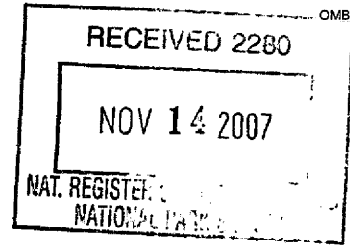


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service



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 The Omaha Star
Other names/site number DO09:0221-012

2. Location

Street & number 2216 North 24th Street Not for publication
City or town Omaha Vicinity
State Nebraska Code NE County Douglas Code 055 Zip code 68110

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, 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 nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Michael J. ...
Signature of certifying official
Director, Nebraska State Historical Society
State or Federal agency and bureau

Nov. 7, 2007
Date

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

Signature of certifying official/Title

State or Federal agency and bureau

Date

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

- Entered in the National Register.
 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): _____

Edson H. Beall 12-27-07

[Signature]
Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

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5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- Private
- Public-local
- Public-state
- Public-federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		Buildings
		Sites
		Structures
		Objects
1	N/A	Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)
N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register
N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

- COMMERCE/TRADE/professional
- DOMESTIC/apartment
- SOCIAL/civic

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

- COMMERCE/TRADE/professional

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions.)

- Commercial

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions.)

- Foundation Brick
- Walls Brick
- Roof Tar
- Other

Narrative Description
(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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.
- 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.

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.)

COMMUNICATIONS

SOCIAL HISTORY

ETHNIC HERITAGE/BLACK

Period of Significance

1940-1957

Significant Dates

1940

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above.)

Brown, Mildred

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

G P Prinz - Architecture Firm

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

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

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 # _____

Primary location for additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other
- Name of repository: _____

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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property _____

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

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
1.	15	253181	4573795	3.			
2.				4.			

[] See continuation sheet

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 Jill Dolberg/Survey Coordinator and Melanie Sharpnack/SHPO Intern
organization Nebraska State Historical Society date August 9, 2007
street & number 1420 P Street/ Box 82554 telephone (402) 471-4773
city or town Lincoln state Nebraska zip code 68501-2554

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 Marguerita Washington/Publisher
street & number 7189 North 78th Street telephone (402) 346-4041
city or town Omaha state Nebraska zip code 68110

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.

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The *Omaha Star* bought their current building in 1940. It had been built in 1923 as a funeral home for Allen Jones by architectural firm G. P. Prinz. Charles A. Carr was the draftsman on the project.¹ Herron Home Building Company was the contractor.

The *Omaha Star* is located on the Southwest corner of 24th and Grant Streets. This commercial building is a rectangular, one story structure that has a flat roof with a crenulated parapet. It has a brick foundation and brown brick veneer exterior. The façade contains a corner entrance covered by a metal awning with a two light transom above the awning. The main entrance on the southeast corner of the building contains two metal screen doors, which cover two white doors with chain link fencing over the windows of the doors. Windows are present on the south and east sides of the building. The windows are all recessed and sit on limestone sills. Chain link fencing covers each window. Above all the windows are red and white scalloped metal awnings. Between the windows on the south and east sides of the building are decorative brick piers, which rest on limestone bases. In between the piers, below the windows, is decorative brickwork with limestone details. On the east side of the building, above the windows, is a painted metal sign publicizing the *Omaha Star* with a bright yellow star, "THE OMAHA STAR" in red lettering, and the continent of Africa in red, black, and green in the corner, all on a white background.

¹ City of Omaha building permit.

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The Omaha Star is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its association with African-American newspaper publishing in Omaha, as well as the early Civil Rights Movement in Omaha. The building is also eligible under Criterion B for its association with Mildred Brown, its publisher and owner for just over fifty years. The Omaha Star building is located one block south of 24th and Lake, the central business district and heart of the African-American community of North Omaha.

North Omaha was largely a black community by World War I, the end of a period of mass migration of African-Americans from agrarian areas in the South to the urban centers of the North.² An estimated one million southern African-Americans left the South in the early decades of the 20th century due to crises in agriculture including the boll weevil epidemics of 1915 and 1916 which destroyed cotton crops, as well as outdated sharecropping systems that restricted the profits tenant farmers could earn when they had to unreasonably share their profits with their landowners. In addition, Southern cities had attracted new industries and jobs, but had largely left African-Americans out of the hiring pool. Still staunchly segregated, the South had little to offer African-Americans looking for a change in their situation.

