

Substantive Review

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only

received MAR 12 1984

date entered

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

1. Name

historic Red River Valley University

and/or common (Old Main)

2. Location

street & number North Dakota State School of Science NA not for publication

city, town Wahpeton NA vicinity of

state North Dakota code 38 county Richland code 077

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 type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" 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 North Dakota State School of Science

street & number 6th Street North

city, town Wahpeton NA vicinity of state North Dakota 58075

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Richland County Courthouse

street & number 2nd Avenue and 2nd Street North

city, town Wahpeton state North Dakota

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title NA has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date NA federal state county local

depository for survey records NA

city, town NA state NA

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

Old Main is a three and a half story red brick building atop a battered basement wall of quarry-faced sandstone random ashlar. It is essentially H-shaped in plan with cross-gable roofs; however, a five-story bell-tower, square in section and topped by a pyramidal hipped roof, and containing the building's main entry is centered on the facade. At the rear and centered on the building is a hip-roofed two-story apsidal projection.

Centered on the west wall of the building is a four story circular tower with conical roof containing a stairwell for between floor access. On the east wall a somewhat smaller three story octagonal tower is now adjoined to and largely obliterated from view by a modern, yet sensitively designed, three story elevator/stairway addition. Construction of this addition resulted in the removal of an original staircase.

A variety of changes have occurred to the building through the years. Chimneys, of which there were several, have all been removed at unknown dates. The slightly projecting facades flanking the bell-tower originally featured ogee shaped parapets, which were removed for an undeterminable reason sometime between 1916 and 1922. The pyramidal belltower roof has lost its original small wall dormers. Though all original window openings have been retained, glass block has been used extensively in replacing the original windows for both maintenance and energy conservation purposes. Only on the facade have modern double-hung windows been used as replacements for the originals; however, the replacement windows are shorter and the upper third of all window openings have been infilled with fiberglass panels. The building's interior, except for the attic space, has lost all integrity: original wood trim, hardware, etc. has been removed. In the attic space, now used for storage, however, very little change has occurred with the exception of the aforementioned window replacement.

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 type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" 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 1891 **Builder/Architect** John H. Coxhead

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

"Old Main" at the Wahpeton State School of Science is significant as one of the few surviving educational buildings associated with the late 19th century "booster college" movement in North Dakota, and because of its role in politics and experimentation in this State regarding the unification of public and sectarian higher education.

Formed by enthusiastic Protestant denominations in cooperation with "boomer communities" -- towns promoting their growth, importance and attractiveness as a place to settle and conduct business -- booster colleges sprang up in several North Dakota communities in the late 1880s. For a few brief years territorial and then state legislators provided a limited amount of public funds to those booster colleges which provided teacher's, or "normal," training. However, establishment of fully public-supported institutions to fill this need (in addition to a variety of other causes ranging from destruction by fire, changes in synodical boundaries, fiscal mismanagement, etc.) led to the dissolution of most of the booster colleges by 1920.

"Old Main" has its origins in the concern for education expressed by early Methodist settlers in North Dakota. As early as 1880 the Minnesota Methodist Conference, of which Dakota Territory Methodists were a part, began studying the possibility of establishing an educational institution in the eastern part of what is now North Dakota. In 1882 plans were laid to establish the Red River Collegiate Institute in Fargo, North Dakota and, though these plans did not bear fruit, for the next eight years the need for a Methodist institute of higher learning was advocated and supported by the lay electorate at each annual conference session. Finally, in 1890 firm steps - in the form of setting deadlines and conditions for establishment of a Methodist College in the new state of North Dakota - were taken; communities interested in serving as the location for the proposed college were given until March 1, 1891, to submit their "bid" which, at a minimum, had to guarantee the donation of eighty acres of land and ten thousand dollars to assist in establishing the institution on a firm footing.

The Richland County community of Wahpeton was chosen as the site of "The Red River Valley University," as the February 25, 1891 articles of incorporation indicated the new institution would be called, ostensibly winning out over any competitors on the basis of the \$21,000.00 cash donation offered by that community in addition to the required eighty acres. Construction on the college building, which was designed by John H. Coxhead (1863-1943) of the Buffalo, New York, architectural firm of Carlin & Coxhead (1890-94), began in the Spring of 1891 and the fledging institution opened its doors in October of 1892 to some eighty students provided instruction by a faculty of four. Enrollment climbed to 115 the following year, to 120 in 1894, to 141 by 1898, and by 1904 had reached 284 students under the direction of a seven member faculty.

9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet.

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property Less than one acre

Quadrangle name Wahpeton, Minn. - N. Dak.

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM References

A 14 684320 5127070
Zone Easting Northing

B
Zone Easting Northing

C

D

E

F

G

H

Verbal boundary description and justification

See continuation sheet.

