

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational 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 Hill Hotelother names/site number D009:0121-011**2. Location**street & number 509 South 16th StreetN/A not for publicationcity, town OmahaN/A vicinitystate Nebraska code NE county Douglas code 055 zip code 68102**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>0</u>	<u>0</u> structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/ANumber 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

Date

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)

Domestic/Hotel

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Vacant/not in use

## 7. Description

Architectural Classification  
(enter categories from instructions)

Commercial Style

Colonial Revival

Other: Georgian Revival

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete

walls Brick

Limestone

roof Asphalt

other Terra Cotta

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

Situated at 16th and Howard Streets near the southern edge of Omaha's central business district, the Hill Hotel is a 13-story, steel-frame, masonry building constructed in 1919 to contain a large-scale hotel operation. The flat-roofed building features floors that are typically L-shaped in plan above a two-story, square base. Stylistically, the hotel combines formal aspects of the Commercial Style with Georgian and Classical Revival decorative detail. Apart from alterations in the street-level facades and deterioration of terra cotta ornament, the hotel's historic and architectural integrity has been preserved.

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Erected at the southeast corner of 16th and Howard Streets in 1919 to the designs of John and Alan McDonald, the Hill Hotel rises 160 feet (13 stories) from a base in plan measuring 66 feet square. Above the second story, a rear light court reduces the area of each floor by about 450 square feet, resulting in a modified L-shaped plan for floors three through 13. The structure has a flat, built-up roof and a full basement.

The hotel's structural skeleton consists of a riveted steel frame with concrete and terra cotta used as fireproof casing materials. Sixteen columns, in a three-by-three bay arrangement, rest on a solid concrete raft. Floors are concrete waffle slabs. Foundation walls are reinforced concrete, except for portions on the south and east where existing masonry from earlier, adjacent structures was retained.

The hotel's two street facades (west and north) are sheathed through the third story in dressed-faced ashlar which is battered in places and painted overall with a light cream color. Dark red brick in a common bond extends above the stone base to the 11th story. The building's upper two stories and attic are faced with varied shades of red brick in a Flemish Garden Wall bond elaborated with projecting headers.

Above the first-floor level, walls on the north and west each contain six ranks of symmetrically arranged windows. Between the third and 13th stories, all windows are uniformly rectangular, sliding-sash type with 2-over-2 lights. Identical, but slightly taller windows occur at the second story; at the attic are small, square openings.

At the storefront level, north and west elevations are similarly divided into three bays, each aligned with two ranks of windows above. Portions of the exterior at this level have undergone several modifications, beginning with alterations in the architects' final drawings during the building's construction. Currently, on the north elevation, three tall, multi-paned windows comprise the first bay. The center bay, now an entry, has been modified with new construction, including door and window framing and a sidewalk canopy. In the third, or corner bay, the original cast iron storefront framing has been maintained, although the area within the opening has been reconstructed. Both storefront bays on the west elevation also retain cast iron framing. The bay near the corner now functions as an entrance, while the center bay (originally a separate storefront) has been reconstructed as a window.

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The primary entrance to the hotel continues to be located in the third bay of the west elevation, though it has been subject to substantial alteration. It appears that its original design featured double, multi-paned doors flanked by multi-paned windows. A flat marquee suspended by chains and detailed to match the cornices of the storefronts covered the entrance. The existing marquee — a recent, mansard-like shingled construction — has been extended to the edge of the sidewalk where it is supported by posts; the door has also been recently re-constructed.

Terra Cotta is used extensively to ornament the hotel's street facades. Except for darkly glazed panels cast in high relief and set between windows at the third story, all terra cotta is glazed white. Surmounting the building's stone base is a course comprised of linked window balconettes with double-bellied balusters. Most of the course has been removed from the north elevation. On the west it is essentially intact, but in need of repair. At the fourth floor, end windows on both elevations have been embellished with terra cotta pilasters and entablatures with finials. More elaborate window ornamentation occurs at the 12th story where a course of decorative panels joins bracketed balconettes at the middle four windows of each elevation. These eight windows are framed by pilasters and crowned with swan's neck pediments. Here balusters are missing from balconets, but most of the original terra cotta work appears intact. The attic windows display the most decorative interest: each is framed by floral designs. Plaques between the windows are linked to the frames by festoons.

Atop the hotel's flat roof are a penthouse connected with the operation of the elevator and a cooling tower. The most prominent feature of the roof, however, is the bracketed cornice which extends approximately five feet beyond the walls of the structure. Copper-clad with a green patina, the cornice is richly embellished with classical ornamentation, including modillions, dentils and inset panels.

Because of its shaft-like form and the particular disposition of its exterior ornament, the design of the Hill Hotel exemplifies the so-called columnar theory of tall building design, and as such, is related to the Commercial Style. The limestone of the first three floors represents the column base. The simple uniformity of the next eight stories corresponds to the column shaft, while the two upper floors, attic and cornice are analogous to a capital. Historical references — as seen in the broken pediments, balconets and design elements including swags and urns — also associate the building with the Georgian, or more precisely, the Adam Revival style. The projecting cornice is a Classical Revival detail.

