PATTERNS ON THE LANDSCAPE:
Heritage Conservation in North Omaha

Landmarks Heritage Preservation Commission
Acknowledgements

The Omaha City Planning Department would like to acknowledge the assistance of many individuals throughout the community who helped with this document by sharing memories and materials, reading manuscripts, assisting with survey work or in other capacities. Our special thanks to North Omaha Community Development, Inc. and Metropolitan Arts Council who completed other elements of this grant which contributed to the production of this study. We also wish to convey our gratitude to Richard K. Dozier, preservation consultant from Tuskegee, Alabama, who provided guidance and thoughtful analysis of North Omaha during a two-day seminar in June, 1983. The following list is an effort to credit all who assisted; any omissions are unintentional.

Mike Adams  J.C. Harris  Elbert Ross
Nicolette Amundson  Jim Hart  Dr. Alonzo Smith
George Booth  Velma Hill  Alice Station
Mildred Brown  A.B. "Buddy" Hogan  Linda Syverson
Bertha Calloway  Daniel Kidd  Von Trimble
Dr. JoAnn Carrigan  John Knapp  Charles Washington
Carl Christian  Lawrence McVoy  Dr. Joseph S. Wood
George Garnett  Dr. Dennis Mihelich  Andy Wright
Edrose Graham  Rowena Moore  Margaret Wright

The preparation of this report was financed in part by a grant from the Secretary of the Interior's Historic Preservation Discretionary Fund Grant-in-Aid Program, administered by the Nebraska State Historical Society under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966.

Report prepared by: Omaha City Planning Department, Martin H. Shukert, Director.
June, 1984

Mayor: Michael Boyle

Omaha City Council: Bernie Simon, President; Connie Findlay, Vice President; Walter Calinger, Fred Conley, David Stahmer, Steve Tomasek, Sylvia Wagner

Landmarks Heritage Preservation Commission: Dr. Joseph S. Wood, Chairman; Prof. Michael Fenner, George Haecker, Lloyd T. Harmsen, Stanley J. How, Patricia Pixley, Cynthia B. Schneider

History by: Garneth O. Peterson, Omaha City Planning Department
Architectural Analysis by: Lynn Meyer, Omaha City Planning Department
Preservation Elements by: Garneth O. Peterson, Martin H. Shukert, Omaha City Planning Department

Contributing Planning Department Staff: Kent Behrens, Margaret Daniels, Lisa Lemble, Robert C. Peters, Judith L. Timberg, Dan Worth

Design by: Dan M. Worth, Omaha City Planning Department
Cover illustration by: Lynn Meyer, Omaha City Planning Department
Photographs from the following collections: Bostwick-Frohardt Collection owned by KMTV and on permanent loan to Western Heritage Museum; Douglas County Historical Society; Great Plains Black Museum; Nebraska Jewish Historical Society; Nebraska State Historical Society; Omaha City Planning Department. All others as noted.

Type set in Times-Roman by Priessman Graphics, Omaha
Photographic reproduction, printing and binding by: Klopp Printing Company, Omaha
First Printing 1984

Report No. 223
Contents

I. Introduction ........................................................................................................ 2

II. A Brief History of North Omaha ............................................................... 6
   Urbanization and the First Wave of Settlement ........................................ 7
   Kountze Place .............................................................................................. 11
   The Role of the Transportation Lines ..................................................... 14
   Industrial Development in North Omaha ............................................... 17
   Prosperity and Growth, 1898-1920 ....................................................... 24
   The Development of Commercial Districts to 1920 ............................. 26
   The Omaha Black Community Before World War I ............................ 34
   The Development of North Omaha Between the Wars ......................... 42
   The Post-World War II Era ...................................................................... 54

III. A Guide to the Architecture of North Omaha ........................................... 66
    Rehabilitation Considerations .............................................................. 84

IV. Conservation Issues, Goals and Strategies ............................................. 86

V. Buildings and Areas Identified for Conservation ..................................... 100

VI. Appendix ..................................................................................................... 106
    Description of Programs ........................................................................ 106
    Building Timeline Summary ............................................................... 107

VII. Endnotes ..................................................................................................... 108

VIII. Bibliography .............................................................................................. 115
1. Zion Baptist Church, 2215 Grant Street, 1984
(Omaha City Planning Department)
2. 24th and Lake Streets, 1944
24th and Lake first achieved importance as a
commercial intersection in the 1890's and be-
came the heart of the black business district after
1920.
(Omaha World-Herald)
North Omaha is a witness to change. It has seen prosperity, depression, decline and the beginning of rebirth in the past century. The people of North Omaha helped build and maintain the area, and gave it the life that made the neighborhood distinctive. The area has always been a home for new immigrants in the city, from Irish, Scandinavians and Germans in the late nineteenth century, mainland Italians and Eastern European Jews by the 1900's, to blacks from the South by World War I. For the first 50 years it was a place where people got started, and then moved farther north or west as their fortunes increased. Beginning in the teens, North Omaha flourished as the black community developed a culture and social life that persisted for several decades.

North 24th Street reached its height in the 1920's when it was the heart of the black community. Black-owned grocery stores and drugstores thrived as the growing community provided plenty of business. Black professionals, physicians, attorneys and dentists had all offices on North 24th. But the street was probably best known as an entertainment center. Dreamland Hall and other clubs hosted the big bands and attracted Omahans from all over the city to hear jazz — the music that was getting its start in the black centers of U.S. cities. The Franklin, Alhambra, and Ritz Theatres showed the latest black movies, including some created by Omahan George Johnson and his Lincoln Film Company.

Unlike the previous residents of North Omaha, blacks who settled there were unable to move out. Just as the 1920's brought the flourishing of the community, it also brought the rigid boundaries of segregation which forced blacks to live in a constricted area. This community weathered the depression and the decline of the area after World War II, as plans and promises for revitalization through urban renewal failed to materialize. By the 1960's, North Omaha's buildings were suffering from age and intensive use. As the physical and economic environment of the area deteriorated, North Omaha witnessed riots that destroyed buildings along 24th Street and ended its commercial viability for a decade.

While open housing laws facilitated some movement out of North Omaha, many residents chose to stay in the neighborhood. It remained the heart of the community and black citizens worked tirelessly to rebuild the area socially while searching for the financial support to rebuild it physically. Not all residential neighborhoods had decayed, and homeowners labored to maintain the fine old districts with their wide, tree-shaded streets and unique architectural treasures.

It is to these North Omahans that this document is dedicated. Their perseverance and efforts to save their neighborhood have been significant forces in checking the decay that threatened to ruin the area twenty years ago. The aim of this plan is to conserve the resources of North Omaha: its people, its buildings, and its whole environment. Revitalization must benefit the residents who fought to maintain the neighborhood through the lean years. At the same time, buildings and neighborhoods that are important for historic, architectural or cultural reasons must be identified and included in future redevelopment activities.

This process of identifying important buildings and neighborhoods is one step in conserving neighborhoods and a primary goal of this plan. Some of these structures or areas may also be designated as landmark heritage preservation sites or landmark heritage preservation districts in recognition of their special unique qualities. Designation of historic, architectural and culturally significant structures and neighborhoods is relatively new to Omaha. In 1977, Title 4 of the Omaha Municipal Code was amended to include the Landmark Heritage Preservation Ordinance. Its stated purpose was to:

1. Designate, preserve, protect, enhance and perpetuate those structures and districts which reflect significant elements of the city's heritage;
2. Foster civic pride in the beauty and accomplishments of the past;
3. Stabilize and improve the aesthetic and economic vitality and values of such structures and districts;
4. Protect and enhance the city's attraction to visitors;
5. Promote the use of outstanding structures or districts for the education, stimulation and welfare of city residents;
6. Promote and encourage continued private ownership and utilization of such buildings and other structures so owned and used.

The Ordinance established the Landmarks Heritage Preservation Commission, composed of seven members appointed by the Mayor, with the approval of the City Council. The City Planning Director serves as Executive Director of the Commission, and the Planning Department staff pro-
vides required technical assistance. The Commission hears requests for landmark heritage preservation sites or landmark heritage preservation district designation, and forwards its recommendations to the City Planning Board and City Council. Properties are evaluated for their historical, cultural, architectural, engineering, geographic or archaeological importance. If the City Council agrees that a structure or district is worthy, they designate it as a landmark heritage preservation site or a landmark heritage preservation district. After designation by the City Council, a building’s exterior must not be modified or altered without the approval of the Landmarks Heritage Preservation Commission. This review by the Commission insures that no alterations occur which could harm the character of the building.

Designation of a building through Omaha’s Landmark Heritage Preservation Ordinance also increases the chances that the structure will be nominated for the National Register of Historic Places. The National Register is an official listing of important buildings and neighborhood districts throughout the United States. The Nebraska State Historical Society makes these nominations to the Department of the Interior. If a structure is accepted for the National Register, its owners may qualify for federal tax benefits. However, these are available only if the building is income producing, such as an apartment or commercial building, and if the structure is substantially rehabilitated.

The Landmarks Heritage Preservation Commission has published A Comprehensive Program for Historic Preservation in Omaha which discusses the designation of buildings under the Landmark Heritage Preservation Ordinance and the National Register in more detail. The Comprehensive Program also provides more specific information about criteria for designation, identification of historic districts, and methods for carrying out preservation projects in Omaha. This document should be consulted when seeking detailed information on recognition of important structures.

Buildings and neighborhoods recommended for designation by the Landmarks Heritage Preservation Commission have reflected a wide range of categories in achieving significance. The past record of designations in North Omaha has reflected this concept. Among the landmarks are several recognized primarily for architectural significance such as St. John A.M.E. Church at 2402 North 22nd, the Bay-Fry residence (now Queen Anne Manor) at 2024 Binney Street, and the George F. Shepard residence at 1802 Wirt Street. Others were designated on the basis of historic and cultural significance, such as the Jewell Building (Dreamland Hall) at 2221-2225 North 24th Street, the Great Plains Black Museum (former Webster Telephone Exchange) at 2213 Lake, the birthsite of Malcolm X at 3448 Pinkney, and the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition site from 16th to 24th, Pinkney to Pratt.

In order to identify important buildings and neighborhoods, it is necessary to know and understand the history of North Omaha. This plan begins with a discussion of the physical, social and cultural development of the area. Most of North Omaha was built in two main construction periods: the boom era of the 1880’s, which saw Omaha’s rise into a metropolitan center, and the golden era of growth ushered in by the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition of 1898 and ending with World War I. The construction periods were also characterized by waves of European immigrant groups moving in and out of North Omaha. The history continues with the growth of Omaha’s black population and its movement to the Near North Side by the 1920’s. The analysis examines the decline of the area after World War II as well as its rebirth in recent years. The history establishes the significance of structures and neighborhoods by analyzing their role in the development and change of North Omaha.

The next section of the plan focuses on the built environment: the existing buildings, an analysis of architectural styles and types, and suggestions for repairs as well as for new construction that will contribute to the character of North Omaha. It is also important to discuss issues such as the age and condition of housing, demographic characteristics, land use conflicts, and displacement of residents, all of which can have an effect on conservation in North Omaha. Section IV establishes goals and
2. George A. Shepard House, 1802 Wirt Street, 1984
The current owners purchased the house from the Shepard family in the 1950's and have carefully maintained its elegant character and architectural features. The house received additional restoration work in recent years as part of a neighborhood target area and was named a City Landmark in 1981.

3. Blue Lion Center, 24th and Lake Streets, 1984
The rehabilitation of two business buildings into the Blue Lion Center has provided new firms with a convenient location and signaled the first new commercial ventures on North 24th Street in recent years.

(Omaha City Planning Department)

strategies designed to address these concerns.

