United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable". For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

Historic name  Oft-Gordon House
Other names/site number  D009: 1388-002

2. Location

Street & number  11523 156th Street
City or town  Bennington
State  Nebraska  Code  NE  County  Douglas  Code  055  Zip code  68007

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this [x] nomination [ ] request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property [X] meets [ ] does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant [ ] nationally [ ] statewide [X] locally. ( [ ] See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

/s/ Michael J. Smith  Feb 2, 2010
Director, Nebraska State Historical Society
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property [ ] meets [ ] does not meet the National Register criteria. ([ ] See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official>Title
__________________________________________________________  Date
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

[ ] entered in the National Register.  Signature of Keeper  Date of Action
[ ] see continuation sheet.

[ ] determined eligible for the National Register.  ________________________________
[ ] see continuation sheet.

[ ] determined not eligible for the National Register.  ________________________________
[ ] removed from the National Register.  ________________________________
[ ] other, (explain):  ________________________________  ________________________________
### 5. Classification

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<th>Ownership of Property</th>
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**Name of related multiple property listing**

(Enter “N/A” if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

0

### 6. Function or Use

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

- DOMESTIC: Single Dwelling
- AGRICULTURE: Animal Facility

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

- DOMESTIC: Single Dwelling

### 7. Description

**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

- Queen Anne

**Materials**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

- Foundation: **CONCRETE**: Concrete Block
- Walls: **Wood**: Cedar Clapboard
- Roof: **ASPHALT**: Asphalt Shingles

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)
Oft-Gordon House
Douglas County, Nebraska

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria
(Mark “X” in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

___ A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

X B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

X C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

___ D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations
(Mark “X” in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

___ A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

___ B Removed from its original location.

___ C A birthplace or a grave.

___ D A cemetery.

___ E A reconstructed building, object, or structure.

___ F A commemorative property.

___ G Less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance
(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Areas of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Architecture
Agriculture
Commerce

Period of Significance
1910-1931
1943-1960

Significant Dates
1910
1913
1943

Significant Person
Eggert Oft; Roy Gordon

Cultural Affiliation
NA

Architect/Builder
Unknown

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography
(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Primary location for additional data:

X State Historic Preservation Office
___ Other State agency
___ Federal agency
___ Local Government
___ University

Name of repository: Private Family Collection
Oft-Gordon House          Douglas County, Nebraska
Name of Property          County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property  Less than 1 acre

UTM References (place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet).

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Verbal Boundary Description
(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification
(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title  Gordon Mueller / Property Owner and Jessie Nunn / National Register Coordinator
organization  Nebraska State Historical Society  date  November 2009
street & number  1500 "R" Street, PO Box 82554  telephone  402-471-4775
city or town  Lincoln  state  NE  zip code  68501

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps
A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property’s location.
A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs
Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items
(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name/title  Gordon and Linda Mueller
street & number  11523 N. 156th Street, P.O. Box 79  telephone  402-614-7509
city or town  Bennington  state  NE  zip code  68007

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:  This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determined eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings.  Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, (15 USC 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement:  Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form.  Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.
The property is located on the southeast corner of 156th Street and Bennington Road (old Highway 36), just one block from Bennington’s business district. Bennington (2000 population 937) is an incorporated village in Douglas County located approximately ten miles northwest of Omaha, the county seat and Nebraska’s largest metropolitan area. While suburbanization has affected Bennington’s western half, the area east of 156th Street retains its small town character. Bennington is located along Big Papillion Creek and the surrounding landscape is characterized by rolling hills and farmland, broken occasionally by suburban development.

The Oft-Gordon House consists of two city lots with the house on the northern lot and the carriage house on the southern lot. Both lots are surrounded by five large sycamore trees; one measuring more than five feet in diameter and a pin-oak which was designated a Nebraska Champion State Tree in 1981. These trees were planted shortly after the house was built by Eggert and Rosa Oft. The property also contains a lily pond which is believed to have been built shortly after the house was constructed. An unpaved driveway off of 156th Street enters the property south of the house and leads to the carriage house. The alley marks the property’s eastern boundary.

The Oft-Gordon House is a two-story, frame, free-classical Queen Anne residence built in 1910. Typical of the style variation, the façade is asymmetrical, the roofline is varied and decorative details are classically-inspired. The foundation and basement are of concrete block construction. The basement is accessed by a stairway from the kitchen and a double door entrance located on the southern side of the house. The house is clad in its original 3 ½ inch cedar siding.

