UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

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

NAME

HISTORIC
First Unitarian Church of Omaha
AND/OR COMMON

LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER
3114 Harney Street

CITY, TOWN
Omaha

STATE
Nebraska

CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY
X BUILDING(S)

OWNERSHIP
PUBLIC
PRIVATE

STATUS
X OCCUPIED
UNOCCUPIED
WORK IN PROGRESS
ACCESSIBLE
X YES: RESTRICTED
YES: UNRESTRICTED
NO

PRESENT USE
AGRICULTURE
COMMERCIAL
EDUCATIONAL
ENTERTAINMENT
GOVERNMENT
INDUSTRIAL
MILITARY
OTHER

OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME
First Unitarian Church of Omaha

LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTER OF DEEDS, ETC.
Register of Deeds, Omaha/Douglas County Civic Center

STREET & NUMBER
18th and Parnau Streets

CITY, TOWN
Omaha

STATE
Nebraska

REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

DATE

FEDERAL
STATE
COUNTY
LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE
The First Unitarian Church of Omaha, a 1917 Colonial Revival edifice, is located on the northwest corner of Harney Street and Turner Boulevard in a mixed-use section of Omaha (1970 pop. 354,389). The building contains one and one-half stories above a raised basement, and the wall construction is of brick laid in Flemish bond. Centered on the main facade is a double-door entrance whose semi-circular fanlight has delicate tracery. Round-arched windows flank the entrance, and over the three first-floor openings are rectangular windows that illuminate the organ loft. Each side wall is punctuated by five round-arched windows and two oculi.

The main facade's fenestration is framed by a tetramyle Roman Ionic portico whose slender columns and pilasters are united by boxed beams on the portico ceiling. The portico's frieze and architrave contain simple moldings, but the cornice, like the continuous cornice atop the walls, is treated with dentil and modillion moldings.

A three-staged tower centered on the front surmounts the building's hipped roof. The tower's first section is a rectangular brick box with quoins and a simple cornice; the second section — a four-sided belfry — is wooden and contains round-arched, louvered openings; and the third section, also of wood, is an octagonal cupola with narrow round-arched windows, finials, diminutive Ionic pilasters, and an octagonal dome. A wooden balustrade surmounting the cornice around the walls has been removed. The church interior contains Colonial Revival fittings of a highly-finished quality. Past the main entrance is a spacious vestibule. Over this room is the organ and choir loft, reached by the main stairway at the west end of the vestibule. In the auditorium, mahogany-topped pews and their arrangement correctly reproduce the seating type and plan of a New England Colonial meetinghouse, and framing the round-arched windows of the side walls are five-bay arcades with pilasters and Ionic columns on plinths. The ceiling of the auditorium is treated with large coffers and there is a balustrade separating the raised platform at the front from the remainder of the church interior. Flanking the platform's centered recess are a wine-glass pulpit and a lectern.

A one-story addition at the church's northwest corner was constructed in 1952 to meet expanding educational facility needs. Designed by architect David Wallace, the addition respects the materials and scale of the original building, which was designed by architects John and Alan McDonald.

1. Russell Sturgis's 1902 Dictionary of Architecture and Building defines Colonial architecture in the following manner: "In American use, that which prevailed in the British settlement in America previous to 1776, and by extension, and because the style cannot be distinctly separated into chronological periods, as late as the beginnings of the present century" (Vol. I, column 639ff).
**SIGNIFICANCE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PERIOD</th>
<th>AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW</th>
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<td>COMMUNICATIONS</td>
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**SPECIFIC DATES** 1917-18 **BUILDER/ARCHITECT** John and Alan McDonald

**STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

The First Unitarian Church of Omaha is architecturally significant to Nebraska as an early and fine product of the Colonial Revival. Designed by John and Alan McDonald, the building is exemplary in illustrating the heritage of Unitarianism in America by reproducing in the Midwest an 18th-century house of worship common to the region where the denomination took root and flourished.

Unitarian services in Omaha were first held in 1866. A congregation was organized and a minister was secured three years later, and the first church building was dedicated in 1871 (The Bee, Omaha, Sept. 30, 1918). Former President William Howard Taft, then serving as president of the Unitarian Church Conference in the United States and Canada, officiated at the cornerstone-laying ceremony for the second and present church (The Bee, Omaha, Oct. 20, 1917). When the Colonial Revival edifice was dedicated on September 29, 1918, it won quick favor from the local press, one newspaper reporting the following:

The new building of the First Unitarian church, Omaha, brings to this city a touch of New England, and it is fitting that this society . . . should be housed in a building resembling so closely the old New England meetinghouse. Both exterior and interior of the new building follow the traditions handed down by the forefathers . . . The whole is truly a leaf from an old book (The Bee, Sept. 28, 1918, p. 3).

The Colonial Revival was second only to the Gothic Revival in American church architecture by the 1920s (Rhoads, The Colonial Revival, Vol. I, p. 200). Like Congregationalists, Unitarians have frequently chosen this style for their church buildings (ibid., p. 212). In 1906, a Unitarian, Allen French, proclaimed that the Gothic "is opposed to our ideals; its religion was as gloomy as its great vaults, as idolatrous as its carved altars, as narrow as its lancet windows." On the other hand, the Georgian of America's Colonial period "came . . . when the Gothic was dead . . . It is as perfect and complete an architectural style as the Gothic itself. It represents the new ideas, it is freer, brighter, more open . . . It adapted itself to our conditions, and still expresses them. Let the Episcopalian cling to his Gothic . . ., but it has nothing to do with us" (French, American Architect, April 7, 1906, p. 116, quoted in Rhoad's The Colonial Revival, Vol. I, p. 213).
John McDonald and his son, Alan, architects, were natives of Omaha. Alan (1891-1948), who earned an architecture degree from Harvard in 1915, may have played the major role in designing the building since he was a member of First Unitarian and had perhaps closely examined Georgian buildings while in New England.
See continuation sheet

**GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

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<th>ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY</th>
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**UTM REFERENCES**

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**VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION**

Lots 4 and 5, Redick's Grove, Omaha, Douglas Co., Nebraska

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STATE</th>
<th>CODE</th>
<th>COUNTY</th>
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</thead>
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**FORM PREPARED BY**

**NAME / TITLE**

Daniel Kidd, Architectural Historian

**ORGANIZATION**

Nebraska State Historical Society

**STREET & NUMBER**

1500 R Street

**CITY OR TOWN**

Lincoln

**DATE**

January, 1980

**TELEPHONE**

402/471-3270

**STATE**

Nebraska

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**STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION**

**THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:***

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NATIONAL</th>
<th>STATE</th>
<th>LOCAL</th>
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**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**

[Signature]

**DATE**

2/6/80

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**FOR NPS USE ONLY**

**I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER**

**DATE**

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**DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION**

**ATTEST:**

**DATE**

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**KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER**

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The Omaha Bee. "Taft Assists in Unitarian Service." October 20, 1917, p. 3.

________. "First Unitarian Church Is Dedicated at Services Held Sunday Morning." September 28, 1918, p. 3.

________. "Unitarians of Omaha at Home in New Church." September 30, 1918, p. 3.


Program of Events for the 1969 Centennial Year of the First Unitarian Church of Omaha. Omaha: First Unitarian Church, 1969.


View to the north. Nebraska State Historical Society, 1972 (NSHS H673.5-3530)

View to the northwest. Nebraska State Historical Society, 1972 (NSHS H673.5-3531)

View to the northwest. Nebraska State Historical Society, 1972 (NSHS H673.5-3532)