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 Physics (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requester. The National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requester. The National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requester. The National Register of Historic Physics (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requester. The National Register of Historic Physics (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requester. The National Register of Historic Physics (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requester. The National Register of Historic Physics (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requester. The National Register of Historic Physics (National Register Bulletin 16A).

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Merrick County, Nebraska County and State

5. Classification					
Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)	Category of Property (Check only one box)	Number of Resources within Property (Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)			
[X] private [] public-local [] public-state [] public-Federal	[X] building(s) [] district [] site [] structure [] object	Contributing Noncontributing 2	sites structures objects		
Name of related multiple pro (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of N/A		Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A			
6. Function or Use					
Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)		Current Functions (Enter categories from instruction)			
Recreation & Culture: Music	Facility	Recreation & Culture: Music Facility			
7. Description					
Architectural Classificatio (Enter categories from instructions)	n	Materials (Enter categories from instructions)			
Other: Dance\Entertainmen	t Hall	foundation <u>Concrete slab and footings</u> walls <u>Wood frame</u>			
		roof Asphalt shingles other Maple wood dance floor			

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

8.	Sta	tement of Significance				
(Mai	k "x"	able National Register Criteria in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for Register listing.)	Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions.)			
[x]	A	Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patters of our history.	Entertainment/Recreation Architecture			
0	В	Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.				
[x] 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.			Period of Significance 1940-1948			
	D	Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.	Significant Dates 1940			
		a Considerations n all the boxes that apply.)				
•		ty is:				
0	Α	owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.	Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above.)			
	В	removed from its original location.	N/A			
[]	С	a birthplace or a grave.	O Housel Affiliation			
	D	a cemetery.	Cultural Affiliation N/A			
0	Ε	a reconstructed building, object, or structure.				
	F	a commemorative property.				
0		less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.	Architect/Builder C.H. Good-Architect Diamond Engineering CoBuilder			
		ive Statement of Significance the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)				
9.	Ма	jor Bibliographical References				
Bik (Cite	olio the	graphy books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one o	r more continuation sheets.)			
	pr (30	us documentation on file (NPS): eliminary determination of individual listing 6 CFR 67) has been requested.	Primary Location for Additional Data: [x] State Historic Preservation Office [] Other State agency			
0	pr	eviously listed in the National Register eviously determined eligible by the National egister	[] Federal agency[] Local government[] University			
0 0	de re	signated a National Historic Landmark corded by Historic American Buildings Survey	[] Other Name of repository:			
[]		corded by Historic American Engineering				

Riverside Park Dance Pavilion

Name of Property

Merrick County, Nebraska

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10). Geograph	ical Data			· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·		<u> </u>
Acr	eage of Pro	perty less than	one_acre				
UTI	M References	s (place additio	nal UTM references on a cor	ntinuation sheet).			
1. 2. 3.	Zone 14	Easting 587550	Northing 4549870	Zone	Easting	Northing	
				[]See conti	nuation sheet.		
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	undary Justi continuation						
11	I. Form Prep	oared By					
nan	ne/title <u>Bill C</u>	allahan, Progra	m Associate				
orga	anization Net	oraska State His	storic Preservation Office			date 8\26\98	
stre	et & number	1500 R Street			·	telephone (<u>402)- 4</u>	71-4788
city or town Lincoln					state NE	zip code <u>68501</u>	
			·				
A	dditional Do	cumentation					
Sub	omit the follow	ving items with	the completed form:				
Cor	ntinuation S	heets					
	USGS map		ute series) indicating the pro stricts and properties having	perty's location. large acreage or numerous re	sources.		
	otographs Representativ	e black and w	hite photographs of the pro	operty.			
	ditional item eck with the		for any additional items.)				
P	roperty Owr	ner					
(Co	mplete this it	em at the requ	est of the SHPO or FPO.)				
nan	ne/title <u>River</u>	side Park Asso	ciation-c\o Richard Levande	r			
stre	et & number	1730 Riverside	e Rd			telephone <u>308\946</u>	3-3537
city	or town <u>Ce</u>	ntral City				state NE	zip code <u>68826</u>

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine 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, (16 U.S.C. 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.

