



**6. Function or Use**

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

library

museum

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

library

museum

**7. Description**

Architectural Classification  
(enter categories from instructions)

Prairie School

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation concrete

walls brick

roof asphalt

other \_\_\_\_\_

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

See Continuation Sheets.

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Framed by a large margin of grass, the A. M. Tofthagen Library-Museum presents a facade with symmetrical massing typical of classically designed library structures. The 1927 building consists of a poured concrete-on-fieldstone basement which supports structural tile walls, sheathed in red brick to a total depth of one foot. Approximately one foot of the concrete basement is exposed above grade, terminating in an overhang of brick. The sill line is represented with a row of soldier coursed brick. The remaining exterior walls are entirely of stretcher coursed brick, except for the single course of headers that defines the window sill level. The building has a partial basement, comprising an area 21 feet by 23 feet. This space originally contained a cistern, furnace and coal bin. The rectangular volume is entered by a shallow projecting bay containing a single door with overlying transom. Directly above the entry is a concrete tablet inscribed, "The A. M. Tofthagen Library Museum." Solid brick railings contain four steps leading to the entry.

The structure lacks strong stylistic associations, however on the front facade of each wing there is faint reference to the Prairie school influence in the four grouped one over one sash with surrounding brick label molding. Features characteristic of earlier decades are the bold, corbeled dentil molding that serves as a cornice, and a large arched window framed by a corbeled hood molding found at the east facade. The exterior has sustained no alteration, apart from the sensitive replication of original door and windows that were installed in 1986.

A smoke stack at the west facade marks the location of the interior fireplace, originally part of Mr. Tofthagen's private office and living quarters. The fireplace mantel, still in place, is highly ornate featuring a surround of tiles and Ionic columns which support a beveled glass overmantel also framed by Ionic columns. The office space, partitioned off until 1930, consumed nine feet of the west end of the building. The puzzling inclusion in the plans of a 3000 gallon cistern in a building supplied with water from the city system seems explainable as the probable source of soft water for the fastidious Mr. Tofthagen's baths. Some credence is given to this theory by the fact that when the bathroom was dismantled in 1930, certain bath items were sold, including "stove tank, bathtub, pump and plumbing to Mrs. Milk for \$25." Although it cannot be definitely established, it is presumed that this bathroom was located in the southwest corner of this room. It seems probable that at least one of the lower sash of one of the south windows west of the library entrance was enclosed by the bathroom.

The northwest portion of the interior is devoted to museum space, displaying various items obtained from Mr. Tofthagen's myriad travels. Remaining space in the building is

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characterized by book shelving, assorted antique cabinets and many paintings, photographs and pictures that were part of the doner's gift.

The only modification to the building involved the minor alteration required to incorporate the area occupied by Mr. Tofthagen's quarters into the library area after his death on November 21, 1929. There is no record and little visible evidence of the bricking-up of two west windows and one north window in what had been his quarters. The original openings were probably infilled in 1930 when partitions were removed and the plumbing was modified. Subsequent improvement all fall under the heading of repair or renovation, including the replacement of the original coal-burning furnace with an oil burner in 1955, the installation of fluorescent lighting in 1956, the stripping of the wood roof deck and replacement with Firestone's Rubber Roof System, as well as the installation of galvanized facia, scupper drains, downspouts and coping metal. The most recent improvements undertaken were the raising of the flower beds along the front of the building by one foot and refacing in timbers, and the installation of two 12 feet high decorative metal street poles salvaged from Lakota's historic period.

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The Tofthagen Library-Museum is nominated to the National Register as a component of the Multiple Properties form for Philanthropically Established Libraries in North Dakota. As a philanthropic effort, the library satisfies the Form's registration requirements with respect to historical and architectural merit and integrity considerations. The nominated building therefore meets Criterion A for associations with library philanthropy statewide. The museum collection given in conjunction with the library is considered a contributing feature of the library property, since the arrival of these collections in Lakota had an unprecedented impact on the cultural life of the community.

