

**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

For HCERS use only

received MAY 27 1982  
date entered

**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 First National Bank Building (D009:2-27)

and/or common First National Bank Building

**2. Location**

street & number 300-312 ~~South 16th Street~~ and 1601-1605 Farnam Street <sup>N/A</sup> not for publication

city, town Omaha N/A vicinity of congressional district Second

state Nebraska code 031 county Douglas code 055

**3. Classification**

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>N/A</u> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

**4. Owner of Property**

name First National Bank

street & number 16th and Dodge Streets

city, town Omaha N/A vicinity of state Nebraska

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Register of Deeds, Omaha-Douglas County Civic Center

street & number 1819 Farnam Street

city, town Omaha state Nebraska

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title Nebraska Historic Buildings Survey has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date On-going  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Nebraska State Historical Society

city, town Lincoln state Nebraska

# 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date <u>N/A</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

## Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The First National Bank Building is a fourteen-story steel-frame, office building located in the center of Omaha's central business district, at 16th and Farnam streets. The U-shaped skyscraper has the "U" opening to the main or eastern facade giving the impression of twin "towers" above the fourth story. The structure has been clad in light-colored brick, terracotta, and granite, and decorated with ornamental detailing in the Late Renaissance Revival manner. The only exterior alterations have been made on the first story. Graham, Burnham & Co. designed the building, which was opened in January, 1917.

The first four floors are treated separately from the "towers" and in a more ornate manner than the upper office floors. The first floor is separated in its design from the rest of the building and used for street level shops and lobby. New surface material and fenestration has removed the original design but fortunately this does not impinge on the design of the floors above. The second and third stories are an important focal point of the facade: two-story pilasters tie the floors together, the prominent wall cornice divides the second and third floors from the fourth, the ornamental scrollwork panels and stylized beed-and-reel molding are placed below the windows, and the oversize three-part windows with transoms on the second floor. The emphasis on the second and third floors is reflected in their function as the bank's offices. Bank suites are housed in the tall second floor. A classically-detailed two-story lobby is placed in the center with a ribbed and coffered ceiling, ornamental plasterwork, and Tennessee and Colorado marble benches and trim (see photos 4 and 5). The columns are a unique hybrid - the lower shaft is smooth marble and the upper Doric column is fluted plasterwork. The fourth floor, the last of the "base" of the building, has exterior decoration of wall cornice and antefixes between paired windows, as though they were roof decoration for the two story unit below.

The rental office space is located in the twin "towers" of the fifth through fourteenth floors. They are plainly treated with paired double-hung windows and stringcourses. The top three stories have ornamental detailing although it is simpler and less archeologically correct than that of the base. The twelfth and thirteenth floors are unified by the placement of wall cornices above and below and ornamental panels between the floors. The piers are decorated as though with capitals. The roofline is terminated, not by a cornice, but by a pierced parapet separated by pier-like extensions topped with antefixes, which reach to the sky emphasizing verticality.

The First National Bank occupied the building until they moved to new quarters in the 1970's. The exterior is in fine condition. The brick and stone were tuckpointed in 1970. Partial interior remodeling has occurred in the basement, first floor, and six of the rental office floors. The major interior space of the second and third floors remains intact. Currently occupied, plans for Tax Act rehabilitation are underway.

# 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 type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input checked="" 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** 1916-17                      **Builder/Architect** Graham, Burnham & Co., Chicago

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)**

As one of the most distinguished skyscrapers in Omaha, the First National Bank Building is of primary architectural significance to the city and to the state. The bank building was designed by the prominent Chicago firm of Graham, Burnham & Co., the successor firm of Daniel H. Burnham's office after his death in 1912 and before it evolved into its more well-known form of Graham, Anderson, Probst, & White. With its sophisticated composition and height, the building is a major landmark both visually and architecturally in downtown Omaha. The Kountze Brothers and the First National Bank have been important to the financial history of Omaha since the first years of the city's founding.

Downtown Omaha experienced a considerable building boom in the second and third decades of the 20th century. The new office, retail, hotel, and civic construction was concentrated in the few blocks between 15th and 18th Streets.<sup>1</sup> These new multi-storied buildings produced the skyline of Omaha and became the heart of the downtown for many decades. The First National Bank was one such business which moved west a few blocks in 1917 to their new skyscraper in the heart of this developing area. With its sophisticated composition and styling and its height, the First National building is one of Omaha's landmark skyscrapers. Its fourteen story height still dominates the immediate area today and is an important element of Omaha's skyline.

