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 National Register Bulletin, How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form. 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 certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).

1. Name of Property

historic name  Wohlner's Neighborhood Grocery
other names/site number  Ben Newman's Grocery  NeHBS #DO09-0428-004

2. Location

street & number  5203 Leavenworth Street
not for publication

city or town  Omaha

state  Nebraska  code  NE  county  Douglas  code  55  zip code  

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,
I hereby certify that this 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 meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

national  statewide  local

/s/ Michael J. Smith  July 14, 2010

Signature of certifying official/Title  Date

Nebraska State Historical Society
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official  Date

Title  State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register
determined eligible for the National Register
determined not eligible for the National Register
removed from the National Register
other (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper  Date of Action
Wohlner's Neighborhood Grocery  
Name of Property  
Douglas, Nebraska  
County and State

5. **Classification**

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<th>Ownership of Property</th>
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6. **Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

COMMERCE/TRADE: Specialty Store

**Current Functions**

Vacant

7. **Description**

**Architectural Classification**

OTHER: One-part Commercial Block

**Materials**

foundation: Brick

walls: Brick

roof: PVC & EPDM Membrane

other:
### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance of the property. Explain contributing and noncontributing resources if necessary. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, setting, size, and significant features.)

#### Summary Paragraph

The Wohlner’s Neighborhood Grocery building is situated on parts of lots 33 and 34 on Block one of Himebaugh’s Addition to the City of Omaha. Although technically in the Elmwood Park suburban neighborhood, the property is located on the south side of Leavenworth Street, an arterial route that borders the south edge of the Dundee Happy Hollow/Historic District in midtown Omaha. The grocery store was considered part of the Leavenworth Street Dundee/Happy Hollow commercial area; a small neighborhood business district located about two miles west of downtown Omaha. This building was used for approximately 86 years as a grocery store flanked, over the years by a pharmacy and beauty salon.

#### Narrative Description

Wohlner’s grocery building is a three-bay, one-story, brick, commercial structure, with a basement, built about 1920 for Ben Newman to house his new grocery business. The building may have been constructed by Ben’s father, Abraham, a Jewish immigrant from Russia who was a builder by trade. Newman occupied the building until about 1940 when it became home to Albert Wohlner’s Neighborhood Grocery.

The building is a typical one-part commercial block with modest ornamentation. The structure originally boasted large plate glass display windows on the entire length of the front (north) façade and around the corner along a portion of the east façade. Continuous transom light windows are placed along the tops of the display windows including above the front entrances of the grocery store and the beauty salon. The entire front façade of the building is sheltered by the original wooden, shingle-roofed canopy that hints of the Craftsman Style popular during the late 1910s and 1920s. The canopy features large brackets and exposed beams supporting its low-pitched roof. Subtle decorative brickwork adds interest to the wall façade above the canopy. The building has a flat parapet roof. Engaged columns, rising from the foundation of the building to the top of the parapet, separate the bays and define the frontal corners of the building. The western third of the building is faced from foundation to the transom window with green and black, structured pigmented glass known commonly as Carrara glass. It could be original to the building, but was most likely added in the mid 1930s, when the beauty salon took over that space. This detail created a more distinctive storefront entrance for the salon.

The original large plate glass windows on the front façade of Wohlner’s Neighborhood Grocery have been replaced over time with smaller openings, and the original recessed doorway is now substitute by large modern glass doors that take up twice the width of the original recessed doorway. A ca. 1930s view of the building as Ben Newman Grocery shows the original exterior appearance of the north/front façade of the central bay. (See photo # 2) The beauty salon doorway (west bay) retains its original recessed design. A large, painted, vintage advertising sign on the west façade of the building publicizes the grocery store and beauty salon, and also the free parking available for customers of both establishments. A modest parking area surrounds the building, an important consideration to the site’s original design. By the 1920s, when the building was constructed, it was necessary to serve the increasing automobile traffic that brought many customers to the businesses.

