

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

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

For NPS use only  
received APR 17 1986  
date entered MAY 28 1986

1. Name

historic Phi Delta Theta Fraternity House (LC13:D9-511)

and/or common n/a

2. Location

street & number 1545 "R" Street n/a not for publication

city, town Lincoln n/a vicinity of

state NE code 031 county Lancaster code 109

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> n/a	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: fraternity house

4. Owner of Property

name Phi Delta Theta House Association

street & number 1545 "R" Street

city, town Lincoln n/a vicinity of state NE

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Register of Deeds

street & number 555 So. 10th Street

city, town Lincoln state NE

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Nebr. State Historic Buildings Survey has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date on-going  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Nebraska State Historical Society

city, town Lincoln state NE

# 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<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 <u>n/a</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

## Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Phi Delta Theta Fraternity House in Lincoln, Nebraska, is a three story, Art Deco building sheathed in Kansas limestone. It is situated just south of the University of Nebraska campus, at the intersection of two major streets ("R" and 16th) that contain most of the campus's fraternity and sorority houses. The most prominent exterior feature is a rounded, glassblock staintower at the corner facing the intersection. A two story rear addition makes a generally rectangular shape of the originally L-shaped plan. The only major change to the principal facades is the replacement of original fenestration. The rear addition adopts the materials of the original building but carefully differentiates itself through height and other design characteristics.

Phi Delta Theta Fraternity House is a blocky, nearly cubic mass when viewed from the north or northeast, facing the principal facades. The walls are sheathed (over brick and tile construction) with Kansas limestone laid in random rangework; the principal decoration is incised horizontal grooves at the corners, suggesting quoins. The principal, north facade is three bays long, with windows that decrease in height on ascending floors. The main entrance is off-center to the east on that facade and has a cast stone doorframe of simplified Neo-classical derivation, with grooved, quarter-round jambs and a lintel with suggestions of acroteria.

The dominant feature of the exterior is a rounded stair tower at the northeast corner formed of translucent glassblocks, surmounted with a limestone band. The stair tower is recessed from the planes of the north and east facades, further accentuating the differentiation from the main, masonry block established by its shape and material.

The east facade is 64 feet long in the original portion and is organized into four bays, making it 12 feet (or one bay) longer than the north front. Presumably this disparity in length prompted the variation seen in the handling of the "quin" grooves. A full set of grooves is incised three bays distant from the northeast corner, suggesting a corner at that location, on the flat of the wall between two ranks of windows. Those grooves also mark the location of the chimney, which is further articulated by a small step in the parapet. The portion of the east wall between the two main sets of grooves corresponds in length to the north front, reinforcing the cubic massing of the building.

As originally constructed, the fraternity house had an L-shaped plan, with buff brick facing on the inner (south and west) walls of the "L." In 1966 an L-shaped addition filled up the original inner corner and produced a new, roughly rectangular plan. The addition is carefully designed both to be compatible with the original structure and to be differentiated from it. Compatibility is achieved by use of identical limestone facing on the east and south walls, laid in the same random rangework pattern as the original walls. The west side of the added wing is faced with buff brick, matching the original secondary facades. To differentiate the addition from the main block, the wing is lower and is set off on the east side by a tall, ground-to-parapet window, demarcating the point of junction.

[SEE CONTINUATION SHEET]

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On the interior, the original portion of the basement includes the chapter room and service, study, and recreation areas. The addition provides the kitchen and dining facility at this level. The main floor contains the foyer, housemother's quarters, trophy room, and living room in the original block, plus student rooms in the addition. The upper floors in both portions are devoted to student rooms. Few original finishes remain in the interior. The most significant interior feature is the curved, cantilevered stair of reinforced concrete that occupies the glassblock stairwell, with an elegant steel railing. Also of interest is a limestone mantel in the living room, with grooved decoration similar to that on the exterior.

While the Phi Delta Theta Fraternity House has suffered changes, it retains a considerable degree of integrity on the exterior. It still dominates its corner setting and expresses a blocky massing. The recent replacement of the original one-over-one sliding sash windows with single pane casements diminishes integrity, but not significantly. The windows function in the design principally as voids pierced into the massy block, rather than as individually important, well-articulated elements. The added wing was skillfully designed to minimize its impact on the main facades through thoughtful use of materials, height, and fenestration.

# 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 type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

**Specific dates** 1937 **Builder/Architect** Olson Construction Co./Martin I. Aitken

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)**

Phi Delta Theta Fraternity House is locally significant in the area of architecture as a rare, relatively well-preserved example of the Art Deco style applied to a residential building, and especially to a fraternity house. Although the house, built in 1937, is a year shy of 50 years old, its significance can be regarded as exceptional on the local level due to its rarity.

