NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(STate: 
NEBRASKA

CounTY:  
Douglas

FOR NPS USE ONLY

ENTRY NUMBER  

DATE

1. NAME

COMMON:  
The Aquila Court Building

AND/OR HISTORIC:  

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER:  
1615 Howard Street

CITY OR TOWN:  
Omaha

STATE  
Nebraska CODE  
31 COUNTY: 
Douglas CODE  
058

3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY  
(Ch Eck One)

☑ District  ☐ Building  ☐ Site  ☐ Structure  ☐ Object

☑ Public  ☐ Private  ☐ Both

Public Acquisition:  
☐ In Process  ☐ Being Considered

☑ Occupied  ☐ Unoccupied  ☐ Preservation work in progress

ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
☐ Yes:  ☐ Restricted  ☐ Unrestricted  ☐ No

PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

☐ Agricultural  ☐ Government  ☐ Park  ☐ Transportation  ☐ Comments

☐ Commercial  ☐ Industrial  ☐ Private Residence  ☐ Other (Specify)

☐ Educational  ☐ Military  ☐ Religious

☐ Entertainment  ☐ Museum  ☐ Scientific

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNERS NAME:  
Unica Casualty Company

STREET AND NUMBER:  
1615 Howard Street

CITY OR TOWN:  
Omaha  
STATE:  
Nebraska

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC:

Register of Deeds, Douglas County Courthouse

STREET AND NUMBER:  
18th and Farnam Streets

CITY OR TOWN:  
Omaha  
STATE:  
Nebraska

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY:  
Historic Preservation in Nebraska

DATE OF SURVEY:  
☐ Federal  ☐ State  ☐ County  ☐ Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:

Nebraska State Historical Society

STREET AND NUMBER:  
1500 "R" Street

CITY OR TOWN:  
Lincoln  
STATE:  
Nebraska

ENTRY NUMBER  

DATE

This nomination is located in the second Nebraska Congressional District
The Aquila Court Building occupies the entire half block on the south side of Howard Street between 16th and 17th Streets. This site is on the southern fringes of Omaha's business district.

The building's Howard and 16th Street facades are four stories, and are faced in Bedford limestone. The architectural character is distinctly Renaissance, although adapted to a commercial setting.

U-shaped in plan, the building is focused around a central courtyard. The transition to this inner court is made by a change in material. All interior facing walls are red brick, which creates a warmer atmosphere. An arcade encompasses the court serving as a screen and protected walkway for the surrounding businesses. It is entered from 17th Street through an arch and colonade. The building's east entrance is directly off the elevator lobby. Originally patterned after an Italian formal garden, the gold fish pool, murmuring waters, stone paths, and numerous plants created a uniquely serene atmosphere in contrast to its urban environment. The court not only provides a prestigious shop setting but also gives the inner offices an exposure to light and natural ventilation. It also serves as a buffer between the north retail-office wing and the south apartment wing.

The south wing is comprised of court-level retail spaces and second-story studio apartments. The apartments are two-story units with a bedroom balcony and clerestory living room space which overlooks the court. The apartments are entered through the court and provide a transition from cityscape to residential atmosphere.

In 1927 the court was extensively altered. It was completely surfaced with split-marble slabs. The verdant pools and canals were replaced with modern fountains and a large ornamental waterwheel. This renovation was stimulated by future plans to convert the court to an outdoor dining area. The court, however, still possesses much of its original quiet charm.
The Aquila Court Building, conceived and designed in Chicago, was a real estate venture of Charles and Raymond Cook, Chicago capitalists. Being the first building which they had commissioned, it was to be an ideal prototype containing offices, small ground level shops, and several town houses. Raymond Cook, the main promoter, insisted on an interior court similar in design to the Italian gardens he had seen in his home town, Chicago. Landscape gardening was his hobby and Mr. Cook personally supervised the courts layout and planting.

Aquila Court is the result of an enlightened client working with architects possessing mature skills. This commission was one of the last received by Holabird and Roche, the prominent Chicago architecture firm. It was under construction the same year that William Holabird died, 1923.

Holabird and Roche are considered as lesser members of the Chicago School. However, they did play an important role in developing a modern architectural approach to America's rising industrialism and commercialism. Along with their teacher, William LeBaron Jenney, they are tied strongly with the development of the skyscraper. They introduced riveted steel construction, which greatly improved the speed and efficiency of skyscraper erection. Their firm was one of the first to set up along the lines of a modern architectural office, with personnel including not only architects, but also engineers, specification writers, superintendents, and accountants. They were equipped to handle confidently any project of that day.

Holabird and Roche's buildings have not been compiled in a complete monography, and their work is most likely more extensive than realized. Their architectural oeuvre is comprised of intricate engineering and spacial development. Detail and forceful architectonic is most generally subdued in favor of logic, the handling of structure, systems integration, and economics.

The works of Holabird and Roche were described in one of the leading 1920 architectural publications as "that which makes up the daily grist." However, in the case of Aquila Court, an ordered and uneventful facade gives way to a unique set of inner spacial relationships.

In the present day of urban emphasis this building represents a well developed integration of the urban components; retail, office, and town
house arranged around a peaceful courtyard.
9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES


Files; Nebraska State Historical Society

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

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

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11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE: Persis Kolberg, Curator of Historic Sites

ORGANIZATION: Nebraska State Historical Society

STREET AND NUMBER: 1500 "R" Street

CITY OR TOWN: Lincoln

STATE: Nebraska

12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

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

National [ ] State [X] Local [ ]

Name: Martin E. Kratt

Title: Director, Nebraska State Historical Society

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

Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date: Aug 28, 1974

ATTEST:

Keeper of The National Register

Date: _______
View looking southwest at east & north facades. Date & photographer unknown.