North Omaha is a variety of neighborhoods, each with different elements which require particular attention. It contains commercial districts, most notably North 24th Street, and industrial sections in the southeast corner and along the Belt Line Railroad on the northern edge. The residential districts consist of neighborhoods as varied as the apartment buildings that line 16th Street to the small houses of the Long School area where many early black residents lived, and the Binney-Wirt-Spencer neighborhood with its fine old homes which form a potential historic district. A final section of this plan, devoted to recommendations, offers suggestions for conservation tailored to meet the needs of each area.

The physical and cultural heritage of North Omaha is among the most unique and significant the city has to offer. The neighborhood possesses a special environment that has often been overlooked in the past by local government officials, developers from the city and elsewhere and Omaha citizens in general. This document aims to remedy that lack of knowledge and provide guidance for both residents and non-residents as North Omaha faces its future.
II. A Brief History of North Omaha

1. Brownell Hall (Former Central House Hotel), Saratoga, 1860's
   The Central House Hotel was the main building in the settlement of Saratoga, laid out between Omaha and Florence in 1856. The building later became Brownell Hall, an Episcopal girl's school, and was moved into Omaha in 1868.
   (Douglas County Historical Society)
Urbanization and the First Wave of Settlement

Early Land Use

When Omaha was founded in 1854, the original city plat extended north only to Webster Street, far south of what is today North Omaha. For its first thirty years, what became North Omaha was comprised of relatively large tracts of land controlled by a few owners, with estates and business enterprises scattered throughout. The city boundaries were extended west to 36th and north to Pratt Street by 1869, but little construction occurred and North Omaha stayed rural in character until the 1880's.

There was one early, brief attempt at urban development, however. In 1856, just as Omaha was becoming a muddy shanty town, speculators laid out the settlement of Saratoga in North Omaha. Saratoga developed primarily because of a sulphur spring flowing out of the bluffs northeast of today's 16th and Locust Streets. The promoters named it after the New York health resort famous for its mineral spring water, hoping to attract attention to the settlement. Indeed, the village grew rapidly after its founding and soon included the "magnificent" Central House Hotel, a brickyard, a lumberyard, and a number of houses. A sawmill was built at the point on the Missouri River known as Saratoga Bend (now part of Carter Lake), which offered a fine landing suitable for all vessels. But Saratoga fell victim to unstable economic conditions. The Panic of 1857 caused the collapse of banking houses throughout the United States and Saratoga's stockholders lacked sufficient resources to support the town. When the neighboring communities of Omaha and Florence capitalized on the traffic created by the Colorado Gold Rush in 1859, Saratoga had no business places left and little means to build itself up again.

The land on which Saratoga stood was not neglected for long. Episcopal Bishop Joseph Talbot purchased the former Central House Hotel and converted it into Brownell Hall, a school for girls, in 1863. Within five years, the building was moved to 16th and Jones in Omaha and bankers Augustus and Herman Kountze acquired most of the land in the Saratoga vicinity. The flat North Omaha plain later held the Douglas County Fair Grounds and the Omaha Driving Park (a race track), before reaching its greatest achievement as the site for the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition in 1898.

The Kountze brothers were not the only large property owners in North Omaha. John A. Horbach, a pioneer who arrived in 1856, operated a freighting and commission business along with his real estate holdings. Horbach's land lay immediately north of the original city plat and included a tract east of 24th and north to Seward Street. Moses F. Shinn owned the quarter section northwest of 24th and Nicholas Shinn, famous in Omaha as a "typical frontier preacher," also had somewhat of a reputation as a faith healer. Shinn's 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Additions were already platted in the 1870's and encompassed much of the area that was later known as Kellogg Heights. Attorney John I. Redick owned property all over the city, but in North Omaha centered his holdings west of 24th Street and north of Bristol. He resided at 24th and Pratt in a fabulous eclectic Victorian home which eventually became the first University of Omaha. Several of Redick's seven sons were also active in real estate and platted later subdivisions in North Omaha.

By the time Redick built his mansion in the 1880's he was one of the last big landowners to live on a country estate in that vicinity. His home on 24th Street diverged from the typical pattern in North Omaha, since Sherman Avenue (later North 16th Street) was the favored location for the splendid houses. Among the residents on Sherman Avenue was merchant James J. Brown, who operated one of the first dry goods and grocery stores in the city and was active in the organization of the Omaha National Bank, Omaha Loan and Trust Company, and an early street railway company. In addition, he served on the City Council and built the J. J. Brown building on the southeast corner of 16th and Douglas (razed 1980). Near the Brown residence was E. V. Smith's home at 1702 Grace, built about 1870. Smith, an early settler and city councilman in Omaha, platted an addition
just south of his residence. In 1886 his three-story Romanesque stone mansion was sold to former Territorial Governor and U.S. Senator Alvin Saunders. In 1891 the home was the site of a reception for President Benjamin Harrison, whose son was married to Saunders’ daughter. Another resident in the district was A. J. Poppleton, who moved to his estate, Elizabeth Place, at 16th and Grant in 1880. A pioneer attorney, Poppleton was well known for his service in the territorial legislature and also as the attorney for the Union Pacific Railroad from 1863 until 1888.

While country estates stood along Sherman Avenue, North Omaha gained one of its first institutions on the hilly land of the southwest corner of the district. In 1878 John A. Creighton, local philanthropist, purchased six and a half acres atop Eden Hill between 28th and 30th, Caldwell to Hamilton. Creighton befriended the Poor Clares, a society of nuns dedicated to a strictly cloistered life, and built them a monastery on the land. When construction began on Eden Hill in 1880, the site was described as “on an eminence that commanded a view of both Omaha and the Missouri River.” The sisters took up residence in 1882 and established a “strict canonical enclosure,” prohibiting contact with the outside world. When the Poor Clares celebrated their Silver Jubilee in 1903, Creighton replaced the previous monastery with a new one, enabling the sisters to maintain their life of solitude.

Expansion in the 1880’s

The 1880’s brought the first large-scale residential subdivision development of North Omaha, reflecting expansion throughout the city in wholesaling, manufacturing and construction. As its population tripled from 30,815 in 1880 to 102,000 ten years later, Omaha was transformed from a frontier settlement to a modern, metropolitan city. Building values revealed the city’s rapid growth, increasing from less than $1,000,000 in 1880 to $8,000,000 by the end of the decade. In 1880 the U.S. Census showed 5,110 dwellings in the city. In the next two years another 1,000 went up, and in 1887, at the height of the boom, 2,179 houses were constructed. During those ten years of growth and expansion, Omaha gained its reputation as a commercial center and became widely known for the Union Stockyards Company and resulting meatpacking center that created Omaha’s satellite suburb.
3. Installation of Telephone Wire on Lake Street
As new subdivisions were laid out and settled, amenities such as telephone service followed.
(Douglas County Historical Society)

4. Bird's Eye View of Downtown Omaha from the High School, 1897
Omaha's growth decade of the 1880's brought not only an increase in population, but in business as well. Based on railroad connections to

South Omaha. While the development of South Omaha did not directly affect the expansion into North Omaha, the wholesaling and manufacturing industries did. The wholesale district was centered in an area south of Harney and east of 12th Street on the edge of downtown and near the rail lines that ran along the Missouri River. Wholesalers built warehouses in the late 1870's and construction continued for two decades, creating a commercial area with firms specializing in wholesale dry goods, hardware, groceries, liquors, and numerous other products. As downtown business expanded and moved into old residential areas, North Omaha became a convenient location for new housing construction.

North Omaha already had a few platted subdivisions aimed at residential settlement by 1880. Most had been laid out in the flurry of post-Civil War growth in 1869 and 1870, with almost no activity in the following decade. These subdivisions were primarily concentrated in the southern portion of the area with John A. Horbach's and E. V. Smith's Additions filling much of the land east of 24th and south of Yates Street. Horbach refused to plat one large L-shaped area between 20th and 24th Streets because of litigation, and it became a market garden and circus ground (and eventually the site of the Logan Fontenelle Homes). Northwest of 24th and Nicholas, Shinn's and Parker's Additions filled an entire quarter section of land.

Patterns on the Land
Even as early as the 1880's, decisions were being made that would affect the appearance of North Omaha 100 years later. The methods by which land was originally sold and subdivided created the patterns of streets, blocks and occasionally, the density of construction that still defines the neighborhood's limits and the various portions that comprise it. Thus the plans and ideas of individual landowners such as Shinn, Horbach and Smith outlined the character of the neighborhood and helped determine the ways North Omaha would develop.

The subdivision of land in North Omaha followed precedents first established under the Land Ordinance of 1785, the basis for the settlement of United States land. Beginning with territory outside the original 13 colonies, Congress required a rectangular survey of the land, dividing it into townships six miles square. A township was composed of 36 sections, each of 640 acres of land, with each section divided into four
quarter sections of 160 acres. This grid pattern, imposed on the land without regard for mountain, river or plain, often determined boundary lines for land purchases. In North Omaha, 16th, 24th and 30th Streets formed the edges of quarter sections, and since they were usually the edge of property lines as well, they became main traveled streets.

Subdivision layout also tended to follow section lines. Because one east-west section line lay midway between Nicholas and Paul Streets, the blocks facing on Nicholas followed the layout of the original city plat, while those facing Paul took on the characteristics of Horbach's Addition. West of 24th Street, Shinn's and Parker's Additions followed a platting formation of 12 and 14 lots per block, while Nelson's Addition in the next quarter section south had long elongated blocks with 24 lots per block. Nelson's Addition no doubt followed that layout because of the steep terrain in that vicinity, with increasing elevations north of Cumming Street.

The number of landowners in a particular area also affected the layout of the land. Shinn's and Parker's subdivisions were laid out entirely in blocks of lots with a 60-foot frontage, providing a regularity of streets and block size. However, none of that uniformity appeared east of 24th Street, where a number of small landowners each platted their property according to their own ideas. Few east-west streets were established, and those that were did not match streets west of 24th Street. E. V. Smith and John Horbach laid out elongated north-south blocks, thus emphasizing 18th, 19th and 20th Streets. In 1884, the quarter section just north of Yates Street east of 24th Street was carved up among no fewer than 25 owners. As the owners platted each piece, the resulting layout created new streets that failed to meet existing streets and provided no uniformity of blocks or subdivisions.

One other decision by a landowner was the number of lots established per block. These varied from the tiny 24-foot frontage lots laid out by the Omaha Building and Loan Association at 17th and Nicholas to the more regular 50- and 60-foot lots in E. V. Smith's Addition. The size of lot dictated the size of the house that could be built on it; thus the property owner established a standard for the status of his subdivision with his original plat. Except for a few isolated pockets and along Florence Boulevard, most of the land south of Lake Street

Key

- Subdivisions Platted before 1880
- Subdivisions Platted 1880-1889
- Subdivisions Platted in 1890 or after
Kountze Place

In Omaha the general pattern of movement for the well-to-do has always been toward the West. Beginning with the earliest settlers on Capitol Hill and the bluffs west of downtown, successive generations have jumped to Park Avenue and the West Farnam-Cathedral area, Happy Hollow and Fairacres, and today's Regency-Rockbrook vicinity. Perhaps the most notable exception to that trend was the development of Kountze Place north of the city center in the 1880's.

The community was founded as a suburb by Herman Kountze, an early settler who helped build Omaha from a prairie village into a city. Kountze was president of the First National Bank, founded with his brothers, and was active in developing real estate subdivisions throughout the expanding area. He bought land in North Omaha as early as the 1860's, but the city did not catch up to it until the real estate boom of the 1880's, when streetcar lines made it possible for people who worked downtown to live in country suburbs.

