

PH0663620

DATA SHEET

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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RECEIVED	FEB 23 1978
DATE ENTERED	MAY 22 1978

# NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

## 1 NAME

HISTORIC

Omaha Public Library

(D009:4-16)

AND/OR COMMON

## 2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

1823 Harney St

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Omaha

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

VICINITY OF

First

STATE

Nebraska

CODE

31

COUNTY

Douglas

CODE

055

## 3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE	
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL	<input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

## 4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

City of Omaha

STREET & NUMBER

Suite 300, Omaha/Douglas Civic Center, 1819 Farnam

CITY, TOWN

Omaha

STATE

Nebraska

VICINITY OF

## 5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Register of Deeds

STREET & NUMBER

Omaha/Douglas Civic Center, 1819 Farnam

CITY, TOWN

Omaha

STATE

Nebraska

## 6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE A survey of historic, architectural and archeological sites in the eastern Nebraska urban region.

DATE

July, 1971

FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

Nebraska State Historical Society

CITY, TOWN

Lincoln

STATE

Nebraska

## 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED    DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

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### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Situated at the southeast corner of 19th and Harney Streets, the Omaha Public Library stands today as one of Omaha's most impressive architectural landmarks. Designed in 1891-92 by the prominent Omaha architect, Thomas Rogers Kimball of Walker & Kimball (Boston & Omaha), the structure was completed and opened to the public in 1894. The building's distinctive Second Renaissance Revival design marks it as one of a small corpus of such designs known to have been constructed in Nebraska.

Measuring 130 x 65 feet, the trabeated masonry bearing walls of this three story over basement structure were built of straw-colored brick laid in a Flemish bond. The rusticated and battered basement walls are of deep brown sandstone. Elaborate terra-cotta detailing enhances the structure and articulates each story of the facade in a manner reminiscent of the palazzos of Renaissance Italy.

Tall, vertical, paired, unadorned windows rise from the molded sill course of the basement the full height of the main floor to the wide terra-cotta string course between the first and second floors. The string course is highlighted with a narrow band of simplified fretwork design. The simple rectangular windows of the second floor rest upon the string course centered above the paired windows of the first floor. The large single pane windows, which pivot around a central, vertical axis, are decorated with elaborate terra-cotta window surrounds or architraves. These slightly projecting architraves are composed of pilasters which flank the window with composite capitals which support a simple cornice. Above the cornice rests an arch whose tympanum features an acanthus motif. The<sub>1</sub> lintel just below the cornice displays the names of important literary figures.

The third floor (double-hung) windows are set in a wide frieze which forms a part of the relatively heavy entablature. The windows are paired and in line with the windows below. Sculpted bas-relief medallions, which enhance the space between the paired windows, feature important ancient figures set into square terra-cotta panels framed in an egg and dart motif.<sup>2</sup> A simple terra-cotta cornice is supported by console brackets just above the row of dentils.

A low-pitched, hipped roof (scarcely visible from street level) crowns the building. Covered with a ribbed copper roof, the eave line at the ends of the ribs displays copper antefixa.

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1. From the northeast to the southwest corner of the building: Schiller, Goethe, Dante, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Tasso, Racine and Corneille; Longfellow, Hawthorne, Emerson and Irving.
  2. From the northeast to the southwest corner of the building: Demosthenes, Aristotle, Socrates, Sophocles, Homer, Cicero, Caesar and Virgil; Horace, Plato, Seneca, Herodotus and Plutarch.

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The rhythms created by the fenestration focuses attention on the central entrance of the symmetrical front facade. Entrance is gained up a short flight of steps through a slightly projecting, arched portal. As is the case with the other decorative details of the building, the portal is executed in terra-cotta and features an arched doorway framed with a cornice supported by pilasters. The pilasters, again with composite capitals, are faced with an arabesque design. The arch itself features a coffered intrados while the extrados is trimmed with a leaf and dart motif. An elaborate wrought-iron fanlight enhances the space over the door. The wrought-iron lights which formerly occupied the space in front of the small vertical windows which flank the portal have been removed.

Above the portal, the second floor windows are spaced in a group of three, with the central architrave more elaborately decorated. On axis with the entrance in the wide frieze of the third floor is a subtle sign denoting "Public Library".

None of the distinctive features of the main facades are displayed on the rear (south) wall. A regular rhythm of segmentally arched windows open from the main and second floors while the elevator and chimney stacks flank the two story iron windows of the central bay. The steel fire escape was added in 1952.

The building features fire-retardant construction. Structural loads are carried by the masonry walls around the perimeter and by three rows of eight inch diameter, cast iron columns on the interior. Fifteen inch (15I41) wrought-iron beams run the length of the building. These carry ten inch (10I25.5 @ 5'-2") iron joists which support nine inch tile arches. The concrete sub-floor is finished with a wood floor on sleepers. The roof construction is of heavy milled timbers.