The Library's doner, A. M. Tofthagen, is a locally significant individual who achieved notoriety for business ventures and elected service to the community. But it is his library gift which sealed his reputation for philanthropy, and the only such property which is associated with the philanthropy for which he became known. No other individual in the community has made a philanthropic gesture of this kind. The Library Museum is therefore nominated under Criterion B as well. The Library Museum is also nominated under Criterion C for design qualities recognizable as period library architecture. The chronology of Tofthagen's life and philanthropy which follows glimpses the motives which generated his gift and the significance of his contribution to the surrounding community of Lakota.

Amun M. Tofthagen achieved local prominence as an entrepreneur and elected official before his philanthropic activities took shape as a library. But it is this gift of the museum-library for which he is best remembered. Born in Hundorp, Norway on November 12, 1858, he came to the United States with his family in 1871, settling with his family on his father's homestead claim in Black River Falls, Wisconsin. It has not been possible to determine how much formal education Tofthagen received. Considering his age when he came to Wisconsin with his family, it is assumed that he obtained at least part of a grade school education in his native Norway. Working with his family on their homestead until he was fifteen or sixteen, he "struck out on his own." By the

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time he was twenty-two years old he had apparently supported himself, and educated himself to the extent that he was able to work as a sales clerk in the dry goods emporium of S. O. and R. C. Jones in Black River Falls, where he remained for two years.

On January 1, 1882, he accepted a position as manager of the dry goods department in a Grand Forks, ND, store opened by an old family friend, Mr. A. Abrahamson, arriving there on March 14, 1882 to take up his new duties. Deed records verify that he acquired one quarter section on November 24, 1883, under terms set forth in the April 24, 1820 "Act Making Further Provisions for the Sale of Public Lands." An additional quarter section was acquired in the same way on October 27, 1885. Both transactions involved full cash payments. The act provided for periodic two week sales of public lands to highest bidders and required cash payment on date of sale.

It is doubtful that he ever took up residence on or personally farmed the land. That he was a bona fide resident of Nelson County is evidenced by his having been appointed the first Nelson County Auditor in 1885. He was reelected to that office for a second term. In 1888 he was elected Register of Deeds and reelected to that office in 1890. Although he continued to be active in Republican politics, he did not again run for public office until 1906 when he was elected a Presidential Elector of the Republican ticket.

In 1895, when Samuel and Jacob Thal were in need of financial backing for a general store in Lakota, A. M. Tofthagen became the major stockholder, acquiring 252 of the original 500 shares issued. Since the original capitalization of the enterprise was \$10,000, it can be assumed that he was in a position to invest slightly over \$5,000 in this venture. A souvenir booklet, "Lakota, North Dakota," published in 1901 described him as "one of the most successful businessmen in this part of the state."

The store was highly successful and profits increased annually. In 1911 the profit amounted to \$50,000, of which it can be assumed that Tofthagen received 50%. That placed him in the category of "the wealthy" in those days, and this substantial income permitted him to spend the last twenty-one years of his live in travel, study and philanthropic endeavors. Although he sold 232 of his 252 shares to Samuel Thal in 1916, he remained President of the corporation until his death in 1929. He was never active in day to day management of the store since he was away from Lakota much of the time.

A firm believer in the broadening experience inherent in travel, on several occasions he completely financed extended trips to the countries of North America for promising

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youths he invited to accompany him. In 1894, on his first trip abroad, he brought back from Europe the start of his art and photograph collection, as well as enthusiasm for travel and collecting that took him to almost every country in the world, from which he brought back the many paintings, photographs, curios and art objects donated to the Library-Museum which bears his name, and which was made possible by the additional gifts of \$5,000 and 1,100 books from his personal library.

