

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

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 Blair High School
other names/site number Central School; NEHBS #WNO2-118

2. Location

street & number Sixteenth and Colfax N/A not for publication
city, town Blair N/A vicinity
state Nebraska code NE county Washington code 177 zip code 68008

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. Hanom February 5, 1991
Signature of certifying official Date

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. 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:)

for 3/14/91
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Education/School

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Work in progress

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)

Romanesque

Other: Colonial Revival

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Brick

walls Brick

roof Asphalt

other Stone/Sandstone

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

Blair High School in Blair, Nebraska is a two story over raised basement brick structure designed in the Richardsonian Romanesque style. The original H-plan, sheltered by a series of hip roofs, had two additions appended to the north. The first, a two story gable-roofed brick Colonial Revival annex was added in 1929. It is a contributing resource for the purposes of national historic nomination. In 1967, a small non-contributing one story flat-roofed brick structure was appended to the west face of the 1929 addition. Although the school's interior has been subject to remodeling, the exterior is predominantly unaltered; overall, the building's structural and architectural integrity remains very good.

Blair School, located on a 1.8 acre level site, is bordered by Sixteenth Street on the east, Colfax Street on the north, Seventeenth Street to the west, and South Street to the south. The principal building fronts South Street. The 1929 addition, however, rotated the main entry to the east where it fronts Sixteenth Street. The original building's H-plan is covered by a hipped roof, originally slate, but now shingled. A gabled-roof frame dormer is centered on the roof's front slope while hipped roof frame dormers flank each end. The roof is crowned by two large vent stacks that seem to recall many regional barns. End pavilions divide the facade into three parts. The recessed central bay is dominated by a one story arcaded entrance.

Internally, the original building is distinguished by the wide central hall and the central assembly hall on the upper level. The main entrance enters into a vestibule that is linked to the main level central hall. The side entrances each open to stairways providing vertical circulation to first and second level classrooms. These stairs are marked by the picturesque wooden balustrades. Although slightly modified, the original plan is still evident. Many rooms still have the original metal coffered ceilings.

A noteworthy feature of the principal building is its fenestration. In the four corner classrooms on both floors, the larger outside wall expanse contains five double-hung windows while the shorter wall has two. All five wardrobe corridors also contain one window. In elevation, this configuration results in groups of six and ten windows which alternately shift around the building corresponding to the corner classrooms (photo #1). The orientation of blackboards combined with the light level in the classrooms might suggest a rationale for this pattern of window placement. Irrespective of the reasoning, this arrangement breaks the symmetry of the elevations and is particularly apparent on the otherwise balanced front facade, where the pavilions -- evenly matched in scale and detail -- contain unequal numbers of windows.

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Structurally, the floors of the original building are supported by wood joists spanning between interior and exterior load bearing masonry walls. The roof is supported by wood joists spanning between wood trusses.

Stylistically, the original building employs a number of elements sympathetic of the late 19th century Romanesque revival. The brick arches above the windows spring from rusticated sandstone impostes. Likewise, the window sills are sandstone. Other evidence of the style can be seen in the vaulted door openings. Here, the arches not only spring from the sandstone impostes but also employ archivolt trim. The raised first floor -- which recalls Roman temple design and also the H.H. Richardson inspired Romanesque revival -- is pronounced by a sandstone water table. The high hip roof is further testimony to this style (photo #1).

However, there are several classically inspired details found throughout, for example, the cornice is enriched with pressed metal block modillions. This detail is carried across the gabled-roof frame dormer forming a pediment (photo #1).

The 1929 addition, an L-shaped plan, was appended onto the northeast corner of the original building. This two story on-grade Georgian style addition comprises more classrooms and a gymnasium. This change in style is important since it reflects the changing perceptions and attitudes in architecture. Furthermore, this addition is also indicative of changes in construction techniques. Steel beams span from steel columns in the interior to load bearing masonry walls along the perimeter. The floor is a concrete slab while the roof and ceiling are gypsum slabs. Spanning over the gymnasium is a system of steel trusses and steel cross bracings. Also of note is the introduction of a sub-basement corridor that serves as a mechanical and electrical chaseaway.

