



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# 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 National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. 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.

## 1. Name of Property

Historic name Nebraska School for the Deaf

Other names/site number DO09:0336-001, -025-032, -034-036

Name of related multiple property listing N/A

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

## 2. Location

Street & Number 3223 North 45th Street

City or town Omaha

State Nebraska

County Douglas

Not for publication  Vicinity

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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 at the following level(s) of significance:  national  statewide  local

Applicable National Register Criteria:  A  B  C  D

SHPO/Director

5/22/19

Date

Signature of certifying official/Title

Nebraska State Historical Society

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of Commenting Official

Date

Title

State of Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

## 4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register.
- determined eligible for the National Register.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Keeper

6-10-2019

Date of Action

Nebraska School for the Deaf  
**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	
<u>11</u>	<u>0</u>	Buildings
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Sites
<u>12</u>	<u>0</u>	Structures
		Objects
		Total

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

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions** (Enter categories from instructions.)

EDUCATION/school  
EDUCATION/education-related

**Current Functions** (Enter categories from instructions.)

SOCIAL/civic  
EDUCATION/school  
RECREATION AND CULTURE/museum  
COMMERCE/TRADE/restaurant

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification** (Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE 19<sup>TH</sup> AND 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY REVIVALS/Late Gothic Revival  
LATE 19<sup>TH</sup> AND 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY REVIVALS/Tudor Revival  
MODERN MOVEMENT/ Mid-Century Modern

**Materials** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property:

FOUNDATION: Concrete, Brick; WALLS: Brick, Stone: Sandstone, Concrete, Glass, Wood; ROOF: Terracotta, Asphalt

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**Name of Property****County and State****Description**

**Summary Paragraph** (Briefly describe the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

The Nebraska School for the Deaf is located at 3223 North 45<sup>th</sup> Street, Omaha, Nebraska. The campus is situated on rolling hills with its high point on the property's west, sloping toward the east. The campus is surrounded by the North Omaha district, Benson to the west, and Midtown to the south. The campus can be split into two sub-districts based on the time frame of construction and architectural style of the buildings in each: the 'northern' campus contains buildings that were predominantly constructed after World War II in the Mid-Century Modern style while the 'southern' campus contains buildings built during the 1920s and 1930s. The southern campus dominant voice is that of Gothic Revival, more specifically Collegiate Gothic. However, each building incorporates the characteristics of Collegiate Gothic in different ways and in cases mixes architectural styles.

**Narrative Description** (Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable.)

The campus has a rectangular footprint comparable to the size of four to six residential city blocks. The resources are concentrated in the middle of the campus creating green space on the west and east ends. The east field is a grass lawn used historically for school sporting events. The western field is smaller and dotted with large, aged trees throughout. The primary entrance is through the west field on an angled drive with parking spaces. Lining the entrance road on the east is a collection of large trees planted annually by the graduating class. The buildings are linked by a network of sidewalks and small access roads with large trees and greenspace filling in the remainder.

Supplementary access roads work with the primary entrance drive to create an effective vehicle circulation system that minimizes interior campus traffic. One north-south access road is adjacent to the Primary Building and Gym. On the south end the same road accesses the Industrial Arts, Laundry, and Power House building cluster with a small parking lot for sporting events.

***INDUSTRIAL ARTS BUILDING (DO09:0336-001)*****1931, Collegiate Gothic**

The Industrial Arts Building is situated on the east end of the courtyard. The western façade is the Industrial Arts Building's primary façade. The façade showcases features characteristic of Collegiate Gothic including the finial adorning the allusion to a gothic spire sloping roof, scalloping designates the split vertical plane from the sloping roof planes, and a muted hood molding incorporated into the lancet style entry ornamentation. The entry is differentiated from the majority of the building by creating the allusion of a pavilion further emphasized by material selections and utilization of established Gothic Revival systems of characteristic cathedral entries. In a Gothic cathedral, the narthex was typically a distinct volume used to further separate the nave from the outside as well as serve as an indication to point of entry. The façade of the narthex generally had three elements vertically striated. A large ornamental entry, the middle section that contained glass and often varied in size, and finally an independent visual pediment to help separate the façade from the primary structure. The Industrial Arts Building adapts this formula. The façade includes all three vertical elements. However, perceivable volumetric qualities of a narthex are replaced by ornamental brick

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work in the form of a pavilion as an allusion to a quality of volume. The foyer behaves in some ways like the narthex of a Gothic cathedral, but its volumetric nature is embedded into rather than extruded from the major building.

Including the entry the west façade beyond the pavilion is comprised of five bays symmetrical from the center. The distal bays have larger four window groupings while the two proximal bays have two window groupings. Each window group is wrapped in a similar sandstone window surround with a quoin effect on the vertical edges. The hip roof visible above is dressed in orange arched profile terracotta shingles.

The north and south facades are similar. The primary difference is the south façade has a minor entrance whereas the north does not. Both facades have a three-bay sequence. The distal bays have two window groupings with similar sandstone window surround, while the central bay has two windows but are articulated independently through independent sandstone surrounds per window. The ornamental scalloping continues from the west façade under the roof plane. The terracotta shingles are again visible above. The north and south facades gradually expose the basement due to the west-east slope of the site. The exposed basement wall has a small opening vertically aligned with the eastern bay. The window does not have similar stylistic ornamentation as the previous windows.

The east façade is three stories due to the west-east slope of the site. The second and first stories are comprised of five bays, however they are not symmetrical from a central bay and there is subtle variation in window placement between the first and second story on the north end. Window groupings are wrapped in sandstone window surrounds with a quoin effect on the vertical edges. An exterior stair has been added. The stair starts from a central opening on the second story and terminates at the north edge of the basement. The basement is differentiated from the stories above by a horizontal brick work trim and is stripped of the ornamentation specific to the collegiate gothic style. The basement level has two central service entrances with overhead doors accessible from the north south access road adjacent to the east façade.

The internal layout of the building is fundamentally different than Gothic cathedrals which makes the inversion possible. From a functional standpoint the Gothic cathedral needed a separate volume to filter out audible and visual noise so that the narthex could have large open floor plans with expansive vertical space. The Industrial Arts Building is *raumplan* style, which creates compartmentalized spaces separated by hallways to ensure limited audible and visual noise eliminating the need for an additional appendage volume. This is common of the Collegiate Gothic style on campuses with a definite budget.

The previously mentioned material change on the façade of the Industrial Arts Building serves to set up an east-west axis that provides a directional quality to the campus as it would have existed during the 1930s. The materiality of the entry establishes an axial hierarchy, important in campus planning for multiple reasons. First of which, it creates a very readable, distinct entry to the Industrial Arts Building from a distance. Meaning, the change in materiality isn't a superficial application to the west façade, but a thoughtful adaptation to achieve the same effect without simple replication. In terms of the Nebraska School for the Deaf campus, the imaginary axis acts as a parallel bisector to the outdoor commons. Associating such a strong linear relationship helps make a visual and implied connection

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between the southeastern cluster of buildings (Industrial Arts Building, Powerhouse Building, Laundry, Classroom Building) and the northeastern cluster (Administration Building, and Boys Dormitory).

***CLASSROOM BUILDING (DO09:0336-028)*****1928 with 1955 addition, Tudor Revival with Collegiate Gothic elements**

The building was designed by architecture firm Leo A. Daly, and it had a two-phase construction plan. The first phase, completed in 1928, included the current central gabled volume and everything to the west of the volume associated with the gable. The addition includes everything to the east of the current central gabled volume and was completed in 1955. The plan consists of three minor pavilions spaced equidistant along the primary central volume. The minor pavilions run perpendicular to the spine of the primary volume. The roof including the addition are dressed in an orange flat profile terracotta shingle. The building utilizes common brick, sandstone window surrounds, and red timbers. The primary entrance is on the north façade and is adjacent to the southern edge of the large grass lawn. The north facade is subdivided by each of the perpendicular pavilions, and each pavilion has an independent gabled roof profile to help identify entrances and areas of circulation. The main entrance is contained under what is the now central perpendicular gable. The first-floor facade is detailed in Gothic Revival style. The door is inset under a lancet shaped stone hood molding with label stops. Flanking both sides of the entrance underneath the label stops are ornate Gothic Revival metal lanterns. The second level is predominantly detailed with Tudor Revival features. A portion of the second-floor facade jetties out over the first floor. Consoles support the bottom transom of the extrusion. The extrusion rests on the transom and the decorative vertical half timbering is separated by panels of herringbone brickwork.

Including the three pavilions, the north façade is composed of nine bays, symmetrical from the central pavilion and has the same fenestration across the first and second stories. The bay proximal to the central pavilion has a singular window. The remaining bays all have windows grouped into sequences of four. Sandstone window surrounds with a quoining effect on the vertical edges dress all the windows not on the entrance facades. The original western and later eastern pavilions hide the roof gable behind crow-stepped gables, their edges dressed with decorative sandstone.

West and east facades are detailed in a similar fashion to north facade. Entry is demarcated by a pavilion differing from the north facade in that the contained points of entry are perpendicular to primary pavilion axis. The second story is articulated independently of the first through the use of decorative half-timbering, herringbone brick work, and maroon consoles creating the allusion to a difference in depth between the first and second story. The first level incorporates a similar rectilinear hood molding with label stops, found on the north façade, to demarcate entry. The eastern facade has an exposed basement due to the slope of the site where the western does not.

The south facade continues the window bay sequence found on the north façade. The fenestration pattern is similar to the north façade except the single window bay is now situated next to the end pavilions and central bay has an irregular fenestration pattern. None of the windows have ornamental surrounds. Located between the central bay and the eastern pavilion an unarticulated stair gives access to the basement level.

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**Name of Property****County and State*****BOYS DORM BUILDING (D009:0336-027)*****1934, Collegiate Gothic; Mid-Century Modern addition**

The Boys Dorm as it exists today is composed of two primary volumes arranged in a "T" shape rotated ninety degrees clockwise. From a plan view the north-south volume is the original boys dorm constructed in the 1920s. The volume running east-west is the later addition constructed in the 1970s. The original building is Collegiate Gothic. The later addition is Mid-Century Modern. Considerate material selections were made so the addition compliments the original building. The building is situated so that both the original building and its addition lie far enough west on the site so it sits atop the predominant west-east slope of the site. No radical earthwork or leveling was necessary, and all building faces read proportionally similar.

The eastern facade is the primary façade of the Boys Dorm and is adjacent to the western edge of the grass lawn. The building is two stories and a half story of the basement visible. The stone molding on the facade alludes to the location of the primary floor. The east facade is subdivided into five bays. The central and end bays allude to three volumetric pavilions with two flat bays contained between the three volumes. This is done in part with an offset in the finish surface of the pavilions as well as the face of the pavilions continuing past the cornice and terminating in way that alludes to the end profile of a gabled roof. The windows on these profiles are grouped into series of three per floor, and share one large sandstone window surround. The windows are articulated as independent openings with inside the surround with a quoin effect on the vertical edges. The windows of the interior bays are spaced further apart and only have a minor sandstone window apron, with no complete surround. The roof is dressed in a curved profile orange terracotta shingle visible between the gable profiles.

The first story and a half of the central bay has an ornate stonework entry that surrounds the entrance. The entirety of the stonework is contained horizontally by two vertical spire protrusions on the edges of the pavilion face. Between the two spires above the door is a blank rectangular pediment. A single door is flanked by two sidelights with a transom window that extends over both the door and the sidelights. All the fenestration contained within the stonework has a maroon wood trim.

The north facade of the building is divided into three equal bays. The central bay has a slender gable profile that continues past the frieze. Centered within is a single door with a six-pane glass pattern. Above the door a singular tall central window. A band of stone molding continues from the eastern facade across the north and wraps over the door before returning to the original horizontal datum. The only difference between north and south facade is the south door is flanked by two windows on the first and third bay on the first floor.

The north façade of the Boys Dorm addition is comprised of five bays. The eastern bay, the place where the addition joins the original building, is articulated as separate from the other four bays. The eastern bay has a set of glass double doors trimmed with black frames contained under flat roof extending beyond the façade. Above the covered entry is a single window, with a subtle soldier style brick work surround. The remaining four bays each employ the same fenestration. Two larger windows per floor for the first and second floor and a smaller square window for the half-revealed basement all vertically and horizontally aligned in a grid.

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The west Façade of the Boys Dorm addition reads as two volumes. The frontal volume is asymmetrically positioned in relation to the large volume behind it. The frontal volume has a single column of three windows aligned closely to the northern edge. Partially visible from the southern edge of the smaller volume is a flat roof plane marking entry.

The southern façade is comprised of six bays. The four central bays read as a continuous surface where the distal bays are offset from the primary surface. The recessed western bay contains a single metal panel door with a large sidelight window under a simple cantilevered flat roof. The recessed eastern bay is the only part of the building where visible earthwork has been done. A small channel has been carved to allow a ramp to connect to the basement door contained in the bay. The eastern bay of the major façade has an irregular fenestration pattern but still adheres to the established horizontal vertical lines. The next bay to the west has no windows, and the remaining two bays employ the same fenestration as the north addition façade.

***POWER HOUSE (DO09:0336-030)*****1930, Collegiate Gothic**

The Power House is positioned perpendicular to the west-east slope with the gable roof with spine running north south. The north and south facades have multileveled, crow-stepped parapets walls. Earth work has been done on the site so that the north facade has a terraced profile while the south is a continuous profile. The south facade is in parallel with an earthen retaining wall that allows for vehicle traffic on the south end of the campus separated from the buildings. The north and south facades are subdivided by four buttresses. The buttresses taper in at a large, angled stone. After the taper the buttresses perform more like a pilaster. The top of each pilaster is capped with a quoin block with a repeated incised linear shape. The geometry of the incised shape looks like that of a simple five-line house profile. The buttresses start at the edges, splitting the crow-stepped faces into three bays. Within each bay are three large industrial-style, rectilinear windows set on large sandstone sills. Directly above the large industrial windows (split by a thin but noticeable transom) is an industrial fan light with a further divided mullion pattern. Near the crest of the north and south planes are roundels with a wagon wheel and cross mullion pattern. The roundels are set within a wedged brick roundel with sandstone keystones at the cardinal extents of the cruciform wagon wheel mullions. The north facade has a door fit flush beneath the sill of the western window along its eastern boundary. A second door lies beneath the eastern window.

The west facade is subdivided into five bays by six buttresses. Within the six bays a similar window composition follows as on the north and south facades. The north most bay on the west facade has been altered. In line with the five bays are five cylindrical metal chimneys positioned on the crest off the roof slope. The slope of the roof is exposed on the west facade. The entirety of the roof is dressed in orange, arched profile terracotta shingle. Rectilinear brick corbeling exists under the roof overhang. The east façade has the same bay sequence as the western façade. The fenestration on the second level differs only that the central window has been removed and filled with bricks. The now fully exposed basement has a service entrance in the southern most bay and the second bay in from the north edge. The central bay has a large cylindrical metal stack that continues up past the roof line and has a small wooden door to its north. The remaining bays have irregular fenestration and employ tall narrow windows.

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**Name of Property****County and State*****LAUNDRY BUILDING (DO09:0336-031)*****Collegiate Gothic**

The Laundry Building is adjacent to the Industrial Arts Building eastern facade and the northeast corner of the Powerhouse building. The Laundry Building runs north-south and has a gable roof dressed with arched profile orange terracotta shingles. The building has a slightly larger east façade than west due to the sites slope, but the relatively small scale of the Laundry Building does not create a second floor.

The primary façade is the southern façade. A small, freestanding shed sits in front of the eastern edge of the southern façade. The shed does not have a permanent foundation and thus it is not counted here as a distinct resource. The small shed was a minor temporary addition that sits in the parking lot currently and does not warrant significance within the historic district. The southern façade has a crow stepped common red brick gable profile that continues past and conceals the roofline. The south façade has three implied bays through the use of materials and window placement. The central bay is indicated by a large arched sandstone pediment with a service door beneath. The distal bays are symmetrical from the central bay. Both contain a single large steel mullion panel window with subtle soldier brick transoms.

The western façade is comprised of four bays and three interior buttresses and the gable profiles on the north and south facades visually enclosing the surface. The two central bays have a similar fenestration pattern; two windows articulated independently with the brick wall surface continued between the windows. The distal bays have a singular centered window. All the windows have a soldier brick style transom, and an angled soldier style brick sill. Unique to the Laundry Building, the western and eastern facades contain a mix of rough-cut bricks with the common brick.

***ADMINISTRATION BUILDING (DO09:0336-029)*****1959, Mid-Century Modern**

The Administration Building is located farthest west on the central east-west axis. In plan it is similar to a capital "T" rotated ninety degrees clockwise. The building is two stories with a half basement exposed. The western façade of the Administration Building is adjacent to the campus's primary avenue. The Administration building was designed by architecture firm Cecil Martin and Associates and completed in 1959. Post 1959, The Administration Building was the first building visitors, students, and parents would see entering the campus. The administration building is unique among all the other Mid-Century Modern buildings that follow. Where the other buildings employ a white concrete frame structure, the Administration Building is less expressive and is dressed almost entirely in a modest, slightly darker, red brick with sandstone accents.

The western facade is composed of two volumes. A smaller volume in the front contains the main entrance. Centered on the in the western façade of the small volume is a large central window flanked on either side by glass doors with silver mullions, with a slender transom window above all. The doors and window utilize the same silver mullions. A simple rectilinear sandstone surround wraps around the grouping. A small flat roof overhangs the entrance volume on all sides. A steel fascia articulates the roof as a separate horizontal element from the volume below. The Administration Building forgoes an ornate entablature and uses simple independent metal letters above the entry to identify the building. The larger volume beyond is split into three bays by a minor finish surface displacement in the center.



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The two lateral bays contain no windows or ornamentation. The central bay has a single grouping of three windows wrapped in a sandstone surround.

The southern facade is comprised of multiple volumes. The intersection of the primary north-south and east-west volume create the two primary faces, with smaller volumes filling in the concave corner created by the intersection on the west side. The face of the north-south volume has a central, multi-level grouping of windows above a door on the first floor. A smaller single-story volume is set back from that face approximately two feet. It contains two glass doors with silver mullions, a small central window between the doors, and shared transom window above connecting all. A vertical volume offset six feet from the edge connects the single-story space with the multilevel north south volume. The east facade is two stories with a half-level basement comprised of eight bays. On the southern side a bay is set back from the primary building surface roughly four feet. The north end of the façade has a similar volumetric setback with a covered entrance in the recess. The central five bays of the eastern façade employ the same fenestration pattern: window groupings of three with a shared sandstone sill accent across the second, first, and half exposed basement.

The northern facade is similar to the south. On the north-south volume the window and door details are the same. The facade of the east west volume repeats the triple-window groupings across both levels as the south face but does not have an entrance. The north face does have access to the lower level from the outside via a partial staircase running parallel to the east-west volume.

***PRIMARY SCHOOL BUILDING (DO09:0336-026)*****1967, Mid-Century Modern**

The Primary Building is located centrally on the site. It is the northern edge that separates the buildings built in the early twentieth century from those built in the middle of the twentieth century. The building was designed by Martin Money and Associates and accommodated a variety of needs for the school. From plan view, the western portion forms a separate ring with a central courtyard. The eastern wings are slightly offset inward from the east-west portions of the courtyard building. The eastern additions create a courtyard enclosed on three sides, open on the east. The main building axis runs parallel to the west-east sloping site. To reduce the effect of the drastic elevation change, the building is split into sections that terrace along the primary axis.

The western façade has a single story, split into seven bays. The bays are identified visually by the equidistant vertical white concrete pillars that run to the top of the roofline. Bays are visually reinforced by a black metal flashing that runs between each of the vertical concrete pillars. Roughly two feet from the top of the white concrete pillars a horizontal white concrete beam runs between pillars to visually unify the facade. The fenestration pattern follows an A-B-C-A-B-C sequence. The base bay is subdivided into five portions, four of which are even and the last is roughly two-thirds of the typical subdivision. The sequence starts with a metal door with a transom window above. Immediately flanking the door on the right-hand side is a grouping of three windows divided by shared vertical mullions. The facade mirrors the fenestration pattern of one bay to the next and then repeats the sequence.

The north facade of the Primary Building shifts from single height on the west to double height on the east end as it runs parallel with the west-east slope. The horizontal white concrete beam continues

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from the west facade across the westernmost volume of the north facade. The visual split observable in plan (courtyard volume and two linear additions on the east of the courtyard) is readable across the north facade. Where the courtyard volume terminates the addition is set back roughly 18 feet inward from finish surface and is reset as a single height space. The eastern volume transitions to a two-story space as it runs parallel with the slope of the site creating the terraced effect.

The western portion of the north facade continues the seven-bay sequence of the west facade. The fenestration pattern is less visually similar and typically has two windows of equal size centered in the bay on both stories when capable. The eastern portion has four bays, one of which is a single story, the other three are two story. The single-story bay is subdivided equally into four segments. The western segment contains a recessed entrance under the reset horizontal concrete beam. The other three subdivisions have singular windows centered horizontally and aligned vertically to the top beam. The second entrance is contained in a narrow double height bay, framed between to the white concrete verticals. It is subdivided with three large windows on the second level, and two smaller windows and the door on the lower level.

The eastern facade is symmetrical. Two identical building volumes flank a central outdoor plaza. Visible above the plaza is an outdoor space that connects the western end of the two symmetrical volumes and beyond that courtyard the triple-height facade of the western volume. The facades of the end are framed as single double height bays, with four windows on the lower level, between white columns. The interior facades that front the plaza are double-story with three bays the easternmost being offset outwards five feet. The eastern bay has a three by two fenestration grid with the lower western corner exchanging a window for door. The central and western bays also have a three by two fenestration grid with all the openings centered around the column that divides the bay.

The southern facade is similar visually similar to the northern except for how it addresses the sloping ground plane. The south elevation is adjacent to the large lawn space, causing the use of a different grading technique. Where on the north face the ground moves down in terraced portions, the earth that meets the south side is smooth and linear. On the eastern portion of the south facade where the elevation change is most prominent, a large, hidden retaining wall is used to make the eastern entry accessible without disrupting the lawn.

***GYMNASIUM / POOL BUILDING (DO09:0336-032)*****1965, Mid-Century Modern**

The Gymnasium / Pool Building shares the central east-west axis with Primary Building and is the building farthest east on the central axis. Beyond the Gymnasium / Pool Building is a large grass field that would have been used as a multi-use sports field. In plan view the building is largely symmetrical. A large central cubic volume is flanked on the north and south by smaller volumes that run parallel along the entire edge of the larger central cuboid volume. The small edge volumes are perpendicularly bisected by smaller rectilinear volumes. A rectangular volume runs parallel to the central volumes western edge. Smaller tributary volumes wrap around the western edge to the north and south connecting all the smaller volumes into a ring shape open entirely on the east side. The site slopes away from the building on the north and south edges while maintaining the dominant west-east slope present throughout the entire site.

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The architecture employs the same white concrete frame with brick-panel logic seen in the Primary School Building. The central volume is three levels and is the visual focal point compared to the ring of volumes that surround it on the north, west, and south sides. The roof of the central volume has been designed to articulate the bays of the primary volume below. It does this by continuing the vertical column lines onto the roof overhang and fills in the space between with an opaque glass tinted blue. All roofs are articulated as separate of the volumes beneath throughout through the use of large overhangs with thick fascia materials.

The eastern facade is the most unique amongst the four. The central cubic volume extends past the subsidiary volumes and is in the visual front. The central volume is lofted onto twelve columns with clearance of roughly fifteen feet beneath creating a portico facing the grass sports field. The face of the lofted volume has five large bays with no windows. The facade beneath the portico is split into seven bays. Five bays are contained under the portico and one flanks either side outside the portico. The bays beneath the portico have a single continuous band of windows that run beneath a horizontal white beam. The windows do not have articulated mullions. The bays outside the portico have no windows and on the lateral edge have an entry embedded approximately twelve feet into the volume.

The volumes continue out laterally from the portico, receding from the most prominent east façade. The volumes that flank the lateral entrances are double height and has a single full bay and a half bay on the outward side. The half-sized bay has eight opaque blue tinted glass windows in a single column with thin horizontal mullions separating panes of glass.

