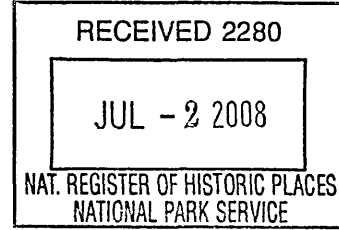


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

768



National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable". For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

Historic name M.A. Disbrow & Company Buildings
Other names/site number DO09:0129-012 (1201-1221 Nicholas St); DO09:0129-010 (1206 Izard St incl mule barn); DO09:0129-009 (1224 Izard St)

2. Location

Street & number 1201-1221 Nicholas Street, 1206, 1218, 1224 Izard Street Not for publication
City or town Omaha Vicinity
State Nebraska Code NE County Douglas Code 055 Zip code 68102

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Michael J. Seal Signature of certifying official
June 24, 2008 Date
Director, Nebraska State Historical Society
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:
 entered in the National Register.
 see continuation sheet.
 determined eligible for the National Register.
 see continuation sheet.
 determined not eligible for the National Register.
 removed from the National Register.
 other, (explain): _____

Edson H. Beall 8-1-08

for Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

M.A. Disbrow & Company Buildings
Name of Property

Douglas County, Nebraska
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- Private
- Public-local
- Public-state
- Public-federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
4		Buildings
		Sites
		Structures
		Objects
4	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)
N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register
N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Commerce/Trade

Industry/Manufacturing Facility

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Commerce/Trade – storage

Currently being vacated

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions.)

No Style

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Foundation Limestone & concrete

Walls Brick (1201-1221 Nicholas, 1218 Izard),
Frame (1206 Izard), Corrugated Steel (1224 Izard)

Roof Rubberized hot patch (1201-1221 Nicholas,
1206-1218 Izard), corrugated steel (1224 Izard)

Other _____

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "X" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- X A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
B Removed from its original location.
C A birthplace or a grave.
D A cemetery.
E A reconstructed building, object, or structure.
F A commemorative property.
G Less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Commerce

Industry

Period of Significance

ca. 1890 -1958

Significant Dates

ca. 1890

1912

1921

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Original architect/builder unknown

A.C. Busk, builder for 1921 addition

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- 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 #

Primary location for additional data:

- x State Historic Preservation Office
x Other State agency
Federal agency
x Local Government
University
x Other
Name of repository: Omaha public library

M.A. Disbrow & Company Buildings

Name of Property

Douglas County, Nebraska

County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property One and 2/3 acres

UTM References (place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet).

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
1.	15	254390	4572612	3.			
2.				4.			

[] See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Janet L. Jeffries, Historian/Architectural Historian

organization Berggren Architects

date April 3, 2008

street & number 1201 O Street

telephone (402) 826-5270/826-8234

city or town Lincoln

state NE zip code 68508

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name/title Trace Smith, Midstates Holdings, LLC

street & number 14605 N 72nd

telephone (402)572-7063

city or town Omaha

state NE zip code 68122

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determined eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, (15 USC 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetM.A. Disbrow & Company Buildings

Name of Property

Douglas County, Nebraska

County and State

Section 7 Page 1

Description

The M.A. Disbrow Company buildings are situated on block 318, Omaha City, in central Omaha near the Missouri River in a former manufacturing area. The property is located in the center of a proposed historic district of similar manufacturing buildings. The four extant buildings represent the majority of the company warehouse and office facilities that once operated on this site. Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps from 1934 to 1968 show that the company also had warehouse facilities across 12th Street east on the southwest corner of block 317. This property, under separate ownership, is not included in this nomination.

The M.A. Disbrow Company first set up shop on the southeast corner of block 318, and expanded until they occupied the entire city block and part of block 317 by the early 20th century. The two major extant buildings are three-story brick structures that provided factory space, warehouse and shipping space, and offices for the company. A frame building, covered with synthetic siding and attached to the south brick building, originally served as a mule barn and was part of the shipping operation. Exact construction dates for these structures are not known, however the brick buildings and the mule barn appear to date to the late 19th/early 20th centuries. A corrugated steel Behlen building, located on the southwest corner of the property, was moved to the site in the mid 20th century, and served as a warehouse and small saw mill. It appears from Sanborn maps that the vacant northwest corner of this block was most often used for lumber storage and parking. A railroad spur bisected block 318, running east to west, allowing trains to come right between the brick factory buildings to load. Trains quit running on this track in the last 15 years, and the track has since been removed (See site plan).

