Form 10-300 (July 1969) UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

STATE:	
Nebraska	
COUNTY:	
Nemaha	
FOR NPS USE ONL	Y
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10.5.26.0003	5/19/70

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DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Brownville, Nebraska's "City of the Seven Hills," is today only a shadow of the bustling Missouri River steamboat town it once was. The site was first settled by Richard Brown in 1854. Named for Brown, the town was platted and designated as the Nemaha County seat in 1855. It grew rapidly as it became a major steamboat landing, river crossing, overland freighting terminus, and milling center. U.S. census reports show that population grew from 425 in 1860 to 1305 in 1870, and indications are that Brownville's population probably exceeded 2000 by 1873. Due to financial depression, declining steamboat traffic, inadequate rail and connections, bonded indebtedness, and finally the loss of the county seat in 1885, Brownville declined in population after 1875 to 1309 in 1880, 457 in 1910, and 243 in 1960.

Brownville's setting is compelling and picturesque. Its hilly, heavily wooded terrain contrasts pleasantly with the flat prairie lands that typify eastern Nebraska. The village is focused on a small Missouri River tributary which cuts through the bluffs surrounding the town. Many points along these bluffs afford supurb views over Brownville and the wide Missouri. Early photographs show Brownville's built-up area extending well up into these bluffs. Now trees and dense brush replace many buildings once located high on the surrounding hills, and a quiet, rustic charm replaces the former hustle and bustle. Because Brownville was all but abandoned by the early twentieth century, many fine early buildings have disappeared, including most commercial structures that formerly lined Main Street. Nevertheless, a surprising number of early buildings survive, mostly brick dwellings. While widely dispersed within a contracted built-up area, together these buildings form a distinguishable historic entity because they are interspersed with so few twentieth century'structures.

Brownville's principal economic resource, its tourism potential, will be dissipated unless the town's nineteenth century appearance is preserved and enhanced. Unfortunately, the current construction of the multi-million dollar Cooper Nuclear Station, situated a few miles south of town, now threatens Brownville with an uncontrolled building boom. Several mobile homes have already been moved into Brownville sphistoric district, and population has increased since 1960. Land values have substantially increased, partly due to the rise in tourism Aprob some time the Nebraska State Historical Society and other groups have urged the enactment of a historic zoning ordinance, and hopefully this wall cook become a reality.

A proposal for the relocation of U.S. to hway 136 through Brownville, recently recommended by the Nebraska Department of Roads, may also constitute a major or minor threat to Brownville's historic character. This proposed routing, shown on an accompanying map, has raised considerable public opposition and, as a result, is now being restudied by the Department of Roads. While the proposed route would involve the demolition of only one or two historically unimportant buildings, it would preempt the sites of several historic buildings which the Brownville Historical Society had planned to reconstruct. Moreover, opponents state that the proposed highway, with its modern grading and fill, would mar central Brownville and a substantial segment, of its forested hills and, with its limited

	SIGNIFICANCE			
•	PERIOD (Check One or More as	Appropriate)		
	Pre-Columbian	16th Century	☐ 18th Century	20th Century
	☐ 15th Century	☐ 17th Century	3 19th Century	
	SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable	le and Known) 1855		
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	Conservation	☐ Music	Transportation	8

TATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Nebraska Territory was created and opened to white settlement in 1854. Most of Nebraska's first communities were established along the Missouri River to serve the great increase in steamboating in the 1850's. ville rapidly emerged as one of the most important of these steamboat towns, and from ca. 1855 to 1875 it remained as one of Nebraska's five or six most populous and prosperous communities. After 1875 Brownville's population declined, but many fine early buildings survive - and most of them with few exterior alterations. The majority of buildings in Brown-ville today were built prior to 1875, and, among Nebraska's five or six leading communities during the 1855-1875 period, only Brownville appears much as it did during its early years. This atmosphere would be lost if the majority of Brownville's early buildings, individually lacking great architectural or historical distinction, were demolished, modernized, or interspersed with incompatible modern structures and land uses. Those Brownville buildings deemed most worthy of preservation include the Methodist Church (1859), Brown-Carson House (1860), Furnas House (ca. 1868), Muir House (1868-72), and Bailey House (1877) - shown as sites 9 through 13, respectively, on an accompanying map.

