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

1. Name

historic Mason School (D009:0205-009)
and or common Mason School

2. Location

street & number 1012 South 24th Street
N/A not for publication

city, town Omaha N/A vicinity of

state Nebraska code 031 county Douglas code 055

3. Classification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Ownership</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Present Use</th>
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<td>X unoccupied</td>
<td>___ commercial ___ park</td>
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<td>___ work in progress ___ educational</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Public Acquisition</td>
<td>Accessible</td>
<td>___ educational ___ entertainment</td>
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<td>___ being considered</td>
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<td></td>
<td>___ no</td>
<td>___ industrial</td>
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4. Owner of Property

name Bradley L. Lee, c/o Dalee Realty Inc.

street & number 214 Norfolk Avenue

city, town Norfolk N/A vicinity of state Nebraska

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Register of Deeds, Omaha/Douglas Civic Center

street & number 1819 Farnam Street

city, town Omaha state Nebraska

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title 1984 Omaha/Douglas County Historic Building Survey

has this property been determined eligible? ___ yes X no

date 1984 - ongoing

___ federal ___ state ___ county X local

depository for survey records Omaha City Planning Department & Nebraska State Historical Society

city, town Omaha/Lincoln state Nebraska
Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Functionally, Mason School is a 16-room classroom facility built in 1888 by the Omaha Board of Education; technically it is built of masonry load-bearing walls spanned by wood joists supporting wood floors, and a wood truss system supporting the roof; formally the building is a two story brick building, an articulated rectangle in plan and designed in the Richardsonian Romanesque style of architecture. Structural and historical integrity has been preserved.

Mason School, located at 1012 South 24th Street, was built in 1888 as part of a program by the Omaha Public Schools to meet the growing enrollment due to Omaha’s expansion.

The original two story brick building is rectangular in plan measuring 138’ 6” x 92’ 4” and is topped by a hybrid roof of gabled and flat sections. The symmetrical main east facade as well as the west facade is characterized by projecting gabled two story end pavilions and a central gabled wall-dormer. The north and south elevations are nearly identical. Each contain a central projecting two story gabled pavilion. At either side of the pavilion are one story quarter-circle turret-like forms capped with conical roofs.

In 1936, a brick addition was built directly south of the original school. It consists of a two story rectangular classroom block and an auditorium block, both with flat roofs. Access to the addition is through a “connecting vestibule” centered on the south entrance of the original school building.

The main entrance to the original school building is through a large semicircular arch centrally located beneath the wall dormer at the eastern facade. Secondary entrances at the north and south facades are also arched and are located in the central pavilions. Double loaded corridors running the buildings longest dimension (north and south) service eight classrooms per floor. Two sets of ornately spindled wood stairs at each end of the corridor provide the necessary vertical circulation. The western one-half of the basement contains restroom and mechanical functions; the remainder is unexcavated.

Circulation in the 1936 addition revolves around a central first floor corridor that serves as an extension of the first floor corridor of the original building. Access to the second floor classrooms is via a stair located in the northeast corner of the structure. An auditorium space is oriented perpendicular to the classroom block with a stage area that backs onto the corridor wall. Space in the addition is also provided for a small kitchen and dining alcove, a teachers lounge, a physical directors office, a nurses’ office and toilet facilities.

The 1888 school building utilizes a structural system of load bearing masonry walls (both interior and exterior) carried on continuous stepped masonry footings. Floors are constructed of dimensional wood framing (2 x 14’s and 3 x 14’s) spanning between bearing walls and are finished with strip hardwood flooring. The roof is composed of a hybrid wood truss system, presenting a sloped, gabled section to public view while the inner sections are relatively flat.

Structurally, the 1936 addition is constructed of masonry load bearing walls on simple concrete footings. Concrete beams comprise the floors and roof of the classroom portion of the addition and the connecting vestibule as well as the floor of the auditorium space. Steel I-beams are used to support the flat roof of the auditorium.

Mason School is a fine and well preserved local adaptation of the Richardsonian Romanesque style of architecture, a popular style used in many public and private buildings of this period. The building’s facades are composed of common red brick with encircling water table, sill courses, rustications and other selected details of limestone. The facades are punctuated by groupings of large double hung windows, round arched at the first and attic levels and flat arched at the second level. Decorative stamped galvanized iron is used generously at the building’s cornice line, at the wall dormer and pavilion pediments and at the window head mouldings.

(see continuation sheet)
In terms of style, the addition to Mason School is very pragmatic with embellishment limited to stonework at the east and south classroom entrances and a simple encircling brick cornice.

Decorative interior features of the original 1888 building include pressed-metal ceilings throughout, turned balusters and carved newell posts at the north and south stairways, wainscotting and decorative door and window moldings and headblocks. Interior finishes in the 1936 addition are spare, limited to the use of simple panel doors and wood moldings.

The integrity of the Mason School complex is very good due to the past maintenance by the Omaha Public School system. The original school building, however, has undergone some alteration. Two prominent, ornate roof vents have been removed and the original slate roof has been replaced with asphalt shingles. All exterior brick and stone surfaces have also been painted, causing some moisture entrapment and exfoliation. All of these problems are to be addressed in the certified rehabilitation of the building.
8. Significance

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Mason School is architecturally significant as one of the finest of only a very few Richardsonian Romanesque style buildings extant in Omaha. Additionally, the building is significant as a work of the prominent early Omaha firm of Mendelsohn, Fisher and Lawrie, and as the oldest extant school in the City.