The steep hipped roof has lower cross gables on the east façade and the side elevations, all of which have wide overhanging eaves. All gable ends have returning eaves creating the appearance of a pediment sitting on an entablature. The roof is covered with asphalt shingles and has its original lightning rod system with four copper spiral rods and glass lightning rod balls. The chimney has been removed. The house has thirty-four double sash windows with crown casings above, except for windows located directly under the cornice mold. Most windows are one-over-one light and all are covered by original wood storm windows. Twenty-nine windows have their original glass; windows in one bedroom, bathroom and pantry have been replaced. Upstairs windows are arranged in pairs providing each bedroom a minimum of two windows. Five windows have leaded/beveled glass panes or transom inserts.

The façade faces west and can be divided into two bays: a flat recessed bay to the north containing the main entrance and a slightly rounded bay with a gable end to the south. The façade is dominated by a full wrap-around porch that extends to the south elevation. The front concrete stairs are approximately ten feet wide and are bordered by red brick walls that support four of the nine wooden porch columns. The porch also includes its original rail and balustrade. A pediment highlighting the main entrance protrudes outward from the porch roofline over the steps.

The entrance contains its original wood door with a large rectangular light, but a modern metal screen door has been installed. A small rectangular window with decorative leaded glass is located north of the main entrance providing light to the main interior stair. To the south of the main entrance are three bay windows. The window opening by the front door contains an 1925 stained glass window the Oft family donated to the first church built in Bennington. It was returned in 1970 when the congregation moved and the original church was torn down. The original window opening, trim and storm have been retained. A balcony was built into the porch’s roof shortly after construction (pre-1930) on the southern side of the house and is accessed from two upstairs bedrooms. Above the porch, the fenestration pattern is similar to that on the first story of the façade. An elongated window is centered above the pediment in the northern bay and bay windows are found to the south. A vent with its original pediment surround is located in the gable end.
The cross gable section of the south elevation features bay windows on both stories. On the main floor, the bay windows indicate the living room, with the parlor located to the west and the dining room to the east. In contrast, the north elevation has a protruding rectilinear bay under its gable end. Here there are fewer windows, which is indicative of the more private spaces on this side of the house. Bedrooms and bathrooms are located on the second story and a bedroom and the kitchen are found on the main level. The main interior stair is lighted by a horizontal fixed window with decorative leaded glass on this elevation. Both gable ends include an original vent similar to the one on the façade. The east end of both side elevations consists of a one-story rear portion of the house.

The rear of the house faces east and has an enclosed back porch. It contains a laundry room and the porch, which was enclosed in the 1930s. The entrance to the basement was replaced with a metal door in the early 1960s, and is flanked by paired windows. A single window is centered in the gable end of the rear elevation.

Interior
Approximately ninety percent of all interior walls are original plaster and lathe construction. First story walls have been recently wallpapered, in some cases using similar designs found in early layers. The foyer, parlor and living rooms have their original oak floors, other rooms have straight grain fir, and the kitchen and pantry have their original blue and white hexagon tile floors. The home has its original five panel doors, and both the doors and windows have crown headers featuring dart and egg molding. All doors have their original hardware and knobs.

The foyer leads to the formal parlor and staircase. It is trimmed in white oak with a spindle and carved oak stairway leading upstairs. A recessed bench seat is found below the stair. A wood colonnade separates the parlor from the foyer. The parlor has its original four-light brass light fixture which highlights several large canvases painted by Nancy Oft, a daughter of Eggert and Rosa. Her collection also includes two farm scenes depicting her grandparent’s farms in Germany, where the family visited in 1913.

Pocket doors with glass lights open from the parlor into the living room area. The wall between the living room and the dining room has been removed. All the rooms have picture railings. Pocket doors separate the living room and downstairs bedroom. The downstairs bedroom has been modified by furring out the west interior wall to create space for built-in cabinets. The dining room contains its original recessed leaded glass china cabinet and embossed wainscoting. It also contains two “pass throughs” which allowed food to be passed to the dining room from the kitchen and pantry.

The upstairs saw little use during the past 100 years. It includes four bedrooms, again in much of their original condition. All the woodwork is original oak or yellow pine and approximately eighty percent is untouched and maintains its original shellac finish. A window in the southwest bedroom has been converted into a door for access to the balcony. All rooms, with the exception of two new upstairs bathrooms have their original wood or tile floors. One new bathroom occupies a room originally designed for a bathroom and the other was built in a closet. Period tile was used for the floors, and features include a claw foot tub and a pull-chain, wall-tank, toilet.

Lighting was originally a combination of electric and gas. Eight of the nine upstairs light fixtures and/or their glass globes are original. One includes a gas ceiling light that has been converted to electricity. Portions of the house have been rewired; however, all new switches are period push-button units.

