

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

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NATIONAL REGISTER

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 Prague Hotel  
other names/site number D009:0117-003

### 2. Location

street & number 1402 South 13th Street N/A not for publication  
city, town Omaha N/A vicinity  
state Nebr. code NE county Douglas code 055 zip code 68108

### 3. Classification

Ownership of Property		Category of Property		Number of Resources within Property	
				Contributing	Noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)		<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local		<input type="checkbox"/> district		<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State		<input type="checkbox"/> site		<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> structures
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal		<input type="checkbox"/> structure		<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> objects
		<input type="checkbox"/> object		<u>1</u>	<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.  
James A. Hanson May 29, 1987  
Signature of certifying official 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.  
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. Beth Ansvener 7/9/87  
 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:) \_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

**6. Function or Use**

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Domestic/hotel  
Commerce Trade/tavern  
Recreation and Culture/auditorium

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Work in progress

**7. Description**

Architectural Classification  
(enter categories from instructions)

Late Victorian  
Renaissance

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Brick  
walls Brick  
roof Asphalt  
other Stone/sandstone  
Metal/tin/iron

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

Located approximately one mile south of Omaha's central business district, the Prague Hotel occupies a corner lot which fronts along 13th Street, a major north-south corridor of mixed commercial and residential development. Constructed in 1898, the building was designed to function as a hotel, tavern/restaurant, and dance hall/auditorium. The three-story brick structure is rectangular in plan with a full basement and flat roof. Solid masonry walls support floors and a roof of standard joist construction. A product of the late Victorian period, the Hotel's design incorporates aspects derived from several stylistic sources, however Renaissance Revival influences predominate. Because the building has been subject to few alterations and little deterioration of original historic fabric has occurred, the property exhibits a high degree of historical and architectural integrity. A certified rehabilitation of the Hotel — vacant since 1985 — is currently in progress.

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Oriented to the east on a corner lot, the Prague Hotel is a three-story brick building, rectangular in plan, measuring 50 by 58 feet, with a full basement and flat roof. Sited approximately 20 feet from 13th Street on the east and William Street on the north, the Hotel abuts a two-story commercial building on the south. A gravel parking lot lies adjacent to the building on the west.

The building's technical system consists of solid masonry walls on continuous footings which support floors and a roof of standard joist construction. Walls on the north, south and east rise above the slightly sloping built-up roof to form a parapet. Dark red brick in a running bond faces the building's east and north walls; west and south walls are common brick.

Facing 13th Street, the Hotel's principal (east) elevation is vertically divided by projecting brick pilasters into four bays (two wide and two narrow). Door and window openings are aligned within each bay. In the north corner bay at the first floor level, the structure's walls are chamfered; a door (modern) and large multi-paned window (original) are set in the splay. First-floor door and window openings are round-arched and include traceried fan lights (the fan light above the central door has been boarded over, as have the main panels in the two first-bay windows). Second- and third-story windows are double-hung, sliding sash with 1-over-1 lights. In the corner bay, multi-paned casement-type windows are surmounted by leaded glass transoms.

Ornamental detailing of the principal facade includes the liberal use of galvanized metal and sandstone. Enriched with block modillions and triglyphs and bearing the words, "Restaurant" and "Sample Room", a stamped metal entablature separates the ground story from the floors above. Supporting the entablature at the structure's beveled northeast corner is a free-standing cast iron column. Above the third story, a pressed-metal entablature is enriched with modillions and a band of dentils. Ornately detailed metal hood moldings crown doors and windows at the first-floor level. Red sandstone is used primarily for sill and lintel courses. Brick surfaces on the first floor of the east facade, as well as those on the north are painted red. White paint covers metal trim.

**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)  
Ethnic Heritage/ European  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Period of Significance  
1898 - 1937  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Significant Dates  
1898, 1915  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Cultural Affiliation  
N/A  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Significant Person  
N/A

Architect/Builder  
Guth, Joseph P.  
Lund, T. J.

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

Under Criterion A. of the National Register Criteria, the Prague Hotel is significant to the ethnic history of Omaha, Nebraska, for its association with the settlement of Czech immigrants established in the city in the 1870s. Located in the geographic center of the initial Czech enclave, the Hotel — built in 1898 — served as a focal point for the community's social and cultural activities: As such, it is representative of the theme, Czech settlement in Omaha, 1870 to 1940. Other extant buildings in the district also reflect the neighborhood's ethnic heritage; however, the Prague Hotel is the earliest important community building that survives with a high degree of architectural and historical integrity yet intact.