While the gabled roof of the addition establishes a contiguous relationship with the original building, the patterning of windows constitutes a morphological break. Whereas the window organization applied on the Romanesque building was rhythmic, the Georgian Revival addition employs a repetitious use of the window module. Typical of this style, the wooden double-hung windows are divided into individual lights; 8-over-8 in this instance. These windows are further enriched by archivolt trim with keystone. This is especially evident on the north elevation of the gymnasium which is garnished further by pilasters (photo #5).

Later, in 1967, a small one story addition was constructed onto the west side of the addition designed by Proudfoot/Rawson/Souers/ & Thomas Architects of Des Moines, Iowa. This resulted in creating an exterior space. (map 2)

Despite the additions to the school, the integrity of the design for the original school has not been compromised. While still maintaining their own place in time, the continued use of brick on the two additions compliments the original scheme.

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
1899-1929

Significant Dates
1899

Cultural Affiliation
N/A

Significant Person
N/A

Architect/Builder
Latenser, John Sr.

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

Blair School, designed as a grammar school by John Latenser, Sr., is significant locally in the area of architecture (Criterion C). During his career John Latenser was responsible for the designs of a number of the most architecturally distinguished buildings in Omaha (located in a neighboring county), including the J.L. Brandeis and Sons Store Building (NRHP, 1982) and Central High School (NRHP, 1979). Blair School is representative of Latenser's public building designs and qualifies for registration on the basis of its relative importance to the community of Blair. It is the only example of work by Latenser in Blair. The period of significance is derived from the date of construction of the Latenser design through date of the first addition's construction.

John Latenser, Sr., born in Liechtenstien, was a prominent architect in Omaha. Before emigrating to the U.S., he completed studies in architecture at the Polytechnic College in Stuttgart. After his arrival he was employed for seven years as a draftsman in Chicago. In 1887, Latenser set up his practice in Omaha that spanned more than 50 years. This included commissions for many of the city's larger civic and commercial building projects, like Central High School (NRHP, 1979), the Douglas County Courthouse (NRHP, 1979), and the J.L. Brandeis and Sons Store Building (NRHP, 1982). In addition, Latenser served as construction superintendent for Omaha's Federal Post Office building beginning in 1891 and two years later was named Superintendent of Federal Buildings for a six-state territory. (Omaha Bee News, 9 December 1934; Omaha World-Herald, 7 October 1936.)

Early in his career, Latenser received commendation from the U.S. government for resolving serious structural problems in Chicago's Post Office Building. The architect's technical skills were also recognized by the Omaha School Board. Newly arrived in the city, Latenser won his first contract for the design of Webster School by pointing out inadequacies in plans offered by 18 other competitors. (Omaha World-Herald, 7 October 1936.)

Several years later, in 1892, Latenser was salaried as the Omaha School District's staff architect. Citing the importance of "pure air, scientific lighting, and sanitary conditions" as requisites for their buildings, School Board President Clinton H. Powell in a report for the year ending 1893 stated:

See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

- Bell, John T. History of Washington County, Nebraska. Omaha: Herald Steam Book and Job Printing House, 1876.
- Bjorkman, Lynn. "Saunders School." National Register of Historic Places, Inventory-Nomination Form. Lincoln: Nebraska State Historical Society, 1986.
- Blumenson, John, J.-G. Identifying American Architecture. New York: W. W. Norton Company, Inc., 1981.
- Meyer, Lynn. "Lincoln (Center) School." National Register of Historic Places, Inventory-Nomination Form. Lincoln: Nebraska State Historical Society, 1985.
- Wakely, Arthur C., ed. Omaha: The Gate City, Vol. II. Chicago: Clarke Publishing Company, 1917.

See continuation sheet

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 of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property 1.8 acres

UTM References

A

1	4	7	3	8	8	9	0	4	6	0	2	4	7	0
Zone				Easting				Northing						

C

Zone				Easting				Northing						

B

Zone				Easting				Northing						

D

Zone				Easting				Northing						

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes the parcel that has been historically associated with the property and other adjoining real estate that contains the 1929 and 1967 additions and which reflects current ownership of the property.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Steven L. Shogrin, Graduate Intern Architect

organization Alley Poyner Architecture, P.C. date 30 October 1990

street & number 1213 Jones Street telephone (402) 341-1544

city or town Omaha state NE zip code 68102

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In construction, arrangement, lighting, facilities for heating and ventilation and all that goes to make up perfect buildings for school purposes, I believe these cannot be excelled by an equal number of buildings in any other city . . . For the excellence of these buildings credit is chiefly due to John Latenser, Esq."

