NPS Form 10-900
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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only
received JUN 18 1986
date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic N/A

and/or common Nine-Mile Prairie (NeHBS # LC00-75)

2. Location

street & number N/A N/A not for publication

city, town Lincoln X vicinity of

state Nebraska code 031 county Lancaster code 109

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
___ district	___ public	___ occupied	___ agriculture	___ museum
___ building(s)	_X_ private	_X_ unoccupied	___ commercial	___ park
___ structure	___ both	___ work in progress	_X_ educational	___ private residence
_X_ site	**Public Acquisition**	**Accessible**	___ entertainment	___ religious
___ object	N/A in process	___ yes: restricted	___ government	_X_ scientific
	___ being considered	_X_ yes: unrestricted	___ industrial	___ transportation
		___ no	___ military	___ other:

4. Owner of Property

name University of Nebraska Foundation

street & number P.O. Box 30186

city, town Lincoln N/A vicinity of state Nebraska

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Lancaster County Courthouse

street & number 555 South 10th Street

city, town Lincoln state Nebraska

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Nebraska Historic Sites Survey has this property been determined eligible? ___ yes _X_ no

date On-going ___ federal _X_ state ___ county ___ local

depository for survey records Nebraska State Historical Society

city, town Lincoln state Nebraska

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
X excellent	___ deteriorated	X unaltered	X original site
___ good	___ ruins	___ altered	___ moved date N/A
___ fair	___ unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Nine-Mile Prairie is located in rural Lancaster County, Nebraska, situated northwest of Lincoln, the state capital. The tract of native prairie is bounded by plowed agricultural land to the east, west and south and by an old ammunition storage facility to the north. The irregularly-shaped tract of rolling land is a typical upland tall-grass prairie with a small number of trees in ravines, and numerous species of plant and animal life. The nomination consists of 228 acres, that portion of the native Nine-Mile Prairie that remains intact and retains its integrity.

Nine-Mile Prairie, a tract of land consisting of 228 acres of native prairie, is located northwest of Lincoln, the state capital of Nebraska. Situated in a rural setting, the prairie is surrounded by plowed agricultural land to the south, west and east and bounded on the north by a World War II bomb storage depot. Nine-Mile Prairie was so named in the 1930's because of its location exactly nine miles from the Lincoln city square. The irregular shaped tract of land is predominantly covered with blue-stem or tall-grass prairie of upland sites (not to be confused with mixed-grass prairies and short-grass prairies, which are still available in abundance from central Nebraska westward), and is the largest intact virgin prairie in eastern Nebraska, and one of the largest such prairies in the prairie states (.e.g. Minnesota, North and South Dakota, Missouri, Kansas and Oklahoma). A small number of trees (cottonwoods, willows) are found in area ravines. Flora consists of approximately 350 species of higher plants, including two rare orchids, and fauna comprises some 80 species of birds, (no data at hand on numbers of nesting species). Presently no information on the numbers of reptiles, mammals or insects is available, but there is evidence of their existance in typical abundance for a prairie of this type. The terrain consists of rolling slopes facing in all directions, three spring-fed streams, and optimum drainage (no natural standing water). The soil is of loessial nature (windblown deposits) and lies over glacial deposits. Formed thousands of years ago, the prairie has changed and evolved without interference by man since that time. The prairie was first used as an educational and research site in the 1920's, and has continued to be studied since that time. The University of Nebraska Foundation purchased the prairie from the Lincoln Airport Authority in 1983 in order to perpetually preserve its character and integrity as a virgin prairie. Since its purchase, the prairie has been used for research and study by thousands of college, secondary and elementary school students.

root systems knit together and responded to climate. Weaver regarded the prairies as similar to a written record:

> Nature is an open book for those who care to read. Each grass-covered hillside is a page on which is written the history of the past, conditions of the present, and predictions of the future. (Adams, 1984, p. 9-10).

When Weaver began his root studies, much of the tall-grass prairie lands had been disturbed by man in previous decades, and the 1920's brought even greater destruction. This cultural encroachment found disfavor with Weaver as he viewed the prairie lands as the best available means of conserving the soil and its fertility (Adam, 1984, p. 10). Studying plant root systems in various prairie communities his work constituted the first scientifically accurate reports on prairie flora.

Weaver had three test prairies near Lincoln, and numerous others elsewhere in the state and Great Plains. The other two near to Lincoln were known as Black's Pasture and Umberger's Pasture, both named for the farmers upon whose land they were located. Both are extant but in poor condition. The only tallgrass prairie site studied extensively by Weaver that retains its integrity is Nine-Mile. Further, it was at Nine-Mile that Weaver and his students performed his famous trench studies, wherein they dug deep and painstakingly careful trenches to observe the rooting morphology of prairie plants. That study is a classic in plant ecology. The photographs they took and the drawings they made are still being reproduced in textbooks. They exhumed entire prairie plant roots sytems intact and mounted them in glass cases. The University still has these, and they are much sought after by various researchers and by museums for display. Since prepared, no one has performed similar work, and they stand as the definitive work on adaptations of prairie plants for seeking water in deep prairie soils.