Brownville's first commercial buildings were erected in 1855, and during the same year the town's founder, Richard Brown, established a flatboat ferry which crossed the Missouri River at this point. Steam ferries began making this trip in 1857, and the village became a major river crossing for westward-bound settlers. Brownville's importance as a steamboat landing was increasing, and soon the town became a leading eastern terminus of overland freighting. This freighting began in 1859 with the Colorado gold rush and continued until ca. 1863. In 1860 a telegraph line was extended from St. Joseph, Missouri, to Brownville, the first Nebraska municipality provided with a telegraphic link to the eastern United States. In the late 1860's Brownville emerged briefly as a "cow town," the end of a trail along which long-horned cattle were driven north Brownville's early importance was further enhanced by the establishment of a U.S. land office here in 1857, then one of four such offices in Nebraska. Here thousands of acres in southeastern Nebraska were claimed under federal preemption acts. Later, on January 1, 1863, Daniel Freeman filed here for a homestead in Gage County. In 1936 the U.S. Congress recognized this filing as the first in the nation under the Homestead Act of 1862 and designated the Freeman homestead as a National Monument. Population decline in Brownville followed the Panic of 1873.

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9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Form 10-300a (July 1969)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

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Page 1

(Continuation Sheet)

(Number all entries)

BROWNVILLE HISTORIC DISTRICT

2. Bounded by Nemaha, Richard, and Seventh streets—west of Second Street—and by Nebraska and West Allen streets and the Missouri River— east of Second Street. (The boundaries follow the center of the above streets as platted, rather than as actually aligned. Substantial sections of these streets are no longer open to vehicular traffic.)

7. access, would cut the town's historic district in two, damaging to integrity. Opponents also contend that the proposed route would have so close to Brownville's successful summer theatre that it would have to be closed due to excessive noise.

Much has been done to revitalize Brownville as a tourist center by the Brownville Historical Society, which has carefully avoided creating a tourist trap. Founded in 1956, this group has encouraged persons to acquire and restore Brownville's fine early structures. Virtually all of these buildings, many of them vacant and near ruins a few years ago, are now owned and occupied by persons sympathetic to their historic and architectural value. Many dwellings have been restored as week-end retreats, while other buildings now function as art galleries and antique shops, and several artists now reside in Brownville. Since 1956 the Brownville Historical Society has sponsored house tours, spring and fall festivals, art shows, handicraft exhibits, flea markets, fiddlers contests, summer repertory plays, and other activities that draw increasing numbers of tourists to Brownville each year.

Situated on U.S. route 136, a major east-west highway, Brownville is well located for tourist development. The Lewis & Clark Trail highway follows Nebraska route 67 north to Brownville and then turns west along U.S. 136. Tourism has increased since the U.S. 136 bridge, built across the Missouri River in 1939, became toll-free in 1969, and a further increase may be expected once Interstate 29, linking Omaha and Kansas City, is completed on the east side of the river. Located on the river's west bank and included within the Brownville Historic District are state-owned recreational grounds offering camping facilities and launching ramps for pleasure boats.

Listed below are those Brownville buildings and sites deemed most worthy of preservation and National Register protection. Their locations are shown on an accompanying map as Nemaha County historic sites 9 through 32. The Brownville Historic District has been so defined that it circumscribes all but two of the following buildings and sites.

9. Methodist Church (see enclosed photograph). Built in 1859 for the Congregationalists led by Rev. Thomas W. Tipton, a Brownville resident and U.S. Senator, 1867-1875. Used as a Methodist Church since 1861. Built of brick and surmounted by a frame cupola, added ca. 1870. Otherwise, few exterior alterations. One of Nebraska's oldest churches and one of the

Form	10-300a
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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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BROWNVILLE HISTORIC DISTRICT

state & Few remaining examples of Greek Revival ecclesiastical architecture. Recorded by HABS, 1934.

