

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Columbian School

other names/site number D009:0317-045

2. Location

street & number 3819 Jones Street

N/A not for publication

city, town Omaha

N/A vicinity

state Nebraska code NE county Douglas code 055 zip code 68105

3. Classification

Ownership of Property

- ☒ private
☐ public-local
☐ public-State
☐ public-Federal

Category of Property

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

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> sites
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> objects
<u>2</u>	<u>0</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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. ☐ See continuation sheet.

Signature of certifying official *James A. Hanson*

Date *October 11, 1990*

State or Federal agency and bureau _____

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. ☐ See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official _____

Date _____

State or Federal agency and bureau _____

5. 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 the Keeper _____

Date of Action _____

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

EDUCATION/School

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)
work in progress

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

Richardsonian Romanesque

foundation Stone

walls Brick

roof Asphalt

other Stone/sandstone

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

Columbian School is a two-story grammar school building constructed in 1892. It exemplifies the style of building designed in the late 19th-century by the prominent American architect H.H. Richardson, and more commonly, the many architects influenced by Richardson's work. An iron fence around portions of the building's perimeter contributes to the structure's significance. The building remains largely unaltered; overall, the structure has retained a high degree of historic and architectural integrity. A certified historic rehabilitation adapting the property for use as apartments is currently underway.

Columbian School, located on a .7 acre site at the corner of 38th Avenue and Jones Street, Omaha, was constructed in 1892 as a ten-room grammar school. The two-story over raised basement rectangular structure, 60' X 100', is covered by a hipped roof which was probably originally slate but is now shingled. A rectangular one-story brick addition was constructed to the west of the building in 1915.

End pavilions divide the facade of the principal building into three parts. The slightly recessed central bay is marked by three massive round arches and a gabled parapet.

The building's two main entrances each open to stairways providing vertical circulation to classrooms on the first and second floors. Although slightly modified, the original floor plan configuration is still evident. The first and second floors were designed alike, each with five classrooms served by a wide central hall. The area between the stairwells was office space. Latenser utilized this basic plan for several other schools, including Center (NRHP, 1985) and Saunders (NRHP, 1986).

Latenser's system of fenestration at Columbian is also similar to that employed for other schools. In the four corner classrooms on both floors, one outside wall expanse contains four double-hung windows while the other outside wall has two. In elevation, this configuration results in groups of two and four windows which alternately shift around the facade of the building corresponding to the corner classrooms. The orientation of blackboards combined with the light level factor in the classrooms might suggest a rationale for this pattern of window placement. Whatever the architect's purpose, this arrangement breaks the symmetry of the elevations and is particularly apparent on the otherwise balanced front facade, where the pavilions--evenly matched in scale and detail--contain unequal numbers of windows.

Technically, the building utilizes a system of interior and exterior load-bearing solid masonry walls. Wood joists span between bearing walls to structure floors covered by 2" wide maple strip flooring. A wood framing system is also employed to support the roof.

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National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 1

Description Continued:

A decorative iron fence, apparently constructed at the same time as the school or shortly thereafter, is situated on top of a perimeter wall that runs along the north (front) and west property lines. A portion of the fence is also located at the rear of the building. The fence is considered a contributing structure in this nomination.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☒ locally

Applicable National Register Criteria ☐ A ☐ B ☒ C ☐ D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) ☐ A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D ☐ E ☐ F ☐ G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Period of Significance

1892

Significant Dates

1892

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Latenser, John Sr.

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

Significant under criterion C, Columbian School is an excellent example of the Richardsonian Romanesque style of architecture, a style employed for many of the most important civic and commercial buildings constructed in Omaha during its first boom period. Grand-scale Romanesque Revival style buildings--patterned after those of H.H. Richardson and his followers--symbolized Omaha's transformation from frontier village to city in the late 1880's and early 1890's. Built in 1892, Columbian is a rare extant representative of the style in Omaha. It is also significant as the work of a master architect John Latenser, Sr., notable for his designs for schools as well as many of the City's largest and best known early twentieth-century structures. While usually associated with classical and renaissance style buildings, Latenser experimented with many architectural styles. Built relatively early in his career, Columbian School is a rare example of Latenser's use of the Richardsonian Romanesque style.

Omaha experienced its first major boom period in the late 19th-century. Wholesaling, manufacturing, and general business investments increased dramatically as did population, which more than tripled from 1880 to 1890. The small frame buildings that characterized Omaha as a frontier town were being replaced by more substantial and imposing buildings of brick and stone. It was a time when many young, emerging midwestern towns were in competition with one another as they attempted to establish themselves as regional centers, and architecture--particularly large-scale civic and commercial architecture--was an important gauge of a city's success.

It was within the relatively short time span between 1887 and 1893 that most of Omaha's first monumental architecture was built or begun, and many of the buildings which stand out as the most important were influenced by the work of H.H. Richardson and his imitators. The Bee Publishing Company Building (1887-88), the Minne Lusa Pumping Station (1888-89), City Hall (1889-94), Saint Joseph Hospital (1890), and the Post Office (1892-1906), were all major examples of Richardsonian Romanesque. None of these are extant today.