The Carriage House was built at the same time as the house (1910). It is rectangular and of frame construction and has an asphalt-shingled gable roof with a cross gable centered in its west-facing facade. It has nine, common, four-light barn windows. The downstairs was converted to a garage. The barn door was enlarged and modified to accommodate two
Oft-Gordon House

Name of Property

Douglas County, Nebraska

County and State

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garage doors. The upstairs loft is unchanged and the downstairs has two rooms for tack and a grain room. The carriage house is considered a contributing building.

**Landscape Features** also contribute to the overall historic feeling of the Oft-Gordon House. The first of these is a lily pond built shortly after the house was constructed for Rosa Oft, who loved goldfish. The lily pond was created with poured concrete and given an irregular or organic shape. It is approximately three feet deep, eight feet wide and eighteen feet long and sits between the house and the driveway toward the front of the property. Water for the pond is supplied by runoff from the roof. The front (west) and north side of the property originally had a wrought iron fence; the portion along Bennington Road remains but the front was taken out in the 1950s for road construction. It was saved with the intention of reinstalling it, which will be done when the town finishes a planned roundabout at the intersection.

The trees found on the property provide a unique and charming setting for this home and were planted by Eggert and Rosa Oft. Family photographs show that shortly after construction the Ofts planted six sycamore trees along Bennington Road and five along the western boundary that parallels 156th Street. They also planted a sycamore in the back yard and a pin-oak between the house and driveway on the south. The trees along Bennington Road were removed in the 1950s for a power line. Four of the five planted on the west remain; one was lost in a storm in the 1980s. The remaining four are magnificent mature examples of the species. The sycamore in the backyard has twin crown branches that split the main truck about fifteen feet from the ground. A storm in the 1930s caused one to crack, splitting the primary trunk. The family repaired the split with a long threaded rod that pulled the truck back together and allowed it to heal. One sycamore trunk measures more than seventeen feet in diameter. The pin-oak is even more impressive towering more than seventy-five feet. In 1981 it received state recognition as being the largest pin-oak in Nebraska. Today, the tree’s canopy shades the entire backyard and much of the house.

**Integrity**

Most major modifications to the house occurred during the period of significance. These include the upstairs balcony which was added sometime before 1930, and the removal of the wall between the dining and living room in the 1950s. The former is a relatively common mid-20th century modification as homeowners opened-up older homes in an attempt to keep up with modern ideas about how to organize domestic space.

Alterations that occurred after the period of significance include the removal of the chimney and the updating of mechanical systems. The house was heated with coal stoves, but a boiler and hot water cast-iron radiators were later installed. The coal boiler was later converted to fuel oil and a thermostat was added. A new heating and air conditioning system was installed in 2008; however, the radiators and piping were left in hopes of installing a small boiler system in the future. Two bathrooms have also been added upstairs, and the west wall of the downstairs bedroom was altered to accommodate built-in dressers.

Overall, the Oft-Gordon House retains sufficient historic integrity of design, materials, workmanship, setting, location, association and feeling to be architecturally significant as Bennington’s best example of the free-classical variant of the Queen Anne style as applied to a residence. Moreover, through its location, setting, and scale, this property also readily conveys its association with two significant contributors to Bennington’s commercial and agricultural development, Eggert Oft and Roy Gordon. The Oft-Gordon House is currently owned by Gordon Muller, Roy Gordon’s grandson, and his wife Linda Mueller. They plan to open it as a bed and breakfast in the spring of 2010. Through old photographs and paint scrapings it was learned that the home’s color was originally a yellow cream with white trim. The house has recently been painted those colors. The couple plans to maintain the historical integrity of the house.
The Oft-Gordon House is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places at the local level under Criteria B and C. Constructed by Eggert and Rosa Oft in 1910, this property is the finest example of the free-classical variant of a Queen Anne residence in Bennington. The Oft-Gordon house is also significant for its association with Eggert Oft, a leader in Bennington's early commercial development and continued sustainability. His son-in-law, Roy Gordon, continued Oft's commercial pursuits, but was also significant in the area of agriculture for his leadership and innovations in the mink ranching industry.

The first period of significance for the Oft Gordon House begins in 1910 with the construction of the residence and carriage house and lasts until Eggert Oft's death in 1931. A second period of significance begins in 1943, the year Roy Gordon began raising mink in the back yard of the Oft Gordon House, and extends through 1960, fifty years from the present. During these periods the Oft-Gordon House was the residence and center of operations for two individuals that made important contributions to commerce and agriculture in Bennington and beyond.

**Criterion B: Eggert Oft (1848 – 1931)**

Eggert Oft is significant at the local level in the area of commerce as a major contributor to the settlement and development of the Bennington farming and commercial community. Eggert, his brother Claus and their parents Claus and Anna Oft left Haupen, Germany and immigrated to Davenport, Iowa in 1869. They eventually settled in the Bennington area in 1877. Eggert bought a farm in 1880 located just one-half mile west of Bennington. Two years later he married Rosa Lage and they had five children; Katy, Meta, Minnie, Hans and Nancy. The farm prospered and the Ofts expanded their business ventures in the small community that would become Bennington.

