Form 10-300 (July 1969)

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

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DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Polk County is comprised of a gently rolling plain of prime agricultural land. The north fork of the Big Blue River takes a curved course across the county, entering in the southwest corner, proceeding to a point just south of Osceola, and then flowing back to the southeast corner of the county.

The Charles H. Morrill Homestead is situated on a picturesque site near the Big Blue River, one-half mile southeast of Stroms-burg on U.S. Highway 81. Two homestead structures remain extant.

The original house, a frame dwelling, was errected in 1872. It was initially 16'x16' and one and one-half stories, but through the years wings have been added. The structure is nearly void of architectural style except for the subtle Italianate detailing of the bay window and the Victorian post brackets throughout the porch additions. The stability projected by this early rural residence is atypical of many of the first makeshift homesteads.

While living in Lincoln in 1899, the Morrills decided to build a summer house. Initially they had planned to build on a choice site on the shore of a Minnesota lake, however, they had always considered Stromsburg their real home and their final choice was their original homestead site.

In the early spring of 1900, Mr. Morrill made a trip to the Black Hills near Spearfish, South Dakota, where a large lumber camp was located. There he personally selected pine logs of high quality, uniform in diameter (8-10 inches) and perfectly straight. Two flatcars were loaded with logs and shipped to Stromsburg.

House plans were furnished by the Morrills and the contract was let to Ludwig Rudeen, who had built log houses in his native country Sweden. The logs were hewn flat on three sides, and the bark was left on the fourth to be exposed to the weather. The cover joints were dovetailed and fastened together with wood pins. The cracks between the logs were chinked with tarred oakum, and the interior was lathed and plastered. The summer house was finished in 1901, and its thick walls provided good insulation through the summer and winter months.

Architecturally the log house typifies the bungaloid mode. It is Swiss Chalet in type and unique in Nebraska. The bungalow style reached the height of its popularity through 1900-1920. Stock plans were readily available and could be purchased for as little as five dollars. The Morrills probably used a stock plan in the design of this summer house, however, the genuine construction techniques of the Swedish builder make this log bungalow truly unique.

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S ATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

As one of the early settlers, Charles H. Morrill is prominently identified with the growth of Polk County and Nebraska. Originally from New Hampshire, he settled in Iowa after the Civil War. In 1871 he came to Nebraska and homesteaded 160 acres in Polk County near the Big Blue River in the township of Stromsburg.

For more than twenty years he farmed the homestead and developed an extensive cattle business. In 1873 Morrill and an associate, J.P. Smith, opened one of the first businesses in Stromsburg, an agricultural implement store. He sold his interests in 1875 and became a partner in a general merchandise store, the only store in Stromsburg at that time.

By 1881 Morrill had accumulated enough business experience and capital to organize the Stromsburg Bank, and in 1883 he purchased interest in the Osceola Bank. In 1899 he became president of the Lancaster Land Co. This corporation owned Havelock, the town in which the Nebraska shops of the Burlington and Missouri River Rail-road were located. His increasing business interests in Lincoln prompted him to make his permanent home there in 1894.

Morrill was also active in politics and the development of Nebraska's system of higher education. In 1879 he became Governor Albinius Nance's private secretary and in 1904 he was elected as Republican National Committeeman. He was elected regent of the State University in 1889, serving as president of the Board of Regents from 1892 to 1902. He took a deep interest in Nebraska's natural history. In the 1890's he and Dr. E. H. Barbour, professor of geology, initiated yearly geological and paleon ological expeditions into all parts of the state. These expeditions resulted in the initial collections of the University Museum. Throughout the latter years of his life Morrill liberally financed expeditions and maintenance of the University's collections. In 1927 when the University museum building was erected, it was befittingly named Morrill Hall. A western county organized in 1908 and a community northwest of Scottsbluff also bear Morrill's name.

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