

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number \_\_\_\_\_ Page \_\_\_\_\_

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### SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 91000896

Date Listed: 7/25/91

Wirth Building  
Property Name

St. Louis  
County

MN  
State

#### Multiple Name

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This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.

Beth Roland  
Signature of the Keeper

7/25/91  
Date of Action

=====  
**Amended Items in Nomination:**

Item #6, Function:

The building is not being used for commercial or other purposes currently; therefore, the current function should be "VACANT/Not in Use."

This information was verified by Susan Roth of the MN SHPO staff.

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**DISTRIBUTION:**

- National Register property file
- Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)

896

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RECEIVED  
JUN 10 1991



# National 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 Wirth Building  
other names/site number N/A

### 2. Location

street & number 13 West Superior Street N/A  not for publication  
city, town Duluth N/A  vicinity  
state Minnesota code MN county St. Louis code 137 zip code 55802

### 3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> objects
			<u>0</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A  
Number 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 Ian R. Stewart Date 6/5/91  
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer  
State or Federal agency and bureau Minnesota Historical Society

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:) \_\_\_\_\_

Beth Boland 7/25/91  
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

## 6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/specialty store

COMMERCE/business

DOMESTIC/single dwelling

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/specialty store

COMMERCE/business

DOMESTIC/single dwelling

## 7. Description

Architectural Classification  
(enter categories from instructions)

Richardsonian Romanesque

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation granite

walls sandstone/brick

roof membrane

other cast iron piers

sheet metal bay window

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Wirth building is a three story commercial building located in downtown Duluth. The building occupies an interior 25 foot frontage lot at the center of the City's main retail business street, Superior Street, which is composed of continuous rows of buildings on each side, 10 to 12 blocks long. The bulk of downtown buildings are 2-4 stories tall and range up to 16 stories, many from the late 1800's and early 1900's.

The Wirth Building's storefront has been modified on the street level but remains original above. The architectural style is Richardsonian Romanesque, characterized primarily by several distinguishing traits: the building's rock faced stone as the sole building material; the massive carved out appearance; the intentional lack of decorative detailing and ornament; and the large deeply recessed second floor arched window opening. As with H.H. Richardson's work, the strength of the Wirth's design comes from the simple and powerful unity and composure of the face itself, rather than from a composition of elements.

General design composition of the front plays between a boldly non-symmetric second floor and a finer rhythmic and patterned third floor. On the west half of the second floor a large angular bay window projects slightly out over the street, while on the east half a grand round arched opening is set deep into the face yielding a heavy massive feeling. In contrast to the second floor front, the third floor design takes on both a smaller scale and symmetrical pattern, where windows are equally sized and spaced across the full front.

In plan the building is 25 feet by 90 feet with a later 10 foot addition on the rear first floor. There is also a partial basement in the front half. The first floor is basically open space. On the second and third floors, layouts are principally the same, composed of a central open stair, middle corridor with rooms off each side and a pair of rooms on each end. Most distinctive interior details are the open stairway with skylight above, large windows between rooms transmitting daylight to interior spaces, and wood wainscoting in the hallways.

See continuation sheet

**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

1886  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Dates

1886  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Cultural Affiliation

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Person

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_

Architect/Builder

Traphagen, Oliver G.  
Wirth, George  
\_\_\_\_\_

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

The Wirth Building is significant under National Register Criterion "C" as a leading example of the Richardsonian Romanesque style in Duluth, and as a representative of an early evolutionary chapter in the career of Oliver G. Traphagen, one of Duluth's most important architects during the particularly formative period of the late 1800's.

In the Midwest, the first solid examples of Richardsonian Romanesque architecture arrived in cities like Minneapolis and Chicago around 1883, (Larson, The Spirit of H.H. Richardson on the Midland Prairies, 1988, pg.20). For Duluth, even the shift from earlier Victorian styles to basic Romanesque did not arrive in earnest until later in 1889 with buildings like the First National Bank and Odd Fellows Hall. Romanesque seemed to peak in Duluth with the construction of the famous Lyceum Theater in 1892, heralded at the time as "modern in every way...a description of modern architectural art...a reposeful and majestic Romanesque type," (Duluth Daily Tribune, August 4, 1891). The Wirth Building had preceded the heart of Romanesque in Duluth by 6 years.