In the meantime, The Fremont, Elkhorn and Missouri Valley Railroad began buying land in the Papio Valley for a railroad corridor between Omaha and Fremont, Nebraska. Land was set aside by the railroad for the development of a new town, which was platted by the Pioneer Town Site Company in 1887. A subsidiary of the Chicago and North Western Railroad, the Pioneer Town Site Company platted at least seventy towns in Nebraska in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries, half of which were completed in 1886 or 1887.1 Because he was already an established businessman and farmer in the Bennington area, Eggert Oft had the wherewithal to take advantage of the inevitable real estate opportunities that comes with the platting of a new town.

The Pioneer Town Site Company started selling Bennington lots in 1888. Eggert Oft purchased nine lots2 in the center of town, and soon after began the construction of a commercial building that would be known as Oft's Hotel. The building served as an important business and social center for travelers and residents and contained a hotel, saloon and opera house.3 A livery stable and mercantile store owned and operated by Eggert Oft soon followed.

Bennington grew rapidly with the arrival of the railroad in 1889 and was incorporated as a town in 1892. Upon incorporation, Eggert Oft was elected to Bennington’s first Board of Trustees. In addition to his civic service and businesses in town, Oft continued to farm several hundred acres outside of Bennington. On Eggert and Rosa Oft’s 25th wedding anniversary in 1907 at least 113 people from the surrounding area showed up at the Oft Farm to help them celebrate.4 The large attendance suggests the prominent position of the couple in Bennington social and business circles.

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2 Oft purchased lots 1-6 and lot 10 in block 11 and lots 13 and 14 in Block 10. Oft-Gordon Family Collection.
4 This number comes from a group photograph held by Gordon Mueller in the Oft-Gordon Family Collection (private).
It is particularly impressive considering that Bennington’s population was exaggerated by including transient railroad workers to reach the 100 residents needed for incorporation. In 1910 the Oft family moved to town after building their dream home at the northeast corner of Bennington Road and 156th Street. The move meant Eggert Oft could keep a closer watch on his thriving businesses in town, while he and his family also enjoyed the comforts their new home.

In 1911, Oft sold one of his town lots on the south side of 2nd Street to the Bennington State Bank Corporation for the construction of a bank. He served as a member of the board during its operation from 1911 to 1928. The bank was forced to close due to an agricultural depression in 1928 at which time Oft regained ownership of the property. The property remained in the family until it was sold in the 1970s. The property is also known as the ‘Luchsinger Building’ and in 2006 it was listed in the National Register (#06000998) for its banking contribution to the community from 1911 to 1928.

A fire started in the Oft Hotel saloon in 1913 resulting in the destruction of several downtown businesses, including all of those operated by Eggert Oft. He would build again, but the fire gave Oft a chance to rethink his commercial activities. While livery stables and hotels were essential components in any new town, by 1913 the commercial climate in Bennington was beginning to change. Automobiles were on the horizon and the town had enough hotels. Instead of simply replacing his previous businesses, Oft decided to focus on what Bennington did not already have.

According to the town’s centennial history:

> In the early 1900s, the town boasted three general merchandise stores, two butcher shops, two banks, several restaurants, four hotels, a mill, two implement dealerships, a hardware store, a newspaper and print shop, a cement block factory, a pharmacy, a lumber yard, and a cigar factory.

By 1913, Bennington was clearly a well established community, but there were still commercial opportunities. Not yet found along Main Street was a recreation hall or a grocery. Specialty stores were slow to replace general stores in small towns north of Omaha, despite their virtual disappearance in southeastern Nebraska by 1910. When Oft built a grocery store at the corner of 2nd and Stark Streets in 1914, it was truly something new for the small community. This store was owned and operated by Eggert Oft until his death, when it was passed on to his son-in-law Roy Gordon. While no longer owned by the Oft-Gordon family, the store is still in business and is currently known as the Clover Leaf Grocery Store.

Oft also constructed Oft’s Hall after the fire, which served as a community recreation center from 1914 until it was sold by the family in the late 1970s. The hall featured local bands, dancing and food and was rented by local couples to celebrate their weddings, anniversaries and other special occasions. According to articles in the Bennington Herald, the facility also hosted fund raisers for local charities and other causes. Oft was able to make a profit through the rental of his property, while at the same time providing the town with much needed space for social gatherings. With the establishment of Oft’s Hall and Bennington’s first grocery in 1914, Eggert Oft was able to successful rebound from the disastrous 1913 fire while also contributing to the evolution of Bennington from a fledgling town to an established community.

