



# City of La Crosse, Wisconsin

City Hall  
400 La Crosse Street  
La Crosse, WI 54601

## Meeting Agenda

### Heritage Preservation Commission

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Thursday, February 26, 2026

6:00 PM

Grandad Room- City Hall 400 La Crosse St

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Members of the public may participate in the meeting in the following ways:  
View Virtually and Speak:

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://cityoflacrosse-org.zoom.us/j/84101189486?pwd=bFhXeHBwdWR3YkhOcmpzWWYrTjRvQT09>

Meeting ID: 841 0118 9486

Passcode: 810151

Phone Only

1 312 626 6799

Or you may attend in person at City Hall located at 400 La Crosse Street. Members of the public who would like to provide written comments on any agenda may do so by emailing [acklint@cityoflacrosse.org](mailto:acklint@cityoflacrosse.org), using a drop box outside of City Hall or mailing the Department of Planning and Development, 400 La Crosse Street, La Crosse WI 54601. Questions, call 608-789-7512.

#### Call to Order

#### Roll Call

#### Approval of Minutes

1. Approval of the January 29, 2026 Special Meeting Minutes.

#### Agenda Items:

2. [26-0063](#) Nomination of the Professional Arts Building- Mayo Campus (St Francis School of Nursing), located at 615 10th Street S, to be designated as a Local Historic Landmark.

**Attachments:** [Nomination](#)

[Notice of Hearing \(For Property Owner\)](#)

[Notice of Hearing \(For Publication\)](#)

[Certified Letter Documentation.pdf](#)

[Proof of Notice of Hearing 615 10th St. S.pdf](#)

*Public Hearing*

3.     [26-0222](#)     Nomination of Emerson Elementary School (Hillview Orthopedic School), located at 2001 Campbell Rd, to be designated as a Local Historic Landmark.  
          Attachments: [Nomination](#)
  
4.     [26-0223](#)     Review and comment on the National Register of Historic Places Nomination for former Fire Station #4 located at 906 Gillette Street.  
          Attachments: [WHS Memo to the Commission](#)  
                          [NRHP Nomination](#)  
                          [Nomination Photos](#)
  
5.     [26-0224](#)     Review and comment on the National Register of Historic Places Nomination for La Crosse's City Hall Building located at 400 La Crosse Street.  
          Attachments: [WHS Memo to the Commission](#)  
                          [NRHP Nomination](#)  
                          [Nomination Photos](#)
  
6.     [26-0225](#)     Review and comment on the National Register of Historic Places Nomination for the HSR Building located at 100 Milwaukee Street.  
          Attachments: [WHS Memo to the Commission](#)  
                          [NRHP Nomination](#)  
                          [Nomination Photos](#)
  
7.     [26-0226](#)     Review and comment on the National Register of Historic Places Nomination for the Congregation Sons of Abraham Building located at 1820 Main Street.  
          Attachments: [WHS Memo to the Commission](#)  
                          [NRHP Nomination](#)  
                          [Nomination Photos](#)
  
8.     Discussion on Historic Certificate Initiative

## Adjournment

*Notice is further given that members of other governmental bodies may be present at the above scheduled meeting to gather information about a subject over which they have decision-making responsibility.*

### NOTICE TO PERSONS WITH A DISABILITY

*Requests from persons with a disability who need assistance to participate in this meeting should call the City Clerk's office at (608) 789-7510 or send an email to [ADAcityclerk@cityoflacrosse.org](mailto:ADAcityclerk@cityoflacrosse.org), with as much advance notice as possible.*

Heritage Preservation Commission Members

CM Mackenzie Mindel, Laura Godden, Natalie Heneghan, Jim Gallagher, Ellie McLoone, John Reiman,  
Eric Garland



# City of La Crosse, Wisconsin

City Hall  
400 La Crosse Street  
La Crosse, WI 54601

## Text File

File Number: 26-0063

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**Agenda Date:** 2/26/2026

**Version:** 1

**Status:** Agenda Ready

**In Control:** Heritage Preservation Commission

**File Type:** Application

**Agenda Number:** 2.



CITY OF LA CROSSE
HERITAGE PRESERVATION COMMISSION

Historic Landmark Nomination Form

1. What is the historic name of the Landmark or Landmark District?

ST. FRANCIS SCHOOL OF NURSING

2. What is the current name of the Landmark or Landmark District?(If applicable)

PROFESSIONAL ARTS BUILDING

3. Property Address: 615 10TH STREET SOUTH

4. OWNERSHIP

- a. Owner(s): FRANCISCAN SKEMP MEDICAL CENTER INC.
b. Street: 700 WEST AVENUE SOUTH
c. City, State, Zip Code: LA CROSSE, WI 54601 Phone: (608)791-9888
d. Email: Parcel ID#: 17-30055-071

5. NOMINATED BY (If different):

- a. Name: PRESERVATION ALLIANCE OF LA CROSSE (PAL)
b. Street: 1353 CALEDONIA STREET
c. City, State, Zip Code: LA CROSSE, WI 54603 Phone: (608)784-1976
d. Email: preservationalliance@gmail.com

6. CLASSIFICATION AND USE (Check all that apply):

Proposed Designation (choose one)

- Landmark District
X Landmark

If it is a Landmark, choose a category (definitions can be found on the instructions page)

- X Historic Structure
Historic Site
Historic Object

Present Use

- Agriculture Industrial Religious Commercial
Military Scientific Educational Museum
Transportation Entertainment Park Government
Private Residence(s) X Other HEALTHCARE

**Condition:**

- |  |                                       |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Excellent       | <input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Good | <input type="checkbox"/> Ruins        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fair            | <input type="checkbox"/> Other        |

**Has the property been nominated previously?**  Yes  No

When? \_\_\_\_\_

What was the outcome? \_\_\_\_\_

**Is the proposed Landmark or District on the National Register?**  Yes  No

When? \_\_\_\_\_

**7. SIGNIFICANCE:**

**Section 20.90 of the *Municipal Code of Ordinances* lists 4 criteria that a district, site, structure or object may be designated under.**

**Please check one or more of the listed criteria that apply to this Property:**

Associated with events or person(s) who have made a significant contribution to the history, heritage, or culture of the City of La Crosse, the County of La Crosse, the State of Wisconsin, or the United States.

It embodies the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type or specimen, inherently valuable for a study of a period, style or method of construction or of indigenous material or craftsmanship.

It is representative of the notable work of a master builder, designer or architect whose individual work is significant in the development of the City of La Crosse, the County of La Crosse, the State of Wisconsin, or the United States.

It exemplifies or reflects the broad cultural, political, economic or social history of the nation, state, or community.

**8. HISTORIC OVERVIEW/ANALYSIS (See attached instructions for analysis outline):**

**Please attach the analysis as a separate document containing the following sections:**

**A. Existing Physical Description**

- a. Write a physical description of the nominated property or district in its current state.
- b. If it has been altered over time, indicate the date(s) and nature of the alterations.
- c. Include additional information as applicable.

**B. Narrative History**

- a. Provide a complete narrative history of the district, structure, site, or object.
- b. If known, include the year it was built, the architecture style, and the name of the architect or builder.
- c. Include references to source material that are listed in the bibliography.

**C. Additional Information**

- a. Include any additional information that helps support the claim of criteria (Section 7) made in this document; or is otherwise deemed useful for the purposes of evaluation.

**D. Bibliography**

- a. Include a list of all sources consulted.
- b. Include copies of relevant source materials with the nomination form.

**9. PHOTOGRAPHS:**

Include photos, as applicable, of the nominated district, structure, site, or object as follows:

**A. Current photographs**

- a. Exterior photographs are required.
- b. Interior photographs if available and relevant to its historic significance.

**B. Historic photographs**

- a. Interior and exterior if available.

Each photograph must be labeled with the street address of the building(s) and the month and year the photograph was taken.

Designation of property will require affixing a plaque to said property and that the plaque will be the sole property of the City of La Crosse. Signature of the property owner assures the Heritage Preservation Commission that designation and installation of a plaque are supported.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Property Owner

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

*Marcus J. Zetter - PRESIDENT, PRESERVATION*  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Nominator *ALLIANCE OF LACROSSE (PAL)*

*1-12-2026*  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

When completed, submit application to the City of La Crosse Planning Department, 400 La Crosse Street, La Crosse WI.

**PLEASE NOTE:** It is the responsibility of the nominator to provide the Heritage Preservation Commission and its Staff with information sufficient to fairly evaluate the nomination. **Incomplete nomination forms will not be accepted.** A fee, in the amount stated in the Schedule of Fees and Licenses table in Section 25.01 of the Municipal Code, must be included.

## A. Property Description:

By Marcus Zettler, Preservation Architect  
On behalf of the Preservation Alliance  
of La Crosse

### Property Overview:

Current Name: Professional Arts Building  
Historic Name: St. Francis School of Nursing  
Address: 613 10<sup>th</sup> Street South, La Crosse,  
Wisconsin

### Building Description:

The Professional Arts Building is a five-story structure with a basement constructed out of multi-wythe, reddish-brown brick bearing walls with limestone trimmings. The Wisconsin Historical Society lists the style as “Neo-Classical/ Beaux Arts” which references earlier styles of architecture that, in their own time, reference the architecture of ancient Rome and Greece. The structure is sited on the west half of the block bounded by Market Street to the south, Ferry Street to the north, 10<sup>th</sup> Street to the west and 11<sup>th</sup> Street to the east. The front of the building faces west (10th) and stretches the entire length of the block. The former gymnasium wing faces north along Ferry Street and occupies roughly half of the block. The former Bishop’s House (local historic landmark) is located at the northeast quadrant of the block and the St. Ann’s Building is being demolished while this nomination was being written is immediately to the east of the building. The building is set back a few feet from the property line on the west and has a steeply bermed lawn rising from the sidewalk to just below the first-floor level. Historic photos show that there was once a grand set of steps leading up to the main entrance, centered on

the facade. There were retaining walls flanking this exterior stair running along 10<sup>th</sup> Street.

The footprint of the building appears to be largely unchanged since it was completed in 1942. The massing of the building is shaped like an “L” with the main leg on 10<sup>th</sup> Street and the smaller leg to the north along Ferry Street. The north leg is a single-story that is double height to accommodate a gymnasium. The detailing is restrained, but well proportioned. There is a continuous band of limestone running around the building at the first-floor window sills, another at the second-floor window sills and a third band at the fifth-floor window heads. The parapet above this band has a smaller stone coping. The brickwork is very refined, being laid in a running bond pattern with a row of headers every sixth course. There are two rows of soldier courses on the building, one below the fifth-floor header band and a second one below the coping at the parapet. The building has a Greek Cross motif in the masonry and, at one time, in art glass above the front doors. Over time this symbol has become a universal sign of medical aid and compassion. There are only two significant changes to the exterior of the building. The first is the original steel double-hung windows have been replaced with modern aluminum units. The current windows are out of character with the structure. The second is a rear addition completed in the early 1970s which added a new elevator and rear entry. The roof for most of the building is flat and not visible from the public way. The only area that differs is the grand stair and elevator shaft that has a hipped roof. This roof is visible from 11<sup>th</sup> Street, but not from the front of the building.