The fact that many of Latenser's existant school buildings -- Columbian, Saunders and Central High School -- remained essentially unaltered further testifies to the architect's expertise in schoolhouse design.

Latenser's relationship with the district appears to have continued intermittently for more than a dozen years. He produced plans for the district on a contractual basis into the 1920's. Although an exact count of his school buildings is difficult to determine, one source credits Latenser with designs for at least 20 of the City's public school facilities. (Wakely, Omaha: The Gate City, Vol. II, p. 35). His reputation continued to be recognized and in 1899, he designed the original Blair School.

Built just nineteen years after John I. Blair auctioned the first parcels of land (just north of the school site) for the founding of the city, Blair School displays the Richardson influenced Romanesque style that figures so prominent regionally. The strength of the town's economy was based on the rail line that John Blair had acquired. As a result, the town went through a mild building boom. Several years before the school was built, the Washington County Courthouse, an excellent example of Richardsonian Romanesque architecture, had been built. With the site for the school just across the street, Latenser became a logical candidate for the design of the school.

Built as the first school in Blair, it figures prominently in a brick street neighborhood already demarcated by two other buildings on the National Register of Historic Places, the previously mentioned Washington County Courthouse just to the east and the Congregational Church of Blair just to the north. Generally speaking, all three buildings were built contemporaneous to one within the building boom in Blair just before the turn of the century. For the most part this district, which serves as a congenial buffer between "Main street" and "Elm street," remains as it was nearly one hundred years ago.

The importance of Blair School, though, is that it stands as the only example of architecture designed by John Latenser, Sr. in Blair, Nebraska. Furthermore, it is significant in the career of Latenser.

Within the context of Latenser's career, Blair School represents a transitional phase, a shift away from Romanesque revival forms toward a more classically inspired aesthetic. Several earlier schoolhouse designs such as Train and Columbian show the architect's experimentation with the style developed by Henry Hobson Richardson, a popular source for architects in the midwest in the late 19th century. In these examples, the presence of round arches framing door and window openings, gable end carried up to form parapets and high hipped roofs typifies the Richardsonian Romanesque.

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Blair, like Saunders School in Omaha (NRHP, 1986) incorporates similar Richardsonian elements, specifically the arcaded entrance and the round-arched windows on the second story. Introduced in the design, however, are more classically inspired features. The pedimented gable dormer, the appearance of the modillions at the cornice and the raised basement are more rooted in the stylistic classical traditions.

This shift to a Neo-Classical Revival style became popular for regional architects and builders with the opening of the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition of 1898. Interestingly, John Latenser was responsible for the design of one of the fair's most prominent structures, the government building. (Omaha World-Herald, 31 January 1943). In keeping with the Beaux-Arts tradition of exposition architecture established by the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, Latenser modeled his building on a Renaissance Palazzo. (Landmarks Heritage Preservation Commission, Patterns on the Landscape: Heritage Conservation in North Omaha, p. 80)

Presumably influenced by this work for the exposition, Latenser's work shifted to this more classically inspired style. Blair School begins to display this shift in styles. Also in 1899, Cass, Pacific and Saunders Schools in Omaha were also in the works. Saunders, the only existant building of the three, continues this evolution.

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Landmarks Heritage Preservation Commission. Patterns on The Landscape: Heritage Conservation in North Omaha. Omaha: Omaha City Planning Department, Report No. 223, 1984.

Omaha Bee News. 9 December 1934.

Omaha World-Herald. 7 December 1936.

Omaha World-Herald. 31 January 1943.

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Legal Description (See Sketch maps 1 and 2)

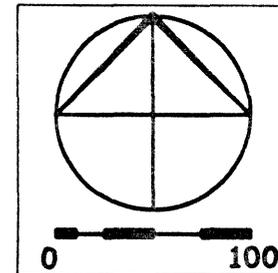
Information shown in brackets [] reflect actual information at the time of survey.

