



**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

**Category of Property**  
(Check only one box)

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1	0	Total

**Name of related multiple property listing**  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

n/a

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Social: meeting hall  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Social: meeting hall  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Late 19th & 20th Century Revivals:  
Subcategory: Late Gothic Revival  
Other: Collegiate Gothic

foundation brick  
walls brick  
roof n/a  
other stone: limestone: frontispiece

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or a grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Ethnic Culture

Architecture

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1928-30

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

1928-30

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

n/a

**Cultural Affiliation**

n/a

**Architect/ Builder**

Kriz, E.J./Stake, R.O., and Urban, Karel

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of Property less than one

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
1.	14	636290	4484520	3.			
2.				4.			

[ ] See continuation sheet.

**Verbal Boundary Description**

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

**Boundary Justification**

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title D. Murphy, Senior Research Architect

organization Nebraska State Historical Society date December 7, 1995

street & number 1500 R Street telephone (402) 471-4774

city or town Lincoln state NE zip code 68501

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets**

**Maps**

- A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs**

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

**Additional items**

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

**Property Owner**

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name \_\_\_\_\_

street & number \_\_\_\_\_ telephone \_\_\_\_\_

city or town \_\_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_\_ zip code \_\_\_\_\_

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Česko-národní síň

Name of Property

Fillmore County, Nebraska

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## DESCRIPTION

The Česko-národní síň is located in the heart of the Milligan business district, a market town in western Fillmore County, Nebraska. The hall is a large two-story over raised-basement structure constructed of reinforced concrete, hollow clay tile, and brick. The east facade of the Collegiate Gothic style building features an elaborate limestone frontispiece with Czech and English-language building titles. The interior focuses on a large multi-purpose auditorium and theatre. This nomination consists of one contributing building. Historical integrity is very high.

Located in eastern Fillmore County, the Česko-národní síň, or Milligan Auditorium, is strategically-positioned at the heart of the business district of Milligan, a farm market town in eastern Fillmore County. The town is along the western edge of a large and concentrated Czech settlement in the Central Plains Region, that also encompasses most of Saline County. The Czech town of Wilber is located along the eastern edge of the settlement.

The auditorium is situated on the southwest corner of the main intersection in Milligan, facing east along Main Street. The building occupies most of two lots, and measures 15.7 by 43 meters. It's structure is reinforced concrete walls and columns for the foundation and basement, with a concrete frame above grade. The frame consists of a post-and-beam system which supports a reinforced concrete pan-joist and slab system for the floors and roof. All major interior walls are built of hollow clay tile, while the exterior walls are clay tile and face brick, laid in common bond.

In massing the building has three main parts; a front, two-story section which houses the entry and flanking storefronts at grade level, with the lodge meeting room on the upper floor; the major central section, which is single-storied over a raised basement, and houses the auditorium above a basement banquet hall; and the rear section which houses the stage with fly-space.

The principal space in the building is the large theatre and auditorium. Entrance is gained from street level under a semi-elliptical vault, through doors leading to a lobby. Secondary entrance to the flanking stores is from the lobby, as well as stairs up to the auditorium and down to the banquet hall. Paired vestibule doors divide the auditorium from the stairway. A ticket booth and cloak room (now a wet-bar) are located to one side of the rear of the auditorium, while a stairway on the other side leads to the balcony and lodge rooms on the second floor. The auditorium measures 15 by nearly 24 meters in size, with a ceiling height of six meters. The large stage at the west end is focused behind a semi-elliptical proscenium opening. The arch is over seven meters wide and more than four meters high.

The stage itself is also spacious, measuring 8.5 by 13.9 meters, and 8.5 meters from the floor to the grid above. It is fully-equipped with small dressing rooms, full sets of stage lights, prompter's box, and fly space for theatre curtains and backdrops. Prominent among the artifacts still extant in the hall is the

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### DESCRIPTION (continued)

Milligan High School proscenium curtain, and an urban drop depicting a baroque Czech town. Access to the stage is provided from the auditorium on each side of the proscenium.

Below the auditorium is the building's secondary community space, the large banquet hall. This hall is used both in conjunction with and/or separately from the auditorium. A large kitchen and bar are in open proximity to the seating area. Furnace rooms for both the auditorium proper and the storefronts, as well as restrooms, are in the basement.

