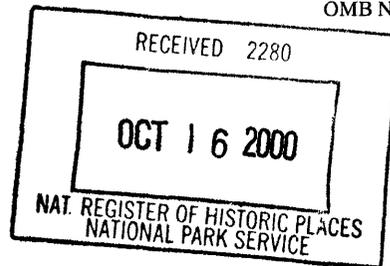


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National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form

This form is used for documenting multiple property groups relating to one or several historic contexts. See instructions in *How to Complete the Multiple Property Documentation Form* (National Register Bulletin 16B). Complete each item by entering the requested information. For additional space, use continuation sheets (Form 10-900-a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

New Submission Amended Submission

A. Name of Multiple Property Listing

Historic and Architectural School Buildings in Nebraska

B. Associated Historic Contexts

(Name each associated historic context, identifying theme, geographical area, and chronological period for each.)

Educational Development and Historic School Buildings in Nebraska: Public Schools K-12, 1854-1959

C. Form Prepared by

name/title Christina Slattery, Architectural Historian

organization Mead & Hunt, Inc.

date August 2000

street & number 6501 Watts Road

telephone 608.273.6380

city or town Madison

state Wisconsin

zip code 53719

D. Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this documentation form meets the National Register documentation standards and sets forth requirements for the listing of related properties consistent with the National Register criteria. This submission meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60 and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Archaeology and Historic Preservation. ([] See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Lambert Sommer
Signature and title of certifying official

10/10/00
Date

Director, Nebraska State Historical Society
State or Federal agency and bureau

I hereby certify that this multiple property documentation form has been approved by the National Register as a basis for evaluating related properties for listing in the National Register.

Edson H. Beall
Signature of the Keeper

11.15.00
Date of action

Table of Contents for Written Narrative

Provide the following information on continuation sheets. Cite the letter and the title before each section of the narrative. Assign page numbers according to the instructions for continuation sheets in *How to Complete the Multiple Property Documentation Form* (National Register Bulletin 16B). Fill in page numbers for each section in the space below.

	Page Numbers
E. Statement of Historic Contexts (If more than one historic context is documented, present them in sequential order.)	
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I. Major Bibliographical References (List major written works and primary location of additional documentation: State Historic Preservation Office, other State agency, Federal agency, local government, university, or other, specifying repository.)	I-1

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for application to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*).

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Section E

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Historic and Architectural School Buildings in Nebraska

E. Statement of Historic Contexts

Educational Development and Historic School Buildings in Nebraska: Public Schools K-12, 1854-1959

Throughout Nebraska's history, from the first settlers to the late 1950s, the state's educational history has demonstrated the differences between the state's urban centers and rural areas. The number of schoolhouses statewide was only 298 in 1869-70, but as westward expansion by settlers into the state increased, so did the number of schools, and only 20 years later the state was home to 5,937 schools. The number of schools steadily increased to between 7,000 and 7,600, and a decline was not seen until the effects of the consolidation movement in the mid-1940s.¹ Schools are a valuable architectural resource within the state and this context provides a background of the state's educational system and policy development, as well as the effects of national and state educational philosophy on the design of these historic properties.

Initial Settlement

Nationally, education was very important to the early European-American settlers, reflecting the strength of the public school movement in the United States during the mid-nineteenth century. This movement advocated free primary education for all, both for progress and for the well-being of society. Leading factors in the education movement may have been the need for a literate workforce for the rapidly increasing industrialization; and the need to "Americanize" the wave of immigrants that had begun arriving on America's shores in the 1840s, especially from Ireland and Germany." Educational reformers also thought universal literacy would benefit society in better-informed voters and provide equal opportunities to all, reducing stratification in society.

The earliest period of Nebraska's settlement as a territory and then its establishment as a state brought significant growth and changes to this western landscape. The establishment of educational policy and priorities included the most basic needs such as constructing school building facilities, hiring teachers, and defining school districts. Settlement into the territory and the growth of the territory's communities both large and small had an impact on the establishment of schools. Since education was generally viewed as an important value, it was often used in the new territory as a way to attract more settlers. The territory's new communities often boasted of their strengths, including their schools, to attract more settlers. For example, the settlement of Brownville in southeastern Nebraska had a private school before the community was even a year old.²

The territory of Nebraska and the state of Nebraska's school system and curriculum were shaped by a number of laws passed in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. An overview of early legislation that developed the state's educational system is outlined in the following table and discussed in more depth in the subsequent text:

Overview of Early School Legislation

Year	Legislation	Summary
1854	Kansas - Nebraska Act (National legislation)	Sections 16 and 36 set aside for educational purposes.
1855	Free Public School Act	Framework for public school system in Nebraska. Territorial legislation provides for the establishment of schools, but high schools were optional and to be supported by private funds. Designation of the Territorial Librarian who was named the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

¹ Elinor L. Baade Brown, "1990 Research for the History of Education in Nebraska," Volume 2 (N.p.; n.d.). Collection of the Nebraska State Historical Society.

² Walter K. Beggs, "Frontier Education in Nebraska." Ph.D. diss., University of Nebraska - Lincoln (1939), 109-110.

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Overview of Early School Legislation

Year	Legislation	Summary
1858	Act for Better Regulation of Schools (Furnas Law)	Adoption of the township district system with township tax base and control over schools.
1867	Act for Revision of School Law	Replaced the township system of organization and returned to the independent district system of school organization. Voters can designate schoolhouse sites, build and sell buildings, borrow money, tax residents, and determine school term (with minimums of 3 months for districts with less than 75 students, 6 months with 75 to 200 students, and 9 months with more than 200 students).
1869	Basic School Law	Allowed for the formation of union or consolidated schools.
1873	State legislation	Law provided for public support of all levels of education. Permits adjoining school districts to organize and establish a high school and allows any community with 150 school children to establish a high school.
1875	Nebraska Constitution	Establishment of the statewide school system and free public instruction for students ages 5 to 21. School organization and responsibility remained with the local school district.
1879	State legislation	First-class cities are permitted to issue bonds to construct high school buildings.
1887	Compulsory Education Law	Required children between the ages of 8 and 14 to attend a public or private school for at least 12 weeks a year.
1895	"Free high school" law	Secured free tuition for all children to attend high school by allowing non-resident students to attend a Nebraska high school at county expense if they have completed eight grades.
1900	State legislation	Established a library in every school, state aid to weak districts, and improvements in teacher certification.
1905 (amended in 1911)	State legislation	Allowed counties without a high school to establish a county high school.
1907	School Library Law	Required school boards to set aside 10 cents per student for the library fund and established a uniform course of study for elementary schools.
1907	"Free High School" Law	Expanded free public high school education to any child whose parent or guardian lived in a district that maintained less than a 4-year high school course of study.
1908	State legislation	Established a uniform high school course of study.
1913	State legislation	Counties without a 4-year accredited high school were mandated to establish a county high school.
1917	Mallery Act	Allowed rural and consolidated high schools with courses in agriculture, manual training, and home economics to apply for state funds based on the number of rooms.
1919 (amended 1921)	State legislation	Provided for school consolidation and brought private, denominational, and parochial schools under state supervision.
1927	State legislation	School systems reorganized to a 6-3-3 plan creating junior high schools.