When Kountze subdivided his 160 acres between 16th and 24th Streets from Locust to Pratt and offered lots for sale, the cornfields of North Omaha began to give way to housing, with one of the first dwellings built on Binney Street in 1886. The following two years witnessed rapid growth with approximately thirty new homes appearing in the development each year, concentrated on the southernmost streets. By 1890, Binney and Wirt held the majority of homes in Kountze Place, with another large representation located on Emmet and Pinkney.

From the beginning Kountze Place attracted the rising upper middle class — successful businessmen, particularly real estate men, and professionals such as lawyers, doctors, and architects. But even these fairly well-to-do individuals stopped building during the nationwide depression of the 1890's. Between 1891 and 1901, fewer than a dozen homes went up in Kountze Place. Very little construction occurred anywhere in the decade, and especially not in a new development at the end of the streetcar lines.

The North Omaha neighborhood received a boost with the decision to hold the 1898 Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition on a portion of the development directly north of Pinkney Street. Herman Kountze donated large open sections of his subdivision for a lagoon surrounded by a stunning "White City" that recalled the formal grandeur of the Renaissance and ancient Greece and Rome. In this fantasy world of purity and order, Midwesterners who had seen little but brick failures, burning heat, and business stagnation for almost a decade found a vision of the city that influenced Omaha building for the next twenty years.

The actual structures of the Exposition, majestic but temporary, were made of plaster of paris and horsehair, and in 1899 they were demolished. Some of the remains were pushed into the lagoon, which was filled in to create Kountze Park between Pinkney and Pratt, from 19th to 21st. In the years following, the area around the park began to be built up as Omahans were drawn to the part of the city that had attracted over two-and-a-half million visitors. Impact was not immediate in Kountze Place, but as the economy gained strength, home construction began to increase there after 1902. New homes went up on Binney and Wirt in the early years of the 1900's and then gradually shifted to streets farther north, particularly Spencer, Lothrop, Emmet, and Pinkney. Evans and Pratt Streets, filling the rest of the tract, began to attract new houses after 1910. By 1925 all of Kountze Place was filled with single family homes, churches, and a few multi-unit dwellings.

In the suburb's Victorian heyday, Kountze Place exhibited some of the most fashionable architecture in the city. Many of the residents hired architects to design their homes, especially along Binney, Wirt, Emmet, and Pinkney Streets, and some of the city's leading architects chose to live there themselves. Henry Voss, who designed distinguished houses in Kountze Place, made his own home at 1818 Wirt Street from 1888 to 1893. All three principals in the architectural firm of Mendelsohn, Fisher, and Lawrie also lived in the suburb and designed important buildings there. Louis Mendelsohn built a house with fourteen rooms and four baths at 2111 Emmet in 1888 and lived there until he sold it, by 1892, to George Joslyn, president of the

was laid out for homes of the middle and working classes.

While new subdivisions were platted throughout the decade in North Omaha, the bulk of activity occurred after 1885. At least 25 new subdivisions were laid out between 1882 and 1885, but 20 in 1886 and 24 in 1887 revealed the high point of the real estate boom. Another 14 were laid out before Omahans experienced the full extent of the 1890's depression.11

The number of available residences in Omaha increased throughout the decade, as witnessed by newspaper ads in the early years which offered mostly vacant property, rather than homes for sale or rent. By 1885 the vacant property had begun to fill up with houses, which then provided the bulk of advertisements. Between 1885 and 1890 some 9,000 dwellings were added to the city. At the same time prices increased with lots that had sold for $300 at the beginning of the decade selling at $750 to $1,300 by the peak of the boom in 1887.12

In general, the 1880's was a seller's market in Omaha, with the demand for housing always overwhelming the supply. Not only did the population of the city increase threefold, but this population was continually on the move, changing residence frequently. A sample of Omahans between 1883 and 1888 revealed that some 75 percent of them changed residence in the period. When they moved, Omahans often preferred single family dwellings near streetcar lines, even if they had to move out some distance to secure such residences.13

While most of North Omaha 1880's settlement was concentrated in the additions
laid out since 1870, one area stood in marked contrast to the other subdivisions. In the quarter section of land that had been a portion of Saratoga, Herman Kountze platted Kountze Place between Locust and Pratt, 16th to 24th. Unlike the other subdivisions, Kountze Place was aimed at the upper middle class professional and businessman rather than the more typical working and middle class residents. Kountze insured the level of status in his subdivision through deed restrictions stipulating the minimum cost of a dwelling and its distance from the street, and prohibited any “immoral, disreputable or illegal business” or sale of any “spirituous or malt liquor” in the subdivision. Such restrictions were common in developing 1880’s neighborhoods that sought to limit the number of people who could afford to settle there. Kountze also took steps to encourage the construction of churches in his subdivision, donating lots to congregations provided they built structures of a specified minimum cost and used stone or brick as construction material. Some 75 dwellings were erected in Kountze Place in the late 1880’s, mostly on Binney, Wirt and Spencer Streets. Unlike those of other North Omaha neighborhoods, these structures were often architect designed and displayed the reigning high style architectural fashions of the day.  

The Role of the Builder-Developer  

While Kountze Place had the high style, elaborate homes created by locally renowned architects, most North Omahans lived in houses designed by building contractors or erected by them from any number of nineteenth century housing pattern books. The pattern books, along with balloon frame construction methods developed earlier in the century, allowed building contractors to take on large-scale housing projects for the first time in history, Western Newspaper Union. (Joslyn, befitting his position as a power in Omaha’s leadership circles, later built himself a Scottish Barional castle.) Harry Lawrie built his house across the street from Mendelssohn at 2112 Emmet by 1890 and remained there almost twenty-five years. Their partner George Fisher lived at 1622 Lothrop for almost twenty years.

Among the community’s prominent businessmen in the Victorian period was Christian Specht, owner of the Western Cornice Works Company and later a city councilman, who lived at 2104 Wirt from 1888 until the mid-1890’s. The vice-president of the large firm of Kilpatrick-Koch Dry Goods Company, Allen Koch, resided at 2120 Wirt during the early 1890’s. Allen T. Rector, of Rector and Wilhelmy wholesale hardware, made his home at 1802 Binney after 1888. John Bay, partner in Bay and Fitch Real Estate and owner of the Crystal Ice Company, built one of the area’s large Victorian houses in 1887 at 2024 Binney.

Thomas Fry, who bought Bay’s grand home in 1901, was typical of the civic leaders who came to prominence during the depression of the 1890’s and the recovery that followed. Fry organized the Fry Shoe Company in 1902 and was president of the Drexel Shoe Company, president of the Nebraska Savings and Loan Company, and a director of U.S. National Bank. One of the original twelve organizers of Ak-Sar-Ben in 1895, Fry served as president of its Board of Governors for nine years. In 1902 the organization named him the eighth King of Ak-Sar-Ben. Fry was a perfect example of the second generation of Omaha leadership; in contrast to the pioneers who had laid out the city and developed it in grand land schemes, Omaha’s influencers after the turn of the century were executives and professional men who provided guidance for the city through active civic work.

Among the Kountze Place professionals who displayed this kind of influence was William A. Redick of 2120 Emmet Street. The son of pioneer John I. Redick, William was a lawyer until 1904, then a district court judge. In the 1912 city election he led a “good government” group soundly defeated by incumbent Mayor Dahlman’s ticket, which was backed by Tom Dennison’s political machine.

Kountze Place also counted an active politician among its residents: Charles Otto Loback, whose career from the 1880’s to 1918 encompassed the offices of state senator, city councilman, city comptroller, and Republican congressman. Loback lived at 1811 Spencer until his death in 1920.

After 1900 the continuing westward movement of Omaha’s upper middle class had its effect, and the builders of big houses began to concentrate outside of Kountze Place. At the same time, salesmen, insurance agents, and operators of small businesses began to move into Kountze Place, along with a sprinkling of clerks and blue collar workers. Consequently, many of the structures built in the neighborhood during this period were vernacular middle class dwellings. These comfortable houses were designed in subdued Classical Revival and bungalow styles more in keeping with twentieth century taste than the exuberant Victorian styles of the 1880’s. Mixed in with them
were large, high style homes, which continued to appear in Kountze Place until 1910.
Among the builders of grand house after 1900 was George Shepard, a marble cutter by trade. Shepard operated a monuments business, managed apartments, and devoted the last thirty years of his life to painting, photography, and music. His oil paintings showed a knowledge of the classical tradition in art, evident also in the house he designed for himself in 1903 at 1802 Wirt Street.

Charles Storz was a post-1900 resident who hired architects Fisher and Lawrie to design his home. Storz had come to Omaha from Germany in 1882 with his brother Gottlieb, who founded the nationally known Storz Brewing Company. In 1894 Charles built a bar and restaurant next to the brewery on North 16th Street and dispensed Storz beer there for over thirty-five years. During this period, in 1909, he built a striking house at 1901 Wirt Street.

While Kountze Place developed primarily as a residential suburb, it also held the Presbyterian Theological Seminary and a large number of churches. Most of these structures were designed by the popular firm of Fisher and Lawrie. The Seminary, founded in 1891, to provide pastors for the small towns of the Midwest, purchased two full blocks between Emmet and Spencer Streets and by 1904 erected a Fisher and Lawrie building that housed the school’s classrooms and dormitory. An indication of the neighborhood’s support for the Seminary occurred in 1923 when a movement began to relocate the school to another section of the city. Kountze Place residents joined to protest the change and succeeded in keeping the institution until it closed in 1943.

The Seminary students were no doubt served by the First United Presbyterian Church, across the street at 2108 Emmet. The congregation, organized in 1868, built this “handsome and convenient” $15,000 church in 1890. It was designed by Mendelssohn, Fisher, and Lawrie with a seating capacity of seven hundred. By the 1920’s, when the Seminary was considering relocation, the church considered it also, as its members increasingly were moving outside of Kountze Place. In 1928 the congregation merged with Central United Presbyterian and sold its building on Emmet to the First Foursquare Gospel Church.

Another early church in Kountze Place was Trinity Methodist Episcopal, designed by George Fisher and built at 21st and Binney in 1887. Kountze sold the two lots to the Methodists for one dollar with the provision that they utilize the land for church purposes and build a structure worth at least $10,000. The 1913 Easter Sunday tornado swept through the southeast corner of Kountze Place and partially demolished Trinity, but the minister and members of the congregation made enough repairs to the church to hold services in it the following Sunday.

Kountze Place was also home to Sacred Heart Church, organized in 1890 to serve Catholics living north of Holy Family parish. The congregation moved from its first location at 26th and Sprague, where the surrounding area remained undeveloped and the church building flooded every time it rained, to two lots donated by Herman Kountze at 22nd and Binney. There the congregation built a Fisher and Lawrie-designed stone church between 1900 and 1902. By 1904 the Dominican Sisters had taken over all educational needs of the parish, establishing elementary and secondary schools on corners opposite the church.

Plymouth Congregational Church had two homes in Kountze Place. The first was on land donated by Herman Kountze at 20th and Spencer for a building designed by George Fisher and constructed in 1899; the second, at 18th and Emmet, was designed by Harry Lawrie and constructed in 1914. The congregation stayed at 1802 Emmet for forty-six years, selling its building in 1961 to Primm Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church.

North Presbyterian Church was founded in 1908 with the merger of two North Side churches, Knox Presbyterian and Second Presbyterian. Their impressive building at 24th and Wirt was constructed in 1910 for $50,000. Immanuel Baptist Church first met at 24th and Binney after its organization in 1888, then built a structure at 24th and Eppley. One other church in the neighborhood was the First Universal Church at the corner of 19th and Lothrop, built for $15,000 in the 1890’s.

erecting an entire street or subdivision of homes in one year. With new building technology at hand, the home builder became another individual decisionmaker in producing the landscape of North Omaha.