The original building was arranged with a closed stack book room, three study rooms, a reference room, Library Board room, librarian's office and cataloguer's room on the main level. A grand iron stairway leads to the second floor where the general reading room, ladies' reading room, a small auditorium (seating 150) and the display room for the Byron Reed collection were provided. The third floor, lit by skylights, has space set aside for display of the Manderson Indian collection and the Lininger Art Gallery. Lunch, work, storage, engineer's and bindery rooms were housed in the basement.

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Interior finishes are very simple except for the main entrance space which features the elaborate cast iron stairway and wooden arches. Wood medallions with an open book motif decorate one wall. A double level iron book stack with glass floors occupies the space at the west end of the main floor. The interior as well as the exterior remain basically unchanged.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1891-1894

~~BUILDER/ARCHITECT~~ Walker & Kimball

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The opening of the Omaha Public Library on July 5, 1894 was an event of great significance for the City of Omaha. This was the first permanent home built for the library which had its start in 1871 or 1872 when the Omaha Library Association was formed. Housed in various quarters throughout the city, the Association flourished for a time until lack of funds forced its closing in 1877. That year, the Omaha City Council, by virtue of a Library Ordinance, levied a tax and accepted a gift of 4,500 books from the old Association. The rapid growth of Omaha's population and the increased demand for books by patrons forced the library to move three times before construction of this first library building.

In spite of an increasing need for more space, it wasn't until Byron Reed bequeathed a plot of ground to be used as the site for a library building to the City in 1891 that progress was made in that direction. Along with land for the building, Reed also donated his excellent collection of books, manuscripts and coins. A \$100,000 bond issue was passed that year and planning began immediately under the supervision of Thomas R. Kimball. Construction proceeded late in 1892 with contractor, John Harte. After completion in 1894, the library's expansion was facilitated by the creation of several branch libraries. Important donations continued to be made. In addition to the initial Byron Reed collection, the Pat Ryan, Robert Gilder, C. N. Dietz, Mrs. Charles E. Johannes and Edward Rosewater collections are now important holdings. The building continued to serve as the symbolic center of Omaha's general education and literary entertainment needs until the completion of the new main library on the Central Park Mall in 1977.

Architecturally, the building is perhaps the best of the early Second Renaissance Revival structures in Nebraska. Following on the heels of what Whiffen<sup>3</sup> describes as the most famous building of the Revival, the Boston Public Library (1888-92) by McKim, Mead and White, the Omaha Public Library bears more than a casual resemblance to the Boston building. Kimball was living in Boston during the construction of the Boston Public Library and was undoubtedly familiar with its design.

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3. Whiffen (1969), page 157

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

See continuation Sheet Item 9

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than one

UTM REFERENCES

A	1 5	2 5 3 6 5 0	4 5 7 1 1 7 0	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

## 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

<u>D. Murphy, Architect</u>	DATE
ORGANIZATION	<u>February, 1978</u>
<u>Nebraska State Historical Society</u>	TELEPHONE
STREET & NUMBER	<u>402-432-2793</u>
<u>1500 R Street</u>	STATE
CITY OR TOWN	<u>Nebraska</u>
<u>Lincoln</u>	

## 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL  STATE  LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE	<u>Martin E. Smith</u>	DATE	<u>2/14/78</u>
TITLE	<u>Director, Nebraska State Historical Society</u>	DATE	

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER	
DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION	DATE <u>5-22-78</u>
ATTEST: <u>Walter C. Cole</u>	KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER
KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER	DATE <u>5-16-78</u>

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Thomas Rogers Kimball was perhaps Nebraska's premier architectural talent. Born in 1862, near Cincinnati, Ohio, he received advanced education at the University of Nebraska, Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the Cowles Art School in Boston. He then studied at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris (1887-88) under various tutors before returning to Boston where the architectural firm of Walker, Kimball and Best was formed. Kimball lived and worked in Boston until 1891 when he opened the branch office in Omaha. He continued in partnership with C. Howard Walker until 1899 when he went into private practice in Omaha. He practiced alone until 1928 when the firm of Kimball, Steele and Sandham was formed. Kimball died in Omaha in 1934.

Kimball's distinguished career led to his selection as a Fellow in the American Institute of Architects in 1901 and his election as National President from 1918-1920. He was Architect-in-Chief with C. Howard Walker for the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition in Omaha (1898) and acted as professional advisor to the Nebraska State Capitol commission from 1919-1932. In this capacity, he wrote the competition which led to the selection of Bertram Goodhue as architect for the new capitol building.

The Omaha Public Library must be listed among Kimball's greatest achievements which include the Hall County Courthouse in Grand Island (1901-04; see NRHP), St. Cecilia's Cathedral in Omaha (1905-59) and several other important buildings. The Omaha library was Kimball's first major commission.<sup>4</sup> The drawings for this building were displayed in the Fine Arts section of the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893.<sup>5</sup>

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4. Batie (1977), page 25

5. Along with a residence in Lincoln, the McCague and Omaha Telephone Buildings, both in Omaha; Batie (1977), page 95.

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