Eggert Oft contributed heavily to the initial commercial development of Bennington through the purchase and sale of commercial lots. More significantly, he established and maintained businesses in the various buildings he constructed in

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5 Oft-Gordon Family Collection and “Bennington, Douglas County,” Virtual Nebraska.
8 Oft Hall and the Clover Leaf Grocery Store are still extant and sit on lots 3-4 of Block 11 and lot 1-2 of Block 11, respectively. Unfortunately neither building currently meets the National Register criteria for historic integrity. (See Supplementary Materials).
1888 and 1914. During his association with the Oft-Gordon House between 1910 and 1931, he successfully ran at least four businesses (a hotel, a livery stable, a recreational hall, and a grocery), constructed two commercial buildings and played a significant role in the establishment of the town’s first bank. Eggert Oft died on March 1, 1931 after nearly fifty years of contributing to Bennington’s commercial growth and sustainability.

Eggert Oft’s Contemporaries in Commerce

Eggert Oft’s closest contemporaries at the local level in the area of commerce during his lifetime were Peter Bunz II and Peter Mangold. Among the various German settlers who populated this portion of the Papio Valley during the period leading up to the incorporation of Bennington, Bunz and the Oft brothers (Claus and Eggert) are the most commonly mentioned businessmen in the limited historical literature about Bennington. Along with two others, Bunz and Claus Oft sold land to the Pioneer Town Site Company that would later be platted as the town of Bennington in 1887. In fact, Bennington was originally called “Bunz Town.”

Claus Oft dammed Papio Creek and started a grist mill during Bennington’s earliest period, but his commercial activities do not appear to extent past this contribution. Bunz’s potential significance, on the other hand, was more contemporaneous with Eggert Oft. In addition to his contributions to the settlement of Bennington, Bunz was also president of Bennington State Bank from its creation in 1911 until his death in 1916. While Bunz could certainly be considered significant to Bennington’s history in the areas of settlement and commerce, his contributions came in different fields of commerce than those of Eggert Oft. During the period of significance (1910-1931) Bunz concentrated on banking, while Oft was heavily involved in the retail and service sectors of commerce in Bennington.

Peter Mangold was another early settler in the Bennington area that played an important role in the community’s commercial development. Mangold started the town’s first elevator and first agricultural merchandise store, and organized the Mangold and Glandt Bank. He was also president of Farmers State Bank in Gretna, Nebraska. Along with Bennington State Bank, the Mangold and Glandt Bank was forced to close in 1928 due to the onset of an agricultural depression preceding the Great Depression in Nebraska. It is unclear how long Mangold’s other business ventures in Bennington lasted, but a subscription history published in 1917 suggests they were abandoned prior to the establishment of the bank. This means that during the period of Eggert Oft’s significance (1910-1931), Mangold’s commercial activities, much like those of Peter Bunz II, were limited to banking.

Commercial opportunities abound with the birth of a new town, and thousands of men and woman became overnight entrepreneurs during Nebraska’s settlement period. However, relatively few enjoyed lasting significance. By the time the histories of smaller towns were being written, significant contributors to early commercial development had narrowed considerably to a handful of individuals. Bennington is no exception. In the early 1900s, Bennington’s commercial district was thriving, but by 1930s the variety of businesses had begun to erode. At the time of his death in 1931, Eggert Oft was one of the few commercial pioneers still in business. Peter Bunz II provided land, financing and the town’s first name, and Peter Mangold is mentioned in the subscription histories, but the “E. Oft, 1914” on Oft’s Hall continues to speak volumes about Eggert Oft’s commercial significance in Bennington. (See Supplementary Material, Photo 1).

9 Bennington, Nebraska, 1892-1992, 9; “Bennington, Douglas County,” Virtual Nebraska.
12 Ibid.
Other properties associated with Eggert Oft
Other properties associated with Eggert Oft in Bennington and the surrounding area lack historic integrity and/or do not sufficiently convey the breadth of his commercial significance. Oft Hall and the Clover Leaf Grocery Store, constructed in 1914, are still extant but the interiors and exteriors of both buildings have been extensively altered. (See Section 10, Supplementary Materials, Photos 3-4). The Luchsinger Building, which sits on land originally owned by Eggert is on the National Register of Historic Places for its role in community banking. Oft and others contributed to the bank but are not recognized individually.

The Oft Farm, located just outside of Bennington, is also extant and still owned by the decedents of the Oft family. The original farm consisted of the farmhouse and approximately fifteen out buildings that sheltered crops and livestock. The house built in the 1880s still stands but is in poor structural condition and is uninhabitable. Only one of the original out buildings remains, a small brick barn which is believed to have been built in the 1920's. (See Section 10, Supplementary Materials, Photos 1-2).