The first significant educational legislation was the Kansas – Nebraska Act of 1854 that not only formed the territories of Kansas and Nebraska, but also promoted public schools. The act stated that Sections 16 and 36 in each township should be set aside for educational purposes. In Nebraska, a total of about 3 million acres was granted from the federal government which “. . . are hereby reserved for the purpose of being applied to schools in said territory and the states and territories hereafter to be erected out of the

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same.”³ Most of the early schools in the territory of Nebraska were privately established and required a tuition fee. The Kansas – Nebraska Act also provided for county school superintendents to be chosen by popular vote.⁴ County superintendents were responsible for dividing the county into districts and encouraging the residents to organize local school districts governed by a three-person board.

One year after the Kansas – Nebraska Act was passed, Nebraska’s school system was set in motion with the Territorial Legislature’s passage of the Free Public School Act. The passage of this act allowed designated school lands to be released for use prior to the territory establishing statehood. The Free Public School Act established the framework for the public school system with the designation of the Territorial Librarian who was named the Superintendent of Public Instruction. The school law also provided for financial support of the schools through the “schoolhouse fund” and the “teachers’ fund,” which authorized county superintendents to levy a tax in the county to support schools.⁵ Prior to the Free Public School Act the relatively limited number of schools throughout the state were privately run. After the act some of the private schools were incorporated into city school systems once they were established.

By 1858, “An Act for the Better Regulation of Schools in Nebraska” was introduced by Robert Furnas. This law replaced previous legislation, which was found to be inadequate in the establishment of schools throughout the territory. Known as the Furnas Law, the legislation adopted the township district system within which there was a township tax base and township control of schools.⁶ The law also gave incorporated towns with a population over 300 people and a separate school board the same power as the township board. Therefore, specific powers were allotted to the township board, the subdistrict boards under it, and the city boards, which included the power to erect high school buildings financed by a special tax. No known examples of a high school were established under this legislation. The Furnas Law also established a territorial common school fund to support the operation of schools and payment of teachers.⁷

Despite school legislation, schools were still not a common element of the territorial landscape in the 1850s and early 1860s. For example, in 1859 only 27 percent of the territory’s 4,767 school age children attended school. The city of Omaha established its first public schools in 1859, while the same year seven counties in the territory reported no schools at all.⁸ Buildings constructed solely for use as a school were rare during this period. In 1859, there were only 15 separate schoolhouse buildings reported in the territory, while many schools began in buildings of other uses and private residences.⁹ One year later, the number of separate school buildings increased to 34 buildings and the number of students enrolled in school increased to 376 high school students and 2,554 elementary students.¹⁰

³ Richard Dudley, “Nebraska Public School Education, 1890-1910,” *Nebraska History*, 54, No. 1 (Spring 1973), 76 and Steven J. Buss, “Public School District Reorganization and Consolidation in Adams County, Nebraska, 1949-89,” *Nebraska History*, 72, No. 2 (Summer 1991), 89.

⁴ Beggs, 44 and James C. Olson, *History of Nebraska* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1955), 103.

⁵ Olson, 103 and George A. Hyma, “The Super-Structure of Nebraska Education in the First Eight Years of Statehood,” M.A. Thesis, University of Nebraska – Lincoln (1940), 6.

⁶ Nebraska State Historical Society, “Historic Context Report 06.01.01 – Rural Education in Nebraska.”

⁷ Helen Siampos, “Early Education in Nebraska.” *Nebraska History*, XXIX (1948), 118; Buss, 89; and Hyma, 16.

⁸ Olson, 104 and Mary Alice Engles, “Secondary Education in the Public Schools of Omaha, Nebraska, 1859-1924,” Ph.D. diss., University of Nebraska – Lincoln (1963), 1.

⁹ Beggs, 89.

¹⁰ Beggs, 90.

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In 1867, Nebraska Territory became a state, and educational laws and policies continued to be revised and developed. "An Act for the Revision of School Law" was passed to replace the township plan, returning the organization of school districts to the independent district system of school organization.¹¹ The districts were to be organized by each county superintendent who was granted the authority to organize as many districts as needed. Each subdistrict, which existed under the 1858 law, was considered a district to be governed by a board of three members elected by the people. Under the new law, voters were given the right to designate schoolhouse sites, build and sell buildings or property, and to borrow up to \$5,000 to purchase school sites and buildings.¹² Voters were also given the power to impose taxes to pay teachers, keep the buildings in repair, and to determine the school term (with minimums of 3 months for districts with less than 75 students, 6 months with 75 to 200 students, and 9 months with more than 200 students).¹³

The formation of union or consolidated schools was allowed under the 1869 Basic School Law enacted by the legislature. By this time, the state boasted 797 school districts and this number continued to increase as a result of continued settlement and population growth.¹⁴ The first State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Samuel DeWitt Beals, was appointed in 1869. Beals focused on improving teaching methods and the state's lack of adequate schools. The Superintendent encouraged school boards to apply for building loans from the Permanent School Fund for building construction. With increased settlement of the state and through Beals' efforts, the number of public schoolhouses increased from 74 the previous year to 301 – six of stone, 16 of brick, 196 of frame, eight log, and three sod – in 1870.¹⁵ It has been estimated that between 1870 and 1875 approximately one rural school was built each day in Nebraska, and for the next 25 years approximately one every 2 days.¹⁶

New school laws continued to be passed in Nebraska in the 1870s and 1880s. By 1873, all first-class cities were defined as a separate school district. Tax money within each district from the sale of liquor licenses and court fines primarily funded Nebraska's school districts. Money was also received from the state from interests on funds gained from the lease and sale of school lands.¹⁷ In 1875, the Nebraska Constitution set forth the basic provisions for the establishment of the statewide school system and called for free instruction in common schools for students ages 5 to 21.¹⁸ However, school government, organization, and management responsibility remained with the local school district. In 1883, local school board control was guaranteed and the local district officers or board of education were given the responsibility for control of the buildings, teachers, and students.¹⁹

In 1885, the state of Nebraska had 185,542 children enrolled in 3,258 school districts.²⁰ Five years later, the number of school districts jumped to 4,408, but 2,015 conducted school for less than 6 months and 444 did not conduct school at all. School districts employed only 9,020 teachers – 2,612 males and 6,417 females – and a shortage of teachers was felt statewide. The teachers taught in

¹¹ Buss, 89.

¹² Hyma, 23-24.

¹³ Hyma, 24 and "Historic Context Report 06.01.01."

¹⁴ Penelope Chatfield, "District No. 10 School National Register of Historic Places Nomination" (1978).

¹⁵ R. McLaran Sawyer, "Samuel DeWitt Beals Frontier Educator," *Nebraska History*, 50, No. 2 (Summer 1969), 176-77.

¹⁶ Andrew Gulliford, *America's Country Schools* (Washington, D.C.: The Preservation Press, 1984), 160.

¹⁷ Dudley, 74-76.

¹⁸ George W. Hervey, comp., *Condensed History of Nebraska for Fifty Years to Date* (Omaha, Nebr.: Nebraska Farmer Co., 1903), 56.

¹⁹ Dudley, 74.

²⁰ "Historic Context Report 06.01.01."