The north and south elevations are the relatively the same. The north and south facades differ only in which mechanical systems are visible, site grading, and the slight variation in articulation of fenestration. The volume perpendicular to the central volume is a single height with single bay with no windows adoring its northern face. The positioning of the ventral volume is in alignment with the central bay of the large cuboid behind. Exclusive to the north façade, the primary cubic volume beyond has four bays with similar opaque blue glass. This is done for indirect lighting and natural ventilation. Beyond the central perpendicular volume is the small volume that runs parallel to the edge of the central volume. The edge volumes maintain the same elevation height as the perpendicular volume. It is split into five bays that share alignment with the bays of the central volume. The bays have different fenestration patterns based on elevation. The fenestration is articulated as an entire bay further subdivided into four horizontal band, the bottom, third, and top are the same blue opaque glass as on the central roof. The second band is a series of four operable ribbon windows. The western bay has a slightly higher independent roofline. The higher roofline continues around the edge and makes up the roof line of the western volume.

The west facade has been altered the most compared to all the others. The vertical surfaces surrounding the corner entrances are clad with a modern, black wall-covering material. The rest of the exterior of the expansive building retains its character from the period of significance.

***CARRIAGE HOUSE (DO09:0336-035)*****Collegiate Gothic**

The Carriage House is in the northwest corner of the campus and is the oldest original building on the campus today, however exact date of completion is unknown. The Carriage House is oriented in a

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north-south direction with a simple gable roof dressed in arched profile orange terracotta shingles. The single-story building is built in an area of the campus with a minor slope with highpoint south to low point north. Paved access to the building exists on both the east and south sides. The Carriage House material selection is unlike the other Collegiate Gothic buildings on the campus. The building utilizes a similar common red brick, but uses a white wood trim as accent. The white color of the mortar between the common brick has blended with the brick over time and now creates a more monolithic reading of the brick walls compared to the other Collegiate Gothic buildings.

The north and south façades of the Carriage House are very similar. Both facades are articulated as a simplified gable profile, with crow steps at the borders of the roof and a single rectilinear bay below. An allusion to minor crow steps along the roof slant are created through the use of subtle white wood insets. Centered under the apex of the roof is a large window opening that has been boarded up with white sheet wood. Both gable profiles are subdivided below the origin of the pitch by horizontal piece of white wood trim and immediately below that a horizontal stripe of header bond brick, a horizontal strip of soldier bond brick, and another horizontal stripe of header bond brick. The bay below the gable is flanked by red brick quoins. Two windows are spaced equidistant from the center of the bay and are now covered with painted white wood. There is subtle variation in window placement from the center point between the north and south facades. The brick work on the western corner of the south façade has deteriorated slightly.

The western façade has deteriorated the most heavily of all the buildings on the campus. The southern half of the west façade is a mix of completely collapsed walls to missing the finish surface brick. The roof on the southern portion of the roof on the western façade has caved in but is still relatively intact. There is evidence that a parapet wall concealed where the roof met the exterior walls. There are two visible window openings, a visible door opening on the northern bounds of the façade none of which are covered. The eastern façade has similar conditions to the western. The terracotta shingles have been entirely stripped on the southern half of the roof and the parapet wall has also collapsed in various places. Two larger service entries are centered on the façade, one of which is sealed and the other is not.

***HOUSE (DO09:0336-034)***

The house on the north edge of campus was constructed by students of the Nebraska School for the Deaf in the mid-1960s. The house sits on a portion of the site that runs from highpoint south west to low point north creating an abnormal site condition. The house is oriented so the crest of the simple gable roof runs southwest by north east. The resultant facades vary in levels exposed above and below grade as a result of the site condition. The house is a single story with a basement level. The basement level and the first story are clad in different materials as well as finished in different colors. The basement level is built out of CMU blocks painted white with a white mortar joint. The first story is covered in a horizontal wood clapboard siding finished in a dark beige. The roof is dressed in an orange flat profile asphalt shingle.

The eastern façade is the primary façade of the house and is comprised of two bays. The northern bay of the east façade fully exposes the basement due to the slope of the site creating a two story reading. The northern bay contains a garage stall where the full basement is exposed and small exterior stair case running parallel to the eastern face connects the drive way leading up to the garage to the front

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porch contained in the southern. The CMU basement wall contains a small window near the smaller southern edge of the northern bay. On the ground floor the northern bay has two window groupings. The northern window is a single operable window and the southern is a set of two operable windows. Both groupings of windows are enclosed with white trim and flanked by white shutters. The eastern wall is recessed under the pitched roof to create a covered porch on the southern bay. Towards the northern edge of the south bay the small staircase changes directions and runs perpendicular to the building face and terminates at the front door of the house. The door is dressed in similar white trim as the windows. A large operable two window grouping occupies the southern half of the south bay. The porch is roughly four feet deep and sits three feet off the ground.

The southern façade is a single bay and has a simple gable roof profile with roof overhang. Roughly eighteen inches of the basement is exposed due to the sloping of the site. The basement walls are still visibly white wall CMU. Two small square windows are set inside the CMU and the top edge of the windows is aligned with the beginning of the beige clapboard that signifies the ground floor. A small stair case runs parallel to the south façade on the west end and terminates in a landing with a similar door to the primary entrance. There are two independent operable windows positioned irregularly on the portion of the façade relating to the first floor. A small attic ventilation grate can be seen near the crest of the roofline.

The western and northern facades are simple, and have no articulated bays or variety in surface. The western façade maintains the articulation of ground level and basement through the use of white CMU for the basement and beige clapboard siding for the first floor. Three windows are placed at irregular intervals across the ground level façade. All are dressed in white wood trim and white shutters. Near the north edge of the western façade a small concrete pad has been laid for mechanical equipment. The north façade is a consistent double story façade. The full height CMU basement wall has a single small square window off center towards the west. In vertical alignment with the small square window is a single operable window, with a similar appearance to the others associated with the ground level façade. Another singular window of the same size is placed on the eastern half of the first story façade with a similar physical appearance.

Although it does not fit the predominant architectural styles on campus and lacks distinction amongst similar residential properties in the area, the house is a contributing resource to the nomination for its role in the vocational education of the students. The house was built by students, with no evidence of the involvement of an architect. This is symbolic of the school incorporating the vocational training aspect of its curriculum into the construction of the campus' built environment.

***GIRLS DORMITORY (D009:0336-025)*****1969, Mid-Century Modern**

The Girls Dormitory is the farthest north on the central north-south axis through the entire site. In plan it is the only building on the site that does not use approximate cardinal directions as the axes for orientation. The Girls dormitory was designed by architecture firm Martin Money and associates. The primary building volume runs northwest to southeast. A central pavilion perpendicularly bisects the primary volume. It indicates the primary entrance on the west side. On the east side the volume bottlenecks where it adjoins the primary volume before returning to its previous size. The building has a single flat roof.

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The western facade houses the primary entrance located in the central pavilion. The central pavilion is a double-height space with three equidistant bays and four vertical white columns separating the bays. The side bays each have two windows per level, and each window is aligned to the outer edge of the bay leaving a central, uninterrupted, vertical brick wall. Above each window is a blue panel and below each is a similar blue panel roughly double the size of the above. The central bay continues the same pattern, but includes a covered door justified towards the southern edge of the central bay leaving a fraction of the brick wall in the center. The southwest facade of the primary volume is symmetrical on either side of the central pavilion. The primary facades are comprised of seven bays employing a repeatable fenestration pattern the peripheral bays are lifted off the ground slightly due to the slope of the site. The first level of the exterior bays has covered entries with small staircases necessary due to the sloping site. Unlike the central bay, two smaller doors are used and are placed underneath the vertical fenestration grid lines leaving the brick wall uninterrupted.

The southern and northern facades are similar. The primary face is singular unadorned bay. Beneath the primary bay, as the site slopes, the basement level are revealed. The primary surfaces of the basement level are painted black. Visible beyond the ventral face is the posterior of the perpendicular central pavilion. The medial bay has four windows in two vertical columns and is farther recessed than the lateral bay. The lateral bay is an unadorned face with a different articulation of roof surface. Both bays are lifted off the ground on six columns creating a northeast-facing portico.

The eastern facade is similar to the northern. The slope of the site has made the basement visible. The facade and fenestration read of a continuation of the two levels above it, the portions of brick are covered with black paint. The central volume employs the fenestration pattern of the primary volume beyond it.

### ***TUNNELS (DO09: 0336-036)***

#### **Structure**

The Tunnels system at the Nebraska School for the Deaf existed to serve two purposes. First, they served as an underground utility to allow ease of access to the heating equipment in the campus buildings. Secondly, these tunnels were used by staff and students to move from building to building protected from the elements, especially during frigid Nebraska winters. The tunnels are all concrete construction, roughly seven feet tall by six feet wide. While not visible from the campus grounds, the Tunnels are listed as a contributing resource due to their role in supporting the educational mission of the Nebraska School for the Deaf.

**NOTE:** During the preparation of this nomination, the Superintendent's Home (1955-1957; DO09:0336-033) was destroyed and is not counted as a resource to this nomination. It was constructed in the Mid-Century Modern style and located on the north east corner of built section of the campus, east of the Girls Dormitory and north of the Pool Building. The home demonstrated many features of Mid-Century Modern domestic architecture such as a long and low profile with strategic compositional window placement. The rule of thirds is a common proportion associated with the modernist movement, and it could be seen in various scale throughout the Superintendent's Home. The primary façade faced the west and was comprised of four bays, the southernmost serving as a carport and the second-from-the-north being recessed several feet from the rest of the façade, creating a small porch. The surrounding

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yard sloped from front-to-back, creating a two-story appearance on the east façade. The roof had a shallow slope that reinforced the rule of thirds proportional system when related to the vertical wall surface and the entirety of the primary level of the home was dressed in white, horizontal wooden board siding with CMU walls visible where the yard sloped and exposed the basement walls.

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**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.)

- 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.  
A reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- E** A commemorative property.
- G** Less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ARCHITECTURE

EDUCATION

SOCIAL HISTORY

**Period of Significance**

1928-1977

**Significant Dates**

1928-34: Collegiate Gothic building period

1955-9: Mid-Century building Phase I

1965-7: Mid-Century building Phase II

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Leo A. Daly (1928 Classroom Building and 1955 Classroom Building Addition)

Cecil Martin and Associates (1959 Administration Building)

Martin Money and Associates (1967 Primary Building and 1969 Girls' Dormitory)

**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

*Author's Note: The name "Nebraska School for the Deaf" replaced the school's original name of "Nebraska Institute for the Deaf and Dumb" in 1909. For the sake of consistency, the authors use the*



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*more recent name, which was in use during the entire period of significance. Also, the uppercase "Deaf" is used to distinguish the Deaf community and their common norms, cultural values, traditions, and language (ASL). Lowercase "deaf" is used simply to describe an audiological condition or status. "Hearing" is used to denote people who are members of dominant American culture.*

The Nebraska School for the Deaf is significant under both Criterion A and C. The listed period of significance encapsulates all three areas of qualification for the consideration of the Nebraska School for the Deaf of state importance. The period of significance is generated from confirmed dates of construction for architecturally significant buildings on the campus, while the importance of the NSD began before and continued after the listed window.

Social History: The Nebraska School for the Deaf is significant under Criterion A: Social History for its association with efforts within Nebraska's Deaf community to sustain cultural and linguistic sovereignty. Upon the adoption of a Nebraska state law in 1911 that banned the use of sign language in classrooms at the Nebraska School for the Deaf (NSD), Deaf students and teachers continually attempted to subvert and resist this ruling over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These actions successfully strengthened and reinforced Nebraskan Deaf communal and linguistic identity; consequently, the Nebraska School for the Deaf is significant at the State level for these contributions to Nebraska's Deaf community.

Education: The Nebraska School for the Deaf is significant under Criterion A: Education for its association with 20<sup>th</sup> century trends in the education of the deaf. Since its founding, educators and administrators of NSD advocated the "combined method" for instruction of students. In 1911, despite protest from Nebraska's Deaf community, oralism eclipsed the combined method as the primary mode of instruction at NSD. Sign language was reintroduced in the fall of 1970, but oralism remained the official education policy until 1977. In conjunction with oral education, NSD established and maintained a robust vocational department that sought to increase the employability and marketability of NSD's graduates. The Nebraska School for the Deaf is significant at the State level as the only residential campus for the deaf established in Nebraska.

Architecture: The Nebraska School for the Deaf is significant under Criterion C: Architecture as a collection of buildings that together embody distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction. From the construction of the first documented structure in 1928 to the termination of major construction in 1969, the physical artifacts that remain on the site provide insight into the narrative of American architecture within the period of significance. Architecture is often a manifestation of culture. The existent architecture of the NSD provides a testament to this. The selection of particular architectural styles represents the aspirations of the institution and illuminates particularities of Omaha in comparison to national trends. The architecture of the NSD chronicles the changes in aspirations of the institution and larger culture, visible through the variation of selection of architectural styles with respect to time.

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**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least one paragraph for each area of significance.)

### Deaf Culture and Education at NSD Prior to 1918

Until 1817, the United States had no formal institutions to educate deaf children. Deaf children often never went to school, remaining at home where they developed “their own idiosyncratic gestural systems in order to communicate” with their families.<sup>1</sup> An informal solution for the wealthy was to send their deaf children abroad to study at schools for the deaf in Europe, but to prominent Hartford, Connecticut physician Mason Cogswell, this was no solution for his deaf daughter, Alice. Cogswell partnered with Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, an advocate of deaf education, to lobby Connecticut’s legislature to establish a formal school for the deaf. Gallaudet in turn approached Laurent Clerc, a deaf graduate of the Institut Royal des Sourds-Muets in Paris, France. Out of this partnership emerged the first school for the deaf in the United States: the American School for the Deaf. Clerc served as the school’s first superintendent.<sup>2</sup>

At their new school, Gallaudet and Clerc hoped to codify and formalize the “language of signs” they observed and learned while in France. This forerunner to American Sign Language (ASL) was most beneficial to deaf individuals both as a method of formal instruction, as well as by solving a pernicious issue Gallaudet believed faced deaf people: isolation from the gospel and a broader Christian community.<sup>3</sup> Sign language brought deaf individuals into the larger Christian fold. Thus, to Gallaudet and other early nineteenth century Christian reformers, sign language was not only appropriate for deaf children to learn, but a necessary component in achieving inner self discipline, redemption, and moral agency.<sup>4</sup> The growing numbers of schools for the deaf established before the Civil War quickly placed methods of education employing sign language—known as “manualism”—at the core of their curriculums. Many schools for the deaf also utilized other methods of instruction, including finger spelling and writing while pairing these with sign language.

As schools for the deaf continued to emerge throughout the antebellum United States, so too did a cohesive and unified Deaf culture. Deaf schools brought together deaf children in larger numbers than ever before, and, as these children received a formal education, they informally began to learn about themselves. This process hinged on the creation of a shared linguistic identity informed by sign language. As most antebellum deaf students could attest, they overwhelmingly “preferred the sign language to English,” often assuming sign language as their primary language and means of communication and English as a second language.<sup>5</sup> Sign language, manualism, and schools for the deaf were foundational in the process whereby deaf people became Deaf.

Larger cultural shifts after the Civil War brought closer scrutiny to Deaf culture and sign language. Whereas antebellum protestant evangelist reformers believed sign language served an important

<sup>1</sup> R.A.R. Edwards, *Words Made Flesh: Nineteenth-Century Deaf Education and the Growth of Deaf Culture* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2012), 12.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 13-16.

<sup>3</sup> Douglas C. Baynton, “‘A Silent Exile on This Earth’: The Metaphorical Construction of Deafness in the Nineteenth Century,” *American Quarterly* 44, no. 2 (June, 1992): 222.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 223.

<sup>5</sup> Edwards, 63.

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moral and religious purpose by bringing deaf people into the Christian community, reformers after the Civil War believed sign language isolated Deaf people from a national community. This emphasis on national unity coincided with one of the largest influxes of immigrants to the United States, a demographic shift that exacerbated anxieties of racial and cultural heterogeneity. To cultural reformers following the Civil War, the Deaf community existed beyond a larger national collective; these reformers targeted and subsequently attacked sign language as the most visible expression of Deaf culture and insisted on “oralism,” a method of education that taught deaf people how to appear like hearing people via lip-reading and speaking.<sup>6</sup>

Undergirding these xenophobic and nationalist preoccupations with national unity were eugenicist and social Darwinist conceptions about human development. The social Darwinism subscribed to by reformers and scholars of the late nineteenth century promoted a vision of humanity progressing and rising as they evolved away from backwards and crude ancestors. Critics of sign language applied a “linguistic Darwinism” contending that inferior languages died out as they were superseded by superior ones. To proponents of oralism, “to sign was to step downward in the scale of being.”<sup>7</sup> Likewise, other oralists, such as Alexander Graham Bell, articulated the abolition of sign language in his 1883 address to the National Academy of Sciences as a necessary component in arresting the “formation of a deaf variety of the human race.”<sup>8</sup> Such eugenicist beliefs became mainstream as oralists launched a campaign against sign language throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Both manualists and oralists predicated their understanding of deaf education along paternalistic and patronizing ideas of deaf children, and deaf people generally, as disabled and inferior to hearing people. Oralism, however, was far more devastating to deaf education than manualism. Oralism stunted early language and educational development; only a few deaf individuals were ever successful under oralist methods of education while the vast majority of deaf children met frustration and repeated failure. Deaf children could not simply learn to act like hearing people, for “they are both members of a species that by nature seeks optimal communication, and inhabitants of a sensory universe in which that end cannot be achieved by oral means alone.”<sup>9</sup>

This contentious terrain formed the backdrop of efforts to create a school for the deaf in Nebraska. In 1866, just one year after the Civil War, William Decoursey French, a deaf instructor at the Indiana School for the Deaf, wrote to then-territorial governor Alvin Saunders urging him to establish some kind of formal educational institution for Nebraska’s deaf children. Receiving a “favorable answer” from Saunders, French was discouraged to learn two years later that “nothing was done apparently for it.”<sup>10</sup> In 1869, French took matters more directly into his own hands, crossing the frozen “Missouri river

<sup>6</sup> Douglas C. Baynton, *Forbidden Signs: American Culture and the Campaign Against Sign Language* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 16.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 55.

<sup>8</sup> Alexander Graham Bell, “Upon the Formation of a Deaf Variety of the Human Race,” paper presented at the National Academy of the Sciences, New Haven, CT, November 13, 1883.

<sup>9</sup> Baynton, *Forbidden Signs*, 10.

<sup>10</sup> William Decoursey French, “Reminiscences of Nebraska History,” Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, NE.

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in a large sleigh drawn by four horses” to convene with legislators and the Reverend H.W. Kuhns in the “village” of Lincoln to formally establish a residential school for the deaf.<sup>11</sup>

French was ultimately successful and that same year the Nebraska School for the Deaf was established in Lincoln. The newly formed corporate board elected French the first superintendent of the school—he would be the last deaf person to serve in that role at the institution. By April 1, 1869 the school opened its doors in a rented house somewhere along the then-rural St. Mary’s Avenue.<sup>12</sup> James and Rebecca Bonner granted the school its first tract of land in 1871, gifting the state of Nebraska a ten-acre wheat field three miles northwest of Omaha.<sup>13</sup> That same year the state legislature authorized the construction of an Italianate-style building on the school’s grounds, which grew over the years to include multiple buildings across the campus.<sup>14</sup>

From the outset, NSD attempted to navigate the complicated and shifting cultural terrain surrounding manualism and oralism. In their early annual reports to the governor of Nebraska, the school’s board of directors pointed out that deaf students at the school preferred the accessibility and agency provided by sign language, a form of linguistic expression that “is just as natural to them as oral language is to us.”<sup>15</sup> At the same time they validated sign language as a viable method of deaf education, the board also drew attention to developing oralist methods of education (primarily to point out the difficulty in applying such methods). Ultimately, NSD staked out a middle ground between manualism and oralism, advocating for the combined method—a form of deaf education that borrowed from both manualist and oralist methods—and assured the governor there was no hesitation on the part of the institution “to blend these various methods in the course of instruction.”<sup>16</sup> For both the school’s administration and members of Nebraska’s Deaf community, the combined method worked compatibly with the educational needs of students attending the school. Indeed, the combined method was broadly accepted and advocated by Deaf people throughout the United States.<sup>17</sup>

At the same time NSD sanctioned the combined method to educate deaf students, school officials aggressively pursued the implementation of a vocational program. Such a vocational program hoped to provide Nebraska’s deaf students with skills “essential to success in life” by teaching printing, drawing, and other trades skills to increase the marketability and employability of NSD’s graduates.<sup>18</sup> From the school’s vocational department, NSD students wrote and printed their own newspaper, *The Nebraska Mute Journal* (later changed to *The Nebraska Journal*), which served as a valuable promoter of Deaf students’ welfare at NSD through the first decade of the twentieth century. In this way, NSD stood at

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> “Bonner & W. to State of Nebraska,” Warranty Deeds for Property, Douglas County, NE, July 19, 1871, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, NE.

<sup>14</sup> Magdalene Pickens, *An Institutional Study of the Nebraska School for the Deaf* (Omaha, NE: University of Nebraska Omaha, 1947), 6.

<sup>15</sup> Board of Directors of the Nebraska Institute for the Deaf and Dumb, *Fifth Report of the Board of Directors of the Nebraska Institute for the Deaf and Dumb* (Omaha, NE: Nebraska Institute for the Deaf and Dumb, 1877), 6-7.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>17</sup> Susan Burch, *Signs of Resistance: American Deaf Cultural History 1900 to World War II* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2002), 10.

<sup>18</sup> *Fifth Report of the Board of Directors of the Nebraska Institute for the Deaf and Dumb*, 5; Letter from H.E. Dawes to Charles Dietrich, December 21<sup>st</sup>, 1901, Charles Dietrich papers, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, NE.

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the forefront of deaf education in the United States, aligning with schools across the country in reinforcing a commitment to vocational training in conjunction with a traditional educational curriculum.

As the nineteenth century wore on, NSD's efforts to find balance between manualism and oralism became increasingly fraught as proponents of oralism overwhelmed and exerted influence on the national deaf educational establishment. Alexander Graham Bell, just seven years after his address to the National Academy of Sciences, visited NSD. Reportedly, Bell came away from the school alarmed and aggravated at the continued use of sign language, urging school officials to do away with sign language completely and formalize oralist methods of education in the school's curriculum.<sup>19</sup> John A. Gillespie, the 1880s superintendent of the school and "one of the most noted instructors in the Auricular method of teaching the Deaf," continued to promote the combined method, but, unlike his predecessors, more aggressively pushed to expand oral education at the school.<sup>20</sup> By 1881, Gillespie organized the first oral class composed of thirteen children that could "hear somewhat" and taught these children to lip-read and "hear" utilizing an audiphone. Gillespie noted "the labor of teaching by this method is wearing in the extreme," but he assured the governor and board of directors that regardless of any difficulty "we feel encouraged to persevere in the course marked out."<sup>21</sup>

By 1883, Gillespie observed these methods of instruction were "in vogue" and students in the oral class had jumped from thirteen to twenty-seven.<sup>22</sup> One proponent of oralism supposedly lauded the school as the first in the United States to establish a separate oral department.<sup>23</sup> Whether or not NSD was the first to create an independent oral department, oralism continued to supersede manualism and the combined method often as the primary, if not exclusive, means of educating deaf children at schools throughout the United States. At the turn of the century, roughly 40 percent of deaf schools in the United States banned sign language and replaced manualist curriculums with oralist curriculums. After World War I (WWI), nearly 80 percent of all schools followed these trends.<sup>24</sup>

Oralist pressure continued to mount in Nebraska in the first decade of the twentieth century as a well-funded and connected group of parents of deaf children organized legislative action against sign language in Nebraska. Like ableist critiques of sign language's supposed role in Deaf people's isolation from a national community, Nebraskan parents of deaf children articulated that sign language supposedly isolated Deaf children from their hearing families. These arguments originated amongst A.N. Dafoe and E.J. Babcock, both parents of deaf children, who launched a campaign in Nebraska's legislature for a bill that would require oral methods and "eliminate" manual teaching entirely at

<sup>19</sup> "Alexander Graham Bell," *Omaha World-Herald*, January 25, 1890.

<sup>20</sup> J.A. Gillespie petition to instate as superintendent of the Nebraska School for the Deaf, undated, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, NE.

<sup>21</sup> Board of Directors of the Nebraska Institute for the Deaf and Dumb, *Third Biennial Report of the Nebraska Institute for the Deaf and Dumb* (Omaha, NE: Nebraska Institute for the Deaf and Dumb, 1883), 7.