The front section of the building accommodates more specialized functions. Typical of many larger Czech halls, a private lodge room is provided on the second floor. Atypically, the room was utilized by a variety of organizations. A garment and record storage room is adjacent to the meeting room. Also on second floor, but separated from the lodge spaces, is access to the auditorium balcony. A moving picture projection booth--still complete with equipment--was added to the balcony in 1941. The first floor of the front section features two small storefronts on either side of the main entrance. They provide continuity to the business district from the street, and have been used for various purposes over the years, including a doctor's office, real estate office, and public library. This commercial aspect of the hall is unusual for the building type in Nebraska, occurring only in one other public Czech hall, the Sokol Hall in Wilber.

While the whole building features an exterior of face-brick, formally the design places emphasis on the front entrance section. This section is set apart from the rest by projecting corner pilasters and sloping stone string-courses. The facade is divided into three bays by projecting pilasters, with the central bay projecting slightly, raised in height above the adjacent bays, and capped with a decorative pediment. A slightly lower pediment enhances the side wall of this section. Windows, which like the rest of the building are divided industrial steel sash, are enhanced with decorative stonework in the front section: simple Late Gothic Revival stone labels over the storefronts, and wide "crenelated" stone surrounds for the remaining.

Further focus is given the central bay by virtue of its design detail. An elaborate Late Gothic Revival frontispiece of stone encompasses both the entrance and second story window openings. The triplet windows, which light the lodge room, are diagonally-divided leaded glass which feature colored-glass shields. The label at the top of the frontispiece encompasses the English name for the building, "Auditorium," above which appears the shield of the principal sponsor for construction, the Z.Č.B.J., or Západní Česko-Bratrská Jednota. Spandrels below the windows feature the emblems of the three other organizational sponsors, the Sokol on the left, the Jednota Českých Dam (J.Č.D.) in the center, and the mask of the local dramatic club, Ochotnický kroužek, on the right. Directly above the vaulted entrance is the Czech language name for the building, "Česko-národní síň," or Czech National Hall.

Typologically the building retains characteristics of the narrow family of building types utilized by Czechs for community hall designs during the earlier period of expansion and cultural florescence, from about 1897 to 1920. The typical Czech accommodation of multiple functions in a public building design format is quite

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## DESCRIPTION (continued)

distinct from the closest American counterparts, represented in Lodge Hall and Opera House building types. Stylistically the building breaks from the use of Old Country styles, typical of the earlier period, in the utilization of Collegiate Gothic. The tripartite symmetry of the facade and formal frontispiece, however, bear closer relationship to the *České novorenesance* than to Collegiate Gothic prototypes. This transitional design is also reflected in the use of dual languages on the facade, and in the minor accommodation of commercial space.

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Česko-národní síň, or Milligan Auditorium, is significant on a statewide level under Criterion A as the product of the major Czech cultural institution in the western "Central Plains Czech Settlement," and more particularly as the exemplary product in Nebraska of the "Period of Coalescence and Assimilation" (c1920-1960), as defined in the Historic Context, "Czech Settlement in Nebraska." Coalescence is evident in the cooperation of multiple Czech organizations, while assimilation is seen in a shift away from Czech toward more use of the English language. The building is also significant statewide under Criterion C for its architectural design and detailing, which clearly expresses the historic themes of the "Period of Coalescence and Assimilation." This is seen in a shift away from Czech architectural styles toward American ones, very competently done at Milligan by a Czech-American architect. The Registration period of significance is derived from the planning and construction dates of the building.

## History

The seeds for the building of a Czech auditorium in Milligan were planted in 1916 by Antonie Bulínová, an active member of the Západní Česko-Bratrské Jednota (Z.Č.B.J.) Řád Rábí. Rábí was founded near Exeter in 1887 as lodge 135 of the Česko-Slovenský Podporující Spolek (Č.S.P.S.), which moved its center to Milligan the next year. The small wood frame hall it built in town in 1890 served as the only Czech meeting place there until construction of the Auditorium. Rábí was a charter member of the new Západní Česko Bratrská Jednota, which split from the Č.S.P.S. on July 1, 1897 in Omaha. One of its members, Karel Šmrha, was instrumental in promoting the split, beginning his efforts in July of 1896 (Bock, pp.1-5).

