

PH0356247

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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RECEIVED APR 7 1977  
DATE ENTERED NOV 23 1977

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  
\*\* George F. Lee Octagon Houses  
AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER  
5 of Nebraska City off US 73/75  
CITY, TOWN  
Nebraska City XX VICINITY OF First  
STATE CODE COUNTY CODE  
Nebraska 31 Otoe 131

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 type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC ACQUISITION	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 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 type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME  
see Continuation Sheet, Item 4  
STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN  
VICINITY OF  
STATE

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.  
Register of Deeds, Otoe County Courthouse  
STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN  
Nebraska City  
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 type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" 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		

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DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Located in rural Otoe County, Nebraska, the two octagon houses are across a road from each other in the farming area atop the bluffs approximately a mile and a half from the Missouri River. Both octagon houses were built and owned by George F. and Betsy S. Lee. The brick octagon house, built in 1872, is of frame construction veneered in brick. The frame octagon house has been covered with asbestos siding.

Both octagon houses are similar in size and design, although they are not identical. The residences are each two stories tall with stone foundations and central chimneys. A small gable-roofed front porch is attached to the front of each house and a one-story kitchen addition is attached on the back. The window arrangement varies for each house; however, there are one or two windows on each side of the octagon.

The floor plan consists of four rooms on first floor, with a small vestibule and four rooms on second. The staircase rises from the front entrance hall straight to the center of the second floor. There is a full basement.

The original setting of each octagon as a rural farmhouse with outbuildings clustered around still exists, even though the outbuildings have changed. The brick octagon house is vacant and deteriorating. The front porch and brick veneer is falling off in places. The original chimney remains, although it is covered in stucco. The frame octagon is still in use as a residence. It is in good condition aside from the modern alterations which include new porch posts and steps, a kitchen addition, an air-conditioner placed in an exterior wall and the asbestos siding.

# 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/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 Brick Octagon-1872 BUILDER ~~UNKNOWN~~ George F. Lee

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

George F. Lee, who built both octagon houses, was a farmer, carpenter and active in politics and the Congregational Church. Born in Guilford, Conn. on December 16, 1830, Lee was raised in Ohio and worked there as a farmer and carpenter until the autumn of 1856. At that time he and his brother, Elford E. Lee, came to Otoe County, Nebraska and each claimed 160 acres of land. George F. Lee retained his land until 1887, and the frame octagon house is located on this property. In 1872, George Lee moved across the road to the land he had previously purchased, and built the brick octagon house. He and his wife, Betsy Strong Lee, lived there until their deaths in 1899 and 1900, respectively. The barn and outbuildings on his farm were also octagon shaped, but none remain.

As an active member of the Congregational Church, Lee helped organize two churches in Nebraska. The Nebraska City congregation was chartered in 1862 and Lee's home neighborhood of Camp Creek organized a church in 1868. Over the years he served the Camp Creek church as Deacon, Clerk, Trustee, and Superintendent of Sunday School. As one of the incorporators of the Camp Creek Cemetery Association, Lee donated the land for the cemetery. The General Association of Congregational Churches in Nebraska appointed Lee to a committee in 1871 which recommended that a Congregational college be established in Crete, Nebraska. Doane College was founded and Lee raised funds for construction of the new school. Lee served on the Doane Board of Trustees from 1874 to 1883 and after his death, a new building, the Lee Memorial Chapel, was named in his honor (see National Register nomination, Doane College Historic Buildings, Crete, Nebraska).

Politically, Lee was a Republican and later a Prohibitionist. He held several political offices and was active in campaigns. In 1858 he was elected to the House of Representatives in the Fifth Territorial Legislature. As Justice of the Peace, Lee served sixteen years and also served the county as county commissioner, road superintendent, special commissioner and registrar of voters.

The popularity of octagon houses throughout the United States in the 1850's was due to the book A Home for All, or the Gravel Wall and Octagon Mode of Building, written by Orson Squire Fowler, innovator, phrenologist, marriage consultant and sex scientist. Fowler asserted that the octagon house was more healthful, economic and natural than the traditional house for rich and poor. The octagon house was more economical with space, creating



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CONTINUATION SHEET Property Owners ITEM NUMBER 4 PAGE 1

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A. Brick Octagon: (OT00-19)

Daniel Baltensperger  
RFD #3  
Nebraska City, Nebraska 68410

B. Frame Octagon: (OT00-18)

Louise Coe Spier, Apt. 1410  
801 South 52nd Street  
Omaha, Nebraska 68106

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CONTINUATION SHEET    Significance    ITEM NUMBER    8    PAGE    2

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one-fifth more floor space for the wall area. The saving of steps, increased amount of window area, better heating were all advantages. Fowler felt every man could be his own architect and builder, and gave detailed construction information. Concrete was also advocated as the cheapest and safest building material.

A few octagon houses were built in Nebraska, and currently three are known to be extant. The octagon plan was also used in barns, sales pavilions, a church, corn cribs and other agricultural outbuildings throughout the state. The George F. Lee brick octagon house was built in 1872, later than the national trend. No date of construction is known for the frame octagon house. Fowler included several floor plans in his book, and one is very similar to the floor plan of the brick house (Fowler, p.92), the exception being the staircase beginning from the front entry instead of his plan, in the center of the house. The low-pitched roof on both houses is the type suggested by Fowler as the easiest to support. The George F. Lee Octagon Houses are two of the three currently known in the state of Nebraska. Many of Orson Fowler's ideas on octagon houses are incorporated in these residences.

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