- 10. Brown-Carson House. Originally a one story brick dwelling built in 1860 for Richard Brown, founder of Brownville. Brown added a two story frame wing in 1861 and sold the property in 1864 to John L. Carson, one of Nebraska's leading 19th century financiers. Carson made further additions about 1880, including a frame second story to the original house. This Italianate dwelling, including its interior furnishings and basement kitchen, has remained virtually unaltered since the 1880's. Just south of the house is the handsome Carson carriage house, built before 1880. In 1966 the Carson family gave both structures to the Brownville Historical Society, which has opened them to tours.
- 11. Furnas House. Probably built in 1868 by and for Andrew J. Berry. Occupied by Robert W. Furnas, Nebraska's third state governor, from 1878 to his death in 1905. Civil War officer, statesman, journalist, and agricultural leader, Furnas played an important role in Nebraska history. A 2½ story brick structure, combining Gothic Revival and Italianate styling. Now owned by Rev. James Stilwell. Recorded by HABS, 1934.
- 12. Muir House (see enclosed photograph). A two story brick mansion begun in 1868 and completed ca. 1872 for Robert V. Muir. One of Nebraska's finest examples of Italianate domestic architecture. Few alterations over the years. The present owner, Mrs. Harold D. LeMar of Omaha, has installed Victorian furnishings and opened it to tours.
- 13. Bailey House (see enclosed photograph). A brick dwelling erected for Benson M. Bailey in 1877, although purportedly built previously nearer the Missouri River and then taken apart and reassembled on the present site. The Brownville Historical Society Museum now occupies the building, a fine example of Gothic Revival architecture.
- 14. Middleton Shop. On the basis of old photographs, this false front frame structure was reconstructed in 1968-69 by the Brownville Historical Society on its old foundation. The original building (not extant) was erected in 1859 for John W. Middleton as a saddle and harness shop on lower Main Street and moved by Middleton in 1862 to the present site, where he occupied it until ca. 1870.
- 15. Gates House. Built in 1859 for Abbott G. Gates and probably constructed by Gates himself, a contractor and mason. A two story brick structure with Greek Revival detailing and very similar in style to the Methodist Church (site 9), built in 1859 by Gates and George Likens. Now owned by John Rippey, the house may be Brownville's oldest dwelling.

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

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NATIONAL VERTURY - NOMINAT REGISTER Page 3 (Continuation Sheet)

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BROWNVILLE HISTORIC DISTRICT

- 16. Lowman House. Probably built in 1860 for Benjamin B. Thompson. Purchased by the Louis Lowman family in 1872 and now occupied by A. Raymond Earl. A simple but handsome $1\frac{1}{2}$ story brick building.
- 17. McLaughlin-Parks House (see enclosed photograph). Probably built in 1862 by and for Timothy McLaughlin, a mason and businessman. Owned by the Parks family from 1920-61. A handsome two story brick structure. The unusual two story brick pilasters separating the bays suggest Greek Revival influence.
- 18. Worthing-Baker House. Built ca. 1863 for Evan Worthing, later owned by the Baker family, and now occupied by Courtney M. Miner. Although the north wing is a 20th century addition, this $1\frac{1}{2}$ story brick residence remains a good example of Greek Revival architecture.
- 19. Beehive House. Built ca. 1863 for John C. Deuser as an apartment house and now occupied solely by Mrs. K. Earl Young. A $2\frac{1}{2}$ story brick structure originally divided into four living units.
- 20. Bratton-Minick House. Built ca. 1864 for George M. Bratton, purchased by the Minick family in 1878, and now occupied by artist Thomas D. Palmerton. A large two story brick residence and a fine example of Italianate architecture.
- 21. Stevens House. Probably built in 1866 for George Stevens and now occupied by the McMann family. A handsome two story brick dwelling.
- 22. Two commercial buildings. Adjoining brick structures built ca. 1870, both good examples of Italianate commercial architecture and both now owned by Brownville's Masonic Lodge.
- 23. Lone Tree Saloon. A two story brick block built ca. 1868 and mentioned in Willa Cather's writings as aloon. Now owned by Courtney M. Miner and used as a mill which produces stone-ground flour. A fine example of Italianate architecture.
- 24. Cogswell House. Built in 1868 for Anthony P. Cogswell and now owned by George Rogers. A handsome two story brick structure. Recorded by HABS, 1934.

