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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

MAR 01 1989

NATIONAL REGISTER

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Watkins, Albert, House
other names/site number LC13:C7-791

2. Location

street & number 920 D Street not for publication n/a
city, town Lincoln vicinity n/a
state Nebraska code NE county Lancaster code 109 zip code 68502

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>2</u>	<u>0</u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> objects
		<u>2</u>	<u>0</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing: n/a
Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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. See continuation sheet.
James G. Hanson February 24, 1989
Signature of certifying official Date
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.

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. 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:) _____

Alvina Byers Entered in the National Register 4/3/89

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: single dwelling

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: multiple dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)

LATE VICTORIAN: Queen Anne

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation STONE: limestone

walls WOOD: weatherboard

roof ASPHALT

other turned wooden porch posts

colored glass windows

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Albert Watkins house in Lincoln, Lancaster County, Nebraska, is a two-and-a-half story, asymmetrical frame building of the Queen Anne style. The house was built in 1887 for Albert Watkins, a newspaper editor, postmaster, and historian, who occupied it until his death there in 1923. The house features a steeply pitched, complex gabled roof with decorative detailing in each of the gable ends. Also notable are the front and side entry porches with bulbous turned posts. In the rear yard is a simple, one-and-a-half story, frame carriage barn. The house retains a high degree of integrity and is currently undergoing a careful rehabilitation.

The Albert Watkins house is a two-and-a-half story, asymmetrical residential building of frame construction with clapboard siding. The steep gabled roofs of roughly cross-gable configuration create a complex and picturesque skyline, along with a very irregular volume in the open attic. Other characteristics of the Queen Anne style include irregular fenestration with small colored panes, bulbous turned porch posts and applied exterior ornamentation.

The main, south facade consists of a tall principal bay with a high gable roof and a narrower, recessed entrance bay beneath a smaller facade gable. The entrance to the left is under a shed-roofed porch with bulbous posts, topped by a rectilinear second story bay window. That large window is divided into nine lights by heavy mullions, and each unit further divided into sixteen panes by thinner muntins. Colored panes of purple and pale yellow glass create a dramatic upper stairhall.

The wider east bay of the south facade has a tripartite window on the ground floor, with the upper sash decorated with small purple or burgundy colored panes. The window has a wide entablature embellished with swags, rosettes, and dentil work. The gable end includes decorative shingles, a bracketed denticular cornice, small-pane attic windows and ornate carved or molded plaques around the attic windows. The bargeboards have applied bulls-eye rosettes.

The east facade is second in prominence only to the south front, with a projecting wing centered between the front and rear portions of the house. The shed-roofed east porch opens toward the south and has bulbous posts and an entrance directly into the dining room. The high gable end of the east wing is

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decorated in the same manner as the front gables. Tucked inconspicuously behind the east wing is a side entrance to stairs that lead to a second floor apartment.

The west side has a large gable corresponding to the one on the east, and a windowless area on the south end reflecting the main stairhall. The rear is less adorned and complex than the other facades, with a simple, wider, low-pitched gable roof and an off-center, enclosed entry porch. North of the house at the rear of the lot is a plain, one-and-a-half story frame carriage barn with shiplap siding. The barn, which probably is contemporary with the main house, has a gable roof with an east-west ridge, a small dormer on the south front, and wide, roller-mounted doors on the north and south sides.

The interior of the house is less ornately decorated than the exterior, apparently due more to choice than to loss. The large entrance hall is also the stairhall, featuring a plain newel and simple turned spindles on a stairs with a quarter run, landing, and long straight run ascending toward the south. To the east of the entry is the front living room or parlor. Sliding or pocket doors enable this room to be shut off from the entry. Directly ahead of the entry is a doorway that leads into a back parlor or library. (This room was converted into a bedroom when the house was made into apartments, but in the current rehabilitation it is being converted back to a library.)

East of the library is the dining room, with direct access to the kitchen in the rear (north) wing. Wide, double pocket doors link the dining room to both the library and the front parlor. The dining room also has its own exterior door, opening onto the east side porch. Dominating the room is a fireplace with an elaborate mantel and overmantel of curved shelves and brackets. Ten beveled plate glass mirrors decorate the overmantel, while the hearth is surrounded with decorative tiles.