Weaver's work has been most influential in scientific, rather than government or private circles. His papers are still cited and his concepts are still widely accepted. Of course ecology has developed enormously since Weaver's time, but his work established experimental and analytical methods that are fundamental in ecological work. He was among the first to go beyond descriptive analysis to develop interpretive research. His research on the effects of the 1930's drought are the definitive efforts on the topic and are still widely cited.

The Great Drought devastated midwestern agriculture in 1934, the worst year of the Great Depression, when the water level had fallen to such an extreme low that vegetation could not reach it. Many regions of the midcontinental grasslands lost from 50-95% of their basal plant cover by 1935 (Tobey, 1955, p. 191). The economic times forced farmers to shift their capital investment into cattle raising to compensate for the dropping prices of wheat. This shift led to a greater need for pasturage, thus overgrazing, precisely at the time the drought had severely weakened the grasslands. As a result, it was pasturage that the drought first destroyed. During the years of drought (c. 1933-42) the grassland school of scientists was preoccupied with the crisis, carrying on intensive scientific research on the problems of range management and grassland conservation. Dr. Weaver became the leader in the academic research effort in the struggle to save the Great Plains. Weaver, above all other individuals, was responsible for the training of more academic scientists in the study of the drought crisis. Weaver's research and his collaboration with Clements provided a substantial portion of the disciplinary knowledge needed to contend with the drought (Tobey, 1955, p. 192).

Under Weaver's guidance, over forty doctorates in plant ecology were completed at the University of Nebraska (more than any other University). Many of these graduates were then hired by United States government agencies (e.g. U. S. Soil Conservation Service, U. S. Forest Service), helping to develop the policies and methods used today in soil conservation and range management (Adams, 1984, p. 13).

Though much of the original tall-grass prairie in eastern Nebraska has long since been converted into agricultural croplands, this nomination recognizes that part of the original Nine-Mile Prairie that remains intact as virgin prairie land. This 228 acre parcel was acquired by the Department of Defense as part of a fenced buffer zone around a World War II bomb storage depot. When the base was deactiviated it was sold to the City of Lincoln. The Lincoln Airport Authority assumed management of the tract in 1966. In 1981 the Nebraska legislature passed new legislation allowing the Airport Authority to sell the land to an institution which would preserve the land as original or virgin prairie. In 1983 the University Foundation acquired the property (Adam, 1984, p. 13, 15). Today the prairie still functions as a research and educational site, making it possible to compare scientific studies done 50 and more years ago with those per-

formed today. Organizations that regularly use Nine-Mile Prairie for teaching include: University of Nebraska-Lincoln (Department of Agronomy, School of Biological Sciences), University of Nebraska-Omaha (Department of Biology), Nebraska Wesleyan University in Lincoln, Doane College in Crete, and various public schools. Groups that use the prairie for nature study and conservation ecology include the Wachiska Audubon Society in Lincoln, Bluestem Sierra Club in Lincoln, and the Omaha Audubon Society in Omaha. Currently there are five research projects (flora and fauna) underway at the site.

A former student, Dr. A. Stoddard, in writing a review of one of Dr. Weaver's books said:

> There comes occasionally to every scientific field a man who is so enthusiastic, and so devoted to his work that it becomes his very way of life. To him nature seems to unfold her secrets in response to his devotion; his ability to understand and communicate with nature becomes an inspiration to students and fellow workers alike. Such a man is John Ernest Weaver in the field of American grassland ecology. (**Lincoln Journal**, June 10, 1966, p. 4).

Nine-Mile Prairie gains significance as the most important site directly associated with Dr. Weaver's career. His University office is unrecognizable today, lacking in historic integrity, while his residence in Lincoln lacks specific associations with his fieldwork, research and writing. Today Nine-Mile is retained in part as a monument to Weaver, representing his devoted and invaluable work in behalf of the Midland prairie.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
___ prehistoric	___ archeology-prehistoric	___ community planning	___ landscape architecture	___ religion
___ 1400–1499	___ archeology-historic	___ conservation	___ law	X science
___ 1500–1599	___ agriculture	___ economics	___ literature	___ sculpture
___ 1600–1699	___ architecture	X education	___ military	___ social/ humanitarian
___ 1700–1799	___ art	___ engineering	___ music	___ theater
___ 1800–1899	___ commerce	___ exploration/settlement	___ philosophy	___ transportation
X 1900–	___ communications	___ industry	___ politics/government	___ other (specify)
		___ invention		

Specific dates 1917-36 **Builder/Architect** N/A

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Nine-Mile Prairie is significant in the areas of science and education for its associations with the life of Dr. John Ernest Weaver (Criterion B), a University of Nebraska professor known as the "founding father of modern plant ecology." Dr. Weaver became internationally known and respected for his work in the field of plant ecology, authoring or co-authoring more than 100 technical papers and a dozen books to become the world's top authority on prairie vegetation. The period of significance (1917-1936) is derived from the time Weaver began his initial study of the prairie, through 1936, the last year in which the property continues to meet the 50 year criterion.