Builders played a variety of roles in developing the landscape. Some worked for property developers or landowners as home builders, probably depending on a plan book or architect's drawing for guidance. Others built residences in scattered locations, but perhaps relied on a particular style or design in their construction. The builders that exerted the most influence were those that assumed the role of property owner or developer themselves, purchasing land and erecting houses on it. The builder with the financial capability to develop a subdivision like Kountze Place was quite rare in North Omaha; consequently builder’s subdivisions tended to be small and were generally located in quarter sections where the land had been chopped into a number of pieces in previous decades.

All these types of builders were participants in the real estate boom. Curtis W. Cain developed Cain Place on the south side of Locust Street from 21st to 24th, then built most of the houses in the small subdivision based on plans drawn by local architects. Wilson’s Addition to Kountze Place, a small subdivision between 25th and 26th, Miami and Corby, contained 12 houses erected by builder Amos Phillips. Fred Christianson erected about 20 structures in North Omaha in the boom years, but rarely more than two in any location. The partnership of Lately and Benson erected some 20 houses along North 21st Street and in the 2100 blocks of Grant and Burdette, all in 1887. William Lately and William Benson were Union Pacific Railroad workers who entered the construction business in 1886. No doubt, to take advantage of the real estate boom. While Benson
companies was fierce, and Mercer’s workers laid track at night to keep up with the horsecars and another cable company in the city. Omahans criticized Mercer as “a dangerous opportunist” and complained about his overhead electric wires, but his motor railway proved to be the wave of the future. In 1889 the city’s various transit companies were united into one organization which soon electrified all the lines. Thus by 1891 North Omaha was well served with streetcar lines on all the major streets: Sherman, 24th, 30th north of Binney, Cuming, Lake and Ames.

The system continued to grow throughout the following decades. A new brick car barn designed by the renowned local architectural firm of Fisher and Lawrie was built at 24th and Ames in 1898. The large structure was located at an important transfer point and held as many as 90 cars on 11 tracks in its heyday. The horsecar barn at 26th and Lake was later replaced by a brick car building and general repair shop, also designed by Fisher and Lawrie, in 1905. Located on a tract of ground two blocks square, the building at 26th and Lake became an important part of the Omaha and Council Bluffs Street Railway Company. The main building contained the machine shop and forge room as well as a separate space for painting and woodworking. Other buildings on the grounds contained offices, drafting rooms and a power substation which supplied motorcars with electricity.

For a brief period in the late 1880’s North Omaha also had a commuter rail line to transport residents around the city. The Belt Line Railroad, built by the Missouri Pacific, utilized a station at 15th and Webster as the beginning of its commuter trips. The train stopped at Oak Chatham (a subdivision southeast of 24th and Ames), Walnut Hill (northwest of 40th and Cuming), and Westside (southwest of 48th and Pacific). Regular trips began on July 15, 1888, with fares offered in 10, 30, 50 and 100 trip prices. An 1890’s booster booklet suggested a Belt Line trip “to get the best impression of the extension of the city in all directions.” The commuter function soon ended, however, and the Belt Line generally served freight and industrial traffic thereafter.

The fact that the car lines ringed North Omaha contributed to the settlement of the area by making it convenient for residents to ride to work. Similarly the placement of car lines nearby also established the area as available for working and middle class families who necessarily located near public transit as they moved out of downtown housing locations.

Closely paralleling the development of neighborhoods and the public transit system was the paving of streets. Since the early days of settlement, Omaha streets had carved their own distinctive place in the city’s history as bottomless pits of mire and muck. As a result, a hard-surfaced road was almost a necessity for efficient settlement of any particular district. In North Omaha these streets were even more specific in identifying the earliest areas of construction than were the streetcar lines. The roadways paved by 1890 were concentrated in the southeastern section of North Omaha in some of the subdivisions platted in the 1870’s. Sherman Avenue, which was gradually beginning to change from a street with a few large residential structures to a major commercial artery, was covered with cedar block paving northward to Wirt Street. In 1890, Wirt, one of the first developed streets in Kountze Place, provided a cedar block connector between 16th and 24th. Grace, Clark and Lake, the main streets that ran between 16th and 24th, were also surfaced at an early date. Another early north-south route was 18th Street from Cuming to Ohio, paved because of its use as an early horse car route. As 24th Street began to develop into a commercial area, and later as the main street on the North Side, it too was one of the early asphalt streets. Bristol and Spaulding became connections between 24th and 30th, with the latter reaching farther west to the Belt Line, undoubtedly to facilitate the development of industry in that area.

By the turn of the century, surfacing of the main streets such as 16th, Ames, and 30th, and a few residential streets scattered throughout the neighborhood had been completed. By 1914 the growth of the first decade of the century prompted paving in those subdivisions that had filled in rapidly, such as Parker’s and Shinn’s Additions, Kountze Place and Bedford Place. Areas with unimproved roads on the eve of the first world war had been skipped over in some cases and were not yet fully developed.

3. Standards. Sam Bass Warner, in an analysis of suburban development in nineteenth century Boston, pointed out that general building practices kept an area “architecturally and economically homogenous.” New home owners and builders alike “sought safety for their investment by building dwellings of a type common to the area.” This ensured some uniformity in style and income categories in a neighborhood until radical changes occurred to upset the balance. In addition, builders were usually quite conservative in style and restricted themselves to only a few housing plans and a limited price range of construction. When their specialty was no longer an accepted style in a neighborhood, they often moved to another area rather than change their style.

While Warner’s analysis focused on builders in suburban Boston, similar practices generally held true with Omaha builders. Certainly they faced the same constraints and problems and during the boom of the 1880’s it would have been easy for them to work throughout the city, constructing houses in a variety of neighborhoods. While there is no definitive analysis of Omaha building practices, it is apparent that some builders erected a wide variety of houses for all classes. Fred Christiansen built cottages for as little as $700 but also constructed the Charles Storz mansion at 19th and Wirt for $7,500. Builder Milton Royes directed his construction toward a particular income group. Most of Royes’ structures in North Omaha were in the wealthy suburb of Kountze Place and cost between $3,500 and $7,000. Because Kountze Place was aimed at a higher income resident than most sections of North Omaha, its architect-designed houses set the tone for popular styles of the 1880’s.

Certainly the most popular style among the upper middle class Kountze Place residents was the Queen Anne. With an irregular shape and an astounding level of
details and trims, the Queen Anne was not only a housing style but a social statement. Community leaders believed that their homes should reflect their social status. The Queen Anne typified the ostentatious display of Victorian life, with its variety of architectural details such as corner towers, wrap-around porches, elaborate stained glass windows and numerous dormers.20

As soon as Queen Annes appeared, however, bits and pieces of the style filtered down to less grand, but still substantial, housing. A dormer window or a corner tower might be all that signified this touch of elegance, but such elements were the builders’ recognition of current architectural fashion. Thus high style details adorned vernacular housing and appeared on dwellings on other more middle class streets such as Spaulding and Manderson west of 24th, as they were built up in the 1880’s.21

The First Immigrants

In the development of North Omaha, the first landowners’ subdivision of property and the architects and builders who followed all affected the look of the landscape. They, in turn, were followed by residents who chose to make their home in the area. Over the past century, the district has been characterized by a continual movement of people through it, by residents who moved farther north and west to newer and better housing stock, and by succeeding waves of immigrant ethnic groups as they made their way in America. The people enriched the existing structure of subdivisions, streets, and houses, adding their own distinctive cultural contributions to the district.

Omaha’s population has always included a wide variety of people from diverse ethnic backgrounds, dating back to 1860 when some 40 percent of the 1,600 residents were

---

1. Bay-Fry House, 2024 Binney, ca. 1910
   Built in 1887 for businessman John P. Bay, this grand Queen Anne style residence was the height of architectural fashion in the Kountze Place neighborhood. The house was purchased in 1901 by Thomas Fry, a civic leader and King of Ak-Sar-Ben who typified the rising upper middle class homeowners in the subdivision at the turn of the century.

2. Streetcar Lines in North Omaha, 1891-1923
   Streetcar lines not only spurred residential development throughout North Omaha by the 1890’s but also helped determine the location of major commercial areas.

(Douglas County Historical Society)

(Omaha City Planning Department)

---

Key

- Streetcar lines in 1891
- Streetcar lines in 1897
- Streetcar lines in 1923
Industrial Development in North Omaha

Although the bulk of North Omaha was residential in character, the district was adjacent to industry on the east and north sides. Some preliminary manufacturing development began in the southeast section of the area in the 1870s, but most expansion occurred through the boom years of the following decade. The Belt Line Railroad, completed by the Missouri Pacific in 1886, had tracks extending north from the 15th and Webster Street Station, running below the 16th Street bluff line to Boyd Street, west along Boyd Street to 31st Avenue, and then meandering southwest through the city. The Belt Line stimulated the development of industry on North Omaha's edges and created impetus for residential growth by providing jobs for residents.

In the 1870s, the few businesses in North Omaha reflected its rural character. By far, the most prevalent enterprises were market gardeners and florists, who took advantage of the available open land to raise fruits, vegetables, and flowers for sale at the open market in Omaha. A few firms, particularly those in the building trades, also required large open tracts of land and located in the district. Among the earliest industries was the Phoenix Foundry and Machine Company, located at 25th and Patrick Streets until 1889. After a fire destroyed the plant, the company, which employed 25 men, moved out to the Belt Line and Pinney Street.

Omaha became known as a brickmaking center in the 1880s, with 52 brick companies turning out 150 million bricks annually. Among the principal manufacturers was Martin Ittner, who operated two brick yards, one of which was located at 30th and Lake Streets. Two other large firms, the Northwestern Marble Works at 1224 North 18th Street, and the well-known Woodman Linseed Oil Works at 1012 North 17th Street, established the rather industrial character of the southeast portion of the district by 1880.

Breweries provided one continuous manufacturing presence in North Omaha, beginning with those operated by Ephraim Engler at 18th and Nicholas and Joseph Baumann at 18th and Charles. Engler began brewing in 1868 and moved to his North 18th Street location by 1871. Baumann began his business in 1865 and later hired Gottlieb Storz, a German immigrant, as his foreman. Storz eventually took control of the company and in 1893 erected a $500,000 brewery at 16th and Grace that soon became a North Omaha landmark. The building, distinguished by its brick smokestack with "Storz" imbedded in it in contrasting brick, housed the Storz Brewery until it finally closed in the 1960s. In keeping with the fashion of breweries in those days, the Storz Company had a number of saloons throughout the city that sold only Storz beer. Gottlieb Storz's brother Charles operated several of them in North Omaha and also resided nearby in Kountze Place.
Western Europeans initially, but later became identified as a place of employment for the unskilled immigrants who arrived from Southern and Eastern Europe after 1900. These immigrants, Poles, Czechs, Lithuanians and others, tended to cluster in neighborhoods. Many of the South Omahas were Roman Catholic, and their parish churches, organized by nationality, helped to cement their neighborhoods together. Except for two Catholic churches and later synagogues, North Omaha was primarily Protestant, with congregations that exhibited little of the permanence of their South Omaha counterparts.24

There was also greater prejudice against the Eastern and Southern Europeans by old-stock Americans, who were wary of the newcomers because they had different cultural backgrounds than the Anglo-Saxon heritage of the Northern and Western Europeans. Varying religions, job skills and prejudice helped create the solid ethnic neighborhoods of South Omaha and the lack of them in North Omaha.25