His travels covered more than 250,000 miles. Just prior to his last trip abroad he told the Lakota American editor, L. A. Stefonowicz, that he had already visited every place in the world he thought worth seeing and didn't know where he'd go next. Tofthagen was definitely not a "tourist." He traveled to educate himself and to explore the world's wonders. He seemed particularly fascinated by remote destinations like the Falklands and obscure South Sea Islands. Native cultures engaged his interest. Most of one year he spent wandering though Africa. He did not, however, neglect "Grand Tour" favorites such as Rome, Milan, Pisa, Paris, and monumental works such as the Taj Mahal and Egypt's pyramids. On a loftier plane, while traveling in China, he paid his respects to Lord Northcote, British Ambassador to China. Before acquiring a title, Mobra S. Northcote, an area pioneer and Lakota resident, had organized and was the president of the first bank in Lakota, the Nelson County State Bank.

As an amateur photographer, Tofthagen packed a postcard size Eastman camera fitted with the finest lens and focusing mechanism available at the time. His sense of composition was unique, and he was endlessly patient in seeking out the position that allowed him to get the most interesting aspects of any scene artistically combined in his photograph. An example of his patience, he is reported to have once spent three weeks in Yellowstone Park before he was satisfied with just the right photo of erupting Giant Geyser, then the most spectacular in the park.

Of his other photos, hundreds were enlarged to 14" x 21" and mounted on 20" x 28" hard backings. Most of the enlargements he had made in a Boston studio. In addition to his own, he brought back from his travels many scenes from around the world taken by commercial photographers - some of them "tourist postcards" but all of excellent quality. Some of these were enlarged to 8 1/2" by 11" and mounted on hard backings. Dozens of smaller photographs of varying size were in his collection. One relative recalls that her own family received hundreds of picture postcards from all over the world.

In addition to his own pictures and those of commercial photographers along his routes of travel, he collected albums of outstanding photographs, among them:

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Two albums, entitled "Morehouse Photo Album Presents, contains 100 9" by 11" photographs mounted on hard backing depict the countries of USA, FRANCE, CANADA GERMANY ENGLAND and AUSTRIA.

One album containing 496 7" by 9" photographs, titled - "Columbian Exposition Album." "Photographs of the World and the Columbian Exposition." "Albums of Great Photographs of the Wonders of the World," that feature the countries of NORTH AMERICA, SOUTH AMERICA, AFRICA, ASIA and EUROPE.

The collection of photographs, paintings, art objects and curios from around the world which accompanied his library gift typified his wide range of interests. Today, the original collection is still housed in it's entirety in the Library-Museum. Included are such odd items as a "peace pipe" he claimed to have smoked with Sitting Bull, and a coconut mailed from Puerto Rico. At the other end of the spectrum are many artistic works produced by artists and craftsmen from around the world, from whom he preferred to buy directly rather than through dealers. Among those most prized by Mr. Tofthagen was his collection of ivory carvings about which Mrs. T. O. Brandenburg, formerly of Lakota wrote to the local newspapers in 1933 (Lakota America, 9-7-33) that she had found no carvings among those exhibited at the Century of Progress in Chicago that equaled those donated by Mr. Tofthagen.

Evidence of his devotion to the art of painting is a collection of 52 volumes, each devoted to the work of a single artist, including color reproductions of their paintings together with a description of each work and biographical data on the artist. Particularly noteworthy is a set of twelve portfolios titled "The Collection of the World's Great Art." These portfolios contain excellent black and white photographic reproductions of works by sixty artists of the following Schools: English-American; French-German; Italian-Spanish and Dutch-Flemish. Included with the indexed portfolios is a chart of the world's great art from fifteen different schools together with comments on the characteristics of each school.

Mr. Tofthagen's library contained a number of sets from limited editions available by subscription only, notable examples of which are:

Set number 7 of the limited edition of 1,000 sets titled "Japan". These beautifully illustrated books contain the writings of eminent Japanese scholars. The books are damask bound and gold embossed on a green vellum rectangle. A most unusual feature of these books is their "double page" with open edges in the binding and folded edge to the outside.