Furthermore, none of the other properties associated with Eggert Oft sufficiently convey the breadth of his contributions to Bennington's commercial history. The farm, for instance, only represents his role in agribusiness, while the bank points solely to his significance in local finance, Oft's Hall to the service branch and the grocery to the retail sector. Eggert Oft's contributions were vital to almost every aspect of Bennington's commercial development and sustainability. Only his Queen Anne residence constructed at a prominent intersection fully conveys his significance. The Oft-Gordon House was built to display Eggert Oft's success and to serve as his legacy.

Criterion B: Roy Gordon (1893 – 1969)
Roy Forest Gordon was born in Fairfield, Iowa to Alex and Lucy Gordon. When he was twelve years old his parents and family moved to Central City, Nebraska. Four years later his family moved to Bennington, Nebraska. He married Nancy, the Oft's youngest daughter in 1919. The couple helped with the family businesses, and in the late 1920s moved into the Oft-Gordon House to take care of the aging Eggert and Rosa Oft. The Gordons remained in the Oft-Gordon House and struggled through the Great Depression maintaining the family businesses into the 1960s.

Roy expanded his father-in-law's grocery into a meat and freezer plant where they rented freezer lockers to individuals. These provided residents with nearly two hundred freezer boxes before private freezers became practical. Freezer boxes were rented monthly and renters had their own key for access; similar to a large post office box. The store also cut and sold substantial amounts of beef. Until the late 1950s beef was sold in half carcasses, which could weigh a couple hundred pounds apiece. Generally, they were carried over the shoulder and hung in walk-in coolers. With the help of his son-in-law, Enno Mueller, Roy designed, built and sold meat carts to other butcher shops that allowed anyone to transfer beef halves without the need of carrying them. Their invention, involved a lifting mechanism mounted on a wheeled cart. Their manufacturing endeavors expanded to include the development of some of the first electric garage door openers in the 1940s. Miniature working models of these still exist.

Roy Gordon was more than just a successor to the Oft family businesses. In 1943, he began raising mink in the backyard of the Oft-Gordon House and went on to become a leader in this rare and largely overlooked branch of Nebraska agriculture. His herd expanded and he eventual moved his mink operation to the family farm. Fur production was never a large component of Nebraska agriculture, but between 1940 and 1950, the number of farms reporting fur animals in
Douglas County lead the way in Nebraska with seven farms in 1950, with three counties having between four and six farms, thirty-five counties reporting between one and three farms, and the remaining counties reported no farms with captive fur animals. (See also Section 10, Supplementary Materials). Mink were being raised near Omaha well before Gordon started his ranch. In 1929, the *Omaha World Herald* featured an article about a mink ranch near Omaha owned by a Dr. Warta with approximately 400 animals on just one acre of land. The ability of ranchers to raise a multitude of animals in a small area is consistent with Gordon’s early ranching activities at the Oft-Gordon House in Bennington. While entrepreneurs like Warta preceded Roy Gordon, the former’s scientific approach, success in breeding shows and contributions to organizing mink ranchers in Nebraska establish his significance in the area of agriculture.

Roy kept meticulous breeding records and detected color variations in his animals. He genetically isolated through breeding a new fur color and is credited with developing the Lavender strain of mink. In the mid-1950s, he sold Lavender breeding stock world-wide to markets in Europe, Russia and Japan. The mink herd reached 5,000 animals at the peak of operation in the 1960s. Each animal had its own cage which prevented fighting and fur damage. The operation consisted of thirty-three buildings. Mink were fed a mixture of frozen fish, fish flour, cereals and packing plant meat by-products bought in Omaha. Nearly a ton of feed was required each day. The development of the canned pet food industry in the 1970s drove up the cost of food, making the industry unprofitable by the late 1970s.

Roy helped organize the state’s first mink show in 1957 and the creation of the Nebraska Mink Breeders Association. Roy began showing his mink at these events starting in 1958 where he won his first blue ribbon. Over the years his mink won dozens of awards in Iowa and Nebraska. Gordon’s work during the period of significance led to further success and recognition after 1960. (See Supplementary Materials). He entered the International Mink Show in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in 1961 where he won four first place trophies, the most for any single rancher up to that time. He was elected president of the Nebraska Mink Breeders Association in 1960 and served until his death in 1969. He also served on the National Board of Fur Farm Organizations from 1960 to 1969. The Nebraska Mink Breeders Association presented Roy and Nancy a beautiful chime clock at their 1968 Annual Meeting for his contribution to the State’s fur industry. Following his death in 1969, the Association created the Roy F. Gordon Memorial Trophy that was passed among annual winners of ‘top mink’ category at the Nebraska Mink Show.

