1. NAME

COMMON:
Joslyn (George A.) Mansion

AND/OR HISTORIC:

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER:
3902 Davenport Street

CITY OR TOWN:
Omaha

STATE:
Nebraska

CODE:
31

COUNTY:
Douglas

CODE:
055

3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)
- District
- Site
- Building
- Structure
- Object

OWNERSHIP
- Public
- Private
- Both

STATUS
- Occupied
- Unoccupied
- Preservation work in progress

ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
- Yes
- Restricted
- Unrestricted
- No

PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)
- Agricultural
- Commercial
- Educational
- Government
- Industrial
- Military
- Museum
- Park
- Religious
- Transportation
- Other (Specify)

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME:
Society of Liberal Arts, Joslyn Art Museum

STREET AND NUMBER:
22nd and Dodge Streets

CITY OR TOWN:
Omaha

STATE:
Nebraska

CODE:
31

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC:
Register of Deeds, Douglas County Court House

ADDRESS:
1700 Farnum Street

CITY OR TOWN:
Omaha

STATE:
Nebraska

CODE:
31

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY:
Historic Preservation in Nebraska

DATE OF SURVEY:
1971

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:
- Federal
- State
- County
- Local

ADDRESS:
Nebraska State Historical Society

STREET AND NUMBER:
1500 "R" Street

CITY OR TOWN:
Lincoln

STATE:
Nebraska

CODE:
31

*First Nebraska Congressional District
Joslyn Castle characterizes the height of Victorian elegance. The three story mansion is of Scotch Baronial-Style architecture. It was built in 1903 at a cost of 500,000 dollars by the late George A. Joslyn, president of the prosperous Western Newspaper Union, and prominent real estate investor. It was designed by John McDonald, a successful Omaha architect.

The castle is constructed of silverdale limestone; most of which was shipped from Vermont, the Joslyns' native state. The stone was shipped in huge slabs which were then cut and formed on the site. The design was influenced by houses the Joslyns had seen in the Eastern United States. The plans were started after the architect had finished an inspection trip of the homes in Bar Harbor, Maine, and Newport, Rhode Island. The carriage house and stable, a two-story building repeating the Medieval Scotch Baronial architecture, sets to the rear of the castle.

Joslyn Castle contains thirty-five rooms, five baths, and three half-baths. The central portion rises four stories with flanking turrets on the southeast and northeast corners, and porte cochere on the east. While the Joslyns were there, the basement contained a bowling alley and billiard room.

The entrance, the most impressive as well as the best preserved section of the castle, is entered through an 18 hundred pound wrought iron door hung in a marble frame and costing 1500 dollars in 1902. The walls of the vestibule are mosaic and the ceiling is set with mother of pearl. This serves as an effective transition into the grandiose reception hall which rises one and a half stories and is elegantly finished in Spanish mahogany. A victorian, grand-staircase curves down vigneting a small alcove overlooking the conservatory. Finishing touches are made by a crystal chandelier trimmed with gold plate and the black and gold marble fireplace brought from Palmira, near the Italian Riviera. This grand entrance seconds the lavish victorian character projected by the castle's facade.

The only major change in the house since its original construction was the addition in 1909 of the music room. It is lower than the rest of the house in order to facilitate the organ pipes which would have otherwise extended past the upper story's windows. The organ is now in the Joslyn Memorial's Concert Hall.

The Castle sets on a 5½ acre estate covering four city blocks. It is almost entirely enclosed by an ornate stone and wrought iron fence. The Castle grounds appear to be a veritable forest, shaded by 250 trees of 48 varieties, with many additional shrubs and vines. Among the many plantings are some trees unusual to Nebraska; including a Chinese gingko tree, said to be particularly suited to the Nebraska climate, smoke tree, golden rain or varnish tree, and hop hornbeams. Many of the trees were said to be full size when they were transplanted. The surrounding trees and shrubbery give an effect of natural growth rather than that of formal landscaping.

---Continued---
In 1940 the house became the property of the Society of Liberal Arts, Joslyn Art Museum, and is now being leased to the Board of Education for use as administrative offices for the Omaha Public Schools. The Society of Liberal Arts Board must approve any changes to be made in the house or on the grounds. Any changes made are carefully studied and carried out so as not to interrupt the original integrity of the Castle.