Mason School was erected in late 1888, a time of tremendous economic growth in Omaha. Business, wholesaling and manufacturing were all increasing rapidly, as was residential development, and the need for new school facilities was particularly acute. On January 1, 1888 bonds were issued for $200,000 for the purpose of building Mason and five other structures to accommodate the growing school age population.

Mason School was designed by the prominent Omaha architectural firm of Mendelsohn, Fisher and Lawrie in the Richardsonian Romanesque style. Inspired by the work of Henry Hobson Richardson of Boston, the style was extremely popular nationally in the 1880's and early 1890's, particularly for public buildings and large scaled residences. Many of Omaha's finest buildings of that period — now lost — were Richardsonian Romanesque. They included the Federal Building (1892-1906), the City Hall (1889-1892) and the Omaha Bee Building (1887-1889). Mason School, the oldest extant school building in the City, is one of only a very few Richardsonian Romanesque style buildings that remain in Omaha, and the best example of the four remaining schools of that style.

The firm of Mendelsohn, Fisher and Lawrie evolved from one of the City's earliest professional partnerships — Dufrene and Mendelsohn, formed in 1881. Dufrene had worked as an architect in Nebraska since 1867, first in partnership with T. B. Borst, and then alone during the 1870's. Mendelsohn, born in Berlin in 1842, had studied in New York and practiced in Detroit prior to coming to Omaha. The 1884 Christian Specht Building (NRHP, 1977) is a product of the Dufrene and Mendelsohn partnership. In 1885 Mendelsohn left Dufrene and entered into a partnership with architect George Fisher. The firm operated as Mendelsohn and Fisher in 1885 and 1886 and then as Mendelsohn and Lawrie in 1887 when Fisher left the firm for a year and Harry Lawrie, a native of Scotland, joined Mendelsohn. Fisher then rejoined the firm and the partnership of Mendelsohn, Fisher and Lawrie was formed.

It is quite possible that, of the three principals in the firm of Mendelsohn, Fisher and Lawrie, Harry Lawrie had the greatest influence on the design and style of Mason School. Prior to his arrival in Omaha in 1887, the year before Mason School was built, Lawrie had worked for four years in Chicago with Burnham and Root. John Wellborn Root, the principal designer for the firm, was greatly influenced by Richardson (Mumford) and did much of his work in the Richardsonian Romanesque style. Richardson himself visited Burnham and Root in Chicago during the time that Lawrie was employed there (Hoffman) and Lawrie worked on several Richardsonian Romanesque style buildings while with Root including the Art Institute and the Phenix Building. Several details on Mason School are particularly reminiscent of some of Roots work in the Romanesque style. They include the tourelles that occur at either side of the gable over the main entrance, the manner in which the round arch of the main entrance is set apart from the plane of the wall by including it within a projecting, rectilinear surround, and the use of diaperwork in the gable ends. Elements that are more typical of Richardson's work are the arched windows that are linked together in series and the quarter-round turrets that flank the north and south entrances.
9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 2.25 acres
Quadrangle name SOUTHERN OMHA, NEBR.-IOWA
Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

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Verbal boundary description and justification
South 38 feet of Lots 39 and 46, and all Lots 40 through 45, and North 1/2 of the West 280 feet of Lot 59, Redick's Second Addition, Douglas County, Nebraska, including only the immediate setting for the school and excluding the adjacent playgrounds which no longer retain their historical and physical integrity.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

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11. Form Prepared By

name: title Dan Worth/City Planner, Architect
       Lynn Meyer; Preservation Administrator

organization Omaha City Planning Department
date May, 1985

street & number 1819 Farnam Street, Suite 1110
telephone (402) 444-5208

city or town Omaha
state Nebraska 68183

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

- national
- state
- local

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

State Historic Preservation Officer signature: James A. Hanson
date: February 4, 1986

For NPS use only
I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register
date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:
date

Chief of Registration
Building Permit Records. Omaha City Planning Department, Omaha, Nebraska.

Deeds and Mortgage Records, Douglas County, Nebraska.


Omaha Architects File. Omaha City Planning Department. Omaha, Nebraska.

Omaha Public Schools Clipping File Collection, “1885-1890”. On File at Joslyn Castle, 3902 Davenport, Omaha.


Photo 1 of 5—looking northwest at principal (east) façade. Photo by Lynn Meyer, 1985, Omaha City Planning Department.
Photo 2 of 5—looking northeast at original building & addition. Photo by Lynn Meyer, 1985, Omaha City Planning Department.
Photo 3 of 5—detail of main entry. Photo by Lynn Meyer, 1985, Omaha City Planning Department.
Photo 4 of 5—window at landing of north stair. Photo by Lynn Meyer, 1985, Omaha City Planning Department.
Photo 5 of 5—detail of north stairway. Photo by Lynn Meyer, 1985, Omaha City Planning Department.