

**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For HCRS use only
received **SEP 21 1982**
date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Porter-Thomsen House

and/or common Porter-Thomsen House (D009:14-13)

2. Location

street & number 3426 Lincoln Blvd. Boulevard N/A not for publication

city, town Omaha N/A 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 type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>N/A</u> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name James N. Laska

street & number 3426 Lincoln Blvd.

city, town Omaha N/A vicinity of state Nebraska 68131

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Register of Deeds, Omaha-Douglas County Civic Center

street & number 1819 Farnam Street

city, town Omaha state Nebraska

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Historic Omaha Buildings Survey has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1977 federal state county local

depository for survey records Landmark Heritage Preservation Commission, City Planning Department

city, town Omaha state Nebraska

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date <u>N/A</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Porter-Thomsen House property consists of the 1902 Georgian Revival house, which has a prominent veranda, and the large brick banked barn to the rear. The house is beautifully sited high on a large, sloping lot (196' x 105') with a front yard overlooking the curving Lincoln Boulevard and Bemis Park below. A wrought-iron fence is placed parallel to the front sidewalk. The house, barn, and lot is in good condition.

Dr. Elmer R. Porter had the house erected in 1902 by William Rice, builder, to the design of Omaha architect Frederick A. Henninger. The house is transitional in style with primarily Georgian Revival characteristics in the nearly square central hall form with symmetrical facade, hipped roof, hipped dormers, portico-like centered porch extension, and columns and colonettes in the interior woodwork. Portions of other styles are used to a lesser degree: Queen Anne or 19th century form are in evidence in the prominent veranda, which extends beyond the sides of the house for a porte-cochere on the west and a rounded sitting area on the east, the window hoods, and fretwork in the interior woodwork; Beaux-Arts influence is shown in the paired columns and prominent brackets; the porch columns are not classical in form, but eight-sided with non-classical capitals evoking a Craftsman-era influence.

A physical description based on the HABS formula is as follows: a wood frame structure, clapboard walls; square (36' x 39') shape; two and one-half stories over raised brick basement; hipped roof with broad eaves; central hipped roof dormers on north and south; five bay porch terminates in a porte cochere on southwest corner, heavily modillioned and bracketed hipped roof portico in central bay of porch supported by paired columns with chamfered corners; double-hung windows with stylized egg-and-dart upper sashes are framed by a plain trim and surmounted by bracketed cornices.

The first floor of the central-hall-plan interior has living and dining rooms on the east side and music room and kitchen on the west. The interior is significant for the excellent preservation of the extensive handpainted murals on canvas which were done by Gustave A. Fuchs, a German-born and trained artist who lived and worked in Omaha for thirty-five years. The open well stairway, entrance hall, vestibule, and second floor hallway are all enlivened by the handpainted ceiling of a simple linear design and by the oak woodwork. A pair of columns with latticework near the ceiling divide the living room from the entry. The living room has an oak fireplace with glazed tile opening surround, slag glass sconces, and beveled mirror in the overmantle. The living and dining rooms have handpainted landscape friezes near the ceiling. The Mission style wall paneling in the dining room has handpainted oil on canvas panels in greens, golds, and browns. The wall and ceiling of the music room have retained the hand-painted decoration; cherubs and ribbons border the ceiling and the walls have panels painted in shades of green.

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The second floor has four bedrooms and a bathroom. A sleeping porch on the north is entered from the northwest (maid's) room. There is evidence that at least some of the bedrooms did have handpainted murals, but none have survived. The third floor is finished as one large room with attic storage on the east and west ends.

The barn to the rear was large enough to hold the six to eight horses and carriages kept by Dr. Porter. The banked brick barn has a gambrel roof with a shingled gabled dormer on the north and south. The north dormer has a double wagon door entrance with access from the alley. The barn retains the stables and blacksmith equipment.

In Judge Thomsen's later years the second floor was made into a separate apartment, hence the need for an exterior stairway. The kitchen, bathroom, and stairway added at this time have been removed by the present owners who plan to continue using the house as a single family dwelling.

The property has been designated a landmark by the City of Omaha Landmarks Heritage Preservation Commission.