The Northern and Western Europeans

Among the first immigrant groups in the city were the Irish, who were active in politics and in building up the city. Construction of the Union Pacific initially attracted Irish laborers and many stayed to work for the railroad later on. When they settled in the area west and northwest of the Union Pacific shops, Holy Family Church at 18th and Izard Streets was built to serve them. Holy Family parish had its beginnings in 1876, when a frame schoolhouse was moved to 17th and Cuming for use as a church and boys' school. Although St. Philomena's Church downtown at 9th and Harney also served Irish Catholics, it was considered too far away for attendance by the well-to-do families who resided near

Like the Storz Brewery, grain milling and storage relied on the agricultural products of Omaha's hinterland which arrived by rail. The concrete towers of grain elevators soon became characteristic of North 16th Street. Since 1887, when the Omaha Milling Company erected its first mill at 1521 North 16th, North Omaha has been a location for milling wheat into flour. The Omaha Milling Company was owned by grain merchant Nels Updike until 1922, when he sold it to Nebraska Consolidated Mills, the forerunner of ConAgra. Long-time Omaha grain merchant Nathan Merriam and James W. Holmquist, whose family operated elevators in small towns throughout northeast Nebraska, built elevators at 15th and Manderson and at 17th and Nicholas Street. In 1927 they sold the 15th and Manderson elevator to the Missouri Pacific Railroad, which leased it to other companies for grain storage.6

Large manufacturing firms required the availability of rail lines in order to effectively haul their products. Two millwork companies, Dishow and Company and Adams-Kelly Millworks, were early settlers near 12th and Nicholas. Organized in 1886 and 1892, respectively, the firms manufactured wooden door and window frames and interior millwork. Another well-known millwork firm was the Alfred Bloom Company. Bloom, a Swedish immigrant, had begun his business at 19th and Charles in the 1890's, then later operated a mill at 24th and Grant. By 1901 he had built a huge four-story brick plant at 15th and California, an industrial area that continued to grow into the twentieth century.7

Other construction material firms requiring not only rail lines but a significant amount of space were lumber yards. Several in North Omaha were the Wyatt-Bullard Lumber Company at 20th and Izard; the Star-Union Company at 10th and Nicholas; the yards of C. N. Dietz at 13th and California; and those of F.C. Colpetzer and C.H. Guiou at 18th and Nicholas. Two firms dealing with petroleum in the 1890's, the Consolidated Tank Line Company at 13th and Locust and the Scofield, Shrum, and Teagle Refinery at 10th and Clark Streets, foreshadowed the later use of the industrial tract as a center for petroleum storage tanks.8

The industrial sector below the 16th Street bluffs continued to expand throughout the nineteenth century. The Nicholas and Locust Street viaducts provided corridors for employees living in North Omaha, allowing them to walk to work nearby. The industrial area expanded even farther eastward with the establishment of East Omaha as an industrial suburb in 1887. With firms such as the Carter White Lead Works, which employed about 75 men, and the Omaha Box Factory with its 65 employees, East Omaha provided another outlet for the workers of North Omaha.9

The industrial tract along the north edge of the Belt Line attracted new enterprises soon after the railroad's completion. The German Yeast Factory erected a three-story brick manufacturing plant in 1886 at the intersection of North 28th Street and the Belt Line. Murphy, Wasey and Company, furniture manufacturers, built a $15,000 brick factory at Spaulding Street in 1888. Two more firms stood at North 29th Street and the Belt Line by the early 1890's: Miller and Gundersen, manufacturers of sash, doors and blinds, begun in 1888; and the Omaha Casket Company, established in 1887.10

By the turn of the century the southern edge of North Omaha had also begun to attract industry. The Wyatt-Bullard Lumber Company at 20th and Izard had become Bullard and Hoagland Lumber, while the C.W. Hull Coal Company stood across the street from it. The new, modern Continental Baking Company was built at 20th and Cuming in 1912.11 Certainly it was logical that North Omaha, with a skyline marked by grain elevators, would also contain a bakery or two for turning the milled flour into bread.

Another manufacturing plant that heralded a new era in urban development was the Ford Motor Company Plant at 16th and Cuming. Designed by the great Detroit industrial architect Albert Kahn, the plant produced parts for Ford engines. The Ford Company and the automobiles it produced perhaps played a greater role in changing the way Americans lived than almost any other invention of that generation, making it easier for people to move farther out of downtown neighborhoods like North Omaha. As petroleum and gasoline became necessary not only for automobiles but for various
industries, one of Omaha's centers for storage tanks and petroleum company facilities developed adjacent to the Belt Line. By the 1920's, North 11th Street, which was reached by the Nicholas ad Locust Street viaducts, contained offices and storage tanks for at least six oil companies. That industrial park also contained a variety of heavy industries, including an ironworks, two steel products companies and a boiler factory and a lumber yard.10

Just as the industrial area east of 16th Street gradually took on new functions, so did the Belt Line industrial sector on the north edge of the district. One of the earliest twentieth century additions was the Uncle Sam Breakfast Food factory at 28th Avenue and Sahler, built in 1907. The founder, Lafayette Cotrin, resembled the fictional Uncle Sam for whom the cereal was named. Thereafter, the various firms that comprised the Belt Line neighborhood remained somewhat constant over several decades. Among the companies that persisted were Platner Brothers Lumber, Hopper Brothers Coal and Lumber, Walrath-Sherwood Lumber, Omaha Blaugas (later Economy Oil Company), U.S. Brush Company, and Omaha Concrete Stone Company.41

This area also experienced some new construction by the 1930's and 1940's. Two cracker and cookie manufacturing companies located in the vicinity; the Independent Biscuit Company and the Iten-Barmettler Biscuit Company. Independent Biscuit was located at 4310 North 30th Street in the Builders' and Merchandisers' Mart in 1936. The new Iten-Barmettler building was constructed in 1936 at 4301 North 30th. Designed by architect James T. Allan, the factory was built by Otto H. Barmettler to house his newly formed cracker manufacturing concern. Barmettler had come to Omaha in 1908 to work for the Iten Biscuit Company, of which he eventually became general manager. When the Iten Company became an affiliate of the National Biscuit Company (Nabisco), Barmettler continued to work for them until deciding to form his own company with the widow of his former employer.13

One last addition to the Belt Line industrial park was the streamlined Moderne style factory erected by the American Road Equipment Company at 4302 North 28th Street in 1948. Designed by staff engineer Frank Vignieri, the building was constructed of poured monolithic concrete, reinforced with surplus World War II airplane landing mat. American Road Equipment pioneered in the manufacturing of motorized road graders and later built forklift trucks.13

Although industrial expansion continued in North Omaha after the bulk of residential construction was completed, it declined by the 1950's. Most available land was taken by then, and industries increasingly dependent on trucks rather than railroads for hauling began to move to the southwest fringe of the city where new industrial parks were located. Yet many of the various manufacturing plants that helped provide impetus for the development of North Omaha remained, continuing the presence of industry in that section of the city throughout the twentieth century.

3. Creighton University and the North Side railroad workers. The school was eventually replaced in 1883 by a two-story brick church at 18th and Izard. The new $17,000 church contained numerous gifts from the wealthy Creighton family, including the main and side altars, confessional, pews and church bells.29

Census data from 1880 showed a concentration of Irish population residing along 16th and 17th Streets north of Izard. Many resided in the cottages built on the small lots of the Omaha Building and Savings Association Addition west of 17th and in similar dwellings on 16th Street. These structures were typical one-story cottages with an attic and an open front porch. Although inexpensive, the cottages contained individual builder touches, such as a side bay window and often some type of decorative porch detailing. This location also held a few rear lots, rather rare in Omaha, as early as the 1880's. The rear lot houses, often referred to as mother-in-law's cottages, were a means to utilize all available lot space for housing. In North Omaha they were located primarily on the alley between North 16th and 17th Streets.27

The Irish presence in North Omaha was reflected by their business places in the 1880's and 1890's. Among the businessmen were T. F. McNamara, who operated a meat market at 1703 Cuming; G. P. Muldoon, blacksmith at 1614 Cuming; Patrick McArdle, coal, at 18th and Izard; and the saloons of James and Edward Quinn at 1024 and 1102 North 16th Streets. Irish residents also lived in the area northwest of 24th and Cuming by 1890. Among the Irish Union Pacific Railroad workers living there were Michael McCandles of 2924 Indiana; Patrick Flanagan at 2424 Seward; Maurice J. Scannell at 2822 Franklin; and Michael
1. Worker’s Cottages, 1400 block, North 16th Street, 1984

Worker’s cottages were utilitarian in design and filled up most of the narrow lots on which they were built. Occasionally, mother-in-law cottages, as shown here, were built in the rear yard to utilize all available space.

(Omaha City Planning Department)

2. German Day Parade, 16th and Cuming Streets

McGrievy at 2637 Blondo. As the Irish presence was becoming established with Holy Family Church, the growth of the 1880’s caused the Archdiocese to establish another parish farther north. The new Sacred Heart Church was completed in 1890 on North 26th Street between Sprague and Sahler. When the economic boom collapsed and that area failed to gain as many residents as expected, the pastor found a new location at 22nd and Binney in Kountze Place. The new site was donated by Herman Kountze with the provision that the new structure be built of stone or brick exterior, cost at least $8,000 and be constructed within five years. The location was more centrally placed within the parish, which extended from the river to 30th Street and Grace Street north. The new Gothic Revival Sacred Heart Church, designed by architects Fisher and Lawrie, was dedicated in 1902; an elementary and high school were built soon after.

Germans made up the largest group of foreign-born in Omaha in both 1880 and 1890. While a good portion of some 4,000 Germans in 1880 settled south of Dodge Street, many also settled in North Omaha, particularly along Cuming Street. Like the Irish, the Germans were best identified by their businesses and their churches. Among the most well-known of German businessmen was Gottlieb Storz, whose brewery and smokestack on North 16th were familiar landmarks. Gottlieb’s brother, Charles, operated saloons in various locations on North 24th and North 16th Streets at the turn of the century. Among other German businessmen were Joseph Schmidt, druggist at 2402 Cuming; Bruening Brothers Meat Market at 2706 Cuming; H. Eichorn & Company grocery at 2704 Lake; and Alfred Wolff’s saloon at 2201 Cuming.

Another long-time German presence was the Ederer family, which established its florist business near 30th and Bristol by 1890. On land that had been the Jensen truck garden farm, Charles and John Ederer built greenhouses, a florist’s shop and a 15-room brick residence. Charles Ederer, once a park designer in Germany, later worked on landscaping plans for the 1898 Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition. North 30th Street also attracted the Flurry family, relatives of the Ederers. In 1892, they constructed the Flurry Block at 3421 North 30th Street, a two-story, $8,000 brick structure designed by Joseph Guth. The Flurys had previously operated a cigar-making
as a foreman at Omaha's Baumann Brewery and eventually established his own brewery on North 16th Street.

