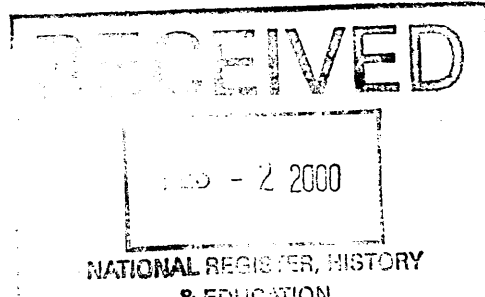


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service



National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "X" in the appropriate box or by entering the information. **NATIONAL PARK SERVICE** Any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable". For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name The Farnam Building

other names/site number D009:0124-042

2. Location

street & number 1607-1617 Farnam Street not for publication

city or town Omaha vicinity

state Nebraska code NE county Douglas code 55 zip code 68102

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, 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. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Michael Sumner  
Signature of certifying official

1/25/00  
Date

Director, Nebraska State Historical Society  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official/Title

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. 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): \_\_\_\_\_

Edson F. Beall

3/9/00

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Keeper

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Action

**Farnam Building**

Name of Property

**Douglas County, Nebraska**

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**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-state
- public-Federal

**Category of Property**  
(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1	0	<b>Total</b>

**Name of related multiple property listing**  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)  
N/A

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**  
N/A

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE/business/professional/specialty store  
/restaurant

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instruction)

WORK IN PROGRESS  
DOMESTIC/multiple dwelling  
COMMERCE/TRADE/specialty store

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

MIXED/Sullivan-esque/Gothic Revival

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete  
walls Brick, Limestone, Bronze, Terra Cotta  
Roof Synthetic  
other

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "X" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or a grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Architecture

Commerce

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1929-1950

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

1929

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

George B. Prinz

Byron Reed Company / Parsons Construction Co.

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

**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 # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary Location for Additional Data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
  - Other State agency
  - Federal agency
  - Local government
  - University
  - Other
- Name of repository:
- Historical Society of Douglas County
- City of Omaha Public Library – Downtown Branch
- Local Government

**Farnam Building**  
Name of Property

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### 10. Geographical Data

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Acreage of Property less than one

UTM References (place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet).

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
1.	15	253900	471270	3.			
2.				4.			

See continuation sheet.

#### Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

#### Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

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### 11. Form Prepared By

---

name/title Martin Kluck, Intern Architect

organization Alley Poyner Architecture

date November 11, 1999

street & number 1213 Jones Street

telephone 402-341-1544

city or town Omaha

state NE zip code 68102

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### Additional Documentation

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Submit the following items with the completed form:

#### Continuation Sheets

#### Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

#### Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

#### Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

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### Property Owner

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(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name/title 1613 Farnam Street Limited Partnership

street & number 1025 Leavenworth Street

telephone 402-345-8000

city or town Omaha

state NE zip code 68102

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**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

United States Department of the Interior  
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## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Farnam Building

Name of Property

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### Narrative Description

The Farnam Building at 1607-1617 Farnam Street in Omaha, Douglas County, Nebraska is a seven story commercial building with a full basement and sidewalk vault built in 1929 in an Eclectic/Sullivan-esque/Art Deco/Gothic Revival style. It is located in the middle of the block on the south side of Farnam Street between 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Streets. This flat-roofed rectangular building measures 132' x 50'. There are a total of 7 structural bays, which in turn form the basis for the originally planned six commercial tenants and elevator lobby serving the upper floors. The building partially bears on the west wall of the brick high-rise historic First National Bank Building to its east. When the building was originally erected, the fourth through seventh floors of the west wall overlooked another building. There is now a ten-story structure on this side. The south side has enameled brick to the window sills of the fourth floor. An unglazed brick was used above this. The Farnam Street elevation has a limestone base to the heads of the second floor windows. Above this the walls achieve a verticality with brick pilasters flanking windows with ornamental bronze spandrel panels between them. Above the seventh floor windows is a limestone crown with ornamental relief that terminates in a monumental, Deco-style battlement.

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The seven-story, ornately detailed Farnam Building at 1607-1617 Farnam Street in Omaha, Nebraska was constructed in 1929 for the use of retail tenants, as the corporate offices of the Byron Reed Company (on the second floor), as well as professional offices on floor three through seven. This section of downtown Omaha was coming to the end of its multi-year renovation of replacing original stick-frame and low-rise masonry buildings with substantial and architecturally significant high-rise buildings. 1929 saw the opening of the Hotel Paxton at the corner of 14<sup>th</sup> and Farnam as well as the opening of the Barker professional office building on the corner of 15<sup>th</sup> and Farnam.