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

state NA code NA county NA code NA

state NA code NA county NA code NA

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Louis N. Hafermehl, Director, Division of Archeology and Historic Preservation

organization State Historical Society of North Dakota date November 10, 1983

street & number North Dakota Heritage Center telephone (701)224-2672

city or town Bismarck state North Dakota 58505

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 National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature James E. Sherry

title State Historic Preservation Officer (North Dakota)

date March 8, 1984

For NPS use only

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

Beth Grosvenor
for Keeper of the National Register

date 4/26/84

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet

Item number 8

Page 1

The success of several booster colleges, among them the Red River Valley University, was perceived by Webster Merrifield, president (1891-1909) of the University of North Dakota, as a potential threat to the healthy growth of the secular institution he directed. The act establishing that institution included a prohibition on the teaching of political and sectarian religious doctrines. In an address to the annual meeting of the North Dakota Methodist Conference Merrifield, by proposing that the conference move the Red River Valley University to a site adjacent to the University at Grand Forks and to use such of their facilities as feasible, opened the way for eliminating both a rival institution and any perceptions of his institution as a "godless university" which might exist in the public mind.

Five years later Merrifield and Edward P. Robertson, president of the Red River Valley University, entered into an agreement which became the basis for cooperation envisioned by President Merrifield in his 1900 address. The agreement provided a careful justification for this church/state cooperative venture in higher education as follows:

"Whereas, The state university is in theory the university of all the people of the state, and is supported by the taxes of the members of the several denominations, as well as by the other citizens of the state, it would seem to be appropriate and fitting that the churches of the several denominations in the state should avail themselves of the privileges which belong to their members as citizens of the state, and should use, to whatever extent may seem desirable in the conduct of their educational work, the facilities afforded by the state university.

It is recognized that the state university is a a civic institution, and has for its mission the training of the youth of the state for efficient service as citizens. It is recognized, also, that the distincitive object of the church in maintaining schools of its own is to secure trained leadership in religious and denominational work. There is, therefore, logically, no conflict between their respective missions, for the same young people are to serve in both these capacities. These two missions being in no sense antagonistic, but supplementary, it would seem the part of wise economy that these two educational agencies should avail themselves, as far as possible, of the facilities and appliances of each other in the working out of their respective missions, keeping always in view of the principal of the separation of the church and stte in so far as regards the control and expenditure of the financial resources of each."¹

1

Stearns, Wallace N., "History of the Red River Valley University," pp. 171-178, Collections of the State Historical Society of North Dakota, Vol. II (Bismarck, North Dakota, 1908).

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

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

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet

Item number 8

Page 2

The practical results of this agreement were the acceptance of up to 30 hours by either school from the other toward a degree and what, at least to Merrifield, was a matter of sound public relations: identification of the State University, in the public mind, with the church. At the time "there was considerable comment in college circles, and on several occasions Merrifield was called upon by other state university presidents to explain the . . . arrangement. He read a paper on the subject at the annual meeting of the National Association of State Universities . . . in 1906. No other university appears to have adopted the plan, and in North Dakota no other sectarian college chose to copy the action of the Red River Valley University."2

Whatever opposition the good citizens of Wahpeton may have had to the departure of the Red River Valley University to Grand Forks was somewhat alleviated by the University's transference of its 80 acres and building, now valued at \$45,000, to the State School of Science which had begun operation in Wahpeton in 1903, for \$20,000.00. The city of Grand Forks, pleased with the expansion of facilities for higher education in its community pledged the University the balance of \$25,000.00. Thus, the Red River Valley University, relocated in Grand Forks and renamed Wesley College, opened its doors for fall classes in 1906.

"Old Main" upon its sale by the Red River Valley University to the State School of Science in 1905 became the permanent home of the latter institution. While that campus has grown substantially, "Old Main" continues to house both administrative offices and classrooms, a function it has now served two different institutions for ninety-one years.

2

Geiger, Louis G., University of the Northern Plains: A History of the University of North Dakota, 1883-1958 (University of North Dakota Press, Grand Forks, North Dakota, 1958).

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

For NPS use only

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date entered

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

Continuation sheet

Item number

9

Page

3

- Geiger, Louis G., University of the Northern Plains: A History of the University of North Dakota, 1883-1958, (University of North Dakota Press, Grand Forks, 1958).
- Stearns, Wallace N., "History of the Red River Valley University," pp. 171-178, Collections of the State Historical Society of North Dakota, Vol. II, Bismarck, 1908).
- Vyzralek, Frank E., "Private Colleges and Academies in Early North Dakota," North Dakota History: Journal of the Northern Plains, Vol. 45, No. 2, (Bismarck, 1978).

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

Continuation sheet

Item number 10

Page 4

In the City of Wahpeton, North Dakota, on the cap campus of the North Dakota State School of Science. Beginning at the point forty feet due north of the intersection of the centerlines of 6th Street North and College Avenue, thence due east 70 feet, thence due north 200 feet, thence 145 feet due west, thence 200 feet due south, thence due east 75 feet to the point of beginning.