

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	AUG 23 1979
DATE ENTERED	08/11/79

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

Omaha High School

AND/OR COMMON

Central High School

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

124 North 20th St.

___ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Omaha

___ VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT
Second

STATE

Nebraska

CODE

031

COUNTY

Douglas

CODE

055

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Omaha Board of Education

STREET & NUMBER

3902 Davenport Street

CITY, TOWN

Omaha

___ VICINITY OF

STATE

Nebraska

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Register of Deeds, City-County Building

STREET & NUMBER

18th and Farnam

CITY, TOWN

Omaha

STATE

Nebraska

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Historic Preservation in Nebraska

DATE

1971

___ FEDERAL STATE ___ COUNTY ___ LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Nebraska State Historical Society

CITY, TOWN

Lincoln

STATE

Nebraska

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

EXCELLENT
 GOOD
 FAIR

DETERIORATED
 RUINS
 UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

UNALTERED
 ALTERED

CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE
 MOVED DATE _____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Central High School with its ten-acre campus is a prominent component of downtown Omaha, Nebraska (1970 pop., 354,389). It is stylistically French Renaissance Revival and was constructed in four phases between 1900-12. A large addition was appended in 1930 and a semi-detached building near the northeast corner of the campus has recently been completed. The campus is bordered on all sides by streets, the busiest being Dodge, a major thoroughfare to the south from which the school is highly visible. The situation is a prime location which commands a view of eastern Omaha, the Missouri River, and Council Bluffs, Iowa, on the opposite bank.

The principal building, designed by John Latenser, Sr., consists of three stories over a full basement, the measurements being 250 x 225 feet. The exposed portion of the basement and the first floor -- a level which exclusively contains arched openings -- are rusticated; stories above are smooth-faced ashlar with a mild profusion of classical detailing, the material for walls and trim being Bedford oolitic limestone. The structural skeleton's members are of steel with iron plate filler.

The main facade faces east and is approached from that direction by a tiered sidewalk that ascends a small rise and divides to encircle the bowed projection of the terrace (see photos 1, 2, 3, and 11). A broad flight of steps provides access to the principal entrance from the terrace. The east facade, which is virtually duplicated on the west, has a five-part arrangement of central pavilion, wings, and end pavilions. The rusticated level of the central pavilion contains five arched openings -- three passages flanked by recessed, semi-circular-headed window openings. There is a hexastyle Corinthian portico of slight projection atop a portion of rusticated masonry protruding from the pavilion, whose dentiled and modillioned pediment contains a tympanum filled with sculpted allegorical figures representing art, science, music, and drama. The five-bay wings flanking the central pavilion are treated with evenly-spaced pilasters; the end pavilions involve coupled pilasters surmounted by a full entablature and an enriched pediment. There is a continuous cornice treated with dentils and modillions, and above the cornice is an uninterrupted parapet treated with recessed panels, string-courses, and anthemion-shaped antefixae. Parapet sections atop the major pavilions are more pronounced through greater height and additional embellishment.

The south facade of Central High School is a three-part arrangement consisting of a center pavilion flanked by five-bay wings (see photo 4). The west facade (see photo 4 also) is identical to the east except for the absence of sculpture in the tympanum of the central pavilion. The north facade was identical to the south. The four major pavilions have tile-covered hipped roofs which allow for attic spaces facing inward toward a central courtyard (see photo 3). All other roof sections are flat.

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The Grounds of the high school originally had a steeper incline: in 1920 the grade of Dodge Street was lowered from twelve to seven percent, as a result of motorists' petitions. The modification called for the construction of new terraces, sidewalks, and steps.

In 1930 a large two-story-with-basement addition was appended to the north (see photo 3). Facilities in this section include an auditorium, a gymnasium, a practice room for the school band, and locker and shower rooms. The exterior was, for the most part, designed to agree with the existing building: the addition is constructed of limestone, its roof is covered with red tiles, and the window arrangement is akin to the main building's window arrangement of the basement and first floor. Although the 1930 construction is somewhat compatible with the Latenser building, it does conceal most of the north side's centered pavilion (see photo 5).

Recently, a semi-detached building of cast-concrete construction was erected east of the 1930 addition (see photos 3 and 6). This building contains a gymnasium and other athletic facilities, and it is unfenestrated except for entrance and exit openings. West of the main building is a three-acre parking lot. A 200-foot-high cylindrical brick chimney stack is located near the lot's western edge. The stack is part of the original construction and was located away from the school building to avoid visual distraction.

