

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

PH0692 913

FOR NPS USE ONLY
RECEIVED DEC 5 1978
DATE ENTERED JAN 23 1979

**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

St.
~~Saint~~ Cecilia's Cathedral

AND/OR COMMON

Same

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

701 North 40th Street

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Omaha

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

2

VICINITY OF

STATE

Nebraska

CODE

31

COUNTY

Douglas

CODE

055

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

OWNERSHIP

STATUS

PRESENT USE

DISTRICT

PUBLIC

OCCUPIED

AGRICULTURE

MUSEUM

BUILDING(S)

PRIVATE

UNOCCUPIED

COMMERCIAL

PARK

STRUCTURE

BOTH

WORK IN PROGRESS

EDUCATIONAL

PRIVATE RESIDENCE

SITE

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

ACCESSIBLE

ENTERTAINMENT

RELIGIOUS

OBJECT

IN PROCESS

YES: RESTRICTED

GOVERNMENT

SCIENTIFIC

BEING CONSIDERED

YES: UNRESTRICTED

INDUSTRIAL

TRANSPORTATION

NO

MILITARY

OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Archdiocese of Omaha, c/o The Most Rev. Daniel Sheehan, Archbishop ✓

STREET & NUMBER

6605 Farnam Street

CITY, TOWN

Omaha

VICINITY OF

Nebraska

STATE

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Douglas County Courthouse, Register of Deeds

STREET & NUMBER

17th and Farnam Streets

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		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input 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

Saint Cecilia's Cathedral is located on the crest of one of Omaha's rolling hills, and the situation is at the northern extreme of the "Gold Coast," a residential section that began developing around the turn of the century. The cathedral is a dominant feature of Omaha's cityscape, and its twin towers are visible from a distance (see photo 1). Construction of this Spanish Renaissance Revival building commenced in 1905 and the cornerstone was laid two years later. But consecration did not occur until 1959 when the total building project was completed.

The main facade (see photo 2) exhibits an interesting contrast between the enlivened surfaces of the nave's gabled end and the smooth finish of the towers. Entrance to the narthex is through the triple portal's bronze doors that are separated by Tuscan columns. There are three arched windows above the portal to indicate the choir and organ loft's location. Embellished niches are between the windows (see photo 3), and heavily rusticated columns carry on the vertical thrust. Combined with the pediments, these elements allow for a lively play between light and shadow. The quatrefoil window is surrounded by moldings and appears to be suspended. Other decorative stonework is above the rose window, and the gable is treated with Baroque scrolls.

Identical cupolas terminate the twin towers which achieve a height of 187 feet. The cupolas utilize voluted curves, a detail used throughout the whole exterior as a unifying feature. Massive buttresses employing volutes surround the nave (see photo 5). These volutes are notable as being large and dramatic elements that render the nave a strong sense of stability.

At the building's northeast corner is Our Lady of Nebraska Chapel, a division with a curvilinear parapet and a semi-circular apse (see photo 5). North of this chapel is the cathedral's secondary entrance (see photo 6) that leads into a vestibule built flush with the chapel. A second chapel, the Nash Chapel, is situated near the cathedral's southwest corner.

The interior plan consists of a nave without transept, an ambulatory, a spacious narthex and north entrance vestibule, a semi-circular apse, and the two attached chapels. The nave is a great auditorium terminating with a sanctuary dominated by a high altar of white marble and a wooden cathedra, screen and clerical stalls (see photo 7). The ceiling, a huge barrel vault with enriched molded ribs (see photo 8), is supported by a series of double-arched bays. The nave is lit both by clerestory windows and first-floor side windows.

Opposite the sanctuary and above the narthex is a loft for organ and choir. A frieze encircles the nave and sanctuary, and high above the altar in the apsidal half-dome is painted the figure of Saint Cecilia flanked by attendant angels.

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Further interior richness is provided by stained glass in the clerestory windows depicting the church's great liturgical hymns, and stained glass in the ambulatory windows portraying the patrons and founders of religious orders in the Archdiocese of Omaha. The ceiling's ambulatory is encrusted with blue and gold tesserae representing the sky and stars. Mosaics on the ceiling of the Nash Chapel contain arabesque designs, and Our Lady of Nebraska Chapel's windows are filled with stained glass reassembled from 16th-century Spanish churches.

The width and length of the cathedral are 138 feet and 255 feet respectively. The architect specified limestone blocks covering a steel frame as the construction means to render the building a fireproof state. Both the interior and exterior are in excellent condition.

The nominated property is a four-acre lot bounded by streets on the north, west and south. The rear of the apse delineates the nominated lot's far east extent. In this lot's southeastern corner is a contemporary one-story diocesan building of brick construction. Due to the reciprocal nature between the cathedral and site, the full four acres are necessary for inclusion.