The west façade fronts on 10th Street. The façade is almost symmetrical. The main entry

projects from the rest of the façade by a few feet acting like a large bay window. The main entry is a punched opening with a round-top arch centered in the projection. The door and transom above is a modern aluminum storefront system. There is a small vertical slit window flanking the door on each side. This is the most ornate part of the building, featuring limestone trim around the door and a pair of stylized pilasters framing the windows on each side of the door. Each of these windows has a carved limestone emblem centered above them with the inscription "AMOR VINCIT". This translates to "love conquers". An abstracted band of dentils steps from the outside pilaster rising to the underside of the second floor window sills. This framed the original sign that once read "ST FRANCIS SCHOOL OF NURSING". This sign was covered over by the current sign reading "Professional Arts Building". On the upper floors, there are three equally sized punched windows slightly recessed from the main face of the wall with two smaller windows flanking the center bay. The sides of the bay are clipped at 45 degrees and also have a small punched window opening. Originally, floors two through five all had this window configuration, but the third floor has a large louver where the middle three windows were and the smaller side windows have been replaced with louvers sized to fit the original window openings. The parapet for this part of the building is rather ornate when contrasted to the rest of the building. There is a large vertical limestone cartouche above each of the three center windows, the two spaces between these windows become pilasters and project up to the sky with limestone caps and there are three additional limestone bands giving a horizontal emphasis as the bay window projects from the

main mass of the building. The main part of the façade on each side of the center bay is nearly identical, there are five pairs of windows on each floor. The fifth floor has a stylized limestone capital between each pair of windows and there is a limestone diamond centered above the window pairs on the parapet. This middle section is book-ended by a projection on the north and the south. This projection features two bays of punched openings at each floor. These punched openings are larger, featuring a pair of windows instead of one window per opening. The parapet has similar detailing to the center bay, but only one cartouche is centered on these sections and the horizontal bands and pilasters are subordinate to the center bay. The only thing breaking the symmetry on this façade is the rectangular bay on the south end of the building. It is held back from the corner, but features two punched openings per floor and a simplified parapet.

The north façade of the building has the same materials as the west façade. There is a large five-story block on the west and a shorter one-story wing to the east. The five-story block has an entry point where it meets the one-story portion. This entry projects out from the main façade and has a rectangular opening with doors and a transom above. The limestone detailing at the top of this projection is modest. To the right are two louvers, possibly windows at some point, with three more punched window openings to the west. This façade has a random pattern for openings, but the upper three floors are all consistent with each other. There is a brick panel detail at the northwest corner of the building featuring a Greek Cross at the second floor and fifth floors. The second floor has two larger openings featuring a pair of

windows at the middle of the wall with four smaller punched openings to the left. There is a single punched opening centered on the door below. The upper floors have one larger punched opening with a pair of windows on the west with two smaller punched openings immediately to the left. This group of three windows has a simplified pilaster and cartouche detail centered above them on the parapet. There is another pair of punched openings to the left (east) of this group and a single punched opening aligning with the door and window opening below. The parapet is rather simple with two horizontal limestone bands at the corners. The one-story portion of the façade is two stories in height. It once housed a gymnasium. There are four large round-top arched openings in this façade equally spaced between brick and limestone pilasters. The façade terminates with a projecting bay that has a door near the west edge of the projection and a small, punched window centered in the mass, possibly to the basement and another opening immediately above it. The upper section of this façade has three punched openings, the center one is a window, the other two are louvers. This part of the building stops just a few feet off the wall of the Bishop's House (Sienna Hall) to the east.

The east façade is the back of the building and is the most utilitarian. The north wing of the building has a single bay of windows, centered on the façade. The main mass of the building is an 'L' shape of the first floor, but resembles an "E" shape above. The center bay on the front is mimicked with a projecting rectangular bay on the west. To the north, there is a row of punched windows on first and second floors. The façade then steps back at the upper floors. There is a single punched opening next to the

center bay, then three pairs of punched windows at each floor and a trio of punched windows as the façade meets the north projection. The center bay has had a modern addition added to it, circa 1971. The brick is similar to the main building, but has a more uniform blend. The detailing on this addition is modern. There are two punched openings in the middle of the façade on each floor, each having a pair of windows. Above and below these windows the brick appears to be laid in a header pattern instead of the running bond pattern common to the rest of the building. The parapet is capped by a minimal coping. The original penthouse with hipped roof is still visible beyond this opening. To the south of the center bay, the first and second floors are similar to the other side with a series of punched openings. Above the second floor, the façade recessed back similar to the north. There is a single punched opening next to the central bay on each floor with three pair of punched openings progressing to the south. The south wing appears to have no openings. This may be due to the fact that there was an existing orphanage immediately to the east of this part of the building.

The south façade of the building is quite small compared to the other facades. There is a rectangular projecting bay set back a few feet from the west façade. This bay has three punched window openings on each floor with a cartouche and pilaster motif similar to the west facade. This bay has more detail than many other parts of the building. The second through fourth floor windows are slightly recessed from the face of the main wall. There is an additional limestone band at the sill of the fifth-floor windows and there are horizontal limestone bands at the parapet and at the fifth-floor

window level. To the east of the bay are two punched windows at each floor. The eastern window on the second floor has been converted to a skywalk connecting to the St. Francis Hospital Building. This façade terminates with a projecting bay on the east side of the building. The first and second floors project farther than the upper floors. A single door opening without a transom opens to an exterior stair with a pair of punched windows above. The third and fourth floors have a pair of punched windows and the fifth floor has a taller pair of punched windows with round-top arches. The parapet has the familiar cartouche, pilasters and horizontal limestone bands.

The interior was not evaluated since the Heritage Preservation Commission would only be reviewing exterior changes to the building if the nomination is successful.

Overall, the historic integrity of the original building is excellent. The exterior masonry is in very good condition at most locations. The modern windows are unfortunate, but fill most of the original masonry openings. The addition, although done in a modern style, is respectful to the scale and proportions of the original building. The current owners appear to have done a good job keeping up with the exterior maintenance of the property. Very little has changed on the exterior of this building over the past eighty plus years.

## B. Historical Analysis:

### Building History:

To discuss the history of the building, we must first discuss the history of the nursing school at St. Francis Hospital. The entire history of St. Francis Hospital is well documented and need not be discussed in this nomination.

The nursing school officially started in 1902 out of necessity. In the prior year two lay women were accepted by the Sisters of St. Francis of Perpetual Adoration. (The hospital had been growing steadily since its founding in 1883.) By the turn of the century, it was clear that additional nurses were needed, more than what the ranks of the sisters could provide.<sup>1</sup> In 1922 Sienna Hall (Bishop's Residence) was purchased from the Catholic Church and used to house nursing students and the St. Ann's Maternity Hospital, (being demolished while this nomination is being written) was completed circa 1927.<sup>2</sup> The nursing program offered a three year diploma and the demand continued to increase until the School of Nursing was constructed. The construction of this building was apparently not the first choice for St. Francis. After a late 1930s audit and subsequent ultimatum from the Wisconsin Department of Nursing required "better facilities or closing the school", St. Francis began negotiating with Dr. William Henke at Grandview Hospital for a merger. The negotiations were near completion when Dr. Henke died on May 7, 1940. The negotiations fell through.<sup>3</sup> Plans for a new nursing school

building began shortly thereafter. The La Crosse Tribune stated that bids were received on April 17<sup>th</sup>, 1941 for a new nursing school building designed by renowned local architects Parkinson and Dockendorff. The structure would be five-stories tall, house 160 nursing students, provide classroom space, and cost approximately \$400,000.<sup>4</sup> Standard Construction Co. of Minneapolis was the general Contractor, Clark-Bracken, Inc. was the electrical contractor, and Al Braunec was the heating and plumbing contractor.<sup>5</sup> The newspaper article goes on to describe the building in much greater detail:

Plans for the building call for five stories and basement. The main building will be 261 by 61 feet, facing west on 10<sup>th</sup> Street, while an addition 100 feet in length, two stories high, extends eastward on Ferry Street. The main entrance will be on 10<sup>th</sup> Street with other entries on Market and Ferry Streets.

The first floor will be devoted to administration offices and classrooms and the Ferry Street addition will be used as a gymnasium. The second floor will house a large library, demonstration room, comfortable club, tea rooms and kitchenette.

The upper floors will each contain 51 rooms for dormitory purposes with a large living room where nurses may gather on each floor.

The basement will be equipped with a laundry for nurses and the balance will be

<sup>1</sup> Larkin, Virginia. "A Tradition of Caring." 1989. P12

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, P13

<sup>3</sup> Lang, Sister Regine. "A Century of Health Care Ministry." 1982. P33

<sup>4</sup> La Crosse Tribune. "Plan \$400,000 Nurses' School." 18 April 1941. P1

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. P1

devoted to trunk storage. An underground tunnel will connect the school with St. Francis hospital and the building will be heated from the central heating plant now serving the hospital and convent. The Trane heating system will be used throughout the building.

The exterior of the new school will be constructed of brick, corresponding with that of St Francis and St. Ann's hospitals and the building will be fire proof throughout. Two large balconies will face eastward overlooking tennis courts.

Doors and window frames will be of metal construction and the walls of the gymnasium will be of cream colored vitreous brick. With the exception of the gymnasium and girls' club rooms, which will have parquet flooring, the rest of the flooring in the building will consist of terrazzo [sic] floors with tile base. Ceilings in the gym and classrooms will have acoustical treatment.

One of the features of the school will be a call and sound system, operated from the central office whereby conversation may be carried on from all class rooms throughout the building.

The new school when completed will be one of the largest and best equipped of any nurses' institution in the country. It will have ample capacity for housing all student nurses as well as a large number of instructors.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> La Crosse Tribune. "Plan \$400,000 Nurses' School. 18 April 1941. P2

Originally, the hope was to complete the building by Christmas of the same year, but due to material shortages caused by World War II, the building was not completed until the spring of 1942.<sup>7</sup> The building was formally dedicated on May 1, 1942. "His Excellency, the Rt. Rev. A. J. McGavick of the La Crosse Diocese, and the Most Rev. William R. Griffin, auxiliary bishop, dedicated and blessed the new St. Francis school of nursing."<sup>8</sup>

The building was constructed with a clear logical layout. As mentioned above, the basement was primarily used for storage with laundry facilities. There were small windows wells dispersed around the perimeter. The first floor had a main entry centered in the building. The entry opened onto a lobby with a grand stair wrapping an elevator on the opposite side of the entry. A central, double-loaded corridor extends to the north and south from this lobby. The corridor had ample storage areas separating the classrooms and offices from the circulation space. The classrooms and offices had ample daylighting provided by many tall windows. The building had three primary stairs, the above-mentioned grand stair and an additional stairway at the end of the north and south wings. There was a multi-user restroom by the south stair across from the Supervisor's Office and the Solarium. The north end of the building had another restroom next to a locker room that separated the main building from the Gymnasium/Auditorium. One final item to note is that there was a "Candy and Ice Cream Room" in the nursing school.

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<sup>7</sup> La Crosse Tribune. "Dedication of St. Francis School of Nursing Planned During Spring." 31 December 1941.