<sup>22</sup> Board of Directors of the Nebraska Institute for the Deaf and Dumb, *Fourth Biennial Report of the Nebraska Institute for the Deaf and Dumb* (Omaha, NE: Nebraska Institute for the Deaf and Dumb, 1885), 7.

<sup>23</sup> Board of Directors of the Nebraska Institute for the Deaf and Dumb, *Sixth Biennial Report of the Nebraska Institute for the Deaf and Dumb* (Omaha, NE: Nebraska Institute for the Deaf and Dumb, 1888), 91.

<sup>24</sup> Baynton, *Forbidden Signs*, 5.

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NSD.<sup>25</sup> Towards this end, Dafoe and Babcock organized the Nebraska Parents' Association for the Promotion of the Teaching of Speech to the Deaf (NPAPTSD) to lobby for such a law.

The organizing effort against sign language alarmed members of Nebraska's adult Deaf community and Deaf instructors at NSD. Sign language was used throughout NSD at student gatherings, sporting events, and chapel services and was likewise sanctioned by school officials, particularly superintendent Reuben Stewart, as an appropriate means of communication between and amongst students and faculty. Stewart, like his predecessor Gillespie, maintained the combined method of instruction within classrooms at NSD. Students and instructors—Deaf and Hearing alike—understood that this approach sustained “the deaf subculture that had developed in nineteenth century America” at NSD and ensured deaf students at the school received a high-quality education.<sup>26</sup> The threats leveled by NPAPTSD against sign language jeopardized the livelihoods of deaf instructors at NSD as well. Unable to teach articulation, Deaf teachers would be pushed from the classroom entirely. This loss of Deaf teachers meant the loss of Deaf role models and thus the “traditions, culture, and most importantly the language of the American deaf community would not be passed on to new generations of deaf children...” in the state of Nebraska.<sup>27</sup>

These fears were ignored by hearing people in positions of authority in Nebraska as NPAPTSD and the Nebraska legislature pressed on in their mission to eradicate sign language at NSD. On February 1, 1911, Senate File 173 was introduced to the Nebraska legislature to instruct students in the “oral, aural, and lip-reading method to the exclusion of the deaf alphabet and sign language...”<sup>28</sup> Students at NSD decried the law as a threat to their “educational welfare,” reaffirming that they preferred the combined method.<sup>29</sup> The adult Deaf community in Nebraska and throughout the United States echoed these fears, warning against such an “unwise law.”<sup>30</sup> But “Nebraska oralists undercut the Deaf community's power to influence educational policies and to preserve its culture within the schools. These oralists largely ignored Deaf pleas...” and in May of 1911 Governor Charles Aldrich signed Nebraska's oralism bill into law.<sup>31</sup>

Accompanying this legislative change came an administrative change at NSD. Frank Booth, a close associate of Alexander Graham Bell that worked as superintendent at Bell's Volta Bureau, swiftly replaced Reuben Stewart, who had openly advocated against the oralism bill. Booth made it clear sign language was not welcome in or out of the classrooms at NSD, writing that sign language “is not now used in the school-room... and I hope to do away with its use outside of the school-room.”<sup>32</sup> Only

<sup>25</sup> John V. Van Cleve, “Nebraska's Oral Law of 1911 and the Deaf Community,” *Nebraska History* 65 (1984): 199.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

<sup>28</sup> E.A.F., “School Items,” *American Annals of the Deaf* 56, no. 3 (May, 1911): 347.

<sup>29</sup> “The Light Turned On,” *The Nebraska Journal*, March 15, 1911.

<sup>30</sup> Olof Hanson, “Reply to an Address by Mr. Carroll G. Pearse, President National Educational Association,” National Association of the Deaf Circular No. 7, 1911, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, NE.

<sup>31</sup> Burch, 26.

<sup>32</sup> Frank W. Booth, quoted in John V. Van Cleve, “Nebraska's Oral Law of 1911 and the Deaf Community,” *Nebraska History* 65 (1984): 208.

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students of “mental and physical incapacity” were allowed to sign in vocational settings.<sup>33</sup> Under Booth’s administration the school’s newspaper, *The Nebraska Journal*, formerly an outspoken advocate of sign language and the combined method, published articles only “favorable to oralism, excluding Deaf people’s perspectives altogether.”<sup>34</sup>

Nebraska’s 1911 oralism law drastically altered and continued to influence the physical and educational development of the school for the next half-century. Under Booth’s tenure, the school underwent a new building program, beginning in 1915 with the erection of a new primary school building and dormitory. As Booth explained, a new primary building was necessary to “segregate them [younger deaf children] at once upon their entrance” from older children, those “manually taught, sign using pupils” who passed on sign language to their younger peers, subsequently adopting sign language “as their vernacular, quite to the exclusion of speech and lip-reading, and thus continuously throughout the school course.”<sup>35</sup> Separating and segregating children by age to discourage sign language was directly reflected in the physical development of the school within the period of significance until the mid-twentieth century when school officials realized efforts to discourage the use of sign language amongst students were futile.

The 1911 law also restructured the school’s teaching force, consequently affecting many aspects of Deaf culture associated with NSD. As deaf instructors at NSD had feared, the 1911 law decreased their marketability and capability as educators. Prior to the passage of the law, eight of twenty-four teachers (roughly 33 percent of the total teaching force) were deaf; that number dropped in half by 1912 to just four deaf teachers.<sup>36</sup> These remaining deaf teachers, like those across the country facing unemployment after oralist laws, were relegated to the school’s vocational department. Prior to the 1911 law, most deaf instructors taught in these positions anyway, as vocational positions often paid less and deaf instructors were able to get hired. After the 1911 law, NSD’s vocational department became not simply an educational arm of the school’s mission to increase their graduates’ employability, but also a primary arena in which Deaf students could mingle, interact with, and learn from Deaf adults. Vocational classes and programs “represented a central Deaf ‘place’ within the schools” where Deaf teachers could transfer intergenerational cultural information from one generation to the next.<sup>37</sup> NSD’s vocational department became a central mainstay in the preservation of Nebraska’s Deaf culture within the period of significance.

**Narrative Statement: Social History**

Despite efforts in 1911 to ban the use of sign language in the classrooms at NSD, students and faculty continued to use sign language, subverting and resisting the 1911 law in an attempt to sustain cultural and linguistic sovereignty throughout the twentieth century. The hallways, dormitories, grounds, athletic facilities, and vocational classrooms served as the backdrop for these efforts; throughout the NSD campus, deaf students wishing to tap into and learn of Deaf culture could find sympathetic

<sup>33</sup> Frank W. Booth, *Eighteenth Biennial Report of the Nebraska School for the Deaf* (Omaha, NE: Nebraska School for the Deaf, 1912), 377.

<sup>34</sup> Burch, 26.

<sup>35</sup> Frank W. Booth, *Eighteenth Biennial Report of the Nebraska School for the Deaf*, 384.

<sup>36</sup> Van Cleve, 201.

<sup>37</sup> Burch, 24.

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students and faculty in sports and extracurricular activities, in the dorms, and in the school's vocational department. Ultimately, these students' attempts to connect with and maintain Deaf culture at NSD triumphed. For the fall semester of 1970, sign language was gradually reintroduced into NSD's curriculum.<sup>38</sup> In March of 1977, the Nebraska Legislature repealed the law barring the school from teaching sign language methods.<sup>39</sup>

NSD's vocational department emerged over the course of the twentieth century as a place on NSD's campus where Deaf culture thrived and most visibly resisted oralist mandates against sign language. As early as the 1870s NSD's vocational department championed the skills passed on to NSD graduates to increase their employability and marketability upon graduation. The vocational department enjoyed continued success throughout the twentieth century and garnered greater stature across the state of Nebraska, but, behind (and perhaps undergirding) the program's success were explicit and sustained attempts to maintain Deaf identity and sovereignty at NSD. This focus on Deaf identity within the school's vocational program depended, in part, on the presence of Deaf instructors at NSD. By 1940, roughly two out of every five vocational teachers at residential schools like NSD were hired from the Deaf community.<sup>40</sup> The presence of Deaf instructors in NSD's vocational department carried "significant cultural undercurrents" as these educators, in contrast to their hearing counterparts, directly communicated with their students using sign language.<sup>41</sup>

Deaf instructors at NSD's vocational department not only ensured sign language's survival, but also maintained a direct line of contact between Nebraska's youth and adult Deaf communities. Such direct contact with Nebraska's Deaf community contributed to overt actions leveled against oralists and Nebraska's 1911 law banning sign language. In the immediate years following the passage of the 1911 law, Nebraska's adult Deaf community banded together with Deaf instructors at NSD to fight to repeal the law. Most notably, P.E. Seely, a Deaf printing instructor at NSD, worked with the Nebraska Association for the Deaf to urge the legislature to repeal or amend the law to reinstate the combined method. The push to repeal met failure and Seely was subsequently fired from NSD's printing department.<sup>42</sup> In 1923, Nebraska's Deaf community and Deaf teachers at NSD circled a petition calling for the removal of Booth from NSD entirely.<sup>43</sup> These movements in Omaha and throughout Nebraska alarmed NSD's administration but were unsuccessful in legislatively changing the status of sign language at NSD.<sup>44</sup> Despite these failures, Deaf instructors and students continued to resist and subvert the 1911 law across NSD's campus.

<sup>38</sup> Seiler, Dr. Peter, former principal at Nebraska School for the Deaf. 'Fwd: Question'. Email to Matt Pelz, 2018.

<sup>39</sup> "Two Bills Passed," *Omaha World-Herald*; Friday, March 25, 1977.

<sup>40</sup> Burch, 24.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Frank Johnson to Nebraska Board of Control, February 5, 1919, Frank W. Booth Papers, Dartmouth College Rauner Special Collections Library.

<sup>43</sup> E.O. Waxfield to Nebraska Board of Commissioners, June 25, 1923, Frank W. Booth Papers, Dartmouth College Rauner Special Collections Library.

<sup>44</sup> "Why the Oral Law Should Be Repealed," *Omaha World-Herald*, February 1, 1913; "Education of the Deaf," *Omaha World-Herald*, October 15, 1914; "Musical Program at Convention for the Deaf," *Omaha World-Herald*, August 17, 1919.



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Athletics and extracurricular activities emerged as another primary arena where Deaf students could sustain cultural and linguistic sovereignty at NSD. Like NSD's vocational department, athletics and extracurricular activities were led or organized by Deaf instructors or graduates from NSD. Within sporting activities students and coaches engaged in sign language, reinforcing solidarity and cultural identity while working together as teammates. NSD often played other schools of the deaf from around the Midwest, bringing Deaf students at NSD into contact with a broader regional Deaf culture and interaction with their fellow Deaf peers.<sup>45</sup> Alongside strengthening Deaf unity and identity, sporting activities at NSD gave Deaf students a chance to represent themselves outside the classroom on their own terms. While NSD administrators may have viewed deaf students patronizingly, on the field or court, NSD students proved themselves as capable (if not more so) than any hearing person. NSD's 1931 victory as Class A champions in the Nebraska State Basketball tournament showed Nebraska's hearing population, as well as its Deaf community, that Deaf students had significant abilities as athletes. The victory was enshrined as a monumental achievement by Nebraska's Deaf community, knitting Deaf Nebraskans closer together culturally.

The attempts on the part of Deaf students and teachers at NSD to maintain their cultural identity also shifted the physical development of the NSD campus. Whereas Frank Booth hoped to segregate children by age in order to discourage the passage of sign language from one generation to the next, such attempts were proven futile by repeated contact amongst Deaf students across campus. This was reflected in the way that administrators both physically and ideologically mapped building programs and new construction at NSD throughout the twentieth century. By the mid-twentieth century, Booth's hopes for the primary dormitory constructed in 1915 were shattered when the building was converted into an all girls' dormitory where most girls lived regardless of age. NSD administrators solidified the futility of age segregation in 1969 when they authorized the construction of a new girls' dormitory on the site of the former building.<sup>46</sup> Likewise, efforts to build or expand upon the boys' dormitory space acknowledged that it was easier to house students by gender, rather than attempt to sever students' connections to sign language and Deaf culture.<sup>47</sup>

These efforts to sustain Deaf culture at NSD did not go unnoticed by NSD administrators or teachers. Indeed, the repetitive nature of signing in vocational and extracurricular settings gradually wore away the stringent restrictions placed around sign language within the classroom. Educators and administrators at NSD could hardly fail to notice how effective sign language was in the school's vocational department and amongst teammates in extracurricular activities as a method of communication amongst Deaf students and faculty. Gradually, teachers informally began utilizing sign language in their own classrooms at NSD, much to the chagrin of NSD administrators legally bound to enforce Nebraska's 1911 law. In the classroom students secretly used sign language to communicate with their teachers, attempting to speak and sign at the same time to give the appearance that they were following the law.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>45</sup> "Football Program: Nebraska School for the Deaf vs. Kansas School for the Deaf," November 8, 1930, Frank W. Booth Papers, Dartmouth College Rauner Special Collections Library; "Fifth Annual Basketball Tournament of the Mid-West Schools for the Deaf Athletic Conference," March 22, 1940, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, NE.

<sup>46</sup> "New Girls' Dorm for Nebraska School for the Deaf," *Omaha World-Herald*, April 7, 1968.

<sup>47</sup> "School for Deaf has \$2,385,000 'Crash' Program," *Omaha World-Herald*, November 15, 1962.

<sup>48</sup> Linsay Darnell, Jr. in *The Unheard Journey of Deaf Nebraskans*, NET, June 25, 2015.

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Slowly, NSD's superintendents and administration began to realize that oralism simply failed to properly educate deaf children in the classroom. George H. Thompson, superintendent of NSD from 1960 to 1975, reached this conclusion after he frequently witnessed teachers and students at NSD shirking the 1911 law. Additionally, Thompson's granddaughter was born deaf; Thompson observed that his granddaughter could communicate most clearly with her parents and with Thompson when she attempted to use sign language, not lip-read or speak. These encounters with his granddaughter swayed Thompson and he promptly went to every classroom at NSD and encouraged teachers and students to begin signing. In March 1977, a legislative change officially broadened the school's teaching methods from oralism to "total communication," the ideological and methodological descendent of the combined method first practiced at NSD.<sup>49</sup>

Thompson's decision to reinstate sign language was a result of both his personal experiences with his granddaughter as well as repeated and meaningful actions on the part of Deaf students and educators at NSD to sustain Deaf cultural and linguistic sovereignty throughout the twentieth century. Beginning with failed attempts to repeal or amend Nebraska's 1911 law, NSD students continually engaged in activities and fields of study that encouraged the use of sign language. Gradually, these attempts to subvert and resist Nebraska's 1911 oralism law resulted in institutional and policy changes at NSD that recognized sign language's place in Nebraskan Deaf communal and personal identity. Such realizations were reflected in the physical development of the school as much as they were sanctioned by policy changes after NSD administrators gave up attempting to segregate deaf children by age and authorized the construction of dormitories that simply separated NSD students by gender.

Overall, the Nebraska School for the Deaf merits recognition for its place in sustaining cultural unity and sovereignty amongst Nebraska's Deaf community. The built environment of the campus itself served as the setting for repeated efforts to maintain this cultural and linguistic sovereignty, thus making the Nebraska School for the Deaf eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A: Social History at the State level of significance.

### **Narrative Statement: Education**

NSD officials and administrators shaped and maintained educational policies at NSD that sought to assimilate deaf children into mainstream hearing culture upon graduation. By 1918, this policy had solidified after the passage of a controversial law in 1911 that banned the use of sign language in the classroom at NSD. The legislative restraints placed on NSD remained consistent with national trends in the education of the deaf; after WWI, roughly 80 percent of all residential schools for the deaf banned or limited the use of sign language in favor of oralist methods of education.<sup>50</sup> The lure of oralist methods of education, at least to NSD officials, remained interlocked with an understanding of deaf people as both disabled and isolated from a broader national community of hearing people. To learn to speak or read lips ensured that deaf children could "carry on their lives as an integral part of society."<sup>51</sup> To NSD officials, those children unable to appear like hearing people thus faced insurmountable

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Baynton, *Forbidden Signs*, 5.

<sup>51</sup> Magdalene Pickens, *An Institutional Study of the Nebraska School for the Deaf* (Omaha, NE: University of Nebraska Omaha, 1947), 27.

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barriers to entering and maintaining their position in society and life beyond the walls of NSD. This understanding of deafness shaped both the educational curriculum and physical development of NSD within the period of significance.

While sign language was legislatively restricted at NSD, this did not mean sign language was excluded from NSD's curriculum entirely. While Nebraska lawmakers may have wished to eradicate sign language from NSD, instructors and educators on the ground at NSD recognized such wishful thinking was nearly impossible to implement. The difficulty of adhering to an exclusively oralist curriculum in part contributed to the growth of NSD's vocational department throughout the period of significance. Because oralist teaching methods were often ineffective, many students were primarily enrolled in the vocational program, where they would learn trade skills from deaf instructors. As early as the 1870s, NSD promoted vocational training for Nebraska's deaf students, first purchasing a printing machine for the school's newspaper, *The Nebraska Journal*. By the mid-twentieth century, the vocational department boasted that in Omaha alone, over 150 deaf graduates were employed in over 30 different industries throughout the city.<sup>52</sup>

Recognizing the stigma leveled at deaf people by hearing people, NSD's vocational department successfully championed that deaf students were as employable as any hearing person. The department's success was widely recognized throughout the state, and as one observer noted in 1947, the "trend in curriculum building since the establishment of the Nebraska School for the Deaf has been toward Vocational Arts."<sup>53</sup> The NSD campus physically reflected the growing stature of the vocational program, constructing a new Tudor Revival style vocational arts building in 1930 on the east side of the school's growing campus.<sup>54</sup> Traditional twentieth century conceptions of gender influenced the vocational department more so than the regular academic curriculum as well. A brief survey of the vocational studies undertaken by students at NSD revealed that girls learned "sewing, homemaking, laundry, and beauty work" amongst other topics, while boys were educated in "printing, woodworking, and farming."<sup>55</sup> The new vocation department building erected in 1930 mirrored this division of labor with traditionally male activities taught on side of the building and traditionally female activities taught on the other.

Like most other schools for the deaf in the United States, NSD operated as a residential school where students lived on campus during the week and, if close enough, went home to their families during the weekends. Only those students who lived far enough from their families where weekend travel was unfeasible or students enrolled in extracurricular activities remained on campus throughout the weekend. To house the growing number of deaf students at the school, NSD constructed separate boys' and girls' dormitories, first in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and again in the mid-twentieth century. Initially, NSD administrators hoped to segregate children by age to discourage the passage of sign language from one generation to the next. This plan, as previously discussed, was scrapped after NSD administrators realized such efforts were ultimately futile.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 32-33.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 24.

<sup>54</sup> Harry Lawrie and W.E. Stockham, "Manual Training School," November 8, 1930, original blueprints courtesy of the Omaha Landmarks Heritage Preservation Commission, Omaha, NE.

<sup>55</sup> Pickens, 24.

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By the late 1960s, NSD administrators set to restructuring the school's curriculum to formally reinstate sign language within the classroom. In this way, NSD followed larger national trends after many experts began to repudiate oralism's reputation, advocating instead for "total communication," the ideological descendent of the combined method.<sup>56</sup> Under total communication, deaf students were taught via whatever method best fit their learning needs. This change in curriculum came on the heels of sustained efforts by Nebraska's Deaf community inside and outside NSD to maintain sign language and Deaf identity throughout the course of the twentieth century. NSD reflected these changes in Deaf and mainstream culture and adjusted their educational policies accordingly.

Within the period of significance, NSD consistently reflected and remained influenced by broader trends in deaf education. By 1918, oralism was fully enshrined as the educational standard within the classroom at NSD, but the 1911 oralist law never extended evenly across all classroom spaces at NSD. The school's vocational department emerged within the period of significance as an arena in which sign language not only survived, but thrived within the legislative bounds enforced by the Nebraska legislature. At the same time, NSD's vocational program proved successful in granting NSD students broader experiences to increase their employability upon graduation. By the mid-twentieth century, the seemingly impermeable boundary isolating sign language outside the classroom began to dissolve as students and teachers informally reintroduced sign language into their curriculums. Finally, in fall of 1970, sign language emerged triumphant and was formally reinstated in curriculums at NSD.

The Nebraska School for the Deaf retains significant integrity of these trends in the education of the deaf as the only residential school for the deaf in the state of Nebraska and thus merits designation at the state level to the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A: Education at the State level of significance.

### **Narrative Statement: Architecture**

The Nebraska School for the Deaf (NSD) is architecturally significant at the state level for providing examples of both an early twentieth century vernacular adaptation of the Collegiate Gothic subtype of the Gothic Revival style as well as the Mid-Century Modern design movement. The proximity of the two different architectural styles within the same campus provide insight as well to the cultural and architectural progression of the larger United States.

### **Collegiate Gothic**

The NSD was founded in the state of Nebraska's infancy. It was unprecedented and forward thinking for a state to establish so quickly a school for the Deaf at that time.<sup>57</sup> Land for the NSD was designated at 3223 North 45th Street and funds secured to construct the first school buildings. Less than ten years after opening, the school was educating and housing over fifty students from across the state.<sup>58</sup> As

<sup>56</sup> Katherine A. Jankowski, *Deaf Empowerment: Emergence, Struggle, and Rhetoric* (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 1997), 7-10.

<sup>57</sup> William M. Decoursey French, "The Nebraska Institute for the Deaf and Dumb." (Documents from the Governors Vault 22A, Omaha, NE, 1870), pg. 1

<sup>58</sup> T.J. Collins, "Fifth Report of the Board of Directors of the Nebraska Institute for Deaf and Dumb From January 1st. 1875, to January 1st, 1877, to the Governor." (Scanned Document, Omaha Institute for the Deaf and Dumb, 1877), pg. 9-10

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enrollment continued to increase, the inadequacy of the land, composition, and construction of the then existing school buildings became evident. During the first decade of the twentieth century the necessity for new school buildings more appropriate for teaching deaf students was always a great concern.<sup>59</sup> As Omaha began to expand northwards, the development of public infrastructure disoriented the campus making its arrangement appear haphazard situated next to the developing city.<sup>60</sup>

The reality was that the architecture on the NSD campus was crude in quality and inappropriate in its function warranted the search for an architectural style that could address both concerns. In the early twentieth century the most prestigious American universities--Yale, Princeton, Chicago, Cornell, and West Point--were constructing Gothic Revival buildings almost exclusively.<sup>61</sup> The construction of these buildings on university campuses generated an architectural sub-style called Collegiate Gothic. Collegiate Gothic was developed to help advance and reinforce the concept that the medieval roots of English higher education offered a counterweight to the materialism motif emerging from the industrial revolution, contemporary culture, and modern architecture. The proponents of Collegiate Gothic believe its physical forms of connected buildings and closed quadrangles would inspire the renewal of an intellectual life rooted in tradition.<sup>62</sup>

The Nebraska school for the Deaf certainly did not have access to the funds that premier private American universities had, therefore a fiscal solution was necessary. In the later evolution the Collegiate Gothic style, around the 1920s, a further substyle developed as a result of the financial strain the style created on monetarily restricted campuses. The campuses developed a decorated shed approach. The exterior had all the expressions and associated symbolisms of the style while the interior was realized in a more economical and adaptive manner.<sup>63</sup> The façade of these buildings was commonly rendered in rough-cut stone of varying grey hues and tones<sup>64</sup>. However, this approach did not seem appropriate for the Nebraska School for the Deaf in terms of budget or context of the developing city. All the Collegiate Gothic buildings were constructed using a modest red brick with sandstone detailing that contextually matches the historic Omaha downtown and still evokes the heritage associated with Collegiate Gothic. Each building has its own subtle variation in overall appearance and the subtlety of their detail creating a campus of distinct buildings. The qualities and execution of those appearances are described previously.