While very few pieces of equipment relating to the milling business remain in the buildings, they are virtually unchanged structurally on the interior from their original configuration. There have been modifications on the exteriors of the buildings including changed doorways, a few replacement windows, and the siding on the mule barn and on the catwalks

Individual building descriptions follow:**1201 Nicholas Street****Factory/warehouse/office building, commonly known as the North Building.**

This three story brick building, built in the 1890s, served as the headquarters of Disbrow's Omaha operation from about 1900 until the firm dissolved in 1982. Sanborn Fire Insurance maps from 1887 and 1890 show the Disbrow Company housed in a frame building directly south of this North Building. By 1901, the physical plant expanded to include the northeast portion of the block, and the present 1201 Nicholas building had been built. Throughout the 20th century, 1201 Nicholas was the official address of the company. Prior to that, an Izard Street address was used, corresponding with the original building located on the southeast corner of the block. There was no record found at this writing that explains the removal of the frame building, and another non-extant brick building located on the Izard and 12th Street corner. These buildings are visible on a company lithograph and on the Sanborn maps.

The North Building rests on piers of solid limestone, 15 feet in diameter where they pierce the basement floor. These piers support structural columns that taper to 15 inches in diameter at the top of the building. These piers are mounted on bedrock to provide adequate support for the extremely heavy milling equipment installed in the building. The building is of utilitarian design and has a rectangular footprint. The warehouse structure's major design elements are the orderly rows of arch-topped, eight-over-eight, double hung windows that penetrate the north, east, and south facades of the building. This multiple fenestration ensured adequate lighting for the factory workers. The west portion of the building was added in 1921, and is a remarkable match to the older structure. The west façade of this building features fewer windows, and only on the third, or factory, level. The stairway from the 1221 Nicholas doorway runs along this west wall. A built-in gutter system directs rainwater to the downspouts mounted on the building's facades.

This North Building served as the portal to the business. The first floor housed a spacious and well-appointed main office, and smaller offices and reception rooms accessed from the 1201 Nicholas doorway at the northeast corner of the building. Across the hallway from the main office is the company safe that displays the Disbrow name. An open staircase rises from the sales desk area to an upper, northeast corner office space that was used by Asha Distributing during the 1980s through the early 2000s.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

M.A. Disbrow & Company Buildings

Name of Property

Douglas County, Nebraska

County and State

Section 7 Page 2

All three levels of the North Building are virtually large, open spaces broken only by the support columns and the offices in the northeast corner of the building.

Beyond the office and sales area on the first floor, and in the center of the building, is the shipping area. Along the south wall of this section are doors to load railroad cars on the spur line that ran along the south façade of this building. These doors are raised from ground level to match the height of the railroad cars. Along the north wall of this first floor center section is a covered, interior loading dock for trucks. Trucks could back into the stall on grade level from Nicholas Street. In the center of this central section of the North Building, is an original freight elevator. It still operates to code and has been well maintained by the current owner. At the west end of this floor is another entrance to the building with a 1221 Nicholas address. Two flights of stairs leading to the upper floors provided access for workers. Dry sprinkler houses are located on this floor for fire prevention.

The second floor was used as a warehouse for product storage, and the third floor was the manufacturing area. A huge squirrel cage exhaust fan, used to help filter out the sawdust, is still in place on the top level of the building and is still operable. Several small offices located at the top of the stairway on third floor have east windows offering views of the plant. It is assumed that foremen and/or managers watched the operation from these vantage points. Also on third floor is an atrium space or head house with clerestory windows bringing in more light to the factory area.

Enclosed cat walks connect the first and third floors of the North Building to the South Building and allowed workers to go from building to building over the rail spur. The second floor passageway was built to fold up to allow the trains to pass. The current owners tell that as recent as the 1980s, the first floor catwalk had to be raised every Wednesday to allow the trains to come between the Disbrow buildings and travel on to the nearby mattress factory.

Ghosts of exterior signage painted on the brick are apparent on the east, north and west facades. A faint remnant of a painted sign "M.A. Disbrow, Millwork" is also visible above the 1221 Nicholas entrance in the transom.