Mrs. Bulín raised \$600 in 1916, but the war diverted attention from the effort. A dozen years passed before the idea of an auditorium was revived; this time from the ranks of Z.Č.B.J. lodge Svatopluk Čech #76, during their meeting of February 28, 1928. By October 18, 1928, an association of Czechs signed the articles of incorporation of the Milligan Auditorium Corporation, which stated in part that "...[we] do hereby certify that we associate ourselves together...to build and operate a community building wherein dances, theater entertainments, and all other legitimate public amusements may be carried on...." The articles were signed by first board members V.V. Šmrha, Antonie Bulín, Vlasta Kottas, Josef Stých, and Václav Ach.

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### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE (continued)

The corporation authorized capital stock in the amount of \$50,000, divided into 500 shares valued at \$100 each. Those who "associated themselves" included: lead Z.Č.B.J lodge Řád Svatopluk Čech #27 (35 shares), together with Z.Č.B.J lodges Řád Rábí #27 (35 shares), Řád Čechie #122 (25 shares), and Lodge Cornhusker #288 (5 shares); Sbor Vesna #90 of the Jednota Českých Dam (Union of Bohemian Women) (10 shares); Sokol Říp (5 shares); and the dramatic club Ochotnický kroužek (5 shares). Bylaws were passed and officers were elected in a special stockholders' meeting on October 14, 1929.

The corporation's minutes are silent on the details of construction. A building committee of 21 members was appointed which handled these details; three were chosen from each of the associated organizations. These "...represented twenty-one varied, often opposing opinions, and none of these opinions ever remained constant. Each seemed, indeed, to change every time the sun arose in the east! It was a gigantic assignment with which the committee wrestled and with which they felt they made such painfully slow headway." E.J. Kriz (Kříž) of Fremont was selected architect, while R.O. Stake, with superintendent Karel Urban, was selected as the contractor. The contract was signed on October 7, 1929, and work began on the 25th of that month ("Souvenir Program").

A three-day celebration and dedication opened the building from April 25 through 27, 1930. Among the many festivities were dinners and suppers, speeches, concerts, dances, and Czech plays. Most of these types of activities remained prominent throughout the history of the building. Receipts from the first six months of operation indicate varied use. Each group using the lodge room, auditorium, and basement paid rent, while income was also generated from the lunch room, cloak room, and benefit bazaars. The major activities included jazz dances, old time dances, and Czech plays and dances. In a 1935 affidavit verifying its non-profit status, the corporation stated that the building served "...the needs of the community in social, educational, and recreational ways...the same...as the Sokol Auditorium at Martha & South 13th in Omaha." It further stated that rooms were rented for a barber shop, and a dentist and real estate office; that the lodge room is rented, as is the basement restaurant; that the main floor is used "...for theatrical purposes, gatherings of all sorts, including funerals as well as dances...;" and that the rest rooms are open to the public ("Milligan Auditorium Corporation Minute Book").

Ownership and operation is still in the hands of the corporation, though the associated parties have changed over the years. The Sokol partnership appears to have ceased by the late 1930s, and vesna Sbor J.Č.D. sold their shares in 1944. Talk of merging the Z.Č.B.J lodges commenced in 1942, but was not accomplished until January 1, 1955, when lodges Rábí, Čechie, and Cornhusker merged into the new Lodge Milligan #420 ("A Brief History"). Today some activities, such as Czech dances, are the same as in the past; others, such as the Sokol gymnastics or the staging of Czech drama, have disappeared; while others yet, such as the current rock-and-roll dances, have merely changed character. The Milligan Auditorium remains today the social and cultural center of the community.



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### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE (continued)

#### Context

The context for evaluation of this property is Czech-American Settlement in Nebraska (NeCRP 18.05.05), and the local Central Plains Czech Settlement (18.05.05.03). Czechs from Bohemia and Moravia form one of the prominent immigrant groups in Nebraska, more having settled here than all of the other Great Plains states combined (Luebke, 418). By 1920 over 140,000 Czech souls had settled the Great Plains, accounting for more than twenty-two percent of the Czech-speaking population of the United States. Of these, 40.3 percent lived in Nebraska (Garver: 1980, 151-52).