Several interior alterations have occurred at Central High as changing needs have necessitated. In general, though, much of the original flavor is preserved and the floor plan remains much the same. Essentially, the arrangement is peripheral: on each of the three main floors is a continuous corridor with four polygonal projections containing two staircases; outside each corridor are classrooms, laboratories, and other spaces of various uses. The plan of staircases has provided a continuing tradition at Central High, for each stairway is designated for use by separate gender (see photo 9). Although this practice of separate stairways seems outmoded by current standards, the custom persists, evidently through the wish of students. As a fire retardant measure, stairways are of cast iron.

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Classical detailing in the forms of consoles, pilasters, and relief panels of cast plaster is throughout most of the 1900-12 building. The old auditorium (see photo 8) contains the boldest classical ornamentation in the forms of full-scaled columns and piers on the mutated stage and heavy moldings around the balcony. In comparison with the facades of the building and the interior, the courtyard is rather austere (see photo 10). The walls facing the court are of brick construction and all their openings are segmentally arched. The architect proposed that a rusticated tower of monumental proportions rise from the building's center (see plate 2, "Building Complete"), but this proposal was not carried out.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD		AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW				
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)		
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION				

SPECIFIC DATES 1900-12; 1930; 1978 BUILDER/ARCHITECT John Latenser, Sr.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Central High School is architecturally significant to Omaha and to Nebraska as an outstanding product of the French Renaissance Revival. John Latenser, Sr., the architect involved, was a prolific designer of public schools in Nebraska and Iowa: Central High ranks as the largest and most sophisticated of these designs. The school building maintains a strong visual relationship with its ten-acre campus, a highly prominent location and site of the Capitol of the Nebraska Territory between the late 1850s-1867. In addition to its impressive physical features and cardinal setting, Omaha Central High School attains significance in the area of education through its distinction as the leading college preparatory school in Nebraska open to public students.

The first session of Omaha High School, now commonly known as Central High, was held on November 10, 1859. Ten years later, the Nebraska State Legislature donated the old Territorial Capitol Building and its surrounding ten acres to the City of Omaha, stipulating that the building be used as a public high school and appropriating \$25,000 for its repair (The Story of 'Old Central', p. 4.) However, the structure was declared unsafe and was demolished in 1870. An eclectic Victorian edifice of three and one-half stories was erected on the Capitol's site, but by 1897 overcrowding and poor ventilation in this structure posed a health threat (Ibid., p. 6). John Latenser, Sr., who had designed numerous school buildings in Omaha as well as throughout Nebraska and western Iowa, was engaged in 1900 to design a fireproof structure for the same site.

Latenser (1858-1936), a native of Liechtenstein, had received technical training in Stuttgart, Germany, before emigrating to the United States. He was engaged in a professional capacity with the Indiana State Capitol Building upon his arrival in this country. He went to Omaha in 1887 after a period in Chicago, and in 1893 he was appointed superintendent of the Federal Building in Omaha. Latenser is credited with having designed thirty-five public school buildings in Omaha during his career (Omaha Bee-News, Dec. 7, 1936, p. 2).

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

See continuation sheet

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 10 acres

QUADRANGLE NAME Omaha North

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:24000

UTM REFERENCES

A 1,5 | 2,5,3,5,4,0 | 4,5,7,1,7,8,0

B 1,5 | 2,5,3,5,2,0 | 4,5,7,1,5,8,0

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C 1,5 | 2,5,3,3,2,0 | 4,5,7,1,5,8,0

D 1,5 | 2,5,3,3,3,0 | 4,5,7,1,7,9,0

E | |

F | |

G | |

H | |

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

A square, ten-acre property in northwestern downtown Omaha bounded on the north by Davenport, on the east by 20th, on the south by Dodge, and on the west by 22nd.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Daniel Kidd, Architectural Historian

ORGANIZATION

Nebraska State Historical Society

DATE

August, 1979

STREET & NUMBER

1500 R Street

TELEPHONE

402/471-3270

CITY OR TOWN

Lincoln

STATE

Nebraska

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE X

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

Marino P. Kuelto

8/6/79

TITLE

Director, Nebraska State Historical Society

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

Carol Skuhl

DATE

10-11-79

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

ATTEST:

William H. Orman

DATE

10-10-79

CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

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When the architect's delineations for the new high school building were made known, the Omaha World-Herald approvingly reviewed them in a full-page article which asserted the following:

(The proposed building) . . . cannot help but be the pride of every Omaha citizen and enlist favorable comment from the thousands of tourists who pass through the metropolis every year . . . The school buildings heretofore erected under his [Latenser's] supervision have received very favorable commendation from educational and engineering journals alike (June 10, 1900, p. 24).