Riverside Park Dance Pavilion

Name of Property

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Section 7 Page 1

Description

The Riverside Park Dance Pavilion is located in Riverside Park, a private development of approximately twenty-five dwellings in Merrick County, east central Nebraska. Riverside Park is located on the Platte River, approximately three miles southeast of Central City, the Merrick County seat, and approximately fifty miles northwest of Lincoln, the state Capitol. The Pavilion is located in a pastoral area surrounded by trees, grass and the small residential development of Riverside Park. The building stands just a few yards from the Platte River bank, perpendicular to the river on a northwest-southeast axis. This nomination also includes a restroom\concession outbuilding. The two buildings are bounded on the west and north by a curving gravel road. A large grass open space is located beyond the road to the west, and a small lake is across the road to the north. In addition to the road and the Platte River on the south, the nominated area is bounded on the east by a property line demarcated by trees and shrubbery.

The Riverside Park Dance Pavilion is a one-story wood frame building constructed in 1940. The building is 118 feet long and 61 feet wide. A 12' X 29' bay on the north end of the Pavilion encloses an interior bandshell. The Pavilion has an arched roof, which terminates in overhanging eaves with exposed rafters. The Pavilion walls are punched through by unglazed wooden windows\shutters on horizontal axes which completely skirt the building at about shoulder height. The windows may be latched closed or, when in use, folded upward. On the west façade, the window shutters may be held open by attached 2X4's that extend bolt-like through metal collars attached to fixed metal poles outside the building. The shutters on the remaining facades may be held open with chains attached to the building.

The west façade also sports a small open pavilion with a concrete slab and a flat roof. The pavilion leads into the Dance Pavilion's interior through two sets of wooden double doors. Additionally, four single doors are located on all four facades. The south end of the building is recessed slightly on the east and west sides.

The interior of the Pavilion is essentially a large open space, dominated by a 94' X 54' maple dance floor. The dance floor is bordered by a 2.5' wide concrete collar which extends to the walls. Bench seats are attached to the walls above the concrete pad on the east and west (longitudinal) sides. An open 18' X 56' eating\seating area is located along the south end of the building, separated from the dance floor by a low wall. The north end of the Dance Pavilion is dominated by an enclosed 20' wide by 14' deep curved band shell. The roof is supported, remarkably, by an arched steel truss system. Installation of a steel truss system presumably eliminated the need for interior vertical supports, allowing for a large, unobstructed dance area.

The restroom\concession outbuilding is located approximately fifty feet north and perpendicular to the Pavilion and measures 21' X 35'. The outbuilding is gable-roofed with overhanging eaves and exposed rafters. The construction date of the outbuilding is unclear. It is clear, however, that it was built either at the same time or very soon after the Pavilion was completed. The architectural character of the outbuilding was obviously meant to reflect that of the Pavilion.

The Pavilion is virtually unchanged from its original construction. The only visible change to the building from its historic configuration has been the removal of two small ventilation stacks from the roof. The Pavilion was built to replace an open-air dance floor, and to provide a large, functional dance hall for Riverside Park and the surrounding area. The Riverside Park Dance Pavilion remains perfectly suited to the purpose for which it was built, and the fact of its excellent physical integrity is testimony to its simple but highly functional design.

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Name of Property

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Riverside Park Dance Pavilion

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Continuation Sheet Section 8 Page 1

Statement of Significance

The Riverside Park Dance Pavilion is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places at the local level under criteria A and C. Under criterion A, the building is eligible in the area of entertainment and recreation. The Pavilion has a significant, historic association with entertainment, diversion and recreation in Merrick and surrounding counties. The Pavilion has been known throughout much of the area as a central location for social gatherings. The Dance Pavilion was constructed to replace an outdoor dance floor that had long been a fixture in the community. The rapidity of successful fund-raising to construct the Pavilion attests to the significance the community placed on the need for this type of facility. Additionally, the sheer number of people who attended events there along with the level of local media coverage associated with its construction reflects the significance of the structure to the community. The Pavilion was constructed as part of a private facility created to provide an entertainment locus in an appealing park location. It was the centerpiece of many community events and celebrations during its period of significance, 1940-1948.

The Pavilion is also eligible under Criterion C, as it embodies the distinct characteristics of a simple dance hall. Once numerous, these dance halls are rare today, and the Pavilion is the only known example of its type in the area. The building has outstanding integrity: very little has been altered since its construction. This integrity owes much to the fact that the Pavilion's relatively simple design is perfectly suited to the purpose for which it was constructed, and for which it still serves.