After the Omaha Public Schools administration moved into the Castle they found it necessary to subdivide some of the large rooms. This was accomplished by erecting removable partitions which can be changed with the future uses of the Castle. An elevator was also installed without altering the original floor plan. It was designed so that it would pass through former closets and an old vault space. The original door casings remain intact and only the doors were removed for the elevator entrances. The only visual alteration is the extension of the elevator shaft pass the roof line of the Castle. Other than this the buildings and grounds have remained virtually unchanged since the time, 1903-1940, that the Joslyns lived in this grand Castle.
### 8. SIGNIFICANCE

**PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)**
- [ ] Pre-Columbian
- [ ] 16th Century
- [ ] 18th Century
- [X] 20th Century
- [ ] 19th Century
- [ ] 15th Century

**SPECIFIC DATES/ISI (If Applicable and Known)**
- 1903

**AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)**
- [ ] Aboriginal
- [ ] Prehistoric
- [ ] Historic
- [ ] Agriculture
- [X] Architecture
- [ ] Art
- [ ] Commerce
- [ ] Communications
- [ ] Conservation
- [ ] Education
- [ ] Engineering
- [ ] Industry
- [ ] Invention
- [ ] Landscape
- [ ] Literature
- [ ] Military
- [ ] Music
- [ ] Political
- [ ] Religion/Philosophy
- [ ] Science
- [ ] Sculpture
- [ ] Social/Humanitarian
- [ ] Theater
- [ ] Transportation
- [ ] Urban Planning
- [ ] Other (Specify)

---

George A. Joslyn was one of Omaha's foremost entrepreneurs. He came to Omaha in 1880 as manager of the Western Newspaper Union. He started with a small interest in the company but with time and hard work he eventually increased his stock, enough to become president. He was well known as a very effective administrator and his company expanded until it covered most of the country. The Western Newspaper Union served thousands of daily and weekly newspapers with patent national and world news sections. His ready print company was the largest of its kind in the United States, and upon his death, in 1916, he had amassed the largest individual fortune in Nebraska.

Mrs. Sarah Joslyn played an important part in her husband's financial success and the Omaha communities cultural development. Upon their arrival in Omaha Mr. Joslyn bought two hotels which Mrs. Joslyn then managed. She was most known for her many philanthropies.

The Joslyn name is most associated with the Joslyn Memorial. After her husband's death, Mrs. Joslyn had a three-million dollar Memorial built in "remembrance of George Alfred Joslyn" which was "given to the people of Omaha." The Memorial contains and exhibits Nebraska's largest art collection. Mrs. Joslyn founded the Society of Liberal Arts to operate the Memorial, and contributed an additional five million dollars for the operation of it. The societies programs include not only the visual arts and sculpture, but also music and dramatic art. According to the Society's articles of incorporation, its purpose is "to promote education in sculpture, literature, painting, music, drama and kindred branches of art, and to carry on appropriate activities conducive to the artistic development of the community."

Mrs. Joslyn was selected as "Omaha's most distinguished citizen of 1928," and continued to devote a major part of the Joslyn fortune to community projects until her death in 1940.

John McDonald was intrusted with the architectural duties of both the Joslyn Castle and again in 1928 for the design of the Memorial. He and his son Alan developed a successful Omaha firm with the help of these two large commissions.

The Joslyn Castle exemplifies the Beaux-art Classicism period of the architectural spectrum. It was built at a time when the architect

---

---
and the client chose an agreeable style. The architect would then vigorously study and apply the underlying principles and details of the particular style chosen, rendering as exact a character as the necessary functions would permit. This period, 1900-1920, coincided with an era characterized by prosperity, a vast business boom, and in general an optimistic outlook on the future. With the financial crisis of the 1930's grandiose homes, such as the Joslyn Castle, were soon to become economically unfeasible and pretentiousness was soon to be overcome by social concern.

The Joslyn Castle portrays a past era not only in architectural conceptions but also in the socio-economic development of American Capitalism.
9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Files - Nebraska State Historical Society


10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CORNER</th>
<th>LATITUDE</th>
<th>LONGITUDE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NW</td>
<td>0°</td>
<td>0°</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NE</td>
<td>0°</td>
<td>0°</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE</td>
<td>0°</td>
<td>0°</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SW</td>
<td>0°</td>
<td>0°</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 5½ acres

11. FORM PREPARED BY

Persijs Kolberg, Curator of Historic Sites

Nebraska State Historical Society

1500 "R" Street

Lincoln

12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

As the designated State Liaison 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. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National ☐  State ☒  Local ☐

Name: [Signature]

Title: Director, Nebraska State Historical Society

Date:

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

[Signature]

Date:

ATTEST:

Keeper of The National Register

Date:
Full south (front) elevation, looking north
Nebraska State Historical Society, 1971 (H673.5-1920)

View of east façade looking west
Nebraska State Historical Society, 1971 (H673.5-1925)
Detail of stonework in southeast turret looking northeast
Nebraska State Historical Society, 1971 (H673.5-1928)

View looking west showing solarium
Nebraska State Historical Society, 1971 (H673.5-2746)
View of north & west facades of carriage house looking southeast
Nebraska State Historical Society, 1971 (H673.5-1921)

Detail of side entrance gate looking east
Nebraska State Historical Society, 1971 (H673.5-1917)