NPS Form 10-900
(Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

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 of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name NOKOMIS AND NAVARRE APARTMENT BUILDINGS

other names/site number

2. Location

street & number 420-426 NORTH TOPEKA AVENUE ☐ not for publication

city, town WICHITA ☐ vicinity

state KANSAS code KS county SEDGWICK code 173 zip code 67202

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
		Contributing	Noncontributing
[X] private	[X] building(s)	2	____ buildings
☐ public-local	☐ district	____	____ sites
☐ public-State	☐ site	____	____ structures
☐ public-Federal	☐ structure	____	____ objects
	☐ object	2	____ Total

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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. ☐ See continuation sheet.

Richard D. Pankratz 2/2/01

Signature of certifying official Date

KANSAS 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.

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. 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:) _____

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: MULTIPLE DWELLING

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: MULTIPLE DWELLING

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)

MODERN MOVEMENT

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation BRICK
walls BRICK
roof ASPHALT
other

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

☒ See continuation sheet

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☒ locally

Applicable National Register Criteria ☐ A ☐ B ☒ C ☐ D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) ☐ A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D ☐ E ☐ F ☐ G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)	Period of Significance	Significant Dates
ARCHITECTURE	1924-1925	1924, 1925

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

NEIL, CLAUDE ELMER - DEVELOPER

DENNY, JOHN MILTON - CONTRACTOR

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

☒ See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

[X] See continuation sheet

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 of additional data:

- [ ] State historic preservation office
- [ ] Other State agency
- [ ] Federal agency
- [ ] Local government
- [X] University
- [ ] Other