<sup>8</sup> La Crosse Tribune. "Bishops Dedicate New St. Francis Nurses' Building." 2 May 1942. P2

The second floor was where the building began to transition from educational purposes to living quarters for the students. The corridor layout was roughly the same as first floor, but the area above the central lobby was used as a library. More social areas were on the south half of the building with a large Living Room having a fireplace, Tea Rooms, a Solarium, Kitchenette and various study spaces. The north half of the building had a large Demonstration Room and bedrooms wrapping around the northwest corner. A very interesting feature in this area is a double corridor, a public one leading to the stairs and a parallel private one opening into the bedrooms and group bathroom.

The third, fourth and fifth floors are all very similar. There was a small Living Room in the middle of the floor with a double loaded corridor of bedrooms to the north and south. There was a group bathroom at each end and a Solarium on the south end of the floor. The building stepped in one structure bay on the west side starting at the third floor. This gives the floor plan an 'E' shape. The three stairs were located in the legs of the 'E'.

The building continued to be used as a nursing school until the final class graduated in 1970.<sup>9</sup> In 1967 the associated Viterbo University started a four-year Baccalaureate nursing program that replaced the three-year diploma program at St. Francis. Nursing education had advanced over the years to the point where Viterbo was already providing some of the classes, particularly science, before the full transition occurred.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Lang, Sister Regine. "A Century of Health Care Ministry." 1982. P35

<sup>10</sup> Larkin, Virginia. "A Tradition of Caring." 1989. P16

Almost immediately, the building began its second era. According to the city directories, the name was changed to the St. Francis Education Building in 1971. A Tribune article notes that "The Lighthouse" a drug information and advice center was reopening in the building in September 1970.<sup>11</sup> Other offices were moved into the building at various times. A number of Tribune articles make note that there was a pain relief center, mental health center, and even a dentist occupying the building through the 1970s. Over time auxiliary offices for St. Francis were also moved into the building such as a chaplain's suite, data processing and accounting to name a few.<sup>12</sup> With all the different uses, the building was renamed the Assisi Center in 1975.<sup>13</sup> The city directories list is by its current name, the Professional Arts Building starting in 1980.

The skywalk, and rear addition with a new elevator and rear entry was designed by Carl Schubert and Associates along with renovating the building's interior circa 1971.<sup>14</sup> This was the most intensive modification to the building's exterior up to the present time.

The building has a tremendous history and there is an excellent collection of stories by former students who went on to have successful nursing careers. The building was expertly designed and constructed and has an exceptional amount of architectural integrity remaining.

<sup>11</sup> La Crosse Tribune. "Lighthouse Reopens Friday for Drug Aid." 24 September 1970. P27

<sup>12</sup> Lang, Sister Regine. "A Century of Health Care Ministry." 1982. P35

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. P36

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. P36

## C. Additional Information:

### Statement of Significance:

1. *The structure is associated with events or person(s) who have made a significant contribution to the history, heritage, or culture of the City of La Crosse, the County of La Crosse, the State of Wisconsin, or the United States.*

The St. Francis School of Nursing was an integral part of the St. Francis Hospital campus and had housed a program that had not only an impact on the City of La Crosse, but on the entire region. The school began in 1902 and was located in various buildings at St. Francis. In 1911 the school was accredited by the Wisconsin Committee on Nursing Education.<sup>15</sup> As was mentioned earlier, housing was provided for the nursing students when the Bishop's House was purchased in 1922. When the St. Ann's building was completed in 1927 most of the first floor was dedicated to instructional space for the nursing program.<sup>16</sup> With enrollment increasing, the fourth floor of St. Ann's Maternity Hospital was converted into student housing. In 1933 the nursing students began taking their science classes at Viterbo University.<sup>17</sup> The program grew to the point where a new nursing school building was warranted. Thus

the St. Francis School of Nursing was completed in 1942. There were three main reasons for the construction of the school. The main reason was the ultimatum from the State of Wisconsin to provide adequate facilities for a nursing school (mentioned above), the increased demand for nurses (this was especially true in the early 1940s as World War II raged in Europe and Asia, and the closing of the other schools of nursing in La Crosse. There were once four schools of nursing in La Crosse serving the four main hospitals, St. Francis Hospital, La Crosse Lutheran Hospital, La Crosse Hospital (Gundersen), and Grandview Hospital. Lutheran Hospital started their three-year diploma nursing program in 1901 and closed with the graduating class of 1933. La Crosse Hospital opened its nursing school in 1903 and closed in 1925. Grandview had a nursing program in place by 1919 and continued until the 1930s when economic pressure forced the school to close.<sup>18</sup> St. Francis School of Nursing became the largest of these schools and had the most longevity.

At the time the nursing school building was completed, nurses were in extremely high demand. Nursing students just a decade earlier were lucky if they found any job working in their profession. The Great Depression had reduced hospital staff, closed nursing schools and kept wages terribly low. With the outbreak of war, the

<sup>15</sup> St. Francis Hospital Quarterly Review. "Diploma Nursing Program Terminates." June 1970. P8

<sup>16</sup> The La Crosse Sunday Tribune. "Hospital Schools of Nursing." 30 April, 1967. P2

<sup>17</sup> St. Francis Hospital Quarterly Review. "Diploma Nursing Program Terminates." June 1970. P9

<sup>18</sup> The La Crosse Sunday Tribune. "Hospital Schools of Nursing." 30 April, 1967. P2

demand for healthcare, especially nurses and doctors, exploded. The United States started the U.S. Nurse Cadet Corps in 1943. This program, passed by Congress accelerated the education, paid for the nurses' schooling and provided a small monthly stipend. "The corps comprised the largest group of uniformed women to serve our country during the war and early post-war years." At the conclusion of the program in the late 1940s, the corps had graduated 124,065 nurses!<sup>19</sup>

After the war, the nursing school continued provide quality graduates both locally and regionally. In 1961 there were 63 in the graduating class. This was the largest class to graduate from the school.<sup>20</sup> In 1954 the St. Francis Nursing School gained accreditation from the National League of Nursing.<sup>21</sup> During the late 1950s and 1960s the educational model for nursing began to shift. From 1963-1967 over 100 nursing schools closed nationwide and almost 70 schools closed in 1968. Wisconsin had 18 schools remaining during this period with Wausau and Eau Claire closing in 1967.<sup>22</sup> The school continued while preparations were being made to make

the shift in educational standards. Viterbo University had been a contributing partner to the nursing school for decades. In 1967 they began a full four-year baccalaureate program. The St. Francis School of Nursing would continue until the first class at Viterbo would be ready to graduate in 1971.<sup>23</sup> Western Technical College also began a nursing program in the late 1960s. These two institutions of higher learning would replace the tradition of the nursing school for the La Crosse Region. The education now shifted to more "education" versus "training" as the article stated. Medicine was becoming highly specialized with more and more technology being implemented. The school has made a lasting impact on the region and much of the spirit of the program continues on in the Viterbo School of Nursing. At the conclusion of the school, it was recorded that there were a total of 1,990 graduates.<sup>24</sup>

2. *The structure is representative of the notable work of a master builder, designer or architect whose individual work is significant in the development of the City of La Crosse, the County of La Crosse, the State of Wisconsin or the United States.*

St. Francis School of Nursing was designed by La Crosse's largest and perhaps most successful architecture

<sup>19</sup> Rindfleisch, Terry. La Crosse Tribune. "Nursing corps played key role during WWII." 11 November 2009. PC2

<sup>20</sup> St. Francis Hospital Quarterly Review. "Diploma Nursing Program Terminates." June 1970. P9

<sup>21</sup> Hessel and Purcell. Franciscan Skemp Healthcare – A History. Franciscan Skemp Healthcare. La Crosse, WI. 2002. P56

<sup>22</sup> The La Crosse Sunday Tribune. "Hospital Schools of Nursing." 30 April, 1967. P2

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. P2

<sup>24</sup> St. Francis Hospital Quarterly Review. "Diploma Nursing Program Terminates." June 1970. P9

firm, Parkinson and Dockendorff. This building was designed at the height of the firm's prominence. Albert E. Parkinson began his career in Sparta in the mid-1890s. Little is known about his education or any apprenticeships. Many of his early designs are finely crafted homes in western Wisconsin. It appears that he formed a partnership with Bernard J. Dockendorff in La Crosse sometime between 1901 and 1905. As the firm grew and rose to prominence, it became known for cutting edge school and church design. They became experts on the subject matter of schools so much so, that they published a book with many of their school designs. The firm was also responsible for the design of the St. Ann's Maternity Hospital and the main St. Francis Hospital Building. It was only natural that they would be the architects of the St. Francis School of Nursing. By 1940, the firm was well established, but not yet winding down at the partners advanced in years. They brought all of their decades of knowledge about school and healthcare design to this project. The result was a building that was proclaimed as wildly successful.

The spacious double-loaded corridors, will daylit spaces, clear and efficient circulation paths and egress locations were all part of the genius of Parkinson and Dockendorff. The building is still in use today and although it may not meet every modern building code, many of the concepts, layouts and construction

methods would be appropriate in construction today.

The style of the building is very abstracted and has some classical influences, but the transition to modern architecture is evident in the building's detailing. The 1940s didn't have a distinctive architectural style since most of the nation's focus was on the war effort. However, the building is very stately in its appearance and utilized good quality building materials installed with a high level of craftsmanship.

Some of the other notable works of Parkinson and Dockendorff include Aquinas High School, Berlin High School (Berlin, WI), Blessed Sacrament School, City of Viroqua Hospital (Viroqua, WI), Grandview Hospital Nurses Home, Heise Clinic (Winona, MN), Holy Cross Hospital (Merrill, WI), Kaukauna High School (Kaukauna, WI) La Crosse County Tuberculosis Hospital, La Crosse State College Phy-Ed Building, Ladysmith High School (Ladysmith, WI), Logan High School, Marathon County Home and Hospital (Wausau, WI), Merrill High School (Merrill, WI), Milwaukee Junior High School (South Milwaukee, WI), New Albin High School (New Albin, IA), Oak Forest Sanitarium (Onalaska, WI), Oconomowoc High School (Oconomowoc, WI), Prairie du Chien High School (Prairie du Chien, WI), Rivoli Theater, Skemp Clinic, and hundreds of other projects not mentioned here.

The addition added in the 1970s is very minimal and does not impact any of the street facing facades. The architecture firm Carl Schubert, formerly Boyum, Schubert and Sorensen, was the premier firm in La Crosse by the post World War II period. Parkinson and Dockendorff both passed away in 1952 which effectively ended the firm. Schubert designed many institutional buildings in the region. Their firm carried the torch that Parkinson and Dockendorff had held for many decades prior. Although the addition was designed in a modernist style, the architect designed it in a way that was very respectful to the original structure in scale, massing and materials.

This building is a significant and highly intact historic structure contributing to the cultural heritage in the Coulee Region. The fact that the building is still owned and used by the original client more than 80 years after its completion is a testament to the superior design and quality of construction. Buildings constructed as substantially as the St. Francis School of Nursing can last hundreds of years if properly maintained. It is imperative that this building is preserved since over the past two years La Crosse has seen large scale destruction of its iconic healthcare architecture. The nursing school building at Gundersen Health (Otto Merman design) was razed as well as the St. Ann's building, and the St. Francis Hospital building is in the process of demolition. These are the

other two companion buildings to the nursing school that were all designed by Parkinson and Dockendorff. One final note, the St. Francis School of Nursing Building was listed as Potentially Eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places in the Architectural Intensive Survey authored by Joan Rausch in 1996.