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5,937 schoolhouses statewide, including 4,655 frame, 235 brick, 210 log, 45 stone, and 792 sod buildings.²¹ The late 1880s and early 1890s was a period of great expansion of the Omaha Public Schools, with 1892 being the city's biggest year for school construction. At this time, many of the city's early frame structures were replaced with more permanent brick structures as the city grew and developed.²²

At the turn-of-the-century, educational legislation focused on improving attendance and curriculum with the requirement for libraries and specified courses of study. The Compulsory Education Law of 1887 brought forth change by requiring all children between the ages of 8 and 14 to attend a public or private school for at least 12 weeks a year.²³ However, the Compulsory Education Law had no provisions for enforcement for those that did not attend school. In 1900, state legislation established a library in every school and provided state aid to weak districts. The importance of libraries was reinforced in the School Library Law of 1907, which required school boards to set aside 10 cents per student for the library fund.²⁴ In 1907, a law also passed requiring a uniform course of study for elementary schools with the first eight grades following the prescribed program or one approved by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction.

The number of districts statewide continued to increase into the twentieth century with 6,708 school districts in 1900, though only 448 of these districts had classes through 12th grade.²⁵ In 1902, the state's 6,666 school districts educated 290,000 children in 6,813 schoolhouses, of which 26 were stone, 327 brick, 121 log, 436 sod, and the remaining wood frame.²⁶ As the number of school districts statewide increased, the majority of these districts were rural. For example, over 4,600 of the 7,000 school districts in 1903 were rural schools and within these schools, approximately 10 percent of the schools had fewer than 5 students, 29 percent had 5 to 10 students, 36 percent had 10 to 15 students, and 27 percent had 15 to 20 students.²⁷

Educational policies in Nebraska were evaluated at a statewide conference held in Lincoln in September 1916. The purpose of the conference was to study the state's educational problems. One of the conference's committees was appointed to study the standardization of rural school buildings. Augustus O. Thomas, State School Superintendent, was involved in improving rural school conditions, including the establishment of standards to measure rural schools, development of a system of rural high schools, and strengthening rural schools through consolidation.²⁸

The early twentieth century brought about a national trend toward school consolidation. By 1903, most states in the Midwest, including Nebraska, had established laws making it legal to use public funds to provide transportation for students and had established procedures for consolidation. During this time, 21 counties in Nebraska made attempts at consolidation; however, the number of school districts remained steady throughout the state and were largely small rural schools. For example, in 1916 there were still 6,571

²¹ Dudley, 66-69.

²² Dan Worth and Lynn Meyer, "Center School National Register of Historic Places Nomination" (1985).

²³ Dudley, 68.

²⁴ "Historic Context Report 06.01.01" and Dudley, 86.

²⁵ Chatfield; Patricia Peterson, "District No. 1 School, Jefferson County National Register of Historic Places Nomination" (1997); Ginger Jensen, "Development of Nebraska Education, 1854-1967," report prepared for Dr. Floyd A. Miller, Commissioner of Education (N.p., 1968), 209.

²⁶ Hervey, 56-57.

²⁷ Dudley, 82.

²⁸ Jensen, 24.

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districts, and about 51 percent of these had less than 12 students.²⁹ By 1920, the number of districts was 7,254, and only 749 of these had grades through 12th.³⁰ As the number of rural schools remained steady, the city of Omaha's school system expanded greatly between 1910 and 1920 with the construction of many new school buildings, in part because of the annexation of surrounding communities.³¹

High School Development

Under territorial law in 1855 the establishment of high schools was optional and was to be supported by private funds. In 1858 this law was modified to allow high schools to be supported by taxation of township property. However, Nebraska's earliest high schools, established in 1859 in Omaha and Brownville, were private and easily attracted students because initially there were no public high schools.³² In some communities like Nebraska City, the local board of education subsidized private high schools by paying a portion of the students' tuition for those that were local residents.³³ Private high schools were also often incorporated into the city system and were transferred to the control of the board of education. An example of this is the Omaha High School established in 1861 by later Superintendent of Public Schools Samuel D. Beals and incorporated into the Omaha City School system in 1871.³⁴ Omaha's first high school building, Central High School, was constructed in 1872. This building was expanded to include four wings, three stories, 32 classrooms, and a gymnasium and could accommodate 1,500 students by 1912.³⁵

The 1873 education law assisted in the development of high schools by allowing adjoining school districts to organize to establish a high school and granted any community with 150 children permission to establish a high school. The law provided public support for all levels of education resulting in a high school building boom, including the construction of high schools in Lincoln, Blair, Ashland, Tecumseh, and Bellevue in 1873; Fremont, Humboldt, Beatrice, and Pawnee City in 1874; and Columbus in 1876.³⁶ Continued growth in high school construction was provided by a 1879 law that permitted first-class cities to issue bonds for money to construct high school buildings.

Attendance and free high school education legislation was passed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, increasing the number of high schools statewide. In 1880, 21 high schools in Nebraska enrolled 1,098 students, which increased to 119 graded high schools and 112 partially graded high schools in 1886.³⁷ An 1895 law allowed non-resident students who had completed eight grades to attend a Nebraska high school at county expense.³⁸ This legislation, known as the "free high school" law, thus secured free tuition

²⁹ "Historic Context Report 06.01.01."

³⁰ Jensen, 209.

³¹ Laurence M. Smith, "A History of the Junior High School in Omaha, Nebraska, 1917-1965," Ph.D. diss., University of Nebraska – Lincoln (1970), 30-31.

³² "Historic Context Report 06.01.04."

³³ Henry J. Hasch, "Some Factors in the Origin and Development of the Free Public High School in Nebraska from 1854 to 1880," Masters of Arts Thesis, University of Nebraska – Lincoln (1926), 22-23.

³⁴ Helen Siampos, "Early Education in Nebraska," *Nebraska History*, XXIX (1948), 118.

³⁵ Engles, 54.

³⁶ "Historic Context Report 06.01.04."

³⁷ Siampos, 118-119.

³⁸ "Historic Context Report 06.01.04."

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for all children. By 1903, 100 villages in the state maintained a 1-year high school, 150 villages had a 2-year high school, 80 villages or cities had 3-year high schools, and 85 cities had 4-year high school courses.³⁹

High school education advocacy extended to western Nebraska with 1905 legislation (amended in 1911) allowing counties without a high school the opportunity to establish a county school.⁴⁰ This made high school education available to children in sparsely populated areas of western Nebraska. Kimball County High School in Kimball was the first county high school established under this law.⁴¹ High school students in rural western Nebraska often moved to town during the school year to attend school. The 1907 Free High School Law expanded free public high school education to any child whose parent or guardian lived in a district that maintained less than a 4-year high school course of study. A uniform high school course of study was published in 1908. By 1910, 385 high schools had received approval by the state superintendent of enrollment under the new Free High School Law.⁴²

In 1913, counties with no 4-year accredited high schools were mandated to establish a county high school. By 1914, county high schools were organized in Arthur, Chase, Grant, Hayes, Keya Paha, Kimball, Perkins, and Thomas. Other counties that came under the law but had not established a high school by 1914 included Banner, Blaine, Deuel, Garden, Hooker, Logan, Loup, and McPherson. It wasn't until 1932 that all 16 counties affected by the 1913 legislation had established county high schools.⁴³

In 1908, the Teachers College High School was established in association with the University of Nebraska to serve as a model school and training ground for the Teachers College.⁴⁴ One hundred and thirty four 4-year high schools and 49, 3-year high schools in the state were accredited by the University of Nebraska in 1910.⁴⁵ In the early twentieth century, high school curriculum was broadened to include practical courses with industrial education at the forefront between 1905 and 1910. New courses in industrial education became popular offering agriculture, domestic science, and manual training.⁴⁶ Even with increased legislation and changes in curriculum, only one-fourth of 8th graders entered high school in 1916.⁴⁷

Junior High School Development

The educational philosophy of junior high schools was an early twentieth century national movement. In Nebraska, the city of Lincoln was at the forefront of this movement. In 1912, Lincoln was one of 30 cities nationally having reorganized schools that met the United States Commissioner of Education definition of junior high schools.⁴⁸ Junior high schools were viewed as a transition between the learning process from childhood and adolescence. In 1914, three Nebraska towns boasted junior high schools – Aurora,

³⁹ Hervey, 56.