When constructed in the early 1920s, the building housed only Ben Newman’s Grocery and was listed as 5203-5205 Leavenworth Street. By 1925, there were three businesses operating in the building -- a drug store at 5203 (east bay), Ben Newman at 5205 (central bay), and a baker at 5207 (west bay). The east bay continued to house a full service pharmacy until 1992, when the grocery area expanded east, and the pharmacy operation was reduced to a prescription counter. The west bay, separated from the grocery store by a permanent wall and individual entrance, held various businesses until 1934, but then became home to the Elmwood Beauty Salon, an 80-plus year enterprise.³

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Wohlner’s Neighborhood Grocery  Douglas, Nebraska
Name of Property                   County and State

Although the east two thirds of the Wohlner’s building has been substantially altered on the front façade, this structure retains relatively good architectural integrity, especially when compared to other Newman and Wohlner family grocery buildings still extant in Omaha. Other grocery store buildings relating to these families have either been razed or have been much more seriously compromised on their exteriors than the Leavenworth Street building. For comparison additional extant, and significantly altered, Wohlner and Newman family grocery buildings include the California Grocery at 3225 California Street, 524 North 16th Street, 5447 South 24th Street, 4900 Dodge Street, and 19th and Ames Streets (now Commercial Avenue).

Wohlner’s Neighborhood Grocery relocated to larger quarters at Aksarben Village in October 2008, and the Leavenworth Street building is currently vacated, with virtually no furnishings or equipment intact from the businesses. There is a conveyor belt in place that brought stock to the grocery store from a basement storage area, and some original floor tile is still visible under replacement flooring. The actual space in the three bays, however, is virtually unchanged from the original floor plan.

Wohlner’s Neighborhood Grocery, while altered, still retains its character and integrity as a good representation of a modest early 20th century neighborhood commercial building. Alterations made to the exterior are reversible. The current owner plans to adapt the interior to house offices, and renovate the exterior to its early 20th century appearance using the vintage Ben Newman Grocery photograph as a guide. The Wohlner name will be incorporated into the buildings new signage to perpetuate the name of the landmark business, and the building will again serve the Dundee/Happy Hollow/Elmwood Park neighborhood as a viable part of this Leavenworth Street commercial district.
Wohlner's Neighborhood Grocery
Name of Property
Douglas, Nebraska
County and State

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.

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.

Areas of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Commerce

Ethnic Heritage

Cultural Affiliation
EUROPEAN: Jewish

Significant Person
(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Albert Wohlner, Ben Newman

Architect/Builder
unknown

Period of Significance
Ca. 1920 - 1960

Significant Dates
1940

Period of Significance (justification)
The period of significance was determined to be from the date of construction (ca. 1920) until 1960, a date that represents 50 years prior to the present time. During these four decades, two different thriving grocery businesses operated in the building, as did the Elmwood Beauty Salon. This property was a linchpin in the Dundee/Happy Hollow neighborhood commercial district. The year 1940 is especially significant as that was when Albert Wohlner moved his long-standing business into the Leavenworth Street building.

Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)
Wohlner’s Neighborhood Grocery  Douglas, Nebraska
Name of Property                   County and State

**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria.)

The Wohlner’s Neighborhood Grocery building, originally Ben Newman’s Grocery, represents an era of small independent markets that emerged in Omaha during the first quarter of the 20th century. These two grocery firms were the only occupants of the building at 5203-5205 Leavenworth from the early 1920s until 2008. The Wohlner’s Grocery building is nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A, at the local level, for its association with events that have made important contributions to the broad patterns of our history. Under this criterion, the Wohlner’s building represents the success of the small independent grocery store that was possible against the competition of larger chain stores and it is also even more significant, that it was owned Albert Wohlner, who, in addition to operating his own independent grocery store, was a powerful player in the city’s larger grocery sphere as a founder and life-time board member of United Cooperative Food Stores, Inc., a cooperative of small independent grocers that became United-A.G. Cooperative, a company that is now a part of food giant Nash-Finch. Ben Newman’s contribution to the larger Omaha grocery arena cannot be overlooked, in that after he left the retail grocery business, he went on to join his brothers in the grocery store planning and fixture business.

The Wohlner’s/Newman building is also nominated at the local level under Criterion B, for its association with the lives of persons significant to our past -- in this case the Newman and Wohlner families of grocers. Ben Newman and Albert Wohlner and the extended Newman and Wohlner families were Jewish immigrants who operated grocery stores in Omaha for decades, and created legacies in Omaha’s grocery history. Both families came from Belarus (Russia) in the first decade of the 20th century and were prominent in Omaha’s Jewish community. Ben Newman (at the Leavenworth Street site ca. 1923 – 1940), and Albert Wohlner and his descendants (at the site ca.1941 – 2008), created a landmark store that survived the competition of the chain groceries. Both men were pioneers in the neighborhood grocery scene and they also broadened their influences by provided necessary services to other grocers. After selling the grocery store, Ben Newman went on to serve area grocers for many years through Newman Store Planning Service and as mentioned above, Albert was instrumental in United Cooperative Food Stores, Inc. Throughout the 20th century and continuing into the 21st century, numerous members of these two families produced a network of grocery service providers that reached across the entire city and the region.