## D. Bibliography:

### Works Cited:

Amor Vincent – Book 2. St Francis School of Nursing. 1943.

City Directories, La Crosse, Wisconsin. Wright Directory Company, Milwaukee, WI, various, La Crosse Public Library Archives.

“Diploma Nursing Program Terminates.” *St. Francis Hospital Quarterly Review*. June 1970.

Hessel, Susan T. and Purcell, Ruth E. Franciscan Skemp Healthcare – A History. Franciscan Skemp Healthcare, Publisher. La Crosse, WI. 2002.

Lang, Sister Regine. A Century of Health Care Ministry – A History of St. Francis Medical Center. St. Francis Medical Center, Publisher. La Crosse, WI. 1982.

Larkin, Marcotte. “A Tradition of Caring.” *Past, Present & Future* Vol. #4. July 1989.

*La Crosse Tribune*.

18 April 1941.

22 April 1941.

31 December 1941.

2 May 1942.

30 April 1967.

13 September 1970.

24 September 1970.

28 February 1972.

7 January 1973.

30 June 1973.

30 September 1976.

23 April 1978.

11 November 2009.

Parkinson and Dockendorff. Construction Documents for St. Francis School of Nursing, Project #785. 1 April 1941.

Parkinson and Dockendorff Archives. Private Collection.

Rausch, Joan. *City of La Crosse, Wisconsin, Intensive Survey Report, Architectural and Historical Survey Report*. City of La Crosse, Wisconsin, July 1996.

Sanborn-Ferris Fire Insurance Company. New York: Sanborn Fire Insurance Company. Fire Insurance Maps for La Crosse, Wisconsin. 1891 and 1906, located at the La Crosse Public Library Archives and Wisconsin Historical Society website.

Historic photographs, archived at University of Wisconsin - La Crosse, Murphy Library Special collections and La Crosse Public Library Archives.

### Web Sources:

La Crosse Property and GIS Data:

<https://experience.arcgis.com/>,

Web 01/11/26.

Wisconsin Historical Society.

“Architecture and History Inventory.”

Property Record for 615 10<sup>th</sup> Street S.

AHI #33046. web, 2026.

### E. Aerial Photo:

615 10<sup>th</sup> Street S.

La Crosse, WI

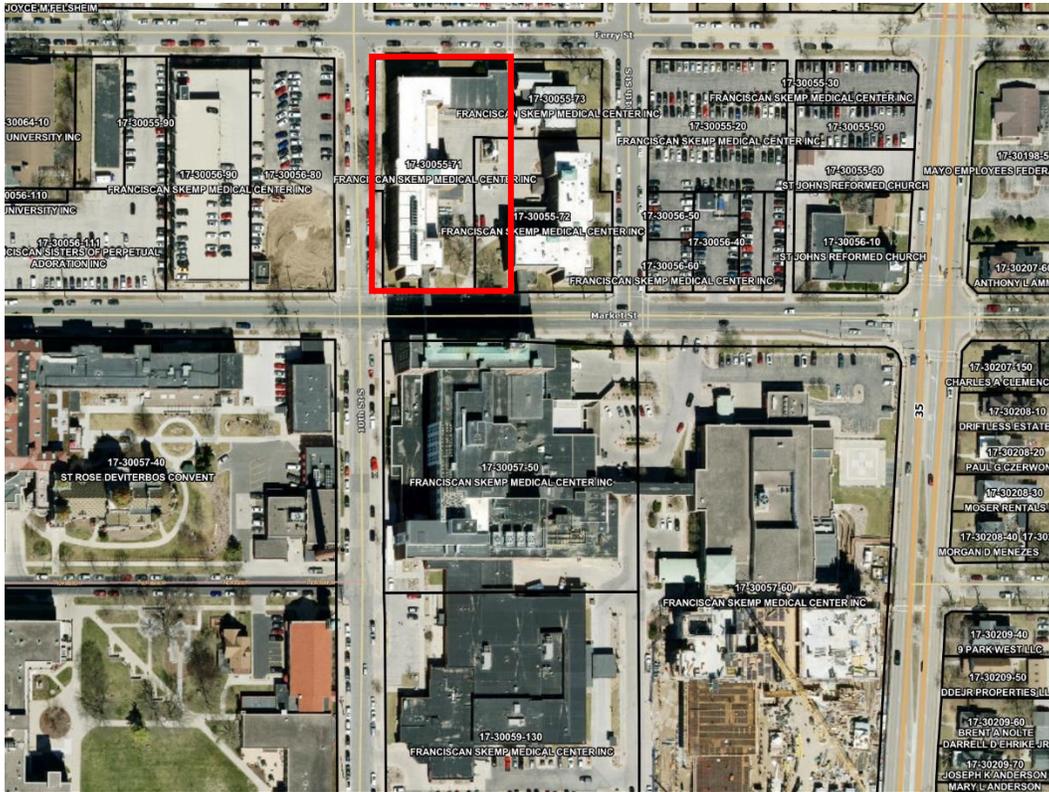


Figure 1 – 2024 aerial image of the site, County of La Crosse, WI.

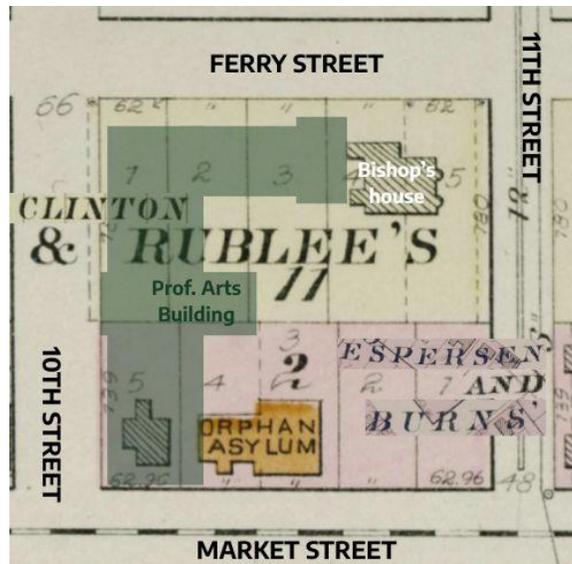


Figure 2 – Overlay of building on 1898 City Atlas. Courtesy of La Crosse Public Library Archives.

## F. Historic Building Photos

### & Drawings:

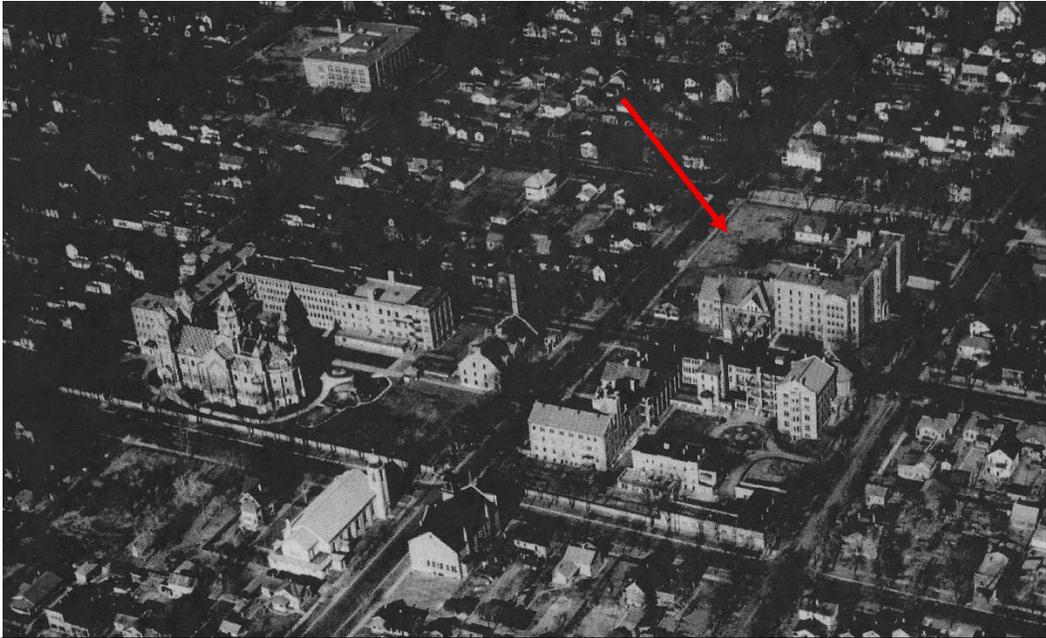


Figure 3 – Aerial view looking northwest at the St. Francis Hospital. Ca. 1931. (No nursing school building) Courtesy of La Crosse Public Library Archives.

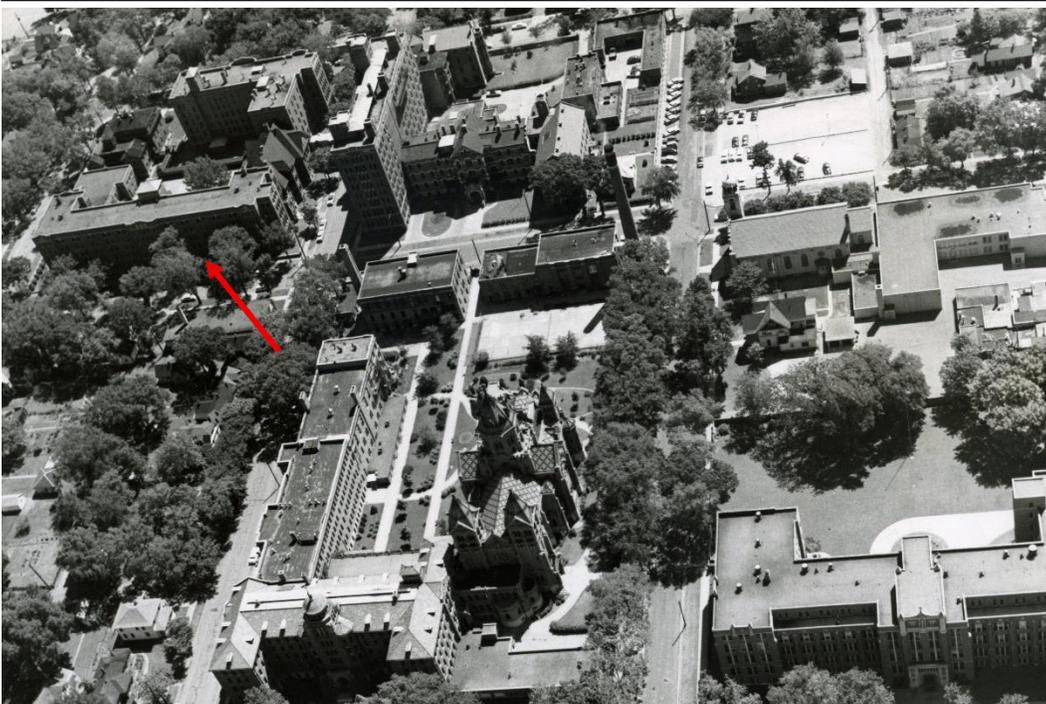


Figure 4 – Aerial view looking east at St. Francis Campus Ca. 1958. (Notice orphanage still extant) Courtesy of UW – La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections.