CRITERION A

In October of 1920, business leaders from Central City purchased over fifty acres of land from the estate of George Howell. The area was known as Parker's Island, named after Jason Parker, popularly known as the first squatter in what would become Merrick County. The group incorporated as the Riverside Park Association. The purpose of the Association, as stated in their by-laws, was to "...improve and operate the (land) for park, playground and recreation purposes and to promote amusements thereon for the welfare of the general public without profit to said Corporation." The Association made it known to the Central City *Republican* that "Taking out articles of incorporation, by no means, was a promotion of personal gain... Any funds that may accrue from the enterprise was devoted to the maintenance and improvement that may be deemed necessary." The Riverside Park Association sold shares of stock as well as summer cabins, nearly all of which are now permanent residences. The Association often acted as a broker for cabin owners by renting their cabins during the summer months.

In October of 1921, the first dance at Riverside Park was held on a concrete slab surrounded by a fence. The park also included tennis courts, a swimming pool with water slides, playground equipment, softball and baseball diamonds, horseshoe pitching courts and a picnic area. The Park was very popular due to the dearth of public recreation facilities in the area, and because "...there were not as many cars back in the 1920's and you could not go as far away from home for your recreation as people do today. Another reason was because there was not any swimming pools in town." 6

Central City Republican. 7 October 1920

Ruth Grudzinski. Riverside Park: A Central City Landmark 1992 Unpublished monograph, P.1

Articles of Incorporation of The Riverside Park Association. Article III

Central City Republican. 21 October 1920

Letters and records of the Riverside Park Association

Ruth Grudzinski. Riverside Park: A Central City Landmark. 1992 Unpublished monograph, P.4 and quote from Mrs. Doris Bodeman in Grudzinski , P.4

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Riverside Park Dance Pavilion

Name of Property

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The Great Depression, described as a "diminution (of) ...general economic conditions," brought difficult times for Riverside Park. Park Association meeting minutes and records from 1934-1938 describe large numbers of uncollected debts and outstanding bills, and Park visitation and cabin rental was down every year between 1930 and 1940. In early 1939 the Association resolved that the business of Riverside Park should "...be deferred until a later meeting to be called at the pleasure of the President." The President of the Association apparently did not call another meeting until January of 1940.

In an extraordinary series of meetings in January and February 1940, the immediate fate of Riverside Park was decided. On February 13, after lengthy discussion, a vote was taken to attempt to keep the park open one more year, and an entirely new board was elected. The new board was given the authority to: "...(raise) finances necessary to pay all outstanding obligations and carry on the activities of the Park...or to take any other action that they may deem to be best or necessary for the interest of the Association." At the next Board meeting, two nights later, President Henry Phares presented and the Board approved the financing and construction of a new, enclosed dance pavilion.

This series of events is instructive in understanding the historic significance of the Pavilion, both as an entertainment centerpiece and as an important asset to the community. Reporting on the early 1940 Park Association board meetings, the Central City *Nonpareil* noted that dances held on the open-air concrete slab "... brought in 50-60% of the (Riverside Park) revenue, and most of that was after 6 on Friday nights." The *Nonpareil*, later discussing the Association's fundraising success in context of the Park's popularity also stated "With its reputation as the pleasure spot of Central Nebraska as the stock prospectus, (Riverside Park) is making great strides in fund raising." The *Republican* opined: "It is hoped that the people of this city and community will appreciate (the Park) enough to patronize it."

In an attempt to rally local business support for the construction of the Pavilion itself, the *Republican* reported that attendance at the Park since its opening totaled almost 440,000 people (1940 Merrick County pop. 9,354), a large proportion of which were from neighboring towns within a fifty mile radius. The *Republican* hoped: "Prospects are that the Commercial Club will assist in the financial program as the business life (sic) of the city feel the Park is one of the biggest business assets." And further: "A good many will be happy to have a fine dance floor at home so the young folks won't have to frequent a questionable place to enjoy their dancing... The projected new pavilion with fine floor will be second to none this side of Omaha." The obvious inference is that the new pavilion was seen not only as a draw for local businesses but also as a means of retaining local trade; not to mention a means of protecting the local young folk.

Financing, (including sale of Riverside Park stock and extension of credit), construction and completion of the new dance pavilion was of sufficient interest to generate front page news in the *Nonpareil* and the *Republican* for nine straight weeks from mid-May to late July. The newspapers reported an almost palpable excitement in the community during this time. From a headline account of volunteer painters: "Battle of the Sexes Results in Painted Buildings" to an amused recitation of new rules: "Probably sad news to some of the younger exponents of dancing is the recent announcement... that the jitterbug will be absolutely taboo on Friday nights" local papers breathlessly detailed the progress of the

Central City Nonpareil. 25 January 1940

bid. 15 February 1940, and; Records of the Riverside Park Association

Records of the Riverside Park Association Stockholders Meeting, January 12, 1939

Records of the Riverside Park Association, 13 February 1940, and; Central City Republican 15 February 1940.