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least one paragraph for each area of significance.)

The Wohner/Newman building is locally significant in the area of commerce due to its association with the early development of Omaha’s grocery history. Both the Newman and Wohlner families, who each occupied the building during the 20th century, played major roles in serving the public via small neighborhood grocery stores. They exemplify a large number of Omaha Jewish immigrant grocers who left downtown Omaha and moved their stores into the suburbs. The entrepreneurial Newman and Wohlner families were totally engaged in the needs and wants of their customers. During the 1920s, they established grocery stores in residential neighborhoods, making shopping convenient for their patrons. Albert Wohlner’s dedication to providing reasonable prices and quality goods to customers also led him to co-found the United Food Cooperative, further influencing the environment of Omaha’s grocery trade. The establishment of the co-op was a defining step in the early 20th century wholesale grocery business.

The building is also locally significant under ethnic heritage for its association, through the Wohner and Newman families, with the large Jewish population in Omaha. These two Jewish families immigrated from Russia/Belarus to Omaha in the early 20th century and made major contributions to Omaha’s Jewish cultural life and to the Omaha business community by means of their strong work ethic and capitalistic spirit. The larger Jewish population in Omaha served as part of the early infrastructure of the city’s commercial activity, and the Wohner and Newman families are shining examples of proficiency in leadership and innovation in this area. This ethnic group was, and continues to be, very prominent in Omaha’s business community. The Wohner and Newman families were not only successful in their own grocery and grocery-related businesses, they were also leaders in maintaining the rich culture of the Jewish people by their association with the synagogue and cultural center.
The city of Omaha, located on the west bank of the Missouri River, was incorporated in 1857, and soon became a center of trade and nucleus of westward expansion. The city served as Nebraska’s territorial capital for a time, and by the 1860s, was a transportation and communications hub. The Union Pacific Railroad, based in Omaha, connected with the Central Pacific Railroad creating a transcontinental link, and the Western Union Telegraph Company ran wires through Omaha to the west. Omaha became known as the “Gate City” to the frontier, and population, industry, and commerce increased rapidly. The Union Pacific built a railroad bridge across the Missouri in 1872, and by the 1880s “boom years,” eight additional railroads served the city. Over time, residential neighborhoods emerged near industrial and manufacturing plants, and for the more affluent, residential districts were created in the countryside adjacent to the city.

Among the suburban neighborhoods created outside of Omaha proper in the late 19th century were Elmwood Park and the adjacent Dundee/Happy Hollow suburbs. These western neighborhoods offered residents rather pastoral, rural lifestyles until the 1910s when the city of Omaha began encroaching on this area. These Omaha neighborhoods were formally annexed into the city soon after their creation -- the adjacent Dundee/Happy Hollow suburbs were annexed in 1915, and the Elmwood Park subdivision in 1917. Small commercial districts were added to the mix of residential housing in the area, and businessmen began to follow the residential migration out of the city to provide shops for the convenience of the suburban dwellers. This was a national movement as city growth and settlement patterns brought specialty shops, including grocery stores, into the suburbs breaking the general store pattern of the 19th century. By the early 20th century, the grocery store building housed only the business and did not necessarily house space for the owner’s residence on an upper floor or in the back as had been the practice. Grocery stores were found in every area of the American city and Omaha was no exception. Suburban neighborhood customers, often more affluent than downtown residents, shopped often as the stores were typically within walking distance of their residences. A strong clientele base and good customer service from the shop owner made for a winning partnership.

Omaha’s Jewish Immigrants

The Abraham Newman family and several Wohlner siblings were part of an early 20th century wave of Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe into the city of Omaha. Although Jewish immigrants first arrived in Nebraska as early as the 1850s, it was the later immigrants, including these two families, who made their mark on Omaha’s business community. Jewish immigrants came to this country because of political discontent and religious persecution, and for the financial opportunities available. In 1882, Omaha welcomed 161 Jewish people. By 1904, the Jewish population in Omaha was 3,000, and by 1917 there were 10,000 Jewish immigrants in the city. Many Jewish residents in Omaha were placed there by the Industrial Removal Office (IRO), an American organization that encouraged new Jewish immigrants to the United States to settle in the interior of the country. The IRO operated between 1899 and 1922. While the time frame of the IRO operation overlaps the immigration of the Newman and Wohlner families discussed in this nomination, these families already had extended family and friends firmly settled in Omaha, who could help them find housing and jobs.