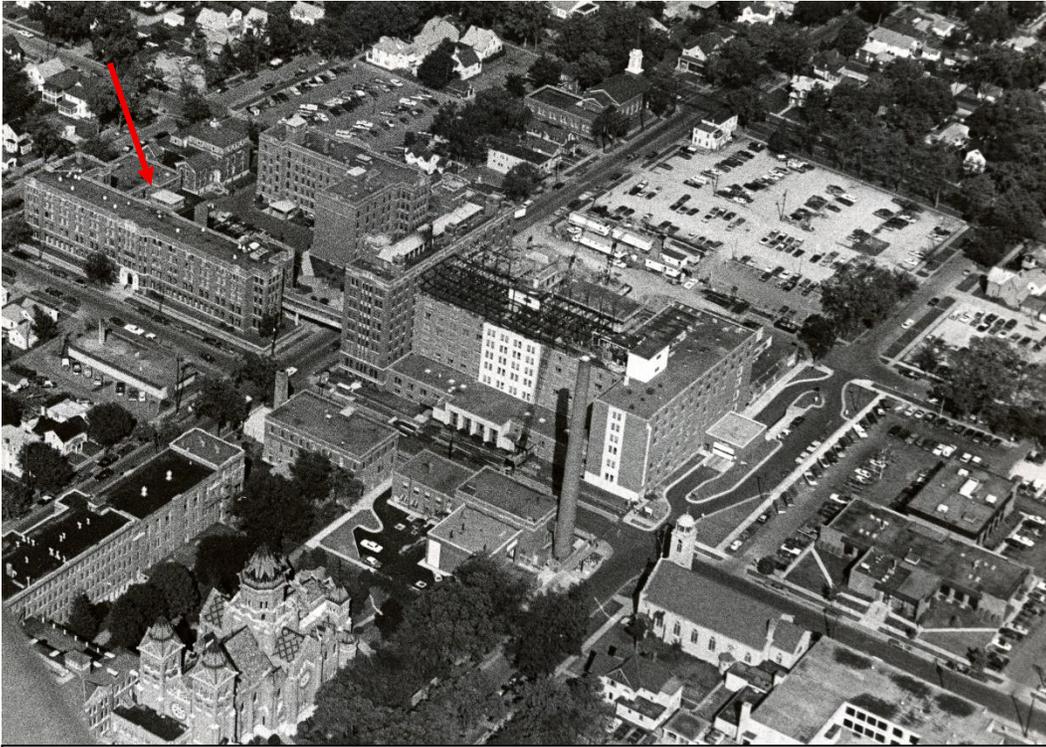


Figure 5 – Aerial view looking northeast at St. Francis Campus Ca. 1978. (Notice orphanage removed) Courtesy of University of Wisconsin – La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections.

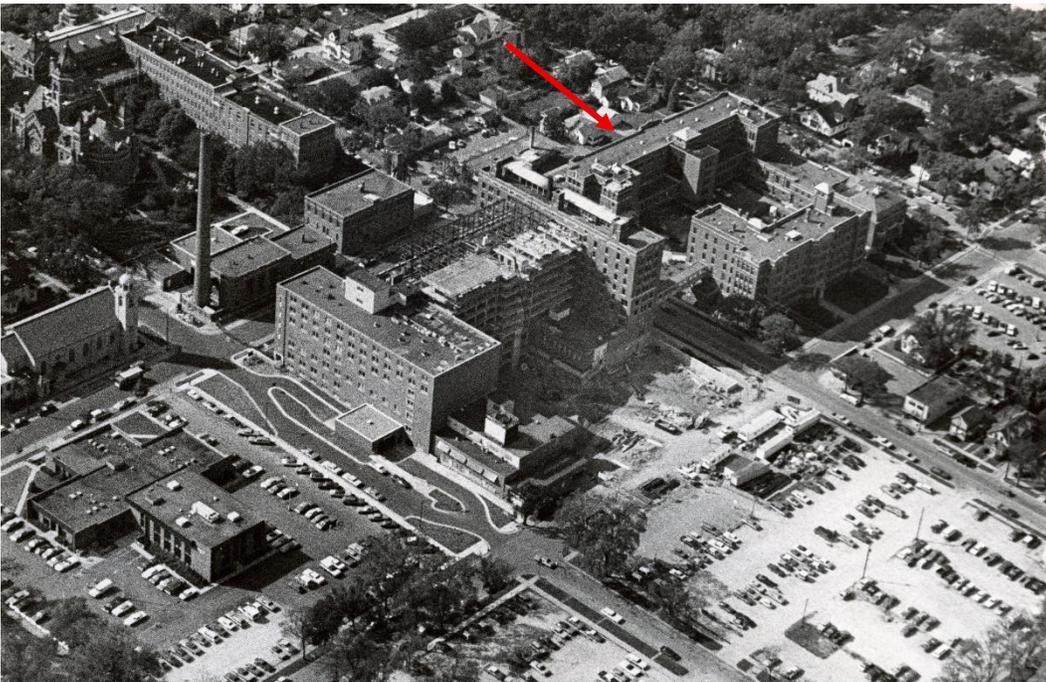


Figure 6 – Aerial view looking northwest at St. Francis Campus Ca. 1978. Courtesy of University of Wisconsin – La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections.



Figure 7 – View from 10<sup>th</sup> and Market Streets looking northeast at St. Francis School of Nursing Ca. 1943. Courtesy of La Crosse Public Library Archives.



Figure 8 – Class photo at front door of Nursing School Ca. 1948. Courtesy of La Crosse Public Library Archives.



Figure 9 – Original construction documents. “Front Elevation” Sheet 1. 1 April 1941.

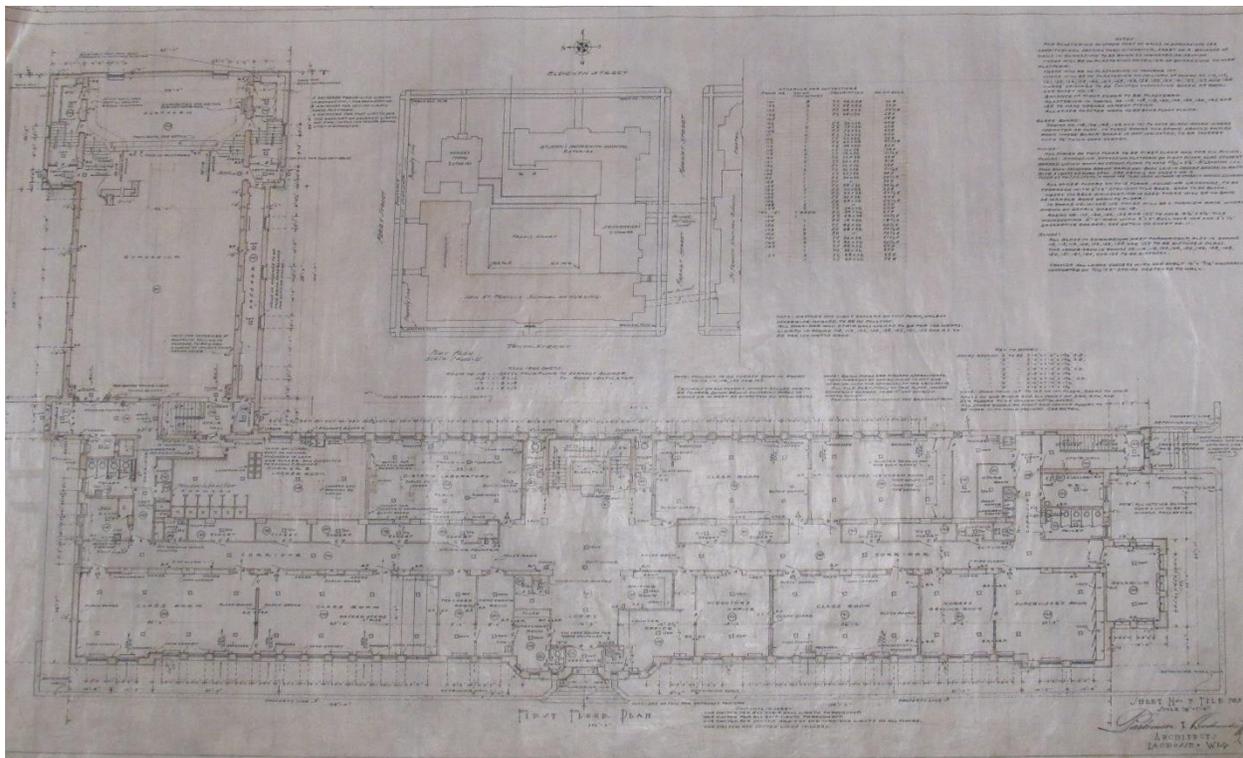


Figure 10 – Original construction documents. “First Floor Plan” & “Plot Plan” Sheet 7. 1 April 1941.

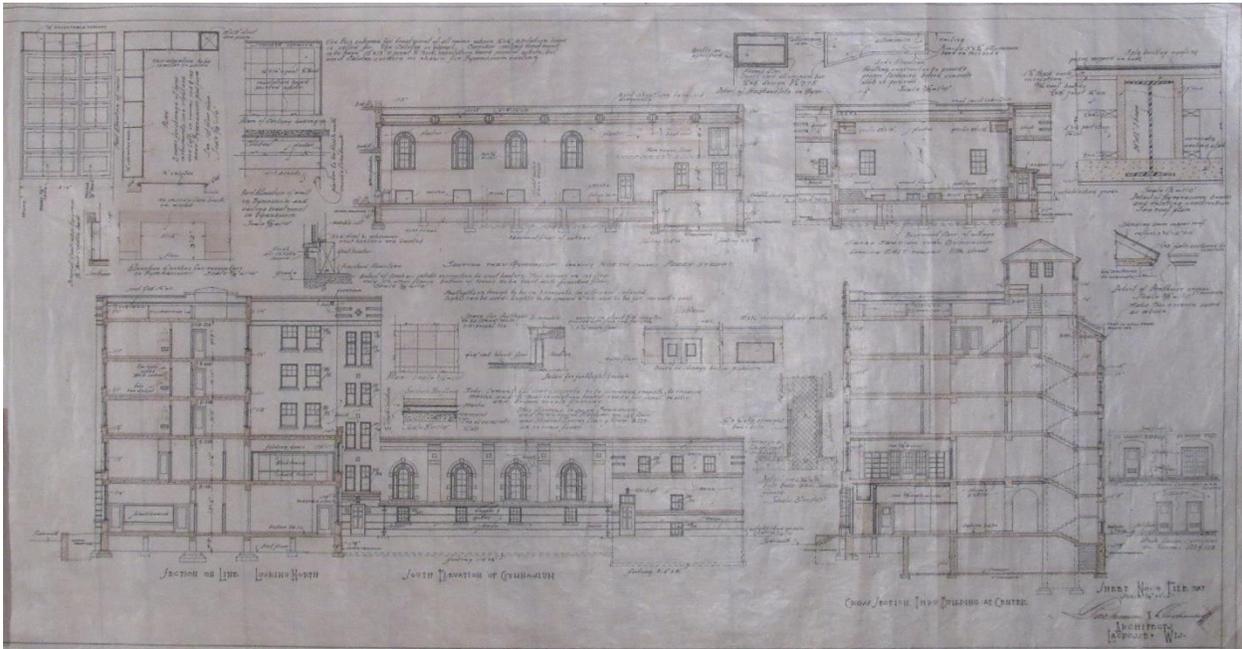


Figure 11 – Original construction documents. “Building Sections” Sheet 4. 1 April 1941.

