**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**

**INVENTORY — NOMINATION FORM**

*Type all entries — complete applicable sections*

**1. NAME**

COMMON:

The City National Bank Building

AND/OR HISTORIC:

**2. LOCATION**

STREET AND NUMBER:

16th and Harney Streets

CITY OR TOWN:

Omaha

STATE:

Nebraska

CODE: 31

COUNTY:

Douglas

CODE: 055

**3. CLASSIFICATION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY (Check One)</th>
<th>OWNERSHIP</th>
<th>STATUS</th>
<th>ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>District</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Occupied</td>
<td>Yes: Restricted</td>
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<tr>
<td>Site</td>
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<td>Unoccupied</td>
<td>Unrestricted</td>
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<td>Structure</td>
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<td>Preservation in progress</td>
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<tr>
<td>Object</td>
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<td>In Process</td>
<td>Restricted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Being Considered</td>
<td>Unrestricted</td>
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PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- [ ] Agricultural
- [ ] Government
- [ ] Park
- [ ] Transportation
- [ ] Comments
- [ ] Commercial
- [ ] Industrial
- [ ] Private Residence
- [ ] Other (Specify)
- [ ] Educational
- [ ] Military
- [ ] Religious
- [ ] 18th and Farnam Streets
- [ ] Entertainment
- [ ] Museum
- [ ] Scientific

**4. OWNER OF PROPERTY**

OWNER'S NAME:

Maenner Co., Realtors

STREET AND NUMBER:

1120 City National Bank Building

CITY OR TOWN:

Omaha

STATE:

Nebraska

CODE: 31

**5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC:

Register of Deeds, Douglas County Courthouse

STREET AND NUMBER:

18th and Farnam Streets

CITY OR TOWN:

Omaha

STATE:

Nebraska

CODE: 31

**6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE OF SURVEY:

Historic Preservation in Nebraska

DATE OF SURVEY: 1971

- [ ] Federal
- [x] State
- [ ] County
- [ ] Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:

Nebraska State Historical Society

STREET AND NUMBER:

1500 "P" Street

CITY OR TOWN:

Lincoln

STATE:

Nebraska

CODE: 31

This nomination is located in the second Nebraska Congressional District.
The sixteen-story City National Bank Building stands at the southeast corner of 16th and Harney Streets. Erected in 1910, it was Omaha's first skyscraper. The bank building is typical of Holabird and Roche's standard skyscraper. Its riveted steel skeleton is clad in buff colored brick with granite detailing. Interior bays are formed by the continuous steel columns; This allows optimum office division and flexibility. Each bay is reflected on the exterior by two large double-hung windows. The main structural divisions and the continuous mullions regulate the facade and give it a vertical emphasis. Mechanical chases are integrated with the continuous structural elements and the sanitary units are stacked for plumbing efficiency.

The facade, relatively free of ornament, depends on its scale and proportion for visual impact. Italianate detailing is subdued and used mainly as a proportioning element.

The building was primarily designed for the legal, medical, and dental professions. Its "L" shaped plan provides all offices with a maximum exposure to light and natural ventilation. The offices are unpretentious, trimmed in mahogany. None of the interior walls are structural and can be altered or removed to accommodate varying tenant needs.

The current occupancy rate and low maintenance still make the bank building an economic asset. Its functional longevity attests to the foresight and practical planning of Holabird and Roche.

In 1927 the Creighton Orpheum Theater was renovated and expanded. Its entrance and main lobby were projected through the City National Bank Building to 16th Street. The new three-story buff brick volume butted against the bank building and the two structures became synonymous in the public mind.

The theater is a grand palace of a past era. Its highly pretentious Renaissance design is heightened with gold leaf and ivory. The lobby is wainscoted in rose cavernette and red laventti marble. The foyer walls are covered with mirrors and panels of gold leaf and inlaid ivory. These hard surfaces are interspersed with draperies of Vatican crimson broclette, embellished with passementerie art. The decor is complete with Florentine drinking fountains and gilded, hand-carved furniture.

The three-story auditorium seats 2,877. The mezzanine level is composed of private loges, seating 360 in the comfort of overstuffed armchairs. The mezzanine foyer is reached by a circular stairway and the balcony by an elevator. The auditorium's walls and ceiling are elaborately embossed with gold and silver patterns. The three-story volume is lighted by a 250 lamp crystal chandelier. The fixture is 16 feet in height, 9 feet in diameter, and weighs 4,500 pounds.