The bedrooms of the second floor were converted (probably in the 1930s) into two small apartments, but most of the rooms retain their original dimensions and door and window trim. The large stairhall is dominated by the grouping of nine square windows of small purple and yellow colored panes. The large attic is undivided, its walls and complex ceiling panelled with narrow "bead board."

The exterior of the Watkins House retains a high degree of integrity. Some early modification may have occurred to the porches, since the Sanborn insurance maps of 1903 appear to depict a wrap-around porch. The roof was originally wood shingle. On the interior, several fireplaces have been blocked or otherwise altered. The house is in the process of rehabilitation. Reroofing was completed in 1988. Much of the exterior paint has been stripped, and some repainting has been accomplished. The parlor mantelpiece found in the attic has been returned to its proper place, and a sympathetic redecorating is partially completed. The integrity of the house does not appear at any risk from these careful efforts.

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)

Period of Significance

Significant Dates

Literature

1887-1923

1902-1913

Cultural Affiliation
n/a

Significant Person

Architect/Builder

Watkins, Albert

Unknown

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

The Watkins house is locally significant in the area of literature (specifically, the writing of history) as the residence of Albert Watkins, an early Nebraska historian who wrote and edited one of the first scholarly histories of the state (Criterion B). He occupied the house for the final thirty-six of his forty-one years in Lincoln. No other property exists that was as directly associated with Watkins, especially during the entire span during which he produced the Illustrated History of Nebraska. Furthermore, no other property as clearly associated with an early historian of Nebraska appears to exist. The period of significance extends from the house's construction for Watkins in 1887, until his death there in 1923.

The Watkins House is a well-preserved, medium-sized, Queen Anne style house, a style widely employed in Lincoln during the burgeoning 1880s, but now represented by a shrinking number of examples. However, the primary significance of this property derives from its association with Albert Watkins (1848-1923), for whom the house was built. He was an attorney, educator, newspaper editor, political activist, postmaster, and historian. His most lasting contribution has been his role as editor and principal author of the "Morton-Watkins" Illustrated History of Nebraska (1905-1913), among the best of the early histories of the state. That project was commenced by J. Sterling Morton in 1897. Watkins assumed the editor-in-chief's role in 1902, shortly before Morton's death, and saw all three volumes to fruition over the next nine years.

Watkins was born in England in 1848. He emigrated with his family to Wisconsin the next year and grew up there. He received a law degree from the Univ. of Wisconsin in 1872, but practiced only briefly before buying a newspaper and assuming the post of superintendent of a county school system in Wisconsin. He bought part interest in a Sioux City, Iowa paper in the late 1870s and edited it for a few years, before relocating in 1882 to Lincoln, Nebraska, where he was editor and part owner of the State Democrat for three years.

See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

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 # _____

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:

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

Specify repository:

Nebraska State Historical Society

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of property .16 acre (less than one acre)

UTM References

A

1	4
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6	9	3	1	3	5
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4	5	1	9	0	7	5
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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

This property is described as Lot 9, Block 191, Original Plat, Lincoln, Lancaster County, Nebraska, measuring 50 feet east-west and 142 feet north-south.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

These boundaries include all the property historically associated with the Albert Watkins House.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Edward F. Zimmer, Ph.D., Historic Preservation Planner; Gloria Mueller, Intern
 organization Lincoln/Lancaster County Planning Department date January 10, 1989
 street & number 555 So. 10th Street telephone (402)471-7491
 city or town Lincoln state Nebraska zip code 68508

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After his arrival in Lincoln, Watkins became prominent as a supporter of President Grover Cleveland. Cleveland rewarded Watkins by appointing him Postmaster of Lincoln in 1885, a position he held until 1889. While Postmaster, Watkins had the house at 920 D Street built in 1887. During Cleveland's second term (1893-1897), Watkins continued his support of the President in favor of the gold standard, and was again rewarded with appointments as receiver of various Nebraska national banks.

From the late 1890s through 1905, Watkins' principal employment was as treasurer of the Security Mutual Life Insurance Company, although he also occasionally listed himself as an attorney. In 1902, at the request of J. Sterling Morton, he assumed from Morton the editorship of a proposed history of Nebraska, the first volume of which was issued in 1905 as The Illustrated History of Nebraska. Such projects consumed most of Watkins' later years. From 1906, Watkins listed himself as "editor" or "writer" in the city directories, without an office address except for his residence at 920 D. The third and final volume of Illustrated History was published in 1911.