1218 Izard Street

Factory/warehouse building commonly known as the South Building.

This three-level brick building is virtually the same design as the Nicholas Street structure. It too, is resting on piers that are mounted on bedrock. The interior space is comprised of three floors, each one a wide open space with only the support columns and elevator shaft breaking up the space. There is no office area, and no public entrance or reception area. A working freight elevator identical to the one in the North Building is situated in the center of the building, and a dry sprinkler house is located on the north façade of the first level. It appears that the same functions took place on each floor of this building as did in the North Building – manufacturing on third floor, storage of inventory on second floor, and shipping operations on first. Access to the rail spur is on the north side of this building. A built-in gutter system is also installed on this building, and a fire escape from third floor is attached to the south façade.

1206 Izard Street

Mule barn/shipping center

Connected to the east side of the South Building, this frame structure dates to the early 20th century and once housed teams of mules that hauled products locally from the Disbrow factory. The barn can be accessed from the South Building. From second floor, a narrow, open bridge or catwalk spans the building east to west. The Smith family was told that workers checked on the mules from this vantage point which offers a view of the entire structure. Clerestory windows light the entire facility which is virtually one large interior space with a small shipping office in the southwest corner and grade level truck entrances on the south. Automated garage doors replace the original stable doors. Though this building has been covered with newer siding, it easily conveys its significance as a former mule barn, further enhanced by to the excellent physical integrity of the interior.

1224 (or 1248) Izard Street

Factory/warehouse Behlen building

According to the current owners, this 1950s corrugated steel building was moved onto the site from a government property, probably in the mid 1950s. It appears on the 1962 Sanborn Fire Insurance map as part of the Disbrow complex. This early corrugated

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

M.A. Disbrow & Company Buildings

Name of Property

Douglas County, Nebraska

County and State

Section 7 Page 3

steel structure was made by Behlen Manufacturing of Columbus, Nebraska, a firm that began producing these buildings in 1949. It measures 26 by 52 feet, and features the large undulating ridges that were used in the earliest Behlen buildings. This building was used as a warehouse, but also for milling operations. There is an exhaust fan and dry sprinkler house in this building.

There are a total of six vintage dry sprinkler houses on the property, located in various places in the three buildings excluding the barn. The system operates via heat sensors and pipes containing pressurized air. When the heat sensors reach alarm mode, water valves open allowing water into the pipes to extinguish the fire. The dry sprinkler systems are also operating to code due to the careful maintenance of the current owner.

The Smith family bought the building in the 1980s to operate Asha Distributing, an HVAC supply company, in the facility. They did not alter the site significantly, as the nature of their business was also wholesale storage and distributing.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

M.A. Disbrow & Company Buildings

Name of Property

Douglas County, Nebraska

County and State

Section 8 Page 4

Statement of Significance

The Disbrow property is nominated to the National Register under Criterion A for its local significance in the areas of commerce and industry. The Disbrow Company operated in Omaha for nearly a century and during that time helped to contribute to a thriving atmosphere of industry and commerce in Omaha. M.A. Disbrow and Company played an important role in the standardization and production of building components that began in the second half of the 19th century and products were sold both locally and across the nation. This family-run millwork company mass-produced items such as doors, windows, staircases, fireplaces, porch pillars, and various decorative elements. From this location, products were shipped to lumber yards across the country. These goods made it possible for middle and upper class Americans to add stylish embellishments to their homes. The increased national demand for quality milled goods in the western states in the late 19th century was the catalyst that brought the Disbrow Company to Nebraska and contributed to their overall success in Omaha. By the early 20th century, the Omaha factory, the second plant for the company, became the firm's multi-state headquarters. The downturn in construction in the United States during the late 1970s and early 1980s caused the dissolution of the company.