Local Contemporaries of Roy Gordon
Roy Gordon has no documented contemporaries at the local level in mink ranching, and only a select few were likely as influential in this relative rare agricultural sector at the statewide level. However, no context yet exists to compare individual contributions to the fur industry across Nebraska during the period of significance (1943-1960). Moreover, the apex of mink ranching was not reached until the 1960s. Further historical research and perspective could reveal a higher level of significance for Roy Gordon’s contributions to Nebraska agriculture in the future.

14 USDA, U.S. Agriculture Census, 1950. Available at http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/Historical_Publications/index.asp. Data was compiled from each state’s “Statistics for the State.” Nationally the number of farms increased from 5,070 to 10,317. Out of 47 states (there was no census available for Tennessee), only Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, North Dakota, Vermont, Massachusetts and New Hampshire saw a drop in farms with fur bearing animals between 1940 and 1950.
15 USDA, US Agricultural Census, 1950. Data was only available for 77 of 93 counties. Merrick County (5), Holt County (4), and Thayer County (4), followed Douglas County in number of farms reporting fur bearing animals in 1950.
Other Properties Associated with Roy Gordon
Other properties associated with Roy Gordon in Bennington and the surrounding area lack historic integrity. The sheds and cages where the mink were raised are gone and the only building remaining is a wooden structure where they prepared the mink feed. That building is not structurally sound. Only the Oft-Gordon residence fully conveys his significance and that of Eggert Oft. Roy Gordon began raising mink in the backyard of the and he and his wife Nancy raised their daughter and lived their entire adult lives in the Oft-Gordon House.

Criterion C: Free-classical Queen Anne
The Oft-Gordon House is also eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C in the area of architecture as a locally significant example of the free classical variant of the Queen Anne style. The house is one of the largest and most stylish in Bennington, as evidenced by its prominent place in Bennington’s centennial publication. This property is an outstanding example of its type and period of construction in the small town of Bennington. Only one other Bennington property equals the Oft-Gordon House in its ability to express the Queen Anne style. However, its construction precedes the Oft-Gordon House by twenty years and its integrity of setting and design has been compromised by the loss of the carriage house and addition of an attached garage.

The free classical variant of the Queen Anne Style became popular during the 1880s as American tastes in residential architecture shifted from the opulence and eclecticism of the Victorian Era to more restrained Classical and Colonial forms. The free classical variant, therefore, has been interpreted as a transitional movement from Queen Anne to Colonial Revival. Essentially, it stretches classical motifs (entablatures, pediments, columns, Palladian windows) over the asymmetrical form of the Queen Anne house. This chronological development corresponds well with the 1910 construction date of the Oft-Gordon House, which is very late for the Queen Anne style.

According to family descendants, the Oft-Gordon house was likely designed and constructed by local builder William Glandt. Despite the absence of a known architect in its design, the Oft-Gordon House displays most of the character-defining features of a free classical Queen Anne residence. This is likely because by 1910 the style and its variants were well established allowing for their application by any talented builder. While the Oft-Gordon House lacks some of the more elaborate features of the free classical Queen Anne (e.g. a turret or Palladian windows) it still successfully represents the style and period of construction, particularly in comparison to the rest of Bennington’s historic housing stock.

The house has an asymmetrical façade and hipped roof with cross gables, a common roof shape for Queen Anne houses. The wrap-around porch with a pediment at the main entry is one feature of the Oft-Gordon House that is a hallmark of the style. As with most free classical Queen Ann houses, the decorative features are arranged to evoke classical architecture. This includes the porch columns, the door and first-story window surrounds which mimic entablatures, and the returning eaves that accentuate the pediment above the porch and at each roof gable. The combination of Victorian and Classical features extends to the interior of the house as well, particularly in the carved woodwork of the main stair and the classical colonnade separating the foyer and parlor.

19 Bennington, Nebraska, 1892 to 1992.
20 Informal Nebraska SHPO staff survey, 10/13/2009 and “Valuation Lookup,” Douglas County Assessor Website at http://douglasne.mapping-online.com/DouglasCoNe/static/valuation.jsp, accessed 11/25/2009. Bennington is one of the few towns that have not been formally surveyed as part of the Nebraska Historic Buildings Survey. As a town in Douglas County that has not been annexed by Omaha, Bennington unfortunately falls somewhere between Nebraska SHPO and Omaha CLG survey jurisdiction.
Conclusion
Eggert Oft and Roy Gordon were major contributors to the agricultural and commercial development of the Bennington area. Eggert’s foresight in the building of Oft’s Hotel and other business ventures provided services critical in the development, incorporation and commercial growth of Bennington. Roy Gordon continued and expanded his father-in-law’s significant commercial enterprises, while also making a name for himself in Nebraska’s agricultural history. Furthermore, the house constructed for Eggert and Rosa Oft in 1910 remains Bennington’s finest example of a Queen Anne residence. The Oft-Gordon House retains excellent historic integrity and continues to convey its association with two of the area’s most significant residents, in addition to possessing architectural significance.
A History of the Origin of the Place Names Connected with The Chicago & North Western and Chicago, St. Paul, Minneapolis & Omaha Railways, Chicago, 1908, available online at http://books.google.com/books?id=62kgAAAAIAJ.