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Set number 379 of a limited edition of 1,000 sets of three volumes each, titled "The Works of Plato." Edition de Luxe. Morocco and vellum bound and gold embossed.

Set number 52 of a limited edition of 100 sets of 20 volumes each, titled: "The Autographed Edition of the Great Events of History by Famous Historians." This

set carries the certification that it was specially prepared for A. M. Tofthagen. It is morocco and Vellum bound and gold embossed.

Set number 17 from the limited edition comprising 250 registered and numbered sets of 20 volumes each, titled: "The Immortals-Masterpieces of Fiction." The edition was sponsored by the French Academy. It is vellum bound and gold embossed.

One six volume set, not labeled a limited edition, mutely testifies to Mr. Tofthagen's wide ranging interests. In addition to once volume titled: "Sacred Books of the East," the other volumes are translations of Hindu, Chinese, Arabian, Persian, Japanese and Turkish literature.

His library contains several impressive bibles, most noteworthy of which consists of two 2 volume sets; one devoted to the Old Testament and one to the New Testament. Also noteworthy is an impressive 858 water colors by the renowned artist, James M. Tissot.

One of his most prized possessions was a 1911 "morocco" bound, gold embossed edition of Encyclopedia Britannica, now one of the editions classified as "somewhat rare." According to Alfred Thal, Mr. Tofthagen read the entire set from cover to cover, frequently making marginal notes. Casual examination of a number of volumes reveal many marked passages, but without commentary.

Considering his scholastic bent, it is not surprising that Mr. Tofthagen came to believe that the lack of a library in Lakota was a handicap in the education of that town's youth. In 1917, he offered to make a gift of 100 books as "seed" for a library to be established in Lakota.

The idea was quickly embraced by the cultured women of the community, and on October 16, 1917, the first recorded meeting of the Lakota Library Board took place at the home of Dr. and Mrs. R. H. Beek. The board, appointed by the Civic League, consisted of Mrs. R. H. Beek, Mrs. M. E. Milk, Mrs. T. O. Brandenburg, Mrs. R. C. Chisholm and Mr.

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John E. Bjorlie, local Superintendent of Schools. Miss Ednah Norton was elected as Librarian and secretary-treasurer.

The initial effort was a combined city-school library in the school building, with the Library Board picking up any extra expenses for heating and lighting in return for public access. The Library Board was assisted by other public spirited individuals, notably Dr. R. H. Beek, Mrs. H. A. King and Mrs. C. N. Frick.

By 1920 the library had outgrown its allotted space in the school, and with permission of the City Council was moved to the second floor of the City Hall. Shelving was donated by Mr. and Mrs. W. C. Hagler. Silver teas and tag days were used to raise money to support the library, as were proceeds from home talent plays directed by Mr. W. A. Burke. Mr. Tofthagen contributed by allowing the Nemo Study Club to use his collections for an exhibit at the City Hall on 9/15/23 to earn money for operation of the library. A glowing report by the Nemo Study Club of the quality and diversity of items exhibited was published in the Lakota American on 10/14/23 (Lakota America, 10-14-23).

In October, 1926, A. M. Tofthagen offered to donate \$5,000 toward the construction of a library building in Lakota for the benefit of the city and Nelson County - (Lakota America, 10-14-26). His proposal was jointly accepted by the City Council and the board of County Commissioners. The proposal of Mr. Tofthagen and acceptance by resolutions of the City Council and the Board of County Commissioners were published 10/14/26 in the Lakota American--a copy of the item follows:

The City of Lakota will agree to heat, light and maintain the building in good condition and repair, pay all necessary librarian and janitor expenses, also to keep the property insured. That the undersigned hereby sets aside upon acceptance under property authority of this gift and the terms thereof, in the National Bank of Lakota the sum of five thousand dollars above mentioned to be drawn upon for the purposes thereof by proper and duly organized authority and designated board or body to receive and care for the same. It being further provided in on of the terms of said gift that the building shall bear the following name: "The A.M. Tofthagen Library-Museum."