Early 20th century Jewish immigrants to Omaha were mostly orthodox, Yiddish speaking people from Eastern Europe, primarily Russia. They came from small villages and were used to hard work. These people were grateful for their freedom and embraced their new country with energy, while also maintaining a strong ethnic identity. Education was important to these immigrants, and they had a reputation for being highly intellectual. While threats to their religious freedom, and embraced their new country with energy, while also maintaining a strong ethnic identity. Education was important to these immigrants, and they had a reputation for being highly intellectual. While threats to their religious
beliefs were not totally erased in America, the pressures of persecution were generally relaxed and Jewish people were allowed the freedom to pursue career opportunities and religious activities.  

In the late 19th century, many Jewish families settled in an area near the packing houses in South Omaha. The Wohlner and Newman families and many other 20th century Jewish immigrants, however, did not follow this pattern. They immediately established commercial enterprises in whatever areas of the city had good clientele bases and need, hence the success of businesses such as the neighborhood grocery. These later immigrants resided and established businesses throughout the city, and did not necessarily live in enclaves with other Jewish people.

In the early part of the 20th century, in addition to the religious activities held at the synagogue, the cultural life of this immigrant group centered around a Jewish Community Center where regular social and cultural activities were held. The Center housed an auditorium, gymnasium, library, and a Talmud Torah, a parochial school for teaching Hebrew, Bible studies and Jewish history. This facility and its programming assured that traditions would be passed down. The Jewish Press newspaper also helped preserve Jewish culture and served as a strong communication network for this immigrant group. A newer Jewish Community Center in West Omaha, and the on-going publication of The Jewish Press continue to sustain and nurture the Jewish culture in Omaha.

### Jewish Immigrants and the Grocery Business

Many Jewish immigrant businessmen began their careers in Omaha as peddlers who sold fruits, vegetables, and other wares on the streets of the city. Other ethnic groups also practiced peddling, and stiff competition developed. The Jewish peddlers, however, had the most robust reputation. The more diligent peddlers prospered enough over time to become established shopkeepers who served manufacturing and industrial plant neighborhoods. These immigrant peddlers and shopkeepers supported their countrymen working in manufacturing or industrial plants through neighborhood commercial operations. Many Jewish grocers who started as peddlers became exceptional merchants, continued to expand their businesses throughout their lifetimes, and played major roles in Omaha’s growth. The early 20th century immigrants found Omaha experiencing rapid suburban growth and commercial expansion, and a multitude of capitalist opportunities were available.

The Wohlner and Newman families joined the business community immediately after arrival and all went into the produce and grocery trade. At least two of Albert Wohlner’s brothers started in the grocery business as peddlers, but there is no evidence that members of Ben Newman's family were peddlers.

As with most ethnic groups who settled in new countries, individuals formed strong cultural ties to one another creating a sense of “community” even when families did not live in contiguous housing. The Jewish families ardently supported one another. In Omaha, there was much intermarriage between Jewish immigrant families. A large network of Jewish grocery families connected by marriage and blood surfaced from the 1920s through the 1940s in Omaha. The Newmans and Wohlners did not intermarry with one another, but each of these families intermarried with other prominent Jewish grocery families making for an interesting grocery genealogy of sorts. This created a very strong network of people all working toward the same goals in the same business.

### The Newman Family

After serving in the Russian army, Abraham Newman left his wife, Rose, and four sons behind in the Minsk, Belarus area and immigrated to the United States in 1904 to search for a better life for his family. He was a carpenter and cabinetmaker by trade. Soon after arriving in Omaha, Newman found work in the Swift and Company carpentry shop, and by 1905 had saved enough money to bring his family to this country. Four daughters were then born in Omaha.

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12 Pollak, 474-501.
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service / National Register of Historic Places Registration Form
NPS Form 10-900     OMB No. 1024-0018     (Expires 5/31/2012)
Wohlner's Neighborhood Grocery  Douglas, Nebraska
Name of Property                   County and State

To ensure that his sons had good livelihoods, Newman built a building at 24th and U Streets about 1914 to house a grocery store. All four young sons, Ben, Sam, Jack, and Maurice, worked with their father at this store that serviced the Bellevue and Fort Crook areas. They delivered goods first with horse and wagon, later by motorcycle, and then by trucks. The slogan of this store was "If Your Grocer Doesn't Please You Try a Newman." By the early 1920s, Ben and Sam were in their early 20s and opened their own grocery stores. Ben opened Ben Newman's Grocery at 52nd and Leavenworth Streets, ca. 1920, and in 1937, Sam opened a store nearby at 49th and Dodge Streets, called Newman Cash Grocery, just inside the Dundee neighborhood boundary.