The Bennington Herald, various issues. Microfilm at the Nebraska State Historical Society


The Douglas County Post-Gazette, various issues.


Mangold, Gretchen. “Bennington, Nebraska,” University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Virtual Nebraska Website, 2005, available online at http://www.casde.unl.edu/history/counties/douglas/bennington/.


Oft-Gordon House
Name of Property

Douglas County, Nebraska
County and State

Geographical Data

Section  10  Page  12

Boundary Description

Lots 10 and 11, Block 5, Town of Bennington, Douglas County, Nebraska

Boundary Justification

The nominated property contains the entire parcel of land historically associated with the Oft-Gordon House.
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

**Photographs**

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**Oft-Gordon House**

Name of Property

**Douglas County, Nebraska**

County and State

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**Photo 01 of 11.** West façade, facing east.

**Photo 02 of 11.** West façade and south elevation, facing northeast.

**Photo 03 of 11.** East (rear) elevation, facing west.

**Photo 04 of 11.** East (rear) and north elevation, facing southwest.

**Photo 05 of 11.** Foyer, main stairway and built-in bench, facing north.

**Photo 06 of 11.** Parlor, foyer and colonnade, facing northeast.

**Photo 07 of 11.** Pocket doors leading to first-floor bedroom, facing north.

**Photo 08 of 11.** Dining room including buffet, pass through, wainscoting, kitchen tile and rear entrance, facing east.

**Photo 09 of 11.** Upstairs bedroom looking into hall, facing south.

**Photo 10 of 11.** West façade of Carriage House, facing east.

**Photo 11 of 11.** North and east elevations of Carriage House, facing southwest.

All photographs taken by Jessie Nunn, Nebraska State Historical Society on October 13, 2009.
Supplementary Material

Name of Property

Oft-Gordon House

County and State

Douglas County, Nebraska

Section 10  Page 14

Photo 1: Eggert Oft Farmhouse and Last Outbuilding
Photo Credit, Gordon Mueller, November 2009

Photo 2: Eggert Oft Farmhouse, Side Elevation
Photo Credit, Gordon Mueller, November 2009

Photo 3: Oft Hall (1914)
Photo Credit, Gordon Mueller, November 2009

Photo 4: Clover Leaf Grocery (1914), Oft Hall (1914, Bennington State Bank (1912) Photo Credit, Gordon Mueller, November 2009
After the Sioux City Mink Show, Roy Gordon needs to enlarge his trophy case. Here he examines his “high point winner” prize.

Purina Feeder
Roy Gordon
Sweeps Sioux City Show

When Purina Mink Chow feeders achieve new heights and win outstanding awards, Purina considers it a privilege to tell others about their accomplishments. Now Purina proudly salutes Roy Gordon, Bennington, Nebraska, for his impressive sweep of the Sioux City Mink Show November 11-12, 1961. Racking up 18,624 total points ... 10,556 points more than his nearest rival. ... Gordon took Best Mink in the Show besides being high point winner. Considering the keen competition from 34 ranchers from five states who entered 394 mink, Gordon's record stands out even more.

A mink rancher since 1948, Roy Gordon has fed Purina Mink Chow for nearly four years. Listed below are the two basic rations Mr. Gordon feeds.

**BREEDER RATION**

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<tr>
<th>Ingredient</th>
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<tr>
<td>Mink Breeder</td>
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<td>Rabbit</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fish</td>
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<tr>
<td>Liver</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tripe</td>
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<td>Chicken</td>
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**DEVELOPING RATION**

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<td>Chicken Trimmings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tripe</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Liver</td>
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**SWITCH TO PURINA MINK FEEDING PROGRAM**

The Purina Mink Program is research-proven and followed by hundreds of mink ranchers from coast to coast. Now is the time to switch to Purina. Call or see your Purina Salesman or Dealer soon. He can book your Purina Mink Chow needs through November 1962, and save you money.
Farms Reporting Captive Fur Bearing Animals by State, 1940 and 1950

Compiled from USDA Agricultural Census, 1950. Regions based on USDA geographical divisions.
### Farms Reporting Captive Fur Bearing Animals in Nebraska by County, 1950


Note: Page 79, which contains data for 16 counties, was not available online.