Specify repository: ABLAH LIBRARY, WICHITA STATE UNIVERSITY

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property LESS THAN ONE ACRE

UTM References

	Zone	Easting	Northing
A	14	646900	4172780
B			
C			
D			

[ ] See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

[X] See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

[X] See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

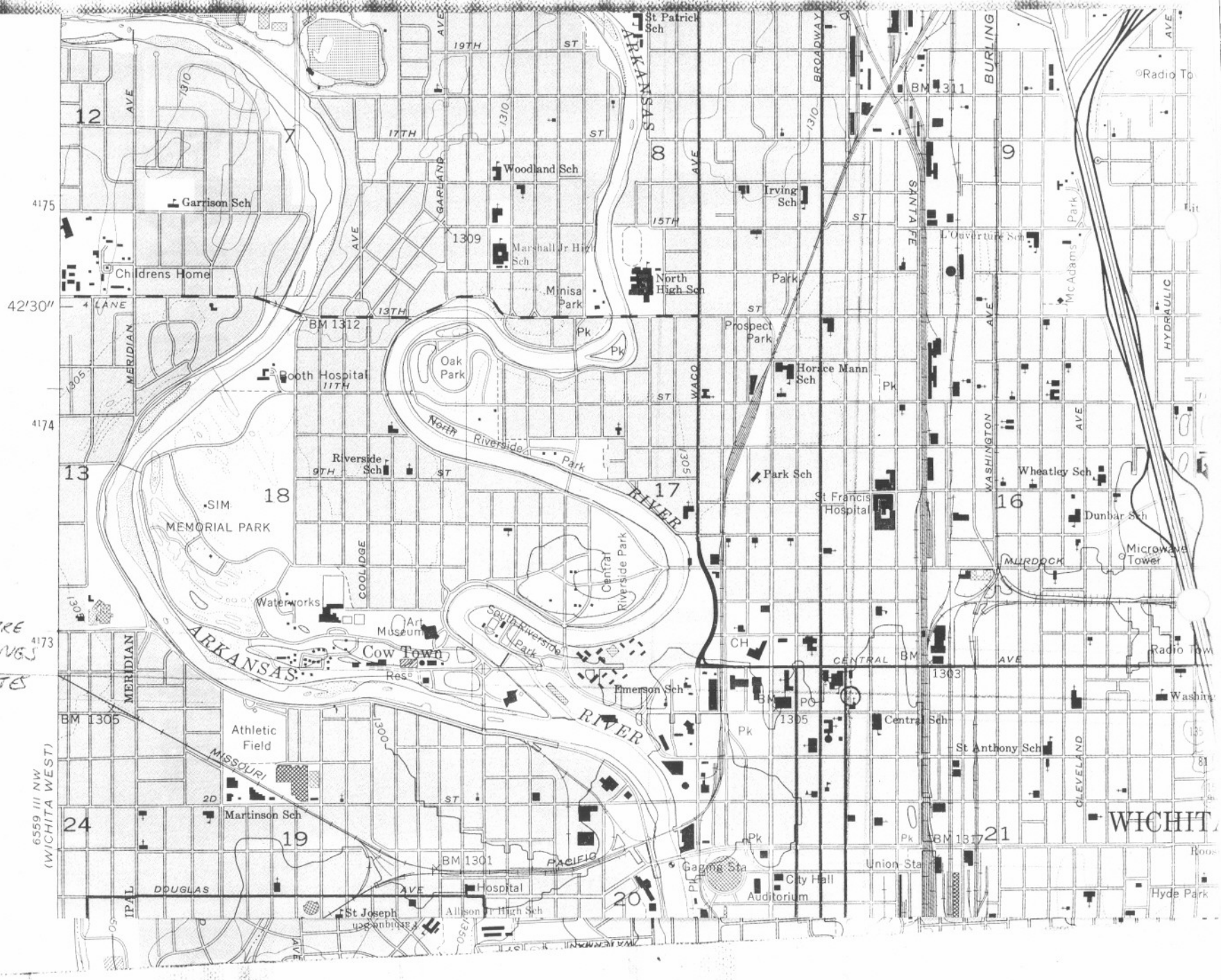
name/title SUSAN JEZAK FORD

organization CITYSEARCH date SEPTEMBER 19,2000

street & number 3628 HOLMES STREET telephone 816-531-2489

city or town KANSAS CITY state MO zip code 64109

★U.S.GPO:1988-0-223-918



Nokomis & Navarre
Apartment Buildings
UTM Coordinates
14 646900
4172780

Overview

The Nokomis and Navarre apartment buildings are sited on the flat plane of Wichita's downtown, just three blocks from the central business district. The area containing the two buildings consists of two and one half city lots, measuring approximately 125 feet by 144 feet. This parcel of ground contains the Nokomis and Navarre apartment buildings, built in 1924 and 1925, respectively. These three-story, rectangular structures with narrow main façades face Topeka Avenue, a moderately busy street.

The Nokomis and Navarre apartment buildings are nearly identical, surviving as a matched pair as originally intended. Their front porches meet the public sidewalk, pulled slightly forward of the main façades, mirroring each other in form and architectural detail. The buildings are constructed of buff brick and, although somewhat plain, are well-designed and utilitarian, retaining much of their original materials and appearance. The design of the buildings combines the Modernistic form with late Craftsman details. The Nokomis, located at 426 North Topeka Avenue and built in 1924, is just north of the Navarre, located at 420 North Topeka Avenue and built in 1925. Both buildings were built by the same real estate developer, Claude E. Neal, and contractor, John Denny. A courtyard, 30 feet wide, containing a swing set separates the two buildings. Between the front of the two buildings, a modern multiple mailbox and a modern wood privacy fence are placed. A damaged chain link fence is installed between the two buildings at the rear. Minimal landscaping exists within the district, consisting of a lawn and shrubbery planted near the porches and fences.

When constructed, the Nokomis and Navarre were located across a vacant city lot just north of St. John's Episcopal Church, on a block containing many apartment buildings and several rooming houses. Although St. John's remains relatively unchanged, many of the apartment houses are now gone, replaced by small office buildings. The district is surrounded by a modern office building on the south and a historic apartment building on the north. The alley to the east, or rear, of the district originally contained eight one-story garages; these have been demolished and the space now contains concrete pads for parking.

The Nokomis and Navarre each continue to serve the original purpose of housing 18 apartments in the original configurations. The public spaces of the buildings have undergone few changes, primarily in the form of modern light fixtures and carpeting. Original woodwork in the form of moldings, stairs and balustrades are still present. Individual apartments are entered on either side of central hallways that run west to east, the length of the buildings. Original secondary entrances to each apartment are still noticeable in the form of doorways, but these entrances have been sealed and are no longer used.