Ben's store building, that would later become Wohlner's Neighborhood Grocery, is located on the northern edge of the Elmwood Park suburb. Ben Newman took advantage of the city's growth and the housing boom in the area, and planted his new building right between the Elmwood Park neighborhood and the two former city suburbs of Dundee and Happy Hollow. Newman's store was built in a commercial area on the south side of Leavenworth Street, an arterial that separates the two neighborhoods. Ben Newman Grocery first appears in the Omaha City Directory at this location in 1923. Ben's slogan was "Let Your Grocer Be Newman." The other Newman brothers also left their father's original U Street grocery, but all stayed in the food business. Jack became a salesman for Atwood Coffee, and later went into the store fixture business. Maurice was a sales manager for Nebraska Consolidated Mills, and later partnered with Jack in his store fixture business. After Ben sold his store to Albert Wohlner in 1940, he joined his brothers in the fixture business, Newman Store Planning Service, and also later helped his wife, Ann, manage her clothing store, the Dundee Smart Shop. Sam Newman, however, continued to sell groceries at his original 49th and Dodge Streets location, just inside the Dundee neighborhood boundary, until 1965, logging more than 35 years at that site. Ben, Maurice, and Jack stayed connected to the Omaha grocery scene during their lifetimes working with area grocery stores to ensure quality fixtures and efficient store layouts, combining the family expertise in both cabinetmaking and grocery store management.

The Wohlner Family

The Wohlner family, whose name was originally Wohlajanski, is Polish, but their home was a village near Minsk, Belarus. This area was once part of Poland, but was annexed by Russia in 1793.

The first of the Wohlners to arrive in the United States was Yitzhak Lieb Wohlajanski (Louis Wohlner), Albert's older brother, who came to Omaha in December, 1905. He had left Russia to avoid being conscripted into the army. Wohlajanski, who changed his name to Louis Wohlner shortly after his arrival, was the son of Elihu and Tzivia Rosenblum Wohlajanski. He was one of several children, including brothers Harry, Morris, Paul, and the youngest sibling, Albert, all of whom would immigrate to Omaha and become grocers over the next few years. Other extended family members also settled in the Omaha/Council Bluffs area prior to 1910, including the Rosenblums and Cohens. The Coopermans arrived later.

The Wohlner family legacy and network in the Omaha grocery community is extensive and influential. This family's grocery lineage includes Albert and his four grocer brothers, their spouses, his brother-in-law, Louis Albert, various cousins and nephews, including the late Harold Cooperman, founder of the No Frills Supermarket chain, and in-laws from a multitude of collateral family lines.

According to early 20th century Omaha city directories, two Wohlner brothers, Louis and Harry, started in the grocery business as peddlers. Louis Wohlner first appeared in the Omaha city directory in 1909. He was listed as a peddler and the only Wohlner in town. Other family members were in this country, but were living across the Missouri River in

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14 Douglas County, Nebraska Property Record #R0726400000, Brown Park Lot 13, Block 3.
15 Douglas County, Nebraska Property Record # R0952520000, Dundee Place, Lot 24, Block 116.
19 "Wohlajanski/Wohlner Family History"
20 "Wohlajanski/Wohlner Family History"
Council Bluffs at this time. By 1911, three Wohlners were listed in the city directory. Louis was no longer a peddler and worked as a grocer on North 16th Street. Morris was a clerk for his uncle Louis Rosenblum, also a grocer, and Harry was a peddler. In 1913, Albert first appeared in the city directory as a meat cutter for his brother Louis. Paul was also working for Louis, and Harry was still a peddler. In 1918, peddler Harry had his own grocery store. By 1920, Albert’s sister Sarah Wohlner had married grocer Louis Albert who was also well-known Jewish grocer. By 1926, four Wohlner brothers, and brother-in-law Louis Albert, owned grocery stores in Omaha, and oldest brother Louis was in the grocery business in nearby Gretna with his brother-in-law Abe Cohen.

