

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT



Best known for the Nebraska State Capitol landscape, Ernst H. Herminghaus was born in Lincoln, Nebraska, in 1890. He attended Lincoln High and then studied horticulture at the University of Nebraska. Continuing his education at the Harvard Graduate School of Design, he studied under Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. and in 1915 received a Landscape Architecture degree. Returning to Lincoln with a Beaux-Arts sensibility, he became Nebraska's first practicing landscape architect designing residential landscapes, including the Woodshire and Rathbone subdivisions. Herminghaus enhanced Lincoln's park system, designing Pioneers Park and Pinewood Bowl. Later he was on the faculty of the University of Nebraska Architecture College teaching landscape history and design. Herminghaus served in both World Wars, planning and designing military facilities. Throughout his life he was involved with landscape design across the United States and overseas. He traveled in his later years and died in Connecticut in 1965. ■

LANDMARK STATUS



In 1997, the National Park Service added Ernst H. Herminghaus' historic landscape to the Registered National Historic Landmark designation for the Nebraska State Capitol. Buildings remain functional for generations and gain historic importance. Landscapes change with the seasons and the growth cycles of the plant material. Few historic landscapes survive intact. The Park Service's inclusion of the grounds in the Landmark designation recognized the need to protect the historic landscape as it enhances Bertram Goodhue's monumental building and plays an important role in its history and interpretation. ■

CAPITOL ENVIRONS



Conceptually, Capitol architect Bertram G. Goodhue saw his building "in the heart of the city of Lincoln, at the intersection of two great avenues." In the future Goodhue envisioned harmonious structures set around the Capitol's "pleasant tree shaded space...and a main avenue of approach...widened and parked" leading to his building. Goodhue's architectural vision in 1920 became the founding concept behind the creation of Centennial Mall in 1967 and the creation of the Nebraska Capitol Environs District in 1987. The Capitol Environs Commission oversees architectural, landscape and urban design issues impacting the District and preserves vistas of the Capitol in the skyline. ■

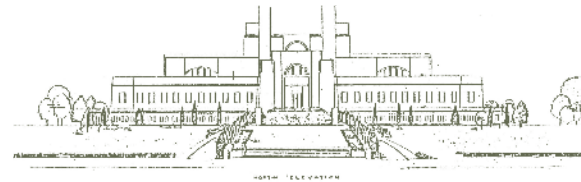


LANDSCAPE AND GROUNDS NEBRASKA STATE CAPITOL

HISTORY



Once the Nebraska State Capitol was completed in 1932, Nebraska's first landscape architect Ernst H. Herminghaus was commissioned to prepare and complete the landscape plan that would become the setting for architect Bertram G. Goodhue's jewel of a Capitol. Understanding Goodhue's landscape ideas and the visual requirements of the site, he used his knowledge of Nebraska's climate and plant material to create a landscape that contributes to the interpretation and appreciation of the building. Significantly, Herminghaus addressed Goodhue's concern that the Capitol not appear too large for its site by planting a border of oak trees around the Capitol on the opposite side of the street from the building, thereby visually enlarging the site. At the north and south entrances Herminghaus graduated the height of the fir trees flanking these entrances, with the tallest trees near the street and the shortest near the building. This arrangement creates a false perspective, and visually elongates these entrance approaches.



Original 1934 drawing by E. H. Herminghaus
North Elevation



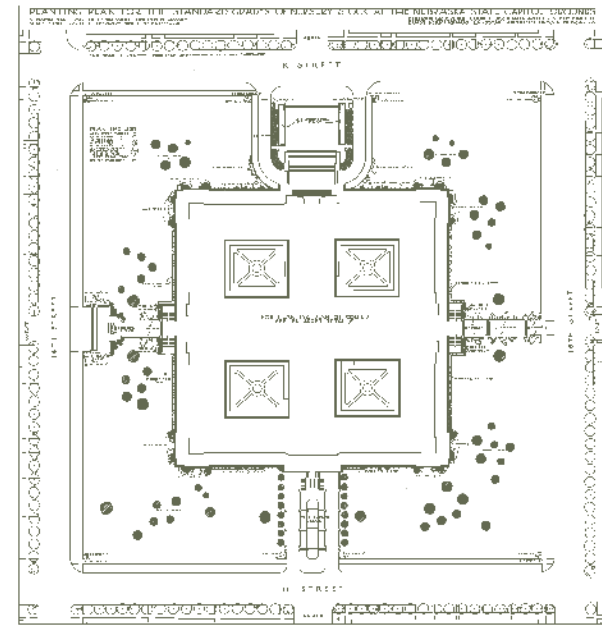
Original 1934 drawing by E. H. Herminghaus
South Elevation

Herminhaus planned to surround Goodhue's "Tower on the Plains" with a lawn mowed at a height of 6" to move in the wind like prairie grasses. The simplicity of the building's exterior ornament and uniform color required that the landscape not compete for the viewer's attention. Herminhaus chose evergreen trees and shrubs as foundation plants to provide constant year-round color at the building's base. He also varied the arrangement of trees on each side of the grounds, using a mix of deciduous species to provide summer shade and seasonal color and to frame views of the building. In the four interior courtyards, his colorful formal designs delighted staff and visitors in the Capitol. ■

MASTER PLAN



Following the Capitol's affiliation with the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum in 1984, landscape architect Richard Sutton, FASLA, was commissioned to create the first Capitol Grounds Restoration Master Plan. Sutton amended the Herminghaus plant list to include new disease-resistant and drought-tolerant cultivars of Herminghaus original plant species. In 2005, John Royster of Big Muddy Workshop updated the Landscape Master Plan to include the courtyards. This current Master Plan enables the State to properly restore and better maintain the original Herminghaus landscape design. Restoration work includes planting or replacing trees and shrubs on all sides of the building. Especially notable are the replanted fir trees flanking the North Entrance and the replanted fir trees and shrub beds at the South Entrance. Nebraska's school children helped with fundraising to restore the evergreen plantings around the 1912 Lincoln Monument on the west side of the Capitol. Individuals and groups have donated funds to restore trees to the grounds as memorials and to celebrate special events, including Arbor Day. Both Herminghaus' original plan and the new Master Plan address the life cycle of plant material and the need for proper maintenance, as well as for replacement when conditions or size demand. ■



Original 1934 drawing by E. H. Herminghaus

1934 Capitol Grounds Landscape Plan