West Façades

The main façades of the Nokomis and Navarre face west. Each is three bays wide and three stories tall. The buildings contain one-story, full front porches, with very low pitched (nearly flat) roofs, each supported by four brick piers, two on the north and two on the south sides of the central doorway. The porches contains brackets under the roof eaves. Seven concrete steps lead to each central entrance. A section of the concrete floor of each front porch is inlaid

with terra cotta tiles that spell out "Nokomis" or "Navarre." The piers of each porch are ornamented with inlaid diamonds of limestone, one placed at the top of each pier. Smaller squares of limestone are placed at the four corners of each front porch wall, accented by soldier and sailor coursing that forms an ornamental square on each of these front walls. Further limestone accents on the porches include slabs placed atop the porch walls, smaller slabs atop small walls on either side of the steps, engaged capitals atop the piers and drains in the center of each porch wall. These limestone accents have been painted white.

The front door to each building consists of a single-width door with rectangular sidelights on either side. Although the configuration appears to be historic, the doors and possibly the glass in the sidelights appear to be modern replacements. Each entrance is topped by a brick lintel course accented by a central rectangular limestone keystone. The keystones have been painted.

The windows of the Nokomis and Navarre appear to be original with newer aluminum storms/screens placed over them. The windows on the north and south sides of the main façade on each level of the building are composed in a Chicago-style configuration, consisting of a central, double-hung window surrounded by two narrow, double-hung windows. The central windows of the main façades on the second and third stories consist of two double-hung windows placed side by side. Each set of windows on the main façades contains a limestone sill and is topped by a brick lintel course accented by a central rectangular limestone keystone, similar to the ornamentation of the entrances. The sills and keystones have been painted white.

Except for the ornamentation of the windows, the second and third stories of the main façades of the Nokomis and Navarre are fairly plain. A central stone plaque carved with the name "Nokomis" or "Navarre" is inlaid between the second and third stories. The third stories contain limestone sill courses that extend around the corners of the buildings to the north and south façades. String courses of copper trim projects above the windows of the third stories and each is topped by a flat parapet ornamented by three limestone diamonds and limestone cubes placed at regular intervals at the top of the parapet.

North and South Façades

The north and south sides of the Nokomis and Navarre Apartments are nearly identical in detailing, each consisting of three stories of eight single or double sets of double-hung windows on the north sides and nine single or double sets of double-hung windows on the south sides. Brick chimneys, located just behind the first set of windows closest to the main façades and extending above the rooflines, fill the space of the missing set of windows on the north sides of the buildings. All windows appear to be original, with the addition of modern aluminum storms/screens. On the north and south sides of each building, the first double set of windows on each story located closest to the main (west) façade contains limestone sills and is topped with brick lintel courses, each ornamented by a central limestone keystone. The remaining windows on these sides have no ornamentation and contain brick sills that slightly project beyond the main wall. The copper trim and the limestone sill courses present on the main façades of the buildings

continue to the first bays of the north and south sides. The decoration of the north and south walls of the front porches is consistent with the front of the porches, consisting of limestone diamonds, cubes and capitals on the porch columns, limestone porch ledges and limestone cubes in the walls of the porches, accented by soldier and sailor brick ornamentation. All limestone accents have been painted white. The brick walls on the north and south sides extend unbroken to parapets that make three small steps toward the rear of the buildings.

East Façade

The rear of each building is three bays wide, with three sets of two, double-hung windows located on the third and second stories. Two sets of two, double-hung windows are located on either side of each rear entry door on the first story. These doors are single, modern, steel doors. The windows appear to be original and are covered with modern storms/screens. The parapet walls of the north and south sides of each building can be seen from this view, but the rear façades contains no parapets. Downspouts are located on these façades and central fire escapes lead from the roofs to windows on the second and third stories and then to the ground. According to Sanborn fire insurance maps, the site originally contained eight one-story garages behind the Nokomis and the Navarre buildings. These garages have been removed and the concrete pad is now used for tenant parking.