There is an interesting side note regarding Sarah Wohlner’s husband. Like his Wohlner brothers-in-law, Louis Albert was very entrepreneurial. In 1939, he began making salad dressings in the back of his grocery store at 35th and Leavenworth Streets, just down the street from Albert Wohlner’s Neighborhood Grocery. Using his wife Sarah Wohlner Albert’s cookbook, Louis experimented with various seasonings and soon had a large clientele demanding more salad dressing. Albert sold the store in 1949 and went into fulltime production of dressings and sauces under the name Louis Albert and Son. The company soon marketed products nationally and internationally, and then after various expansions, the company was sold to a Wisconsin firm in 1990. The dressings made Albert’s Fine Foods a household name and production continues. Although now owned by Westin, Inc, a large Omaha produce importer, Albert’s salad dressing bottles still feature a photo of Louis Albert on each label.

The Wohlner grocery legacy continued to expand over the years. By the early 1940s, a second generation of Wohlner family members joined the original brothers, and they either worked for Albert at Wohlner’s Neighborhood Grocery, owned their own neighborhood markets around the city, worked for other grocers including their uncle Louis Albert, or worked in management for various O.P Skaggs stores, an Omaha grocery chain. Harry’s store was in the hands of nephew, Harold Cooperman, the son of his sister Frieda Wohlner Cooperman. Louis, who had owned a grocery store in Tabor, Iowa for several years after closing the Gretna business, had moved back to Omaha and retired. Paul stayed in the business into the late 1940s, but sold his store to O.P. Skaggs and continued as a branch manager. After 22 years in various grocery operations, Harold Cooperman created a successful chain of eight Harold’s Markets between 1955 and 1980, and then found success and fame as the founder of the No Frills Supermarket chain.

Another more minor Wohlner family connection to the larger Omaha grocery community is the fact that Hinky Dinky founder Jules Newman’s first grocery store venture in the city was as Paul Wohlner’s partner in Benson Grocery. This short association lasted from 1919 to 1921. Jules Newman, also the son of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe, created the Hinky Dinky grocery chain in 1925, and was a serious competitor to the Wohlner family grocery operations. Though the name is the same, there is no relationship between the Abraham Newman family and the Jules Newman family.

Albert Wohlner and the Grocery Business

Albert Wohlner, the family member who would carry on the family’s name in the grocery business long after his brothers sold their stores, was born in 1895 near Minsk, Belarus (Russia) and arrived in Omaha as a teenager. He went to work as a meat cutter for his older brother Louis, and then served in the Navy during World War I. Upon returning to Omaha in 1919, he and his cousin S.M. Frohm, formed a partnership and started a grocery business at 3225 California Street. The California Grocery, as the shop was called, became a very popular neighborhood grocery and was well known for its quality meat counter. Albert’s skill as a meat cutter gained him a good reputation and ensured premiere meat selections at the California Grocery and later at his Wohlner’s Neighborhood Grocery. Albert operated the California Grocery until about 1941, even after his partner Frohm died in 1930.
About 1941, Albert moved into the Ben Newman Grocery building at 5205 Leavenworth Street and launched his business in this Elmwood Park/Dundee area of suburban Omaha. He named the new store Wohlner’s Neighborhood Grocery, initiating a business that remains vital today under the leadership of his grandson Michael Schwartz. Wohlner’s became a neighborhood landmark, and its excellent reputation brought in customers from all across the city, particularly for the meat selections, but also because of the other quality goods and superior customer service. The grocery store provided Kosher products to Jewish customers, but also catered to all clients.

Of the five immigrant Wohlner brothers and his brother-in-law, Albert was the only one who continued to operate his own independent grocery store during his entire working life.

An interesting aside to the Wohlner – Newman connection is that Albert Wohlner and Sam Newman, Ben’s brother and the one Newman brother who continued to operate an independent grocery store throughout his lifetime, both died in June, 1984, one day apart. They were buried in the Beth El Cemetery. Their obituaries appeared adjacent to one another in The Jewish Press.

Albert Wohlner and United Cooperative Food Stores

In the first decades of the 20th century, the chain store concept emerged and began to threaten independent grocers. The chains could undercut the independents in pricing due to their ability to purchase larger quantities. The chain stores became a serious threat by 1929, when the entire tier of wholesaling and retailing was jeopardized. By that time, the chain stores had begun to work directly with mass food producers, eliminating a transaction and thereby drastically reducing overhead costs. The traditional wholesale system still used by independent grocers could not compete with the chain system of purchasing. By the late 1920s, independent grocers nationwide had begun to organize and try various strategies to pressure the grocery chains. Most attempts failed.