The architectural detailing and ornamentation of the hotel's roofline and street facades are carried through the first rank of windows on the south and east elevations. The structure's remaining wall area — devoid of stylization — is composed of utility brick. Secondary elevation window openings are rectangular, uniformly-spaced with 1-over-1, double-hung sashes.

On the south, the Hill was constructed to share a party wall with a five-story masonry building, the Iler Block, which served as an annex to the hotel. In 1980, the Iler Block was reduced to one story and remodelled extensively both on the exterior and interior; virtually none of the original building's historical fabric remains. The parapet of the Iler building extended approximately up to the seventh floor level of the Hill. Below that area, wall openings have been bricked in, leaving the imprint of the earlier construction. The imprint of another razed building, the Garfield Block, also remains discernible on the east wall of the Hill. A parking lot now occupies the area where that four-story commercial block once stood sharing a common wall with the hotel.

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In terms of function, the area within the 160-foot hotel tower was originally organized with commercial and lobby space on the first floor. The second floor contained additional lobby space and guest rooms. The third through 13th floors followed an identical plan: 12 guest rooms (with bathrooms) arranged around an L-shaped corridor. Support and mechanical functions in addition to a large public room were housed in the basement. Two centrally located elevators and a stairway provided interior vertical circulation with an exterior firestairs at the corner of the south elevation.

Although the building has undergone a number of interior remodellings over the years, the fundamental division of interior space has remained substantially unchanged. Major alterations are apparent, however, on the first- and second-floor levels. On the first floor, self-contained commercial bays have been eliminated (initially during the 1930s), replaced by integrated hotel service rooms (specifically, a bar and restaurant). On the second floor, the original lobby area and guest rooms have been reapportioned for offices and storage rooms. The architects' drawings show that the lobby space on both the first and second floors featured elaborate plasterwork arches, cornices and capitals. Remnants of these original interior finishes have been found to exist covered by walls and lowered ceilings. Further dismantling of the overlying construction is necessary to determine the extent and condition of the remaining historic fabric.

Generally, the Hill Hotel has survived with a high degree of historic and architectural integrity intact. There are, however, several issues affecting the property's integrity that will need to be addressed in a certified historic rehabilitation: the new construction at the building's main entrance; and the deterioration and removal of terra cotta ornament, particularly on the building's north elevation.

## 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

1919

Significant Dates

1919

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

McDonald, John

McDonald, Alan

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

Representing the work of the prominent Omaha architectural firm of John and Alan McDonald, the Hill Hotel achieves significance on a local level under Criterion C of the National Register Criteria. A 1919 Adamesque skyscraper, the building reflects a distinct and important phase of the McDonalds' work in Omaha: Between 1910 and 1925, the McDonald firm produced designs for a number of the city's most notable Colonial Revival buildings. The hotel also holds importance as the firm's major commercial commission yet extant.

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Omaha businessmen John W. and Lem H. Hill began construction of the Hill Hotel in the fall of 1919 on a lot at the southwest corner of 16th and Howard Streets. Previously the site had held a three-story building containing stores and flats put up by Omaha distillery magnate Peter Iler in 1887. Later this building was converted for use as an annex to the Iler Grand Hotel erected on the south half of the lot in 1897. Like the earlier building it replaced, the Hill also functioned in association with the Iler Grand building. The Hill and Iler shared a party wall which allowed access between buildings at several levels. Now reduced to one story, the Iler building continues to be used as an annex to the Hill; however, because of extensive remodeling its integrity has been lost and it no longer contributes to the historic or architectural significance of the property.

The cost of the 140-room Hill Hotel was listed on a building permit at \$250,000; the Vaughan Construction Company was the builder. After about five years of ownership, the Hill brothers relinquished the hotel through mortgage default. Over the next 60 years and despite a number of changes in ownership, the property continued to be operated as a hotel until the early 1980s. At that time, its owner — who had completed an extensive remodeling several years before — closed the hotel and related bar and restaurant. The building has since remained vacant; a certified historic rehabilitation is planned to convert the property to apartments.

According to original drawings and a city building permit, John and Alan McDonald were responsible for the design of the 13-story tower. In Omaha, the architectural practice of John McDonald and his son Alan spanned a total of nearly 70 years. The senior McDonald (1861-1956) established the firm of McDonald and Ogilvy in 1887 and by the turn of the century, the architect had developed his own successful practice, largely through residential commissions from the city's prominent upper-class families. After receiving an architectural degree from Harvard College in 1915, Alan McDonald (1891-1947) joined his father's Omaha practice and over the next 30 years, the McDonalds played a major role in shaping the city's architectural character (Omaha Architects File).