⁴⁰ "Historic Context Report 06.01.04."

⁴¹ Joni Gilkerson, "Keya Paha County High School National Register of Historic Places Nomination" (1986).

⁴² Dudley, 82-85.

⁴³ "Historic Context Report 06.01.04," and Gilkerson.

⁴⁴ Robert W. Carlson, "A History of the Teachers College High School," Master of Education Thesis, University of Nebraska – Lincoln (1958), 4.

⁴⁵ "Historic Context Report 06.01.04."

⁴⁶ "Historic Context Report 06.01."

⁴⁷ "Historic Context Report 06.01.01."

⁴⁸ James E. Keill, "A History of the Junior High School in Lincoln, Nebraska," Ph.D. diss., University of Nebraska – Lincoln (1968), 253.

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Blair, and Lincoln. Lincoln remained at the forefront of the Junior High movement with six schools by 1916.⁴⁹ The junior high school movement gained popularity throughout the country in the 1920s.

Early School Architecture

Nationally, educators advocated “proper school design” through the publication of school design books, including Henry Barnard’s *School Architecture*, originally published in the early nineteenth century. Barnard espoused the idea of a well-built and impressive school to inspire students. Barnard emphasized practicality of school design, including location, style, construction, size, light, ventilation, and temperature and promoted schools with separate entrances for the sexes and classrooms that allowed enough fresh air to promote health and education.⁵⁰ Many authors of school design books tried to improve learning by improving the building or learning environment. James Johonnot’s 1871 *School-Houses* discussed the inadequacies of many early vernacular schoolhouses and proposed that schoolhouses be designed using “distinctive architecture which applies the principles of science to the wants and necessities of the school.” Johonnot promoted the Greek and the Gothic styles for schoolhouses.⁵¹ By the mid-to-late nineteenth century, architectural plan books or handbooks promoted proper designs and influenced the design of many rural schools in the United States.⁵²

Starting in the 1870s, the Omaha School District’s annual reports show an emphasis on “pure air, scientific lighting, and sanitary conditions” in its buildings. Since school attendance was not required at this time, the Board of Education believed that “safe, attractive, well-ventilated, and illuminated facilities were needed to gain widespread public support and ensure student attendance.”⁵³

Since early buildings, including rural school buildings, were designed based on the availability of materials and resources and expertise of local residents in the building trades, sod was not an unusual construction method for schools in western Nebraska. Professional architects and builders were rarely hired to construct the small rural schools. Farmers had a vested interest in the construction of their school building because they were directly responsible through taxes for paying for the building. Often farmers and rural residents drew their own plans; sometimes they sought advice from the county superintendent, or from neighboring school districts.⁵⁴ The construction of a new school in a district may have demonstrated the area’s and farmer’s prosperity because it showed a willingness to incur higher costs for school construction. Immigrants settling into the frontier of western Nebraska did not tend to build imitating styles of their homeland, but rather adopted a consistent and simple school form found throughout the Midwest.⁵⁵

Most one-room country schools were constructed with a rectangular plan, although square was not uncommon. Size was often determined by the practical visual and audible distance from the teacher. A series of three or four windows was commonly found on one or both of the long sides of the building. One door was most common, often facing south or east and located on the short side of the building, and sometimes covered by a portico. Two entrances – separating girls from the boys – were also seen, which carried through from occasional religious prototypes. Simple gable roofs and later hipped roofs were often recommended by plan books.⁵⁶

⁴⁹ A report issued by G. Vernon Bennett cited six junior high schools in Lincoln in 1916, but did not mention the names or locations of the schools. Keill, 254.

⁵⁰ Jean and Robert McClintock, ed., Henry Barnard’s School Architecture, (New York: Teachers College Press, 1970), 56.

⁵¹ James Johonnot, School-Houses (New York: J.W. Schermerhorn & Co., 1871), 14 and 55.

⁵² Gulliford, 166-67.

⁵³ Lynn Bjorkman, “Saunders School National Register of Historic Places Nomination” (1986).

⁵⁴ Wayne E. Fuller, One-Room Schools of the Middle West, (Lawrence, Kan.: The University Press of Kansas, 1994), 14.

⁵⁵ Fuller, One-Room Schools, 27 and 88.

⁵⁶ Gulliford, 172.

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By 1900, privies became standard, but a number of schools had not had them prior to the 1890s. Sanitation and design issues were addressed in plan books and writings about rural schools in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Constructed of rough logs and a sod roof, the earliest school buildings in Nebraska measured about 22 x 32 feet with a height of 12 feet and cost about \$1,000.⁵⁷ From these, the majority of Nebraska's earliest one-room schools of frame construction evolved, although sod construction was common in western Nebraska. The state superintendent's report for 1890 listed 5,937 school buildings – 4,655 frame, 792 sod, 235 brick, 210 log, and 45 stone.⁵⁸

Early improvements to the basic schoolhouse often included the addition of a porch and extra utility rooms. This protected the classroom from winter breezes when the door was opened and often provided both boys' and girls' cloakrooms. Other "improved schools" of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries included the incorporation of bells and belfries. This was not necessarily a practical addition, but they gained popularity and became a symbol of the one-room school. School improvements did not happen to all schools, many had no embellishments (bells, etc.), no water pumps in the yards, few trees, and primitive privies.⁵⁹ Improvements to school grounds were initiated in 1872 with the institution of Arbor Day in Nebraska. This program led to the beautification of school grounds throughout the state. The one-room schools observed Arbor Day with fervor and many of the state's schoolyards were enhanced with the planting of trees and other landscaping.⁶⁰

"Plans and Specifications for School-Houses" was published by the Nebraska Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction.⁶¹ This pamphlet to promote school design was distributed to county superintendents and was available to school officers upon request. The pamphlet provided five standard plans, prepared by architect William Gray of Lincoln, with suggestions for schoolhouse design that considered topics such as natural lighting, heating, and "ornamenting the grounds." The pamphlet included a general discussion of siting, size, and specifications of building materials. Recommendations encouraged the schoolhouse site to be at least 1 acre with two privies located apart but convenient to the playground. Additional guidance indicated placing the building on a foundation with the front facade facing east or south, providing each student with at least 12 square feet of floor room with those over 10 years old having at least 15 feet of floor room, and giving each student 200 cubic feet of air space.⁶²

School design continued to be promoted in the twentieth century through educational journals, state publications, and state laws. Early twentieth century publications included S.A. Challman's *The Rural School Plant*, bulletins from the U.S. Office of Education written by Fletcher B. Dresslar in 1914 and 1930, and educational and construction journals such as *School Board Journal* and *The Brickbuilder*. *Modern School Houses* from 1910 includes an essay by A.D.F. Hamlin titled "Consideration in School House Design" which stated:

"The schoolhouses of any community are gauges of its enlightenment. They should be the best and most carefully constructed buildings it possesses: not the most splendid and ornate, but the most perfect in design and complete and thorough in execution and equipment."⁶³

⁵⁷ Siampos, 116.