(Omaha Public Library)

4. Pella Lutheran Church (Hope Lutheran)
   2723 North 30th Street, 1984
   Built for a congregation of Danish heritage, this church was later sold to a black congregation and became Hope Lutheran.

business out of their nearby home on Pinkney Street. The new building held the business on the main floor while the family lived upstairs.31

Most Germans in North Omaha were Protestants. Some German Catholics attended Holy Family Church, but the Germans were more evident through their Evangelical, Baptist and Lutheran churches. At least two Evangelical churches were built in North Omaha: Zion's Church of the Evangelical Association, organized 1888, which built a structure at 25th and Caldwell, and Salem Church of the Evangelical Association, which constructed its building at the southwest corner of 18th and Cuming in 1904. The German Immanuel Baptist Church constructed a building at 26th and Seward in 1888 and later moved to 24th and Miami. Several blocks away was the Church of the Brethren (Dunkard Society), which erected a house of worship at 2123 Miami in 1915. Among the more long-lasting of German churches were St. Paul's German-English Lutheran and First German Presbyterian. St. Paul's was established in 1887 at 28th and Parker. Although destroyed by the 1913 tornado, the church was rebuilt at 25th and Evans. The First German Presbyterian Church constructed its house of worship at the southeast corner of 18th and Cuming in 1882. By 1910 they had built another church at 20th and Willis; it became known as Bethany Church and remained there for several decades.32

The Scandinavians, principally Swedes and Danes, made up a third large ethnic group in 1880. Swedes in particular located in the area north and west of the Union Pacific Railroad shops, on the fringe of the Irish settlement, and farther north, between 18th and 20th, Paul to Seward. Both Swedes and Danes settled farther west along either side of Cuming Street as well.33

Although neither Swedes nor Danes clustered for very long in any area, there was a brief Swedish settlement known as Stockholm around 19th and Charles. This location was convenient to Immanuel Lutheran Church at 19th and Cass, then the main congregation in the city. Among the Swedish residents there in the late 1880's were Reverend Eric A. Fogelstrom, pastor of Immanuel Lutheran at 1127 North 19th; attorney Arthur Ferguson at 1586 North 18th Street; and grocer John P. Jerpe at 1525 North 19th Street. The houses just south of Jerpe's home formed a real
1. J.F. Bloom Company, 1702 Cuming Street, 1984
A Swedish immigrant, J.F. Bloom established his cemetery monument business in Omaha in 1900. The facade of Bloom's headquarters, built in 1910, illustrates the use of impression stone detailing to enliven a vernacular commercial structure.
(Omaha City Planning Department)

2. Ideal Cement Stone Company, 1708-12 Cuming Street, 1950
Another building trade company formed by Scandinavian immigrants, the Ideal Cement Stone Company erected several Classic Box style homes from concrete blocks in North Omaha. (Boestwick-Froehardt Collection)

Among the businesses established by Danes in North Omaha was the P. F. Petersen Bakery at 24th and Cuming. Established in 1890, the bakery was later consolidated with three others to form the Union Pacific Steam Baking Company at 3610 North 30th Street. In later years the firm was again known as Petersen Baking Company and grew famous for its Peter Pan bread.37

The Scandinavians founded a variety of churches in North Omaha, none of which remained there very long. Three were eventually located in Shinn's Addition west of 24th Street: First Danish Baptist, at 2511 Decatur in 1888; the Norwegian-Danish Methodist, at 25th and Decatur after the turn of the century; and the Norwegian-Danish Evangelical Lutheran, which stood at the corner of 26th and Hamilton. St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran was organized in 1886 and built a church at 21st and Burdette in 1887. Twenty years later the congregation constructed a new building at 20th and Burdette, the church's home for another four decades. Pella Lutheran Church, a Danish congregation, was organized in 1886. The congregation first met in a mission house at 25th and Decatur, which was moved to 26th and Grant and later replaced by a new building in 1894. When that church was destroyed by the 1913 tornado, the members erected another new building at 30th and Corby, where they remained for three decades.38

The 1890's Depression
While the 1880's expanded the city's boundaries and increased its population to three times the 1880 figure, the boom could not last forever. By the end of the decade, the inflated prices charged for lots and homes had begun to drop. As the economy slowed, the construction industry went into a slump and the feverish pace of building came to an end. The usual signs of depression, such as bank failures, soup kitchens, charity stores and unemployment lines, made their appearance in cities across the United States, including Omaha. Streetcar tracks running to new subdivisions rusted from disuse, while many of the suburbs became cornfields for lack of new construction.

In addition Omaha suffered from the drought that struck the Midwest. As the wholesaling and retailing center for the region, the city's economy was necessarily tied to that of its hinterland. The hot, dry winds and lack of rain ended the hopes of
many farmers who had settled their lands in the wet years of the 1880's, and many farms were abandoned. The desperation of the farmers' plight was made more clear to Omahans in July of 1892 when the People's Party, or Populists, decided to hold their national convention in the city. The Populists had grown out of the old Farmer's Alliance of the previous decade, a loosely organized group which supported regulation of transportation and communication facilities, currency reform and equitable prices for farm products. As the depression worsened, increasing numbers of farmers flocked to the party and attended the July convention.39

The Populists convened their Omaha gathering at the Coliseum, a huge auditorium erected in 1887. Known as the "Madison Square Garden of the Midwest," the Coliseum had been the site of such spectacular events as six-day bicycle races and tugs of war until the political convention, which brought some 1,300 Populist delegates and 10,000 visitors to the four-day meeting.40 The Omaha convention was a significant factor in coalescing the Populists' beliefs and attracting attention to their cause. Some of the ideas they supported were later adopted by the two major national parties, and a number of their proposals became law in the Progressive Era after 1900.

The Coliseum on North 20th Street went on to have an even more colorful life. The Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben, a civic and social organization created in 1895 as a means to bring entertainment to depression-weary Omahans, made the Coliseum its home until the structure burned in 1927. For years the Knights put on "den shows," humorous plays designed to attract out-of-town businessmen to Omaha and its commercial advantages. Their annual fall festival and its spectacular electric parades began at the Coliseum and proceeded south on 20th Street to downtown.41

While the Populists made the farmers' plight painfully clear to the nation, they could not end the drought and depression. The economic situation was the most severe Omaha had ever faced, but it did not completely curtail all development. The first half of the decade saw some construction in the southern portion of North Omaha, particularly Shinn's and Parker's Additions, which had grown in the previous decade. The land between Blondo and Lake Streets west of 24th, relatively unsettled in the 1880's, also experienced some building. New residences also went up along Bristol and Spaulding Streets, two streets that were paved by 1890 and served as important connectors between 24th and 30th north of 30th. One other area of construction occurred in the irregularly shaped subdivisions between Burdette and Locust, east of 24th, which started to develop by the 1890's.42

The bulk of residences erected were one-and-a-half to two-story frame vernacular houses. Individual touches, such as Eastlake detail on porches or the use of fishscale shingles in gable ends, were often added by builders. Structures on Bristol and Spaulding included the same vernacular types exhibited farther south but also contained a sprinkling of larger and more detailed dwellings. Both cottages and larger dwellings often displayed elements borrowed from the high style Queen Ann, such as corner towers, wrap-around porches or bay windows. The bulk of this construction, however, was aimed at the middle or working classes as opposed to the elaborate high style housing in Kountze Place. That area's rapid 1880's growth slowed almost to a standstill in the next decade. Clearly the more expensive architect designed homes were not being built in North Omaha during the depression. The lower cost housing south of Kountze Place, meeting the needs of lower and middle income families, made up the bulk of construction in the 1890's.43

While the depression ended the frantic days of the first wave of construction in North Omaha, it was, in reality, only a brief pause in the buildup of the neighborhood. The twentieth century would bring not only new construction, but new groups of people into the neighborhood, both of which would further affect the appearance of the landscape.
Prosperity and Growth, 1898-1920

Recovery and the Exposition

Despite the depression which continued until 1898, Omaha's municipal government initiated a long-term public works project — the development of a park and boulevard system. The creation of parks systems was one aspect of the City Beautiful Movement, a late nineteenth-early twentieth century effort to improve the physical appearance of the nation's developing urban centers. The idea of beautification was enhanced by the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago with its classical style architecture and orderly, planned atmosphere. At the same time, park land was being viewed as an important amenity of urban life, and cities such as Boston, New York, Kansas City and St. Louis all began to develop park and boulevard systems.

The creation of the Omaha Board of Park Commissioners in 1889 started the city's effort to implement new urban design principles. The growth of the 1880's convinced Omahans that their city was a new metropolitan center and needed the beautification effort to further establish its identity. Among the Board's first actions was the hiring of landscape architect H.W.S. Cleveland of Minneapolis to design the system and provide landscaping plans for parks within it. Cleveland had previously worked for Frederick Law Olmsted, the designer of New York City's Central Park, and had designed boulevard systems in Chicago and Minneapolis before his Omaha work. The Omaha system began with Riverview Park in southeast Omaha and encircled the whole city, including both existing and planned parks. The first leg of the system to be graded and landscaped was Florence Boulevard, running through the heart of North Omaha. It followed North 19th to Ohio Street and then jogged over to 20th, continuing north to the planned Miller Park. Grading of the boulevard began in 1893, along with planting of trees and shrubs to beautify the roadway, which soon became popular for biking and driving because of its level terrain.

The presence of Florence Boulevard influenced the choice of location for one of Omaha's most important events — the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition of 1898. Several sites around the city were considered for the Exposition, but when Herman Kountze offered to donate four blocks at the north end of Kountze
3. View West Toward the Government Building, Grand Court of the Exposition, 1898

Although they looked permanent, the classical and Renaissance-style Exposition buildings were actually constructed of plaster of paris and horsehair. After the fair ended, the buildings were dismantled and some of the remains pushed into the lagoon.

(Omaha Public Library)

4. The Streets of Cairo, Exposition Midway, 1898

The highlight of the Midway for many fairgoers was the Streets of Cairo, home of Little Egypt, the dancer who attracted crowds with her famous “muscle dance.”

(Omaha Public Library)

Place for the Exposition and use as a park afterward, the decision was made. No doubt Kountze realized that the Exposition would help build up North Omaha, including his Kountze Place subdivision, by encouraging other construction as well as street paving and extension of streetcar lines.2

In the long run the Exposition did lead to new construction in North Omaha, but more importantly it put Omaha on the road to economic recovery. Based on the success of the World’s Columbian Exposition, the Trans-Mississippi Exposition was originally conceived by local businessmen as a way to showcase the products, industry and civilization of the states west of the Mississippi River. The great spectacle was run by Omaha banker Gurdon W. Wattles with financing from government sources and private citizens. The fair brought over 2.6 million visitors to the city in its five-month term and was both a financial and psychological success in lifting the gloom of depression from Omahans.3

Perhaps the reason for this overwhelming achievement was that the fair bore absolutely no resemblance to life in the Trans-Mississippi West. Classical and Renaissance style buildings stood around the reflecting lagoon, forming the Grand Court of the Exposition. Under the guidance of Omaha architects Thomas Kimball and C. Howard Walker, the glittering white city presented a look of order and decorum. Other Exposition buildings extended north beyond the Grand Court toward Ames Avenue, while the midway, the section of the fair to arouse the interest of the majority of fairgoers, was located east of Sherman Avenue in a section known as the Bluff Tract. The midway and its attractions often caught the attention of the newspapers as they discussed the giant see-saw ride, the depiction of a Spanish-American War battle, or Little Egypt, the dancer who brought in the crowds with her revealing “hootchy-kootchy” routines.4

With numerous buildings housing state exhibits and others devoted to liberal arts, transportation, agriculture and government, the Exposition was a celebration of how far life on the Great Plains had come in half a century. In Omaha the great fair signaled the beginning of the city’s golden age of development. This era, lasting from the turn of the century until World War I, brought growth, expansion and prosperity, all of which were clearly in evidence in...
North Omaha.

Twentieth Century Growth and Residential Construction

As the Exposition signaled a general economic recovery in Omaha, it also attracted attention to North Omaha and initiated its greatest decade of new construction. Between 1900 and 1910, all portions of the district experienced a significant level of building. For the first time new construction occurred in all areas, both north and south of Lake Street, as residents began moving farther out from downtown. Although only 29 new subdivisions were platted between 1900 and 1914, relatively few in comparison to the 44 laid out in 1886-1887, the decade still witnessed an amazing level of construction in both new subdivisions and those laid out previously. New housing continued to go up south of Lake Street. Patrick's Addition, north of Blondo to Lake west of 24th, experienced heavy construction during the decade. The fringes of this area also began to develop, particularly toward 30th Street. In this sector, only one large area northwest of 29th and Parker remained undeveloped because of its prohibitive terrain, which reached a high point at 29th and Blondo.