Interiors

Except for the addition of modern light fixtures and carpeting, the interior public spaces of the Nokomis and Navarre retain much of their original appearance. The interior of each building is divided into three stories. First stories contain the main entrance to the buildings on the west, or front, sides. Each entrance contains a small tiled floor area, an original radiator near the left door sidelight and dark wood paneling along approximately 25 feet of the south wall. Craftsman-styled stairways with two square balusters per step are located on the north walls leading to the second story. Newel posts are simple and squared. Identical stairways are located along the north walls at the rear of the buildings, allowing access to the upper floors from the front or rear entrances. Rear exterior doors are located on east sides of the buildings. These are plain entrances with a new, metal doors. Stairways similar to those on the first stories are located on the second floors leading to the third stories. Carpeted east-west hallways extend from the fronts of the buildings to the rears on all three levels, with three apartment entrances located on either side of the hallways. Three original secondary entrances, now sealed but still visible, are also located on each side of the hallways. Original moldings, stairs and balustrades are still present on all levels, although door moldings are now painted in the white paint that covers the walls.

The Nokomis and Navarre apartment buildings appear very much as they did during the period of significance. Portions of the woodwork, especially on exterior window frames, are in need of repair, but the structures are currently well maintained. The subtle application of ornament and the matched solidity of this pair of handsome buildings make an excellent contribution to the Wichita streetscape.

Overview

The Nokomis and Navarre apartment buildings are eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C, architecture. The buildings are excellent extant examples of mid-priced housing that came to Wichita during one of the city's most important periods of growth. The design of the two apartment buildings, combining Modernistic form with late Craftsman detailing, is unique within the downtown area for buildings of this size. The fact that the Nokomis and Navarre are identical buildings contributes to their notability. Located at 420 and 426 North Topeka Avenue, respectively, in Wichita, Kansas, the Navarre and Nokomis stand today in the downtown area, relatively unchanged from their original appearance in 1925.

The main façades of the matched buildings face east toward Wichita's central business district. The buff brick buildings are excellent combinations of the Modernistic style combined with late-Craftsman details. The efficient forms of the rectangular buildings are accented by Chicago-style windows, brackets under the porch eaves and inlaid limestone ornamentation in the main façades. These limestone details are highlighted by carved plaques inscribed "Nokomis" or "Navarre," inlaid in the center of each façade. Full front porches serve a threefold purpose as buffer zones between the street and the interior dwelling spaces, shelter for the main entrances and a location for residents to congregate in the shade they provides. The overall effect is a compact, yet extremely attractive set of buildings that still contributes to Wichita's downtown streetscape.

History of District and Historical Context

Construction on the Nokomis apartment building began on October 6, 1924. Construction on the Navarre soon followed, begun in March, 1925. Claude E. Neil, a prolific Wichita developer, purchased the two sites from St. John's Episcopal Church, located south of the district at the corner of North Topeka Avenue and East Third Street. As planned, the Nokomis accommodated 18 families in its three-story brick building. Local newspapers reported that construction would cost approximately $65,000, resulting in the finest apartment building Neil had ever constructed in Wichita[1]. Construction on the Navarre apartment building, a virtual twin to the Nokomis, began in March, 1925 and was to cost $70,000[2].

The Nokomis and Navarre have traditionally provided living space for middle income workers. Early Nokomis tenants included several stenographers and teachers, but the apartment building also housed an attorney and workers associated with the livestock trade. A 1927 City Directory listing for the two buildings lists female tenants for nine of the 18 apartments in the Nokomis and occupations for the Navarre that included engineer, salesman, realtor and teacher. City directories from the 1930s through the 1950s list tenants in the district with middle-income occupations, such as salesman, stenographer, secretary, teachers and office worker, as well as employees associated with the grain and airline industries.