Omaha was one of the communities whose black population grew significantly during World War I. From 1909 to 1919, the black population in Omaha grew 113% to 10,000, most of whom were living in North Omaha.³ Between the World Wars, Omaha's black residents were largely restricted to working in a handful of occupations. The bulk of men were employed in manufacturing or mechanical industries, such as the meatpacking industry, and men and women were working in domestic or personal service in large numbers as well.⁴ After the stock market crashed in 1929, North Omahans felt the Great Depression in two areas: employment and housing. Because many African-Americans were unskilled laborers, they were among the first laid off from their jobs. This trend was consistent throughout the nation: unemployment rates for African-Americans were far higher than those of European-Americans, and by 1935, one-sixth of those on relief were blacks, while they made up only one-tenth of the population of the United States.⁵ Their situation did not necessarily improve as time passed. After World War II, of Omaha's 8000 employers, only 804 would hire African-Americans, and then mostly only at a service level.⁶ Forty-six percent of children cared for in the Aid to Dependent Children Program were black, while they represented only seven percent of the general population.⁷ When African-Americans were able to obtain a college education, seven out of ten college graduates would leave the Omaha area for lack of opportunity to use their education.⁸

In terms of housing, the influx of African-Americans had followed other immigrant groups into Omaha, first into the southern sections of the area and then gradually north and west as their economic status improved. However, racism halted the movement of African-Americans out of North Omaha with "invisible walls that formed the ghetto."⁹ Middle and upper class African-Americans stayed in the neighborhood for lack of another place to move to, forced to remain in overcrowded, deteriorating housing. The one positive outcome of this segregation was the sense of community that developed during the 1920s and 1930s, a community that both supported, and was supported by, Mildred Brown's *Omaha Star*.

² *Patterns on the Landscape*, 42.

³ Olson, *History of Nebraska*, 289.

⁴ *Patterns on the Landscape*, 46.

⁵ *Patterns on the Landscape*, 52.

⁶ *Omaha Star*, 9 January 1953, "Facts about Omaha Negroes To be Presented."

⁷ *Omaha Star*, 9 January 1953, "Facts about Omaha Negroes To be Presented."

⁸ *Omaha Star*, 9 January 1953, "Facts about Omaha Negroes To be Presented."

⁹ *Patterns on the Landscape*, 53.

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MILDRED BROWN

Mildred Brown was born to parents Reverend B. J. and Maggie Brown in Birmingham, Alabama in 1913. At the age of 16, she graduated from Miles Memorial Teachers College and taught elementary school. In 1936, she met Dr. Edward Gilbert, a pharmacist, and they were married later that year. They moved to Chicago where she continued her education, and eventually moved to Sioux City, Iowa. Mildred Gilbert began her career as a newspaper owner in Sioux City in the mid-1930s when her pastor, Reverend D. H. Harris, suggested it would be a good career for her. She published a small weekly paper in Sioux City called the *Silent Messenger*, and organized the Booker T. Washington Community Center for young people in her neighborhood "who were wandering aimlessly in the streets."¹⁰

In 1937, the Gilberts moved to Omaha, and Mildred secured a job at the *Omaha Guide*, a black newspaper, selling ads. After eighteen months, she started the *Omaha Star* with its inaugural issue appearing on 9 July 1938, with the motto: "Dedicated to the service of the people that no good cause shall lack a champion and that evil shall not go unopposed."¹¹

In an introduction to the newspaper, Mildred Gilbert wrote:

To the Citizens of Omaha: It is with profound pleasure that the Omaha Star Publishing Co., and [sic] organization of energetic, well trained journalistic minds, give to you this day a paper of the people, by the people and for the people. We here and now wish to have you know that the Omaha Star dedicates its existence to the task of serving the general public in every way humanly possible. It shall be our policy to move in an unerring path of duty in the behalf of Black America in Omaha, bringing to you the local news of the city as we find it, as well as the national highlights. Promoting and backing for the welfare of the citizens of Omaha and Black America in general...As we launch out into the sea of journalistic adventure, we sincerely request the support of the general public. The time is at hand when we as a group must begin to build. Give the Omaha Star a firm foundation by way of subscribing and reading support and we will assure you that we in turn will build an enterprise worthy of consideration, a mouthpiece and a force for the people of Omaha.¹²

In addition to offering the *Star* as a mouthpiece for the African-American community in Omaha, the Gilberts also encouraged the community to realize the positive effect the buying power 16,000 African-Americans could have if they would carefully cater their purchases only to businesses that employed African-Americans and treated the community well. Specifically, in the second issue of the paper, Edward Gilbert pointed out that members of the North Omaha black community were patronizing an ice cream shop at 24th and Lake, Reed's Ice Cream, which would be targeted for their discriminatory hiring practices over a decade later by the De Porres Club. Gilbert spent an hour outside the ice cream shop and counted at least one hundred African-Americans approving of their hiring practices through their purchasing power.¹³ Mildred and Edward Gilbert divorced in 1943, and Mildred resumed using her maiden name, Brown.

