

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

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

1. Name

historic Bemis Omaha Bag Company Building

and/or common Bemis Bag Building

2. Location

street & number 614-624 South 11th Street and 1102-1118 Jones Street na not for publication

city, town Omaha na vicinity of

state Nebraska code 031 county Douglas code 055

3. Classification

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

4. Owner of Property

name Samuel D. Mercer

street & number c/o Mercer Management Co., 1066 Howard Street

city, town Omaha na vicinity of state Nebraska 68102

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Register of Deeds, Omaha/Douglas Civic Center

street & number 1819 Farnam Street

city, town Omaha state Nebraska

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Historic Omaha Bldg. survey has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date On-going federal state county local

depository for survey records Landmarks Heritage Preservation Commission,
Omaha City Planning Dept.

city, town Omaha state Nebraska

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		date <u>na</u>

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Bemis Omaha Bag Company Building is one of Omaha's prominent 19th century factory and warehouse buildings. Occupying nearly half of a city block and standing five stories tall, it is an imposing part of the city's 19th century warehouse area. The building was constructed in three parts between 1887 and 1902. It was occupied by the Bemis Company until 1978, and its integrity is good.

Original Building

Designed by the prominent Omaha architectural firm of Mendelssohn and Lawrie and constructed in 1887 by Harte and Lindsay, the original Bemis Omaha Bag Company Building occupies the northern half of two lots on the northwest corner of Eleventh and Jones Streets. This five-story structure with a frontage of 66 feet on Eleventh Street and 120 feet along the alley stood seventy feet above the ground and cost about \$40,000 to build.

The red brick structure has exterior walls of graduated solid masonry construction resting on rough stone piers at the first floor and basement levels. The original building has five stories plus raised basement with a three-bay composition and three windows per bay. On first floor, the sills and lintels are cast-iron and the original opening has been filled in with brick and industrial sash. The northern bay has a new front entry. The windows on the second through fourth floors are grouped in threes with stone sills and multi-pane transoms. The original pane arrangement is somewhat unclear; historic photographs are needed for an exact description. The fourth floor windows have a four-over-two arrangement for the center window and two-over-two for the flanking windows; this may be the original arrangement, for other floors have more missing panes. Stone stringcourses separate the first and fifth floors. The center bay windows have cast-iron support elements and lintels. The fifth floor windows are segmentally-arched with five-over-two panes. The regularly-spaced alley windows have two-over-two panes. The interior structure is a hybrid of light joist and heavy timber (mill) construction with two tiers of timber post on each floor producing approximately 12' x 22' bays. Vertical circulation was provided by two centrally located service elevators and two open stairways located on the east and south sides of the building.

A bag and sack factory and wholesale warehouse space, the building was designed for its original uses by floors: basement--storage; first--bag making and bailing; second--main entrance via a pedestrian bridge from the Eleventh Street viaduct, business office, and print shop; third--cutting and sewing; fourth--overall factory, stove; fifth--tin shop.

First Addition

Owing to insufficient space and inadequate plant organization, an adjacent lot (lot 6) was purchased, and a three-story plus raised basement, red brick building was constructed in 1898 on the site. The designer of this addition was Lockwood, Greene & Company, a Boston engineering firm. Standing forty

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feet above the ground and having a frontage of 66 feet along Jones Street, the structure utilized the proportions and massing of the 1887 factory. The major departure from the detailing found in the original building was the replacement of the segmental-headed window opening with a limestone lintel, producing white horizontal bands across the facade. In the addition's interior, wood floors and joists were supported by one row of steel pipe columns on a 12' x 26' grid and steel beams; an elevator located at the intersection of the two structures provided service to all levels. The large window openings have eight-over-eight panes with four-pane transoms. A prominent stringcourse at sill level divides the first two floors from the third. The top floor has round-arched windows. The only major exterior alteration on the front facade is the addition of a large loading door on the west corner of the top floor.

Upon completion, the Bemis Company moved their sewing and cutting operations to the second floor of the addition and established a lunch room and gymnasium on the third floor. The third, fourth, and fifth floors of the original structure were then leased to King and Smead, manufacturers of shirts, overalls, and pants.