The Farnam building was designed with 6 commercial bays for retail tenants. The westernmost two bays were constructed for the Northrup Jones Co., a lunchroom/pastry shop that later expanded into the adjacent eastern bay. The kitchen and bakery were located in the basement. Deliveries were made from Farnam Street via a scuttle in the sidewalk that led directly into the storage room/vault. At the time of the original construction, Northrup Jones had an entry similar to the other commercial bays with the exception that the entrance was inset and accessed around a structural column. The other storefronts fit nicely between the stone pilasters that changed to brick once above the second floor. As different commercial tenants have come and gone, the various storefronts have changed. The most notable storefront change occurred in the late 1930's when the Northrup Jones Co. expanded. Architect John Latenser was hired to design a new, continuous storefront.

Unlike the other commercial spaces, which were steel and glass set within the stone base, Latenser decided a different look was needed to identify the Company as one contiguous space. A contrasting stone base appears to support a wall of brick the same color as the rest of the façade brick. Within this brick expanse are cream-colored terra cotta pilasters flanking a central arched doorway surrounded by cream-colored terra cotta with light blue ornaments. Between the doorway and the pilasters there are small glass jewel cases with Chippendale tops that provided menu display. Above the door and these cases, in an ornamental crown molding that runs the length of the storefront, there's an indentation that holds a fluorescent light strip. At the front of this indentation, at the face of the crown, there are bronze letters that spell out Northrup Jones Co., providing a chiaroscuro effect. Centered on each bay to either side of the doorway are large glass display cases framed in cream-colored terra cotta with light blue accents. This framing consists of a small pilaster on either side with an Aztecan head design. The overall style, as described by the architect, is Georgian.

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Farnam Building

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George Prinz was the architect of the Farnam Building. An Ohio native, George B. Prinz (1864-1946) was educated at M.I.T., possibly where he met Thomas R. Kimball of Omaha as a fellow student, and studied for two years in Europe. Prinz moved to Omaha in 1891 to work for Kimball who was starting an architectural practice. Thomas R. Kimball was Omaha's most prominent architect, having designed the Omaha Public Library as well as the Douglas County and Hall County Courthouses. Prinz began his own firm in 1909, practicing architecture until 1940. During this time Prinz designed such buildings as the Livestock Exchange as well as the Masonic Temple, which came to be known as the Douglas Building.

Built by the Byron Reed Company, the building was touted as a completely "fireproof" structure because of its concrete structure and poured concrete floor slabs. The rear (south) façade was designed utilitarian in nature, being all single-colored brick with no ornamentation. The front façade is an incredible composition of materials, textures and colors. The base band is a red, gray and black mottled granite band. Directly above this is an expanse of limestone that rises to a height approximately one foot above the second floor windows. The storefronts on the first floor and the large, arched windows of the second floor provide the width to give the stone verticality. These stone "piers are approximately four feet wide and step back to provide a strong, two foot wide central shaft. These stone piers terminate at the tops with an ornamental pattern. There are two designs to this pattern, with the designs alternating between piers. Completing the effect of this stone base is an expansive twelve inch arched stone head over the second floor windows.

A monumental stone arch marks the entrance to the first floor elevator lobby, with "FARNAM BUILDING" engraved in its head. Rosettes are engraved on either side of these words. Crowning the arch is a one foot high, highly ornamented sculptural frieze. Copper flashing provides a brilliant green top to this arch. On either side of the opening are bronze plaques with "FARNAM BUILDING" embossed. At the time of the building's construction this archway led to an exterior vestibule that had walls of the same limestone and an ornate plaster ceiling. This vestibule is now fully enclosed, with a curtain wall system infilling the opening.

Above the arched second floor windows and the sill of the third floor windows there is a small amount of the red brick which is used for the entire upper façade. This brick band terminates in a deep limestone sill that has a central diamond-shaped ornament carved into the center and large dentils running along the underside.

The stepped-stone pilasters continue as stepped brick pilasters until this third-floor sill. At this point the pilasters step back once again, providing an even greater sense of verticality. There are two windows per structural bay at floors three through seven. These windows are divided by a vertical brick band that's approximately half the width of the adjacent brick pilasters. Adding to the verticality are bronze spandrel panels that span between the window sills and heads. These bronze panels have ornament in three designs. The three designs alternate in a consistent A-B-C rhythm across the façade. These bronze panels are continuous between windows from the heads of those on the third floor to the sills of those on the seventh. At the heads of the seventh floor windows the brick pilasters stop and a continuous stone crown tops the building.