⁵⁸ Dudley, 66.

⁵⁹ Fuller, *One-Room Schools*, 19, 21, and 40.

⁶⁰ Fuller, *One-Room Schools*, 38 and 76.

⁶¹ The date of this publication is unknown, but it is likely that it was published in the early twentieth century.

⁶² Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. *Plans and Specifications for School-Houses*, Lincoln, Nebr.: N.p., n.d., 3-9.

⁶³ Daniel Kidd, "Omaha High School National Register of Historic Places Nomination" (1979).

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A 1912 publication *Country Life and the Country School* included a discussion of improving the physical environment of the country school. The most noted problem to the existing rural school buildings was that “a school of only one room should never be built,” it should always be at least two rooms. The publication also discussed issues of ventilation and lighting and recommended that windows should not be placed on both sides of the room, but rather only on the left side.⁶⁴

Nationwide architectural plans for “model” rural schools encouraged consolidation and transformation of rural schools into urban counterparts. Likewise in Nebraska, the State Department of Public Instruction published *School Buildings and Grounds in Nebraska* in 1902 by William K. Fowler to disseminate recommendations to school officials regarding designs and plans for creating a modern school building. The publication’s topics included building design, ventilation, spatial arrangement, proper lighting, and heating.⁶⁵ “The state superintendent felt that rural schools changed little from 1870-1900” which may have been the impetus for the statewide publication regarding school buildings.⁶⁶

National publications continued to advocate the ideas of the “modern schoolhouse.” For example, a 1915 series of articles in the trade journal *The Brickbuilder* featured this topic. The series addressed a variety of issues, including the classroom; wardrobes, toilets, and special rooms; volume and cost; exposure and plan; and special features such as the cooking room, assembly hall, manual training room, gymnasium, and fresh air rooms. Brick (for obvious reasons) was discussed as the exterior material of choice for the modern school. Even the style of the building was discussed with the following: “The exterior treatment of a modern elementary school should always be dignified, but never showy or ostentatious.”⁶⁷

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a number of combined high schools and elementary schools were constructed in communities where all the classes could fit together in one building or the high school program was not fully developed and therefore did not require its own space. For example, the Valentine Public School (listed on the National Register of Historic Places [NRHP] in 1984), constructed in 1897-98 with a 1908 addition, was designed to serve as both a primary and secondary education building. On the building’s plan one of the building’s six original classrooms was labeled “high school.” The Steele City School (listed on the NRHP in 1997), completed in 1914, is another example of a combined elementary/senior high school. The building’s first floor included elementary classrooms and the second floor had high school rooms, including one classroom for home economics and science classes.⁶⁸

Post World War I Consolidation and Construction Boom

Following World War I, economic times were fairly prosperous in the state which led to the state’s population growth and increased construction of schools. During this period, discussion also continued regarding school consolidation. State supervision of schools increased under 1919 legislation (amended in 1921) when private, denominational and parochial schools were brought under state supervision. This same legislation also provided for school consolidation. However, consolidation did not make much progress and Nebraska’s number of school districts increased to 7,264 in 1919.⁶⁹ Other educational changes during this period included the state legislature providing for the education of the physically handicapped in the late 1920s.⁷⁰

⁶⁴ Mabel Carney, *Country Life and the Country School* (Chicago: Row, Peterson, and Company, 1912), 207-208.

⁶⁵ Peterson.

⁶⁶ “Historic Context Report 06.01.01.”

⁶⁷ Walter Kilham, “The Modern Schoolhouse IV,” *The Brickbuilder*, April 1915, 97-98.

⁶⁸ Peterson.

⁶⁹ “Historic Context Report 06.01.01” and Chatfield.

⁷⁰ “Historic Context Report 06.01.01.”

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Education philosophy and curriculum requirements in Nebraska were influenced by national trends. During the early twentieth century, elementary school curriculum expanded beyond the “three Rs.” Attention was directed at developing well-rounded individuals with the inclusion of “manual training” for boys, especially woodworking; and “domestic science” for girls, specifically sewing and cooking. New curriculum requirements often affected the types of specialized teaching areas that were incorporated into the design of school buildings, primarily at the junior high school and high school level, but also for the larger urban elementary schools. For example, a rising concern for health and nutrition led to the inclusion of a gymnasium, lunchroom, and indoor bathrooms. In many cases, an assembly room or auditorium was also included, either as a separate room or as a stage at one end of the gymnasium.

Libraries also came into vogue. In the late 1910s, the “library” was a bookshelf located in a corner of each classroom. By the mid-1920s, the library was a separate room. Finally, the state-of-the-art elementary school building of the late 1910s and the 1920s was spacious and light, with good ventilation, heating and electricity.⁷¹ Another example of change in school form came in the mid-1920s when cities across the country were experimenting and/or using the work-study-play or platoon organizational system. In this system, students did not remain in one room for the day, but rather they shifted from room to room, including the shop, drawing room, auditorium, gymnasium and playroom. This affected the design of school buildings because fewer individual classrooms were needed overall and more specialized rooms were developed.⁷²

Junior High Schools

In the early 1920s, more than 3,500 junior high schools were established in the country and national education publications discussed the junior high school as a permanent unit in the American public school system.⁷³ In 1927, Nebraska’s legislature followed the national trend and passed a law reorganizing the school system into a 6-3-3 plan, creating junior high schools. However, throughout Nebraska not all school systems reorganized, many systems modified the plan to a 6-6, 7-5, or 5-3-4 plan or maintained their 8-4 plan and called grades 7 and 8 junior high. Statewide by 1928, 38 schools were operating under the name “junior high school” with some form of distinct organization. Of these, 17 were of the 2-year type and 19 were 3-year schools. Sixteen were housed separately, nine with a senior high, five with an elementary, and eight in a building with both senior high and elementary.⁷⁴ While Lincoln was at the forefront of the junior high movement, Omaha in the 1920s was still experiencing conflict on the junior high school organizational structure and thus it had not become an integral part of the Omaha school system. Omaha was largely operating on the K-8 and then four grade high school system. As a result, grade schools and high school buildings were the focus for new construction between 1926 and 1946 because funding was limited.⁷⁵

High Schools

High school funding to rural schools was increased in 1917 with the passage of the Mallery Act allowing rural and consolidated high schools with courses in agriculture, manual training, and home economics to apply for state funds based on their number of rooms.⁷⁶ The 1921-25 *Report of the Nebraska Superintendent of Public Instruction* lists county high schools located in the corresponding

⁷¹ William T. Anderson, “The Development of the Common Schools,” *Wisconsin Blue Book: 1923*, (Madison: State Printing Board, 1923), 114-119.