<sup>59</sup> Charles R. Sherman, D.O. Dwyer, and H.H. Hanks "Seventeenth Biennial Report of the Superintendent and Board of Trustees of the Nebraska School for the Deaf, for the Years 1909 and 1910, to the Governor Ashton C. Shallenberger,"(historical document scan, University Place NE, 1910) pg. 303-304

<sup>60</sup> H.H. Hanks, D.O. Dwyer, and Viola J. Cameron "Eighteenth Biennial Report of the Superintendent and the Board of Trustees of the Nebraska School for the Deaf, for the years 1911 and 1912, to the Governor Chester H. Aldrich" (historical document scan, Omaha, 1912) pg. 385-386

<sup>61</sup> T.J. Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1994), pg.188

<sup>62</sup> R.P. Dober, *Campus Heritage: An Appreciation of the History and Traditions of College and University Architecture* (Ann Arbor: Society of College and University Planning, 2005), pg. 18

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 18

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 19

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The Boys Dorm, Classroom Building, and Industrial Arts Building create an open quadrangle, a distinct paradigm of Collegiate Gothic. While lawns and green spaces are evident in many architectural styles and compositions, the open quadrangle became a highly functional typology for the American campus and Collegiate Gothic architecture.<sup>65</sup> The incremental nature of campus development, ventilation and daylight requirements, and the potential risk of structural degradation in the event of catastrophe secured the open quadrangle as an organizational tactic associated with Collegiate Gothic opposed to the conjoined buildings and enclosed greenspaces associated with the original Gothic style.<sup>66</sup>

**Architectural Progression**

The age of American universities and boarding schools constructing almost exclusively revival-style buildings was coming to an end in the mid-to-late 1930s. Culturally, Americans were no longer interested and they did not think it was necessary to reference archaic forms and symbols as a source of authority in architecture.

Several factors led to the shift in cultural perception of architectural authority. Around the time America was constructing archaic building forms as a source of authority, a group of thinkers and architects were upset with the negative effect that the Industrial Revolution had on social organization, quality of construction, and overall mortality of culture and devised theorized a solution. Figures like Augustus Pugin, John Ruskin, and William Morris believed that the creation of an architectural style that was honest and celebrated the craftsmanship of the architect would serve as a visual and experiential rectifier for English culture. The Arts and Crafts movement, as it came to be known, ultimately sought to reintegrate art and life, craft and utility. The scale of the Arts and Crafts movement was focused primarily on developing a vernacular domestic architecture. Proponents believed that through an honest vernacular domestic architecture, authority could be instilled and be better suited to return inhabitants to a simplified, moral everyday life.<sup>67</sup>

Rather than a unified style, the Arts and Crafts movement was essentially a group of shared concerns that were resolved architecturally.<sup>68</sup> Eventually the primary concerns of the movement made their way to other European countries that had already industrialized. These ideas were adopted and adapted by modernists over time as modern architecture transitioned into the public sphere. A movement of German modernists incorporated an adaptation of Arts and Crafts ideals into their modern architecture mantra. The German architects believed that design had the moral power to influence people's lives, architecture possessed integrity through honest expression of the nature of materials, and strong repulsion towards the dishonesty of "fake" revival styles.<sup>69</sup>

The German ideals and aspirations for modern architecture were introduced to the American public through famous German and German-American architects like Mies van der Rohe and Walter Gropius, amongst others. Modernist projects began to be seen as approachable, honest, and efficient uses of

<sup>65</sup> R.P. Dober, *Campus Architecture: Building in the Groves of Academe* ( New York: McGraw-Hill, 1996), pg. 246

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, pg. 252

<sup>67</sup> W.J. Curtis, *Modern Architecture since 1900* (London: Phaidon Press, 2013), pg. 87

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, pg. 67

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, pg. 100

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space and money. As renowned Modern architects were commissioned to construct campus buildings, precedents were set that articulated the appropriateness of modernist style for educational buildings.

**Mid-Century Modern**

The Modern buildings constructed as a part of the Nebraska School for the Deaf campus are clear examples of the Mid-Century Modern style during the 1960s and 1970s. The buildings are composed of pure orthogonal forms and their purity is accentuated by the visible structural frames exposed on the edges. The buildings all have modernist proportional techniques applied in terms of fenestration, visible structure, and materials.

Modern buildings take a variety of forms to optimize their efficiency based on internal use. The central Primary School is punctured by a grass courtyard on the west end and slit on the east end. These allow safe places for younger children to play as well as more accessible natural light and ventilation for the classroom spaces. The Girls Dormitory and the Gym / Pool Building address the sloping site by lofting masses and supporting them with rectilinear columns for a grand effect facing the eastern edge of the site. The operation of lifting and suspending through the use of columns is one key of the earliest forms of High Modernism championed by Le Corbusier.

The material selection is thoughtful and conservative. In attempt to enforce unity and reinforce heritage of the school, as well as Omaha, the primary exterior walls are all dressed in similar brick as the Collegiate Gothic buildings built thirty to forty years prior. The placement of the new buildings enhances the composition of the existent campus buildings. Existent lawns and infrastructure are protected where designed appropriately and new outdoor space is created where previously inadequate.

**Architectural Legacy**

The Nebraska School for the Deaf is architecturally significant for providing examples of both an early twentieth century vernacular adaptation of the Collegiate Gothic style as well as the Mid-Century Modern style. The proximity of the two different architectural styles within the same campus provide insight as well to the cultural and architectural progression of United States.

The NSD's architectural heritage is an interesting composition of primarily two design styles serving as three dimensional artifacts that provide insight to history of architecture of American school campuses. None of which suffers from stylistic indeterminacy, each building is composed thoughtfully in true style and therefore provides clear associations to the context in which it was built. Beyond that, it illustrates the cultural shift in thinking, traceable through the architecture, from a predominantly referential and historic system of attributing authority and value to one that favors and trusts in contemporary models.

**Additional Context: NSD Post-Period of Significance**

Following the reintroduction of sign language into NSD's curriculum, the school and Nebraska's Deaf community faced new challenges. At the same time Deaf students fought nationally for the right to teach and communicate in sign language at residential schools, the Civil Rights movement garnered significant legislative gains. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and ensuing civil rights legislation primarily

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targeted the segregation of white and non-white students in educational settings, but this backlash against segregation was applied to residential schools for the deaf as well. NSD faced increasing scrutiny in the latter decades of the twentieth century, for “In the face of inclusionist rhetoric, ‘segregation’ became the adversary. It was thus necessary to attempt to eradicate residential schools, for they represented the antithesis of full inclusion. As a result, in some states, residential schools for the Deaf were threatened with shutdowns.”<sup>70</sup>

These threats arrived on the doorstep of NSD as early as 1984 when the Nebraska legislature considered shutting the school down.<sup>71</sup> Opponents of separate residential schools for the deaf like NSD advocated for “mainstreaming,” a process that would place deaf children amongst their hearing peers in public schools. To Nebraska’s Deaf community, mainstreaming only appeared as the latest incarnation of oralism: placing deaf students in public schools would separate and disband Deaf cultural unity and identity. Such fears were not unfounded, for deaf children often faced isolation at public schools rather than inclusion that proponents of mainstreaming believed would be the outcome of shutting down residential schools for the deaf.<sup>72</sup> By 1998, enrollment at NSD dwindled, in part as a result of Nebraska’s efforts to mainstream deaf students, and the school was ordered to close its doors. Like their predecessors eighty years prior, Nebraska legislators refused input from Nebraska’s Deaf community, despite an outpouring of opposition to the state Department of Education’s plan to shutter the campus.<sup>73</sup>

Following the closure of the school, the State of Nebraska sold the land to private owners. Afterwards, multiple Christian nonprofits operated after-school programs on the campus for low-income or at-risk youth in the Omaha community. The campus still operates under these programs at the time of writing this nomination.

**Statement on Criteria Consideration G**

The period of significance of the Nebraska School for the Deaf ends in 1977, when the oralist law was finally repealed. The repeal was the culmination of decades-long efforts to reform the state’s approach to education of Deaf students, including policy changes during the early 1970s and legislative debates. A particularly important milestone was the formal reintroduction of sign language on campus in the fall of 1970, shortly after the Nebraska Department of Education embraced a policy of incorporating signing and speech simultaneously. However, this policy change did not mark the end of debate in the controversy over oralism. The issue remained open as legislators debated the issue up to and during their 1977 session. The repeal of the oralist law was not a mere formality, but a hard-fought victory for reformers as the 1977 vote effectively ended debate on the topic. In recognition of the events and developments leading to the repeal of the oralist law, the significance of the district in the areas of Social History and Education merits exemption from the fifty-year age requirement under Criteria Consideration G.

<sup>70</sup> Jankowski, 87.

<sup>71</sup> Jim McKee, “Nebraska School for the Deaf earned national acclaim,” *Lincoln Journal Star*, October 19, 2014.

<sup>72</sup> Baynton, *Forbidden Signs*, 157.

<sup>73</sup> “Historic Rally Held on Nebraska School for the Deaf Graduation Day,” National Association of the Deaf, <http://nad.s1001.sureserver.com/news/1998/6/historic-rally-held-nebraska-school-deaf-graduation-day>, accessed August 22, 2018.



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Nebraska School for the Deaf  
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Nebraska School for the Deaf  
**Name of Property**

Douglas County, Nebraska  
**County and State**

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"School for Deaf has \$2,385,000 'Crash' Program," *Omaha World-Herald*, November 15, 1962.

"The Light Turned On," *The Nebraska Journal*, March 15, 1911.

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**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 #
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey #

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other (Name of repository)

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): DO09:0336-001, 025-036

Nebraska School for the Deaf  
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Douglas County, Nebraska  
**County and State**

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of property 23.2 USGS Quadrangle Omaha North

**Latitude/Longitude Coordinates**

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_

1.	Latitude	<u>41.28860 N</u>	Longitude	<u>95.98048 W</u>
2.	Latitude	<u>41.28659 N</u>	Longitude	<u>95.98049 W</u>
3.	Latitude	<u>41.28657 N</u>	Longitude	<u>95.97587 W</u>
4.	Latitude	<u>41.28859 N</u>	Longitude	<u>95.97590 W</u>

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The Nebraska School for the Deaf campus is bound by N. 45<sup>th</sup> Street on the west, N. 42<sup>nd</sup> Street on the east, and Bedford Ave. on the North. A single row of small residential properties bound the site on the south edge. Beyond the residential properties is Wirt Street.

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The proposed boundary includes all land historically associated with the Nebraska School of the Deaf.

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Jennifer Honebrink, Cale Miller, Matthew Pelz, and Brian Whetstone  
organization Restoration Exchange Omaha date November 26, 2018  
street & number 3902 Davenport telephone 402.679.5854  
city or town Omaha state NE zip code 68131  
email director@restorationexchange.org

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO for any additional items.)

Nebraska School for the Deaf

Douglas County, Nebraska

Name of Property

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Map 1 - 24000 ft view of NSD campus. Boundaries indicated in red.

Nebraska School for the Deaf  
**Name of Property**

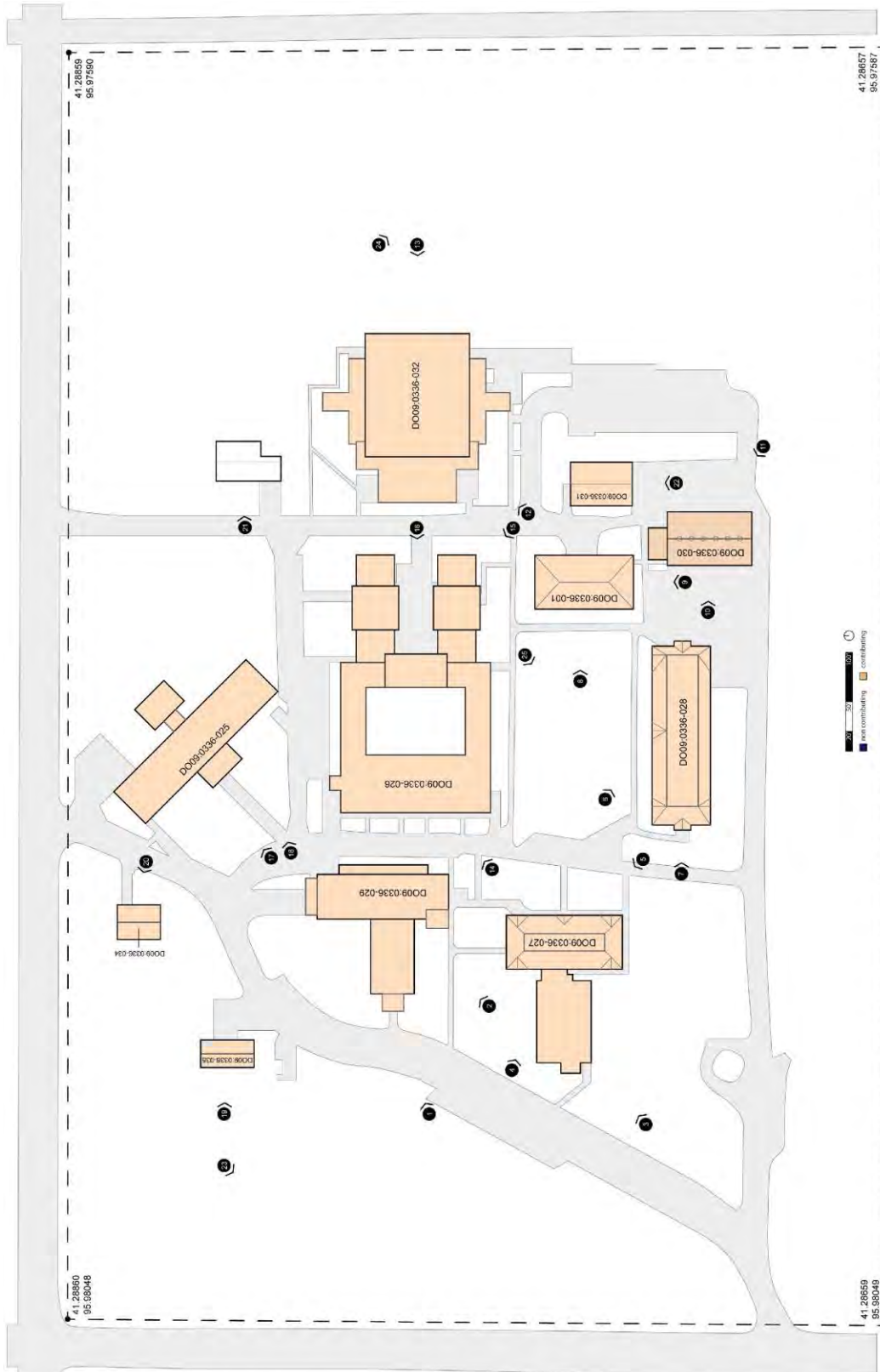
Douglas County, Nebraska  
**County and State**



Map 2 - 6000 ft view of NSD campus. Boundaries indicated in red.

Nebraska School for the Deaf  
Name of Property

Douglas County, Nebraska  
County and State



Map 3 – Photo key, Lat/Long, and Contributing/Non-Contributing map of NSD campus. The Contributing tunnels (DO09: 0336-036) are not delineated on map. The footprint of the former Superintendent’s House is outlined but not shaded.

Nebraska School for the Deaf  
**Name of Property**

Douglas County, Nebraska  
**County and State**

**Photographs**

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

**Photo Log**

Name of Property Nebraska School for the Deaf

City or Vicinity Omaha County Douglas State Nebraska

Photographer Cale Miller, Brian Whetstone, Matt Pelz Date Photographed August-November 2018

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera.

**Image 1: Administration Building. Looking northeast.**

**Image 2: Administration. Looking northeast.**

**Image 3: Boys Dormitory. Looking northeast**

**Image 4: Boys Dormitory. Looking southeast**

**Image 5: Boys Dormitory. Looking west.**

**Image 6: Classroom Building. Looking southeast.**

**Image 7: Classroom Building. Looking east.**

**Image 8: Industrial Arts Building. Looking east.**

**Image 9: Industrial Arts Building. Looking north.**

**Image 10: Power House. Looking east.**

**Image 11: Power House. Looking west.**

**Image 12: Gym/Pool Building. Looking northeast.**

**Image 13: Gym/Pool Building. Looking west.**

**Image 14: Primary School. Looking east.**

**Image 15: Primary School. Looking northwest.**

**Image 16: Primary School. Looking west.**

**Image 17: Girls Dormitory. Looking northwest.**

**Image 18: Girls Dormitory. Looking northwest.**

**Image 19: Groundskeeper House. Looking east.**



Nebraska School for the Deaf

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Douglas County, Nebraska

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**Name of Property**

**County and State**

**Image 20: House constructed by students. Looking west.**

**Image 21: Superintendent's House. Looking east.**

**Image 22: Laundry Building. Looking north.**

**Image 23: West field. Looking southwest.**

**Image 24: East field. Looking southeast.**

**Image 25: Quad. Looking southwest.**

**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.460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including 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 Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.



ADMINISTRATION BUILDING

A

NO PARKING  
FIRE LANE

Handicapped parking sign





Home of the  
Activity Center

ACTIVITY CENTER







**OMAHA  
STREET SCHOOL**







V







P

↑

POWER  
HOUSE







J.S. INTERNATIONAL CENTER  
1000 S. 10TH AVENUE, SUITE 100  
TULSA, OK 74106  
408-407-7010



ILLINOIS  
YVJ 294







D



D

PARKING  
AHEAD  
↑





4325

WELCOME





LAUNDRY









OMAHA  
STREET NUMBER

National Register of Historic Places  
Memo to File

# Correspondence

The Correspondence consists of communications from (and possibly to) the nominating authority, notes from the staff of the National Register of Historic Places, and/or other material the National Register of Historic Places received associated with the property.

Correspondence may also include information from other sources, drafts of the nomination, letters of support or objection, memorandums, and ephemera which document the efforts to recognize the property.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Requested Action: Resubmission

Property Name: Nebraska School for the Deaf

Multiple Name: \_\_\_\_\_

State & County: NEBRASKA, Douglas

Date Received: 5/24/2019      Date of Pending List: \_\_\_\_\_      Date of 16th Day: \_\_\_\_\_      Date of 45th Day: 7/8/2019      Date of Weekly List: \_\_\_\_\_

Reference number: RS100003571

Nominator: SHPO

Reason For Review: \_\_\_\_\_

X Accept       Return       Reject      6/10/2019 Date

Abstract/Summary Comments: Return comments addressed. The school served as the centerpiece of the estate's efforts to educate the hearing impaired of Nebraska. It also served as a laboratory for changing philosophies of such education. The campus itself is cohesive architecturally, reflecting progressive designs in educational buildings.

Recommendation/ Criteria: Accept / A & C

Reviewer Jim Gabbert      Discipline Historian

Telephone (202)354-2275      Date \_\_\_\_\_

DOCUMENTATION:      see attached comments : No      see attached SLR : No

If a nomination is returned to the nomination authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the National Park Service.

January 30, 2019

Jim Gabbert  
NPS-National Register of Historic Places  
1849 C Street, NW  
Mail Stop 7228  
Washington, DC 20240



Re: Nebraska School for the Deaf, Omaha, Douglas County, NE

Dear Mr. Gabbert,

Enclosed is the complete nomination packet for the Nebraska School for the Deaf, in Omaha, Douglas, Nebraska. The enclosed contents are as follows:

- The signed first page of the Nebraska School for the Deaf nomination;
- One (1) archival disc with the true and correct copy of the nomination for the Nebraska School for the Deaf to the National Register of Historic Places in PDF format; and
- Two (2) archival discs with the photographs for the Nebraska School for the Deaf nomination.

If you have any questions regarding the submitted materials, feel free to contact me at the phone number or email address below.

Sincerely,



David L. Calease  
National Register Coordinator  
Nebraska State Historic Preservation Office

Phone: 402-471-4775  
Fax: 402-471-3100  
[david.calease@nebraska.gov](mailto:david.calease@nebraska.gov)

Enclosures (4): Signed National Register nomination cover sheet  
1 disc with Nomination  
2 discs with National Register Photographs

1500 R Street  
Lincoln, NE 68508-1651  
P: 402.471.3270  
P: 800.833.6747  
F: 402.471.3100  
[history.nebraska.gov](http://history.nebraska.gov)

3571

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# 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 National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. 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.

## 1. Name of Property

Historic name Nebraska School for the Deaf

Other names/site number DO09:0336-001, 025-036

Name of related multiple property listing N/A

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

## 2. Location

Street & Number 3223 North 45th Street

City or town Omaha State Nebraska County Douglas

Not for publication  Vicinity

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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 at the following level(s) of significance:  national  statewide  local

Applicable National Register Criteria:  A  B  C  D

SHPO/Director

1/25/19

Signature of certifying official/Title:

Date

Nebraska State Historical Society

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of Commenting Official

Date

Title

State of Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

## 4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register.
- determined eligible for the National Register.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

Nebraska School for the Deaf  
**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	
<u>11</u>	<u>1</u>	Buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>1</u>	Sites
<u>0</u>	<u>1</u>	Structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	Objects
<u>11</u>	<u>2</u>	Total

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

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions** (Enter categories from instructions.)

EDUCATION/school  
EDUCATION/education-related

**Current Functions** (Enter categories from instructions.)

SOCIAL/civic  
EDUCATION/school  
RECREATION AND CULTURE/museum  
COMMERCE/TRADE/restaurant

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification** (Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE 19<sup>TH</sup> AND 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY REVIVALS/Late Gothic Revival  
LATE 19<sup>TH</sup> AND 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY REVIVALS/Tudor Revival  
MODERN MOVEMENT/ Mid-Century Modern

**Materials** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property:

FOUNDATION: Concrete, Brick; WALLS: Brick, Stone: Sandstone, Concrete, Glass, Wood; ROOF: Terracotta, Asphalt

Nebraska School for the Deaf

Douglas County, Nebraska

Name of Property

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**Description**

**Summary Paragraph** (Briefly describe the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

The Nebraska School for the Deaf is located at 3223 North 45<sup>th</sup> Street, Omaha, Nebraska. The campus is situated on rolling hills with its high point on the property’s west, sloping toward the east. The campus is surrounded by the North Omaha district, Benson to the west, and Midtown to the south. The campus can be split into two sub-districts based on the time frame of construction and architectural style of the buildings in each: the ‘northern’ campus contains buildings that were predominantly constructed after World War II in the Mid-Century Modern style while the ‘southern’ campus contains buildings built during the 1920s and 1930s. The southern campus dominant voice is that of Gothic Revival, more specifically Collegiate Gothic. However, each building incorporates the characteristics of Collegiate Gothic in different ways and in cases mixes architectural styles.

**Narrative Description** (Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable.)

The campus has a rectangular footprint comparable to the size of four to six residential city blocks. The resources are concentrated in the middle of the campus creating green space on the west and east ends. The east field is a grass lawn used historically for school sporting events. The western field is smaller and dotted with large, aged trees throughout. The primary entrance is through the west field on an angled drive with parking spaces. Lining the entrance road on the east is a collection of large trees planted annually by the graduating class. The buildings are linked by a network of sidewalks and small access roads with large trees and greenspace filling in the remainder.

Supplementary access roads work with the primary entrance drive to create an effective vehicle circulation system that minimizes interior campus traffic. One north-south access road is adjacent to the Superintendent house, Primary Building, and Gym. On the south end the same road accesses the Industrial Arts, Laundry, and Power House building cluster with a small parking lot for sporting events.

*INDUSTRIAL ARTS BUILDING (DO09:0336-001)*

1931, Collegiate Gothic

CONTRIBUTING

The Industrial Arts Building is situated on the east end of the courtyard. The western façade is the Industrial Arts Building’s primary façade. The façade showcases features characteristic of Collegiate Gothic including the finial adorning the allusion to a gothic spire sloping roof, scalloping designates the split vertical plane from the sloping roof planes, and a muted hood molding incorporated into the lancet style entry ornamentation. The entry is differentiated from the majority of the building by creating the allusion of a pavilion further emphasized by material selections and utilization of established Gothic Revival systems of characteristic cathedral entries. In a Gothic cathedral, the narthex was typically a distinct volume used to further separate the nave from the outside as well as serve as an indication to point of entry. The façade of the narthex generally had three elements vertically striated. A large ornamental entry, the middle section that contained glass and often varied in size, and finally an independent visual pediment to help separate the façade from the primary structure. The Industrial Arts Building adapts this formula. The façade includes all three vertical



Nebraska School for the DeafDouglas County, Nebraska**Name of Property****County and State**

elements. However, perceivable volumetric qualities of a narthex are replaced by ornamental brick work in the form of a pavilion as an allusion to a quality of volume. The foyer behaves in some ways like the narthex of a Gothic cathedral, but its volumetric nature is embedded into rather than extruded from the major building.

Including the entry the west façade beyond the pavilion is comprised of five bays symmetrical from the center. The distal bays have larger four window groupings while the two proximal bays have two window groupings. Each window group is wrapped in a similar sandstone window surround with a quoin effect on the vertical edges. The hip roof visible above is dressed in orange arched profile terracotta shingles.