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 checked="" 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/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 1905-59

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Thomas Rogers Kimball

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Saint Cecilia's Cathedral, begun in 1905, is significant as being a dramatic departure from the common architectural styles selected for Roman Catholic churches in the early twentieth century. It ranks as one of the ten largest cathedrals in the United States, and its size speaks well of the aspirations and pride of Roman Catholics in Omaha and the Middle West. Further significance is achieved through the building's associations with Thomas Rogers Kimball, an eminent American architect, and by the building's majestic site location.

The cathedral's style is Spanish Renaissance Revival, a style prevalent in Mexico and South America, but largely unexplored in the United States in the early part of this century. The Spanish Renaissance Revival did, in fact, "not become prominent in the United States until after the Panama-California Exposition at San Diego in 1915, after which Spanish architecture became the rage (Batie, p. 70)."

Thomas Rogers Kimball (1862-1934) studied at the University of Nebraska for two years before going to Massachusetts, where he studied art in Boston and completed a three-year course in architecture at M.I.T. Further studies in art were conducted at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris. Kimball began an architectural practice in Boston in 1889, and opened an office in Omaha five years later. His career was quite productive, and was distinguished mostly by public buildings in the mid-western states. He served as president of the A.I.A. for two successive years (Withey and Withey, pp. 344-45).

The architect had supposed historical grounds for selecting the distinctive Spanish Renaissance style for Saint Cecilia's: "If the reports concerning the expedition of Coronado in 1541 be accepted as true, the first clergyman to visit the region now included in the State of Nebraska was a (Spanish) Catholic priest--Father Juan de Padilla, who accompanied the expedition (Wakeley, p. 387)." Kimball stated that the cathedral was to be "one of the first, if not the first, to be built in the United States strictly following the Old Country conventions (The True Voice, March 17, 1905)."

Kimball began plans for Saint Cecilia's in 1901 under the supervision of Archbishop Richard Scannell:

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

See continuation sheet

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 4 acres

QUADRANGLE NAME Omaha north

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:24000

UTM REFERENCES

A 15 2510610 457231910

B

C

D

E

F

G

H

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

see cont sheet

A square lot bounded by Chicago Street on north, 40th Street on west, Davenport Street on south, and the cathedral's apse serving as the far eastern extent: Lot 14, western third of Block 3, Park Place, as identified on City of Omaha Plat.

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

November, 1978

STREET & NUMBER

1500 "R" Street

TELEPHONE

471-3270
402/432-2793

CITY OR TOWN

Lincoln

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 National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

Marvin O. Kuntz

TITLE

Director

DATE

11/22/78

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

1-25-79

ATTEST:

CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

DATE

William H. Brasham 1-25-79

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Kimball's design was followed carefully throughout the 54-year period of construction, even after his death in 1934. Although his plans included four chapels, funds ~~permitted~~ construction of only two The cathedral's prolonged construction period was largely due to Bishop Scannell's dictum that the building would proceed only as funds were available (Omaha City Architecture, p. 146)."

Saint Cecilia's parish was founded in 1888 and an elegant building was erected shortly afterwards. By 1894, however, the congregation had grown too large for the church. The new building commenced by the parish in the early 1900's became the third Roman Catholic cathedral in Omaha and the laying of the cornerstone, attended by most bishops and archbishops of the Middle West, was a joyous occasion in the Catholic community's history. The True Voice, an Omaha Catholic publication, anxiously followed the cathedral's construction progress until 1916 when enough work was completed to hold services. In addition, this publication urged its readers to purchase houses or lots in the cathedral's vicinity.

Saint Cecilia's was consecrated in 1959 upon the completion of domed cupolas atop the twin towers. The vast majority of work, however, took place prior to 1916 when the first services were held. The cathedral ranks among Omaha's truly monumental edifices. The hillcrest upon which Saint Cecilia's was erected is elevated 1200 feet above sea level. Omaha is a series of hills rising from the Missouri River Basin. The elevated site was selectively chosen, allowing the cathedral to serve as the most prominent building in the city's east central section.

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Omaha City Architecture. Omaha: Landmarks, Inc. and the Junior
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Wakeley, Arthur C. Omaha: The Gate City, and Douglas County, Nebraska.
Chicago: S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1917.