As the publisher of the *Omaha Star*, the longest operating black-owned newspaper run by a woman, Mildred Brown provided neighborhood news and commentary for more than fifty years. The paper served an important function by calling attention to the accomplishments of people in the black community and emphasizing positive values. The newspaper recognized individuals who received awards, or got new jobs in industries that had previously been closed to African-Americans. It announced acts of civic pride and community charity. They highlighted one neighborhood family per week in order to continue to foster a sense of community. On the occasion of the *Star's* ninth anniversary, Ms. Brown

¹⁰ *Omaha Star*, 9 November 1989.

¹¹ *Omaha Star*, 9 July 1938, banner.

¹² *Omaha Star*, 9 July 1938, "The Omaha Star Makes Its Debut."

¹³ *Omaha Star*, 16 July 1938, "An Echo From My Den."

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again pledged her support to the community, congratulated North Omaha on the growth of its businesses and fast development, and offered up this advice for her neighbors.

The Star on its anniversary wishes to urge that you continue to repair and buy homes as you are now doing, save your money and invest it wisely. Buy more Savings bonds that you may be comfortable if and when things change.¹⁴

Reverend Joseph Forbes, a former pastor of St. John A. M. E. Church said, "Mildred was a friend of the pastors... she made her paper available anytime we needed a platform. She saw her work as a ministry. She believed that God had given her a calling."¹⁵ One entire page was per edition was devoted to the work of the churches in the community, submitted by the pastors.

Among her concerns was the struggle for racial equality. Mildred Brown's primary early role in the *Omaha Star* was in selling ads. She was not only an excellent salesperson; she found that she could use the ads as a tool of her activism. She refused to sell newspaper ads to companies that did not employ black workers. She also used editorials to encourage her readers to protest the segregation of the military and she challenged them to apply for jobs that the Martin Bomber plant at Offutt Air Force Base in Bellevue, Nebraska. She hired Charles Washington, who is widely remembered for his work for civil rights, as a reporter and columnist. Whitney Young, who was the executive secretary of the Omaha Urban League before eventually becoming the executive director of the National Urban League, contributed editorials. The paper supported boycotts to call attention to discrimination, and she and her staff were often labeled "troublemakers."¹⁶ She guided the newspaper through the tumultuous eras of the Civil Rights Movement, from segregation to the demonstrations of the 1950s and 1960s, to the racial unrest of the late 1960s and early 1970s. The *Omaha Star* reported the triumphs and the tragedies that occurred both locally and throughout the nation.

Mildred Brown was not interested in letting discrimination get any further a foothold in Omaha than it already had. She worked tirelessly with many organizations to work for equality and peace. She was a member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Black Publishers Association, the National Business League, the Urban League of Nebraska, and the Great Plains Black Museum.¹⁷ During the time during which it was active, she was the spokeswoman for the De Porres Club, and also allowed it to meet in the Omaha Star building after the club ran out of funds to support their own facility. She spent countless hours working in the community, receiving over one hundred and fifty community service awards, including the "Unsung Heroine Award" for service awarded by the NAACP, one of only thirty-five people in the country to be honored with this award by the time of her death. She was also appointed by President Lyndon B. Johnson as a goodwill ambassador to East Germany to investigate alleged human rights violations following the construction of the Berlin Wall.¹⁸ She also worked to improve the lives of the newspaper carriers and her office workers. If she learned that someone did not have enough food at home, she would buy them bags of groceries to supply their larder.¹⁹ The newspaper carriers often received a special Christmas or Easter party in gratitude for their hard work, when they might receive the only gifts they were given all year.

At the time of her death in 1989, the *Omaha Star* had a staff of twenty, and a circulation of 30,685 in thirty-nine states. In 1969, Mildred Brown wrote, "Why then do Negro publishers persist? The answer is clear. If the Negro is deprived of his

¹⁴ *Omaha Star*, 31 July 1947, "An Expression of Gratitude."

¹⁵ *Omaha Star*, 9 November 1989, "Service Celebrates Life of Mildred Brown."

¹⁶ *Omaha Star*, 9 November 1989, "Mildred Brown Had a Key Role."

¹⁷ *Omaha Star*, 9 November 1989, "Funeral Notices."

¹⁸ *Omaha Star*, 9 November 1989.

¹⁹ Dr. Marguerita Washington, Oral history interview by Jill E. Dolberg, 7 August 2007, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, Nebraska.