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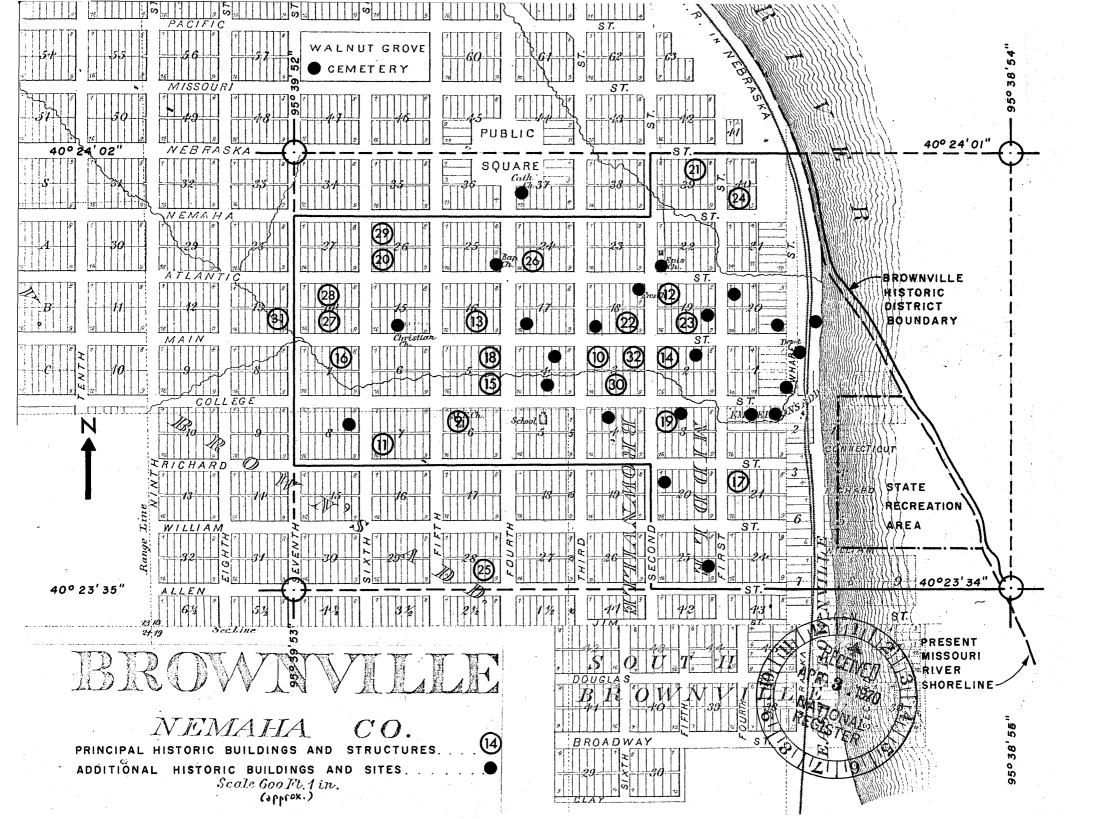
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BROWNVILLE HISTORIC DISTRICT