In 1910, Watkins became historian of the Nebraska State Historical Society (NSHS), editing five volumes of the Society's Collections before his death in 1923. An examination of those issues, and Watkins' own description of his role as editor in the preface to volume 16 of 1911, show him to have been painstaking, even picky, in his pursuit of factual accuracy. He noted that many of the articles in Collections were based on personal recollections, which though valuable sources of historical material, lacked "careful checking by reliable standards, such as public records and other accepted data. Accordingly the editor has aimed to supply this need in frequent foot notes, supplementary as well as critical." Albert Watkins died in his home at 920 D Street, on November 19, 1923, after a long illness. An unusually frank obituary of Watkins, probably penned by his NSHS colleague Addison E. Sheldon, noted that "Watkins' mind was critical rather than constructive. His criticism was keen and caustic....Probably his chief literary joy was a never-ending search for little defects in any document." (Nebraska History, 1923)

Since Watkins' most lasting contribution was his role in the Illustrated History of Nebraska, it is important to examine both the worth of that publication, and Watkins' part in its creation. The value of the Illustrated History is acknowledged by James Olson in his History of Nebraska (1955, revised ed. 1966), the current standard text on state history. Olson states "The best and most detailed account of the establishment of territorial government...[and] on the political history of Nebraska during the period of admission to the Union and establishment of state government is Morton and Watkins, Illustrated History of Nebraska."

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As for Watkins' role, the Illustrated History effort commenced around 1897 under the direction of J. Sterling Morton, the Nebraska City editor, writer, arborist, and conservative Democratic political leader (the same branch of the party in which Watkins was active). According to Watkins, Morton envisioned only "a brief outline of the formal history of the territory and state," plus "histories of counties, [and] articles on special topics, including histories of the various churches and other societies and biographical sketches..." (Editor's Preface, v. I, Illustrated History). Watkins, on the other hand, "held firmly the opinion that a comprehensive and systematic history was more desirable..." (Ibid.). Watkins tellingly retitled the introduction to the final volume "Author's Preface," instead of "Editor's," writing in 1911:

When I undertook the task of constructing the text, or history proper, nothing whatever had been done toward it, so that all the preliminary research, as well as the constructive part of the work, fell upon me....in fact the only material or preparation for the history which Mr. Morton turned over to me was a vast number of biographical sketches in very crude form.

The Sheldon obituary of Watkins confirms that "Mr. Watkins did by far the larger part of the editorial work upon the Morton History and outside of special articles by well known Nebraskans, most of the narrative writing in that work." Ascribing to Watkins principal credit for this seminal state history is well founded.

Two additional issues should be addressed in assessing the significance of 920 D Street, based on its association with Watkins as an historian. The first is whether any other property is more closely associated with the significant person (Watkins), the second is whether other properties associated with early historians of Nebraska are more significant. The Watkins House was built for Albert Watkins and his family in 1887 and was occupied by him for the last thirty-six of his forty-one years in Lincoln. He lived there the entire period, 1902 through 1911, during which he wrote and edited The illustrated History of Nebraska. During the first four or five years of his involvement in that project (1902-1905), he was treasurer of an insurance company and presumably shared its office space in the First National Bank Building at 10th and O Streets. Whether Watkins conducted his historical endeavors there during that period is moot, since the building was replaced in 1910. From 1906 through 1909, Watkins' sole address in the city directories was 920 D St., and it seems likely that he did much of his writing there. From 1910 through his death in 1923, Watkins was associated with the Historical Society, then housed in the basement of the University of Nebraska Library (now referred to as Old Architecture Hall, LC13:C9-7, listed on NRHP in 1975). While Watkins presumably worked there in his final decade, his involvement (and even that of the Society as a whole) is a minor part of that building's significance, while his association with 920 D Street is clear, long-standing, and pervasive.

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Other early historians of Nebraska include Harrison Johnson (Johnson's History of Nebraska, 1880), Alfred T. Andreas (publisher of History of the State of Nebraska, 1882), and Addison E. Sheldon (Semi-Centennial History of Nebraska, 1904, and Nebraska: The Land and the People, 1931). Given the Watkins House's location in Lincoln, we might also consider A. B. Hayes and Sam. D. Cox (History of the City of Lincoln, 1889), and A. J. Sawyer (ed. of Lincoln and Lancaster County, 1916). In addition, Charles Gere, though primarily important as founder of Nebraska State Journal newspaper, also wrote articles on the early history of the state.

