

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY
RECEIVED JAN 30 1976
DATE ENTERED MAY 28 1976

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

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

1 NAME

HISTORIC

AND/OR COMMON

**Morton-James Public Library

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

11th Street and First Corso

__NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Nebraska City

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

First

STATE

Nebraska

__ VICINITY OF

CODE

31

COUNTY

Otoe

CODE

131

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER: Library

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

City of Nebraska City, Nebraska

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Nebraska City

__ VICINITY OF

STATE

Nebraska

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Register of Deeds--Otoe County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

10th Street and Central Avenue

CITY, TOWN

Nebraska City

STATE

Nebraska

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

DATE

__FEDERAL __STATE __COUNTY __LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Morton-James Public Library is a T-shaped brick and stone structure which was built in 1896-97. The hipped roof of this building is intersected near the north end by a gabled pavilion which projects from the east and west facades to form the "T" and the entrance at the west. The projection gives the building a three-part plan which reflects the interior functions.

Designed in a simplified yet characteristically Richardsonian Romanesque manner by the Omaha architectural firm of Fisher and Lawrie, the building exhibits elements rather explicitly derived from designs created by H. H. Richardson. The overall form of the building is a modest expression of the kind of picturesque composition common to many of Richardson's commissions for small libraries on the East Coast of the United States. In addition, the building utilizes a design vocabulary specific to Richardson's innovative creations.

The original building, or approximately the northern two-thirds of the present building, was begun in 1896 and completed by the contractor, Hamilton Brothers Construction Company, in 1897. In 1932-33 an addition was built to the south of the original building, but in a manner which utilized the same materials and details as the original building. This additional book-stack space was constructed by James Welch and is evident on the exterior only by the break in the regular pattern of fenestration along the east and west facades of this portion of the building.

The east-west "T" or gabled pavilion is the most prominent element of the design. Entrance is through this pavilion on the west directly to the main hall of the building, which is occupied by a reference area, lounge, and circulation desk. To the north of the main hall is the reading room, which is housed in the octagonally shaped wing so characteristic of many of Richardson's designs. To the south of the main hall is the reference room and book-stack area. Interior finishes are of oak and plaster.

Constructed of a dark brown "chipped" or "rock-faced" brick and trimmed in dark red-brown sandstone, the building in a modest way resembles the strength and massing of some of Richardson's work. Two large Syrian arches flank the entrance porch of the west pavilion. These are balanced by a group of three tall rectangular transomed lights and a series of four small round arched windows in the gable. A dark red-brown terra-cotta coping tops the parapet of the gable with a simple finial at the peak. Red-brown sandstone accents the otherwise monochromatic scheme at the water table, over the arches, at the base of the columns, as a sill course under the windows and as a header course above the window of the entrance pavilion. The rock-faced brick wall is slightly battered below the water table, while the brick is corbelled at the cornice supporting the roof eaves.

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 checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input 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 1896-97

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Fisher & Lawrie, Omaha

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Discussions concerning the establishment of a public library at Nebraska City began as early as 1885. John W. Steinhart was the moving force behind this idea. It wasn't until about 1895, however, that the first positive moves were made. Steinhart, while visiting with Jay Morton (son of J. Sterling Morton) in Chicago had mentioned the possibility to him and Morton offered to donate the proceeds of the sale of a storage building to help finance the library. Steinhart, however, was unable to sell the building. Morton then offered to construct the building if the people of Nebraska City would purchase the ground, agree to equip the building with lights, shelves, tables, chairs, and other minor needs and create a Library Board. This proposition was put to the public and by February 1896 an article in the Nebraska City News stated that the "...building will be built in accordance with the latest ideas and designs in such work."

With the acceptance of the proposition by the citizens of Nebraska City, Morton chose the Hamilton Brothers Construction Company of Omaha to erect the building and contacted the Omaha architect George L. Fisher to make the plans. The building was completed by March of 1897 with the grand opening ceremony held April 10, 1897. Electric lights were installed in 1900 and in 1901 a new steam boiler was installed. The first trees were planted along the west side of the building in 1907. These have since been replaced and a new growth of trees is well-established along the west sidewalk of the property.

