

PH 367168

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

DATA SHEET

FOR NPS USE ONLY
RECEIVED FEB 24 1977
DATE ENTERED SEP 19 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
Christian Specht Building
AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

1110 Douglas Street

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Omaha

VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Second

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

Tires, Inc.

STREET & NUMBER

1102 Douglas

CITY, TOWN

Omaha

VICINITY OF

STATE

Nebraska

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Register of Deeds, Douglas County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

18th and Farnam

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

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

The Christian Specht building, 1884, is a three-story cast iron front commercial structure designed by Dufrene and Mendelssohn, Omaha architects, and manufactured by Specht's Western Cornice Works. The building has a narrow 22-foot frontage facing south on Douglas Street in downtown Omaha.

The galvanized iron front is designed in the Renaissance Revival style, Northern Italian mode, a style popular in cast-iron facades of the period. The first-floor facade is very open with large windows and a center double door, all flanked by columns or pilasters. The upper levels each have three window bays separated by Corinthian columns, with pilasters strongly defining the corners. A cornice tops the building. Originally, the cornice was surmounted by a parapet but this has been removed. The two upper stories of the front are currently out of line and leaning to the west.

Aside from the iron front, the building is constructed of Omaha pressed brick with wood floors and joists. The floor plan is entirely open on all three levels, with a stairway at the rear. The only modern change has been the installation of an elevator. The building is presently used as a warehouse.

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 checked="" 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

~~DESIGNER~~ ARCHITECT Dufrene and Mendelssohn, Omaha
BUILDER: Western Cornice Works, Omaha

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Christian Specht building, 1884, is the only extant cast-iron front building known in Nebraska and one of a very few ever built in the state. Designed by Dufrene and Mendelssohn, an Omaha architectural firm, the front was cast by Specht's own Western Cornice Works.

With the coming of the Industrial Revolution, iron was introduced as a building material and first used in 18th-century England. Iron supports allowed for an open floor plan and for more windows. Those reasons, plus the belief that iron was fireproof, encouraged the growing use of iron throughout Europe in the first half of the 19th century. European interest in exposed iron waned after the 1850's with the realization that iron was not fireproof.

For the next several decades, iron was chiefly used in American commercial facades. James Bogardus erected the first cast-iron front in 1848, and Henry Bessemer invented the process whereby iron could be modeled into large-scale building components in 1855. Cast-iron fronts became increasingly popular because the components could be mass-produced and erected quickly without losing any of the ornate Renaissance Revival style. Large windows and an open floor plan, as noted previously, were also important advantages.

Records suggest that only three cast-iron front buildings were constructed in Omaha and none are presently known in the rest of the state. All three were built in the 1881 to 1884 period. Building components and details made of metal, i.e. cornices, columns, window caps and roofing, that the Western Cornice Works usually produced, are common in Omaha and throughout eastern Nebraska. One or two-story commercial buildings often have a cast iron column or two or metal window frames; however, an entire storefront of cast-iron is most unusual.

The Specht building in its style, narrow frontage, window area and open floor plan, reflects the typical treatment of a cast-iron front building of the period. The Renaissance Revival style, Northern Italian mode was popular for cast-iron; its three-dimensional ornateness could be easily mass-produced. As cast-iron could not span wide distances, this example has the typical narrow front. To let in maximum light, the first story is taller than the upper levels and has the most window area.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

See Continuation Sheet, Item #9

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than one

UTM REFERENCES

A

1	5	2	5	4	4	7	10	4	5	7	1	4	2	0
ZONE				EASTING				NORTHING						

B

ZONE				EASTING			

D

ZONE				EASTING			

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

Penelope Chatfield, Curator of Historic Sites

ORGANIZATION

Nebraska State Historical Society

DATE

January, 1977

STREET & NUMBER

1500 "R" Street

TELEPHONE

(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

Martin A. Knott

2/15/77

TITLE

Director, Nebraska State Historical Society

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

Penelope Chatfield

DATE

9/19/77

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHITECTURE AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

ATTEST:

Charles A. ...

DATE

9.19.77

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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The Western Cornice Works, owned by Christian Specht, manufactured galvanized iron cornices, metal dormer windows, finials, window caps, tin and iron roofing and a metallic skylight patented by Specht. Born in Berlin in 1842, Specht operated a metal cornice factory in Cincinnati from 1861 until 1880, when he moved to Omaha. During the extensive building boom of the 1880's in Omaha his business was very successful. The Western Cornice Works was the largest of three cornice-making firms in Omaha during the decade. Erected in the fourth year of the firm's operation, the building was occupied by the business for only one year, and was then subsequently used by Allen Brothers, grocers. Specht was involved in politics, serving four years as Omaha City Councilman and filling a partial term in the Nebraska Legislature in 1890. Christian Specht and his sons, Henry, William, and James (also cornice-makers) appear to have moved from Omaha in 1895, as no records were found after this date.

The Omaha architectural firm of Dufrene and Mendelssohn designed the Specht building. A. R. Dufrene had worked as an architect in Nebraska since 1867. After working as a carpenter and joiner in Detroit, he studied architecture in the office of W. W. Pfeiffer of Portland, Oregon. Working with T. B. Borst from 1867-1870, they designed all the Union Pacific Railroad stations during the construction of the transcontinental railroad. During the 1870's, Dufrene practiced alone in Omaha, designing some of the most prominent residential and commercial buildings in the city. In 1880, Louis Mendelssohn moved from Detroit to enter into partnership with Dufrene. Mendelssohn, born in Berlin, had practiced architecture for nine years in Detroit. The partnership continued until 1885. At that time, Mendelssohn left and entered a partnership with George L. Fisher. The firm became Mendelssohn, Fisher and Lawrie in 1887 when Harry Lawrie joined the firm. The firm was prominent in Nebraska for many years (see National Register nomination--Old University Library, Lincoln, Nebraska).

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Hitchcock, Henry-Russell. Architecture: 19th and 20th Centuries. Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1971.

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Savage, James W. and John T. Bell. History of City of Omaha, Nebraska. Chicago: Munsell and Co., 1894.

Whiffen, Marcus. American Architecture Since 1780. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1969.