Construction of the new high school building commenced in 1900 and the first phase, the east wing, was completed in 1901 (see photo 1). This portion connected with the old building by covered hallways on each floor, eliminating the overcrowded conditions immediately (see Plate One, "Wing of New Building and Old High School Connected"). Construction ultimately encircled the old building, whose core was dismantled and removed after the final wing was completed in 1912 (see photo 2).

Two years before Central High School's construction was completed, an essay by A.D.F. Hamlin titled "Consideration in School House Design" stated the following: "The schoolhouses of any community are gauges of its enlightenment. They should be the best and most carefully constructed buildings it possesses: not the most splendid and ornate, but the most perfect in design and complete and thorough in execution and equipment." (Modern School Houses, New York: Swetland Pub. Co., 1910). Latenser obviously agreed with Hamlin's dictum, although he did not refrain from designing Central High School to be splendid and ornate.

Schools were among the notable exceptions of public buildings that mostly escaped the "City Beautiful" idea. When they were, in scattered instances, built in the Classic or Renaissance revivals, however, public schools did not often achieve the monumentality that characterized railroad stations, museums, or libraries (Burchard and Bush-Brown, The Architecture of America, p. 282). Omaha Central, however, is a monumental edifice that rivals other important Omaha public buildings in grandeur and in quality of design and workmanship. If Latenser's total plan had been followed, the building would have been even more imposing: the architect proposed that a square tower of rusticated stone, crowned by a hemispherical-domed lantern, occupy the location of the central courtyard (see Plate Two, "Building Complete").

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Central High is the only known instance by Latenser employing any variety of the Renaissance Revival in school architecture: up to this time he had depended mostly on the Romanesque Revival and the Tudor Gothic. The prominent location and the large enrollment of Omaha Central (2,000 in 1900) demanded something grander, though, and for it Latenser selected a style that was without Midwestern antecedents or American traditions. Latenser's inspiration may have been Gabriel's 1761-70 Twin Palaces at the Place de la Concorde in Paris, but this is only speculation based on limited visual comparison.

The arrangement of classrooms, corridors, staircases, and other parts is masterfully planned, allowing for easy traffic flow, low transmittal of noise, abundant ventilation and natural light, and convenient access among floors. The floor plan remains virtually unchanged today, attesting to Latenser's proficiency in public school planning.

From its beginnings, Central High School has offered a strong college preparatory program, and traditionally, seventy percent of its graduates seek a higher education. In comparison, the average percentage of Nebraska high school graduates who obtain post-secondary education is fifty percent (interview with Dr. G. E. Moller, Principal, Central High School, Omaha, April 3, 1979). Students at Central are drawn from a 142-square-mile district and the present enrollment is 1,300. Many students reside closer to other public schools, but opt to attend Central due to its long-standing reputation for academic excellence and its strong preparatory program.

Before and since the 1900-12 building's completion, administrators of the Omaha Schools System have been determined that the school would rate highly. In 1913, Dr. E. Holovtchiner, President of the Omaha Board of Education, declared the following: "No expense shall be spared to make our schools and educational institutions models to which the world would point as examples. Our schools today are of the highest type, so acknowledged by foreign educators" (Annual Report of the Board of Education, Omaha, 1913, p. 9).

In 1921 the National Honor Society was founded at Omaha Central High School by Professor J. G. Masters, who served as Principal at that time. The society, which promotes excellence in scholarship, leadership, service, and character, has had an accumulative membership of over five million students, and there are currently 16,050 local chapters (Encyclopedia of Associations, Vol. I, 1978, p. 495).

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The relationship between building(s) and site and the historical associations of the Central High campus are felt to justify nomination of the full ten acres. The Douglas County Courthouse, another large civic building designed by Latenser in the French Renaissance Revival, is 2,000 feet southeast of the high school and is being nominated simultaneously.