Late 19th Century Home Building

Late 19th century American houses were characterized by variety. Architects, builders, and entrepreneurs in manufacturing took advantage of the public's need for stylistic direction and quality, affordable building materials. They created designs, established factories, and produced pattern books and millwork catalogues to guide the American consumer toward fashionable housing described in fashionable terms such as Gothic, Shingle Style, Queen Anne, Italianate, etc. The middle and upper classes were eager to build homes that represented their social standings, and needed various levels of ornamentation for all household trim, doorways, windows, and porches. The many milling companies that appeared across the country in the second half of the century catered to these needs and developed a healthy competition to design and create unique designs. These companies, along with architects and builders, actually set the standards in building design in order to sell products.¹ M.A. Disbrow and Company were leaders in this effort, and soon after its mid-1850s founding, the company became well-known in Iowa for its interior and exterior Eastlake, Queen Anne, and early Colonial Revival architectural elements.²

Early History of the Disbrow Company

Martin A. Disbrow, a Connecticut native, founded M.A. Disbrow and Company, a wholesale millwork factory in Lyons, Iowa, (now part of Clinton) in 1856. Disbrow came to Iowa that year, after a stressful few years of seeking his fortune in New York City. The 24-year-old moved west looking for a more healthful climate and the expanded career opportunities often found on the frontier. Disbrow arrived in Lyons via train, and with seed money from his New York work and capital from his sister Sarah, bought lots on the Mississippi River for a millwork factory. His factory was one of the first of several mills in this town that was a major setting for the 19th century lumber industry, utilizing logs rafted down the river from Wisconsin. During this time, the major industries in the Lyons/Clinton area were lumbering and the railroad.³

The Disbrow Company started in Lyons with one building and a small 30 horsepower engine running the equipment, but the business grew rapidly and the physical plant followed suit.⁴ The heavily ornamented housing styles and elaborate taste of late 19th century American builders created a market for Disbrow and other millwork companies that virtually spelled success if an astute leader was at the helm of the business. M.A. Disbrow had such a reputation. A 1911 history of Clinton County, Iowa, described the, by then, late Mr. Disbrow as a tireless worker, a genius who orchestrated excellent factory methods and produced excellent products, and an efficient, hands-on manager who handled all aspects of his business with ease.⁵ Only the office building from the Lyons factory still

¹ Smeins, Linda E., *Building an American Identity, Pattern Books and Communities 1870 – 1900*. Walnut Creek, California: Alta Mira Press, 1999, 11-20.

² Gebhard, David and Gerald Mansheim, *Buildings of Iowa*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993, 55.

³ Gebhard and Mansheim, 54.

⁴ Hart, Arthur A., "M.A. Disbrow & Company: Catalogue Architecture." *The Palimpsest*, Vol. 56, No. 4 (1975).

⁵ Wolfe, P.B., ed. *History of Clinton County, Iowa*. Indianapolis, Indiana: B.F. Bowen 1911.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetM.A. Disbrow & Company Buildings

Name of Property

Douglas County, Nebraska

County and State

Section 8 Page 5

stands, and after a variety of uses including a long period as a Knights of Columbus hall, is now the McKinley Street Taverne, a restaurant and lounge.⁶

The Disbrows were a well-respected New England family of New Fairfield, Connecticut. Martin Disbrow was born there in 1832, and after his mother died three years later, he went to live with his grandparents on their farm. It was from their strict upbringing that he learned a strong work ethic that would carry him through life. Twenty years after establishing his Iowa factory, he married Mary Lincoln in Norton, Massachusetts and took her west to Lyons, Iowa. Disbrow was 44 years old. He and Mary had five children, three of whom survived to adulthood.⁷ None of these children held leadership positions in the family business, and it is not apparent whether or not any of them even worked at the Disbrow Company. The family's business dynasty descended through Disbrow's protégé, nephew M.B. Copeland.

Disbrow's older sister Sarah, who helped him launch the company with her financial support, also came to Lyons with her brother in 1856. She died in 1905 at the home of her brother, Martin. She had never married.⁸

Omaha's Development

The City of Omaha, located on the west bank of the Missouri River, was incorporated in 1857, and soon became a center of trade and nucleus of westward expansion. The city served as Nebraska's territorial capital for a time, and by the 1860s, was a transportation and communications hub. The Union Pacific Railroad, based in Omaha, connected with the Central Pacific Railroad creating a transcontinental link, and the Western Union Telegraph Company ran wires through Omaha to the west. Omaha became known as the "Gate City" to the frontier, and population, industry and commerce increased rapidly. The Union Pacific built a railroad bridge across the Missouri in 1872, and by the 1880s "boom years," eight additional railroads served the city. Construction, both commercial and residential, was occurring in earnest by this time.⁹ Omaha was also enjoying a rapidly expanding jobbing trade and large warehouse districts developed to accommodate the commercial traffic.¹⁰

These progressive elements about Omaha appealed to M.A. Disbrow as he searched for sites for the expansion of his successful Iowa business.