The north and south facades are similar. The primary difference is the south façade has a minor entrance whereas the north does not. Both facades have a three-bay sequence. The distal bays have two window groupings with similar sandstone window surround, while the central bay has two windows but are articulated independently through independent sandstone surrounds per window. The ornamental scalloping continues from the west façade under the roof plane. The terracotta shingles are again visible above. The north and south facades gradually expose the basement due to the west-east slope of the site. The exposed basement wall has a small opening vertically aligned with the eastern bay. The window does not have similar stylistic ornamentation as the previous windows.

The east façade is three stories due to the west-east slope of the site. The second and first stories are comprised of five bays, however they are not symmetrical from a central bay and there is subtle variation in window placement between the first and second story on the north end. Window groupings are wrapped in sandstone window surrounds with a quoin effect on the vertical edges. An exterior stair has been added. The stair starts from a central opening on the second story and terminates at the north edge of the basement. The basement is differentiated from the stories above by a horizontal brick work trim and is stripped of the ornamentation specific to the collegiate gothic style. The basement level has two central service entrances with overhead doors accessible from the north south access road adjacent to the east façade.

The internal layout of the building is fundamentally different than Gothic cathedrals which makes the inversion possible. From a functional standpoint the Gothic cathedral needed a separate volume to filter out audible and visual noise so that the narthex could have large open floor plans with expansive vertical space. The Industrial Arts Building is *raumplan* style, which creates compartmentalized spaces separated by hallways to ensure limited audible and visual noise eliminating the need for an additional appendage volume. This is common of the Collegiate Gothic style on campuses with a definite budget.

The previously mentioned material change on the façade of the Industrial Arts Building serves to set up an east-west axis that provides a directional quality to the campus as it would have existed during the 1930s. The materiality of the entry establishes an axial hierarchy, important in campus planning for multiple reasons. First of which, it creates a very readable, distinct entry to the Industrial Arts Building from a distance. Meaning, the change in materiality isn't a superficial application to the west façade, but a thoughtful adaptation to achieve the same effect without simple replication. In terms of the Nebraska School for the Deaf campus, the imaginary axis acts as a parallel bisector to the outdoor commons. Associating such a strong linear relationship helps make a visual and implied connection

Nebraska School for the Deaf

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between the southeastern cluster of buildings (Industrial Arts Building, Powerhouse Building, Laundry, Classroom Building) and the northeastern cluster (Administration Building, and Boys Dormitory).

**CLASSROOM BUILDING (D009:0336-028)**

1928 with 1955 addition, Tudor Revival with Collegiate Gothic elements

**CONTRIBUTING**

The building was designed by architecture firm Leo A. Daly, and it had a two-phase construction plan. The first phase, completed in 1928, included the current central gabled volume and everything to the west of the volume associated with the gable. The addition includes everything to the east of the current central gabled volume and was completed in 1955. The plan consists of three minor pavilions spaced equidistant along the primary central volume. The minor pavilions run perpendicular to the spine of the primary volume. The roof including the addition are dressed in an orange flat profile terracotta shingle. The building utilizes common brick, sandstone window surrounds, and red timbers. The primary entrance is on the north façade and is adjacent to the southern edge of the large grass lawn. The north facade is subdivided by each of the perpendicular pavilions, and each pavilion has an independent gabled roof profile to help identify entrances and areas of circulation. The main entrance is contained under what is the now central perpendicular gable. The first-floor facade is detailed in Gothic Revival style. The door is inset under a lancet shaped stone hood molding with label stops. Flanking both sides of the entrance underneath the label stops are ornate Gothic Revival metal lanterns. The second level is predominantly detailed with Tudor Revival features. A portion of the second-floor facade jetties out over the first floor. Consoles support the bottom transom of the extrusion. The extrusion rests on the transom and the decorative vertical half timbering is separated by panels of herringbone brickwork.

Including the three pavilions, the north façade is composed of nine bays, symmetrical from the central pavilion and has the same fenestration across the first and second stories. The bay proximal to the central pavilion has a singular window. The remaining bays all have windows grouped into sequences of four. Sandstone window surrounds with a quoining effect on the vertical edges dress all the windows not on the entrance facades. The original western and later eastern pavilions hide the roof gable behind crow-stepped gables, their edges dressed with decorative sandstone.

West and east facades are detailed in a similar fashion to north facade. Entry is demarcated by a pavilion differing from the north facade in that the contained points of entry are perpendicular to primary pavilion axis. The second story is articulated independently of the first through the use of decorative half-timbering, herringbone brick work, and maroon consoles creating the allusion to a difference in depth between the first and second story. The first level incorporates a similar rectilinear hood molding with label stops, found on the north façade, to demarcate entry. The eastern facade has an exposed basement due to the slope of the site where the western does not.

The south facade continues the window bay sequence found on the north façade. The fenestration pattern is similar to the north façade except the single window bay is now situated next to the end pavilions and central bay has an irregular fenestration pattern. None of the windows have ornamental surrounds. Located between the central bay and the eastern pavilion an unarticulated stair gives access to the basement level.

Nebraska School for the Deaf

Douglas County, Nebraska

**Name of Property****County and State***BOYS DORM BUILDING (D009:0336-027)*

1934, Collegiate Gothic; Mid-Century Modern addition

## CONTRIBUTING

The Boys Dorm as it exists today is composed of two primary volumes arranged in a "T" shape rotated ninety degrees clockwise. From a plan view the north-south volume is the original boys dorm constructed in the 1920s. The volume running east-west is the later addition constructed in the 1970s. The original building is Collegiate Gothic. The later addition is Mid-Century Modern. Considerate material selections were made so the addition compliments the original building. The building is situated so that both the original building and its addition lie far enough west on the site so it sits atop the predominant west-east slope of the site. No radical earthwork or leveling was necessary, and all building faces read proportionally similar.

The eastern facade is the primary façade of the Boys Dorm and is adjacent to the western edge of the grass lawn. The building is two stories and a half story of the basement visible. The stone molding on the facade alludes to the location of the primary floor. The east facade is subdivided into five bays. The central and end bays allude to three volumetric pavilions with two flat bays contained between the three volumes. This is done in part with an offset in the finish surface of the pavilions as well as the face of the pavilions continuing past the cornice and terminating in way that alludes to the end profile of a gabled roof. The windows on these profiles are grouped into series of three per floor, and share one large sandstone window surround. The windows are articulated as independent openings with inside the surround with a quoin effect on the vertical edges. The windows of the interior bays are spaced further apart and only have a minor sandstone window apron, with no complete surround. The roof is dressed in a curved profile orange terracotta shingle visible between the gable profiles.

The first story and a half of the central bay has an ornate stonework entry that surrounds the entrance. The entirety of the stonework is contained horizontally by two vertical spire protrusions on the edges of the pavilion face. Between the two spires above the door is a blank rectangular pediment. A single door is flanked by two sidelights with a transom window that extends over both the door and the sidelights. All the fenestration contained within the stonework has a maroon wood trim.

The north facade of the building is divided into three equal bays. The central bay has a slender gable profile that continues past the frieze. Centered within is a single door with a six-pane glass pattern. Above the door a singular tall central window. A band of stone molding continues from the eastern facade across the north and wraps over the door before returning to the original horizontal datum. The only difference between north and south facade is the south door is flanked by two windows on the first and third bay on the first floor.

The north façade of the Boys Dorm addition is comprised of five bays. The eastern bay, the place where the addition joins the original building, is articulated as separate from the other four bays. The eastern bay has a set of glass double doors trimmed with black frames contained under flat roof extending beyond the façade. Above the covered entry is a single window, with a subtle soldier style brick work surround. The remaining four bays each employ the same fenestration. Two larger windows

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per floor for the first and second floor and a smaller square window for the half-revealed basement all vertically and horizontally aligned in a grid.

The west Façade of the Boys Dorm addition reads as two volumes. The frontal volume is asymmetrically positioned in relation to the large volume behind it. The frontal volume has a single column of three windows aligned closely to the northern edge. Partially visible from the southern edge of the smaller volume is a flat roof plane marking entry.

The southern façade is comprised of six bays. The four central bays read as a continuous surface where the distal bays are offset from the primary surface. The recessed western bay contains a single metal panel door with a large sidelight window under a simple cantilevered flat roof. The recessed eastern bay is the only part of the building where visible earthwork has been done. A small channel has been carved to allow a ramp to connect to the basement door contained in the bay. The eastern bay of the major façade has an irregular fenestration pattern but still adheres to the established horizontal vertical lines. The next bay to the west has no windows, and the remaining two bays employ the same fenestration as the north addition façade.

*POWER HOUSE (DO09:0336-030)*

1930, Collegiate Gothic

## CONTRIBUTING

The Power House is positioned perpendicular to the west-east slope with the gable roof with spine running north south. The north and south facades have multileveled, crow-stepped parapets walls. Earth work has been done on the site so that the north facade has a terraced profile while the south is a continuous profile. The south facade is in parallel with an earthen retaining wall that allows for vehicle traffic on the south end of the campus separated from the buildings. The north and south facades are subdivided by four buttresses. The buttresses taper in at a large, angled stone. After the taper the buttresses perform more like a pilaster. The top of each pilaster is capped with a quoin block with a repeated incised linear shape. The geometry of the incised shape looks like that of a simple five-line house profile. The buttresses start at the edges, splitting the crow-stepped faces into three bays. Within each bay are three large industrial-style, rectilinear windows set on large sandstone sills. Directly above the large industrial windows (split by a thin but noticeable transom) is an industrial fan light with a further divided mullion pattern. Near the crest of the north and south planes are roundels with a wagon wheel and cross mullion pattern. The roundels are set within a wedged brick roundel with sandstone keystones at the cardinal extents of the cruciform wagon wheel mullions. The north facade has a door fit flush beneath the sill of the western window along its eastern boundary. A second door lies beneath the eastern window.

The west facade is subdivided into five bays by six buttresses. Within the six bays a similar window composition follows as on the north and south facades. The north most bay on the west facade has been altered. In line with the five bays are five cylindrical metal chimneys positioned on the crest off the roof slope. The slope of the roof is exposed on the west facade. The entirety of the roof is dressed in orange, arched profile terracotta shingle. Rectilinear brick corbeling exists under the roof overhang. The east façade has the same bay sequence as the western façade. The fenestration on the second level differs only that the central window has been removed and filled with bricks. The now fully

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exposed basement has a service entrance in the southern most bay and the second bay in from the north edge. The central bay has a large cylindrical metal stack that continues up past the roof line and has a small wooden door to its north. The remaining bays have irregular fenestration and employ tall narrow windows.

***LAUNDRY BUILDING (DO09:0336-031)***

Collegiate Gothic

CONTRIBUTING

The Laundry Building is adjacent to the Industrial Arts Building eastern facade and the northeast corner of the Powerhouse building. The Laundry Building runs north-south and has a gable roof dressed with arched profile orange terracotta shingles. The building has a slightly larger east façade than west due to the sites slope, but the relatively small scale of the Laundry Building does not create a second floor.

The primary façade is the southern façade. A small, freestanding shed sits in front of the eastern edge of the southern façade. The shed does not have a permanent foundation and thus it is not counted here as a distinct resource. The small shed was a minor temporary addition that sits in the parking lot currently and does not warrant significance within the historic district. The southern façade has a crow stepped common red brick gable profile that continues past and conceals the roofline. The south façade has three implied bays through the use of materials and window placement. The central bay is indicated by a large arched sandstone pediment with a service door beneath. The distal bays are symmetrical from the central bay. Both contain a single large steel mullion panel window with subtle soldier brick transoms.

The western façade is comprised of four bays and three interior buttresses and the gable profiles on the north and south facades visually enclosing the surface. The two central bays have a similar fenestration pattern; two windows articulated independently with the brick wall surface continued between the windows. The distal bays have a singular centered window. All the windows have a soldier brick style transom, and an angled soldier style brick sill. Unique to the Laundry Building, the western and eastern facades contain a mix of rough-cut bricks with the common brick.

***ADMINISTRATION BUILDING (DO09:0336-029)***

1959, Mid-Century Modern

CONTRIBUTING

The Administration Building is located farthest west on the central east-west axis. In plan it is similar to a capital "T" rotated ninety degrees clockwise. The building is two stories with a half basement exposed. The western façade of the Administration Building is adjacent to the campus's primary avenue. The Administration building was designed by architecture firm Cecil Martin and Associates and completed in 1959. Post 1959, The Administration Building was the first building visitors, students, and parents would see entering the campus. The administration building is unique among all the other Mid-Century Modern buildings that follow. Where the other buildings employ a white concrete frame structure, the Administration Building is less expressive and is dressed almost entirely in a modest, slightly darker, red brick with sandstone accents.

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The western facade is composed of two volumes. A smaller volume in the front contains the main entrance. Centered on the in the western façade of the small volume is a large central window flanked on either side by glass doors with silver mullions, with a slender transom window above all. The doors and window utilize the same silver mullions. A simple rectilinear sandstone surround wraps around the grouping. A small flat roof overhangs the entrance volume on all sides. A steel fascia articulates the roof as a separate horizontal element from the volume below. The Administration Building forgoes an ornate entablature and uses simple independent metal letters above the entry to identify the building. The larger volume beyond is split into three bays by a minor finish surface displacement in the center. The two lateral bays contain no windows or ornamentation. The central bay has a single grouping of three windows wrapped in a sandstone surround.

The southern facade is comprised of multiple volumes. The intersection of the primary north-south and east-west volume create the two primary faces, with smaller volumes filling in the concave corner created by the intersection on the west side. The face of the north-south volume has a central, multi-level grouping of windows above a door on the first floor. A smaller single-story volume is set back from that face approximately two feet. It contains two glass doors with silver mullions, a small central window between the doors, and shared transom window above connecting all. A vertical volume offset six feet from the edge connects the single-story space with the multilevel north south volume. The east facade is two stories with a half-level basement comprised of eight bays. On the southern side a bay is set back from the primary building surface roughly four feet. The north end of the façade has a similar volumetric setback with a covered entrance in the recess. The central five bays of the eastern façade employ the same fenestration pattern: window groupings of three with a shared sandstone sill accent across the second, first, and half exposed basement.

The northern facade is similar to the south. On the north-south volume the window and door details are the same. The facade of the east west volume repeats the triple-window groupings across both levels as the south face but does not have an entrance. The north face does have access to the lower level from the outside via a partial staircase running parallel to the east-west volume.

**PRIMARY SCHOOL BUILDING (DO09:0336-026)**

1967, Mid-Century Modern

**CONTRIBUTING**

The Primary Building is located centrally on the site. It is the northern edge that separates the buildings built in the early twentieth century from those built in the middle of the twentieth century. The building was designed by Martin Money and Associates and accommodated a variety of needs for the school. From plan view, the western portion forms a separate ring with a central courtyard. The eastern wings are slightly offset inward from the east-west portions of the courtyard building. The eastern additions create a courtyard enclosed on three sides, open on the east. The main building axis runs parallel to the west-east sloping site. To reduce the effect of the drastic elevation change, the building is split into sections that terrace along the primary axis.

The western façade has a single story, split into seven bays. The bays are identified visually by the equidistant vertical white concrete pillars that run to the top of the roofline. Bays are visually reinforced by a black metal flashing that runs between each of the vertical concrete pillars. Roughly two feet from the top of the white concrete pillars a horizontal white concrete beam runs between

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pillars to visually unify the facade. The fenestration pattern follows an A-B-C-A-B-C sequence. The base bay is subdivided into five portions, four of which are even and the last is roughly two-thirds of the typical subdivision. The sequence starts with a metal door with a transom window above. Immediately flanking the door on the right-hand side is a grouping of three windows divided by shared vertical mullions. The facade mirrors the fenestration pattern of one bay to the next and then repeats the sequence.

The north facade of the Primary Building shifts from single height on the west to double height on the east end as it runs parallel with the west-east slope. The horizontal white concrete beam continues from the west facade across the westernmost volume of the north facade. The visual split observable in plan (courtyard volume and two linear additions on the east of the courtyard) is readable across the north facade. Where the courtyard volume terminates the addition is set back roughly 18 feet inward from finish surface and is reset as a single height space. The eastern volume transitions to a two-story space as it runs parallel with the slope of the site creating the terraced effect.

The western portion of the north facade continues the seven-bay sequence of the west facade. The fenestration pattern is less visually similar and typically has two windows of equal size centered in the bay on both stories when capable. The eastern portion has four bays, one of which is a single story, the other three are two story. The single-story bay is subdivided equally into four segments. The western segment contains a recessed entrance under the reset horizontal concrete beam. The other three subdivisions have singular windows centered horizontally and aligned vertically to the top beam. The second entrance is contained in a narrow double height bay, framed between the white concrete verticals. It is subdivided with three large windows on the second level, and two smaller windows and the door on the lower level.

The eastern facade is symmetrical. Two identical building volumes flank a central outdoor plaza. Visible above the plaza is an outdoor space that connects the western end of the two symmetrical volumes and beyond that courtyard the triple-height facade of the western volume. The facades of the end are framed as single double height bays, with four windows on the lower level, between white columns. The interior facades that front the plaza are double-story with three bays the easternmost being offset outwards five feet. The eastern bay has a three by two fenestration grid with the lower western corner exchanging a window for door. The central and western bays also have a three by two fenestration grid with all the openings centered around the column that divides the bay.

The southern facade is similar visually similar to the northern except for how it addresses the sloping ground plane. The south elevation is adjacent to the large lawn space, causing the use of a different grading technique. Where on the north face the ground moves down in terraced portions, the earth that meets the south side is smooth and linear. On the eastern portion of the south facade where the elevation change is most prominent, a large, hidden retaining wall is used to make the eastern entry accessible without disrupting the lawn.

*GYMNASIUM / POOL BUILDING (DO09:0336-032)*

1965, Mid-Century Modern

CONTRIBUTING

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The Gymnasium / Pool Building shares the central east-west axis with Primary Building and is the building farthest east on the central axis. Beyond the Gymnasium / Pool Building is a large grass field that would have been used as a multi-use sports field. In plan view the building is largely symmetrical. A large central cubic volume is flanked on the north and south by smaller volumes that run parallel along the entire edge of the larger central cuboid volume. The small edge volumes are perpendicularly bisected by smaller rectilinear volumes. A rectangular volume runs parallel to the central volumes western edge. Smaller tributary volumes wrap around the western edge to the north and south connecting all the smaller volumes into a ring shape open entirely on the east side. The site slopes away from the building on the north and south edges while maintaining the dominant west-east slope present throughout the entire site.

The architecture employs the same white concrete frame with brick-panel logic seen in the Primary School Building. The central volume is three levels and is the visual focal point compared to the ring of volumes that surround it on the north, west, and south sides. The roof of the central volume has been designed to articulate the bays of the primary volume below. It does this by continuing the vertical column lines onto the roof overhang and fills in the space between with an opaque glass tinted blue. All roofs are articulated as separate of the volumes beneath throughout through the use of large overhangs with thick fascia materials.

The eastern facade is the most unique amongst the four. The central cubic volume extends past the subsidiary volumes and is in the visual front. The central volume is lofted onto twelve columns with clearance of roughly fifteen feet beneath creating a portico facing the grass sports field. The face of the lofted volume has five large bays with no windows. The facade beneath the portico is split into seven bays. Five bays are contained under the portico and one flanks either side outside the portico. The bays beneath the portico have a single continuous band of windows that run beneath a horizontal white beam. The windows do not have articulated mullions. The bays outside the portico have no windows and on the lateral edge have an entry embedded approximately twelve feet into the volume.

The volumes continue out laterally from the portico, receding from the most prominent east façade. The volumes that flank the lateral entrances are double height and has a single full bay and a half bay on the outward side. The half-sized bay has eight opaque blue tinted glass windows in a single column with thin horizontal mullions separating panes of glass.

The north and south elevations are the relatively the same. The north and south facades differ only in which mechanical systems are visible, site grading, and the slight variation in articulation of fenestration. The volume perpendicular to the central volume is a single height with single bay with no windows adorning its northern face. The positioning of the ventral volume is in alignment with the central bay of the large cuboid behind. Exclusive to the north façade, the primary cubic volume beyond has four bays with similar opaque blue glass. This is done for indirect lighting and natural ventilation. Beyond the central perpendicular volume is the small volume that runs parallel to the edge of the central volume. The edge volumes maintain the same elevation height as the perpendicular volume. It is split into five bays that share alignment with the bays of the central volume. The bays have different fenestration patterns based on elevation. The fenestration is articulated as an entire bay further subdivided into four horizontal band, the bottom, third, and top are the same blue opaque glass as on the central roof. The second band is a series of four operable ribbon windows. The western bay has a



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slightly higher independent roofline. The higher roofline continues around the edge and makes up the roof line of the western volume.

The west facade has been altered the most compared to all the others. The vertical surfaces surrounding the corner entrances are clad with a modern, black wall-covering material. The rest of the exterior of the expansive building retains its character from the period of significance.

*CARRIAGE HOUSE (DO09:0336-035)*

Collegiate Gothic

CONTRIBUTING

The Carriage House is in the northwest corner of the campus and is the oldest original building on the campus today, however exact date of completion is unknown. The Carriage House is oriented in a north-south direction with a simple gable roof dressed in arched profile orange terracotta shingles. The single-story building is built in an area of the campus with a minor slope with highpoint south to low point north. Paved access to the building exists on both the east and south sides. The Carriage House material selection is unlike the other Collegiate Gothic buildings on the campus. The building utilizes a similar common red brick, but uses a white wood trim as accent. The white color of the mortar between the common brick has blended with the brick over time and now creates a more monolithic reading of the brick walls compared to the other Collegiate Gothic buildings.

The north and south façades of the Carriage House are very similar. Both façades are articulated as a simplified gable profile, with crow steps at the borders of the roof and a single rectilinear bay below. An allusion to minor crow steps along the roof slant are created through the use of subtle white wood insets. Centered under the apex of the roof is a large window opening that has been boarded up with white sheet wood. Both gable profiles are subdivided below the origin of the pitch by horizontal piece of white wood trim and immediately below that a horizontal stripe of header bond brick, a horizontal stripe of soldier bond brick, and another horizontal stripe of header bond brick. The bay below the gable is flanked by red brick quoins. Two windows are spaced equidistant from the center of the bay and are now covered with painted white wood. There is subtle variation in window placement from the center point between the north and south façades. The brick work on the western corner of the south façade has deteriorated slightly.

The western façade has deteriorated the most heavily of all the buildings on the campus. The southern half of the west façade is a mix of completely collapsed walls to missing the finish surface brick. The roof on the southern portion of the roof on the western façade has caved in but is still relatively intact. There is evidence that a parapet wall concealed where the roof met the exterior walls. There are two visible window openings, a visible door opening on the northern bounds of the façade none of which are covered. The eastern façade has similar conditions to the western. The terracotta shingles have been entirely stripped on the southern half of the roof and the parapet wall has also collapsed in various places. Two larger service entries are centered on the façade, one of which is sealed and the other is not.

*HOUSE (DO09:0336-034)*

NON-CONTRIBUTING

The house on the north edge of campus was a structure constructed by students of the Nebraska

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School for the Deaf in the mid-1960s. The house sits on a portion of the site that runs from highpoint south west to low point north creating an abnormal site condition. The house is oriented so the crest of the simple gable roof runs southwest by north east. The resultant facades vary in levels exposed above and below grade as a result of the site condition. The house is a single story with a basement level. The basement level and the first story are clad in different materials as well as finished in different colors. The basement level is built out of CMU blocks painted white with a white mortar joint. The first story is covered in a horizontal wood clapboard siding finished in a dark beige. The roof is dressed in an orange flat profile asphalt shingle.

The eastern façade is the primary façade of the house and is comprised of two bays. The northern bay of the east façade fully exposes the basement due to the slope of the site creating a two story reading. The northern bay contains a garage stall where the full basement is exposed and small exterior stair case running parallel to the eastern face connects the drive way leading up to the garage to the front porch contained in the southern. The CMU basement wall contains a small window near the smaller southern edge of the northern bay. On the ground floor the northern bay has two window groupings. The northern window is a single operable window and the southern is a set of two operable windows. Both groupings of windows are enclosed with white trim and flanked by white shutters. The eastern wall is recessed under the pitched roof to create a covered porch on the southern bay. Towards the northern edge of the south bay the small stair case changes directions and runs perpendicular to the building face and terminates at the front door of the house. The door is dressed in similar white trim as the windows. A large operable two window grouping occupies the southern half of the south bay. The porch is roughly four feet deep and sits three feet off the ground.

