UNIVERSITY OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME
HISTORIC
Dr. Samuel D. Mercer House

AND/OR COMMON
Mercer Apartments

2 LOCATION
STREET & NUMBER
3920 Cuming Street

CITY, TOWN
Omaha

STATE
Nebraska

3 CLASSIFICATION
CATEGORY
DISTRICT

OWNERSHIP
PUBLIC

STATUS
OCCUPIED

PRESENT USE
AGRICULTURE

PRIVATE

COMMERCIAL

WORK IN PROGRESS

MUSEUM

NEITHER

EDUCATIONAL

ACCESSIBLE

RECREATIONAL

PRIVATE RESIDENCE

YES: RESTRICTED

OTHER

NO

SECOND

ENTERTAINMENT

31

RELIGIOUS

COUNTY
Douglas

GOVERNMENT

055

SCIENTIFIC

TRANSPORTATION

MILITARY

INFORMATION NOT FOR PUBLICATION

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY
NAME
Mercer Management

STREET & NUMBER
1016 Howard Street

CITY, TOWN
Omaha

STATE
Nebraska

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION
COURTHOUSE
Register of Deeds—Douglas County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER
18th and Farnam Streets

CITY, TOWN
Omaha

STATE
Nebraska

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS
TITLE
Historic Preservation in Nebraska

DATE
1971

FEDERAL

STATE

COUNTY

LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS
Nebraska State Historical Society

CITY, TOWN
Lincoln

STATE
Nebraska
The Samuel D. Mercer mansion is located on a hilly three-acre site at the northeast corner of 40th and Cuming Streets. The site, which abruptly slopes to the south, is dominated by the structure. Its siting at the top of the hill enhances the Picturesque nature of the design.

The structure, which was built between 1883-85, is a two and one-half story red-brick dwelling constructed on a substantial stone foundation. Irregular in plan and Picturesque in massing, the house features highly articulated walls, with emphasis upon dormers, bay windows and relief panels of brick and terra cotta. The central feature of the design is the three-story square tower which flanks the main (south) entrance. The tower, which is supported on a two-story bay window, features tall rectangular windows—a characteristic feature of the fenestration of the house—and is topped with a pyramidal roof which is light on four sides with steep-pitched, gabled dormers of a somewhat Gothic Revival imagery.

Overall, the house most precisely fits what has been called the Queen Anne style of architecture. Popular in the United States from the early 1870's and in Nebraska through the turn of the century, this dwelling stands as a somewhat unique example of the style in Nebraska. As originally constructed, the dwelling displayed a highly polychromatic effect which accented the variety of form and texture apparent in the design. This effect may still be seen in the polychromatic decorations produced in the slate roof. In addition, the original structure displayed a number of porches, verandas and balconies of Eastlake design, which were painted to enhance the overall effect.

The original structure—built at a total cost of $60,000—enclosed twenty-three rooms. The ground floor contained the library, den, dining room and kitchen, servants quarters, and a large entrance hall. Nine bedrooms and a billiard room were provided on the second floor, while the floor area in the attic space was occupied with five more bedrooms and the cupola in the tower. Great attention was devoted to details, including the use of cherry, mahogany, oak, and black walnut, paneled and carved woodwork, and parquet floors. The mosaic tiled front hallway, handsome fireplaces and intricately designed hardware and fixtures contribute to the lavishness of the interior decor. Perhaps most notable is the Eastlake-inspired stairhall which is encompassed by a second-floor gallery railings, posts and arched doorways. Here, also, the polychromy so characteristic of the exterior was brought to the interior with the large skylight panel of stained and leaded glass which lights the stairhall. Smaller panels of stained glass serve as transom lights over a number of the ground story and second story windows.

The Mercer family occupied the mansion until 1920, when it was converted into apartments. In 1926 additions were made to the structure in a fashion which was, for the most part, compatible with the original brickwork. The elaborate Eastlake porches and gingerbread trim were removed and garages replaced the stables at the rear.
Architecturally the Mercer Mansion stands as one of the fine examples of the Queen Anne style of residential architecture in the State. Typifying the irregularity of plan and massing, and the variety of color and texture so characteristic of the style, the house also stands as a rather unique example among those extant in Nebraska. The most common type of the developed Queen Anne dwelling in Nebraska was an articulated rectangle which invariably featured a circular (rarely polygonal) corner tower. The dwellings that characterize this type tend to be late, having been built in the later part of the 19th and the early 20th century. One could say that they became the Standardized Queen Anne plan-form.

The most obvious feature of the Mercer mansion that distinguished it from the majority of the Nebraska examples is seen in the tower. Placed near the corner of the original dwelling, the tower is actually a part of the south wall. Its square plan, the pattern of its fenestration, and the medieval nature of its detailing give it a more literally Shavian character distinct from the bulk of Queen Anne building in the state. Another example, built in wood, of even more Shavian character was built in 1881 for C. W. E. Dorsey in Fremont by Omaha architect B. A. Fowler. These two dwellings constitute a unique development of the Queen Anne among extant examples in the State and establishes a greater significance for the Mercer mansion. In spite of the absence of the original Eastlake porches—Eastlake woodwork is still extant on the interior—the residence remains an exceptional structure whose imagery characterizes the "Picturesque" movement of the late 19th century.
MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES


See Continuation Sheet, Item #9.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY  3

UTM REFERENCES

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

A 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11
C 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

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

STATE CODE COUNTY CODE

STATE CODE COUNTY CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME/TITLE

D. Murphy—Curator of Historic Sites

ORGANIZATION

Nebraska State Historical Society

DATE

January 1976

STREET & NUMBER

1500 R Street

TELEPHONE

402-432-2793

CITY OR TOWN

Lincoln

STATE

Nebraska

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL ___ STATE X LOCAL ___

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

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

DATE

TITLE

Director, Nebraska State Historical Society

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER
Conservation Files: Nebraska State Historical Society


Overall view of south façade.
Nebraska State Historical Society, 1971 (H673.5-2320)
View of main (south) entrance looking north.
Nebraska State Historical Society, 1971 (H673.5-2752)
View of west façade looking east.
Nebraska State Historical Society, 1971 (H673.5-2757)

Detail view of tower, south & east elevations, looking northwest
Nebraska State Historical Society, 1971 (H673.5-2756)
View of 2nd floor gallery around the stairwell.
Nebraska State Historical Society, 1971 (H673.5-2760)

View of skylight above stair hall.
Nebraska State Historical Society, 1971 (H673.5-2769)