⁷² Guy Study, “Elementary School Buildings,” *The Architectural Record* (May 1926), 419-420.

⁷³ Samuel Mills, “Features of the Junior High School in the Smaller Schools of Nebraska,” Master’s Thesis, University of Nebraska – Lincoln (1929), 1-2.

⁷⁴ “Historic Context Report 06.01.03.”

⁷⁵ Smith, “A History of the Junior High School in Omaha, Nebraska, 1917-1965, 59.

⁷⁶ “Historic Context Report 06.01.04.”

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county seats: Arthur, Wheeler, Rock, Perkins, Banner, Sioux, Hayes, Chase, Kimball, Hooker, Keya Paha, Thomas, Deuel, Garden, and McPherson.⁷⁷

Changes in curriculum resulting in changes in school form are demonstrated in Omaha's Technical High School. The school moved into a new building in 1923 which "attracted nationwide attention not only because of its size but also because of the excellence of its design and the variety of educational facilities that it provided." The facility included 20 shops, 12 laboratories, 5 drafting rooms, a greenhouse, a 2,000-seat auditorium, a library, a cafeteria, a swimming pool, 2 gymnasiums, and a roof garden.⁷⁸

Architecture

By the 1920s, most rural schools were constructed based upon plans in design books. Standard design features included a hipped roof and a series of windows on one side of the room close together to appear as one window often with east or west exposure. Plan books of the time also promoted built-in bookcases, cloakrooms, and full basements for community use.⁷⁹

By 1929, the Nebraska Department of Public Instruction published pamphlets promoting school design, including *Rural School Standards*. This 1929 pamphlet included goals for rural schools to achieve in both building environment and instruction to qualify as a "standard school" in Nebraska. Minimum requirements for a "standard school" included 10 items, of which the following six related to the building and surrounding environment:

- School grounds must be adequate, well drained, and kept clean. One or more acres of ground is recommended.
- There shall be a good well on the grounds or nearby and sanitary methods for the use of water must be provided.
- The school must provide single desks of suitable size adjusted to the needs of the children, and the room must contain at least 15 feet of floor space to each child.
- The schoolroom must be lighted from the left or the left and rear with the window area equivalent to one-fifth of the floor space.
- The heating must be of some approved type and the room must contain 200 cubic feet of air space for each child.
- Outbuildings must be placed as far apart as possible, and kept clean and free from marks. In front of each there should be a board shield screening the entrance.⁸⁰

Under this program, schools were inspected and scored to see if they met the minimum requirements as a "standard school." Schools reaching 75 points were classified as a "standard school," and those with a score of 95 points were classified as "superior schools."⁸¹ Additional requirements for a superior one-room school included the following relating to the building and surroundings:

- At least 1 acre of schoolyard, neatly fenced, covered with a good sod, and planted with trees, shrubs, and flowers, concrete or cinder walks to the entrance and to outbuildings.

⁷⁷ Gilkerson.

⁷⁸ Engles, 58.

⁷⁹ Gulliford, 194.

⁸⁰ Chole C. Baldrige, Rural School Standards: Requirements for Standardization of Rural Schools (State of Nebraska, Department of Public Instruction, 1929), 4-5.

⁸¹ Baldrige, 4-5.

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- Besides the schoolroom, there should be a basement, work and play room, cloak room, and a library room.⁸²

Only one school in 1929, Martel District 22 in Lancaster County, was listed as a “superior rural school,” but hundreds of schools statewide were recognized as “standard rural schools.”⁸³

Rural School Standards included standard schoolhouse plans used to encourage the erection of improved rural schools. “We have selected economical plans of schoolhouses that meet the requirements for standard schools relative to light, heat, and ventilation. The welfare of the child is the determining factor in schoolhouse construction.”⁸⁴ Plans for a standard two-room school featured a hipped roof with front shed roof dormer and central entry with front porch. The first floor included two classrooms, each with a library and storage area, bathrooms, and girls’ and boys’ wardrobes. The basement included a large playroom, furnace room, fuel room, and kitchen. Plans for a one-room rural school with or without a basement, with a hipped roof having an intersecting front gable and front gable dormer on the main facade and a central entry were also included. The layout included a classroom, library, boys’ and girls’ wardrobes, and toilets. The basement included a playroom, furnace and fuel room. In the absence of a basement, the area for the basement stairs and landing became the fuel room and small teachers’ lounge.⁸⁵

The pamphlet continued with specifications for classrooms, including a rectangular shape, windows on the left side of the pupils, minimum elementary classroom size of 15 square feet and 200 cubic feet of air space per student, window area equivalent to one-fifth of the floor area, and light coming from the left or rear. Following these specifications, a room 28 feet long and 22 feet wide with a 12-foot ceiling could accommodate 30 children.⁸⁶

The pamphlet also made recommendations for the improvement of older school buildings in order to meet the minimum requirements for a “standard school.” Suggestions included rearranging windows to provide lighting from the left of the pupils, adding a foundation to provide additional space, improving heating and ventilating, repainting, installing new hardwood floors, and adding a fuel room and library.⁸⁷

The grounds of the rural schoolhouse also received attention with the size of the schoolyard at a 1 acre minimum with 2 acres preferred. Appropriate yard specifications were discussed as oblong shaped, dry, and free from weeds, stones, bricks, sticks, and ashes. The pamphlet also addressed the placement of the outbuildings, which in accordance with Section 6335, Nebraska School Laws, outbuildings were required to be located as far from the main entrance to the schoolhouse as possible. Outhouse buildings were required to have a window on each side and a flue for ventilation.⁸⁸

The Passing of the Little Red Schoolhouse published in 1928 by architect George Grabe of Columbus and Fremont, Nebraska, also provided guidance on schoolhouse design in Nebraska. Grabe prepared the publication and distributed it primarily to county school superintendents as a promotional piece. He used his 18 years of experience preparing school plans for school boards as the pamphlet’s topic with the hopes of assisting other school boards with their future efforts to remodel or construct school buildings.

⁸² Baldrige, 9.

⁸³ Baldrige, 58.

⁸⁴ Baldrige, 11.

⁸⁵ Baldrige, 11-17.

⁸⁶ Baldrige 11 and 29.

⁸⁷ Baldrige, 24.

⁸⁸ Baldrige 25 and 37.

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Grabe offered his recommendations for rural school building design, including specifications for building size and materials, lighting, siting, heating, water supply, and sanitation. The pamphlet offered nine standard plans for rural one-room schools available for purchase from \$65 to \$90 for complete plans and specifications. The pamphlet states that “plans and specifications will be in the mail within 24 hours after we receive the order.”⁸⁹ It is unknown how much influence Grabe’s publication had on the design of rural school buildings in Nebraska, but the pamphlet does illustrate a number of plans and examples of his work that represent typical school building designs seen throughout the state.