The construction of the Nokomis and Navarre occurred as Wichita became a truly modern city. Since the organization of the Wichita Town and Land Company in 1868, the area had gone through several cycles of prosperity

and decline. The most noticeable of these cycles were related to the cattle industry in the early 1870s, the expansion of the railroads in the 1880s and the development of the aviation industry from 1908 to 1910. After World War I, the aircraft industry continued to grow and, coupled with the nearby discovery of oil in the area after 1915[3], contributed significantly and permanently to the city's economy. This growth, primarily from the aircraft industry, caused the city's population to swell from 72,000 in 1920 to 111,000 in 1930[4]. This increase in population called for an increase in housing.

With the city's growth came professional planning and development. Wichita's first zoning ordinance was passed in 1922[5]. Significant construction took place downtown during the early 1920s, including the building of the First National Bank and the Miller Theater 1922, as well as the Shirkmere Apartments and the 100-rooom McClellan Hotel in 1923.[6] As this booming economy gave rise to impressive public buildings downtown and fashionable new suburbs east of downtown, there continued to be a need for centrally located, mid-priced housing. The Nokomis and as its twin counterpart, the Navarre, provided urban Wichita with these much-needed apartments. The apartment buildings were well built, owned by a reputable developer and each apartment provided an economic layout that included a living room, bedroom, kitchenette and bath[7]. Although Wichita had changed dramatically to accommodate the automobile[8], these buildings were well within walking distance of downtown offices and public transportation.

Developer Claude Neil and contractor John M. Denny teamed up in 1924 to build the Nokomis and its 1925 twin, the Navarre. Claude Neil earned a reputation as a prominent real estate agent and developer in Wichita and Topeka during the first half of the 20th century. He was born in Lincoln, Missouri in 1882 and he began building houses in Topeka in 1909. He moved to Wichita in 1918 and began working as a realtor[9]. Prior to the construction of the Nokomis, Neil built nine four-family apartment houses and approximately 50 single-family dwellings in Wichita's College Hill neighborhood. Neil named his newest building, located in downtown Wichita, after Nokomis, Illinois, his wife's home town[10]. Builder and contractor John Denny built numerous houses and public buildings in Wichita between 1907 and 1940, including the Coleman Lamp and Stove company buildings, an annex to Wichita hospital and the United Congregational church[11].

Style

The expertise of Claude Neil and John Denny came together to create these extremely handsome apartment buildings that provided the much-needed function of mid-priced housing in downtown Wichita. After completing a number of houses in the newly fashionable neighborhood of College Hill, Neil undoubtedly saw a need for affordable downtown housing and Denny, well versed in commercial buildings, was able to meet the need with the successful construction of the Nokomis. The identical Navarre apartment building, built to the south of the Nokomis less than one year later, attests to the success of the collaboration. Together, the two buildings form a cohesive unit of housing from this era. The Modernistic form is an effective one for holding the eighteen apartments in compact, yet appealing structures. The application of inlaid limestone accents to the buff brick creates a subtle texture on the main façades that is almost Southwestern in flavor. The buildings fits well within their combined three city lots, providing striking façades oriented to downtown Wichita.

The Modernistic style was very new to Wichita and the rest of the country in 1924. The style began as Art Deco around 1920 and typically featured smooth wall surfaces, a flat roof and decorative elements featuring geometric motifs. The style became well known in 1922, when a world-wide competition was held for a the new Chicago *Tribune* building. The design chosen was a Gothic design, but a young Finnish architect, Eliel Saarinen, received the second prize for his streamlined art deco design, which was widely publicized and quickly popularized the style. Although it was quite rare for individual houses before 1930, the Modernistic style was often used for apartment buildings[12]. The subdued application of Craftsman ornamentation and traditional full-front porches bring a sense of conservatism to the design of the two buildings, creating a style unique to this district.

The Area Today

In the mid-1920s, the neighborhood surrounding the Nokomis and Navarre contained a number of medium-sized apartment buildings. Many of these have been demolished, including the Clifford Apartments, located at 425 North Topeka. As these buildings disappear from the Wichita landscape, each example becomes more prized. No known apartment buildings in the immediate neighborhood today exist in the style or form of the Nokomis-Navarre Historic District. The fact that the both buildings are in very good condition and remain in their identical configuration contributes further to the district's significance and status.