New construction continued in the southeast quadrant, too. The Horbach land at 20th and Paul, which still did not have streets cut through it, experienced some building but continued to provide enough open space to serve as a circus ground after the turn of the century. At the same time, this sector was old enough to begin a second wave of construction. Land uses that had persisted since the 1870's were changing, with industrial uses replacing some residential areas. Housing types began to change too, particularly along 16th Street, which experienced a transformation from a nineteenth century country drive lined with estates to a heavily traveled artery convenient to downtown. Multi-family housing in the form of apartment houses became a predominant new land use, as old mansions were torn down or subdivided for apartment or institutional use.

Certainly North 16th Street was ripe for this particular type of land use change. When the first mansions were built in the 1870's, the road had been a fine overlook to the river plain below. In 1877, however, the Missouri changed its course, forming Cut-Off Lake (Carter Lake) and a new channel several miles away. The flat plain already held railroad tracks and throughout

The Development of Commercial Districts to 1920

Unlike industrial development, which to a large extent relied on amenities such as available space, railroads and accessibility, commercial areas reflected the residents of a neighborhood. The types of businesses and their locations were primarily responsive to customers and their ethnic heritage, buying habits, and income levels. Thus, commercial districts exhibited a great deal more change over time than their industrial counterparts. North 24th Street has undergone numerous changes since its first emergence as a commercial street in the 1880's.

The initial concentration of business activity on North 24th Street reflected the earliest subdivision of the land. Since 24th Street formed a quarter section line, few land holdings extended across it. A variety of landowners held the property on either side of the street, and with no city regulations to ensure uniformity, land was laid out according to the owner's wishes. As a result, a number of streets begin or end at 24th Street. In addition, 24th was the bottom of the hill as land rose over 300 feet in several blocks to the west, making it an easily traveled north-south route. Streetcar lines and paved streets worked hand in hand with topographical features. Twenty-fourth was among the first streets to have a car line and paving, thus reinforcing its role as a main street. Businesses naturally congregated where great numbers of residents were traveling car lines or making transfers; thus 24th Street along with Lake Street, a main east-west car line, eventually became the center of a bustling business district.

The expansion of business activity on North 24th paralleled population growth of North Omaha in general. In 1885, Cumming Street was still the main commercial artery of North Omaha. No grocery, saloon or drugstore appeared on North 24th, although a few were located on North 16th and North 20th. By 1890, however, the layout and population of a number of North Omaha subdivisions also had an effect on commercial development. Although Cumming Street retained its business character, 24th Street experienced a boom of commercial expansion. Between Cumming and Charles alone, at least eight groceries, four saloons and three drugstores served North Omaha residents. Other concentrations of business activity were beginning to develop at 24th and Burdette, 24th and Lake and all along Lake at various corners. Grocery stores in particular were located on street corners throughout the residential neighborhoods south of Lake Street.

By 1895, new businesses appeared in the northern half of the district, with three groceries and a saloon on 16th and 24th, and several grocery stores on North 30th Street around Pinkney and Pratt. Unlike the southern half of the district, few groceries or saloons appeared on street corners north of Lake Street. No doubt Herman Kountze would not have permitted such land use in Kountze Place, with its emphasis on upper middle class status. Eventually, improved refrigeration methods made it easier to store goods for a longer period of time and reduced the number of grocery store trips. As
a result, residents no longer required grocery stores located within several blocks of their houses.

Since the 1890's depression slowed business expansion, the commercial pattern did not change markedly by 1900. One new shopping area had sprung up near 16th and Corby, just a block south of the main streetcar route to East Omaha on Locust Street. The four groceries, three saloons and two drugstores probably centered around Corby Street because the intersection of Locust and 16th, which was a streetcar transfer point, was not yet available for commercial use. The entrance to the midway of the Trans-Mississippi Exposition was on 16th and Locust, and it took several years after the great fair before that land was platted for residences or any commercial expansion. The proximity of the fair no doubt provided business for the new shopping area, since the established routes for fair-goers were along the 16th and 24th street car lines. The fair had a similar effect along 24th Street, with several grocery stores appearing on 24th at Binney and Wirt Streets.

Another cluster of businesses located on the west side of 24th between Spaulding and Sprague, both of which were main connections between 24th and 30th Streets, and the Belt Line just beyond. Several houses had been built on each of the streets in the late 1880's and early 1890's so some residential neighborhood shopping needs existed in this vicinity. The corners on both sides of Sprague Street further illustrated the typical saloon pattern of the day, with each brewery operating its own retail outlet. On the southwest corner of the intersection the Krug Brewing Company of South Omaha erected a saloon designed by architect Joseph Guth in 1897; by 1903 the Metz Brewing Company built its saloon, designed by Henry Voss, on the northwest corner of the intersection. After the turn of the century, the block north of the Metz saloon was also built up with commercial structures.

By 1910, the commercial pattern of North Omaha established North 24th Street as the main shopping center, with businesses distributed evenly between Paul and Ohio Streets. Grocery stores remained scattered on street corners throughout the residential neighborhoods south of Lake, with small clusters on 16th between Corby and Locust, and at 20th and Lake Streets. North of Lake, stores were limited to 16th, 24th and 30th Streets. The concentration on 24th remained between Spaulding and Sprague, while a new cluster formed at 24th and Ames, another important streetcar transfer point.

Although the types and numbers of stores in North Omaha would change over time, the basic pattern of residential, commercial and industrial districts was set by the second decade of the twentieth century. Most of the district was settled by then, and the influences of public transit were already established. After that time a number of businesses would disappear as new methods of centralized marketing replaced neighborhood stores and residents could drive longer distances to do their shopping. However, new businesses would also come in, reflecting the changing ethnic groups that exerted influences upon the commercial neighborhoods of North Omaha.
18th and 19th Streets were dropped and 16th became a main traveled artery. This role was firmly established by the Trans-Mississippi Exposition of 1898, as fairgoers frequently took the car line to the 16th Street midway entrance.

By the time of the Exposition, Sherman Avenue was already the site of the first multi-family unit in North Omaha to be termed an apartment house, the Sherman. Built in 1897 at Sherman and Lake, this classical style dwelling set the tone for the development of North 16th Street as an apartment row. The next big growth spurt occurred a decade later with Omaha's most innovative apartment buildings, the Strethlow Terrace Complex at 2024 Sherman.8

Builder Robert Strethlow was a German immigrant who had learned carpentry skills in his native land. In America he became an exposition builder, erecting structures not only for Omaha's 1898 Exposition but for several other expositions in the following decade. His apartment complex project was far ahead of its time, with the buildings surrounding a long, landscaped courtyard and offering tenant amenities such as a tennis court, community house and garage. Strethlow's grand vision resulted from collaboration with noted local architect Frederick Henninger, whose design for the apartment buildings was enhanced with details derived from the Prairie School, the Arts and Crafts movement, and Japanese architecture. The Strethlow Terrace also encouraged further apartment construction, and between 1909 and 1916 another ten buildings went up on Sherman Avenue, thus establishing its twentieth century character as an apartment district.9

North of Lake Street, construction continued in the small subdivisions laid out earlier by numerous builders. Kountze Place, after gaining almost no new residences in the previous decade, also began to fill up south of Evans Street in the 1900's. The site of the Grand Court of the Exposition remained open through the decade, but the Bluff Tract which held the midway east of 16th was almost completely built up by 1910. For the first time the northernmost sections of North Omaha were built up as well. On both sides of 24th Street construction continued north to the industrial tract along the Belt Line. A streetcar line extension on Ames west of 24th also initiated construction there.10

The second great growth spurt in North Omaha brought variations in residential construction, as both vernacular types and high styles were altered from their 1880's character. Except for Kountze Place, the bulk of construction continued in a vernacular fashion, although often in an expanded version. The rectangular one-and-a-half story cottage increasingly became a full two- or two-and-a-half story dwelling, retaining the street-facing gable and front porch across the lower story, but often adding dormers and more windows at the second floor.11

In the years since the 1880's building boom, the expansive, elaborate Queen Anne had slowly given way to more closed, compact house forms and subdued detailing. The classical order and purity of Chicago's World Columbian Exposition and Omaha's Trans-Mississippi Exposition established this trend, which influenced the next generation of architects and builders of both high styles and vernacular structures. Thus, after 1900 a vernacular residence was more likely to have simple, Tuscan porch columns and a triangular classical pediment over the door than Eastlake gingerbread or fishscale shingles. In many cases, these houses, especially the simpler versions, were built designed or adapted from pattern books. However, the compact, rectangular form was also utilized by architects who added a few elegant details and built on a larger scale.12

At the same time these classical influences gave rise to a vernacular housing type which became the basis of pre-World War I construction — the "Classic Box." Composed of a square body of two-and-a-half stories, this cubic form dwelling often had a hipped roof, hipped dormers, broad eaves and a one-story porch across the front. The Classic Box was simple, economical and compact enough to fit on lots in most middle class suburbs. It also provided a basic form that could be left in its simplest appearance or carefully detailed. Common additions included a projecting side bay of one or two stories, a pediment over the entry, a side projection for a stair landing or
new construction in subdivisions platted in the 1880's.
(Douglas County Historical Society)
4, 3602 North 21st Street, 1984
This bungalow, constructed in 1911, exemplifies the Craftsman influence with its stucco and brick construction and bracketed eaves. It faces Kountze (Malcolm X) Park, the former site of the Grand Court of the Trans-Mississippi Ex-

position.
( Omaha City Planning Department)
5. Classic Boxes, Evans Street, 1984
The classic box was a restrained, more compact house than the extravagant Victorian dwellings of the late nineteenth century and reflected changing architectural tastes and lifestyles.
( Omaha City Planning Department)

a front bay window. Classic Boxes were most prevalent in North Omaha in the area north of Lake Street where the new subdivisions were being laid out after 1900. The Classic Box filled in the vacant lots in Kountze Place, as well as streets farther north and west of 24th Street, such as Evans and Pratt, which were being developed for the first time.  14

The pre-World War I era, particularly after 1910, introduced one more housing style to North Omaha. The Craftsman (Arts and Crafts) style, with an emphasis on wood craftsmanship and simplicity, provided a new school of thought on architectural details. Craftsman influences appeared in trim adorning Classic Boxes, but also set the stage for the popular bungalow dwelling which filled streets in the northern portions of the district.  15

While many Craftsman-inspired residences were large, two-story dwellings, the bungalow was a small, cottage-like version with a broad, sheltering roof and simple lines. In North Omaha the bungalow was sometimes stucco or brick, but more often a wood or frame house. Some bungalows were built on Evans and Pratt Streets east of 24th, the former Grand Court of the Exposition, which was almost entirely filled up between 1910 and 1915. Others went up on the former Exposition midway east of 16th Street and on other empty portions of the bluff.  16

Builders active in the period before World War I continued to utilize various earlier vernacular types as well as the new Classic Box and classical detailing. Clearly the most active builder in this period, and in fact throughout the entire development of North Omaha, was the real estate firm of Hastings and Heyden. Between 1903 and 1914 the company built almost 100 residences scattered throughout North Omaha, often constructing six or eight houses on one street. In general, Hastings and Heyden built modest one-and-a-half to two-story frame vernacular dwellings, with clusters of construction in the 2800 block of Corby, the 2800 block of Maple and the 3000 block of North 23rd. However, in Kountze Place the firm constructed larger dwellings, including two-and-a-half story Classic Boxes and other substantial homes on Lothrop and Spencer Streets.  17

Although Hastings and Heyden was the most active firm in the pre-World War I era, other builders were also at work in North Omaha. Edward Smith built at least 30 residences between 1905 and 1917, scattered throughout the neighborhood, with no more than three to a street. Smith generally erected one-and-a-half to two-story frame vernacular dwellings, with only a few larger structures on Evans and Pinkney. The firm of Rasp Brothers, active between 1912 and 1919, constructed a number of residences with the characteristics of a popular type of bungalow. The approximately 25 houses they erected in North Omaha were frequently one-and-a-half stories with the gable ridge parallel to the street, and a large, central dormer on the upper story over an open front porch. While Rasp Brothers did not build great numbers of dwellings, they erected homes in keeping with new emerging trends.  18

The "New" Immigration
The concentration of Northern and Western European immigrants that populated America's cities before 1880 gradually gave way to increased numbers of Southern and Eastern Europeans. While the arriving Irish, Scandinavians and Germans became less predominant between 1880 and 1890, the totals of immigrants from the Russian and Austro-Hungarian Empires and Italy all more than doubled. In contrast to the Northern and Western Europeans, the new immigrants tended to settle in cities, particularly in the Northeastern United States,
where they filled the demand for unskilled labor. However, Omaha also had opportunities for these new settlers, not only in its industries but in the expanding wholesale and commercial trade. South Omaha attracted the bulk of Omaha's new immigration, especially the Czechs and Poles, to its packinghouses. North Omaha offered a better location for immigrants who worked in downtown trades and industries, such as Italians and Eastern European Jews. As the Germans, Irish and Scandinavians of North Omaha gradually scattered throughout the city, their residences were filled by this next wave of new Omaha residents.