All of the published materials, including state recommendations and journal articles demonstrate how school design grew to become a specialized problem in the field of architecture where architectural philosophy was combined with educational philosophy. For example, educational requirements emphasizing health and playground activities led to larger athletic facilities and the placement of schools on larger lots.⁹⁰

The appropriate architectural style for school design in the 1920s was the topic of discussion in the *Architectural Record*. Appropriate styles for northern states included the Colonial and the English Tudor styles, while Spanish and Italian styles were recommended for the southern states.⁹¹ Most schools, even urban schools, were not designed using the high style forms, such as Classical or Renaissance Revival, that were employed for train stations or libraries and other public buildings. However, the Omaha High School (listed on the NRHP in 1979) completed between 1900-1912 in the French Renaissance Revival style is an exception to this trend.⁹²

Requirements for elementary school building standards during this period included “fireproof buildings of two or three stories in height; no basement for school purposes; classrooms planned to permit the use of laboratory and socialized class methods; a special library-study-reference room to serve also as a meeting room for student societies; provision for civic-social centers for the school; gymnasium; locker rooms; and lunchroom or cafeteria.”⁹³ The design for the 1923 Prescott Elementary School in Lincoln serves as an example of these principles. The *American School Board Journal* referred to the Prescott Elementary School as “typical of the kind of elementary buildings which the board of education proposes to erect under its present building program.” The two-story building included 26 standard classrooms measuring 24 x 30 feet, with additional rooms such as art rooms, music rooms, library, two kindergartens, two play rooms, office rooms, kitchen, health suite, and teachers’ restrooms on both levels.⁹⁴

Nationally, the North Central Association standards for junior high school buildings included in *Junior High School Education* by Calvin O. Davis in 1926 emphasized the need for the building to “ensure hygienic conditions for both teachers and pupils.” The standards also included the need for a laboratory, gymnasium, auditorium, library, and rooms for both academic instruction and teachings in practical arts and recreation. The design requirements for a junior high school building were similar to those of elementary schools, although specialized rooms were needed for the variety of elective courses offered, including home economics, laboratories, and mechanical shops for industrial arts. Other building provisions desirable for junior high schools included an

⁸⁹ George Grabe, *The Passing of the Little Red Schoolhouse* (Fremont, Nebr.: George Grabe, 1928), 12-21.

⁹⁰ William B. Ittner, “Forty Years in American School Architecture,” *American School Board Journal*, 82 (May 1931), 49.

⁹¹ Guy Study, “Junior and Senior High Schools,” *The Architectural Record* (July 1926), 208 and 224.

⁹² Kidd.

⁹³ Rhue E. Green, “A Study of the Distinguishing Characteristics of the Junior High Schools of Nebraska,” Master of Arts Thesis, University of Nebraska – Lincoln (1928), 133-34.

⁹⁴ “The Prescott Elementary School,” *American School Board Journal* (August 1923), 60.

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auditorium with a stage, arrangements for moving pictures, preferably two gymnasiums, an office and reception area for the principal, and a restroom for female teachers.⁹⁵

In the 1920s, plans for both junior and senior high schools struggled with the location of the gymnasium and the auditorium – either grouping the two spaces together or keeping them separate. William B. Ittner, school architect and writer, recommended in a 1926 article that the best place for the auditorium and gymnasium, as a joint facility, was in the center of the building. “Ittner’s plan” became an accepted standard throughout the country. The article features the Beatrice Junior High School, designed by J.H. Felt & Co., as an example of good design with the central auditorium and boys’ and girls’ gymnasiums.⁹⁶

Works Progress Administration and Depression-era Resources

During the Depression years, local school districts drastically cut expenditures and some were even unable to pay teachers’ salaries because funding at the local level was not available.⁹⁷ Federal funds totaling \$37,000 through the Civil Works Administration and the Federal Emergency Relief Administration allowed Nebraska’s one-room schools to stay open by paying the teachers’ salaries in 1933 and 1934.⁹⁸ Between 1933 and 1937 the Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works assisted in financing 70 percent of all school buildings nationally.⁹⁹

Relief for the schools came in the mid-1930s with the Federal Emergency Relief Act administered by the state. Through this funding many new school buildings were erected and services were provided for rural schools.¹⁰⁰ Many rural schools benefitted from New Deal-era programs, including rural electrification, which replaced many schools’ kerosene lamps; indoor plumbing for some schools; and the construction of new outdoor privies by the Works Progress Administration for others. The Public Works Administration, later known as Works Progress Administration, also provided funding for the improvement and construction of public school buildings, including large modern buildings and small one-room schools. For example, in 1934, residents of the Sandhills built a two-room sod high school with the assistance of Works Progress Administration labor. Determined to have a high school close to home, ranchers and residents volunteered to aid in the construction of the school, which included a classroom and living quarters for the teacher. The Lakeland Sod High School also included a sod barn and two sod outhouses. The school operated until 1941 with 11 students in the final graduation class.¹⁰¹

School buildings were used extensively as meeting places during the 1930s and early 1940s. Local residents met at the school to discuss and organize many of the New Deal Programs such as rural electrification and soil conservation, and at the onset of World War II they held Food for Victory meetings.¹⁰² State education legislation in the 1930s included a provision for the state to pay for children of military personnel to attend public schools.¹⁰³

⁹⁵ Green, 134-136.

⁹⁶ Study, “Junior and Senior High Schools,” 203-204.

⁹⁷ “Historic Context Report 06.01.”

⁹⁸ Fuller, One-Room Schools, 109-110.

⁹⁹ Ross P. Korsgaard, “A History of Federal Aid to Education in Nebraska.” Ph.D. diss., University of Nebraska – Lincoln (1963), 94.

¹⁰⁰ “Historic Context Report 06.01.0.”

¹⁰¹ Gulliford, 181-82.

¹⁰² Fuller, One-Room Schools, 110.

¹⁰³ “Historic Context Report 06.01.01.”

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In 1938, the State Planning Board was commissioned to study expenditures and recommended a broadened tax base, consolidation of schools, and state aid to education. This led to the “beginning of consolidation battles.”¹⁰⁴ The efforts of consolidation during the 1920s had led to only 71 consolidated schools in the state in 1934 with still more than 6,000 one-room schools.¹⁰⁵

Post World War II Baby Boom-era Through 1959

The design and construction of school buildings continued to be of interest in this period following World War II and into the baby boom-era of the 1950s. The Department of Public Instruction established a department to survey school buildings and to provide consulting services through the University of Nebraska regarding school building construction.¹⁰⁶ The Department of Public Instruction in 1949 was given responsibility for accrediting and approving school systems and setting standards for rural, private, and public elementary schools.¹⁰⁷

Following World War II educational reforms included expanded services and curriculum across the state. For example, in 1946 the first driver education classes were offered in 27 high schools. The same year the National School Lunch Act passed. Expanded services for the physically-handicapped and the inception of special education programs also occurred in the late 1940s. The Johnson-O’Malley Act passed during this period provided that the state would supervise and distribute tuition, transportation, and lunch money to public schools with Native American students in certain districts.¹⁰⁸ In 1955, the office of state superintendent of public instruction was abolished and was replaced with school commissioner.¹⁰⁹

In the 1940s, the state began experiencing increased urbanization and the development of large scale agriculture. As a result, the rural population declined and consolidation battles continued with two diverse sides. The Reorganization of School Districts Act passed in 1949, while 6,734 districts remained in the state.¹¹⁰ The act required county superintendents to call a meeting of all school board members in the county within 120 days. Each school board was required to elect a committee to develop plans to reorganize schools by 1953 and submit them to the State Committee for the Reorganization of School Districts. The state committee’s recommendations then appeared on a special ballot. In 1955, the law was amended to require “comprehensive planning” in the school districts in addition to smaller scale reorganization.¹¹¹

Funding for schools increased in the 1950s. Public Law 815 of 1951-52 allowed certain school districts to apply for federal money to provide adequate school plant facilities. The National Defense Education Act of 1959 provided for improvement of school buildings through remodeling and buying school equipment. Also in the mid-1950s the “Keep Nebraska Beautiful” program resulted in numerous trees and shrubs planted on school grounds.¹¹²

¹⁰⁴ “Historic Context Report 06.01.”