The Omaha Factory

Disbrow had incorporated his Iowa business in 1884, and in 1886, he opened a second factory in Omaha to more easily reach the markets in the western states. He sent his nephew, Maynard Bassett "M.B." Copeland, a former Massachusetts school teacher who had come to Lyons to work in the family business, to manage the Omaha facility. The incorporation was accomplished with about \$69,000 in capital stock. Disbrow contributed about \$50,000 and Copeland \$9,000.¹¹

Disbrow selected a site very close to the Missouri River on block 318 in Omaha City.¹² This location, bounded by Nicholas and IZard Streets, and 12th and 13th Streets, was reminiscent of the Lyons, Iowa plant's river bank location and was home to M.A. Disbrow and Company until the firm was sold to The Radford Company of Oshkosh, Wisconsin in 1982.¹³

Disbrow first erected a frame building on the southeast corner of block 318, and for several years, operated a wholesale shop out of this single building. It appears that in the first few years of the Omaha division's existence, much of the manufacturing was done in the Iowa plant and the Omaha branch was a distributing center. By 1901, however, the physical plant had expanded to include the northeast corner of Block 318, and a second building had been constructed.¹⁴ This brick building (1201 Nicholas) is now the east part of what is commonly called the North Building, and included a large factory space on third floor. In 1921, a builder named A.C. Busk was

⁶ www.clintonia.com/lyonsbusiness.html. 2008. Hart, 99.

⁷ Wolfe, 1096-98.

⁸ *The Clinton Herald*, January 3, 1905.

⁹ Mead and Hunt, Inc., Reconnaissance Survey of Portions of South Central Omaha, Nebraska Historic Buildings Survey, July 2006, 1-4.

¹⁰ Larsen, Lawrence H. and Barbara J. Cottrell. *The Gate City, A History of Omaha*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997. 79,80.

¹¹ Hart, 106 - 109.

¹² Douglas County, Nebraska property records.

¹³ Carpenter, Robert, AIA, step-son of Joseph Glover and former board member, Disbrow and Company, email interview, March 21, 2008.

¹⁴ Sanborn Insurance Maps, 1887, 1890, 1901.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

M.A. Disbrow & Company Buildings

Name of Property

Douglas County, Nebraska

County and State

Section 8 Page 6

awarded the contract to build an addition onto the west end of this building. A contemporary account of the project reported that the new \$60,000 addition would double the capacity of the Disbrow plant.¹⁵

The Disbrow Company expanded rapidly at the Omaha location, and M.B. Copeland ran an efficient operation under the watchful guidance of Martin Disbrow. Copeland was in constant communication with his uncle Martin in Iowa, where family records indicate an almost daily letter exchange between the men. Disbrow was very good at marketing and often had Copeland working on designs for corporate greeting cards for customers, engravings of the Iowa and Omaha plants for use in public relations publications, and designs for the nationally distributed company catalogs. Disbrow was very particular and coached Copeland to enhance the company's advertising engravings if necessary to project a better appearance. He once told Copeland to raise the height of the east shop in Lyons to three stories, and to move the lumber piles, etc.¹⁶ Apparently this marketing strategy for print goods did not conjure up a notion of false advertising to customers for the business thrived.

Disbrow also advised Copeland not to be threatened by the competition who chose to undercut Disbrow prices. He said those companies would go broke in their own time. A 19th century Chicago trade journal commended the Disbrow Company and Martin Disbrow, commenting on Disbrow's excellent factory methods and products, and the wonderful character and brilliance of Mr. Disbrow himself.¹⁷

The Disbrow Company quickly made a name for itself in Omaha and appeared in a variety of publications. In 1887, after only a year in operation, the company was mentioned in a booklet featuring the industries in Omaha. That publication boasted that the company had established the Omaha wholesale house to reach the western trade. It described the building and commented that the office space was finished in oak.¹⁸ In 1894, the Omaha factory was one of six woodworking mills in Omaha and employed 15 men. M.A. Disbrow, of Lyons, Iowa was listed as president, and M.B. Copeland, of Omaha, was secretary and treasurer.¹⁹

M.A. Disbrow and Company regularly produced wholesale catalogs to market products to lumberyards and builders across the nation. Several have survived, and show the changing tastes of American builders over the years.