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CONTINUATION SHEET Bibliography ITEM NUMBER 9 PAGE 2

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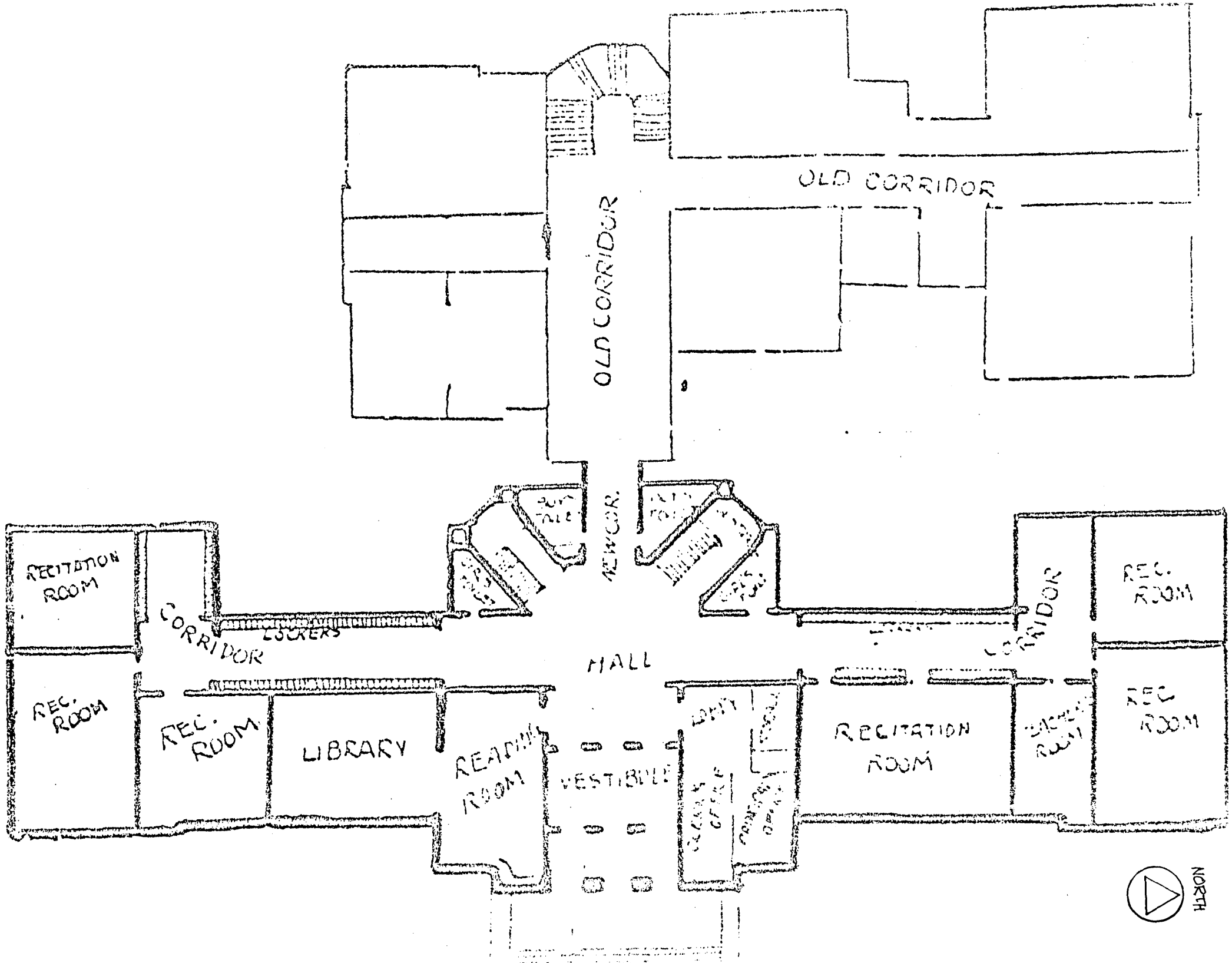
Omaha Excelsior. March 15, 1913.

Omaha World-Herald. June 10, 1900.