Lots one (1), two (2), three (3), four (4), five (5), six (6), eleven (11), twelve (12) and the east 48.7 feet of lot ten (10); and that portion of block seventy-six (76) [vacated alley] described as follows:

Commencing at the northeast corner of lot twelve (12), the point of beginning, thence west along the north line of lots twelve (12), eleven (11) and ten (10) to a point 48.7 feet west of the northeast corner of lot (10), thence north parallel to the east line of lot (10) extended to the south line of lot three (3), thence east along the south line of lots three (3), two (2) and one (1) to the southeast corner of lot one (1), thence south along the east line of lot one (1) extended, to the point of beginning; [Together with the north one-half of vacated alley adjoining lots six (6), five (5), four (4) and lot three (3) except the east 48.7 feet of lot three (3) thereof].

BLAIR SCHOOL

GENERAL SCHOOL BUILDING
BLOCK 78, BLAIR, NEBRASKA



ALLEY · POYNER
ARCHITECTURE
PROFESSIONAL CORPORATION
1810 JONES STREET, OMAHA, NEBRASKA 68108
(402) 641-1544

GRANT STREET

5	4	3	2	1
---	---	---	---	---

6	5	4	3	2	1
---	---	---	---	---	---

6	5	4	3
---	---	---	---

8	9	10	11	12
---	---	----	----	----

7	8	9	10	11	12
---	---	---	----	----	----

7	8	9	10
---	---	---	----

SEVENTEENTH STREET

COLFAX STREET

5	4	3	2	1
---	---	---	---	---

6	5	4	3	2	1
---	---	---	---	---	---

6	5	4	3
---	---	---	---

SIXTEENTH STREET

8	9	10	11	12
---	---	----	----	----

7	8	9	10	11	12
---	---	---	----	----	----

SOUTH STREET

CONSULTANTS

REVISION DATE

PROJECT NUMBER: 80000
DATE

MAP 1

COLFAX

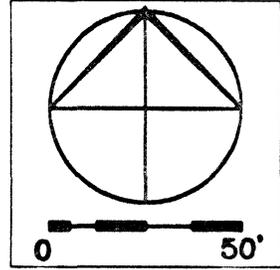
⑤ STREET

⑥

⑦

BLAIR SCHOOL

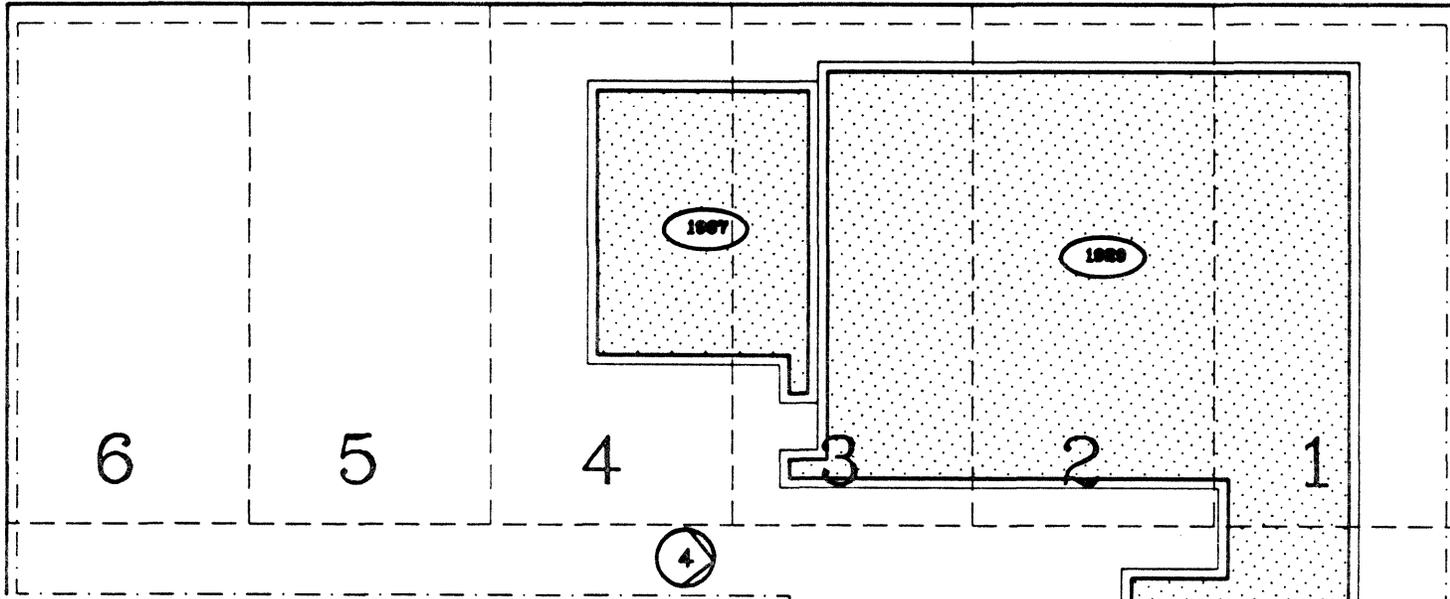
CENTRAL SCHOOL BUILDING
BLOCK 78, BLAIR, NEBRASKA