Withey, Henry, and Withey, Elsie R. Biographical Dictionary of
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Verbal Boundary Description

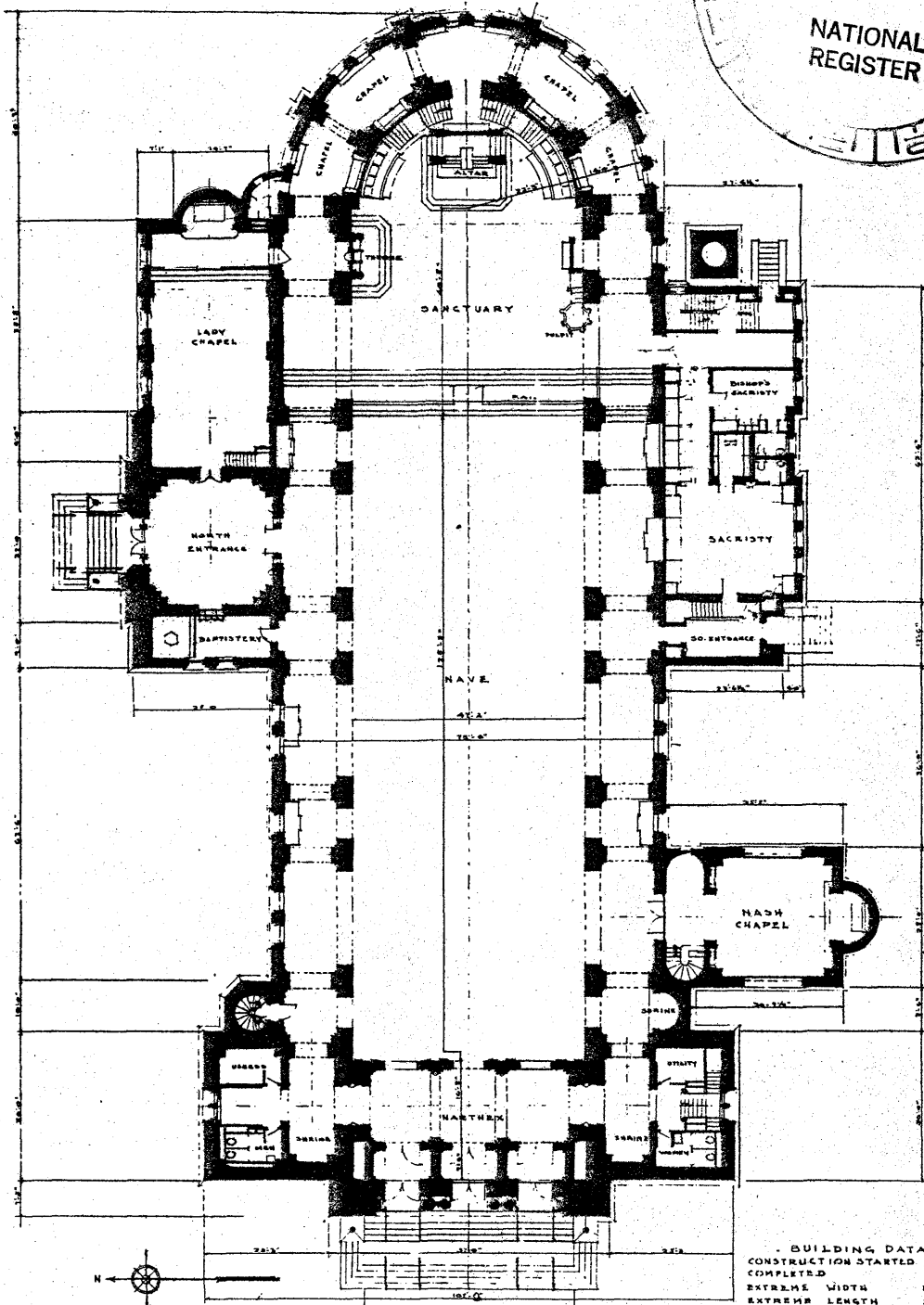
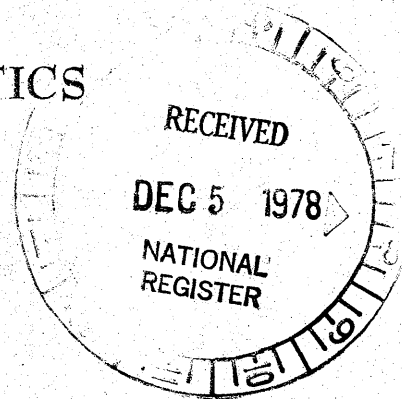
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PAGE

A square lot bounded by Burt Street on the north, 40th Street on the west, Webster Street on the south, and the cathedral's apse serving as the far eastern extent: Lot 14, western half of Block 3, Park Place, as identified on City of Omaha Plat.

FLOOR PLAN STATISTICS



FLOOR PLAN.

BUILDING DATA
 CONSTRUCTION STARTED 1909
 COMPLETED 1929
 EXTREME WIDTH 158 FT
 EXTREME LENGTH 252 FT
 HEIGHT FLOOR TO CEILING 74 FT
 HEIGHT GRADE TO CROSS TIE 148 FT