☒ See continuation sheet

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In the publication A Comprehensive Program for Historic Preservation in Omaha, John and Alan McDonald are acknowledged as one of three Omaha firms "whose work dominated the city's building scene for over 40 years." Important examples of this work include: the Joslyn Art Museum (1928); the Faidley Building (1930, razed 1981); Beth El Synagogue (1940); and the following Omaha properties currently listed on the National Register of Historic Places: the First Unitarian Church (1917); the Bradford-Pettis House (1910); the Standard Oil Building (1919); the Joslyn Mansion (1904); and the 1917 Old People's Home (Comprehensive Program: pp. 86-87).

Considering the broad range of the McDonalds' commissions encompassing civic, commercial and residential projects, the Hill Hotel exemplifies a distinct and important phase of the firm's work. Like Omaha's two other dominant architectural firms, Thomas Rodgers Kimball and John Latenser and Sons, the McDonald firm was grounded in late 19th and early 20th century historical revivalism. In reviewing the firm's early projects, a definite trend appears to develop after 1910. Beginning with Benson High School in 1913 and extending through the 1925 Dundee Theater, the McDonalds produced what can be viewed as the city's most coherent group of Colonial Revival buildings. No other Omaha architect produced a comparable quantity or range of work in this style. Also part of this period are the First Unitarian Church, the city's finest example of Georgian Revival architecture, the Old People's Home and the Elks Club (razed 1982). The Hill Hotel — a Commercial Style, tall building in its form and structural detail — is associated with this group because of its Georgian, or more specifically, Adam, ornamental features. Regarded, then, within this collection of buildings, the Hill achieves significance as the McDonalds' only application of the Colonial Revival style to the tall building type.

Features of the Adam style had been borrowed to ornament urban skyscraper hotels as early as 1910, namely, in Warren and Wetmore's designs for the Vanderbilt in New York City. William B. Rhoades in his study, The Colonial Revival, observes that, "by 1913 when the Architectural Review published a survey of hotels, the Adam style had become popular as an alternative to the still dominant French academic type." Rhoades continues, "The Adam style (in hotel design) was found not only in New York...but in Philadelphia...and in the Midwest..." (Rhoades: pp. 293). In the designs for the Hill, the McDonalds provided Omaha with its only version of this particular consolidation of form, style and function — the Georgian skyscraper hotel.

In addition to stylistic considerations, the Hill Hotel also holds importance as the most significant surviving example of the McDonalds' work in commercial construction. Within Omaha's central business district, the Beebe and Runyan Warehouse, the Standard Oil Building and the Hill are the firm's only known commercial buildings; several others including the 1930 Faidley Building have been demolished. The hotel's scale, design quality and location on the primary retail street in the downtown area accounts for its first-rank status among the McDonalds' commercial projects.

The date of the hotel's construction, 1919, has been noted as both the period and date of the building's significance. Data for the evaluation of the Hill Hotel against other buildings associated with John and Alan McDonald, as well as with other Omaha hotel buildings, was derived from the 1984 Omaha/Douglas County Building Survey.

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

### 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 # \_\_\_\_\_

☒ See continuation sheet

### 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 acre

### UTM References

A 

1	5
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2	5	3	9	6	0
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4	5	7	1	0	4	0
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Zone Easting Northing

C 

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B 

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Zone Easting Northing

D 

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☐ See continuation sheet

### Verbal Boundary Description

☒ See continuation sheet

### Boundary Justification

☒ See continuation sheet

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title \_\_\_\_\_ Lynn Bjorkman, City Planner

organization \_\_\_\_\_ Omaha City Planning Department date \_\_\_\_\_ January 1988

street & number \_\_\_\_\_ Omaha/Douglas Civic Center, 1819 Farnam telephone \_\_\_\_\_ (402) 444-4927

city or town \_\_\_\_\_ Omaha state \_\_\_\_\_ NE zip code \_\_\_\_\_ 68183

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Building Permits and Plans on File. Omaha City Planning Department, Omaha/Douglas Civic Center. Omaha, NE.

Deeds Records. Register of Deeds, Douglas County, Nebraska. Omaha/Douglas Civic Center. Omaha, NE.

Landmark Designation for the Hill Hotel (H1-81-3). Landmarks Heritage Preservation Commission. Omaha City Planning Department, Omaha/Douglas Civic Center. Omaha, NE.

Landmarks Heritage Preservation Commission. A Comprehensive Program for Historic Preservation in Omaha. Omaha: Omaha City Planning Department, 1980.

Omaha City Directories. Omaha Public Library. Omaha, NE.

Omaha/Douglas County Building Survey. Omaha City Planning Department, Omaha/Douglas Civic Center. Omaha, NE.

Rhoades, William Bertolet. The Colonial Revival, Volumes I and II. New York: Garland Publishing Company, 1977.



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### VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The nominated property is all of lots 3 and 4, Block 169, Original City of Omaha, Douglas County.

### BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

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



West façade looking southeast. Photo by Lynn Meyer, 1983, Omaha City Planning Department.