The stone crown continues the lines of the stone pilasters below up into a deco-like battlement with each element of the pilaster stepping up one foot, terminating in an angled top. Between the pilasters, a modillioned cornice tops this stone band. Between the cornice and third floor window heads, centered between the pilasters, there are three squares of ornaments in two designs. One of these designs is a leaf pattern with a medallion at its center. The other design is a geometric medallion placed over a multi-line X. These ornaments are in a consistent A-B-A rhythm, with the organic pattern being "A" and the geometric pattern being "B".

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**Farnam Building** \_\_\_\_\_

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The interiors of the 6 office floors of this building changed with the times as well as the tenants. The public corridors appear the same today as they did upon the building's completion. The floors of the corridors are of a tan/brown terrazzo mix bordered by black/gray terrazzo for an area rug effect. The wainscot is marble, being composed of a 6" base, 4" chair rail, with marble between. This pinkish-gray wainscot is four feet tall. Above it are plaster walls. Doors are wood full-panel, with the panels sometimes being made of clear or frosted glass. The four inch trim on these doors occurs above the marble wainscot only (the marble wainscot abuts the door opening for the lower four feet. This theme is carried out and elaborated on in the main (first floor) lobby. The marble wainscot in this lobby rises to a height of ten feet. The ceiling, at a height of approximately fourteen feet, is divided into four-foot wide coffers that have gold and green stenciling in a deco "flame" pattern. At the rear of this lobby, leading to a rear vestibule, there is a pair of ebony doors inlaid with large squares of ornate metalwork. This same pattern occurs in the elevator doors. Original light fixtures in this lobby were deco "flame" multi-tiered pendant fixtures. A mailbox, building directory, radiator grills, and electric cabinet cover are all fitted with ornamental bronze work.

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Statement of Significance

The Farnam Building is locally significant under Criterion A for its contribution to commerce in Omaha. Since its construction in 1929, the building has played an important role in the business community. Constructed by the Byron-Reed Company, the building was the locus for the financial and legal community who met at the Northrup-Jones restaurant on the street level. It played an instrumental role in downtown business transactions. The Farnam Building is significant under Criterion C as a representative example of early 20<sup>th</sup> century commercial/retail construction illustrating ornately detailed Art Deco, Nouveau, and Gothic ornamentation. It is also associated with two significant Omaha architects, George Prinz and John Latenser, Jr.

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The city of Omaha was platted in 1854 in hopes that their organized territory would be attractive as a path for the transcontinental railroad. The city grew slowly at first while establishing necessary public and government services like newspapers, post offices and city hall. It wasn't until 1863 when the public announcement came that the Omaha area would be the eastern terminus for the transcontinental railroad that the population and construction boom began. Job opportunities and therefore population abounded during the 1880's after the railroad's arrival. During the later part of the 1800s and early 1900s, Omaha experienced tremendous growth. Census data shows Omaha's population at 16,000 in 1870 and over 124,000 in 1910. It was during this period that the downtown and warehousing area began to take shape with many warehouses and businesses undergoing construction. Construction came to a halt during the hard economic times of the 1890s. However, during the recovery years after the turn of the century and especially in the teen years prior to World War I, Omaha again saw a tremendous growth spurt and renewed financial prosperity. This period prior to and during World War I was known as the Golden Years. Farm prices were high and the economy good. During the 1920s farm prices fluctuated and though the economy remained for the most part steady in Omaha, fluctuations were present that foreshadowed the crash of 1929.

The 1920s saw the growth of Omaha neighborhoods and apartment houses. Downtown began to fill out with cultural resources like theatres and museums. These entertainment venues were never a focus during the booming population years from 1860s onward. Buildings constructed in downtown during the period include the Aquila Court, a modern multi-use, mall type building, an Elks Club, art museum, many theatres, and also insurance complexes, namely Woodmen of the World and the Mutual Benefit Health and Accident Association (now Mutual of Omaha). The Farnam Building, completed in 1929 was one of the last of this era to be constructed before the economy fell flat.