¹⁰⁵ Fuller, One-Room Schools, 108.

¹⁰⁶ Jensen, 35.

¹⁰⁷ “Historic Context Report 06.01.01.”

¹⁰⁸ “Historic Context Report 06.01.04” and “Historic Context Report 06.01.01.”

¹⁰⁹ Jensen, 41.

¹¹⁰ “Historic Context Report 06.01.01.”

¹¹¹ Buss, 91.

¹¹² “Historic Context Report 06.01.01.”

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Consolidation efforts were well underway in the 1950s and the number of school districts in 1956 was 4,958, which continued to decline and was reduced to 3,538 by 1960.¹¹³ In 1958, Nebraska was one of only four states that still had over 2,000 operating one-room schools. The other states included Wisconsin, Iowa, and South Dakota.¹¹⁴

Junior High School

In 1951, less than 10 percent of school systems were utilizing a junior high school model with either 6-2-4, 6-3-3, or 6-6 plans. Three-year schools (grades 7, 8, and 9) were located in Beatrice, Grand Island, Fremont, Hastings, Kearney, Lincoln, McCook, Scottsbluff, and York. Two-year schools (grades 7 and 8, plus two 3-year schools with grades 6, 7, and 8) were located in Ainsworth, Albion, Alliance, Auburn, Columbus, Cozad, Fairbury, Falls City, Nebraska City, Norfolk, North Platte, Sidney, and South Sioux City. Six 6-6 plans with grades 7 and 8 considered junior high were located in Bayard, Clarkson, Gering, Gothenburg, Hartington, Holdrege, Lexington, Lyman, Minden, Mitchell, Ord, Ravenna, and Stromsburg.¹¹⁵

In the 1950s, Omaha focused on the development and construction of junior high schools. In 1951, a number of junior high schools were recommended in the city's building program, as well as the reorganization to 6-3-3 grade division system. In 1955, a survey and bond issue recommended the establishment of 12 junior high schools in the city. Monroe Junior High School (in the expanded Monroe Elementary School) served as the model and programs were tested there. Three other entirely new junior high school buildings were established in Omaha between 1958 and 1960 – Indian Hill Elementary-Junior High School, McMillan Junior High School, and George W. Norris Junior High School.¹¹⁶

High Schools

In 1955, the new "million dollar" school was built for the Teachers College High School in Lincoln – and was later known as the University High School. "The construction of the new million dollar school plant at Fifteenth and Vine Streets has undoubtedly been an important factor in the development of the modern high school."¹¹⁷ The school design and layout reflected the current thinking in educational facilities and teaching methods. The high school contained no desks, only moveable chairs and tables. There was also great emphasis on audio-visual aids, including heavy plastic drapes to be pulled to display motion pictures, slides, or filmstrips, and special storage facilities for audio-visual aids. Other specialty items included modern appliances in the home economics department and a kiln in the art department, and darkroom facilities.¹¹⁸

¹¹³ "Historic Context Report 06.01.01."

¹¹⁴ Fuller, *One-Room Schools*, 122.

¹¹⁵ "Historic Context Report 06.01.03."

¹¹⁶ Smith, "A History of the Junior High School in Omaha, Nebraska, 1917-1965," 102, 104, 124, 129, and 165.

¹¹⁷ Carlson, 56.

¹¹⁸ Carlson, 56-58.

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Conclusion

Nebraska's educational legislation and facilities reflect national trends in educational philosophy and design, but also represent changes in the state. The state's educational history began with classrooms in homes, churches, and other buildings before even the simplest one-room school buildings were erected. With increased settlement of the territory and the state of Nebraska in the nineteenth century, separate school buildings were constructed both in rural areas and urban centers. The twentieth century brought increased school facilities, consolidation, and changes in school design that reflected changes in curriculum. The state's school buildings – elementary, junior high school, and high school – are a fixture of the state's landscape and demonstrate various eras of the state's educational history.

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F. Associated Property Types

For the context of *Educational Development and Historic School Buildings in Nebraska: Public Schools K-12, 1854-1959*, the associated property types would include any buildings, sites, structures, and objects related to urban and rural public school education in Nebraska from 1854-1959. Property types to be considered eligible for the NRHP would primarily include public school buildings – elementary, junior high school, and high school buildings. Other property types may include associated buildings such as a separate gymnasium or auditorium building, teacher's housing, and outbuildings such as privies.

To qualify for the NRHP, the property must be an intact example of a school or related resource and should retain essential elements of the seven aspects of integrity – location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association as defined in *National Register Bulletin 15: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*. Overall, the property must retain a high degree of physical integrity and should reflect its period of construction. For certain rare property types, such as rural one-room schools, the building does not need to be an exceptional example of its type. In the case of rare property types the seven aspects of integrity are weighed in light of surviving resources. However, rural one-room schools and other rare building types should retain sufficient integrity of design to merit NRHP listing.

Eligible school buildings would include both urban and rural schools ranging in size from one-room schools to expansive urban schools. The school buildings will be constructed of a variety of materials and represent various architectural styles and building forms. The resource does not need to retain its historic function to be eligible for the NRHP. The property can be eligible for the NRHP under *Criterion A* for its historical association with education in Nebraska; *Criterion B* for an association with a notable person; and/or *Criterion C* for its architectural significance, including representation of method of construction, work of a master, or representative of a property type. Properties can be significant at the national, state, or local level.

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G. Geographical Data

All resources of this Multiple Property Documentation will be located within the boundaries of the State of Nebraska.

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H. Summary of Identification and Evaluation Methods

The Multiple Property Listing of historic and architectural school buildings in Nebraska is based upon the state's survey program – the Nebraska Historic Buildings Survey (NeHBS). The ongoing NeHBS began in 1974 and is a county-by-county survey effort that includes documentation of over 60,000 properties that reflect the rich architectural and historic heritage of Nebraska. The survey is conducted by researchers who drive every rural and urban public road in a county and record each property that meets certain historic requirements outlined in the *Nebraska Historic Buildings Survey Manual* (July 9, 1997), largely based upon NRHP criteria. Surveyed properties include standing structures throughout the state that appeared to be at least 50 years old and retained a sufficient degree of architectural integrity, including those properties that are potentially eligible for the NRHP. At present, surveyed property types documented in the NeHBS include one-room schools, elementary schools, junior high schools, and high schools. The Multiple Property Listing also draws information from NRHP nominations completed for school buildings throughout the state.

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