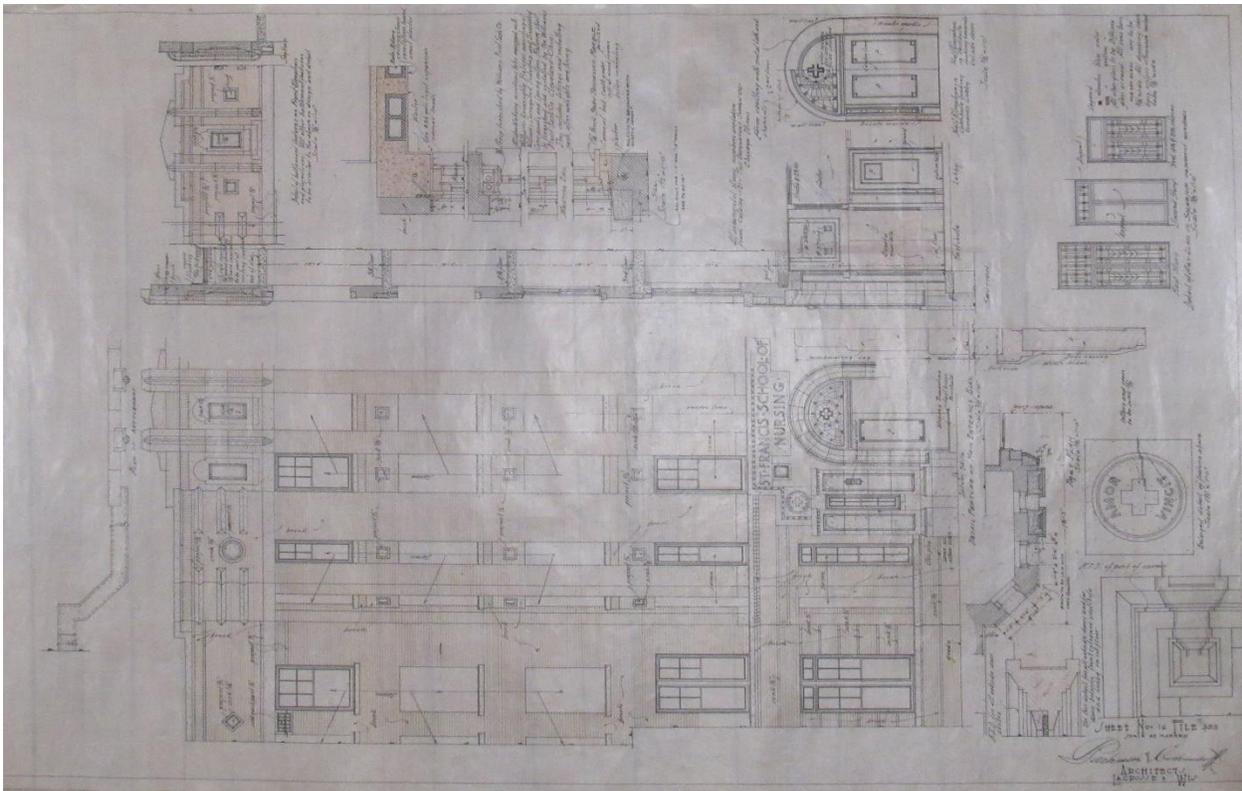


Figure 12 – Original construction documents. “Facade Details” Sheet 16. 1 April 1941.

## G. Current Building Photos:

by Marc Zettler



Figure 13 – View of west (front) façade of School of Nursing. October 2025.



Figure 14 – Detailed view of west (front) façade of School of Nursing. October 2025.



Figure 15 – Detailed view of the carved limestone at School of Nursing Entry. October 2025.

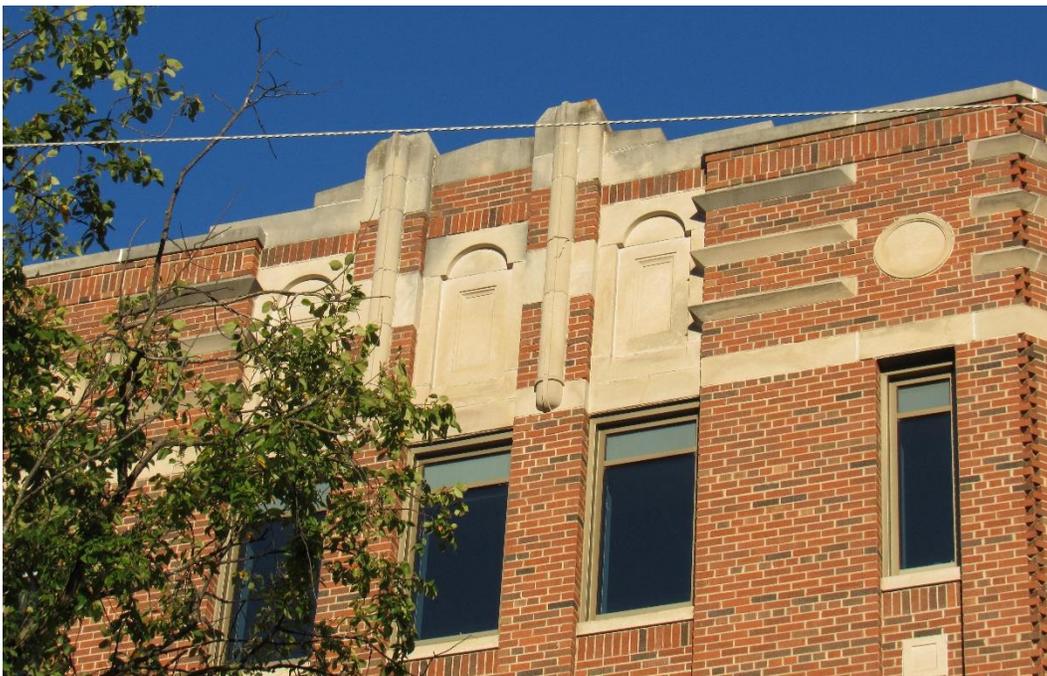


Figure 16 – Detailed view of the parapet detail above the main entry at the School of Nursing. October 2025.



Figure 17 – View of the south façade at the School of Nursing. October 2025.



Figure 18 – View of the west façade at the School of Nursing. During the St. Ann’s demolition. November 2025.



Figure 19 – View of the courtyard east of the School of Nursing. October 2025.



Figure 20 – View of the north façade of the School of Nursing. October 2025.

**NOTICE OF HEARING ON DESIGNATION OF HISTORIC STRUCTURE OR SITE**

TO: **Mayo Clinic Health System (FSMC)**  
**C/O Gordie Howie**  
**700 West Ave**  
**La Crosse, WI 54601**

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the Heritage Preservation Commission of the City of La Crosse will hold a public hearing to consider the proposed designation of your property located at **615 10<sup>th</sup> Street S, La Crosse, WI, 54601**, as a historic structure or site. Such public hearing will be held at **6:00PM** on **Thursday, February 26, 2026**, in the **Grandad Room** in City Hall, 400 La Crosse Street, La Crosse, Wisconsin.

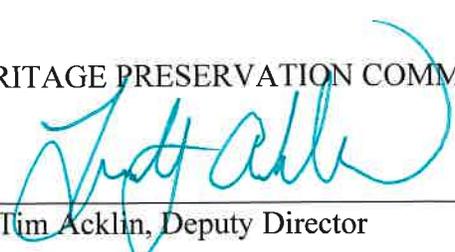
**YOU ARE FURTHER NOTIFIED** that any person interested may be heard for or against such proposed designation, and may appear in person, by agent or attorney or may file a written objection or written letter of support in the Office of the City Clerk, City Hall, La Crosse, Wisconsin 54601. In addition, no permit to demolish all or part of the structure will be issued while the nomination is pending review by the Heritage Preservation Commission. A nomination is considered pending once a completed nomination has been submitted to the Planning and Development Department.

Such proposed designation would mean that you could be precluded from demolishing all or part of the exterior of a historic structure, historic site, or structure or contributing building in a historic district without first receiving a Certificate of Appropriateness for Demolition from the Heritage Preservation Commission.

This notice is given pursuant to Section 20.54 of the City of La Crosse Code of Ordinances.

Dated this 30<sup>th</sup> day of January 2026.

HERITAGE PRESERVATION COMMISSION

By: 

\_\_\_\_\_  
Tim Acklin, Deputy Director

cc: Mayor  
Redevelopment Authority  
Park & Recreation Department  
Fire Prevention and Building Safety Department  
Planning Department  
City Clerk  
Common Council.

**NOTICE OF HEARING**  
**BEFORE THE HERITAGE PRESERVATION COMMISSION**

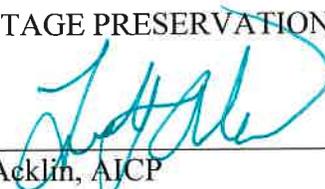
NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the Historic Preservation Commission of the City of La Crosse will consider designation of the following property:

<u>NAME OF PROPERTY</u>	<u>LOCATION</u>
<b>PROFESSIONAL ARTS BUILDING (ST FRANCIS SCHOOL OF NURSING)</b>	<b>615 10<sup>th</sup> STREET S</b>

Such hearing will be held in the **Grandad Room**, of City Hall located at 400 La Crosse St on **Thursday, February 26, 2026**, at **6:00pm**. and will be open to the public. All persons affected by such designation may appear and testify for or against such application pursuant to City Ordinance 20.54.

Dated this January 30, 2026

HERITAGE PRESERVATION COMMISSION

By:   
\_\_\_\_\_  
Tim Acklin, AICP  
Deputy Director

This meeting may be recessed into Closed Session pursuant to Wisconsin State Statutes Section 19.85(1)(a) to deliberate its decision.