HISTORY

Phi Delta Theta was chartered in 1875 at the University of Nebraska, when that institution was just six years old. Martin I. Aitken (1907-1974) designed the current chapter house in 1937. He was a Lincoln native who graduated from the University of Nebraska in 1929 and from Yale School of Architecture in 1933, where one of his classmates was Eero Saarinen. Returning to Lincoln during the Depression, Aitken worked as a draftsman for a few years, first for the telephone company and then for the architectural firm of Meginnis and Schaumberg, before establishing an independent practice around 1937. The fraternity house was one of his earliest commissions, which was followed by many houses, banks, and telephone company buildings throughout Nebraska. In Lincoln the downtown Telephone Company Building was one of his most prominent projects. In his later years Aitken affiliated with three other architects in the firm Aitken, Hazen, Hoffman and Miller, which remains in operation today (1986).

SIGNIFICANCE

Lincoln has few Art Deco buildings and even fewer residential structures in this style, especially among the "Greek" houses in the University environs. Most of Lincoln's buildings of this style are modest commercial structures, generally one to three stories tall, with some shallow relief work, angular decoration, glass blocks, or other features of the style. These include the Union Bus Depot (300 So. 13th, ca. 1930, by Davis and Wilson), the former Skelly Oil Co. station and adjacent Safeway store (2600 and 2620 "O" Street, 1936 and 1937, Jesse B. Miller), and the Smith Dorsey Co. building (233 So. 10th, 1933-9, Meginnis and Schaumberg). Of these, only the last might be National Register-eligible, with its rounded corner, sleek terra cotta sheathing, and glassblock ribbon windows. Lincoln's richest Art Deco decoration appears on a remodeling project of 1936, in which Meginnis and Schaumberg transformed the five-story Little Building of 1907 (11th and "O," NW corner) into the Lincoln Liberty Life Building by removing the original cornice and adding a sixth floor, which was treated as a wide, windowless frieze with shallow relief carving.

[SEE CONTINUATION SHEET.]

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation Sheet.

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property less than one acre

Quadrangle name Lincoln, Nebr.

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM References

A 

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

B 

Zone			Easting					Northing						

C 

Zone			Easting					Northing						

D 

Zone			Easting					Northing						

E 

Zone			Easting					Northing						

F 

Zone			Easting					Northing						

G 

Zone			Easting					Northing						

H 

Zone			Easting					Northing						

Verbal boundary description and justification

Property described as the east 80 feet of Lot A, County Clerk's Subdivision of Lot 32, Little's Subdivision, Lincoln, Lancaster County, Nebr., including all historically associated property.

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

state n/a code county code

state code county code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Edward F. Zimmer/Historic Preservation Planner

organization Lincoln/Lancaster County Planning Dept. date Jan. 10, 1986

street & number 555 S0. 10th St. telephone (402)471-7491

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

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 James A. Johnson

title Director, Nebraska State Historical Society date April 5, 1986

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

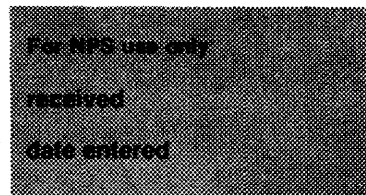
Keeper of the National Register [Signature] date 5/28/86

Attest: \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_

Chief of Registration

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Despite the relatively small number of Art Deco style buildings in Lincoln, the Phi Delta Theta Fraternity House cannot be regarded as so anomalous as to have no significance. In the late 1930s, Fritz Craig designed a pair of Art Deco structures related to the Phi Delta Theta House in scale, materials, and location. His Salvation Army Temple at 11th and "Q" (1939, soon to be demolished) has a stepped, ziggurat-like parapet above the main entrance. Also in 1939, Craig designed a remodeling and addition to the Zeta Beta Tau Fraternity House (1345 "R", now Alpha Xi Lambda). The Aitken-designed building is a more significant representative of the style and period than the Craig design in that Phi Delta Theta was the earlier project, appears to have influenced the later house, and is a more fully developed design.

The only other residential Art Deco design in Lincoln that might be National Register-eligible is an apartment house in the Near South neighborhood (1601 So. 20th St.) designed in 1930 by Lincoln architect N. Bruce Hazen. A blocky, T-plan building sheathed in limestone, the apartment house is a degree more ornamented than the fraternity house and has a good degree of exterior integrity, but has less geometric interest in its massing and does not make such conscious use of its site.

The Phi Delta Theta Fraternity house was designated a Lincoln Landmark by the City Council in September 1985.

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Lincoln building permits #25891 and 92119, Codes Administration Dept.,  
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Lincoln Star (obituary of M. I. Aitken), 7-15-1974, 13:2.

Ertl, Ted, project director.

Architectural and Historical Site Survey of Lincoln, Lincoln: Univ. of  
Nebraska, ca. 1978.

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An Architectural Album, Lincoln: 1979.

Aitken, Mrs. Martin I. (Mary Ann)

Interview with E. Zimmer, Dec. 12, 1985.