More importantly, of all the European immigrant groups to settle the Plains, the majority of Czechs were freethinkers--individuals who had severed all ties with organized religion. As many as fifty-five percent called themselves freethinkers (Garver: 1980, 148). The intellectual origins of freethought lie in the 18th century European Enlightenment, which ultimately provided the intellectual basis for the 19th-century Czech National Revival (*Národní obrození*). The establishment of Czechoslovakia in 1918 was the crowning political achievement of this revival (Garver: 1978, 6, 13).

The growth of Czech freethought on the Plains was fostered primarily through voluntary fraternal and benevolent associations. The first of these societies was founded in 1854 as the Česko Slovenský Podporující Spolek (Č.S.P.S.) or Bohemian-Slovakian Benevolent Society. The Č.S.P.S. began organizing on the Plains in the 1870s. Among its many aims was the provision of mutual life and health insurance, as well as many of the benefits that religious people sought through church-related channels such as fellowship, entertainment, community service, and charitable and educational activities (Garver: 1980, 158). Affiliated with the liberal *programme* of the Č.S.P.S. was the Jednota Českých Dam, or Union of Bohemian Women. Its appearance in Nebraska began in the mid-1880s (Rosicky, 358-59).

Nebraska Czech freethinkers first established Č.S.P.S. lodges, but internal dispute led Plains and midwestern Czechs to secede and form a new organization, the Západní Česko-Bratrská Jednota (Z.Č.B.J.) or Western Bohemian Fraternal Association, in 1897. Meeting in Omaha, the new association was founded by Czechs representing thirty-one Č.S.P.S. lodges. Primary among the reasons for the organization was the admittance of women as full insurable members, institution of life insurance payments based upon age, and a loosening of anti-clerical stances. Milligan Auditorium Corporation participating lodges Svatopluk Čech and Milligan are two of the nearly fifty Z.Č.B.J. lodges still active in Nebraska ("A Brief History," pp.3-12). The Z.Č.B.J. remains the largest of the Czech fraternal organizations in the United States.

Freethinking or liberal Czech organizations have had a powerful influence not only on the development of Czech-American society (Garver: 1980, 165), but have also been principle conservators of the Czech heritage in America as well. The social function of these organization offered opportunity for cultural enrichment. Organizations sponsored a wide variety of cultural activities, but most obviously today (and most pertinent to this nomination), was the provision of *places* to occasion cultural activity. Construction of multi-purpose public halls created a New World "commons" which was surrogate for the Old Country

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### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE (continued)

village green. Furthermore, lodges acted as institutions which assisted immigrants in the process of integration into the broader stream of American life, easing the transition from being Czech to becoming Czech-American. In this way the lodges moderated the powerful demands of assimilation presented by the dominant culture. In the end, a degree of Czech identity survived the settlement and assimilation process, which enriches the lives of all who are open to diversity today (Murphy, "Gathering the World," p. 23).

While the Z.Č.B.J. became the principal such organization, many others played key roles in the Milligan effort. Prominent among these was the Tělocvičná Jednota Sokol, or Sokol Gymnastic Society. It was established in Praha, Bohemia in 1862. The first Sokol in the United states was established at St. Louis in 1865. Founded upon the principle of a healthy mind in a healthy body, the concept of physical training for the body together with national and patriotic training for the mind played a major role in the establishment of Czech cultural life in this country. Sokol is the only of the many Czech-American associations to have its roots in the Old Country (Rosicky, 352-55).

In addition to chapters of national liberal organizations, many independent local groups were formed to foster growth of various aspects of the Czech cultural heritage. Non-benefit singing, reading, and dramatic clubs were among the first Czech-American societies formed in the state. Such groups remained popular through the first several decades of settlement. Among the most ubiquitous of these were dramatic clubs, which principal purpose was the staging of Czech plays. Beyond entertainment, these clubs functioned to keep the native language and dramatic traditions alive. Drama was one of the important activities of local Czech free schools, where it was used to teach Czech language and history to children (Kučera, pp. 13-14; Murphy, "Dramatic Expressions," p.170).