A few Italians had settled in Omaha as early as the 1850's, but their numbers remained few until the 1900's when the Italian population increased from approximately 500 to 2300. The main Italian and Sicilian colonies in the city centered around 24th and Poppleton and 6th and Pierce, but a smaller cluster developed in North Omaha in the old Irish neighborhood around Holy Family Church.

Families living around 20th and Clark Streets formed the basis of this Italian neighborhood, which gradually encompassed the area from Locust to Izard and west to approximately 22nd Street. Primarily from Northern Italy, as opposed to Southern Italians and Sicilians, these immigrants frequently possessed job skills which helped them find employment in North Omaha industries. In 1916, more than one-third of Omaha's employed Italian males worked for the Union Pacific Railroad, mostly in the shops. Holy Family Church formed the center of community life, just as it had for the earlier Irish settlers. The church became predominantly Italian, receiving its first Italian priest and becoming an Italian National Parish in the 1930's. As late as 1940, Holy Family School was the only distinctly Italian parish school in Omaha, with 100 of the 140 students of Italian parentage.

Like the other Italian churches in Omaha, Holy Family had a patron saint, San Alfio, the focus of an annual summer celebration. The first observance of the San Alfio Festival in Omaha was an eight-day event in June, 1929, centering on North 17th Street between Nicholas and Clark Streets. San Alfio Hall, at 1702 Clark, was a social-religious center for the neighborhood, as was the Christ Child Center at 1814 North 18th Street. These organizations typically offered classes and social activities for both adults and children, in the manner of social settlement houses. By the twentieth century, this neighborhood had experienced some deterioration as industry encroached from the south and east. Small inexpensive cottages of the 1880's remained and were supplemented by new construction of the same variety, although often a little larger than the previous dwellings.

At the same time that Italians were replacing Irish-Americans in the southeast corner of the district, they were joined by another group which exerted a more lasting influence in North Omaha, Eastern European Jews. The first Jews to arrive in Omaha were Germans, Austrians and Bohemians who considered themselves pioneers rather than immigrants. They had arrived as early as the 1850's and were largely Americanized and assimilated, since many of them had lived in other American cities before migrating west to Omaha. In contrast, the large number of Eastern European Jews who began arriving in the 1880's were refugees, persons who left their homelands to escape the restrictions placed on their ownership of land, mobility and religion. Many of them spoke only Yiddish and were Orthodox in religious practices, as opposed to the Reform outlook espoused by Omaha's first Jewish settlers. A Hebrew Benevolent Society was formed in the

1. Former San Alfio Hall, 1702 Clark Street, 1984
   Once the center of an established Italian community, this building is now surrounded by an increasingly industrial neighborhood.
   (Omaha City Planning Department)
2. Beth Hamedrosh Adas Jeshuran (now Tabernacle Church of Christ Holiness), 1521 North 25th Street, 1984

1880's to assist the Eastern European refugees in getting established in Omaha.

Before 1900, most Eastern European Jews lived downtown between 9th and 13th, Harney to Center, and particularly along South 10th between Harney and Leavenworth, where the new arrivals filled almost every house. Many of them operated shops or peddled goods, which allowed them to avoid working on their holy days. By 1905 this downtown community began to shift northward. The encroachment of business into their residence area, coupled with an estimated doubling of the Jewish population of Omaha between 1900 and 1914, caused many to move into the working class neighborhoods of North Omaha.

Because many Jews went into business, they became particularly visible along the commercial streets of North Omaha, es-
When built in 1922, this synagogue was located in the heart of a Jewish residential neighborhood. It became the Tabernacle Church of Christ Holiness in the early 1950's.

3. Kuklin and Fried Meat Market, 1513 North 24th Street, 1919

North 24th Street was the main Jewish business district in the city for the first two decades of the twentieth century.

(NEbraska Jewish Historical Society)

4. Lake School, 19th and Willis Streets, March 26, 1914

Although the racial balance in North Omaha was changing in 1930, Jewish students still comprised 20% of the pupils at Lake School.

(Boatwrick-Frohardt Collection)

 pecially North 24th. As early as 1900 a wide variety of Jewish grocers had stores throughout the district: Louis Gottstein at 1302 North 24th; Kohn and Rosencranz at 2124 North 26th; A. I. Kulakofsky at 1010 North 16th; and Israel Moskovitz at 1923 Clark. An analysis of North 24th Street merchants between 1912 and 1920 showed a wide variety of Jewish businessmen, including Max Fogel, meats, at 1204 North 24th; Sam Spiegel, junk dealer, at 1205-09 North 24th; Louis Pinkovitz, blacksmith, at 1314 North 24th; and Hersch Friedman, shoemaker, at 1405 North 24th.

The Eastern European Jews who settled on the North Side brought a strong institutional presence to the neighborhood. Since many of them were Orthodox in religious outlook and walked to their synagogues, they tended to build houses of worship close to residence districts. Thus, congregations that had been started in downtown or Near South Side locations moved north and erected new buildings as their members moved into North Omaha.

The Lithuanian Jews first organized as B'nai Israel in 1889 and met on South 13th Street until 1911. They later reorganized as Beth Hamedrosh Hagodol and built a new house of worship at 19th and Burt. Russian Jews at first worshipped with the Lithuanians but later organized their own synagogue, Chevra B'nai Israel Adas Russia, the Society of Russian Israelites. They built their first synagogue on Capitol Avenue between 12th and 13th in 1889; in 1910 they dedicated a new synagogue at 18th and Chicago. Some members of this group later split from the congregation because they lived too far north to walk to services. They formed Beth Hamedrosh Adas Jeshuran and built a new synagogue at 25th and Seward in 1922. Hungarian Jews started a charitable society to provide sickness and death benefits which evolved into a congregation. In 1909, they purchased and remodeled the former Second Presbyterian Church at 24th and Nicholas and formed B'nai Jacob Anshe Sholem (later B'nai Jacob-Adas Jeshuran). That structure remained their home until 1949, when the building was moved to 3028 Cuming.

Although the Reform synagogue, the Congregation of Israel, was located west of downtown, the bulk of Jewish institutions were located on the North Side. The Jewish Old People's Home opened in March, 1917, at 2504 Charles, with a bath house built next door on North 25th Street. A labor
lyceum, or working man's club, was built at 2203 Clark in 1922. The lyceum provided a library and social and educational activities, much like the various other social settlement houses around the city. It was eventually relocated to 30th and Cuming, adjacent to the synagogue which had also been moved. Jews had started a movement for their own hospital as early as 1899, when they occupied a building on Sherman Avenue near the Exposition grounds. From 1902 to 1907, they occupied the former J. J. Brown residence at 2225 Sherman Avenue, as the old mansions in that area increasingly shifted to institutional uses. They eventually built their new hospital just west of downtown at 24th Avenue and Harney in 1908.27

The Jewish community eventually settled throughout the area south of Lake Street. Although many would move westward and out of the area, a number of Jews remained in the neighborhood or maintained their businesses there for several decades. As late as 1930, students of Russian parentage made up about 20 percent of the children at Kellom and Lake Schools and 10 percent of Long School students.28

The 1913 Tornado

Most of the changes to the landscape of North Omaha were man-made and rested on decisions of individual landowners, builders and residents. However, in one brief period on March 23, 1913, North Omaha suffered a drastic transformation caused by a devastating tornado. About six o'clock in the evening on Easter Sunday, the storm swept through Omaha, beginning its destruction in the southwest corner of the city. It moved through the wealthy West Farnam and Bemis Park districts before hitting the hills at 30th Street near Parker and Franklin and inflicting its greatest damage at 24th and Lake. The path of the storm, four-and-a-half miles long and a quarter-mile wide, caused property damage estimated at $5 million.29

The tornado, which killed approximately 140 persons and injured another 350, also destroyed 1,800 homes and left 2,500 homeless. In the vicinity of 24th and Lake at least 60 people died. Newspapers declared that “in this closely settled neighborhood the damage was stupendous,” and resembled “a battlefield after a terrific conflict.” Seventeen men were killed in the collapse of Idlewild Pool Hall at 24th and Grant and another 12 persons in the ruins of the Diamond Theater at 2410 Lake.
Among the churches suffering damage were the German-English Lutheran Church at 28th and Parker, Trinity Methodist Episcopal at 22nd and Binney, Zion Baptist at 22nd and Grant, and the Danish Evangelical Lutheran (Pella Lutheran) Church at 26th and Grant. 30

The Webster Telephone Exchange at 22nd and Lake became a makeshift hospital since it was one of the few buildings left standing in the vicinity. Although all the building's windows had been blown out, the 25 telephone operators remained at their stations and assisted in the disaster effort. Soldiers from Fort Omaha arrived soon after the storm to patrol the hard-hit districts and lead the search for dead and injured buried in the rubble. The cleanup began with over $420,000 sent to Omaha from across the United States and funds raised through local charities. Omaha's Jewish community, in particular, diverted monies raised for their community center to the relief of tornado victims. 31

While North Omaha rebuilt following the tornado, the prosperity and expansion that marked the first decade of the twentieth century continued to encourage new construction throughout the city. The bulk of North Omaha building took place in the northern half of the district on land not previously utilized for residences. Once the U.S. entered World War I, however, construction slowed significantly. After 1916, virtually the only concentrated building in North Omaha was Victor Place at 16th and Victor Streets. This new subdivision was built up between 1916 and 1918 on the old Poppleton estate, one of the last 16th Street estates to give way to new construction. Even after the war when Omaha experienced a brief construction boom, North Omaha did not gain many more structures. New building was scattered and simply filled in the leftover land, as no large tracts were left for subdivision development. Thus by 1925 the entire North Omaha district was virtually filled, having been built up over a period of some 50 years. 32

Although the physical development of North Omaha was largely complete by the 1920's, the landscape did not remain unchanged. Each group of people that resided in the neighborhood left its own distinctive cultural mark, whether it was the original landowners and builders or the various immigrants that settled for awhile and then moved on. The World War I era brought new residents that ultimately remained in North Omaha. Encouraged by job offers from the packinghouses and railroads, Southern blacks migrated to Omaha and settled on the North Side. Because their cultural contributions to the neighborhood have been great, the story of North Omaha in the twentieth century is primarily the story of Omaha's black community.