

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICENATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

Webster Telephone Exchange Building

AND/OR COMMON

Great Plains Black Museum

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

2213 Lake Street

___ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Omaha

___ VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Second

STATE

Nebraska

CODE

31

COUNTY

Douglas

CODE

055

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

___ DISTRICT

☒ BUILDING(S)

___ STRUCTURE

___ SITE

___ OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

___ PUBLIC

☒ PRIVATE

___ BOTH

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

___ IN PROCESS

___ BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

☒ OCCUPIED

___ UNOCCUPIED

___ WORK IN PROGRESS

ACCESSIBLE

___ YES: RESTRICTED

☒ YES: UNRESTRICTED

___ NO

PRESENT USE

___ AGRICULTURE

☒ MUSEUM

___ COMMERCIAL

___ PARK

___ EDUCATIONAL

___ PRIVATE RESIDENCE

___ ENTERTAINMENT

___ RELIGIOUS

___ GOVERNMENT

___ SCIENTIFIC

___ INDUSTRIAL

___ TRANSPORTATION

___ MILITARY

___ OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Bertha W. & James T. Calloway

STREET & NUMBER

2213 Lake Street

CITY, TOWN

Omaha

___ VICINITY OF

STATE

Nebraska

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTIONCOURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Douglas County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

17th & 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 Webster Telephone Exchange Building is located in a mixed commercial/residential area which is one-half block from 24th St., the primary commercial street for the Near North Side neighborhood. The brick building was opened June 9, 1907 by the Nebraska Telephone Co. as one of their exchange buildings. The portion of L-shaped brick building which faces Lake Street is one and a half stories tall with a full basement and the rest of the building is one story plus basement. A brick watertable defines the line between first floor and basement. The exterior appears unchanged with the exception of the painting of part of the stone trim and the replacement of the front door.

The exterior facade is strongly symmetrical. The central doorway is emphasized with quoin-like alternating bands of stone and brick. The words "Nebraska Telephone Co." are carved into stone above the entrance. Aside from the doorway the strongest feature of exterior is the large rectangular windows with stone lintels on each side of the door. These windows, the dormer windows and small windows complete the symmetrical arrangement. The slate roof has parapeted gable ends. Fancy brickwork trims the dormer windows and brick corbelling highlights the cornice line.

The Webster Exchange is eclectic in style using neo-classicism in the symmetrical arrangement of the facade and Jacobethan Revival elements in the building's details. Having previously designed many buildings in a classical vein, architect Kimball enforces the classical symmetry of the facade even when the interior function seems to call for a change. For example, the transom of the large west window on the front facade is brick filled in a pattern which matches the dormer brickwork. The small dormer window above this is also taller than its opposite counterpart. Although the original interior plans are not available, it appears that the function of the rooms may have necessitated that these spaces be open or closed. Both of these changes were done discreetly so as to interfere as little as possible with the symmetry. The quoin-like doorway surround also has classical elements.

The windows, doorway, roof and building materials are typical of the Jacobethan Revival style which was popular nationally in the 1890-1915 period. The prominent rectangular windows divided into rectangular lights by mullions are common in the style. Usually of stone, the mullions are brick here but stone sills and lintels are strongly emphasized. The other windows are Tudor-arched which is historically appropriate for the period. The ridged roof with parapeted gable ends, round-arched doorway and the use of brick with stone trim are all typical features of the style.

The interior has been remodeled repeatedly and is not historically or architecturally significant. The original plans have not been found. After its completion in 1907, the building was remodeled into a community center in 1933, an apartment house in 1952 and is now being adapted into a museum.

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/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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY) Ethnic
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1907 ~~BUICKER~~/ARCHITECT Thomas R. Kimball, Omaha

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Webster Telephone Exchange Building is significant in the areas of communications, architecture and for its importance to the black community. The building was constructed as part of the system of telephone exchanges of the Nebraska Telephone Co. Located in the center of the black community, the building has served as a community center and is now the Great Plains Black Museum. It was designed in 1907 by Thomas R. Kimball, the most prominent of Nebraska architects.