The southern façade is a single bay and has a simple gable roof profile with roof overhang. Roughly eighteen inches of the basement is exposed due to the sloping of the site. The basement walls are still visibly white wall CMU. Two small square windows are set inside the CMU and the top edge of the windows is aligned with the beginning of the beige clapboard that signifies the ground floor. A small stair case runs parallel to the south façade on the west end and terminates in a landing with a similar door to the primary entrance. There are two independent operable windows positioned irregularly on the portion of the façade relating to the first floor. A small attic ventilation grate can be seen near the crest of the roofline.

The western and northern facades are simple, and have no articulated bays or variety in surface. The western façade maintains the articulation of ground level and basement through the use of white CMU for the basement and beige clapboard siding for the first floor. Three windows are placed at irregular intervals across the ground level façade. All are dressed in white wood trim and white shutters. Near the north edge of the western façade a small concrete pad has been laid for mechanical equipment. The north façade is a consistent double story façade. The full height CMU basement wall has a single small square window off center towards the west. In vertical alignment with the small square window is a single operable window, with a similar appearance to the others associated with the ground level façade. Another singular window of the same size is placed on the eastern half of the first story façade with a similar physical appearance.

The House is listed as non-contributing due to several factors. First, the house was student built, and no evidence has surfaced of the involvement of an architect. As a result, no gestures or identifiable

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features that could be considered significant due to an architectural style are perceivable. This excludes it from being considered as a contributing structure for both Collegiate Gothic and Mid-Century Modern, both of which have specific features. Secondly, the house lacks distinction amongst similar residential properties in the area, therefore if the house were to be listed as an independent style within the campus it cannot be maintained that it is exemplary when compared to similar structures in the area.

*GIRLS DORMITORY (DO09:0336-025)*

## CONTRIBUTING

1969, Mid-Century Modern

The Girls Dormitory is the farthest north on the central north-south axis through the entire site. In plan it is the only building on the site that does not use approximate cardinal directions as the axes for orientation. The Girls dormitory was designed by architecture firm Martin Money and associates. The primary building volume runs northwest to southeast. A central pavilion perpendicularly bisects the primary volume. It indicates the primary entrance on the west side. On the east side the volume bottlenecks where it adjoins the primary volume before returning to its previous size. The building has a single flat roof.

The western facade houses the primary entrance located in the central pavilion. The central pavilion is a double-height space with three equidistant bays and four vertical white columns separating the bays. The side bays each have two windows per level, and each window is aligned to the outer edge of the bay leaving a central, uninterrupted, vertical brick wall. Above each window is a blue panel and below each is a similar blue panel roughly double the size of the above. The central bay continues the same pattern, but includes a covered door justified towards the southern edge of the central bay leaving a fraction of the brick wall in the center. The southwest facade of the primary volume is symmetrical on either side of the central pavilion. The primary facades are comprised of seven bays employing a repeatable fenestration pattern the peripheral bays are lifted off the ground slightly due to the slope of the site. The first level of the exterior bays has covered entries with small staircases necessary due to the sloping site. Unlike the central bay, two smaller doors are used and are placed underneath the vertical fenestration grid lines leaving the brick wall uninterrupted.

The southern and northern facades are similar. The primary face is singular unadorned bay. Beneath the primary bay, as the site slopes, the basement level are revealed. The primary surfaces of the basement level are painted black. Visible beyond the ventral face is the posterior of the perpendicular central pavilion. The medial bay has four windows in two vertical columns and is farther recessed than the lateral bay. The lateral bay is an unadorned face with a different articulation of roof surface. Both bays are lifted off the ground on six columns creating a northeast-facing portico.

The eastern facade is similar to the northern. The slope of the site has made the basement visible. The facade and fenestration read of a continuation of the two levels above it, the portions of brick are covered with black paint. The central volume employs the fenestration pattern of the primary volume beyond it.

*SUPERINTENDENT'S HOME (DO09:0336-033)*

1955-1957, Mid-Century Modern

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CONTRIBUTING

The Superintendent's Home is located on the north east corner of built section of the campus. Located east of the Girls Dormitory and north of the Pool Building, it too is constructed in the Mid-Century Modern style. The Superintendent's Home has a "P" shaped footprint from plan view. The spine of the roof runs north-south, with a small portion of what would be the stem of "P" continuing east past the spine before terminating. The whole roof is dressed in flat profile grey asphalt shingle. The house sits on a portion of the site that has a predominant high point west to low point east slope. The Superintendent's Home is also located on a very slight concave slope with the highpoints existing on the north and south ends of the concave curve. This creates a minor depression that runs east west in addition to the predominant west to east slope present throughout the whole site. Where houses of earlier design movements had a rather squat and square reading from street level, Mid-Century Modern homes generally had a much longer and lower profile with strategic compositional window placement. The rule of thirds is a common proportion associated with the modernist movement, and it can be seen in various scale throughout the façades of the Superintendent's Home. The main visible materials used in the Superintendent's Home are white horizontal wooden board siding and blue CMU block.

The west façade, adjacent to one of the minor roads through the campus, is the primary façade of the Superintendent's Home. The west façade is composed of four bays, with three bays making up the building face and the open air car port making up the remaining bay to the south. The relationship of vertical wall surface to roof surface is proportionally different than any other structure on the campus. The roof has a shallow slope that reinforces the rule of thirds proportional system when related to the vertical wall surface. The shallow roof slope exposes a minimalist chimney over the farthest north bay of the facade. The roof associated with the open air car port takes up the entirety of the stem of the house's "P" shape observable in plan. The southern bay has a single grouping of three windows aligned nearer the south edge of the bay. The grouping has a single larger vertical window on the south and two equal sized windows that split the vertical dimension of the larger window evenly. The entire grouping has a square boundary. The central bay is recessed three feet from the finish surface of the two distal bays, creating a covered entry way. Aligned to the south edge of the central bay is the front door. A grouping of three windows is aligned to the northern vertical of the door. A large inoperable horizontal window is immediately adjacent to the doorway, and two vertical small operable square windows split the vertical distance of the large horizontal window on the far side of the door. The grouping of windows is not horizontally aligned with the door. The northern bay is very similar to the southern bay, however the relationship of the same window grouping to vertical wall surface is mirrored so the larger portion of blank wall is on the interior of the bay. The entirety of the west façade is dressed in white, horizontal wooden board siding. On the northern edge of the west façade where the basement becomes visible the blue CMU is exposed.

The south façade of the building has one face but reads two due to the offset of the roof plane and concrete pad to account for the open air car port. The open air car port covers the western half of the south façade. The south façade is a gable profile and the spine of the roof also indicates the eastern termination of the large concrete pad that protrudes off the façade. Two parallel wooden beams carry the load of the extended roof plane. One beam is located under the spine of the roof and the other is flush with the western edge of the south faced. At the termination of the beams small cylindrical columns resolve the load of the roof plane into the concrete pad. In the western bay is a covered entrance near the western edge and vertically aligned to the top of the door is a small rectangular

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window. The western bay has a single window grouping of two operable windows sharing a central mullion. A similar window grouping is repeated on the basement level, however the windows are slightly more slender. The sloping of the site reveals more of the basement moving from west to east. The ground floor maintains the white horizontal wooden board siding, and the basement is blue block CMU. All the windows are articulated with white mullions and white trim.

The east façade reads as a double story façade due to sloping of the site and the reveal of the entire basement. The differentiation of levels through the use horizontal wooden board siding for the ground floor and blue CMU block for the basement is continued. The east façade is composed of three bays with the two distal bays mirroring each other from the central bay. The southern and northern bays have a single central window grouping comprised of three windows. The groupings are similar to those seen on the western façade, however the larger vertical windows are now positioned nearer the distal edge of the façade, while the two small operable windows are on the proximal side. The window groupings are repeated on the basement level and maintain vertical alignment. The position of the larger window and smaller windows are reversed on the basement level so that the larger window is again proximal to the center bay. The finish surface of the central bay, across both levels, is recessed by roughly nine to twelve inches. The central bay on the ground floor has a single grouping of four windows that cover the entirety of the horizontal distance of the bay. Three small operable windows are vertically stacked on the south edge of the central bay and a singular large horizontal inoperable window occupies the remainder of the bay. The large horizontal bay is roughly four times as wide as the smaller operable windows, and is the largest window on the house. The basement level continues the overall window grouping footprint, however the individual windows are articulated differently. There is a large square window in the center of the bay flanked by two vertical operable windows on either side.

The north façade is a gable profile with minimal fenestration compared to the other facades. The visual differentiation of floors through materiality is maintained. Horizontal white wooden board siding is utilized on the ground floor and blue CMU block is used for the basement level. Both the ground floor and basement level have the same fenestration pattern. Three small horizontal, independent windows are placed equidistant across the horizontal distance of the façade. The windows maintain vertical alignment from one floor to the other.

**STEAM TUNNELS (DO09: 0336-036)**

Structure

NON-CONTRIBUTING

The Steam Tunnels are an underground utility to allow ease of access to the heating equipment in the campus buildings. The steam tunnels are all concrete construction, roughly seven feet tall by six feet wide. The Steam Tunnels are listed as non-contributing due to the fact that they display no qualities or identifiable features that could be associated with an architectural style, do not possess a high artistic value, and the design or construction is not associated with a singular distinguished individual. The steam tunnels are not considered as contributing for the Nebraska School for the Deaf because it does not add to the overall historic environment, nor does it contribute to the architectural identity of the school.

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**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.)

- 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.

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ARCHITECTURE

EDUCATION

SOCIAL HISTORY

**Period of Significance**

1928-1977

**Significant Dates**

1928-34: Collegiate Gothic building period

1955-9: Mid-Century building Phase I

1965-7: Mid-Century building Phase II

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Leo A. Daly (1928 Classroom Building and 1955 Classroom Building Addition)

Cecil Martin and Associates (1959 Administration Building)

Martin Money and Associates (1967 Primary Building and 1969 Girls' Dormitory)

**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

*Author's Note: The name "Nebraska School for the Deaf" replaced the school's original name of "Nebraska Institute for the Deaf and Dumb" in 1909. For the sake of consistency, the authors use the*

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*more recent name, which was in use during the entire period of significance. Also, the uppercase "Deaf" is used to distinguish the Deaf community and their common norms, cultural values, traditions, and language (ASL). Lowercase "deaf" is used simply to describe an audiological condition or status. "Hearing" is used to denote people who are members of dominant American culture.*

The Nebraska School for the Deaf is significant under both Criterion A and C. The listed period of significance encapsulates all three areas of qualification for the consideration of the Nebraska School for the Deaf of state importance. The period of significance is generated from confirmed dates of construction for architecturally significant buildings on the campus, while the importance of the NSD began before and continued after the listed window.

Social History: The Nebraska School for the Deaf is significant under Criterion A: Social History for its association with efforts within Nebraska's Deaf community to sustain cultural and linguistic sovereignty. Upon the adoption of a Nebraska state law in 1911 that banned the use of sign language in classrooms at the Nebraska School for the Deaf (NSD), Deaf students and teachers continually attempted to subvert and resist this ruling over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These actions successfully strengthened and reinforced Nebraskan Deaf communal and linguistic identity; consequently, the Nebraska School for the Deaf is significant at the State level for these contributions to Nebraska's Deaf community.

Education: The Nebraska School for the Deaf is significant under Criterion A: Education for its association with 20<sup>th</sup> century trends in the education of the deaf. Since its founding, educators and administrators of NSD advocated the "combined method" for instruction of students. In 1911, despite protest from Nebraska's Deaf community, oralism eclipsed the combined method as the primary mode of instruction at NSD. Sign language was reintroduced in the fall of 1970, but oralism remained the official education policy until 1977. In conjunction with oral education, NSD established and maintained a robust vocational department that sought to increase the employability and marketability of NSD's graduates. The Nebraska School for the Deaf is significant at the State level as the only residential campus for the deaf established in Nebraska.

Architecture: The Nebraska School for the Deaf is significant under Criterion C: Architecture as a collection of buildings that together embody distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction. From the construction of the first documented structure in 1928 to the termination of major construction in 1969, the physical artifacts that remain on the site provide insight into the narrative of American architecture within the period of significance. Architecture is often a manifestation of culture. The existent architecture of the NSD provides a testament to this. The selection of particular architectural styles represents the aspirations of the institution and illuminates particularities of Omaha in comparison to national trends. The architecture of the NSD chronicles the changes in aspirations of the institution and larger culture, visible through the variation of selection of architectural styles with respect to time.

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**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least one paragraph for each area of significance.)

### Deaf Culture and Education at NSD Prior to 1918

Until 1817, the United States had no formal institutions to educate deaf children. Deaf children often never went to school, remaining at home where they developed “their own idiosyncratic gestural systems in order to communicate” with their families.<sup>1</sup> An informal solution for the wealthy was to send their deaf children abroad to study at schools for the deaf in Europe, but to prominent Hartford, Connecticut physician Mason Cogswell, this was no solution for his deaf daughter, Alice. Cogswell partnered with Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, an advocate of deaf education, to lobby Connecticut’s legislature to establish a formal school for the deaf. Gallaudet in turn approached Laurent Clerc, a deaf graduate of the Institut Royal des Sourds-Muets in Paris, France. Out of this partnership emerged the first school for the deaf in the United States: the American School for the Deaf. Clerc served as the school’s first superintendent.<sup>2</sup>

At their new school, Gallaudet and Clerc hoped to codify and formalize the “language of signs” they observed and learned while in France. This forerunner to American Sign Language (ASL) was most beneficial to deaf individuals both as a method of formal instruction, as well as by solving a pernicious issue Gallaudet believed faced deaf people: isolation from the gospel and a broader Christian community.<sup>3</sup> Sign language brought deaf individuals into the larger Christian fold. Thus, to Gallaudet and other early nineteenth century Christian reformers, sign language was not only appropriate for deaf children to learn, but a necessary component in achieving inner self discipline, redemption, and moral agency.<sup>4</sup> The growing numbers of schools for the deaf established before the Civil War quickly placed methods of education employing sign language—known as “manualism”—at the core of their curriculums. Many schools for the deaf also utilized other methods of instruction, including finger spelling and writing while pairing these with sign language.

As schools for the deaf continued to emerge throughout the antebellum United States, so too did a cohesive and unified Deaf culture. Deaf schools brought together deaf children in larger numbers than ever before, and, as these children received a formal education, they informally began to learn about themselves. This process hinged on the creation of a shared linguistic identity informed by sign language. As most antebellum deaf students could attest, they overwhelmingly “preferred the sign language to English,” often assuming sign language as their primary language and means of communication and English as a second language.<sup>5</sup> Sign language, manualism, and schools for the deaf were foundational in the process whereby deaf people became Deaf.

Larger cultural shifts after the Civil War brought closer scrutiny to Deaf culture and sign language. Whereas antebellum protestant evangelist reformers believed sign language served an important

<sup>1</sup> R.A.R. Edwards, *Words Made Flesh: Nineteenth-Century Deaf Education and the Growth of Deaf Culture* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2012), 12.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 13-16.

<sup>3</sup> Douglas C. Baynton, “‘A Silent Exile on This Earth’: The Metaphorical Construction of Deafness in the Nineteenth Century,” *American Quarterly* 44, no. 2 (June, 1992): 222.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 223.

<sup>5</sup> Edwards, 63.



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moral and religious purpose by bringing deaf people into the Christian community, reformers after the Civil War believed sign language isolated Deaf people from a national community. This emphasis on national unity coincided with one of the largest influxes of immigrants to the United States, a demographic shift that exacerbated anxieties of racial and cultural heterogeneity. To cultural reformers following the Civil War, the Deaf community existed beyond a larger national collective; these reformers targeted and subsequently attacked sign language as the most visible expression of Deaf culture and insisted on “oralism,” a method of education that taught deaf people how to appear like hearing people via lip-reading and speaking.<sup>6</sup>

Undergirding these xenophobic and nationalist preoccupations with national unity were eugenicist and social Darwinist conceptions about human development. The social Darwinism subscribed to by reformers and scholars of the late nineteenth century promoted a vision of humanity progressing and rising as they evolved away from backwards and crude ancestors. Critics of sign language applied a “linguistic Darwinism” contending that inferior languages died out as they were superseded by superior ones. To proponents of oralism, “to sign was to step downward in the scale of being.”<sup>7</sup> Likewise, other oralists, such as Alexander Graham Bell, articulated the abolition of sign language in his 1883 address to the National Academy of Sciences as a necessary component in arresting the “formation of a deaf variety of the human race.”<sup>8</sup> Such eugenicist beliefs became mainstream as oralists launched a campaign against sign language throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Both manualists and oralists predicated their understanding of deaf education along paternalistic and patronizing ideas of deaf children, and deaf people generally, as disabled and inferior to hearing people. Oralism, however, was far more devastating to deaf education than manualism. Oralism stunted early language and educational development; only a few deaf individuals were ever successful under oralist methods of education while the vast majority of deaf children met frustration and repeated failure. Deaf children could not simply learn to act like hearing people, for “they are both members of a species that by nature seeks optimal communication, and inhabitants of a sensory universe in which that end cannot be achieved by oral means alone.”<sup>9</sup>

This contentious terrain formed the backdrop of efforts to create a school for the deaf in Nebraska. In 1866, just one year after the Civil War, William Decoursey French, a deaf instructor at the Indiana School for the Deaf, wrote to then-territorial governor Alvin Saunders urging him to establish some kind of formal educational institution for Nebraska’s deaf children. Receiving a “favorable answer” from Saunders, French was discouraged to learn two years later that “nothing was done apparently for it.”<sup>10</sup> In 1869, French took matters more directly into his own hands, crossing the frozen “Missouri river

<sup>6</sup> Douglas C. Baynton, *Forbidden Signs: American Culture and the Campaign Against Sign Language* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 16.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 55.

<sup>8</sup> Alexander Graham Bell, “Upon the Formation of a Deaf Variety of the Human Race,” paper presented at the National Academy of the Sciences, New Haven, CT, November 13, 1883.

<sup>9</sup> Baynton, *Forbidden Signs*, 10.

<sup>10</sup> William Decoursey French, “Reminiscences of Nebraska History,” Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, NE.

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in a large sleigh drawn by four horses” to convene with legislators and the Reverend H.W. Kuhns in the “village” of Lincoln to formally establish a residential school for the deaf.<sup>11</sup>

French was ultimately successful and that same year the Nebraska School for the Deaf was established in Lincoln. The newly formed corporate board elected French the first superintendent of the school—he would be the last deaf person to serve in that role at the institution. By April 1, 1869 the school opened its doors in a rented house somewhere along the then-rural St. Mary’s Avenue.<sup>12</sup> James and Rebecca Bonner granted the school its first tract of land in 1871, gifting the state of Nebraska a ten-acre wheat field three miles northwest of Omaha.<sup>13</sup> That same year the state legislature authorized the construction of an Italianate-style building on the school’s grounds, which grew over the years to include multiple buildings across the campus.<sup>14</sup>

From the outset, NSD attempted to navigate the complicated and shifting cultural terrain surrounding manualism and oralism. In their early annual reports to the governor of Nebraska, the school’s board of directors pointed out that deaf students at the school preferred the accessibility and agency provided by sign language, a form of linguistic expression that “is just as natural to them as oral language is to us.”<sup>15</sup> At the same time they validated sign language as a viable method of deaf education, the board also drew attention to developing oralist methods of education (primarily to point out the difficulty in applying such methods). Ultimately, NSD staked out a middle ground between manualism and oralism, advocating for the combined method—a form of deaf education that borrowed from both manualist and oralist methods—and assured the governor there was no hesitation on the part of the institution “to blend these various methods in the course of instruction.”<sup>16</sup> For both the school’s administration and members of Nebraska’s Deaf community, the combined method worked compatibly with the educational needs of students attending the school. Indeed, the combined method was broadly accepted and advocated by Deaf people throughout the United States.<sup>17</sup>

At the same time NSD sanctioned the combined method to educate deaf students, school officials aggressively pursued the implementation of a vocational program. Such a vocational program hoped to provide Nebraska’s deaf students with skills “essential to success in life” by teaching printing, drawing, and other trades skills to increase the marketability and employability of NSD’s graduates.<sup>18</sup> From the school’s vocational department, NSD students wrote and printed their own newspaper, *The Nebraska Mute Journal* (later changed to *The Nebraska Journal*), which served as a valuable promoter of Deaf students’ welfare at NSD through the first decade of the twentieth century. In this way, NSD stood at

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> “Bonner & W. to State of Nebraska,” Warranty Deeds for Property, Douglas County, NE, July 19, 1871, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, NE.

<sup>14</sup> Magdalene Pickens, *An Institutional Study of the Nebraska School for the Deaf* (Omaha, NE: University of Nebraska Omaha, 1947), 6.

<sup>15</sup> Board of Directors of the Nebraska Institute for the Deaf and Dumb, *Fifth Report of the Board of Directors of the Nebraska Institute for the Deaf and Dumb* (Omaha, NE: Nebraska Institute for the Deaf and Dumb, 1877), 6-7.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>17</sup> Susan Burch, *Signs of Resistance: American Deaf Cultural History 1900 to World War II* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2002), 10.

<sup>18</sup> *Fifth Report of the Board of Directors of the Nebraska Institute for the Deaf and Dumb*, 5; Letter from H.E. Dawes to Charles Dietrich, December 21<sup>st</sup>, 1901, Charles Dietrich papers, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, NE.

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the forefront of deaf education in the United States, aligning with schools across the country in reinforcing a commitment to vocational training in conjunction with a traditional educational curriculum.

As the nineteenth century wore on, NSD's efforts to find balance between manualism and oralism became increasingly fraught as proponents of oralism overwhelmed and exerted influence on the national deaf educational establishment. Alexander Graham Bell, just seven years after his address to the National Academy of Sciences, visited NSD. Reportedly, Bell came away from the school alarmed and aggravated at the continued use of sign language, urging school officials to do away with sign language completely and formalize oralist methods of education in the school's curriculum.<sup>19</sup> John A. Gillespie, the 1880s superintendent of the school and "one of the most noted instructors in the Auricular method of teaching the Deaf," continued to promote the combined method, but, unlike his predecessors, more aggressively pushed to expand oral education at the school.<sup>20</sup> By 1881, Gillespie organized the first oral class composed of thirteen children that could "hear somewhat" and taught these children to lip-read and "hear" utilizing an audiphone. Gillespie noted "the labor of teaching by this method is wearing in the extreme," but he assured the governor and board of directors that regardless of any difficulty "we feel encouraged to persevere in the course marked out."<sup>21</sup>

By 1883, Gillespie observed these methods of instruction were "in vogue" and students in the oral class had jumped from thirteen to twenty-seven.<sup>22</sup> One proponent of oralism supposedly lauded the school as the first in the United States to establish a separate oral department.<sup>23</sup> Whether or not NSD was the first to create an independent oral department, oralism continued to supersede manualism and the combined method often as the primary, if not exclusive, means of educating deaf children at schools throughout the United States. At the turn of the century, roughly 40 percent of deaf schools in the United States banned sign language and replaced manualist curriculums with oralist curriculums. After World War I (WWI), nearly 80 percent of all schools followed these trends.<sup>24</sup>

Oralist pressure continued to mount in Nebraska in the first decade of the twentieth century as a well-funded and connected group of parents of deaf children organized legislative action against sign language in Nebraska. Like ableist critiques of sign language's supposed role in Deaf people's isolation from a national community, Nebraskan parents of deaf children articulated that sign language supposedly isolated Deaf children from their hearing families. These arguments originated amongst A.N. Dafoe and E.J. Babcock, both parents of deaf children, who launched a campaign in Nebraska's legislature for a bill that would require oral methods and "eliminate" manual teaching entirely at

<sup>19</sup> "Alexander Graham Bell," *Omaha World-Herald*, January 25, 1890.

<sup>20</sup> J.A. Gillespie petition to instate as superintendent of the Nebraska School for the Deaf, undated, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, NE.

<sup>21</sup> Board of Directors of the Nebraska Institute for the Deaf and Dumb, *Third Biennial Report of the Nebraska Institute for the Deaf and Dumb* (Omaha, NE: Nebraska Institute for the Deaf and Dumb, 1883), 7.