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The initial stage of Czech emigration to the United States began in the 1860s due to two factors: The removal of restraints prohibiting emigration by the Austro-Hungarian government; and local economic difficulties caused by the break-up of the peasant farming economy (Jones: p. 198). Significant numbers of Czechs primarily from Bohemia and Moravia settled in the Great Plains region, especially in Nebraska where they outnumbered the combined total of all other Great Plains states (Luebke: p. 418). Of the more than 630,000 Czech-speaking immigrants who settled in the United States by 1920, about 9 percent were located in Nebraska (Garver: p. 151-152). One of Nebraska's dominant immigrant groups, Czech settlement was concentrated primarily in the eastern portion of the state in Douglas, Saunders, Butler, Colfax and Saline Counties (Luebke: p. 418).

Omaha's first Czech-born resident, newspaper publisher Edward Rosewater, settled in the city in 1863. Eight years later, Rosewater founded the Czech language newspaper "Pokrok Západu" which induced Czechs in other states and in the homeland to locate in Nebraska (Rosicky: p. 26). Census data shows that by 1880, the number of Czechs residing in Omaha had grown to almost 900. The data also indicates that the greatest concentration of Czech settlement was located in an area from Pacific to Pine, between 11th and 15th Streets (Fimple: p. 38).

Referred to as "Praha" (Prague), or "Bohemian Town," the settlement was a densely populated and homogeneous community. Business, social and religious institutions within the area catered to Czech residents, providing the community with a high degree of self-sufficiency. South 13th Street near William was recognized as the community's primary business district. By 1910, the street contained, among others, the shops of William Vasak, dry goods; Joseph Kotrba, a shoemaker; the Sthlik and Hoto Saloon; Mrs. Julia Stenicka, milliner; and the office of Dr. F. A. Sedlacek (Omaha City Directory).

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

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:

Omaha City Planning Department

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of property Less than one acre

UTM References

A 

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

B 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

D 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The property is described as the east 100 feet of Lot 1, Block 9, Kountze's Third Addition, an addition to the City of Omaha, as surveyed, platted and recorded in Douglas County, Nebraska.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes the parcel that has historically been associated with the property.

See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Lynn Bjorkman, City Planner  
organization Omaha City Planning Department date 30 March 1987  
street & number Omaha/Douglas Civic Center, 1819 Farnam telephone (402) 444-4927  
city or town Omaha state NE zip code 68183

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Formal and decorative aspects of the building's principal facade extend only through the corner bay of the building's secondary (north) elevation. The balance of this street-facing wall contains five ranks of regularly-spaced windows, (double-hung, sliding sash, 1-over-1) and shows little embellishment, except for sandstone lintels and string courses. Windows on upper floors are rectangular, while small, square window openings (now boarded-in) pierce the wall on the ground floor level. The building's west and south elevations contain rectangular, irregularly-spaced windows.

The Prague Hotel was originally designed to fulfill several functions and the division of the building's interior space, though altered, still reflects significant aspects of its original character. On the first floor, a tavern — entered through the corner door — occupies the northeast section of the building. A door on the principal facade near the building's south corner opens to a room used as the main dining area for the restaurant operation. Smaller dining rooms (now used for storage) are grouped at the rear of the structure. Kitchen facilities were situated in the basement.

Centered on the principal facade, another door provides access to a central stairway which leads to the hotel's rooms on the second and third levels. Although the third floor was at first used as a dance hall and auditorium, a 1915 remodel divided the open space into rooms patterned on the existing second-floor plan. That plan appears to be relatively unaltered and features small rooms arranged around a central U-shaped hall.

Although a lack of maintenance has caused some deterioration of historic fabric over the years, the building's exterior has, for the most part, remained intact and in good condition. Modernizations have removed or altered most of the original interior details. Original interior features which do remain include: wainscotting in the south restaurant area; patterned tile in the hotel entry; and pressed metal ceilings in the tavern area (above a modern suspended ceiling), in a storage room and in several other areas on the lower and upper floors.

In its formal and structural aspects, the Prague Hotel represents a common 19th century commercial building type: the two-part commercial block. Architectural interest lies primarily in the detailing and decoration of the principal facade. The pilastered arcade formed by door and window openings on the ground floor, as well as the prominent pressed-metal cornice enriched with modillions and dentils suggest Renaissance Revival stylistic sources. The traceried fan lights in street level windows are typically a Colonial Revival feature and the hood moldings above the ground level windows are reminiscent of the Italianate. Overall, the effect is that of Victorian eclecticism.