Columbian School, designed by prominent Omaha architect John Latenser, Sr., is one of the best of a very few Richardsonian Romanesque style buildings that remain in the city today. Elements found on Columbian that are characteristic of the style include its rusticated sandstone base and trim; the broad, round arches at the entrance; and the "eyebrow" windows in the roof.

☒ See continuation sheet

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National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 1

Significance Continued:

The architectural and structural integrity of Columbian School is very good. Only minimal changes have been made to the building in the course of its nearly one hundred year history.

Born into a family of architects in Liechtenstein, John Latenser, Sr., (1858-1936) emigrated to the United States after completing studies in architecture at the Polytechnic College in Stuttgart. For seven years he was employed as a draftsman in Chicago before setting up an architectural practice in Omaha in 1887. Latenser's Omaha practice spanned more than 50 years and included commissions for many of the City's larger civic and commercial building projects, including Central High School (NRHP, 1979), the Douglas County Courthouse (NRHP, 1979), and the J.L. Brandeis and Sons Store Building (NRHP, 1982). In addition, Latenser served as construction superintendent for Omaha's Federal Post Office building beginning in 1891 and two years later was named Superintendent of Federal Building for a six-state territory. (Omaha Bee News, 9 December, 1934; Omaha World-Herald, 7 October, 1936.)

Early in his career, Latenser received a commendation from the United States government for solving serious structural problems in Chicago's Federal Post Office Building. The architect's technical skills were also recognized by the Omaha School Board. Newly arrived in the city, Latenser won his first contract for the design of Webster School by pointing out inadequacies in plans offered by 18 other competitors. (Omaha World-Herald, 7 October, 1936.)

School district annual reports from 1870-1890 reveal the Board of Education's emphasis on the importance of "pure air, scientific lighting, (and) sanitary conditions" as requisites for its buildings. Because compulsory attendance was neither strenuously regulated nor enforced until after the turn of the century, local school authorities realized that safe, attractive, well ventilated and illuminated facilities were needed to gain widespread public support and insure student attendance. In Latenser, the Board found an architect who could carry out its specifications. Board president Clinton N. Powell in a report for the year ending 1893 stated that:

"In construction, arrangement, lighting, facilities for heating and ventilation and all that goes to make up perfect buildings for school purposes, I believe these cannot be excelled by an equal number of buildings in any other city... For the excellence of these buildings credit is chiefly due to John Latenser, Esq..."

(Omaha Public Schools, Annual Report of the Board of Education, 1893)

Of Latenser's extant school buildings--Center and Saunders Schools and Central High School, for example--the fact that original interior and exterior plans remain essentially unaltered further testifies to the architect's expertise in school design.

Latenser was salaried as the Omaha School District's staff architect in 1892, the year Columbian School was built. This relationship with the district appears to have continued intermittently for more than a dozen years; subsequently, Latenser produced plans for the district on a contractual basis into the 1920's. Although an exact count of his school buildings is difficult to determine, one source credits Latenser with designs for at least 20 of the City's public school facilities. (Wakeley, Omaha: The Gate City, Vol. II, P. 35.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Building Permits for Columbian School. Permits and Inspection Division. Omaha City Planning Department. Omaha/Douglas Civic Center, Omaha, NE.

Omaha Bee News. 9 December, 1934.

Omaha/Douglas County Historic Buildings Survey. 1984-ongoing. Omaha City Planning Department. Omaha/Douglas Civic Center. Omaha, NE.

Omaha World Herald. 7 October 1936.

Wakeley, Arthur C. Omaha: The Gate City and Douglas County Nebraska. Vol II. Chicago: The S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1917.

☐ See continuation sheet

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 of additional data:

- ☐ State historic preservation office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☒ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other

Specify repository:

Omaha City Planning Department

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property less than one

UTM References

A

1	5
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2	5	1	2	0	0
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4	5	7	0	9	3	0
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Zone Easting Northing

B

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Zone Easting Northing

C

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D

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☐ See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of Columbian School is shown as the shaded area on the accompanying map entitled, "1984 Omaha/Douglas County Historic Buildings Survey: Columbian School, D009:0317-045."

☐ See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes the parcel that has historically been associated with the property.

☐ See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

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organization Omaha City Planning Department

date August, 1990

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Photo 1 of 4—view of main façade looking southwest. Photo by Lynn Meyer, 1989, Omaha City Planning Department



Photo 2 of 4—view of corridor & stairways, 2nd floor. Photo by Lynn Meyer, 1990, Omaha City Planning Department



Photo 3 of 4—detail of stairway. Photo by Lynn Meyer, 1990, Omaha City Planning Department



Photo 4 of 4—detail of metal ceiling & cornice. Photo by Lynn Meyer, 1990, Omaha City Planning Department