In Omaha, Albert Wohlner played a major role in this anti-chain movement and went on to co-found a group to counteract the unfair practices. In the early 1930s, while American grocers were pressuring congress for national fair trade laws, Wohlner was taking action in Omaha, and became instrumental in the creation and operation of an innovative grocery wholesale venture. In Omaha, Hinky Dinky and O.P. Skaggs were the major threats to that city’s independent grocers. Wohlner and a very small number of other independent, and mostly Jewish, grocers, founded a wholesale grocery cooperative to protect their businesses from unsavory pricing practices by packers and manufacturers in the Omaha trading area, and to also keep the large corporate chains from squelching the smaller competitors. Two small groups had been formed earlier in Omaha, The Handy Service and A.G. (American Grocery) Stores, but they were not as effective as they needed to be to compete against the wholesale warehouses who bought directly from canners and manufacturers. Documentation has not been found to prove whether or not Albert Wohlner was involved in these earlier cooperatives.

In 1933, Wohlner and his group of fellow grocers officially launched their own wholesale grocery business. The new enterprise was named United Cooperative Food Stores, Inc. The group selected a 13-member board of directors, and set up solid administrative practices. After overcoming start-up obstacles, the company began to flourish. In the early days, canners and manufacturers hesitated to list United as one of their wholesalers, for fear of antagonizing the larger established wholesalers. Any skeptics, though, were convinced when confronted by the determined board of directors, and when they realized the co-op members were a unwavering, savvy group of retailers. This new organization was soon seen as a legitimate jobbing outlet. United Cooperative Food Stores, Inc. blazed new ground, since it was founded three years before the national fair trade law, the Robinson-Patman Act, took effect in 1936. This act regulated discriminating practices in trade.

By the late 1940s, the size of United Food Stores had grown from a very small group of grocers to a membership of 135 businesses in the Omaha/Council Bluffs area. In a 15-year period, the co-op outgrew four warehouses, and after World War II, built a new 40,000 square foot modern building at 19th and Ames Streets, now 4450 Commercial Avenue, that offered all foods staples including fresh fruits and vegetables. The company prided itself in being owned solely by retail

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29 Ibid. 101 – 110.
Wohlner’s Neighborhood Grocery  Douglas, Nebraska

Name of Property                   County and State

Wohlner’s Neighborhood Grocery is the best preserved edifice connected to Albert Wohlner and the Wohlner family of Omaha area grocers. This building stands as a symbol of the success and perseverance of the large network of early 20th century Jewish independent grocers. Of the numerous grocery establishments founded by the Wohlner family, Albert’s store is the sole survivor in the larger Wohlner legacy of family-owned, independent stores. Other Wohlner family groceries are either defunct, or were bought out by chains. Independent grocery stores were vulnerable and most did not survive. A check of the Omaha City Directories shows that in 1928 when the Newmans and Wohlners were in the early phases of building their grocery businesses, they were among 670 grocers in the city. By 1945, the number was reduced to 474 grocery stores, and by 1965 there were only 249 grocery stores listed. The latter two numbers also include chain grocery stores.

It is significant that Albert built his small neighborhood grocery business into a landmark, destination food store, while all of the other grocer family members, except for Harold Cooperman, opted to join big chain store corporations as management, or sell out to them. Nephew Cooperman chose to expand his smaller grocery chain into the large wholesale grocery chain, No Frills Supermarket, but still operated his business according to the principles of United Food Cooperative.

The continued longevity of Wohlner’s Neighborhood Grocery speaks to the quality of its products and the excellent service offered by the store. Albert’s system of independent grocery management, that he was instrumental in galvanizing through the United Food Cooperative, was successful and the family-owned store continues to prosper. Today in its new location, Wohlner’s Neighborhood Grocery has expanded further to offer on-line shopping.

Albert Wohlner’s involvement in United Food Cooperative was particularly significant to the success of Omaha’s independent grocers. Wohlner had a stalwart commitment to the grocery trade, and exuded great influence in Omaha’s grocery community through his work as a founder and life-long board member of the powerful United Food Cooperative, Inc.

The Wohlner Neighborhood Grocery building, renovated with a new purpose, will continue to stand as a landmark in the 52nd and Leavenworth Street commercial area. The building represents the dedication of Albert Wohlner as a leader of all small independent grocers, and also his own exceptional success as an independent grocer.

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30 United Cooperative Food Stores, Inc. a promotional publication in celebration of the new warehouse, ca. 1940s, n.d.