<sup>22</sup> Board of Directors of the Nebraska Institute for the Deaf and Dumb, *Fourth Biennial Report of the Nebraska Institute for the Deaf and Dumb* (Omaha, NE: Nebraska Institute for the Deaf and Dumb, 1885), 7.

<sup>23</sup> Board of Directors of the Nebraska Institute for the Deaf and Dumb, *Sixth Biennial Report of the Nebraska Institute for the Deaf and Dumb* (Omaha, NE: Nebraska Institute for the Deaf and Dumb, 1888), 91.

<sup>24</sup> Baynton, *Forbidden Signs*, 5.

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NSD.<sup>25</sup> Towards this end, Dafoe and Babcock organized the Nebraska Parents' Association for the Promotion of the Teaching of Speech to the Deaf (NPAPTSD) to lobby for such a law.

The organizing effort against sign language alarmed members of Nebraska's adult Deaf community and Deaf instructors at NSD. Sign language was used throughout NSD at student gatherings, sporting events, and chapel services and was likewise sanctioned by school officials, particularly superintendent Reuben Stewart, as an appropriate means of communication between and amongst students and faculty. Stewart, like his predecessor Gillespie, maintained the combined method of instruction within classrooms at NSD. Students and instructors—Deaf and Hearing alike—understood that this approach sustained “the deaf subculture that had developed in nineteenth century America” at NSD and ensured deaf students at the school received a high-quality education.<sup>26</sup> The threats leveled by NPAPTSD against sign language jeopardized the livelihoods of deaf instructors at NSD as well. Unable to teach articulation, Deaf teachers would be pushed from the classroom entirely. This loss of Deaf teachers meant the loss of Deaf role models and thus the “traditions, culture, and most importantly the language of the American deaf community would not be passed on to new generations of deaf children...” in the state of Nebraska.<sup>27</sup>

These fears were ignored by hearing people in positions of authority in Nebraska as NPAPTSD and the Nebraska legislature pressed on in their mission to eradicate sign language at NSD. On February 1, 1911, Senate File 173 was introduced to the Nebraska legislature to instruct students in the “oral, aural, and lip-reading method to the exclusion of the deaf alphabet and sign language...”<sup>28</sup> Students at NSD decried the law as a threat to their “educational welfare,” reaffirming that they preferred the combined method.<sup>29</sup> The adult Deaf community in Nebraska and throughout the United States echoed these fears, warning against such an “unwise law.”<sup>30</sup> But “Nebraska oralists undercut the Deaf community's power to influence educational policies and to preserve its culture within the schools. These oralists largely ignored Deaf pleas...” and in May of 1911 Governor Charles Aldrich signed Nebraska's oralism bill into law.<sup>31</sup>

Accompanying this legislative change came an administrative change at NSD. Frank Booth, a close associate of Alexander Graham Bell that worked as superintendent at Bell's Volta Bureau, swiftly replaced Reuben Stewart, who had openly advocated against the oralism bill. Booth made it clear sign language was not welcome in or out of the classrooms at NSD, writing that sign language “is not now used in the school-room... and I hope to do away with its use outside of the school-room.”<sup>32</sup> Only

<sup>25</sup> John V. Van Cleve, “Nebraska's Oral Law of 1911 and the Deaf Community,” *Nebraska History* 65 (1984): 199.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 200.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 201.

<sup>28</sup> E.A.F., “School Items,” *American Annals of the Deaf* 56, no. 3 (May, 1911): 347.

<sup>29</sup> “The Light Turned On,” *The Nebraska Journal*, March 15, 1911.

<sup>30</sup> Olof Hanson, “Reply to an Address by Mr. Carroll G. Pearse, President National Educational Association,” National Association of the Deaf Circular No. 7, 1911, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, NE.

<sup>31</sup> Burch, 26.

<sup>32</sup> Frank W. Booth, quoted in John V. Van Cleve, “Nebraska's Oral Law of 1911 and the Deaf Community,” *Nebraska History* 65 (1984): 208.

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students of “mental and physical incapacity” were allowed to sign in vocational settings.<sup>33</sup> Under Booth’s administration the school’s newspaper, *The Nebraska Journal*, formerly an outspoken advocate of sign language and the combined method, published articles only “favorable to oralism, excluding Deaf people’s perspectives altogether.”<sup>34</sup>

Nebraska’s 1911 oralism law drastically altered and continued to influence the physical and educational development of the school for the next half-century. Under Booth’s tenure, the school underwent a new building program, beginning in 1915 with the erection of a new primary school building and dormitory. As Booth explained, a new primary building was necessary to “segregate them [younger deaf children] at once upon their entrance” from older children, those “manually taught, sign using pupils” who passed on sign language to their younger peers, subsequently adopting sign language “as their vernacular, quite to the exclusion of speech and lip-reading, and thus continuously throughout the school course.”<sup>35</sup> Separating and segregating children by age to discourage sign language was directly reflected in the physical development of the school within the period of significance until the mid-twentieth century when school officials realized efforts to discourage the use of sign language amongst students were futile.

The 1911 law also restructured the school’s teaching force, consequently affecting many aspects of Deaf culture associated with NSD. As deaf instructors at NSD had feared, the 1911 law decreased their marketability and capability as educators. Prior to the passage of the law, eight of twenty-four teachers (roughly 33 percent of the total teaching force) were deaf; that number dropped in half by 1912 to just four deaf teachers.<sup>36</sup> These remaining deaf teachers, like those across the country facing unemployment after oralist laws, were relegated to the school’s vocational department. Prior to the 1911 law, most deaf instructors taught in these positions anyway, as vocational positions often paid less and deaf instructors were able to get hired. After the 1911 law, NSD’s vocational department became not simply an educational arm of the school’s mission to increase their graduates’ employability, but also a primary arena in which Deaf students could mingle, interact with, and learn from Deaf adults. Vocational classes and programs “represented a central Deaf ‘place’ within the schools” where Deaf teachers could transfer intergenerational cultural information from one generation to the next.<sup>37</sup> NSD’s vocational department became a central mainstay in the preservation of Nebraska’s Deaf culture within the period of significance.

**Narrative Statement: Social History**

Despite efforts in 1911 to ban the use of sign language in the classrooms at NSD, students and faculty continued to use sign language, subverting and resisting the 1911 law in an attempt to sustain cultural and linguistic sovereignty throughout the twentieth century. The hallways, dormitories, grounds, athletic facilities, and vocational classrooms served as the backdrop for these efforts; throughout the NSD campus, deaf students wishing to tap into and learn of Deaf culture could find sympathetic

<sup>33</sup> Frank W. Booth, *Eighteenth Biennial Report of the Nebraska School for the Deaf* (Omaha, NE: Nebraska School for the Deaf, 1912), 377.

<sup>34</sup> Burch, 26.

<sup>35</sup> Frank W. Booth, *Eighteenth Biennial Report of the Nebraska School for the Deaf*, 384.

<sup>36</sup> Van Cleve, 201.

<sup>37</sup> Burch, 24.

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students and faculty in sports and extracurricular activities, in the dorms, and in the school's vocational department. Ultimately, these students' attempts to connect with and maintain Deaf culture at NSD triumphed. For the fall semester of 1970, sign language was gradually reintroduced into NSD's curriculum.<sup>38</sup> In March of 1977, the Nebraska Legislature repealed the law barring the school from teaching sign language methods.<sup>39</sup>

NSD's vocational department emerged over the course of the twentieth century as a place on NSD's campus where Deaf culture thrived and most visibly resisted oralist mandates against sign language. As early as the 1870s NSD's vocational department championed the skills passed on to NSD graduates to increase their employability and marketability upon graduation. The vocational department enjoyed continued success throughout the twentieth century and garnered greater stature across the state of Nebraska, but, behind (and perhaps undergirding) the program's success were explicit and sustained attempts to maintain Deaf identity and sovereignty at NSD. This focus on Deaf identity within the school's vocational program depended, in part, on the presence of Deaf instructors at NSD. By 1940, roughly two out of every five vocational teachers at residential schools like NSD were hired from the Deaf community.<sup>40</sup> The presence of Deaf instructors in NSD's vocational department carried "significant cultural undercurrents" as these educators, in contrast to their hearing counterparts, directly communicated with their students using sign language.<sup>41</sup>

Deaf instructors at NSD's vocational department not only ensured sign language's survival, but also maintained a direct line of contact between Nebraska's youth and adult Deaf communities. Such direct contact with Nebraska's Deaf community contributed to overt actions leveled against oralists and Nebraska's 1911 law banning sign language. In the immediate years following the passage of the 1911 law, Nebraska's adult Deaf community banded together with Deaf instructors at NSD to fight to repeal the law. Most notably, P.E. Seely, a Deaf printing instructor at NSD, worked with the Nebraska Association for the Deaf to urge the legislature to repeal or amend the law to reinstate the combined method. The push to repeal met failure and Seely was subsequently fired from NSD's printing department.<sup>42</sup> In 1923, Nebraska's Deaf community and Deaf teachers at NSD circled a petition calling for the removal of Booth from NSD entirely.<sup>43</sup> These movements in Omaha and throughout Nebraska alarmed NSD's administration but were unsuccessful in legislatively changing the status of sign language at NSD.<sup>44</sup> Despite these failures, Deaf instructors and students continued to resist and subvert the 1911 law across NSD's campus.

<sup>38</sup> Seiler, Dr. Peter, former principal at Nebraska School for the Deaf. 'Fwd: Question'. Email to Matt Pelz, 2018.

<sup>39</sup> "Two Bills Passed," *Omaha World-Herald*; Friday, March 25, 1977.

<sup>40</sup> Burch, 24.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Frank Johnson to Nebraska Board of Control, February 5, 1919, Frank W. Booth Papers, Dartmouth College Rauner Special Collections Library.

<sup>43</sup> E.O. Waxfield to Nebraska Board of Commissioners, June 25, 1923, Frank W. Booth Papers, Dartmouth College Rauner Special Collections Library.

<sup>44</sup> "Why the Oral Law Should Be Repealed," *Omaha World-Herald*, February 1, 1913; "Education of the Deaf," *Omaha World-Herald*, October 15, 1914; "Musical Program at Convention for the Deaf," *Omaha World-Herald*, August 17, 1919.

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Athletics and extracurricular activities emerged as another primary arena where Deaf students could sustain cultural and linguistic sovereignty at NSD. Like NSD's vocational department, athletics and extracurricular activities were led or organized by Deaf instructors or graduates from NSD. Within sporting activities students and coaches engaged in sign language, reinforcing solidarity and cultural identity while working together as teammates. NSD often played other schools of the deaf from around the Midwest, bringing Deaf students at NSD into contact with a broader regional Deaf culture and interaction with their fellow Deaf peers.<sup>45</sup> Alongside strengthening Deaf unity and identity, sporting activities at NSD gave Deaf students a chance to represent themselves outside the classroom on their own terms. While NSD administrators may have viewed deaf students patronizingly, on the field or court, NSD students proved themselves as capable (if not more so) than any hearing person. NSD's 1931 victory as Class A champions in the Nebraska State Basketball tournament showed Nebraska's hearing population, as well as its Deaf community, that Deaf students had significant abilities as athletes. The victory was enshrined as a monumental achievement by Nebraska's Deaf community, knitting Deaf Nebraskans closer together culturally.

The attempts on the part of Deaf students and teachers at NSD to maintain their cultural identity also shifted the physical development of the NSD campus. Whereas Frank Booth hoped to segregate children by age in order to discourage the passage of sign language from one generation to the next, such attempts were proven futile by repeated contact amongst Deaf students across campus. This was reflected in the way that administrators both physically and ideologically mapped building programs and new construction at NSD throughout the twentieth century. By the mid-twentieth century, Booth's hopes for the primary dormitory constructed in 1915 were shattered when the building was converted into an all girls' dormitory where most girls lived regardless of age. NSD administrators solidified the futility of age segregation in 1969 when they authorized the construction of a new girls' dormitory on the site of the former building.<sup>46</sup> Likewise, efforts to build or expand upon the boys' dormitory space acknowledged that it was easier to house students by gender, rather than attempt to sever students' connections to sign language and Deaf culture.<sup>47</sup>

These efforts to sustain Deaf culture at NSD did not go unnoticed by NSD administrators or teachers. Indeed, the repetitive nature of signing in vocational and extracurricular settings gradually wore away the stringent restrictions placed around sign language within the classroom. Educators and administrators at NSD could hardly fail to notice how effective sign language was in the school's vocational department and amongst teammates in extracurricular activities as a method of communication amongst Deaf students and faculty. Gradually, teachers informally began utilizing sign language in their own classrooms at NSD, much to the chagrin of NSD administrators legally bound to enforce Nebraska's 1911 law. In the classroom students secretly used sign language to communicate with their teachers, attempting to speak and sign at the same time to give the appearance that they were following the law.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>45</sup> "Football Program: Nebraska School for the Deaf vs. Kansas School for the Deaf," November 8, 1930, Frank W. Booth Papers, Dartmouth College Rauner Special Collections Library; "Fifth Annual Basketball Tournament of the Mid-West Schools for the Deaf Athletic Conference," March 22, 1940, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, NE.

<sup>46</sup> "New Girls' Dorm for Nebraska School for the Deaf," *Omaha World-Herald*, April 7, 1968.

<sup>47</sup> "School for Deaf has \$2,385,000 'Crash' Program," *Omaha World-Herald*, November 15, 1962.

<sup>48</sup> Linsay Darnell, Jr. in *The Unheard Journey of Deaf Nebraskans*, NET, June 25, 2015.

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Slowly, NSD's superintendents and administration began to realize that oralism simply failed to properly educate deaf children in the classroom. George H. Thompson, superintendent of NSD from 1960 to 1975, reached this conclusion after he frequently witnessed teachers and students at NSD shirking the 1911 law. Additionally, Thompson's granddaughter was born deaf; Thompson observed that his granddaughter could communicate most clearly with her parents and with Thompson when she attempted to use sign language, not lip-read or speak. These encounters with his granddaughter swayed Thompson and he promptly went to every classroom at NSD and encouraged teachers and students to begin signing. In March 1977, a legislative change officially broadened the school's teaching methods from oralism to "total communication," the ideological and methodological descendent of the combined method first practiced at NSD.<sup>49</sup>

Thompson's decision to reinstate sign language was a result of both his personal experiences with his granddaughter as well as repeated and meaningful actions on the part of Deaf students and educators at NSD to sustain Deaf cultural and linguistic sovereignty throughout the twentieth century. Beginning with failed attempts to repeal or amend Nebraska's 1911 law, NSD students continually engaged in activities and fields of study that encouraged the use of sign language. Gradually, these attempts to subvert and resist Nebraska's 1911 oralism law resulted in institutional and policy changes at NSD that recognized sign language's place in Nebraskan Deaf communal and personal identity. Such realizations were reflected in the physical development of the school as much as they were sanctioned by policy changes after NSD administrators gave up attempting to segregate deaf children by age and authorized the construction of dormitories that simply separated NSD students by gender.

Overall, the Nebraska School for the Deaf merits recognition for its place in sustaining cultural unity and sovereignty amongst Nebraska's Deaf community. The built environment of the campus itself served as the setting for repeated efforts to maintain this cultural and linguistic sovereignty, thus making the Nebraska School for the Deaf eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A: Social History at the State level of significance.

### **Narrative Statement: Education**

NSD officials and administrators shaped and maintained educational policies at NSD that sought to assimilate deaf children into mainstream hearing culture upon graduation. By 1918, this policy had solidified after the passage of a controversial law in 1911 that banned the use of sign language in the classroom at NSD. The legislative restraints placed on NSD remained consistent with national trends in the education of the deaf; after WWI, roughly 80 percent of all residential schools for the deaf banned or limited the use of sign language in favor of oralist methods of education.<sup>50</sup> The lure of oralist methods of education, at least to NSD officials, remained interlocked with an understanding of deaf people as both disabled and isolated from a broader national community of hearing people. To learn to speak or read lips ensured that deaf children could "carry on their lives as an integral part of society."<sup>51</sup> To NSD officials, those children unable to appear like hearing people thus faced insurmountable

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Baynton, *Forbidden Signs*, 5.

<sup>51</sup> Magdalene Pickens, *An Institutional Study of the Nebraska School for the Deaf* (Omaha, NE: University of Nebraska Omaha, 1947), 27.



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barriers to entering and maintaining their position in society and life beyond the walls of NSD. This understanding of deafness shaped both the educational curriculum and physical development of NSD within the period of significance.

While sign language was legislatively restricted at NSD, this did not mean sign language was excluded from NSD's curriculum entirely. While Nebraska lawmakers may have wished to eradicate sign language from NSD, instructors and educators on the ground at NSD recognized such wishful thinking was nearly impossible to implement. The difficulty of adhering to an exclusively oralist curriculum in part contributed to the growth of NSD's vocational department throughout the period of significance. Because oralist teaching methods were often ineffective, many students were primarily enrolled in the vocational program, where they would learn trade skills from deaf instructors. As early as the 1870s, NSD promoted vocational training for Nebraska's deaf students, first purchasing a printing machine for the school's newspaper, *The Nebraska Journal*. By the mid-twentieth century, the vocational department boasted that in Omaha alone, over 150 deaf graduates were employed in over 30 different industries throughout the city.<sup>52</sup>

Recognizing the stigma leveled at deaf people by hearing people, NSD's vocational department successfully championed that deaf students were as employable as any hearing person. The department's success was widely recognized throughout the state, and as one observer noted in 1947, the "trend in curriculum building since the establishment of the Nebraska School for the Deaf has been toward Vocational Arts."<sup>53</sup> The NSD campus physically reflected the growing stature of the vocational program, constructing a new Tudor Revival style vocational arts building in 1930 on the east side of the school's growing campus.<sup>54</sup> Traditional twentieth century conceptions of gender influenced the vocational department more so than the regular academic curriculum as well. A brief survey of the vocational studies undertaken by students at NSD revealed that girls learned "sewing, homemaking, laundry, and beauty work" amongst other topics, while boys were educated in "printing, woodworking, and farming."<sup>55</sup> The new vocation department building erected in 1930 mirrored this division of labor with traditionally male activities taught on side of the building and traditionally female activities taught on the other.

Like most other schools for the deaf in the United States, NSD operated as a residential school where students lived on campus during the week and, if close enough, went home to their families during the weekends. Only those students who lived far enough from their families where weekend travel was unfeasible or students enrolled in extracurricular activities remained on campus throughout the weekend. To house the growing number of deaf students at the school, NSD constructed separate boys' and girls' dormitories, first in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and again in the mid-twentieth century. Initially, NSD administrators hoped to segregate children by age to discourage the passage of sign language from one generation to the next. This plan, as previously discussed, was scrapped after NSD administrators realized such efforts were ultimately futile.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 32-33.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 24.

<sup>54</sup> Harry Lawrie and W.E. Stockham, "Manual Training School," November 8, 1930, original blueprints courtesy of the Omaha Landmarks Heritage Preservation Commission, Omaha, NE.

<sup>55</sup> Pickens, 24.

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By the late 1960s, NSD administrators set to restructuring the school's curriculum to formally reinstate sign language within the classroom. In this way, NSD followed larger national trends after many experts began to repudiate oralism's reputation, advocating instead for "total communication," the ideological descendent of the combined method.<sup>56</sup> Under total communication, deaf students were taught via whatever method best fit their learning needs. This change in curriculum came on the heels of sustained efforts by Nebraska's Deaf community inside and outside NSD to maintain sign language and Deaf identity throughout the course of the twentieth century. NSD reflected these changes in Deaf and mainstream culture and adjusted their educational policies accordingly.

Within the period of significance, NSD consistently reflected and remained influenced by broader trends in deaf education. By 1918, oralism was fully enshrined as the educational standard within the classroom at NSD, but the 1911 oralist law never extended evenly across all classroom spaces at NSD. The school's vocational department emerged within the period of significance as an arena in which sign language not only survived, but thrived within the legislative bounds enforced by the Nebraska legislature. At the same time, NSD's vocational program proved successful in granting NSD students broader experiences to increase their employability upon graduation. By the mid-twentieth century, the seemingly impermeable boundary isolating sign language outside the classroom began to dissolve as students and teachers informally reintroduced sign language into their curriculums. Finally, in fall of 1970, sign language emerged triumphant and was formally reinstated in curriculums at NSD.

The Nebraska School for the Deaf retains significant integrity of these trends in the education of the deaf as the only residential school for the deaf in the state of Nebraska and thus merits designation at the state level to the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A: Education at the State level of significance.

### **Narrative Statement: Architecture**

The Nebraska School for the Deaf (NSD) is architecturally significant at the state level for providing examples of both an early twentieth century vernacular adaptation of the Collegiate Gothic subtype of the Gothic Revival style as well as the Mid-Century Modern design movement. The proximity of the two different architectural styles within the same campus provide insight as well to the cultural and architectural progression of the larger United States.

### **Collegiate Gothic**

The NSD was founded in the state of Nebraska's infancy. It was unprecedented and forward thinking for a state to establish so quickly a school for the Deaf at that time.<sup>57</sup> Land for the NSD was designated at 3223 North 45th Street and funds secured to construct the first school buildings. Less than ten years after opening, the school was educating and housing over fifty students from across the state.<sup>58</sup> As

<sup>56</sup> Katherine A. Jankowski, *Deaf Empowerment: Emergence, Struggle, and Rhetoric* (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 1997), 7-10.

<sup>57</sup> William M. Decoursey French, "The Nebraska Institute for the Deaf and Dumb." (Documents from the Governors Vault 22A, Omaha, NE, 1870), pg. 1

<sup>58</sup> T.J. Collins, "Fifth Report of the Board of Directors of the Nebraska Institute for Deaf and Dumb From January 1st. 1875, to January 1st, 1877, to the Governor." (Scanned Document, Omaha Institute for the Deaf and Dumb, 1877), pg. 9-10

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enrollment continued to increase, the inadequacy of the land, composition, and construction of the then existing school buildings became evident. During the first decade of the twentieth century the necessity for new school buildings more appropriate for teaching deaf students was always a great concern.<sup>59</sup> As Omaha began to expand northwards, the development of public infrastructure disoriented the campus making its arrangement appear haphazard situated next to the developing city.<sup>60</sup>

The reality was that the architecture on the NSD campus was crude in quality and inappropriate in its function warranted the search for an architectural style that could address both concerns. In the early twentieth century the most prestigious American universities--Yale, Princeton, Chicago, Cornell, and West Point--were constructing Gothic Revival buildings almost exclusively.<sup>61</sup> The construction of these buildings on university campuses generated an architectural sub-style called Collegiate Gothic. Collegiate Gothic was developed to help advance and reinforce the concept that the medieval roots of English higher education offered a counterweight to the materialism motif emerging from the industrial revolution, contemporary culture, and modern architecture. The proponents of Collegiate Gothic believe its physical forms of connected buildings and closed quadrangles would inspire the renewal of an intellectual life rooted in tradition.<sup>62</sup>

The Nebraska school for the Deaf certainly did not have access to the funds that premier private American universities had, therefore a fiscal solution was necessary. In the later evolution the Collegiate Gothic style, around the 1920s, a further substyle developed as a result of the financial strain the style created on monetarily restricted campuses. The campuses developed a decorated shed approach. The exterior had all the expressions and associated symbolisms of the style while the interior was realized in a more economical and adaptive manner.<sup>63</sup> The façade of these buildings was commonly rendered in rough-cut stone of varying grey hues and tones<sup>64</sup>. However, this approach did not seem appropriate for the Nebraska School for the Deaf in terms of budget or context of the developing city. All the Collegiate Gothic buildings were constructed using a modest red brick with sandstone detailing that contextually matches the historic Omaha downtown and still evokes the heritage associated with Collegiate Gothic. Each building has its own subtle variation in overall appearance and the subtlety of their detail creating a campus of distinct buildings. The qualities and execution of those appearances are described previously.