Second Addition

In May of 1902, the Bemis Company expanded again and erected a five-story plus raised basement brick structure, identical in detailing to the first addition, on the southern half of the two original lots, producing a frontage of 132 feet along Eleventh Street and 198 feet along Jones Street. This final addition, designed by C. A. Tripp and erected at a cost of \$36,000, has standard heavy timber (mill) construction with two rows of timber posts on a slightly smaller 10' x 20' bay. All the windows are paired with a six-over-six arrangement and three-pane transoms on the first three floors. Prominent white stone lintels and sills decorate the simple facade with contrasting color. A metal fire escape is located at the southeast corner of the building. The top floor window openings are round-arched, as they are on the original building and the first addition. A stone stringcourse with brick dentils at sill level of the third floor is placed on both primary facades. The main entry was originally off the viaduct.

This complex, containing 140,000 square feet, was occupied by the Bemis Omaha Bag Company until March 1978, when the operations were moved to a new location. The building was designated a local landmark by the City of Omaha in 1978. The building has not changed since the enclosed photographs were taken. The only change to its surroundings has been the removal of the viaduct on 11th Street.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below						
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input 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 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 type="checkbox"/> social/			
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation			
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)			

Specific dates 1887-1978 (1887, 1897, **Builder/Architect** (see #7)
1902)

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Bemis Omaha Bag Company Building is architecturally significant to Omaha as a prominent and representative example of a late 19th-century factory and warehouse building. The Bemis company was a national leader in the manufacturing and sale of bags and sacks for flour, grain, and other commodities. The Omaha branch was the company's third factory which opened in 1887 with the completion of this building.

Judson Moss Bemis (1833-1921) established his first bag factory in St. Louis in 1858, producing cotton bags for flour. At the time wooden barrels were the more common container for flour, and there were few bag manufacturers in the country. Over the next several decades, wooden barrels became increasingly expensive, and bags and sacks became more popular, as they were cheaper and easier to handle.¹ The milling industry changed in the 1880's to larger, more centralized mills after the introduction of the chilled steel roll for grinding wheat.² Minneapolis was at the forefront of this development, and Bemis opened his first branch factory there in 1882. Bemis had previously moved the firm's headquarters to Boston where he personally handled financial matters and the purchase of raw materials for the factories (cotton, burlap, jute, etc.) from markets in the U.S., India, and Scotland.

The second branch factory was established in Omaha in 1887.³ Although Omaha was not a milling center, the city did possess the railway connections and favorable rates for economical and prompt distribution of goods to the west. It was also built to counter a competitor's factory in Kansas City.⁴ The Omaha branch originally manufactured burlap and cotton bags and dealt in grain bags and twine. The firm initially employed sixty persons in the manufacturing and printing of flour and other sacks.⁵ The success of the Omaha branch can be seen in the sizeable increase in its physical plant, with two large additions built between 1898 and 1902. "By the end of the nineteenth century the Bemis Company, with its six factories located at strategic points, was the largest concern of its kind in the world."⁶ The company continued to grow in the early 20th century with new factories, overseas investments, and the establishment of a factory and company town at Bemis, Tennessee. The Bemis Company occupied the Omaha branch buildings until 1978 when it moved to new quarters.

Architecturally, the Bemis Bag Building is a representative and substantial product of the factory/warehouse building type as developed in Chicago, New York, and other large cities in the late 19th century. The utilitarian nature of the building and the fact that non-company people would rarely visit the building resulted in a design with minimal ornamentation. Marcus Whiffen designates these buildings as part of the Commercial Style and describes them as "five to sixteen stories with straight fronts, or slight central projections at most, flat roofs, and level skylines. The character of their facades derives from the

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fenestration, to which any ornament--often there is none--is altogether subordinate. The pattern is often entirely regular..."⁷ The Bemis building reflects each of these characteristics, including the slight central projection on the original three-bay building. The fenestration is highly important to the character of the facades, particularly in the 1902 second addition where the contrasting white stone lintels and sills provide the major decoration, color, and rhythm. The simple cornice with little or no decorative detail is common. The piers and groupings of windows are the primary organizing feature of the original building's facade. This arrangement is typical for this building type as described by Russell Sturgis in warehouse buildings of the same period.⁸

Omaha had a number of factory and warehouse buildings constructed in the 1880's through the early 20th century as the Union Pacific railway system facilitated the distribution of goods to the Pacific coast.⁹ Some buildings of this type are discussed in the "Old Market" Historic District (NRHP, 1979). Factory/warehouse buildings of this height (five stories) and scale are distinctive within the "Old Market" and the adjacent warehouse area. The Bemis Bag Building is representative of this type in Omaha, where some such buildings have been demolished or altered. Although this building is judged within the context of Omaha, it should be noted that Omaha is the only city in the state with such a large distribution industry which could create a warehouse district with buildings of this height and scale. In this sense, the Bemis building and other significant ones of its type have state-wide significance.

