

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY
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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

First Unitarian Church of Omaha

AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

3114 Harney Street

___ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Omaha

___ VICINITY OF

Second

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

STATE

Nebraska

CODE

031

COUNTY

Douglas

CODE

055

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE	
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input 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	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC ACQUISITION	<input type="checkbox"/> ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> 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 type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

First Unitarian Church of Omaha

STREET & NUMBER

3114 Harney Street

CITY, TOWN

Omaha

___ VICINITY OF

STATE

Nebraska

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Register of Deeds, Omaha/Douglas County Civic Center

STREET & NUMBER

18th and Farnam Streets

CITY, TOWN

Omaha

STATE

Nebraska

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

DATE

___ FEDERAL ___ STATE ___ COUNTY ___ LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The First Unitarian Church of Omaha, a 1917 Colonial Revival edifice,¹ is located on the northwest corner of Harney Street and Turner Boulevard in a mixed-use section of Omaha (1970 pop. 354,389). The building contains one and one-half stories above a raised basement, and the wall construction is of brick laid in Flemish bond. Centered on the main facade is a double-door entrance whose semi-circular fanlight has delicate tracery. Round-arched windows flank the entrance, and over the three first-floor openings are rectangular windows that illuminate the organ loft. Each side wall is punctuated by five round-arched windows and two oculi.

The main facade's fenestration is framed by a tetrastyle Roman Ionic portico whose slender columns and pilasters are united by boxed beams on the portico ceiling. The portico's frieze and architrave contain simple moldings, but the cornice, like the continuous cornice atop the walls, is treated with dentil and modillion moldings.

A three-staged tower centered on the front surmounts the building's hipped roof. The tower's first section is a rectangular brick box with quoins and a simple cornice; the second section -- a four-sided belfry -- is wooden and contains round-arched, louvred openings; and the third section, also of wood, is an octagonal cupola with narrow round-arched windows, finials, diminutive Ionic pilasters, and an octagonal dome. A wooden balustrade surmounting the cornice around the walls has been removed. The church interior contains Colonial Revival fittings of a highly-finished quality. Past the main entrance is a spacious vestibule. Over this room is the organ and choir loft, reached by the main stairway at the west end of the vestibule. In the auditorium, mahogany-topped pews and their arrangement correctly reproduce the seating type and plan of a New England Colonial meetinghouse, and framing the round-arched windows of the side walls are five-bay arcades with pilasters and Ionic columns on plinths. The ceiling of the auditorium is treated with large coffers and there is a balustrade separating the raised platform at the front from the remainder of the church interior. Flanking the platform's centered recess are a wine-glass pulpit and a lectern.

A one-story addition at the church's northwest corner was constructed in 1952 to meet expanding educational facility needs. Designed by architect David Wallace, the addition respects the materials and scale of the original building, which was designed by architects John and Alan McDonald.

1. Russell Sturgis's 1902 Dictionary of Architecture and Building defines Colonial architecture in the following manner: "In American use, that which prevailed in the British settlement in America previous to 1776, and by extention, and because the style cannot be distinctly separated into chronological periods, as late as the beginnings of the present century" (Vol. I, column 639ff).

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/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 type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1917-18 BUILDER/ARCHITECT John and Alan McDonald

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The First Unitarian Church of Omaha is architecturally significant to Nebraska as an early and fine product of the Colonial Revival. Designed by John and Alan McDonald, the building is exemplary in illustrating the heritage of Unitarianism in America by reproducing in the Midwest an 18th-century house of worship common to the region where the denomination took root and flourished.

Unitarian services in Omaha were first held in 1866. A congregation was organized and a minister was secured three years later, and the first church building was dedicated in 1871 (The Bee, Omaha, Sept. 30, 1918). Former President William Howard Taft, then serving as president of the Unitarian Church Conference in the United States and Canada, officiated at the cornerstone-laying ceremony for the second and present church (The Bee, Omaha, Oct. 20, 1917). When the Colonial Revival edifice was dedicated on September 29, 1918, it won quick favor from the local press, one newspaper reporting the following:

The new building of the First Unitarian church, Omaha, brings to this city a touch of New England, and it is fitting that this society . . . should be housed in a building resembling so closely the old New England meetinghouse. Both exterior and interior of the new building follow the traditions handed down by the forefathers . . . The whole is truly a leaf from an old book (The Bee, Sept. 28, 1918, p. 3).

The Colonial Revival was second only to the Gothic Revival in American church architecture by the 1920s (Rhoads, The Colonial Revival, Vol. 1, p. 200). Like Congregationalists, Unitarians have frequently chosen this style for their church buildings (Ibid., p. 212). In 1906, a Unitarian, Allen French, proclaimed that the Gothic "is opposed to our ideals; its religion was as gloomy as its great vaults, as idolatrous as its carved altars, as narrow as its lancet windows." On the other hand, the Georgian of America's Colonial period "came . . . when the Gothic was dead . . . It is as perfect and complete an architectural style as the Gothic itself. It represents the new ideas, it is freer, brighter, more open . . . It adapted itself to our conditions, and still expresses them. Let the Episcopalian cling to his Gothic . . ., but it has nothing to do with us" (French, American Architect, April 7, 1906, p. 116, quoted in Rhoad's The Colonial Revival, Vol. I, p. 213).

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John McDonald and his son, Alan, architects, were natives of Omaha. Alan (1891-1948), who earned an architecture degree from Harvard in 1915, may have played the major role in designing the building since he was a member of First Unitarian and had perhaps closely examined Georgian buildings while in New England.

MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

See continuation sheet

GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than one
 UTM REFERENCES

Quadrangle Name: Omaha North, Nebr.-Iowa
 Quadrangle Scale:

A 1,5 2,5,2,1,9,0 4,5,7,1,2,9,0
 ZONE EASTING NORTHING
 C

B
 ZONE EASTING NORTHING
 D

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Lots 4 and 5, Redick's Grove, Omaha, Douglas Co., Nebraska

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Daniel Kidd, Architectural Historian

ORGANIZATION

Nebraska State Historical Society

DATE

January, 1980

STREET & NUMBER

1500 R Street

TELEPHONE

402/471-3270

CITY OR TOWN

Lincoln

STATE

Nebraska

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE X

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

Marcin W. Kmetz 2/6/80

TITLE

Director, Nebraska State Historical Society

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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The Omaha Bee. "Taft Assists in Unitarian Service." October 20,
1917, p. 3.

_____. "First Unitarian Church Is Dedicated at Services
Held Sunday Morning." September 28, 1918, p. 3.

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Yale University Press, 1926.

Program of Events for the 1969 Centennial Year of the First
Unitarian Church of Omaha. Omaha: First Unitarian Church,
1969.

Rhoads, William Bertolet. The Colonial Revival, Vols. I and II.
New York: Garland Pub. Co., 1977.

Sturgis, Russell. Dictionary of American Architecture and
Building. New York, 1920.



View to the north. Nebraska State Historical Society, 1972 (NSHS H673.5-3530)



View to the northwest.
Nebraska State Historical Society, 1972 (NSHS H673.5-3531)



View to the northwest.
Nebraska State Historical Society, 1972 (NSHS H673.5-3532)