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 type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1902 **Builder/Architect** Frederick A. Henninger, Omaha

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Porter-Thomsen House is architecturally significant as a prominent product of the Georgian Revival style from the early years of its use in Nebraska, with transitional elements from the Queen Anne style and classical influences. The interior is highly significant to the state for the hand-painted ceilings, walls, and friezes by Gustave A. Fuchs - a rare collection of well-preserved landscape and decorative murals. The siting of the house takes maximum advantage of a long, steeply sloping lot with a southern exposure prominently overlooking Lincoln Boulevard and Bemis Park. Dr. Elmer R. Porter, a medical doctor in private practice, had the house constructed in 1902. Arthur C. Thomsen, owner from 1923 to 1970, was a dean of the University of Omaha Law School, editor of the Night Law Bulletin, and District Court Judge from 1928 to 1961.

In Omaha, the dawn of the twentieth century brought renewed prosperity after the depression of the 1890s. A number of residential suburbs first platted in the boom years of the 1880s failed in the following decade and did not regain momentum until after 1900. One of these suburbs was Bemis Park, located between 33rd and 38th, Cuming and Hamilton Streets. It was probably the first subdivision in the city platted with respect to terrain rather than on the more typical grid system. The landscape architect left a ravine near Cuming Street for a park, since the ground was too steep for housing. Lincoln Boulevard, winding around the hill overlooking the scene, was a prime location for middle and upper middle class housing and complemented Bemis Park. Bemis Park and Lincoln Boulevard were part of the city's first parks and boulevard system.

One of the first structures built on the Boulevard was the grand home of Dr. Elmer R. Porter at 3426 Lincoln Boulevard. Erected in 1902, the frame, Georgian Revival dwelling with its huge veranda is one of the most elaborate of all the residences overlooking the park. Porter graduated from the Omaha Medical College (later the University of Nebraska College of Medicine) in 1898 before beginning his practice in the city. Maintaining an office in the Brandeis Theater Building, Dr. Porter reportedly had the largest medical practice in Omaha and offered his services regardless of a patient's ability to pay.

9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property less than one

Quadrangle name Omaha North, NE

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UMT References

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Verbal boundary description and justification

Lots 29 and 30, Block 10, Bemis Park Addition, City of Omaha, Douglas County, Nebraska, which encompasses the historic boundaries of the property.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A code county code

state code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Penelope Chatfield Sodhi, Preservation Historian
Robert Peters, Preservation Administrator
 organization Nebraska State Historical Society
Omaha City Planning Department date June, 1982
 street & number 1500 R Street
1819 Farnam Street telephone 402/471-3850
 city or town Lincoln
Omaha state Nebraska

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state 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 Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature Morwin O'Knecht 9/8/82

title Director, Nebraska State Historical Society date

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

Shelone Byers Entered in the National Register date 10/21/82
 Keeper of the National Register

Affest: _____ date _____
 Chief of Registration

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Dr. Porter hired an artist friend, Gustave A. Fuchs, at a reported cost of \$5000 to paint the murals in his house.¹ Fuchs (1851-1930) was born in Germany where he completed his art study and came to America in 1882. He painted landscape murals in the Board of Trade Building, Chicago, and the Illinois State Capitol, Springfield.² In 1892 he moved to Omaha and worked with Alfred and John Fuchs for Henry Lehman (Painter, wholesale and retail wallpaper) where all three Fuchs were described as fresco painters.³ Gustave and John organized their own painting firm of Fuchs & Fuchs in the mid-1890's and employed their sons. After the turn of the century the firm was reorganized with his son, Bruno, and Frank E. Blind as G. A. Fuchs, Son, and Blind, interior decorators. His obituary described Gustave Fuchs as a landscape painter and decorator. Bruno continued in business as an interior decorator until his death in 1942.⁴

Few handpainted murals have been identified in residences in the Nebraska Historic Buildings Survey to date. The Porter House murals are all the more rare for the number and their good condition, which remain in one house. The music rooms of the Porter-Thomsen House and the Gottlieb Storz House (Omaha, NRHP) are similarly treated in color and design. Fuchs may have painted the Storz House murals which were done at nearly the same time (1905). The handpainted and stencilled walls and ceilings of the Colman House (Jefferson County, NRHP pending) painted by Danish immigrants Charles Hansen and James Willer, are similar in time period-1912 - but are done in the Art Nouveau style, very different than the Porter House murals.