Further changes were made to the building as time passed. A new direct lighting system was installed in 1923 and the building received its first telephone service in 1931. This same year the interior was redecorated with the walls and radiators receiving a new coat of paint while the floors were oiled and patched. In August of 1932 Jay Morton proposed additional book-stack space, a three-level addition with steel book stacks and fireproof construction. This addition was built by James Welch at a cost of around \$10,000. The addition was dedicated on January 29, 1933.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Hitchcock, Henry-Russell: The Architecture of H. H. Richardson and His Times, Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1961.
 Schacht, Diane Nadine: "A History of the Public Library Movement in Nebraska City, Nebraska," Masters Thesis, Nov. 1971.
 Whiffen, Marcus: American Architecture Since 1789, Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1969.
Files and Archives of the Nebraska State Historical Society

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than one acre
 UTM REFERENCES

A	1,5	2,5,8	5,2,0	4,5	10,6	14,5,0	B					
	ZONE	EASTING		NORTHING				ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		
C							D					

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

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

D. Murphy, Curator of Historic Sites

ORGANIZATION

Nebraska State Historical Society

STREET & NUMBER

1500 R Street

CITY OR TOWN

Lincoln

DATE

January 1976

TELEPHONE

(402) 432-2793

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

Marian O'Kneith 1/15/76

TITLE Director, Nebraska State Historical Society

DATE

1/28/76

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

AC: THE DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

Leah A. [Signature]
Mark [Signature]

DATE

1/28/76

DATE

1-25-76

AC: THE KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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The Morton-James Public Library is situated near the heart of one of Nebraska's most interesting historical communities. Located immediately southeast of the Otoe County Courthouse, the building is one block west of the exceptional U. S. Post Office Building (see National Register Nomination). Basically a Richardsonian Romanesque structure, the U. S. Post Office offers an interesting contrast in design approach to that of the Library.

Of great interest is the library's modest associations with some of H. H. Richardson's designs for small libraries in the eastern United States. Although there is no direct evidence that the architect, George L. Fisher, had ever seen any of Richardson's work, it seems clear that he was nonetheless aware of it. Morton, the financier of the building, had seen many small public libraries in New England, among which certainly would have been some of Richardson's designs.

Certainly many of Richardson's libraries could be considered as prototypes to the design of the Nebraska City Library. A number of Richardson's designs portray a similarity of overall composition which can also be seen in the Nebraska City building. In terms of interior organization of space and the disposition of the formal elements, Richardson's Winn Memorial Library (Woburn, Massachusetts), the Billings Library (Burlington, Vermont), and the Converse Memorial Library (Malden, Massachusetts) come to mind.

The Morton-James Library, of course, exhibits none of the elaborateness of the Richardson designs, with the absence of towers a most obvious difference between the various compositions. This building, typical of the Richardson compositions, exhibits the rectangular library or book-stack wing lighted from the sides by a continuous series of rectangular windows. The octagonal, hip-roofed wing to the north--the reading room--can be seen in more elaborate form in the Billings and Winn Memorial Libraries. The gabled entrance pavilion of the Nebraska City building shares some kinship with this portion of the Converse Memorial Library which also utilizes the arched entrance porch balanced by the series of three rectangular transomed windows. The precedent for the series of round arched windows seen in the gable of the Morton-James Library may be found on many of Richardson's buildings, not the least of which are his library buildings.

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All of these details are modified by their execution in brick, as opposed to the stone which Richardson used so well. Of interest is the type of brick used on the Nebraska City building, which makes an attempt at producing a rusticated stone effect. This dark-brown brick has a chipped surface which, when examined at close scale, gives the appearance of rock-faced masonry. This brick gives a rough textured, slightly rustic appearance to the building when viewed as a whole. Brick, of course, was not alien to Richardson, who utilized the material so well on the Emmanuel Church in Pittsburgh. Here, also, we see the corbelled brick cornice and the battered base of the exterior wall which is featured on the Morton-James Public Library.

We know very little about the firm of Fisher & Lawrie except that they executed a substantial amount of work in Nebraska City between the years 1894-95. In addition to a number of residences (see the Calvin Chapman House, site #33, Nebraska City Historic District) they had designed several large buildings including the Warren and Stevenson blocks, the G.A.R. Memorial Building and the Romanesque-inspired First Baptist Church (see South Nebraska City Historic District). The G.A.R. Building is an interesting, somewhat Richardsonian Romanesque structure, situated on the north side of First Corso between the Morton-James Library and the U. S. Post Office Building.

With the exception of the Old University Library which the firm under the title of Mendelssohn, Fisher and Lawrie designed in Lincoln, Nebraska (1891-95; see National Register nomination), the Morton-James Library is probably the finest known structure which the firm designed during these years. This building remains as a modest, yet fine example of the Richardsonian Romanesque style of architecture in Nebraska and compares favorably with the other known non-residential structures of the style in the state.