The earliest existing Disbrow catalog dates to 1892. This catalog was a handsome, well-bound book that showcased a large selection of doors and windows, and their accompanying frames, baseboards, wainscoting and picture rails, mostly in the Queen Anne style. A variety of portiere work – elaborate spool and spindle decorations for arches between rooms and for front hallways – was also offered. Approximately 132 head block designs, for the corners of interior doorways, were shown in this catalog. The most ornate were priced at only \$60 per hundred, compared to the common "bulls eye" design that sold for \$5 per hundred. The price varied, too, depending on the type of wood used. The catalogs showed how builders could mix and match the various components to achieve a myriad of styles. For example, the price conscience customer interested in the Queen Anne style, was offered imitation, hand-grained, pine doors made to look like maple and mahogany.²⁰

An 1899 catalog for windows, doors, and blinds features select lists of satisfied customers both in the eastern and western parts of the United States. Supplemental photos 8 to 11 demonstrate the wide-spread market of this company. Sixteen states were represented in the customer lists, and a total of \$34,000 was spent. The lists were compiled from the 1898 accounts receivable ledgers of both factories, and named lumberyards and building contractors from New York to Washington, and from Wisconsin to Mississippi.²¹

Disbrow produced entire porches, bay windows, interior and exterior newel posts, brackets, gable decorations, and vergeboards. Commercial buildings and churches were also clad in Disbrow ornamentation. One could buy woodwork for entire storefronts, office and bank counters, and special doors with "Office," "Bookkeeper," "Cashier," "Private," etc., etched into the glass. The catalogues advertised beveled plate glass components. Beginning in 1904, the catalogues included a special section on leaded colored art glass reproduced by stone lithography in full color. The Disbrow catalogues changed with the popular building designs. Catalogs of the 1890s showed the Victorian styles, including Queen Anne and Shingle Style. By 1900, Art Nouveau and Classical Revival components appeared, and then in 1908, the Arts and Crafts design elements were shown.²²

Disbrow and Copeland created catalogs that were so helpful that they were used as reference manuals for people who needed

¹⁵ *Omaha Chamber of Commerce Journal*, September 21, 1921, 5

¹⁶ Hart, 106-110.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 113.

¹⁸ Brown, Herbert G., ed., *The Industries of Omaha, Nebraska*. Omaha: Industrial Publishing Company, 1887.

¹⁹ Butterfield, Consul W., *History of the City of Omaha, Nebraska and South Omaha*. Munsell and Company, New York, 1894, 498.

²⁰ Hart, 100,101.

²¹ M.A. Disbrow & Co., *Catalogue of Windows, Doors, Blinds*, Omaha, Nebraska, 1899.

²² Hart, 104-106.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

M.A. Disbrow & Company Buildings

Name of Property

Douglas County, Nebraska

County and State

Section 9 Page 8

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

M.A. Disbrow & Company Buildings

Name of Property

Douglas County, Nebraska

County and State

Section 8 Page 7

guidance in how to create certain architectural styles. Many had pages printed in color. They even named their components to capture the imagination of their buyers. Doors, for example, carried such names as the "Jenny Lind," the "Winnebago," and the "Crown Prince." In honor of the Omaha plant, doors were called "Omaha" and "Ak-Sar-Ben." There was a "Clinton" door in honor of Clinton, Iowa. A few components in the Disbrow catalogs were manufactured by other specialty companies and marketed by Disbrow. In 1916, for example, the company catalog featured items from 35 other specialty companies.²³

Even after Disbrow's death in 1906, the company continued to expand and flourish. A solid legacy had been established via quality products, excellent marketing methods, and innovative advertising materials. By 1906, the Lyons plant was 50 years old, was housed in large brick facilities, and operated hundreds of machines with engines totaling 450 horsepower. The Omaha plant was 20 years old at this time, and was already in its second generation of factory and warehouse buildings. In 1912, another plant opened in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and after that, a factory was built in Cheyenne Wyoming. The leadership of the company had passed to Disbrow's widow, Mary, for a time after Martin's death, but in 1912, Copeland was named president, and ran the entire multi-state operation from the Omaha location in an office in the North Building.²⁴