Central City Nonpareil, 15 February 1940

¹² ibid. 14 March 1940

¹³ <u>Central City Republican</u>. 15 February, 1940

¹⁴ ibid. 14 March 1940

¹⁵ ibid.

¹⁶ ibid. 30 May 1940

¹⁷ ibid. 6 June 1940

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Riverside Park Dance Pavilion

Name of Property

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new pavilion and its projected opening. Finally, the first dance in the Pavilion was held Friday, June 7, 1940. Over one-thousand people from as far away as Kearney, Grand Island, Albion, Ravenna, York and Columbus danced to the music of Leo Pieper and his Orchestra. 18

The dedication and grand opening of the Pavilion was held the next week, June 14. Sternie Sternberg and his Orchestra played for "well over 370 couples" from five counties and seven states who attended the dedication and grand opening of "...the largest and finest maple dance floor west of Omaha." 19 Crowds continued to flock to the new Pavilion, and on June 28 "All redheads, even if it's dyed..." were admitted for free to the Riverside Park Pavilion dance. 20

Excitement surrounding the Pavilion's opening reached a fever pitch with the Fourth of July holiday. The Pavilion was the centerpiece of a day that included: "...swimming, music (three bands and nickelodeon), playground, tables and stoves for picnics, concessions, a parade, baseball, horseshoe tournaments, races (both foot and novelty), tug-of-war, swimming races and the Central City Municipal Band..."²¹; all for ten cents admission. To top the day off, Elton Worth and his band played in the new Riverside Park Dance Pavilion: "...the huge pavilion will handle just about as many people as will care to dance..."²². "The Celebration was...destined to be the finest Central City has ever known...", as over five thousand people entered the Park and over seven hundred couples purchased dance tickets. ²³

Although the initial excitement of the construction and opening of the Pavilion eventually dissipated, the building remained a popular gathering place throughout the 1940's. At least once and usually twice weekly dances were advertised in the local newspapers. Wally Wallace, Earl Gardner, Skippy Anderson, Gene Pieper, Sammy Haven, Riley Smith and their Orchestras as well as Tiny Little, Hutch Miller and John Holub and their Bands were all popular regional or local groups that played at the Pavilion. Additionally, the "nickelodeon" apparently got a good workout on many evenings when live entertainment was not provided.

CRITERION C

The architecture of the Pavilion, although modest, is significant in its own right. No specific historic building inventory of dance\entertainment halls has been completed in Nebraska. Anecdotal evidence is that dance halls were quite numerous throughout the Pavilion's period of significance. Most dance halls were owned and operated either by private clubs or fraternal organizations, and many organizations included ballrooms in larger, multi- purpose buildings. As a matter of reference, the Riverside Park Dance Pavilion has always been owned by a private, not-for profit organization, and serves no other function or use than as a dance hall.

These buildings were generally characterized by large open spaces, high ceilings and large seating capacities. Most also had some facilities for concessions, and many were located in rural or edge-of-town locations. Anecdotal evidence indicates that, in the context of this type of structure, the Pavilion is architecturally quite modest. There is virtually no ornamentation (with the exception of the overhanging eaves and exposed rafters) and relatively little seating in the building. The Pavilion has only a very small indoor "lounge" area and a somewhat larger, connected outdoor pavilion that may be used for seating or congregating. However the general configuration of the Pavilion is typical for this type of building: a large central dance floor and surrounding seating arrangement.

Of note, the enclosed bandshell located at the north end of the Pavilion is an interesting element: a more typical

¹⁸ Central City Nonpareil. 13 June 1940

Central City Republican. 20 June 1940

Central City Republican. 27 June 1940

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ibid. 4 July 1940

²³ ibid. 11 July 1**940**

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arrangement would be a stage-like structure located centrally along one of the longer walls. It is possible this arrangement was not utilized in order to maximize the number of windows that could be opened in the building. Also of note: the steel roof-truss system is somewhat unique in such a simple building. A short note from architect C.H. Good to the Park Association congratulates them on their foresight because "...wood trusses are apt to shrink and cause trouble in the future."²⁴ More practically, the roof truss allows for a completely open dance floor, with no need for vertical supports that would interfere with jitterbugging dancers. The steel trusses were apparently an extravagance the Association could barely afford: increasingly curt letters from the Sonken-Galamba Iron, Steel and Metals Corporation in Kansas City request payment for the trusses through October of 1940.²⁵