ALLEY POYNER
ARCHITECTURE
PROFESSIONAL CORPORATION
1818 JUPITER STREET, OMAHA, NEBRASKA 68102
(402) 941-1944

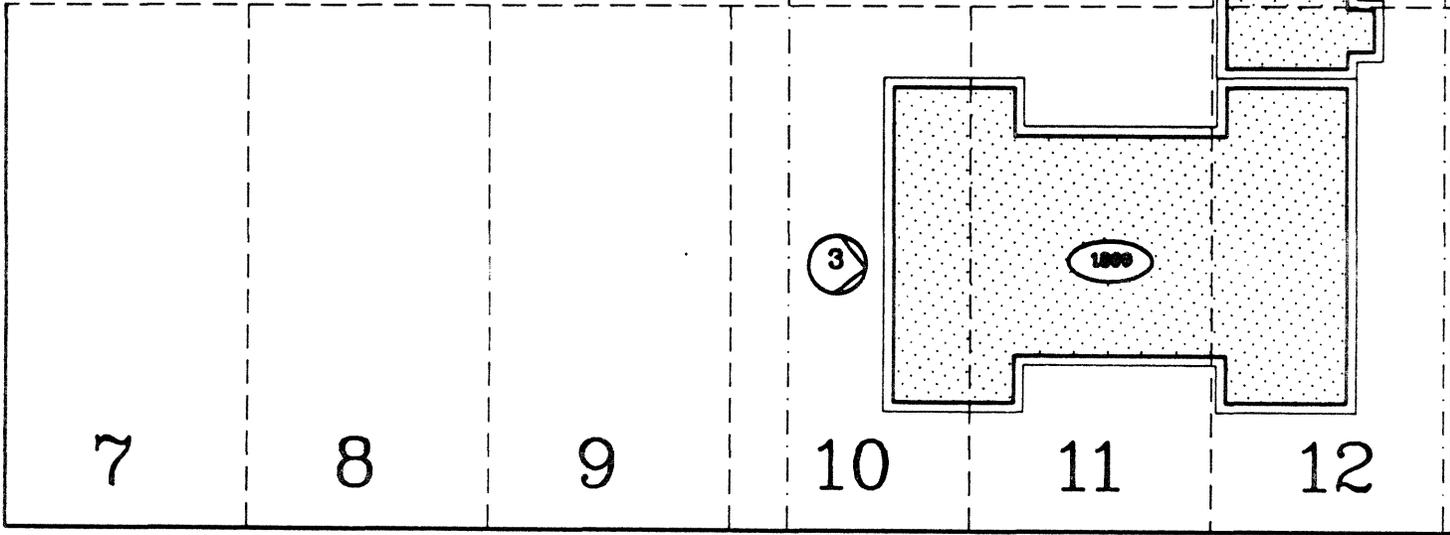
SEVENTEENTH STREET

STREET



SEVENTEENTH STREET

SIXTEENTH STREET



SOUTH

② STREET

①

DRAWN BY

REVISION

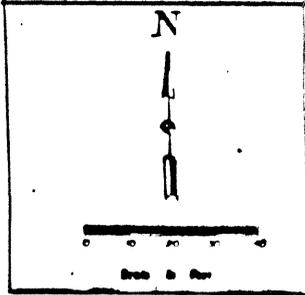
PROJECT NUMBER 88000

DATE

MAP 2

Blair
School

CENTRAL SCHOOL BUILDING
LOCATION ON BLOCK 76,
O.T.S., BLAIR, NEBRASKA



sixteenth street

sixteenth street