During the company's entire 126-year existence -- 96 years in Omaha -- the operation was directed by Disbrow family members. Mr. Disbrow's nephew M.B. Copeland ran the company for 71 years. He lived to be 97 years old. Copeland's son-in-law Ernest Glover took over from Copeland in 1948, and Ernest's son Joseph, in turn, took over as president when his father retired in the late 1960s. Joseph Glover was president in 1982 when the company closed. A severe nationwide downturn in the construction market and a high 21 percent inflation rate created a hardship for the company. Disbrow and Company was sold to a Wisconsin milling firm, The Radford Company, who operated the Omaha location as a branch for a short time.²⁵ The Radford Company is still in business with offices in Oshkosh, Wisconsin and Duluth, Minnesota.²⁶

Conclusion

In the mid-1980s, the Disbrow property was sold to John Smith who operated his HVAC business, Asha Distributing, on the site. The buildings remain in the Smith family, and are now owned by John's son, Trace, who plans to sell them to a buyer for adaptive reuse as residential, office, and retail space. The buyer, and the architectural firm working on the design, are considering housing and office units in the two brick buildings and may create a restaurant or other retail establishment in the old mule barn area. The Behlen Building may become a parking garage for the residents. It is planned that the Disbrow name will be incorporated into the new design plan so that the property perpetuates this significant company's name in the city of Omaha.²⁷ This rehabilitation work will be done as part of a certified rehabilitation.

The Disbrow name is still synonymous with the building industry. Twenty-five years after it closed, architects, builders, and lumberyards still recall the name and the quality goods and services provided by this company. Ron Sack, CEO of the multi-yard Sack Lumber Company in Nebraska, for example, recently recollected the decades of regular visits by Disbrow salesmen to his family's firm.²⁸

The Omaha site of the Disbrow Company is a comprehensive and tangible reminder of this prominent factory and distribution center. The Omaha site was the headquarters of this large, multi-state operation for 70 years -- from 1912 to 1982. Only the office building remains on the site of the original Iowa plant, and the fates of the smaller Cedar Rapids and Cheyenne factories are not known at this time.

²³ Hart, 113-115.

²⁴ Hart, 110.

²⁵ Hart, 119. *Omaha City Directories*, R.L. Polk and Company, 1921 - 1982. Carpenter interview, March 2008.

²⁶ www.radfordco.com

²⁷ Interviews with owner Trace Smith, Adam Watson, PJ Morgan Real Estate, and Bryan R. Zimmer, AIA, The Architectural Offices, Omaha, February, 2008.

²⁸ Sack, Ron, Sack Lumber Company, Crete, Nebraska, interview, March 31, 2008.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

M.A. Disbrow & Company Buildings

Name of Property

Douglas County, Nebraska

County and State

Section 10 Page 9

Verbal Boundary Description:

The M.A. Disbrow and Company site includes all of block 318 (lots 1-8) and the vacated East 16 feet of 13th street adjacent to lot 5 on the West in Omaha City, Douglas County, Nebraska, and totals approximately one and two-thirds acres.

Boundary Justification:

These boundaries correspond with the legal description of the property, and includes all extant buildings and features historically associated with the property.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

M.A. Disbrow & Company Buildings

Name of Property

Douglas County, Nebraska

County and State

Section 11 Page 10

The illustrations submitted with this M.A. Disbrow and Company nomination were collected from various sources as listed in the bibliography.

Photographs:

Grant Landreth
Nebraska State Historic Preservation Office
June 2008
Nebraska State Historic Preservation Office

Photographs

Photograph #	Building(s)	Description	View (looking)
1 of 7	1201-21 Nicholas	North façade	SW
2 of 7	1201-21 Nicholas	West façade	SE
3 of 7	Cat walks	Located between bldgs	E
4 of 7	Behlen building, 1218 Iazard & Mule barn	Overview	NE
5 of 7	Behlen building, 1218 Iazard & Mule barn	View of south facades	NNE
6 of 7	1218 Iazard	South facade	NNW
7 of 7	All	Overview of complex	NW