The building was constructed by the Byron Reed Company on a piece of property that was virtually the only unoccupied piece of land in the heart of the retail and office district of the city. The Byron Reed Company, organized in 1857, is the oldest real estate company in the state. Founder, Byron Reed, was active in the city government and at one time had the largest rent roll in Omaha. When he died in 1889, Reed donated a parcel of land for a public library, his collection of coins, medals, rare manuscripts, autographs, and private library to the City of Omaha. His obituary stated that "He was to Omaha what the Astors were to New York" The Byron Reed Company formed the Farnam Realty Company in order to develop the property and construct the Farnam Building. L. P. Campbell, vice president of the Byron Reed Company, believed that the construction of the new building would be a "civic improvement of major importance". The corporate offices of the Byron Reed Company occupied the entire second floor from 1929 through 1966.

The Farnam Realty Company hired architect George P. Prinz to design the building. An Ohio native, George Prinz was educated at M.I.T. where he met fellow student Thomas R. Kimball of Omaha. After studying in Europe for two years, he



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returned to Omaha and went to work for Thomas Kimball. Prinz established his own firm in 1909 and practiced until 1940. The Livestock Exchange Building (listed NRHP, 1999) and the Masonic Temple a/k/a the Douglas Building (razed 1998) were also designed by Prinz.

According to newspaper articles at the time, the preliminary plans showed gothic influence with Bedford stone and brick construction. While the building was being designed to "harmonize with other new buildings in the downtown district", it was also the latest in business blocks, featuring 'peacock alleys' and other innovations. On December 3, 1967 in an article in the Omaha World-Herald, architect Nes Latenser supplied the following professional critique on the Farnam Building: "A tricky one. It has echoes of the natural forms used by Sullivan but is more nearly Art Noveaux, a big thing in the 1920s. It was so far out that it is back in again in the twisting, coiling, interlocking forms of hippie posters."

The building permit indicates that the Parsons Construction Company built it for \$270,000. The seven-story building was designed for retail shops and stores on the first two floors and offices on the third through seventh floors. The Milwaukee Railroad, the W.L. Douglas Shoe Company and Northrup-Jones were the first commercial tenants in the building. The Travelers Health Association occupied the entire third floor of the building. Northrup-Jones leased space in the building from 1929 until 1994. One of Omaha's oldest restaurants, Northrup-Jones was a second home for scores of judges, lawyers, politicians and business people who gathered over years for coffee, pastries and friendship. Owner, Wilbur A. Jones once wrote that "stocks, bonds and real estate is sold daily and loans made and lawsuits settled" around the counters of Northrup-Jones. Other occupants of the building included the Omaha Chamber of Commerce and the Legal Aid Society.

As Nes Latenser's quote indicates the building is eclectic in its styling. The building has a myriad of architectural details providing the pedestrian with an ornate textural façade. George Prinz took care to intertwine every surface of the building with related materials and details. Architecturally it shows Prinz's ability to work with a variety of styles, details, and materials and make them harmonize and reflect modern building preferences.

Ten years after construction of the building, Northrup-Jones wanted a distinctive look for their space. They hired Omaha architect John Latenser, Jr. to rehabilitate the eastern most bays of the street level to set off their space. Latenser came up with a Georgian Revival, glazed terra cotta façade to add to the building. This 1939 addition is architecturally significant in its own rite not only for its association with John Latenser, Jr, son of his namesake also a significant Omaha architect, but for its integrity of style and detail.

Overall this building contributes to the economic and commercial development of the 1920s in Omaha and reflects the popular building styles of the times.

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"Beautiful Farnam Building to Open May 1<sup>st</sup>". *Omaha Chamber of Commerce Journal*. April 20, 1929, p. 7-12

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Verbal Boundary Description

Lots 2 and 3, Block 140, in the City of Omaha, as surveyed and lithographed in Douglas County, Nebraska, except that part of Lots 2 and 3, Block 140, Original City of Omaha, as surveyed and platted and recorded in Douglas County, Nebraska described as follows: Beginning at the S.E. corner of said Lot 2; thence Westerly on the South line of said Lots 2 and 3, 112.00 feet; thence Northerly on a line 112.00 feet West of and parallel to the East line of said Lot 2, 63.00 feet; thence Easterly on a line 63.00 feet North of and parallel to the South line of said Lots 2 and 3, 112.00 feet to the East line of said Lot 2; thence Southerly on the East line of said Lot 3, 63.00 feet to the point of beginning.

Boundary Justification

This boundary includes all historically associated property.