

PH0367150

DATA SHEET

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED MAR 17 1976

DATE ENTERED

JUN 22 1976

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC  
 Dr. Samuel D. Mercer House  
AND/OR COMMON  
Mercer Apartments

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER  
3920 Cuming 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\_\_ NOT FOR PUBLICATION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
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT
			<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL
			<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY
			<input type="checkbox"/> PARK
			<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
			<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
			<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
			<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME  
Mercer Management  
STREET & NUMBER  
1016 Howard Street  
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 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 type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input 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

The Samuel D. Mercer mansion is located on a hilly three-acre site at the northeast corner of 40th and Cuming Streets. The site, which abruptly slopes to the south, is dominated by the structure. Its siting at the top of the hill enhances the Picturesque nature of the design.

The structure, which was built between 1883-85, is a two and one-half story red-brick dwelling constructed on a substantial stone foundation. Irregular in plan and Picturesque in massing, the house features highly articulated walls, with emphasis upon dormers, bay windows and relief panels of brick and terra cotta. The central feature of the design is the three-story square tower which flanks the main (south) entrance. The tower, which is supported on a two-story bay window, features tall rectangular windows-- a characteristic feature of the fenestration of the house--and is topped with a pyramidal roof which is light on four sides with steep-pitched, gabled dormers of a somewhat Gothic Revival imagery.

Overall, the house most precisely fits what has been called the Queen Anne style of architecture. Popular in the United States from the early 1870's and in Nebraska through the turn of the century, this dwelling stands as a somewhat unique example of the style in Nebraska. As originally constructed, the dwelling displayed a highly polychromatic effect which accented the variety of form and texture apparent in the design. This effect may still be seen in the polychromatic decorations produced in the slate roof. In addition, the original structure displayed a number of porches, verandas and balconys of Eastlake design, which were painted to enhance the overall effect.

The original structure--built at a total cost of \$60,000--enclosed twenty-three rooms. The ground floor contained the library, den, dining room and kitchen, servants quarters, and a large entrance hall. Nine bedrooms and a billiard room were provided on the second floor, while the floor area in the attic space was occupied with five more bedrooms and the cupola in the tower. Great attention was devoted to details, including the use of cherry, mahogany, oak, and black walnut, paneled and carved woodwork, and parquet floors. The mosaic tiled front hallway, handsome fireplaces and intricately designed hardware and fixtures contribute to the lavishness of the interior decor. Perhaps most notable is the Eastlake-inspired stairhall which is encompassed by a second-floor gallery railings, posts and arched doorways. Here, also, the polychromy so characteristic of the exterior was brought to the interior with the large skylight panel of stained and leaded glass which lights the stairhall. Smaller panels of stained glass serve as transom lights over a number of the ground story and second story windows.

The Mercer family occupied the mansion until 1920, when it was converted into apartments. In 1926 additions were made to the structure in a fashion which was, for the most part, compatible with the original brickwork. The elaborate Eastlake porches and gingerbread trim were removed and garages replaced the stables at the rear.

# 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 checked="" 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      1883-85

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Samuel D. Mercer was one of the most prominent men in the history of medicine in the state of Nebraska. Born in 1842 in Marion County, Illinois, he received his literary education there and later at McKendell College in Lebanon, Illinois. He attended medical schools at Michigan University, Chicago Medical College, and Berkshire Medical College in Massachusetts where he was graduated.

Before coming to Nebraska in 1866, he served as Assistant Surgeon of the One Hundred and Forty-ninth Regiment of the Illinois Volunteers of the Civil War. After arriving in Omaha he immediately began his medical career, which he continued until April of 1887.

In February of 1868, he made a motion to appoint a committee to correspond with reputable members of the medical profession in regard to the organization of a State medical society. This effort resulted in the Nebraska State Medical Society. For eighteen years he was the assistant surgeon of the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad and held the position of chief surgeon for the Union Pacific Railroad for eight years. He also organized the Union Pacific Railroad's medical department. At the time of his retirement in 1887 he was recognized as one of the leading surgeons in the northwest.

Among his many related activities, he organized the first hospital in Omaha in 1868. He also organized the Omaha Medical College, where he held the chair of clinical surgery. Later he held the chair of surgery and clinical surgery in the medical department of the University of Nebraska. He was president of the Board of United States Pension Examiners for a number of years, secretary of the Nebraska Medical Association for seven years, and a corresponding member of the Boston Gynecological Society. During the active years of his medical practice he published a book on spinal curvature and treatment of spinal diseases.

After his retirement from the medical profession he engaged in a number of enterprises calculated to benefit the city--most notably in the building of cable tramways and motor street railways. Dr. Mercer was respected as one of the most energetic and contributive citizens of Omaha at the time of his death in 1907.

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CONTINUATION SHEET Significance ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 2

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Architecturally the Mercer Mansion stands as one of the fine examples of the Queen Anne style of residential architecture in the State. Typifying the irregularity of plan and massing, and the variety of color and texture so characteristic of the style, the house also stands as a rather unique example among those extant in Nebraska. The most common type of the developed Queen Anne dwelling in Nebraska was an articulated rectangle which invariably featured a circular (rarely polygonal) corner tower. The dwellings that characterize this type tend to be late, having been built in the later part of the 19th and the early 20th century. One could say that they became the Standardized Queen Anne plan-form.

The most obvious feature of the Mercer mansion that distinguished it from the majority of the Nebraska examples is seen in the tower. Placed near the corner of the original dwelling, the tower is actually a part of the south wall. Its square plan, the pattern of its fenestration, and the medieval nature of its detailing give it a more literally Shavian character distinct from the bulk of Queen Anne building in the state. Another example, built in wood, of even more Shavian character was built in 1881 for G. W. E. Dorsey in Fremont by Omaha architect B. A. Fowler. These two dwellings constitute a unique development of the Queen Anne among extant examples in the State and establishes a greater significance for the Mercer mansion. In spite of the absence of the original Eastlake porches--Eastlake woodwork is still extant on the interior--the residence remains an exceptional structure whose imagery characterizes the "Picturesque" movement of the late 19th century.

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CONTINUATION SHEET Bibliography ITEM NUMBER 9 PAGE 2

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