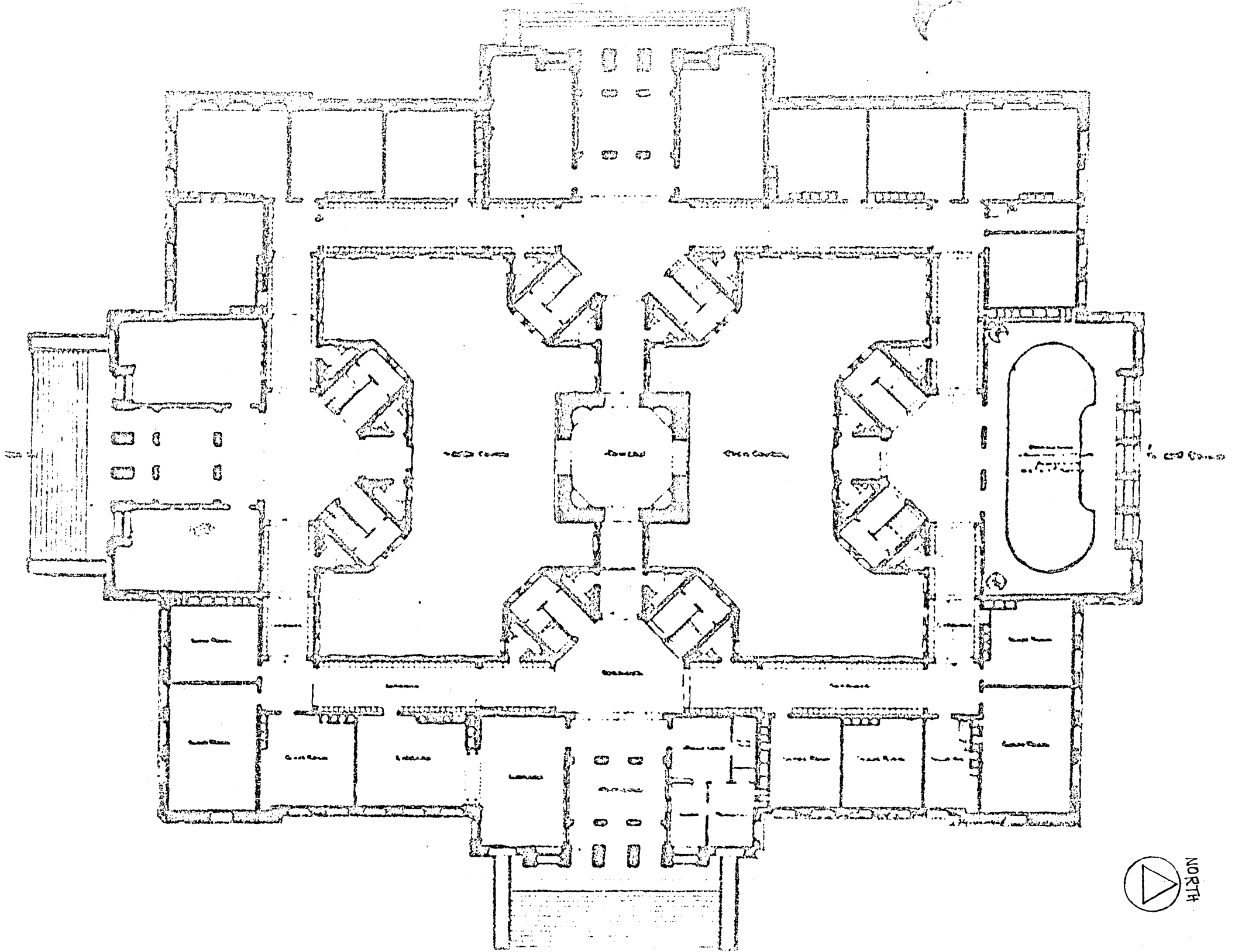
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Interview with Dr. G. E. Moller, Principal, Omaha High School (Central High
School), Omaha, April 3, 1979.



Omaha High School (Central High School)
D009-4:11 Omaha, Douglas Co., Nebr.
Plate One, "Wing of New Building and
Old High School Connected." 1979
Omaha World-Herald, June 10, 1900, p. 24.
AUG 22 1979



NORTH

Omaha High School (Central High School)
D009-4:11 Omaha, Douglas Co., Nebr.
Plate Two, "Building Complete."
Omaha World-Herald, June 10, 1900, p. 24.

NOTE: Central tower was not built.