In December, 1926, a new Library Board was formally organized. The Lakota American reported on 6/9/27 (Lakota America,6-9-27) that a contract for construction of a building 25' by 50' had been awarded to the Devils Lake, N.D. firm of Feldseth and Johnson for the sum of \$5,755. Specifications called for a building with exterior

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dimensions of 25' by 50', walls of brick and tile one foot thick, a noiseless floor, furnace, cistern, bath, electrical circuits and connected to city water and sewer. Contracts for heating, lighting and plumbing awarded at the same time to unidentified subcontractors, bring the total cost to \$7,125. It is unknown if the \$2,175 cost in excess of Tofthagen's gift of \$5,000 was picked up by him or others. However, his original proposal, cited above, provided for additional funds to be raised by "subscriptions or other means."

The front of the building was to be placed fifty feet back from the sidewalk in the interest of minimizing distracting street noise in the reading room. It is quite probable that the donor suggested this specification. A lifelong scholar, Tofthagen spent many hours in deep study in his quarters consisting of a room with bath across the west end of the building, his Lakota office and domicile when in residence several months of each year.

Because of the distinctive massing which identifies the building as a library structure, the Lakota Library-Museum is nominated under Criterion C. Although sparsely ornamented, the building's facade has a massing and physical presentation characteristic of late nineteenth and early twentieth century library architecture. Of the endowed libraries in North Dakota listed on or eligible for the National Register, all are similarly massed with a single rectangular volume and shallow projecting entry. The Lakota example echoes the Prairie style window treatment of the Alfred Dickey Library in Jamestown; both feature grouped sash framed by pronounced label moldings. Apart from the window treatment, the library's chaste design is simply embellished by a strong corbelled cornice and by a broad arched window with corbelled label molding found at the east facade.

The specified location of the building on the lots required it to be backed up against the north property line, making it forever impossible to expand the building in the most logical way. This, despite early statements that the planners envisaged "a building easily enlarged." The ever expanding need for additional stacks to accommodate the growing number of books, numbering 10,939 on 1/1/90, and the allocation of a sizeable area as a children's corner have been necessary for fulfillment of the institution's primary role--that of a library. The result has been to substantially diminish space available for display of museum items, a condition compounded by need for space to exhibit gifts of local cultural and historical interest. Still, Mr. Tofthagen's gift remains today in the condition in which he bequeathed it, a foresighted contribution to the educational and cultural life of Lakota.

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Lakota American, September, 7, 1933

October 14, 1923

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December 9, 1926

June 9, 1927

August 11, 1927

July 14, 1927

September 1, 1927

September 29, 1927

October 6, 1927

October 13, 1927

October 20, 1927

November 2, 1927

Thal, Alfred. "Oral History." North Dakota State Archives, State Historical Society, Heritage Center, Bismarck.

**8. Statement of Significance**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally     statewide     locally

Applicable National Register Criteria     A     B     C     D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions)     A     B     C     D     E     F     G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Education

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Period of Significance

1927 - 1941

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Dates

1927

1929

\_\_\_\_\_

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Person

Tofthagen, Amun M.

Architect/Builder

Unknown

\_\_\_\_\_

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

See Continuation Sheets.

See continuation sheet

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

See Continuation sheet.

Previous documentation on file (NPS): N/A

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of property less than 1 acre

UTM References

A 

14	5	4	8	8	4	0	5	3	2	0	9	1	0
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 Zone Easting Northing

C 

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B 

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 Zone Easting Northing

D 

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See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

Lots 13, 14 and 15 of Block 17 in the original townsite plat of Lakota.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

Boundary is delineated by the legal urban description on file with the Nelson County Register of Deeds.

See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Frank Seebart, Lauren McCroskey/Architectural Historian  
 organization State Historical Society of North Dakota date July 31, 1991  
 street & number 612 E. Blvd. Ave, Heritage Center telephone (701)224-2672  
 city or town Bismarck state ND zip code 58505