The Wirth Building represents a competent design and the debut of the Richardsonian Romanesque style in Duluth. The building's early date of construction is striking for it marks the appearance of this style a number of years before it came into wider use in the city of Duluth. For the next five years after the Wirth's appearance, the Richardsonian style would not be significantly drawn on again. Five years during this extremely prosperous period yielded an enormous amount of architecture. This was a period of unparalleled growth for the city, and yet the Wirth's architectural style remained isolated until Traphagen & Fitzpatrick's First Presbyterian Church was constructed in 1891. Then in 1892 architects Palmer and Hall designed Old

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

See Continuation Sheet 9:1

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: \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of property Less than one acre

UTM References

A 

1	5
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5	6	8	7	9	0
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5	1	8	1	6	6	0
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 Zone Easting Northing

B 

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 Zone Easting Northing

C 

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D 

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See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

East half of Lot 7, Duluth Proper 1st Division West Superior Street.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

Boundary includes the City lot historically associated with the property.

See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Larry M. Turbes, AIA  
 organization Larry M. Turbes/Associates date 3/5/91  
 street & number Midwest Federal Building Suite 809 telephone (218) 722-1106  
 city or town Duluth state MN zip code 55802

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Structurally the building has granite stone foundation walls and brick side party walls for bearing, and wood floor and roof joists spanning the width of the building. The front brownstone wall is supported by cast iron columns on each side and a composite of four steel beams at the second floor line. The rear wall is constructed of common brick in a flush plain design. The brownstone front with its heavily relieved rock faced stone begins at the second floor line with 18 inch high coursing in a running bond, tight joints with red colored beaded mortar, and diminishes to smaller 10 inch coursing with wider flush joints at the top. Contrasting buff colored sandstone in the same rock face is used for several levels of string courses and the wall coping, for the second floor arch, for gothic arched banding above third floor windows, and also around the gable's circular emblem.

One of the building's most distinguishing elements is the monumental round arched window opening, a hallmark of the Richardsonian Romanesque style. The round arch is 22 inches deep, featured with buff colored sandstone standing on decoratively carved blocks. The opening is filled with a composition of wood paneling at the base, wood windows and a fixed arched sash set with small square leaded panes of ribbed glass above.

Third floor window openings are all the same, set back 8 inches, constructed with gothic arches, (unusual for Richardsonian), and filled with wood double hung windows and a fixed arched sash above. Window sashes are one piece and dividing muntins bars were not used.

The bay window on the second floor is also somewhat peculiar for a Richardson Romanesque building. A more true Richardsonian building would have incorporated a bay window, but the bay form would have been carved out as an integral part of the stone face rather than an element "attached" to the face. The window is framed in wood and covered with decorative stamped metal. The bay's roof acts as a small balcony above and has an iron railing with curvilinear rails, bowing outward at the base, returning and then coiling out again at the top. The third floor window above the bay unit has a dropped sill for access out to this small balcony area.

To each side of the front, round tourelles begin at the third floor with intricately carved round stone brackets and end above

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the roof in rounded cone shapes projecting above the roof. The high relief of rough cut stone on these tourelles creates a particularly dramatic effect, giving the appearance of a form of soft sculpture.

The brownstone wall continues above the roof into a plain triangular gable. In the center is a round carved brownstone emblem displaying the date of construction, 1886. A simple flush rock faced stone coping caps off the wall and a square stone pedestal terminates the gable's peak. True to Richardsonian lithic design principles, the gable is a fairly plain monolithic continuation of the face below.

Alterations have been made to the front at the street level in several stages, resulting in a complete loss of original elements with the exception of side cast iron columns and steel beams above, now buried below remodeling work.

A new roof is being installed and the stone front has recently been pointed with new mortar per the original color and joint types. The stone has been washed, and because the brownstone is soft and has experienced some weathered shaling and soft spot pocketing, a liquid weatherproofing was applied to inhibit further deterioration. Also the triangular gable wall above the roof has developed an outward lean through the years and structural steel bracing back to the roof was added to help alleviate further movement. Wood windows as well as parts of the bay window structure are deteriorated and in need of repair or replacement.

For the interior, the original first floor decor has been destroyed, but the second and third floors remain in a condition very close to their original form. The condition of original interior materials and finishes is very poor though. Plaster has been irreparably damaged through tenant abuse and lack of building heat for several winters, and some of the woodwork has suffered from abuse as well.

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Central High School, the most substantial example of Richardsonian Romanesque architecture in the city. The Wirth building is a strong example of Richardsonian. The design clearly fits into the restrained monochromatic Romanesque mode of H.H. Richardson, and is a very early first look at this historical architectural style for Duluth.