<sup>59</sup> Charles R. Sherman, D.O. Dwyer, and H.H. Hanks "Seventeenth Biennial Report of the Superintendent and Board of Trustees of the Nebraska School for the Deaf, for the Years 1909 and 1910, to the Governor Ashton C. Shallenberger,"(historical document scan, University Place NE, 1910) pg. 303-304

<sup>60</sup> H.H. Hanks, D.O. Dwyer, and Viola J. Cameron "Eighteenth Biennial Report of the Superintendent and the Board of Trustees of the Nebraska School for the Deaf, for the years 1911 and 1912, to the Governor Chester H. Aldrich" (historical document scan, Omaha, 1912) pg. 385-386

<sup>61</sup> T.J. Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1994), pg.188

<sup>62</sup> R.P. Dober, *Campus Heritage: An Appreciation of the History and Traditions of College and University Architecture* (Ann Arbor: Society of College and University Planning, 2005), pg. 18

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 18

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 19

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The Boys Dorm, Classroom Building, and Industrial Arts Building create an open quadrangle, a distinct paradigm of Collegiate Gothic. While lawns and green spaces are evident in many architectural styles and compositions, the open quadrangle became a highly functional typology for the American campus and Collegiate Gothic architecture.<sup>65</sup> The incremental nature of campus development, ventilation and daylight requirements, and the potential risk of structural degradation in the event of catastrophe secured the open quadrangle as an organizational tactic associated with Collegiate Gothic opposed to the conjoined buildings and enclosed greenspaces associated with the original Gothic style.<sup>66</sup>

**Architectural Progression**

The age of American universities and boarding schools constructing almost exclusively revival-style buildings was coming to an end in the mid-to-late 1930s. Culturally, Americans were no longer interested and they did not think it was necessary to reference archaic forms and symbols as a source of authority in architecture.

Several factors led to the shift in cultural perception of architectural authority. Around the time America was constructing archaic building forms as a source of authority, a group of thinkers and architects were upset with the negative effect that the Industrial Revolution had on social organization, quality of construction, and overall mortality of culture and devised theorized a solution. Figures like Augustus Pugin, John Ruskin, and William Morris believed that the creation of an architectural style that was honest and celebrated the craftsmanship of the architect would serve as a visual and experiential rectifier for English culture. The Arts and Crafts movement, as it came to be known, ultimately sought to reintegrate art and life, craft and utility. The scale of the Arts and Crafts movement was focused primarily on developing a vernacular domestic architecture. Proponents believed that through an honest vernacular domestic architecture, authority could be instilled and be better suited to return inhabitants to a simplified, moral everyday life.<sup>67</sup>

Rather than a unified style, the Arts and Crafts movement was essentially a group of shared concerns that were resolved architecturally.<sup>68</sup> Eventually the primary concerns of the movement made their way to other European countries that had already industrialized. These ideas were adopted and adapted by modernists over time as modern architecture transitioned into the public sphere. A movement of German modernists incorporated an adaptation of Arts and Crafts ideals into their modern architecture mantra. The German architects believed that design had the moral power to influence people's lives, architecture possessed integrity through honest expression of the nature of materials, and strong repulsion towards the dishonesty of "fake" revival styles.<sup>69</sup>

The German ideals and aspirations for modern architecture were introduced to the American public through famous German and German-American architects like Mies van der Rohe and Walter Gropius, amongst others. Modernist projects began to be seen as approachable, honest, and efficient uses of

<sup>65</sup> R.P. Dober, *Campus Architecture: Building in the Groves of Academe* ( New York: McGraw-Hill, 1996), pg. 246

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, pg. 252

<sup>67</sup> W.J. Curtis, *Modern Architecture since 1900* (London: Phaidon Press, 2013), pg. 87

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, pg. 67

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, pg. 100

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space and money. As renowned Modern architects were commissioned to construct campus buildings, precedents were set that articulated the appropriateness of modernist style for educational buildings.

**Mid-Century Modern**

The Modern buildings constructed as a part of the Nebraska School for the Deaf campus are clear examples of the Mid-Century Modern style during the 1960s and 1970s. The buildings are composed of pure orthogonal forms and their purity is accentuated by the visible structural frames exposed on the edges. The buildings all have modernist proportional techniques applied in terms of fenestration, visible structure, and materials.

Modern buildings take a variety of forms to optimize their efficiency based on internal use. The central Primary School is punctured by a grass courtyard on the west end and slit on the east end. These allow safe places for younger children to play as well as more accessible natural light and ventilation for the classroom spaces. The Girls Dormitory and the Gym / Pool Building address the sloping site by lofting masses and supporting them with rectilinear columns for a grand effect facing the eastern edge of the site. The operation of lifting and suspending through the use of columns is one key of the earliest forms of High Modernism championed by Le Corbusier.

The material selection is thoughtful and conservative. In attempt to enforce unity and reinforce heritage of the school, as well as Omaha, the primary exterior walls are all dressed in similar brick as the Collegiate Gothic buildings built thirty to forty years prior. The placement of the new buildings enhances the composition of the existent campus buildings. Existent lawns and infrastructure are protected where designed appropriately and new outdoor space is created where previously inadequate.

**Architectural Legacy**

The Nebraska School for the Deaf is architecturally significant for providing examples of both an early twentieth century vernacular adaptation of the Collegiate Gothic style as well as the Mid-Century Modern style. The proximity of the two different architectural styles within the same campus provide insight as well to the cultural and architectural progression of United States.

The NSD's architectural heritage is an interesting composition of primarily two design styles serving as three dimensional artifacts that provide insight to history of architecture of American school campuses. None of which suffers from stylistic indeterminacy, each building is composed thoughtfully in true style and therefore provides clear associations to the context in which it was built. Beyond that, it illustrates the cultural shift in thinking, traceable through the architecture, from a predominantly referential and historic system of attributing authority and value to one that favors and trusts in contemporary models.

**Additional Context: NSD Post-Period of Significance**

Following the reintroduction of sign language into NSD's curriculum, the school and Nebraska's Deaf community faced new challenges. At the same time Deaf students fought nationally for the right to teach and communicate in sign language at residential schools, the Civil Rights movement garnered significant legislative gains. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and ensuing civil rights legislation primarily

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targeted the segregation of white and non-white students in educational settings, but this backlash against segregation was applied to residential schools for the deaf as well. NSD faced increasing scrutiny in the latter decades of the twentieth century, for “In the face of inclusionist rhetoric, ‘segregation’ became the adversary. It was thus necessary to attempt to eradicate residential schools, for they represented the antithesis of full inclusion. As a result, in some states, residential schools for the Deaf were threatened with shutdowns.”<sup>70</sup>

These threats arrived on the doorstep of NSD as early as 1984 when the Nebraska legislature considered shutting the school down.<sup>71</sup> Opponents of separate residential schools for the deaf like NSD advocated for “mainstreaming,” a process that would place deaf children amongst their hearing peers in public schools. To Nebraska’s Deaf community, mainstreaming only appeared as the latest incarnation of oralism: placing deaf students in public schools would separate and disband Deaf cultural unity and identity. Such fears were not unfounded, for deaf children often faced isolation at public schools rather than inclusion that proponents of mainstreaming believed would be the outcome of shutting down residential schools for the deaf.<sup>72</sup> By 1998, enrollment at NSD dwindled, in part as a result of Nebraska’s efforts to mainstream deaf students, and the school was ordered to close its doors. Like their predecessors eighty years prior, Nebraska legislators refused input from Nebraska’s Deaf community, despite an outpouring of opposition to the state Department of Education’s plan to shutter the campus.<sup>73</sup>

Following the closure of the school, the State of Nebraska sold the land to private owners. Afterwards, multiple Christian nonprofits operated after-school programs on the campus for low-income or at-risk youth in the Omaha community. The campus still operates under these programs at the time of writing this nomination.

**Statement on Criteria Consideration G**

The period of significance of the Nebraska School for the Deaf ends in 1977, when the oralist law was finally repealed. The repeal was the culmination of decades-long efforts to reform the state’s approach to education of Deaf students, including policy changes during the early 1970s and legislative debates. A particularly important milestone was the formal reintroduction of sign language on campus in the fall of 1970, shortly after the Nebraska Department of Education embraced a policy of incorporating signing and speech simultaneously. However, this policy change did not mark the end of debate in the controversy over oralism. The issue remained open as legislators debated the issue up to and during their 1977 session. The repeal of the oralist law was not a mere formality, but a hard-fought victory for reformers as the 1977 vote effectively ended debate on the topic. In recognition of the events and developments leading to the repeal of the oralist law, the significance of the district in the areas of Social History and Education merits exemption from the fifty-year age requirement under Criteria Consideration G.

<sup>70</sup> Jankowski, 87.

<sup>71</sup> Jim McKee, “Nebraska School for the Deaf earned national acclaim,” *Lincoln Journal Star*, October 19, 2014.

<sup>72</sup> Baynton, *Forbidden Signs*, 157.

<sup>73</sup> “Historic Rally Held on Nebraska School for the Deaf Graduation Day,” National Association of the Deaf, <http://nad.s1001.sureserver.com/news/1998/6/historic-rally-held-nebraska-school-deaf-graduation-day>, accessed August 22, 2018.

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**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 #
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey #

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other (Name of repository)

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): DO09:0336-001, 025-036

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Douglas County, Nebraska  
**County and State**

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of property 23.2 USGS Quadrangle Omaha North

**Latitude/Longitude Coordinates**

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_

1.	Latitude	<u>41.28860 N</u>	Longitude	<u>95.98048 W</u>
2.	Latitude	<u>41.28659 N</u>	Longitude	<u>95.98049 W</u>
3.	Latitude	<u>41.28657 N</u>	Longitude	<u>95.97587 W</u>
4.	Latitude	<u>41.28859 N</u>	Longitude	<u>95.97590 W</u>

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The Nebraska School for the Deaf campus is bound by N. 45<sup>th</sup> Street on the west, N. 42<sup>nd</sup> Street on the east, and Bedford Ave. on the North. A single row of small residential properties bound the site on the south edge. Beyond the residential properties is Wirt Street.

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The proposed boundary includes all land historically associated with the Nebraska School of the Deaf.

Returned

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Jennifer Honebrink, Cale Miller, Matthew Pelz, and Brian Whetstone  
organization Restoration Exchange Omaha date November 26, 2018  
street & number 3902 Davenport telephone 402.679.5854  
city or town Omaha state NE zip code 68131  
email director@restorationexchange.org

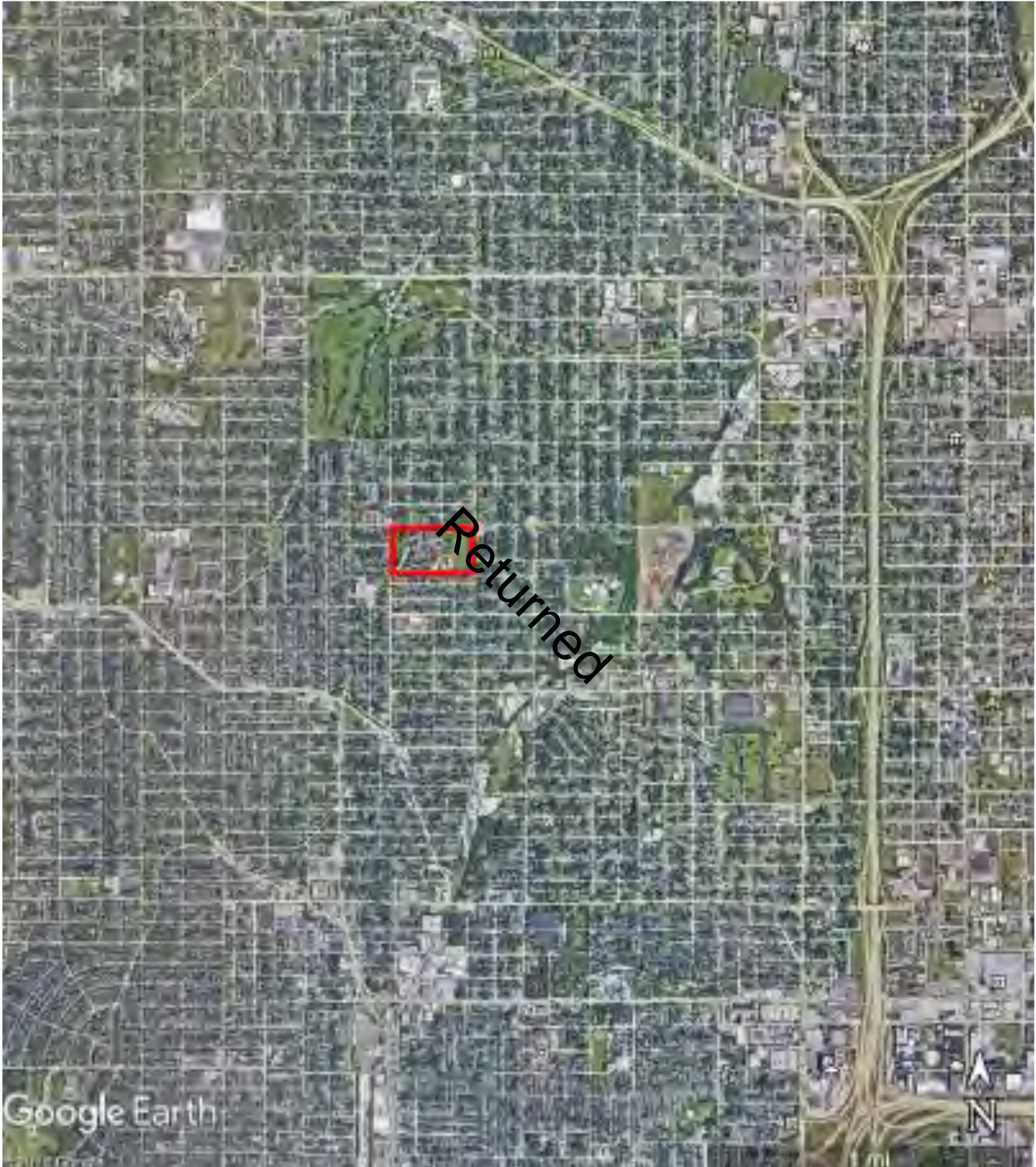
**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO for any additional items.)

Nebraska School for the Deaf  
**Name of Property**

Douglas County, Nebraska  
**County and State**



Map 1 - 24000 ft view of NSD campus. Boundaries indicated in red.

Nebraska School for the Deaf  
**Name of Property**

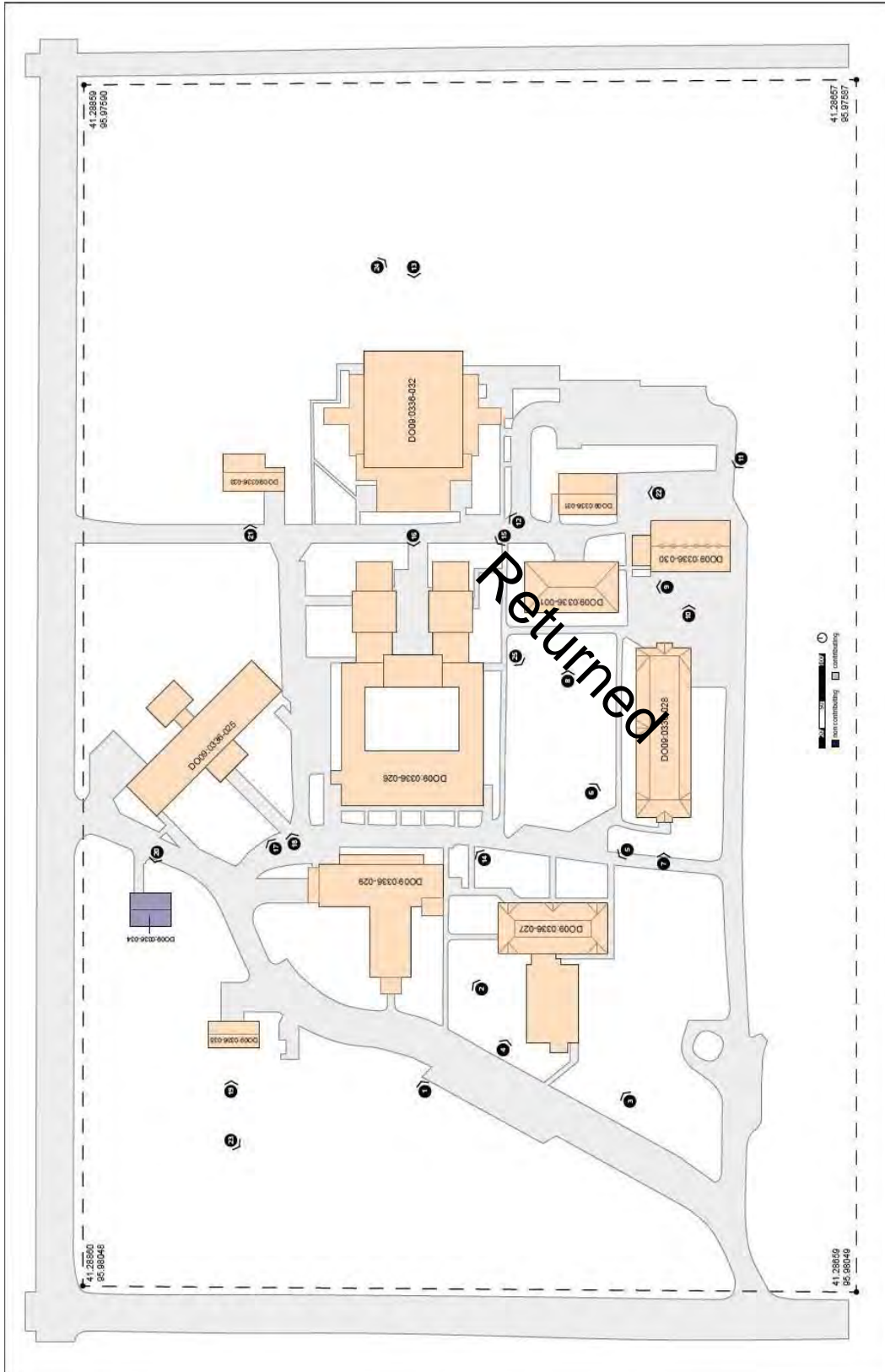
Douglas County, Nebraska  
**County and State**



Map 2 - 6000 ft view of NSD campus. Boundaries indicated in red.

Nebraska School for the Deaf  
Name of Property

Douglas County, Nebraska  
County and State



Map 3 – Photo key, Lat/Long, and Contributing/Non-Contributing map of NSD campus. Non-contributing tunnels (DO09: 0336-036) not delineated on map.

Nebraska School for the Deaf  
**Name of Property**

Douglas County, Nebraska  
**County and State**

### Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

### Photo Log

Name of Property Nebraska School for the Deaf  
City or Vicinity Omaha County Douglas State Nebraska  
Photographer Cale Miller, Brian Whetstone, Matt Pelz Date Photographed August-November 2018

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera.

- Image 1: Administration Building. Looking northeast.
- Image 2: Administration. Looking northeast.
- Image 3: Boys Dormitory. Looking northeast
- Image 4: Boys Dormitory. Looking southeast
- Image 5: Boys Dormitory. Looking west.
- Image 6: Classroom Building. Looking southeast.
- Image 7: Classroom Building. Looking east.
- Image 8: Industrial Arts Building. Looking east.
- Image 9: Industrial Arts Building. Looking north.
- Image 10: Power House. Looking east.
- Image 11: Power House. Looking west.
- Image 12: Gym/Pool Building. Looking northeast.
- Image 13: Gym/Pool Building. Looking west.
- Image 14: Primary School. Looking east.
- Image 15: Primary School. Looking northwest.
- Image 16: Primary School. Looking west.
- Image 17: Girls Dormitory. Looking northwest.
- Image 18: Girls Dormitory. Looking northwest.
- Image 19: Groundskeeper House. Looking east.
- Image 20: House constructed by students. Looking west.
- Image 21: Superintendent's House. Looking east.
- Image 22: Laundry Building. Looking north.
- Image 23: West field. Looking southwest.
- Image 24: East field. Looking southeast.
- Image 25: Quad. Looking southwest.

Returned

**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.460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including 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 Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Requested Action: Nomination

Property Name: Nebraska School for the Deaf

Multiple Name: \_\_\_\_\_

State & County: NEBRASKA, Douglas

Date Received: 2/14/2019      Date of Pending List: 3/7/2019      Date of 16th Day: 3/22/2019      Date of 45th Day: 4/1/2019      Date of Weekly List: \_\_\_\_\_

Reference number: SG100003571

Nominator: SHPO

Reason For Review:

- |   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Appeal           | <input type="checkbox"/> PDIL            | <input type="checkbox"/> Text/Data Issue    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> SHPO Request     | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape       | <input type="checkbox"/> Photo              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Waiver           | <input type="checkbox"/> National        | <input type="checkbox"/> Map/Boundary       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Resubmission     | <input type="checkbox"/> Mobile Resource | <input type="checkbox"/> Period             |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other | <input type="checkbox"/> TCP             | <input type="checkbox"/> Less than 50 years |
|   | <input type="checkbox"/> CLG             |   |

Accept       Return       Reject      4/1/2019 Date

Abstract/Summary Comments: Issues with application of significance to evaluation of resources. Please see attached comments

Recommendation/ Criteria: Return

Reviewer Jim Gabbert  Discipline Historian

Telephone (202)354-2275 Date 4/1/2019

DOCUMENTATION:      see attached comments : No      see attached SLR : No

If a nomination is returned to the nomination authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the National Park Service.



# United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
1849 C Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20240

## The United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

### National Register of Historic Places Evaluation/Return Sheet

Property Name: Nebraska School for the Deaf  
Douglas County, NE

Reference Number: 100003571

#### Reason for Return

The Nebraska School for the Deaf appears to be eligible for the National Register, but the nomination is being returned for technical revision.

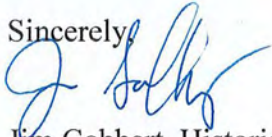
Two of the properties, one identified as "House (DO09:0336-034)" and the other as "Steam Tunnels (DO09:0336-036)" are identified as noncontributing resources, but the reasoning for this status is a skewed view of the associative properties of the two resources by applying a narrow view of what contributing means. The property as a whole is primarily significant for its function as the state's school for the hearing impaired. Any architectural significance lies in the composition of the school as a physical plant, not in the particular qualities of the individual resources. Frankly, they are pretty mundane examples of their respective eras. So applying high standards – "student built...no evidence of...an architect; lacks distinction amongst similar residential properties..." or "display no qualities or identifiable features that could be associated with an architectural style..." – ignores the associative qualities of the resources. The "House" was built by students in fulfillment of the educational mission of the school. It is literally a physical manifestation of a portion of the educational philosophy at the time it was built. The "Steam Tunnels" are an important part of the physical plant of the school, directly associated with the functionality of the buildings as living/learning environments. I was surprised that they were even noted, since such things are typically ignored. I was doubly surprised, then, that they were counted as noncontributing.

Please re-evaluate the resources based on ALL of the criteria applied to the campus. Any changes would necessitate a new Section 5, Section 7, and accompanying maps.



We appreciate the opportunity to review this nomination and hope that you find these comments useful. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions. I can be reached at (202) 354-2275 or email at <[James\\_Gabbert@nps.gov](mailto:James_Gabbert@nps.gov)>.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jim Gabbert". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Jim" being more prominent than the last name "Gabbert".

Jim Gabbert, Historian  
National Register of Historic Places  
4/2/2019

May 22, 2019

Jim Gabbert  
NPS-National Register of Historic Places  
1849 C Street, NW  
Mail Stop 7228  
Washington, DC 20240



Re: Nebraska School for the Deaf, Omaha, Douglas County, NE

Dear Mr. Gabbert,

Please accept the resubmission of the Nebraska School for the Deaf nomination form for review. Located in Omaha, Douglas County, Nebraska, your office returned the original nomination to the Nebraska State Historic Preservation Office for revision on April 2, 2019. Our office believes that the request revisions have been made and are resubmitting the document for your review.

Enclosed is the complete revised nomination packet for the Nebraska School for the Deaf, in Omaha, Douglas County, Nebraska. The enclosed contents are as follows:

- The signed first page of the Nebraska School for the Deaf nomination;
- One (1) archival disc with the true and correct copy of the nomination for the Nebraska School for the Deaf to the National Register of Historic Places in PDF format; and
- Two (2) archival discs with the photographs for the Nebraska School for the Deaf nomination.

If you have any questions regarding the submitted materials, feel free to contact me at the phone number or email address below.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'David L. Calease'.

David L. Calease  
National Register Coordinator  
Nebraska State Historic Preservation Office

Phone: 402-471-4775  
[david.calease@nebraska.gov](mailto:david.calease@nebraska.gov)

Enclosures (4): Signed National Register nomination cover sheet

1500 R Street  
Lincoln, NE 68508-1651  
P: 402.471.3270  
P: 800.833.6747  
F: 402.471.3100  
[history.nebraska.gov](http://history.nebraska.gov)