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The site of the Prague Hotel, the southeast corner of 13th and William Streets, was platted as part of Kountze's Third Addition, annexed to the City in 1857. An early Czech immigrant, Vaclav Stepanek, built the city's first Czech dance hall on the site in 1869 (Writers Project Guide: p. 11). The Omaha Brewing Association (later the Storz Brewing Company) purchased the property in 1897 and the next year, according to building permits, erected the hotel at a cost of \$12,000.

The Brewing Association commissioned Omaha architect J. P. Guth to design the Prague Hotel. Trained in Germany, Guth worked in the engineering department of the Union Pacific Railway until 1887 when he opened an office with local architect Joseph Dietrick. The partnership dissolved in 1890 and over the next 40 years Guth worked independently, providing plans for a range of commercial and residential projects which include: the Fepco Building (1903); the Trimble House (1909); Omaha Casket Company (1905) and Druid Hall (1914).

In addition to the Prague Hotel, J. P. Guth planned a number of industrial brewery buildings for the Storz and Krug Companies. In 1897 he designed a tavern at 4024 North 24th Street and was probably responsible for the plans of other neighborhood taverns owned by local breweries (Omaha Architects File).

Originally constructed with a restaurant and tavern on the first floor, hotel rooms on the second floor and a dance hall on the third floor, the Prague Hotel was built as a center for the Czech community's social and cultural activities. Joe Pivonka, a native of Bohemia, ran the operation from its opening for the Storz Company and in 1915 Pivonka purchased the Hotel from the brewery. Z.Č.B.J. lodge meetings (a Czech fraternal and benevolent association), dramatic productions and private parties were held in the dance hall until about 1915 when the space was remodelled for additional hotel rooms (Writers Project Guide: p. 11). The hotel and restaurant specializing in Czech food attracted many patrons from beyond the limits of the neighborhood. Salesmen serving the district's businesses and ranchers bringing cattle to market at the South Omaha stockyards were frequent patrons. The hotel also played an informal role in the political life of Omaha. Campaign meetings were held in the restaurant which served as a gathering place for business, professional and political leaders from throughout the city (Hruska: Interview). The Czech statesman, Eduard Beneš was a guest at the hotel shortly after World War I, while on a tour to raise funds for the newly formed Czechoslovakian state (Writers Project Guide: p. 11).

Members of the Pivonka family owned and operated the Hotel into the 1940s. By this time the district was losing much of its character as a Czech enclave; however, the Hotel helped to maintain the original cultural identity of the neighborhood, primarily through the popularity of the Restaurant's Bohemian cuisine.

In subsequent years, the Hotel's restaurant was closed, but the building continued to house a bar and residential hotel operation until 1985 when the upper floors of the building were condemned due to building code violations. The structure is currently vacant and a certified historic rehabilitation of the property is underway.

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The period of significance for the property, 1898 to 1937, derives from the date of the building's original construction (1898) through 1937, the final year in which the property continues to meet the 50-year criterion. While census data shows that the neighborhood's ethnic character was clearly established by 1880, determining an end point for the community's disintegration poses a more difficult question. Census data, written accounts and oral history suggest that the area's ethnic cohesiveness persisted at least into the early 1940s, substantiating the upper limit of the period of significance at 1937. Significant dates within the period of significance are noted for the building's construction (1898) and for the conversion of the dance hall to hotel guest rooms (1915).

The Prague Hotel was evaluated on a local level against other buildings with similar associations to the theme of Czech settlement. The evaluation was based on the 1984 Omaha/Douglas County Building Survey and included all buildings within the primary geographic area of Czech settlement. Other extant buildings in the district, particularly the 1926 Sokol Auditorium (D009:0113-001) and the 1886 St. Wenceslaus Catholic Church (D009:0115-001) also represent the neighborhood's ethnic history. However, St. Wenceslaus Church has been subject to much alteration with a considerable loss of architectural integrity; Sokol Auditorium dates from a later stage in the district's development, as reflected in its location south of the settlement's original business district. A well-preserved example of a 19th century commercial building in the center of the original Czech settlement, the Prague Hotel is the earliest, important community building that survives with a high degree of structural and historical integrity yet intact.

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