### Periods

Four principal historic periods are discernable in the history of Czech settlement in Nebraska. The first is the period of initial settlement and ideological conflict, dating from about 1863 to 1900. This is a period devoted to the gaining of an economic and cultural foothold in the new land, and was characterized by ideological conflicts which sources were in the Old Country political and religious environment. Here the conflicts divided Czechs into freethinkers, Catholics, and Protestants. The establishment of a plethora of separate benefit and non-benefit societies, as well as parishes and congregations, characterize this period. The second is a period of expansion and cultural florescence, dating from roughly 1897 to 1920. This period saw the geographic and economic expansion of the initial core settlements, together with the flourishing of an essentially Old Country cultural heritage throughout the settlements. Many of the old ideological animosities begin to dissipate during this period.

The third period is the period of significance for the Milligan Auditorium. Dating from about 1920 to 1960, this period is characterized by a coalescence of the ethnic culture, and by broad assimilation into the mainstream of American life. Immigrant quotas, language restrictions, and widespread discrimination against Czechs during and after World War I lead to a gradual decline in Czech-American identity and

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### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE (continued)

institutions. Nativist pressures served to strengthen bonds among Czechs of varying persuasion, even while traditions were being suppressed. Czechs coalesced their efforts rather than maintain the old conflictual ways, as evidenced in the merging of fraternal lodges and greater cooperation among formerly divergent groups. The multi-organizational construction of the Milligan Auditorium is one of the best examples of this phenomenon.

The fourth period, one of mutuality and the Czech-American Revival, begins with the emergence of the Czech Festival in the early 1960s. Mutual cultural concerns now are reflected in a new kind of organization, led by the associated groups of the Nebraska Czechs, Inc.

#### Significance

The Česko-národní síň, or Milligan Auditorium, stands today as perhaps the most significant Czech-American building in Nebraska representing the period of coalescence and assimilation. Of the ten halls recorded in the Nebraska Historic Buildings Survey which were constructed by liberal Czechs during this period, the Auditorium is the only to have been built by an association of multiple organizations. Saline Center Hall (SA00-043, NRHP) was also built by an association of groups, but it was an association of lodges of the same organization, re-formed by merger. Milligan's association of four separate lodges of the Z.Č.B.J., a *vesna* of the J.Č.D., a society of the T.J. Sokols, and the local dramatic club Ochoťnický kroužek is unique among the public Czech halls in Nebraska. A very strong sense of cultural coalescence is evident in this unique association.

Architecturally the building is a significant manifestation of Czech-American cultural assimilation. Of the ten halls previously mentioned, seven portray strong ethnic associations in architectural style. Of the remaining three, two are predominantly utilitarian designs that might be said to be devoid of style (Saline Center, SA00-043; Box Butte, BX00-001). Only the Milligan Auditorium evidences a predominantly American association in the use of the Collegiate Gothic style of architecture. Architect Kriz chose the style for its strong associations with the architecture of private clubs during this period; paradoxically in this case, the architectural associations were explicitly with the architecture of mens' clubs. The result was a facade designed in an American style, for a building type strong in association with the liberal Czech movement in Nebraska. Certain characteristics of the type still prevail in the facade; Czech associations are evident in the composition, which shows greater relationship with Renaissance Revival sources (*České novorenesance*) than the, typically, asymmetrical Collegiate Gothic.

Assimilation is a long process that is reflected in the building design. While the Articles of Incorporation and the Minutes of the corporation were kept in English, there is evidence that minutes were routinely "translated into Bohemian [sic]" before they were approved (see "Minute Book," p.78, Jan. 21, 1935). This ambivalence is also evident in the frontispiece of the building, where "Auditorium" is rendered in English, and "Czech-National Hall" is given in Czech. Likewise, the frontispiece exhibits the phenomenon of coalescence in the incorporation of the associated organizations' emblems on the front of the building.

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**BIBLIOGRAPHY (continued)**

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**VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION**

Lots 1 and 2, Block 9, Original Town of Milligan, Fillmore County, Nebraska

**BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION**

This property includes all real estate historically associated with the nominated resource.