Publish: (Tuesday, February 3, 2026),  
(1) Affidavit please

SENDER: COMPLETE THIS SECTION	COMPLETE THIS SECTION ON DELIVERY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Complete items 1, 2, and 3.</li> <li>■ Print your name and address on the reverse so that we can return the card to you.</li> <li>■ Attach this card to the back of the mailpiece, or on the front if space permits.</li> </ul>	<p>A. Signature  <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <i>J. M. Wissing</i> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agent  <input type="checkbox"/> Addressee</p>
<p>1. Article Addressed to:</p> <p><i>Mayo Clinic Health System  c/o Gordie Howie  700 West Ave  La Crosse, WI 54601</i></p>	<p>B. Received by (Printed Name)  <i>John M. Wissing</i></p> <p>C. Date of Delivery  <i>2-9-2020</i></p> <p>D. Is delivery address different from item 1? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes  If YES, enter delivery address below: <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>
 9590 9402 8728 3310 5307 41	<p>3. Service Type</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Adult Signature <input type="checkbox"/> Priority Mail Express® <input type="checkbox"/> Adult Signature Restricted Delivery <input type="checkbox"/> Registered Mail™ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Certified Mail® <input type="checkbox"/> Registered Mail Restricted Delivery <input type="checkbox"/> Certified Mail Restricted Delivery <input type="checkbox"/> Signature Confirmation™ <input type="checkbox"/> Collect on Delivery <input type="checkbox"/> Signature Confirmation Restricted Delivery <input type="checkbox"/> Collect on Delivery Restricted Delivery <input type="checkbox"/> Insured Mail <input type="checkbox"/> Insured Mail Restricted Delivery (over \$500)
<p>2. Article Number (Transfer from service label)</p> <p><i>589 0710 5270 1994 4862 59</i></p>	
<p>PS Form 3811, July 2020 PSN 7530-02-000-9053 <span style="float: right;">Domestic Return Receipt</span></p>	

9589 0710 5270 1994 4862 59

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<p>Postage \$ _____</p> <p><b>Total Postage and Fees</b> \$ _____</p>	
<p>Sent To  <i>Mayo Clinic Health System c/o Gordie Howie</i>  Street and Apt. No., or PO Box No.  <i>700 West Ave</i>  City, State, ZIP+4®  <i>La Crosse, WI 54601</i></p>	

PS Form 3800, January 2023 PSN 7530-02-000-9047 See Reverse for Instructions

**AFFIDAVIT OF PUBLICATION**

**Lacrosse Tribune**  
1407 St. Andrew St., La Crosse, WI 54603  
(866) 735-5631

Retain this portion for your records. Please do not remit payment until you receive your advertising invoice.

State of Florida, County of Orange, ss:

Anjana Bhadoriya, being first duly sworn, deposes and says: That (s)he is a duly authorized signatory of Column Software, PBC and duly authorized agent of Lee Enterprises, publishers of Lacrosse Tribune, a newspaper at, La Crosse, for county of La Crosse, in the state of Wisconsin, and that an advertisement of which the annexed is a true copy, taken from said paper, was published, therein on the dates listed below.

**PUBLICATION DATES:**

February. 5 2026

**NOTICE ID:** 9eqZAWJDsAxGtS8qmHSY

**PUBLISHER ID:** COL-WI-101979

**NOTICE NAME:** Notice of Public Hearing- 615 10th St HPC

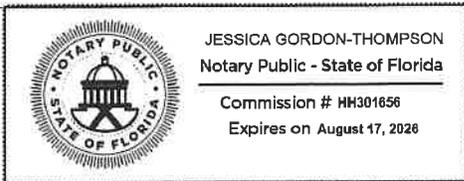
**Publication Fee:** \$44.85

Section: Legals

Category: 0001 Wisconsin Legals

*Anjana Bhadoriya*

(Signed)



**VERIFICATION**

State of Florida  
County of Orange

Subscribed in my presence and sworn to before me on this: **02/06/2026**

*J. Thompson*

Notary Public  
Notarized remotely online using communication technology via Proof.

**Notice of Public Hearing on  
Historic Designation for 615  
10th St S**

**NOTICE OF HEARING  
BEFORE THE HERITAGE  
PRESERVATION COMMISSION**

**NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN** that the Historic Preservation Commission of the City of La Crosse will consider designation of the following property:

**PROFESSIONAL ARTS BUILD-  
ING (ST FRANCIS SCHOOL OF  
NURSING) 615 10 th STREET  
S** Such hearing will be held in the **Grandad Room**, of City Hall located at 400 La Crosse St on **Thursday, February 26, 2026** at **6:00pm** and will be open to the public. All persons affected by such designation may appear and testify for or against such application pursuant to City Ordinance 20.54.

Dated this January 30, 2026

Tim Acklin  
Deputy Director

This meeting may be recessed into Closed Session pursuant to Wisconsin State Statutes Section 19.85(1)(a) to deliberate its decision.

2/5 LAG  
COL-WI-101979 WNAXLP

COLUMN SOFTWARE PBC  
9450 SW GEMINI DR PMB 79042  
BEAVERTON OR 97008-7105

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13201 1 MB 0.672  
TIM ACKLIN  
400 La Crosse St  
La Crosse, WI 54601-3374



000014194200065601





# City of La Crosse, Wisconsin

City Hall  
400 La Crosse Street  
La Crosse, WI 54601

## Text File

File Number: 26-0222

---

**Agenda Date:**

**Version:** 1

**Status:** Agenda Ready

**In Control:** Heritage Preservation Commission

**File Type:** Application

**Agenda Number:** 3.



CITY OF LA CROSSE
HERITAGE PRESERVATION COMMISSION

Historic Landmark Nomination Form

1. What is the historic name of the Landmark or Landmark District?

HILLVIEW ORTHOPEDIC SCHOOL

2. What is the current name of the Landmark or Landmark District?(If applicable)

EMERSON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

3. Property Address: 2101 CAMPBELL ROAD

4. OWNERSHIP

- a. Owner(s): SCHOOL DISTRICT OF LA CROSSE
b. Street: 807 EAST AVENUE S.
c. City, State, Zip Code: LA CROSSE, WI 54601 Phone: (608)789-7990
d. Email: Parcel ID#: 17-20261-012

5. NOMINATED BY (If different):

- a. Name: PRESERVATION ALLIANCE OF LA CROSSE (PAL)
b. Street: 1353 CALEDONIA STREET
c. City, State, Zip Code: LA CROSSE, WI 54603 Phone: (608)784-1976
d. Email: preservationalliance@gmail.com

6. CLASSIFICATION AND USE (Check all that apply):

Proposed Designation (choose one)

- Landmark District
X Landmark

If it is a Landmark, choose a category (definitions can be found on the instructions page)

- X Historic Structure
Historic Site
Historic Object

Present Use

- Agriculture Industrial Religious Commercial
Military Scientific X Educational Museum
Transportation Entertainment Park Government
Private Residence(s) Other

**Condition:**

- |  |                                       |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Excellent       | <input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Good | <input type="checkbox"/> Ruins        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fair            | <input type="checkbox"/> Other        |

**Has the property been nominated previously?**  Yes  No

When? \_\_\_\_\_

What was the outcome? \_\_\_\_\_

**Is the proposed Landmark or District on the National Register?**  Yes  No

When? \_\_\_\_\_

**7. SIGNIFICANCE:**

**Section 20.90 of the *Municipal Code of Ordinances* lists 4 criteria that a district, site, structure or object may be designated under.**

**Please check one or more of the listed criteria that apply to this Property:**

- Associated with events or person(s) who have made a significant contribution to the history, heritage, or culture of the City of La Crosse, the County of La Crosse, the State of Wisconsin, or the United States.
- It embodies the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type or specimen, inherently valuable for a study of a period, style or method of construction or of indigenous material or craftsmanship.
- It is representative of the notable work of a master builder, designer or architect whose individual work is significant in the development of the City of La Crosse, the County of La Crosse, the State of Wisconsin, or the United States.
- It exemplifies or reflects the broad cultural, political, economic or social history of the nation, state, or community.

**8. HISTORIC OVERVIEW/ANALYSIS (See attached instructions for analysis outline):**

**Please attach the analysis as a separate document containing the following sections:**

**A. Existing Physical Description**

- a. Write a physical description of the nominated property or district in its current state.
- b. If it has been altered over time, indicate the date(s) and nature of the alterations.
- c. Include additional information as applicable.

**B. Narrative History**

- a. Provide a complete narrative history of the district, structure, site, or object.
- b. If known, include the year it was built, the architecture style, and the name of the architect or builder.
- c. Include references to source material that are listed in the bibliography.

**C. Additional Information**

- a. Include any additional information that helps support the claim of criteria (Section 7) made in this document; or is otherwise deemed useful for the purposes of evaluation.

**D. Bibliography**

- a. Include a list of all sources consulted.
- b. Include copies of relevant source materials with the nomination form.

**9. PHOTOGRAPHS:**

**Include photos, as applicable, of the nominated district, structure, site, or object as follows:**

**A. Current photographs**

- a. Exterior photographs are required.
- b. Interior photographs if available and relevant to its historic significance.

**B. Historic photographs**

- a. Interior and exterior if available.

**Each photograph must be labeled with the street address of the building(s) and the month and year the photograph was taken.**

**Designation of property will require affixing a plaque to said property and that the plaque will be the sole property of the City of La Crosse. Signature of the property owner assures the Heritage Preservation Commission that designation and installation of a plaque are supported.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Property Owner

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

*Marcus J. Zittel* - PRESIDENT, PRESERVATION  
Signature of Nominator **ALLIANCE OF LACROSSE (PAL)**

*2-9-2026*  
Date

**When completed, submit application to the City of La Crosse Planning Department, 400 La Crosse Street, La Crosse WI.**

**PLEASE NOTE:** It is the responsibility of the nominator to provide the Heritage Preservation Commission and its Staff with information sufficient to fairly evaluate the nomination. **Incomplete nomination forms will not be accepted. A fee, in the amount stated in the Schedule of Fees and Licenses table in Section 25.01 of the Municipal Code, must be included.**

## A. Property Description:

By Marcus Zettler, Preservation Architect  
On behalf of the Preservation Alliance  
of La Crosse

### Property Overview:

Current Name: Emerson Elementary School  
Historic Name: Hillview Orthopedic School  
Address: 2101 Campbell Road, La Crosse,  
Wisconsin

### Building Description:

Emerson School is a two-story structure flush with grade constructed out of multi-wythe, cream colored brick bearing walls. The Wisconsin Historical Society lists the style as “Contemporary” however, there are some subtle references to the Art Deco Style. The structure is sited on an angle running southwest to northeast on the north side of Campbell Street. The school is immediately east of the track and fieldhouse for UW-La Crosse. The front of the building faces southeast (Campbell Street) and is not parallel to the street. A parking lot is located to the north of the school and a playground to the east. There is a small visitors parking lot to the south of the building next to the main entry.

The original building has a simple rectangular massing with a running southwest-northeast and features a flat roof concealed by a parapet. When the building was constructed in 1939 it was only intended to be a one-story school. A 1950s addition added a second floor to the school, done in the same style as the original construction. There are two other additions present today. A one-story box was added to the north of the building and bears no resemblance to the original architecture. It is

out of character with the rest of the school. The addition to the northeast is much larger and sympathetic to the school in scale and materials. The addition has two stories, punched openings, a secondary entry and a gymnasium on the back side facing the parking lot. The front of the original building has a balanced, but not symmetrical facade. The west side of the composition has a one-story office area with a curving modern canopy over the main entrance. The main façade is two-stories and has large groups of punched openings. These openings vary in size, but the west bay has two vertically oriented openings flanking a large horizontal opening on both the first and second floor (we will call this type ‘A’), the next bay has much longer openings (type ‘B’). There are then two smaller openings with higher sill heights (type ‘C’). There is then a type A window group followed by type B and then the next type C is modified on first floor to have a pair of entry doors surrounded by a limestone by projecting out from the façade with stylized Art Deco pilasters. On the other side of the door is a type B window group followed by a type C, a type A and another type C. This was the end of the original school building. The addition steps back a couple of feet and has a very plain façade. There are two punched openings in this mass, one on the first floor having four entry doors and a ribbon window above. The façade then steps out, flush with the original building and has two punched openings on each floor each containing a single aluminum window unit with four lites. There are some odd stripes created with green brick between the first floor window heads and second floor window sills. Today modern steel doors have replaced the original metal doors. The limestone sills are still extant at the windows, but the original

windows have been replaced with modern half-height windows. The rest of the openings have been replaced with metal infill panels. The original limestone coping may still be extant beneath the modern metal coping at the top of the walls.