Different firms designed each of the parts of the building. Mendelssohn and Lawrie, a prominent Omaha firm, designed the original building; Lockwood, Greene, and Company, a Boston engineering firm, designed the first addition; and C. A. Tripp, the 1902 addition. Different designers probably account for the different structural systems in each section. C. A. Tripp borrowed some details from the 1898 addition, especially the prominent stone lintels and sills, so that two of the sections present a superficially similar appearance. Nothing is known about C. A. Tripp or Lockwood, Greene and Company.

Mendelssohn and Lawrie were prominent local architects who came to Omaha in the 1880's and practiced there for many years. The firm existed under this name only for the year of 1887 and was followed by Mendelssoh, Fisher and Lawrie when a previous partner returned. Buildings listed on the National Register, designed by these architects under various partnerships are the Christian Specht Building (1884), Omaha; the Burlington Headquarters (1879), Omaha; Old University Library, Lincoln (1891-95), and the Sacred Heart Grade School and Lyceum (1927), Omaha.

Louis Mendelssohn, born in Berlin, Germany in 1842, studied in New York City and practiced architecture for nine years in Detroit, Michigan prior to his arrival in Omaha in February, 1880. Here he engaged in business for a period of five years with A. R. Dufrene. After Dufrene left the firm, Mendelssohn associated with George L. Fisher for two additional years. He remained in various partnerships in Omaha until the mid-1890's. Harry Lawrie arrived in Chicago in 1883 after nine

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years professional experience in Glasgow and Edinburg, Scotland, he entered the office of Burnham and Root, the leading architects of the city. During his last two years in Chicago he presided over the Chicago Architectural Sketch Club. In 1887 he moved to Omaha to join as a partner with Louis Mendelssohn. After 1913 he practiced alone until his death in 1935.

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1. William C. Edgar, Judson Moss Bemis, Pioneer (Minneapolis: The Bellman Co., 1926), p. 259.
 2. Ibid., p. 251.
 3. Arthur C. Wakeley, Omaha: The Gate City and Douglas County, Nebraska (Chicago: S. J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1917), p. 227, and James W. Savage and John T. Bell, History of the City of Omaha, Nebraska (Chicago: Munsell & Co., 1891), p. 503.
 4. Edgar, p. 256.
 5. Omaha Bee Annual Review, January 1, 1890.
 6. Edgar, p. 258.
 7. Marcus Whiffen, American Architecture Since 1780 (Cambridge, Mass.: The M.I.T. Press, 1969), p. 183.
 8. Russell Sturgis, "The Warehouse and Factory in Architecture," The Architectural Record XV:1 (Jan. 1904), p. 7-9.
 9. For further discussion of Omaha's distribution development, see Penelope Chatfield Sodhi, "The 'Old Market': Omaha's Wholesale Jobbing Development, 1880-1895," Heritage of the Great Plains XV:4 (Fall 1982), pp. 1-10.

9. Major Bibliographical References

see continuation sheet.

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property less than one

Quadrangle name Omaha North, NE-IOWA

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A

1	5	2	5	4	4	2	0	4	5	7	0	8	4	0
Zone			Easting				Northing							

B

Zone			Easting				Northing							

C

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D

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Verbal boundary description and justification

Lots 6, 7, and 8, block 175, Original City of Omaha, Douglas County, Nebraska, the historic boundaries of the property.

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

state na code county code

state na code county code

11. Form Prepared By

Penny Chatfield Sodhi, Preservation Historian (Editor)

name/title Robert Peters, City Planner

organization Nebraska State Historical Society
Omaha City Planning Department

date September 1984
August 1978

street & number 1500 R Street
1819 Farnam Street
Lincoln

telephone 402/471-4767
402/444-5208

city or town Omaha

state Nebraska

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 National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature *Murray D. Kutt* 11/19/84

title Director, Nebraska State Historical Society date

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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Northeast aspect. Photo by Joni Gilkerson, 1984, NSHS (8407/22:17)



Southeast aspect. Photo by Joni Gilkerson, 1984, NSHS (8407/22:14)



View looking northwest. Photo by P. Chatfield, 1978, NSHS (7804/4:17)



East aspect. Photo by Joni Gilkerson, 1984, NSHS (8407/22:16)