31 Interview by author with Pam McCabe, Products Unlimited, Inc. – Pillow Mfg., Omaha, March 26, 2010.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

- Douglas County, Nebraska marriage records.
- Douglas County, Nebraska property records.
- *Hinky Dinky History*, seventeen page manuscript on file at the Nebraska Jewish Historical Society, no author, n.d.
- Omaha City Directories, Omaha: Polk, R.L. and Company, 1904 – 1946.
Wohlner’s Neighborhood Grocery Douglas, Nebraska
Name of Property County and State

Stageberg, Nancy Newman. 37 Dorchester Drive, Daly, California, 94015. Interview with author, March 2010. (Ms. Stageberg is Ben Newman’s granddaughter.)

United Food Stores. a promotional publication in celebration of the new warehouse, ca. 1940s, n.d.


Who’s Who in Nebraska. Lincoln: Nebraska Press Association, 1940.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
designated a National Historic Landmark
recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # __________
recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # __________
recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # __________

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository: Berggren Architects, Lincoln, Nebraska

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): DO09:0428-004

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than one acre
(Do not include previously listed resource acreage.)

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

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Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

Wohlner’s Neighborhood Grocery property is an irregular tract including the north six feet of the east 100 feet of Lot 33, and the west 50 feet of the east 150 feet of the north 100 feet and the east 100 feet of Lot 34, Block one, Himebaugh’s Addition to the City of Omaha, Douglas County, Nebraska.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)
These boundaries correspond with the legal description of the property, and include the site of the Wohlner’s building and other open space for parking historically associated with the property.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Janet L. Jeffries, historian
organization: Berggren Architects
date: April 12, 2010
street & number: 1201 O Street, Suite 302
telephone: (402) 475-0597
city or town: Lincoln
state: NE
zip code: 68508
e-mail: janet.jeffries@doane.edu or jeffries.janet841@gmail.com

Additional Documentation
Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **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. Key all photographs to this map.

- **Continuation Sheets**

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

Photographs:
Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

Name of Property: Wohlner’s Neighborhood Grocery
City or Vicinity: Omaha
County: Douglas
State: Nebraska
Photographer: Janet L. Jeffries, Berggren Architects, Lincoln, Nebraska unless otherwise noted.
Dates Photographed: November 2009 – March 2010

Description of Photograph(s) and number:

Photo 01 of 14 Wohlner’s Neighborhood Grocery, north (front) and west facades, 2009
Photo 02 of 14 West façade sign detail, 2009
Photo 03 of 14 East and North (front) facades, 2009
Wohlner’s Neighborhood Grocery
Name of Property

Douglas, Nebraska
County and State

Photo 04 of 14  Bracket detail at northeast corner, 2010

Photo 05 of 14  North (front) and façades, 2010

Photo 06 of 14  West and south (rear) facades, 2009

Photo 07 of 14  East façade looking North across Leavenworth Street, 2010

Photo 08 of 14  North façade of west (beauty salon) bay, 2009

Photo 09 of 14  Interior, east bay looking south, 2010

Photo 10 of 14  Interior, east bay looking north, 2010

Photo 11 of 14  Interior, looking east- northeast into east bay from central bay, 2010

Photo 12 of 14  Interior, east (left) and central bays looking South, 2010

Photo 13 of 14  Interior, west bay looking south-southwest, 2010

Photo 14 of 14  Interior, west bay looking north, 2010

Historic Photo  Photo of 5205 Leavenworth as Ben Newman’s Grocery, ca. late 1930s. Central bay, north façade.

Photo courtesy of the Douglas County Historical Society.

Property Owner:

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

ame    G. Thomas Simmons, IV, Registered Agent, 5203 Leavenworth LLC

street & number  667 N. 66th Street  telephone

city or town  Omaha  state  NE  zip code  68132

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:  This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine 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 (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement:  Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 hours per response including 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 Office of Planning and Performance Management. U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.
Photographer: Janet L. Jeffries, Berggren Architects, Lincoln, Nebraska unless otherwise noted.
Dates Photographed: November 2009 – March 2010

Photo 1 of 15  North (front) and west facades, 2009

Photo 2 of 15  Photo of 5205 Leavenworth as Ben Newman’s Grocery, ca. late 1930s. Central bay, north façade
Photo courtesy of the Douglas County Historical Society

Photo 3 of 15  West façade sign detail, 2009
Photo 4 of 15  East and North (front) facades, 2009

Photo 5 of 15  Bracket detail at northeast corner, 2010

Photo 6 of 15  North (front) and facades, 2010