- 25. Tipton House. Probably built in 1869 for Mrs. H. M. Atkinson, daughter of U.S. Senator T. W. Tipton, and now owned by Randel Smith, President of the Brownville Historical Society. A fine example of Italianate architecture, this large two story brick residence is located outside the Brownville Historic District.
- 26. Colhapp House. Built in 1869 for John L. Colhapp and now occupied by J. Adolf Wensein, Brownville Postmaster. This 1½ story brick dwelling with Gothic bargeboard is a good example of Gothic Revival architecture.
- 27. Wibley House. Built in 1870 for William D. Lewis and purchased the same year by Eli S. Wibley. Occupied since 1944 by Mrs. Maude Miller, this $1\frac{1}{2}$ story brick dwelling is a good example of Gothic Revival architecture.
- 28. Nace House. A two story brick residence built in 1871 in the Italianate style for Israel S. Nace. Beautifully restored and now occupied by Donald J. Gappa.
- 29. Hoover House. Built ca. 1873 for William H. Hoover and now occupied by Alfred M. Pebley. This $1\frac{1}{2}$ story brick dwelling is a fine example of Gothic Revival architecture.
- 30. Christian Church. A frame building erected in 1903 on Main Street on the site of the present brick Christian Church. Moved to College Street in 1966 and converted by the Brownville Historical Society into a theatre -- Nebraska's only successful summer repertory theatre.
- 31. Brewery Cave. Used by the Brownville Brewery ca. 1866-1900 and now used summers as a coffee house. Located just outside the Brownville Historic District.
- 32. Boettner Park. Owned by the Brownville Historical Society. Located here are a historic marker, a war memorial, and a cannon which was cast in Springfield, Mass., in 1846 and purportedly came to Brownville prior to the Civil War.



Form:10-301 (July 1969)

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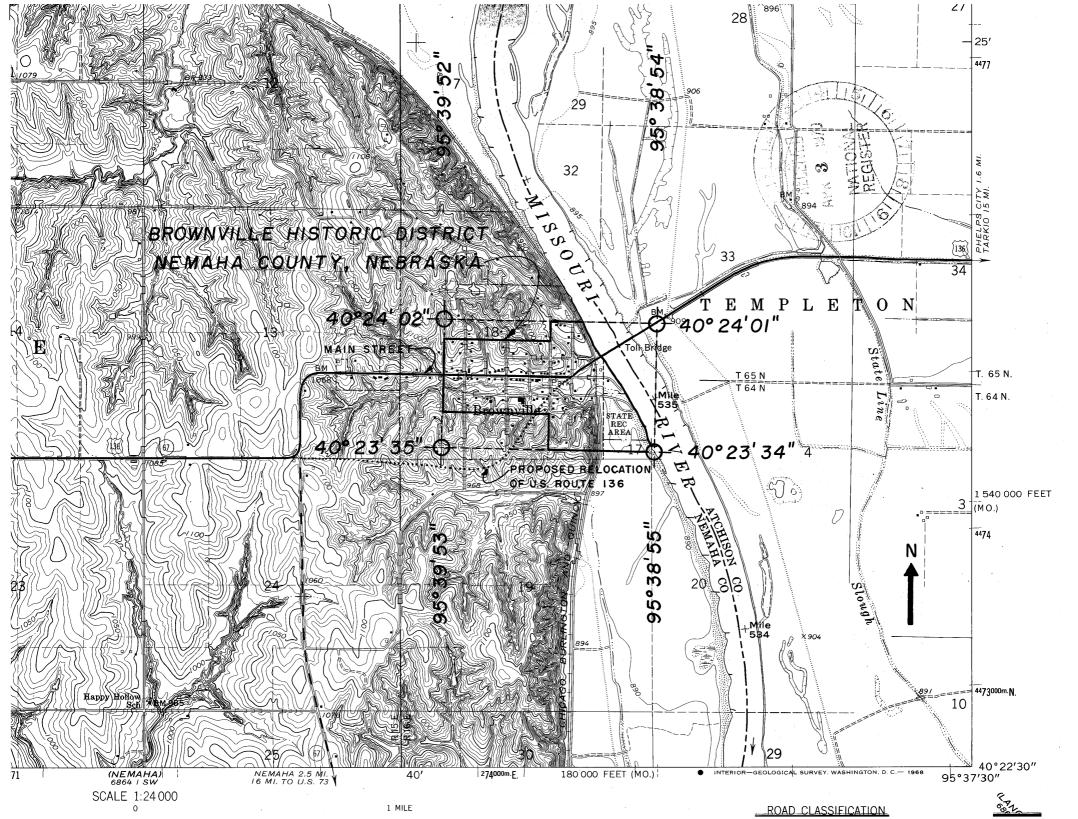
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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

N'ATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES PROPERTY MAP FORM

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