- public-Federal

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1 _____	_____	buildings
_____	_____	sites
_____	_____	structures
_____	_____	objects
1 _____	_____	Total

**Name of related multiple property listing**  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

N/A \_\_\_\_\_

0 \_\_\_\_\_

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instruction)

Religion: church school, church related residence, religious facility

Religion: religious facility, church-related residence

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE VICTORIAN: Second Renaissance Revival

foundation concrete

walls brick

roof clay tile

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 listing.)

- 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.
- 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 is 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 a 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.

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

- Architecture \_\_\_\_\_
- Ethnic Heritage \_\_\_\_\_
- Education \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1926-1950  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

1926, 1936, 1950  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A \_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

Lahr, Matthew; Stangel, Carl  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**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 for Additional Data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
  - Other State agency
  - Federal agency
  - Local government
  - University
  - Other
- Name of repository:  
Omaha City Planning, Notre Dame Academy

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**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of Property approximately 1

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

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
1.	15	251605	4579927	3.			
2.				4.			

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 Melissa Dirr  
organization Omaha City Planning date December 1997  
street & number 1819 Farnam telephone (402) 444-5210  
city or town Omaha state NE zip code 68183

**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**

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

**Property Owner**

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name/title Notre Dame Academy and Convent  
street & number 3501 State St. telephone (402) 455-2994  
city or town Omaha state NE zip code 68112

**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 the 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 Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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### DESCRIPTION

Residing on one of the highest points in the Florence neighborhood in northern Omaha, Nebraska, Notre Dame Academy, at 3501 State Street is a three-story concrete block blonde brick veneer building designed in the Late Italian Renaissance Revival style. Omaha architects Matthew Lahr and Carl Stangel designed the E-shaped convent and school in 1924 with construction occurring in four stages ranging from 1926 to 1965. Although the building was constructed in differing phases the designs came from the original architect plans, except for a 1965 rear addition.

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Notre Dame Academy is a three story building with full basement, constructed in the late Italian Renaissance Revival style. Designed by Omaha architects Matthew Lahr and Carl Stangel, the "E" shaped building was erected in three phases, from 1926 to 1950, based on the original architects design. Rising from a concrete block raised foundation a poured concrete cap acts as a beltcourse running the circumference of the building above the basement windows. Another beltcourse immediately below the third story windows have heavy dentil molding. Cantilevers support the slightly overhanging eave of the low pitched hipped roof line. The main (north) facade has three projecting bays, one in the center and one at each end. The central projecting portico is capped by a full pediment with broken raking cornice ornamented with heavy dentil molding and a sculptural image of Mary in the tympanum. A cross rises from the apex of the pediment. Large second story arched windows have bas relief scroll work between second and third story resulting in these windows reading as one unit. A port cochere supported by paired Corinthian type columns shelters the main double doors and circular driveway underneath. The words "Notre Dame" appear in the cornice of the port cochere. Fenestration is evenly spaced with arched windows on main level and rectangular windows on second and third floors. A final wing located behind the northwest corner of the building was added in 1965 in period design. This ell does not effect the integrity of the building as it is recessed from the back corner of the building and is not visible from any of the main facades or roadway.

Elements of the Late Italian Renaissance Revival, in use from roughly 1890s-1920s, appear in Lahr and Stangel's design. This style often changes window type and shape with each floor, as exemplified by the arched windows on the first story and the straight-headed windows on the second floor in this building. It also utilizes an enlarged beltcourse to delineate the smaller third story. Other elements of the Italian Renaissance Revival style include a segmented fan light, arched and square lintels with voussoirs and keystones, and a portico with Corinthian capitals.

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The interior is utilitarian in nature. The far eastern wing served as the first classroom and dormitory space for the nuns and the students. The addition of the central bay added more class space, and the 1950's addition provided the students and nuns their own chapel so they would not have to make the walk up and down the steep hill for their daily services. In 1965 the last addition to the building was completed during the height of enrollment for the school. This leg housed the nuns away from the school children and was constructed in modern design; however is not visible from the main facade so does not detract from the historic integrity of the building. One of the defining characteristics of the building is the clay tile roof which the Sisters insisted on because it reminded them of buildings in their native Czechoslovakia.