Supplemental Photographs

1 of 12	Entire block 318	Historic bird's eye	NE
2 of 12	N/A	Martin A. Disbrow	N/A
3 of 12	Lyons, Iowa	Historic bird's eye	W/SW
4 of 12	First structure/non-extant	South & east facades	NW
5 of 12	N/A	M.B. Copeland	N/A
6 of 12	1201 Nicholas	Company safe	S
7 of 12	Historic advertising poster	Includes Omaha	N/A
8 of 12	1899 catalog	Cover	N/A
9 of 12	1899 catalog	Customer list	N/A
10 of 12	1899 catalog	Selected pages	N/A
11 of 12	1899 catalog	Selected pages	N/A
12 of 12	Advertising token	Stamped metal	N/A

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

M.A. Disbrow & Company Buildings

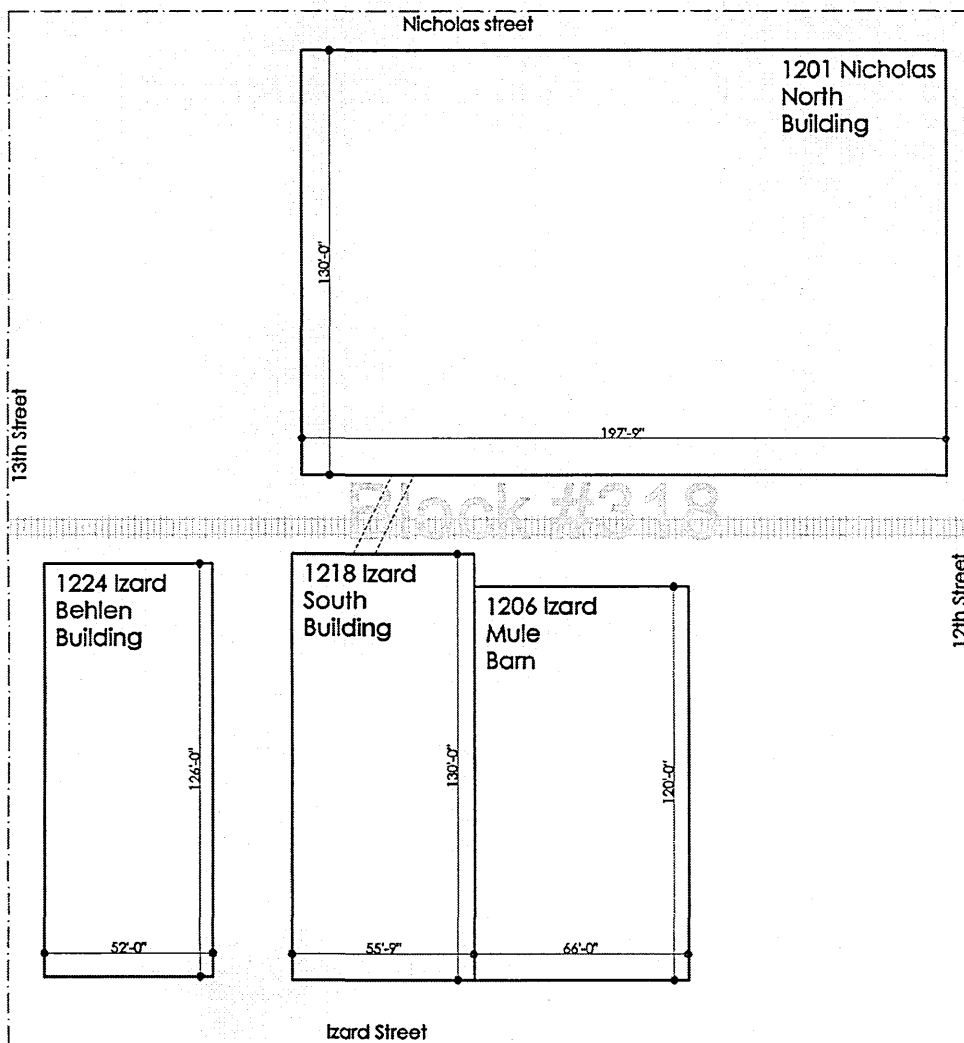
Name of Property

Douglas County, Nebraska

County and State

Section 11 Page 11

M.A. Disbrow & Company Buildings
Site plan by Laurel Shoemaker, Berggren Architects, Inc., March 2008
All buildings are contributing



M. A. Disbrow & Company Buildings, Omaha, Nebraska
Scale: 1" = 40'-0"