Harrison Johnson (1822-1885) lived in Omaha from 1854 to 1880, then in Johnstown, Brown County, for the last five years of his life. No significant extant property associated with Johnson, particularly while in Omaha, is presently known. Andreas published his Nebraska history from Chicago, and whether he lived in Nebraska, especially during the period in which his work was published, is unclear. Addison Sheldon (1861-1943) was a homesteader, newspaperman, legislator, and long-time director of the legislature's Reference Bureau, before joining NSHS around 1917. He lived at 1319 So. 23rd Street in Lincoln from the 1920s until he died there in 1943. That house, built in 1907, was demolished in 1964.

Among historians of Lincoln, Arthur B. Hayes (1860-1942) was an editor of the State Journal in the 1880s, when the early History of the City of Lincoln was written. He boarded at 441 No. 10th (not extant) during that time, then left Lincoln for Utah in 1890 and spent his final decades as an attorney in Washington, D. C. His co-author Samuel D. Cox was also a journalist, first with State Journal and then as owner-editor of the Lincoln Daily Call from 1888 to 1894. He roomed at various downtown addresses during that period, none extant. Cox settled in Scott's Bluff County in 1895 and was active in local affairs, including editorship of the Minatare Sentinel, before he was murdered in 1906. A. J. Sawyer was a Lincoln attorney and real estate developer. His large, Queen Anne style mansion at the northeast corner of 17th and F Streets stood from 1887 to 1925, when it was demolished for First Presbyterian Church. C. H. Gere lived in a large house at 849 D Street from 1892 until his death in 1904. His daughters moved the house in 1923 to 2811 So. 24th Street in Lincoln and had it extensively remodeled. The only intact property associated with an early writer of Nebraska or Lincoln history that has been identified is Albert Watkins' house at 920 D Street in Lincoln.

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A. B. Hayes and Sam. D. Cox, History of the City of Lincoln, Nebraska.
Lincoln: State Journal Co., 1889.

J. Sterling Morton and Albert Watkins, Illustrated History of Nebraska, 3 vol.
Lincoln: Western Publishing and Engraving Co., 1905-1913.

Albert Watkins, Outline of Nebraska History. Lincoln: Nebr. State Historical
Society, 1910.

Albert Watkins, "Editor's Preface," Collections of the Nebraska State
Historical Society, 16:1911.

"Death Comes to Historian," (obituary of Albert Watkins), Lincoln Star,
Nov. 19, 1923, 1:3, 9:7-8.

Addison E. Sheldon, ed., "Albert Watkins" obituary, Nebraska History, 6:4,
97-8, Oct.-Dec. 1923.

James C. Olson, History of Nebraska, 2nd ed. Lincoln and London: University of
Nebraska Press, 1966.

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The following information is the same for all seven photographs:

**Albert Watkins House, 920 D Street
Lincoln, Lancaster County, Nebraska
NEHBS# LC13:C7-791
E. Zimmer, photog./Negatives at Lincoln/Lancaster County Planning Dept.**

Photo 1 of 7
Dec. 1988, Neg. 8812:2-12
View of Watkins House from southeast, showing south
(left) and east (right) facades.

Photo 2 of 7
August 1988, Neg. 8808:3-18a
View of Watkins House from south, showing south
facade.

Photo 3 of 7
Dec. 1988, Neg. 8812:2-14
Detail of gable end of south facade of Watkins House,
from south.

Photo 4 of 7
Dec. 1988, Neg. 8812:2-4
View of carriage barn behind Watkins House,
from southeast.

Photo 5 of 7
Dec. 1988, Neg. 8812:2-29
Interior view of first floor stairhall of
Watkins House, looking west.

Photo 6 of 7
Dec. 1988, Neg. 8808:2-18
Interior view of first floor dining room
of Watkins House, looking east-northeast.

Photo 7 of 7
Dec. 1988, Neg. 8812:2-23
Detail of fireplace and mantelpiece in Watkins
House dining room, looking north.