The First National has some rare features in Omaha's office buildings: it and the New York Life Insurance Building (NRHP 10-18-72) are the only ones with a U-shaped plan and the "U" opening on the main facade. The appearance of two "towers" emphasizes the vertical. The lack of a cornice is an unusual feature in Omaha's tall buildings. The use of acanthus leaf antefixes piercing the roof balustrade is strikingly different and further stresses the height of the building. Consequently, the overall effect is vertical, in spite of stringcourses and the lack of piers.

The First National compares well with the City National Bank Building (NRHP 3-26-73), one block to the south and perhaps Omaha's premier skyscraper. Both are fourteen story office towers designed for banks by Chicago architects with a light-colored brick surface. Holabird and Roche designed the City National Bank in 1910. Few Omaha buildings achieve the quality of these two. The ordering of the facades is similar: the first four floors form a base emphasized by pilasters or piers and wall cornices, the ground level is treated separately for shops, the office floors are treated plainly, and wall cornices and stringcourses emphasize the termination of the building. A major difference between the two is the First National's application of pilasters, ornamental scrollwork, and acanthus leaf details in a late Renaissance Revival manner to the structure.

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property less than one

Quadrangle name Omaha North, NE

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UMT References

A 

1	5	2	5	3	9	2	0	4	5	7	1	2	8	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B 

Zone		Easting				Northing							

C 

Zone		Easting				Northing							

D 

Zone		Easting				Northing							

E 

Zone		Easting				Northing							

F 

Zone		Easting				Northing							

G 

Zone		Easting				Northing							

H 

Zone		Easting				Northing							

Verbal boundary description and justification

Lot 1, Block 140, Original Plat, City of Omaha, Nebraska, including all of the historically associated property.

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

state	N/A	code	county	code
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state	code	county	code
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# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Donna Peschio, Secretary; Penelope Chatfield, Preservation Historian

organization Peschio & Co.  
Nebraska State Historical Society

date March, 1982

street & number 1016 Douglas Street  
1500 R Street

telephone 402/341-5400; 471-3850

city or town Omaha  
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 Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

*Mervyn O'Knecht*    5/13/82

title Director, Nebraska State Historical Society

date

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

*Alvin Byers*

Entered in the  
National Register

date

6/25/82

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

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A number of Omaha owners looked to Chicago for architects during the building boom, a natural inclination considering Chicago's development of the skyscraper and Omaha's railroad and business connections with that city. The First National Bank hired Graham, Burnham & Co., the successor firm of D. H. Burnham & Co. Ernest R. Graham (1868-1932) joined the office of Daniel H. Burnham at the age of twenty as a draftsman and became a virtual partner in less than ten years. His name was added to the firm upon Burnham's death in 1912 and remained as such until 1917 when the name was changed to Graham, Anderson, Probst and White.

As one of Omaha's oldest and most prominent banks, the First National has played an important role in the financial history of Omaha. Augustus and Herman Kountze founded the Kountze Bros. banking house in Omaha in December, 1857. The timing was judicious - just three years after the opening of Nebraska Territory and a few months after the Panic of 1857 which forced the closing of most of Omaha's earliest banks. Brothers Luther and Charles Kountze joined the firm within a few years, and the brothers decided to open branch houses in other cities. In the 1860's the Denver branch, later the Colorado National Bank, opened under the direction of Luther and Charles, and Augustus and Luther later opened the New York Banking House of the Kountze Brothers in New York City. Herman Kountze remained in charge of the mother bank at Omaha and was an important force in Omaha for many years. In 1863 the house was reorganized as a national bank, the first in Nebraska to receive a national charter. First National Bank grew and prospered with the Kountzes and remained today Omaha's second oldest and one of her most prominent banks.

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1. see also New York Life Insurance Building (NRHP (10-18-72), Douglas County Courthouse (NRHP 10-11-79), Aquila Court Building (NRHP 8-28-74), City National Bank (NRHP 3-26-73), Flatiron Building (NRHP 9-21-78), and the Standard Oil Co. Building (NRHP 8-24-79).

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