In the Nebraska State Historic Preservation Office's 1992 historic buildings survey of Merrick County, no dance\entertainment halls were recorded, including the Pavilion nominated herein. It is possible that the current somewhat remote and isolated location of the Riverside Park Dance Pavilion prevented the NeHBS consultant from actually finding the building. Riverside Park, once a center of entertainment activity, has become primarily a private residential community. The Pavilion is the solitary quasi-public facility in the subdivision. The swimming pool, horseshoe pits, playground equipment, ball fields and picnic areas are all gone. Only the Dance Pavilion remains: still in its historic, beautiful location overlooking the Platte River.

The Pavilion represents a distinct type of construction through its architecture. Simply designed, the Pavilion nevertheless illustrates its function as a dance hall through that design. The Pavilion has exceedingly high architectural integrity: the only significant change in the building since the end of its period of significance is the removal of two small ventilation stacks from the roof of the building. Although with much less frequency and smaller crowds than when it was built, the Pavilion continues to serve as it was intended: a dance hall for special events and family gatherings in the area.

The Riverside Park Dance Pavilion is also a locally rare example of a public dance\entertainment hall. During the 1940's the Pavilion (and Riverside Park) served a great community need, and was a well known center for social gatherings. The significance of the Pavilion is reflected by the enormous interest in its construction, the popularity of the entertainment that took place there, and by the fact that its construction quite probably rescued Riverside Park from oblivion just as the Depression was ending. Retrospectively, the Pavilion was built during an almost poignant period. The country was just emerging from the depths of economic depression, and had yet to face the horrors of a second world war. Community gatherings seemed a natural and vital part of living. The Riverside Park Dance Pavilion gives testimony to the ability of even the most simple building to mark important moments in our history.

Undated letter from C.H. Good to E.H. Phares, President, Riverside Park Association.

²⁵Letters dated July 18-October 4, 1940 from Sonken-Galamba Corp. to P.S. Heaton, Treasurer, Riverside Park Association.

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Continuation Sheet Section 9 Page 1

Name of Property

Merrick County, Nebraska

County and State

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Central City Nonpareil	15 February 1940 7 March 1940 14 March 1940 28 March 1940 25 April 1940
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	11 January 1940
	25 January 1940
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	14 March 1940
	28 March 1940
	16 May 1940
	30 May 1940
	6 June 1940
	13 June 1940
	20 June 1940
	27 June 1940
	4 July 1940
	11 July 1940
	27 July 1940

- Grudzinski, Ruth. "Riverside Park: A Central City Landmark" Unpublished monograph, 1992. Copy in files of the Nebraska State Historic Preservation Office.
- Articles of Incorporation of the Riverside Park Association, Located in uncatalogued records of the Riverside Park Association.
- Minutes of meetings of the Riverside Park Association Board and Stockholders meetings, June, 1921-March 1940. One Volume. Located in uncatalogued records of the Riverside Park Association.
- Letter to P.S. Heaton, Secretary\Treasurer of the Riverside Park Association from C.H. Good, Architect. Located in uncatalogued records of the Riverside Park Association. Copy in files of the Nebraska State Historic Preservation Office.
- Letters to P.S. Heaton, Secretary\Treasurer of the Riverside Park Association from Sonken-Galamba Corporation. 6\18\40, 8\26\40, 9\16\40,9\24\40 and 10\4\40. Located in uncatalogued records of the Riverside Park Association. Copies in files of the Nebraska State Historic Preservation Office.
- Uncatalogued records, letters and memorabilia of the Riverside Park Association. In possession of Richard Levander, 1998 Secretary\Treasurer of the Association.

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Rivers	ide	Park	Dance	Pavil	lion
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Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property is located in an unplatted rural residential subdivision. The subdivision is located on approximately 90 acres in the SEC 1\4 of Section 14, TWP 13 North, Range 6 East in Merrick County.

The nominated property is an irregular rectangular parcel approximately 200 x100 feet. The southeastern boundary of the property is the Platte River, the northwestern and western boundary is the center point of Riverside Road, and the eastern boundary is a property line demarcated by a tree and shrubbery line.

Boundary Justification

Boundary includes parcel of land historically associated with the Riverside Park Dance Pavilion.