Flanking the auditorium and stage on the north are 14 dressing rooms,
two chorus rooms, and the green room. Stage curtains range from damasks to metallic fabrics, and one is covered with rhinestones.

An interesting feature of the theater is its air conditioning system. Air is forced up onto the truss cavity of the roof and allowed to drop into the auditorium. Return air vents under the seats then collect the air. In this manner a complete air change is accomplished every three minutes; a sophisticated system in 1927. In the summer months the auditorium is cooled by spraying water on the roof which in turn cools the air as it passes through the roof cavity.
The design for the National Bank Building was based upon Chicago School principles and executed by the prominent Chicago School architectural firm of Holabird and Roche. Construction was undertaken at a time when old world ideals were being combined with modern technology. Holabird and Roche had held strongly to the governing desiging factors of economy, structure, natural light, efficiency, and systems integration. These factors became primary in their solution to the high-rise office building in general. The City National Bank Building introduced Omaha to the 20th century. Its magnitude and simple steel skeleton must have had a great impact on Omaha's citizenry. In 1927 the newly expanded Orpheum Theater projected a lobby through to the bank building's 16th Street main facade. This unique utilization gave the theater an established and prestigious entrance.

The Creighton Orpheum Theater opened in 1892. It was originally a vaudeville house on a circuit originating in Chicago. It has always occupied its present site, but the original entrance was on 15th Street.

In 1927, the new two million dollar Orpheum was opened with a seating capacity of 2,877. It was Omaha's grandest theater, and its opening was the civic social event of the decade. It was built just before the advent of talking movies. Designed primarily for stage and musical productions, its performances have ranged from vaudeville to Lawrence Welk to Frank Sinatra. As the cost of live entertainment increased, the Orpheum shifted to a movie theater. Changing trends and competition from compact theaters with lower overhead forced the Orpheum to close in 1971.

Entertainment palaces of this size and elegance are fast becoming extinct. However, the Orpheum's acoustic qualifications and the potential of restoring its original grandeur has enhanced community interest in making it the home of the Omaha Symphony Orchestra.

The works of Holabird and Roche were described in one of the leading 1920 architectural publications as, "that which makes up the daily grist." This is an accurate summation of the bulk of the firm's projects.

William Holabird (1845-1923), after two years at the U.S. Military Academy, moved to Chicago in 1875 to study architecture. He entered the office of William LeBaron Jenney as a draftsman where he received his fund-


Files; Nebraska State Historical Society

### 10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

<table>
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<th>CORNER</th>
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<td>SW</td>
<td>Degrees Minutes Seconds</td>
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### APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY:

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STATE:</th>
<th>CODE</th>
<th>COUNTY:</th>
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</table>

### 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

**DATE:** 2/23/73

### 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:** [Signature]

**Title:** Director, Nebraska State Historical Society

**DATE:** 2/23/73

**NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION**

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

**Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation**

**DATE:**

**ATTEST:**

**Keeper of The National Register**

**DATE:**
Original Holabird & Roche sketch, c 1909
Photo credit: Bostwick-Frohardt, collection owned by KMTV, Omaha

Interior view of typical hall, 1910
Photo credit: Bostwick-Frohardt, collection owned by KMTV, Omaha

Interior view of new (existing) Orpheum Theater, view towards southeast, 1910
Photo credit: Bostwick-Frohardt, collection owned by KMTV, Omaha
Initial stages of construction. View of west & south façades, looking northeast, 1910
Photo credit: Bostwick-Frohardt, collection owned by KMTV, Omaha

View of old Orpheum Theater Bldg; view of north & west façades looking southeast, c1919
Photo credit: Bostwick-Frohardt, collection owned by KMTV, Omaha

View of Orpheum Theater Bldg, north & west facades looking southeast, c1940
Photo credit: Bostwick-Frohardt, collection owned by KMTV, Omaha
View of east & north facades of Orpheum Theater and east & north facades of City National Bank Bldg, 1910
Photo credit: Bostwick-Frohardt, collection owned by KMTV, Omaha

Interior view of Orpheum Theater, looking south, 1910
Photo credit: Bostwick-Frohardt, collection owned by KMTV, Omaha