The longest, and perhaps most well-known, resident was Judge Arthur C. Thomsen (1886-1970), who purchased the house in 1923. Judge Thomsen graduated from Omaha Law School (later affiliated with the University of Omaha) in 1909. He began a law practice, but maintained his connection with the Law School by serving as the institution's dean, its secretary, as an instructor, and as editor of the Night Law Bulletin. Thomsen was elected as District Court Judge in 1928 and held that position until 1961. He served as second Lieutenant in the Air Service, Balloon Division (observer) in World War I.⁵ His wife, Emily Susan (Johnson) Thomsen, was an English teacher and the first librarian of Benson High School.

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The Porter House presents an orderly Georgian Revival exterior package with flush planes, flattened ornamentation, few protruding parts, and a sophisticated central-hall-plan interior detailed with hefty ceiling beams, head-high wainscoting, and classical columns. Erected in 1902, the house is fairly early in the use of Georgian Revival in Nebraska. Elements of the Queen Anne remain, most noticeably in the sweeping veranda which extends beyond the sides of the house on both the east and west. The lattice-like oak woodwork at ceiling level in the entrance hall openings is more typical of 1890's interior decoration than the classicism after the turn of the century. Craftsman period influence is suggested in the front porch columns and capitals and the Mission-style dining room woodwork. On the front porch, the portico-like extension in the center, heavily modillioned cornice, and paired columns mark a classical influence common in Nebraska residential architecture after the turn of the century. The structure represents a transitional period in midwestern residential architecture.

Frederick A. Henninger, architect of the house, was born in 1865 to a German immigrant family which had settled in Albia, Iowa. He received his formal training at the Chicago Art Institute where he was described as a "natural born artist." After attending the institute for two years, Henninger moved to Lincoln, Nebraska, and worked for a local architect by the name of William Gray. In the early 1890's he relocated to Omaha and sought employment as a laborer in the Union Pacific Shops. By 1895, Henninger had established himself as an architect with the F. C. Ledebrock office and in the following year purchased the business from Ledebrock.

F. A. Henninger remained an active Omaha architect until his retirement in 1937, at which time the firm was taken over by his son, F. A. Henninger, Jr. The firm's activities encompassed the entire spectrum of the built environment and during its most active period, the F. A. Henninger office designed "a house a day."

Major Omaha structures designed by Henninger include the Securities Building (16th and Farnam), the U.S. National Bank Building (16th and Farnam), the Grain Exchange (19th and Harney), the Farm Credit Building (19th and Douglas), the West Farnam Apartments (3817 Dewey Avenue) and the residences of Edgar Morsman (38th and Jackson), Casper Yost Offutt (109 North 54th Street), E. L. Stone (3722 Pacific) O. H. Barmettler (622 North 38th Street), and Havens-Page House (NRHP pending).

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- ¹ Information from Mrs. R. E. (Lystra) Kinchiner, 5108 Parker Street, Omaha, daughter of Judge Arthur Thomsen, supplied by James Laska.
- ² Gustave Fuchs obituary, Omaha World-Herald, March 8, 1930, p. 8.
- ³ Omaha city directory, 1892
- ⁴ Omaha city directory, 1903-1942
- ⁵ Sara M. and Robert M. Baldwin, Nebraskana, Hebron, Ne.: Baldwin Co., 1932, pp. 1191-1192.

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Baldwin Co., 1932.

Baldwin, Sara M. Who's Who in Omaha 1928. Omaha: Robert M. Baldwin,
publisher, 1928.

"Death Comes to Thomsen, Long A Judge." Omaha World-Herald, October 5, 1970.

"Gustave Fuchs Dies," Omaha World-Herald, March 8, 1930, p. 8.

Letter from Dr. Elmer R. Porter to Bemis Park Neighborhood Association
Historical Committee, July 19, 1979.

McWilliams, Sue. "Old Home. . . A Composite of Memories." Omaha Sun,
November 26, 1980.

Omaha city directories, 1890-1942.

The True Voice. 10th Anniversary Edition, December 5, 1913.

Written information supplied by James Laska, including city building permit;
information from letter by Dr. Elmer R. Porter, July 19, 1979; interviews
of Lystra Thomsen Kinchiner, (daughter of Judge Thomsen), Mrs. Jack
Taylor (grand-daughter of Gustave Fuchs), and Mrs. James Nelsen (daughter
of Pedersen family, 1914-1923 owners of the house).