The Nokomis and Navarre were donated to and have been owned by the non-profit HOPE, Inc. organization since December 1995. HOPE, Inc. strives to help the homeless and working poor by providing employment, education and housing. According to founder and CEO Ms. E. Jean Carter, in 1995 the property housed many individuals involved in substance abuse and criminal activity. Following acquisition of the building by HOPE, Inc., numerous tenants were evicted and a full-time maintenance staff was hired for the upkeep of the properties. The apartment buildings today are quiet, clean and well maintained. Restoration of the buildings to their original condition has now become a primary goal of the organization.

The Nokomis and Navarre apartment buildings are modest structures whose designs have withstood the test of time. The main façades—the most decorative façades on the building—have changed little from the years of the district's significance. The form and detailing combine to create a set of sturdy, appealing buildings in design and size. They still stand as originally intended, as useful, affordable apartment buildings. They remain as excellent representations of the housing that grew out of the city's most important period of growth, but also as a buildings that can continue to meet housing needs of the next century. The simple design of the two buildings remains unique to the area and a striking example of creatively designed housing.

1. "Build $65,000 Apartment on N. Topeka Ave.". *Wichita Beacon*, 24 October 1924.
2. "Duplicating Nokomis Apartments". Wichita Beacon, 14 March 1925.
3. Sachs, David H. and George Ehrlich. *Guide to Kansas Architecture*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1996.
4. Long, R.M. *Wichita Century; A Pictorial History of Wichita, KS 1870-1970*. Wichita, KS: The Wichita Historical Museum Association, Inc., 1969

[5] Sachs.
[6] Long.
[7] "Build $65,000 Apartment on N. Topeka Ave.". *Wichita Beacon*, 5 October 1924.
[8] *Historic Resource Survey Report for the Northwest Quadrant of The College Hill Neighborhood. Wichita, Kansas.*
[9] Baldwin, Robert M. *Who's Who in Wichita*. Wichita, KS: R.M. Baldwin Corp., 1929.
[10] "Neil Plans Apartment". *Wichita Eagle*, 5 October 1924.
[11] "John M. Denny, 72, Is Taken By Death Here On Saturday". *Wichita Eagle*, 30 June 1940.
[12] McAlester, Virginia and Lee. *A Field Guide to American Houses*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1995.

Bibliography

"Build $65,000 Apartment on N. Topeka Ave.". Wichita Beacon, 24 October 1924.
Sachs, David H. and George Ehrlich. Guide to Kansas Architecture. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1996.
Long, R.M. Wichita Century; A Pictorial History of Wichita, KS 1870-1970. Wichita, KS: The Wichita Historical Museum Association, Inc., 1969
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"John M. Denny, 72, Is Taken By Death Here On Saturday". Wichita Eagle, 30 June 1940.
McAlester, Virginia and Lee. A Field Guide to American Houses. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1995.

Verbal Boundary Description: The nominated property is located on lots 73, 75 and 77 of J. R. Mead's Addition in Wichita, Kansas. The apartments are bounded by Topeka Avenue on the west, an alley on the east and adjacent property lines on the north and south.

Boundary Justification: The nominated property includes all land and features historically associated with it, with the exception of the garages, which have been demolished.

Photographs

Items 1-5 apply to all enclosed photographs.

1. Nokomis and Navarre Apartment Buildings
2. Sedgwick County, Kansas
3. Susan Jezak Ford
4. Photographed March 27, 2000
5. Original negatives will be located at the Kansas State Historical Society.

6. West façade; camera pointed east toward building.
7. #1

6. Nokomis west façade; camera pointed east toward building.
7. #2

6. Navarre southwest corner; camera pointed northeast.
7. #3

6. Southeast corners of buildings; camera pointed northwest.
7. #4

6. Navarre east façade; camera pointed west.
7.#5

6. Nokomis east façade; camera pointed west.
7. #6

6. Navarre interior lobby; camera pointed east.
7. #7

6. Navarre interior lobby; camera pointed west.
7. #8

6. Navarre apartment kitchen.
7. #9

6. Navarre apartment interior.
7. #10

6. Navarre interior hallway; camera pointed east.
7. #11

Property Owner:

HOPE, Inc.
2137 N. Battin
Wichita, KS 67208