One of several exchanges throughout Omaha, the Webster Telephone Exchange was part of the Nebraska Telephone Co. system. Incorporated in 1882 the company had purchased the Omaha Electric Co., the first exchange in the state (1879). The Nebraska Telephone Co. had received from the American Bell Telephone Co. the perpetual right to use the invention of the telephone in the state. After the first decade of existence, telephone use increased rapidly and the company was successful and the dominant telephone company in the state. Many of the exchange buildings, including the Webster Exchange (1907), were constructed in the 1905-1915 period of intensive growth partially stimulated by the competition of the independent telephone companies. American Bell Telephone gradually purchased stock in the company until it gained full control in 1912. The telephone company donated the Webster Exchange for use as the Mid-City Community Center in 1933.

Black Americans have been a part of the heritage of Omaha and Nebraska since the territorial period of the 1850's. The first major immigration of blacks to Nebraska occurred in the 1870's and the majority settled in Omaha. Housing in Omaha during the 19th century was available to anyone who could pay and ethnic ghettos were not common. However, by the turn of the century, the situation had changed. Blacks were slowly pushed into the area designated the Near North Side which centered on 24th & Lake Streets. A smaller community of blacks was segregated in South Omaha near the stockyards. During 1910-1920 segregation and tension increased as a large influx of blacks from the South arrived for the growing number of industrial jobs created by World War I. Tension and resentment broke out in a riot in 1919 and a black man was lynched. The Near North Side has continued to be the center of the black community to the present day.

The Omaha chapter of the National Urban League was organized in 1928 to foster improvement in the economic, industrial, social and housing conditions of blacks. The American Bell Telephone Co. donated the Webster Exchange Building to the Urban League in 1933 and it was remodelled into a community center. A community center for blacks had existed since 1920 but it was consolidated with the Urban League in 1933. The Mid-City

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Community Center had a free employment bureau, library, reading room, sewing room, day nursery, medical and dental clinic, and Little Theatre. Adult education classes and young people's groups were sponsored at the center.

The community center existed until about 1950. The building was sold and remodeled into a 16 unit apartment house. In the 1970's the building was used one year as a community center for Greater Omaha Community Action. Since 1975 the Great Plains Black Museum was founded to preserve the black heritage of the area thru the museum and archives.

The Webster Telephone Exchange is one of the lesser buildings designed by Thomas R. Kimball. President of the American Institute of Architects 1918-1920 and active nationally in the profession, Kimball is the most notable of Nebraska architects. Born April 19, 1862 in Linwood, Ohio, and raised in Omaha, Kimball attended the University of Nebraska for two years (1877-78) and at the age of eighteen went to Boston to study art and painting. He graduated from the three year architectural program at M.I.T. and continued his studies of art in Paris under the painter, Harpignes.

While in partnership with C. Howard Walker, Boston (1889-1898), Kimball was in charge of the Omaha office. The firm was architect-in-chief of the Trans-Mississippi Exposition, Omaha, 1898. In that year he withdrew from the firm and had his own office for the next thirty years. Although much of his work is in Omaha, his designs are throughout Nebraska and surrounding states (see Hall County Courthouse, Grand Island, Nebraska and Burlington Station, Omaha, NRHP nominations).

Prominent in his profession, Kimball was an advisor to the architectural commissions for the Nebraska State Capitol, Indianapolis War Memorial and the Kansas City War Memorial. Besides serving as national president of A.I.A., he was a member of the Board of Directors and was elected a Fellow of the society.

MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY LESS THAN ONE

UTM REFERENCES

A 1 5 2 5 3 3 2 0 4 5 7 3 9 6 0
ZONE EASTING NORTHING

B
ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C
D
VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Penelope B. Chatfield, Curator of Historic Sites

ORGANIZATION

Nebraska State Historical Society

DATE

May, 1977

STREET & NUMBER

1500 R Street

TELEPHONE

(402) 432-2793

CITY OR TOWN

Lincoln

STATE

Nebraska

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL X

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

Marvin F. Kivett

TITLE

Marvin F. Kivett, Director

DATE

6/16/77

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

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
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Photo 1 of 2 — view to the south. Photo by D. Murphy, 1976, Nebraska State Historical Society (NSHS 7612/2:20)



Photo 2 of 2 — view to the south. Photo by D. Murphy, 1976, Nebraska State Historical Society (NSHS 7612/2:18)