### Statement of Significance

Notre Dame Academy is located in the Florence neighborhood in northern Omaha and is locally significant under criterion A for its ethnic association with the Czech population in Nebraska as the only school and convent of the Czechoslovakian School Sisters of Notre Dame in the United States. The order originated in Czechoslovakia and came to America to educate local citizens in the Czech language and culture. It is also significant under criterion C as a local example of an architect designed building in the late Italian Renaissance Revival style. Designed by Omaha architects Matthew Lahr and Carl Stangel in 1924, the building was constructed in phases over the next 26 years, all complying with the original design. The building today houses the Sisters of Notre Dame and is undergoing renovation for low income senior housing.

Although criterion consideration A applies, as the property is owned by a religious institution and used for religious purposes, it is significant for its contribution to the Czech ethnic heritage in Omaha. It is also significant for its architectural distinction as an example of late Italian Renaissance Revival style. Therefore, it's areas of significance are outside that of its religious function and is eligible for the National Register for the above mentioned areas.

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### BACKGROUND

Facing State Street in the Florence community of northeastern Omaha, this building dominates one of the highest points in the area. Florence was originally settled during the Mormon winter encampment of 1846-47. After the Mormons

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departed for the Great Salt Lake in Utah, the city was occupied by local settlers and was officially platted in 1854, then incorporated as a city in 1856. At the time 270 blocks were platted for the city including exclusive space for a new bank to facilitate metropolitan proceedings (bank listed NRHP, 1969). The Florence area provided an ideal location for settlement because of its proximity to the Missouri River and the grid system already laid out and abandoned by the Mormons. The city was named after Florence Kilbourn the niece of one of the founders, James Mitchell. Florence continued to grow through the late teens when it was annexed into the city of Omaha.

The Czech Sisters of Notre Dame were brought to Omaha to provide Czech culture and language. Liberal Czechs or Freethinkers, who taught Czech language and culture through evening and weekend classes had already settled in Omaha. However, the Catholic church did not consider this to be adequate education for the Czech population. Existing Catholic Schools included some Czech language and culture in their curriculum, but the church leaders wanted Czech Catholic teachers for the Czech parishioners because there was not enough emphasis on culture, language, and religion. So, in 1908 the Sisters of Notre Dame in Czechoslovakia were invited to this country by the Most Reverend Thomas Bonacum, Bishop of Lincoln, Nebraska, and Reverend Charles Bleha of St. Louis, Missouri on behalf of their local Czech populations. Five Sisters arrived in Fenton, Missouri in 1910 and began teaching the Czech language, culture, and religion at the Hessoun Orphanage in Missouri. The order grew with more Czechoslovakian sisters arriving and Czech-American women joining the order, and by 1914 they were teaching in Nebraska and were ready to establish their own convent and mother house. They purchased a house in Schuyler, Nebraska, for the purpose of establishing their mother house, but Rome refused to move their novitiate from their original American location in Fenton, MO. However, they received an invitation from the Right Reverend Archbishop Jeremiah J. Harty, D.D. to establish their novitiate in Omaha. The sisters bought Seven Oaks Farm from Father Edward J. Flanagan of Boys Town who thought he might establish his organization in the same location until he realized the site was too small to accommodate his needs. The Sisters moved into an existing farmhouse in 1920.

The Sisters became entrenched and soon required a new building to accommodate their growing membership, a high school, and boarders. Omaha architects Matthew Lahr and Carl Stangel were retained and began designing the E-shaped building in 1924. The Sisters could only afford to build one-third of the building, so construction began on the north east wing by R.L. Hyde contractors in 1925. This building housed the high school which opened in 1926 with twenty-six students, most of whom were Czech girls from Wisconsin, Kansas, Iowa, and Nebraska, as well as dormitory and housing for the Sisters. In 1936, the Sisters approved a \$50,000 addition and alterations to the existing building so they could add a girls elementary school, provide boarding for that school during the week, and accommodate the

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increase in high school enrollment. In 1950 the chapel and the west wing of the main facade were completed and the last building phase concluded in 1965 with an additional wing to the south (back) of the west wing. These building phases were all based on the original architects plan from 1924.