The Wirth is also significant because the building represents an important early chapter in the career of Oliver G. Traphagen, Duluth's most renowned architect of the late 19th century. O.G. Traphagen was born in Tarry Town, New York, September 3, 1854. His parents moved to Wisconsin and then St. Paul where he spent most of his younger years. Traphagen was not formally educated in architecture, but instead was a local resident who moved up from carpenter to contractor to architect through experience. He came from St. Paul to Duluth in 1880 to work as a carpenter and by 1883 was listed in the City Directory as "Architect and Superintendent," (Scott, Traphagen & Fitzpatrick: "Representative Architects of Duluth," 1967, pg.1; R.L. Polk Duluth City Directory, 1983-84).

Traphagen worked alone until 1885 when he joined in partnership with St. Paul architect George Wirth, (relationship if any to the Wirth Building owner remains undetermined). During these initial years as an architect, Traphagen designed both private residences and commercial buildings. Only one example of this first era in Traphagen's career is known to remain: the modified H.H. Bell Residence at 602 East Second Street in Duluth.

George Wirth lived and practiced in St. Paul from 1879 until 1889. During those years he also practiced in Duluth, and for two of these years (1885-6) he was a partner with O.G. Traphagen. In contrast to Traphagen, George Wirth was formally educated. He was three years older than Traphagen, born in Bavaria and attended the Polytechnical Institute at Ratisbonne. Later he attended Cornell University, (History of Ramsey County and the City of St. Paul, 1881, pg.631). George Wirth had been one of the most significant architects to work in Duluth in the early 1880s, and was particularly noted for his design of the 1883 Grand Opera House, a very festive looking French Victorian building, (Scott, Duluth's Legacy, 1974, pg.9; Residences, Businesses and Public Buildings of George Wirth, 1884, pg.29).



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We can only speculate as to why George Wirth and O.G. Traphagen joined together in 1885. Traphagen was local, had shown very promising design talent, and Wirth was educated, also quite talented and had developed a good reputation in the city. At the same time they announced their partnership, the local Board of Trade announced a competition to design a building, (the first of two to be built in Duluth). According to the Duluth Daily Tribune (January 3, 1886), Wirth and Traphagen were selected out of "some 8 or 10 architects." There were only two firms in Duluth at the time so the majority of submissions were from non local architects. The Board of Trade building was their most significant accomplishment together, but the building was destroyed by fire only nine years later.

It was during this two year partnership that the Wirth Building was designed, and the Wirth is a respectable testament to this chapter in O.G. Traphagen's career. No definitive evidence has indicated which of the two partners was primarily responsible for the Wirth Building's design, George Wirth or O. G. Traphagen. The building's style was a departure from both architect's previous work giving no clues, and after the Wirth Building there are only significant records of O.G. Traphagen's work where he went on to design predominantly in the Romanesque Revival style and again the Richardsonian Romanesque style.

After Wirth and Traphagen separated in 1886, George Wirth continued to live and practice in St Paul for three more years after which no further information of his whereabouts has been found. Oliver Traphagen had won the confidence of Duluth dignitaries and the business community and he continued to practice alone, receiving large commissions such as the City Hall and Jail, First National Bank and Odd Fellows Buildings.

In 1890 the well known partnership of Traphagen & Fitzpatrick was established. This was the peak of Traphagen's career. Again Traphagen had allied with an educated and trained architect, Francis W. Fitzpatrick. Fitzpatrick was ten years older than Traphagen, he was formally educated in the United States and spent three years abroad studying with French architect M. Bourgeau. Prior to moving to Duluth he had spent five years serving as assistant to Leroy S. Buffington in Minneapolis, (Scott, Traphagen & Fitzpatrick: "Representative Architects of Duluth," 1967, pg.3). The team of Traphagen and Fitzpatrick

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produced numerous public, commercial and residential buildings in Duluth, the most distinctive being the Lyceum Theater, First Presbyterian Church and second Board of Trade Building. They mastered the Romanesque Revival style with exceptional sophistication. It was during this period that the Richardsonian style of the Wirth Building would be reused again. Several buildings of this most prominent time in Traphagen's career are on the National Register.

In 1895 the firm Traphagen and Fitzpatrick dissolved and shortly after Traphagen moved to Honolulu, Hawaii where he continued his professional career. The Moana Hotel on Waikiki Beach, designed by Traphagen and completed in 1901, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Finally in 1906 O.G. Traphagen moved to San Francisco where he retired.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS & REFERENCES

- Northeast Minnesota Historical Center, University of Minnesota  
Duluth, and Patricia Maus, Director  
Duluth Public Library  
St. Louis County Historical Society, and Maryanne Norton,  
Assistant Director  
Northwest Architectural Archives, University Of Minnesota, Twin  
Cities, and Alan Lathrop, Director  
Duluth City Building Inspection  
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