Nine-Mile Prairie is significant in the area of science as a principal site for the pioneering studies of plant ecology by Dr. J. E. Weaver and the University of Nebraska. As one of the largest tracts of virgin prairie remaining in eastern Nebraska, the prairie attains significance for its associations with Dr. Weaver (Criterion B) who performed much of his work on this virgin tract of prairie land, the only site in the state that holds such a long history of continuous scientific study. The property also attains significance in the area of education as the site used for University of Nebraska student resarch projects starting in the 1920's under Dr. Weaver's direction, and nature study by numerous public and private individuals. The prairie has not only served (and continues to serve) as a useful and invaluable teaching and research tool, but also as a part of the area's natural heritage.

John Ernest Weaver was born May 5, 1884. He graduated from the University of Nebraska in 1909 and then received his doctor's degree from the University of Minnesota. In 1915 he joined the faculty of the University of Nebraska at Lincoln, and began a career which was to last over 35 years there. His career was to make the University a leader for over 20 years in the scientific field of plant ecology. Starting in the summer of 1917 Weaver, who was vigorously studying prairie plant roots at that time, began digging grave-like pits on prairies around Lincoln, excavating individual plant roots like an archaeologist, studying how

9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 228 acres

Quadrangle name Emerald, Nebraska **Quadrangle scale** 1:24000

UTM References

	Zone	Easting	Northing
A	14	684976	452638
B	14	684976	452581
C	14	683338	452581
D	14	683338	452605
E			
F			
G			
H			

Verbal boundary description and justification

See continuation sheet.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	N/A	code	county	code
state	N/A	code	county	code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title See continuation sheet

organization **date** March 1985

street & number **telephone**

city or town **state**

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

X 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 James A. Johnson

title Director, Nebraska State Historical Society **date** June 10, 1986

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

for Beth Grosvenor **date** 7/30/86

Keeper of the National Register

Attest: **date**

Chief of Registration

GPO 894-788

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Continuation sheet Verbal Boundary Description Item number 10 Page 1

A tract of land in the Northeast Quarter (NE1/4) of Section 2, Township 10 North, Range 5 east of the 6th P>M> Lancaster County, Nebraska, more particularly described as follows:

Beginning at the southeast corner of the said NE 1/4 (an aluminum cap in a concrete monument stamped "LAFB C E AS-7"); thence with the east line of the said NE 1/4 which is assumed to bear north 00 10'32" east, a distance of 1113.35 feet; thence south 89 58'16" west, a distance of 211.90 feet; thence north 30 00'16" west, a distance of 89 58'16" west, a distance of 1248.29 feet; thence north 00 00'34" west, a distance of 411.54 feet; thence north 89 59'25" west in a line parallel with and 33.00 feet southerly from the north line of the said NE 1/4, a distance of 1814.29 feet to a point in the west line of said NE 1/4; thence south 00 09'08" west with the said west line, a distance of 2582.32 feet to the southwest corner of the said NE 1/4 (A #8 REBAR which lies 2.03 feet southerly from a concrete monument); thence south 89 29'12" east with the south line of the said NE 1/4, a distance of 2654 feet to the point of beginning; containing an area of 136.10 acres more or less; and a tract of land in the Northwest Quarter (NW 1/4) of Section 1, Township 10 North, Range 5 East of the 6th P.M., Lancaster County, Nebraska more particularly described as follows:

Beginning at the southwest corner of the said NW 1/4 (an aluminum cap in a concrete monument stamped "LAFB C E AS-7"); thence with the west line of the said NW 1/4 which is assumed to bear north 00 10' 32" East, a distance of 1113.35 feet; thence north 89 58' 16" east, a distance of 735.97 feet; thence north 60 10' 54" east, a distance of 1697.03 feet; thence south 89 24' 50" east, a distance of 450.26 feet to a point in the east line of the said NW 1/4; thence south 00 17' 37" west with the said east line a distance of 1958.88 feet to the southeast corner of the said NW 1/4 (A #8 REBAR which lies 7.88 feet southerly from a concrete monument); thence north 89 52' 22" west with the south line of the said NW 1/4, a distance of 2651.95 feet to the point of beginning; containing an area of 90.93 acres more or less.

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