### ETHNIC ASSOCIATION

The Notre Dame Academy building is the only school and convent of the Czechoslovakian School Sisters of Notre Dame in the United States. Five Sisters arrived in this country in 1910 to help "the welfare and the religious life of the Bohemians in this part of Nebraska." Already present in Nebraska were a group of Czechs called the Freethinkers who educated their young in their native culture and language outside of the school day. The established religious leadership did not feel the children were being educated sufficiently in their language and culture, so Reverend Thomas Bonacum, Bishop of Lincoln, Nebraska and Reverend Charles Bleha of St. Louis, Missouri called on the Notre Dame Sisters to provide a daily presence in children's educational lives. The sisters arrived in 1910 and located in Fenton, Missouri where they operated Hessoun Orphanage until they were invited later in the same year by Reverend John Stephen Broz a noted Bohemian poet and historian to teach at St. Wenceslaus School in Dodge, Nebraska (just north and west of Omaha). After a failed attempt to establish their novitiate in Schuyler, Nebraska where they purchased a house at the suggestion of Father Broz, they moved to Omaha. The Sisters came to Omaha in 1917 where they established their novitiate, at the invitation of the Right Reverend Archbishop Jeremiah J. Harty, D.D..

To further attract students, the sisters advertised in Czech language newspapers and Catholic newsletters. The majority of girls attending the school were from Czech families and the academy helped to fulfill the needs of the Czech community in the Midwest. The Sisters mission in Omaha was to fulfill the needs of the daughters of Czech immigrants to retain their language, culture, and heritage. They accomplished this by providing Czech language classes, prayer services and extra-curricular clubs. Aside from religion and basic academics, the academy offered a wide variety of classes including business and commerce, fine arts, home economics, and physical education. Beyond retaining the Czech culture, the Sisters purpose was to educate the young women in a trade in order to allow them to earn a living or provide themselves with a dowry. Czech language, culture, and custom were required study until 1936, when only prayer services were conducted in Czechoslovakian. The required courses were dropped as the population of the school became more diverse with Germans, Irish, and other ethnic groups attending, although prayer services continued until 1948, and a Czech retreat for women from 1937-1965. Language classes and the Czech club (established in 1932 and active until 1943) were open to all nationalities.



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The school remained active and grew until 1965 when it reached its peak. After 1965, its population began to drop and the Sisters quit boarding. The school closed in 1974, but the Sisters continue to use the building as their convent. Although the Academy of the School Sisters of Notre Dame is no longer active as a school, its impact on the development of the Czechoslovakian culture and language in Omaha is profound. The Academy was the only school in Omaha that provided a Czechoslovakian education to students and it was the only convent that provided Czech speaking sisters to other parishes to help teach school. The preservation of the Czech culture, language, and religion was directly felt in the community especially during the time when the language was taught at the school (1925-1936).

### ARCHITECTURE

Notre Dame Academy was built in the late Italian Renaissance Revival style as determined by the architects Matthew Lahr and Carl Stangel. The arched windows, astylar walls, and detailed cornice typify the style, as it was initially characterized by the use of classical orders, round arches, and symmetrical composition. Also significant to the manifestation of the style is the clay tile roof. The sisters of Notre Dame insisted upon the clay tile roof because it so reminded them of the architecture in their home country. It is unusual in this part of the country to witness a physical manifestation of ethnic building practices. The roof is a defining characteristic of the building.

The symmetrical facade with its dropped gable pediment and Corinthian order columns on the portico are reminiscent of the features that define the Renaissance Revival. Overall the building retains a high degree of historic integrity and remains a good example of its architectural style. Although the entirety of the architect's plan was not immediately implemented, the subsequent construction followed those plans to the letter revealing a significant evolution that represented the frugal nature of the building's occupants. It remains a landmark for the Florence community.

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### BIBLIOGRAPHY

City of Omaha survey files and materials.

Convent de Notre Dame Chronicle. Transl. by Sister Dolores Pavlik, 1958 (courtesy of the Sisters of Notre Dame, Omaha, NE)

Kucera, Vladimir, and Alfred Novacek, eds. Czechs and Nebraska. Ord, NE Quiz Graphic Arts, Inc., 1967

Rolenc, Sister Anita de N.D. "The History of Notre Dame Academy, Omaha, Nebraska." MA thesis, University of Nebraska at Omaha, 1975.

Whiffen, Marcus. American Architecture Since 1780. MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 1969.

Wakeley, Arthur C. Omaha: The Gate City. S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, Chicago, 1917.

### VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The boundary of the Notre Dame Academy is defined through its legal definition as lot 1, Notre Dame Sisters Replat II. This is the official boundary of the building.

### BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The legal boundary is the parcel of land that has historically been associated with the building.



Photo 1 of 2—North façade looking south. Photo by Kent Behrens, 1994, Omaha City Planning Department.



Photo 1 of 2—North façade looking southeast. Photo by Kent Behrens, 1994, Omaha City Planning Department.