The east façade faces the playground. The modern addition completely obscures the original school. The addition has two masses, the first is a two-story classroom area that lines up with the front façade of the main school. It has a re-entrant corner and a blank brick wall. The main portion of the façade has a pair of entry doors projecting from the pace of the wall, the rest of this wall is a windowless brick mass. The rear part of the addition appears to be a gym or auditorium space with punched windows high on the wall. The same cream colored brick with green brick accents are used on this façade, similar to the front.

The north façade has similar details to the south façade, but they are simplified. There are groups of windows in similar spacings to the front of the building. These window openings have the same, modern, half-height windows with metal infill panels above. The north addition has a solid façade at the base with a ribbon of windows at the clerestory. Above the windows, metal panels clad the façade up to the top of the parapet. The side walls of the addition are finished with a brown brick. This addition is out of scale and proportion with the main school. The larger, new addition on the northeast side of the building has no windows. It is a large expanse of brick wall punctuated by a single door on the west and a pair of doors on the east. The scale and detailing of this addition are more sympathetic to the original school, but

the lack of windows creates a stark difference to the older parts of the building.

The west façade has a one-story office wing projecting out from the mass of the main building. There is a single door with transom centered in the mass and a large punched opening to the south. The second-floor on the main portion of the school behind the office wing also has a punched window opening. A modern whimsical canopy spans between the one-story office wing and the main two-story portion of the building. It covers the main entry to the school. The canopy is a broad sweeping arc that is well scaled to the building composition. It stays just below the parapet line of the office wing.

The interior was not accessible at the time of this nomination. Historic photos of the interior were found and are included in the historic photos section of this nomination.

Overall, the historic integrity of the original building is good. The exterior masonry is in very good condition at most locations. The modern windows are in poor condition and are not compatible with the size of the historic masonry openings. The north addition is out of character with the main building and should be considered 'not contributing' to the overall historic structure. The northeast addition, although plain, is sympathetic in scale and material of the original school.

## B. Historical Analysis:

### Building History:

The Emerson Orthopedic School was dedicated on Saturday, January 20, 1940.<sup>1</sup> During the planning stages, the school was known as the Hillside Orthopedic School. The school was renamed to Emerson Orthopedic School (after the poet) in January 1940 just before the dedication.<sup>2</sup>

The construction of this school was part of a city-wide overhaul of the public school system. From 1938-1940 there were eight school projects under construction in the city.<sup>3</sup> Funds from the PWA (Public Works Administration) made this building boom possible. It was designed by the architecture firm of Boyum, Schubert & Sorensen.<sup>4</sup> This school was not a typical elementary school. From the beginning it was specifically designed to accommodate children with disabilities. In the late 1930s studies and analysis were being done to determine the need for the orthopedic department. The studies showed that the existing facilities were woefully inadequate. The Orthopedic Department was located on the third floor of the old Washburn School. The classroom area for children with disabilities required them to climb four flights of stairs! This department was the first of its kind in Wisconsin and is the predecessor of today's special ed. At the time of the evaluations in

1938, the La Crosse Orthopedic Department had students from nine different counties.<sup>5</sup> The Orthopedic Department was integrated with what was called the "Open Window" department at Washburn School. These departments worked with children who had various disabilities and diseases. Children in the 1930s still had to fear debilitating diseases such as polio and tuberculosis. The school also worked with students recovering from surgeries, malnourishment, and nervous disorders.<sup>6</sup> The oldest special school department in La Crosse was the Deaf School, established in 1887.<sup>7</sup>

The design for the school was unique among the educational buildings in the city. It was designed as a single-story building with no stairs. Ramps were used to change floor levels. There were grab bars located on the walls. The school consisted of the Orthopedic and Open Window wing on the southwest side of the building and the regular elementary school classrooms on the northeast. In addition to the special education classrooms, there were treatment rooms with therapy pools and resting areas. The school was constructed out of fire-resistant materials such as masonry, plaster, tile, and steel windows and doors. This creates acoustically reflective surfaces. To increase sound absorption, early acoustic ceilings were installed, probably wood-fiber tiles. Wood and other combustibles were kept to a minimum. The walls were multi-wythe solid masonry, the floor was made of concrete, hallways and

<sup>1</sup> "Emerson Orthopedic School Transferred to Local Board." La Crosse Tribune. Jan. 21, 1940. P1, 10

<sup>2</sup> "School Board Re-Elects Rossiter; Defines Boundaries of Districts." La Crosse Tribune. Jan. 19, 1940. P7

<sup>3</sup> "Eight New Schools and Additions Involve Expenditure of \$1,734,161." La Crosse Tribune. July 2, 1939. P5

<sup>4</sup> Steele, Fred E. "Agreement" 1938.

<sup>5</sup> "State and Counties Aid Finance of Handicapped Child Training." La Crosse Tribune. Feb. 2, 1938. P1

<sup>6</sup> "Special School Here Inadequate." La Crosse Tribune. Feb. 4, 1938. P1

<sup>7</sup> "Deaf School is Oldest of Special Departments." La Crosse Tribune. Feb. 6, 1938. P1

treatment rooms had a ceramic tile wainscot, and the walls were mostly finished with plaster. The cost of the school was estimated to be just over \$220,000 with furnishings prior to construction.<sup>8</sup> However, a December 31, 1939 Tribune article stated that the cost of the school was \$125,804. The older newspaper article included furnishings and also illustrated a much more elaborate design with the school shaped in a “V” with two equal wings. The existing school was constructed as a single long rectangular shape. The school exhibited some slight Art Deco detailing, but primarily exhibits early International Style influences. The starkness of ornament was typical of Depression Era buildings.

At the conclusion of World War II, the “baby boom” began. This increase in children required more classroom space. The School Board again turned to Schubert, Sorensen and Associates (name of the firm changed) to design a large addition to Emerson School. The expansion project was first bid in 1954. The low bid reportedly came in at \$387,376 and was rejected by the Council.<sup>9</sup> The plans were revised and the second round of bidding resulted in a low bid of \$314,834.94 on February, 3, 1955. This bid was submitted by WMC, Inc. of Winona for General Contractor, R. H. Lovold for plumbing and HVAC, Meyers Equipment Co. for kitchen equipment, and Clark-Bracken, Inc. for electrical work.<sup>10</sup> This majority of this expansion was to add a second floor to the school, covering most of the original building footprint.

<sup>8</sup> “Special Departments of La Crosse Schools Training Handicapped Children Inadequate.” La Crosse Tribune, Jan. 30, 1938. P1

<sup>9</sup> “Board Opens Bids on New Project Feb. 3.” La Crosse Tribune, Jan. 4, 1955. P1

<sup>10</sup> “Board Accepts Low Bids on Emerson Job.” La Crosse Tribune, Feb. 4, 1955. P1

The Tribune article explaining the bids stated that the “Reduction in the cost of the Emerson project on the second bids was accomplished by omitting a basement lunch program facility, reducing the outside matching stone trim to a minimum and omitting the second floor matching ceramic tile in the corridor walls.”<sup>11</sup> The open house for the new addition was held at the end of February 1956.<sup>12</sup> The windows of the second floor closely matched the first floor and there was a one-story wing on the northeast side of the building. This addition basically doubled the classroom space in the school.

Around 1972 a new addition was constructed off of the back of the school adding a new IMC (Instructional Media Center a.k.a. library). The classroom wing located to the north of the original school also appears to be from this period. The IMC wing of the building was burned to the ground by a 17 year-old former student on January 1, 1983.<sup>13</sup> The decision was made to refurbish the school in an effort to remove smoke and water damage. The IMC addition was a total loss estimated around \$500,000.<sup>14</sup> This addition was cleared away and a new addition was created in its place. This caused a massive disruption to the school district since 345 students and 35 staff members had to be reassigned to other schools.<sup>15</sup> The reconstruction was swift and the school reopened to students on August 30, 1983. As a result of the fire, the new library was

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> “Hold Open House Program for New Emerson Addition.” La Crosse Tribune, Feb. 28, 1956. P11

<sup>13</sup> “Youth Admits Torching Emerson.” La Crosse Tribune, Mar. 19, 1983. P1, 16

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> “Fire Destroys Addition at Emerson.” La Crosse Tribune, Jan. 2, 1983. P1

the first to be computerized in the La Crosse School District.<sup>16</sup>

The school remained very popular among La Crosse residents. In the late 1980s overcrowding in the school district led to bussing children who were in the Emerson boundaries to other schools. This was met with opposition from parents and was covered in numerous Tribune articles. This doubled the size of the property. Another addition was mentioned in 1991. This appears to be the addition added to the northeast addition at the end of the school. The addition faces Crowley Park which has for many years demonstrated the great partnership between the school district and the council. The park received a major renovation in 2008 adding new play equipment, rain gardens and a gazebo that can act as an outdoor classroom.<sup>17</sup>

Student enrollment has been on a downward trajectory for the past three decades in La Crosse. Consolidations plans were discussed in the early 2020s. By 2024, the plan was to consolidate Emerson School and Spence into a new school located at the Hogan School site.<sup>18</sup> At the time of this nomination, the Hogan School is being needlessly demolished to “make room” for a new school building on the site. It appears that Emerson’s role as an elementary school in La Crosse may be nearing an end after almost 90 years of service. It is a testament to the original design that the building can still serve its original purpose into modern times.

The building has a tremendous history with ties to the federal PWA programs. It retains much of its architectural character from the 1939 and 1955 building campaigns. The later 1972 addition is not sympathetic, but is located behind the main structure. The 1983 and 1991 additions are simple and subordinate to the main structure. It is unique among the schools of La Crosse as the first school deliberately designed to provide educational opportunities for children with disabilities.

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<sup>16</sup> “Rebuilt Emerson Awaits Students.” La Crosse Tribune, Aug. 25, 1983. P40

<sup>17</sup> “More than a Playground.” La Crosse Tribune, Oct. 24, 2008. P1

<sup>18</sup> “Board Looking at Long-Range Consolidation Plan, Referendum.” La Crosse Tribune, Feb. 8, 2024. PA1

## C. Additional Information:

### Statement of Significance:

1. *Associated with events or persons who have made a significant contribution to the history, heritage, or culture of the City of La Crosse, the County of La Crosse, the State of Wisconsin or the United States.*

The Emerson Orthopedic School is significant in its function to provide an educational facility for children with disabilities. The building was well constructed and typical of the period, but the historic merit of the building is nested in its function to the community. This school housed a groundbreaking program, the precursor of today's special ed. It served not only the children of La Crosse, but of the entire region. At least nine different counties in Wisconsin sent children with special needs to this school for an education. This school had specialized treatment rooms including therapy pools and resting rooms. The layout was very logical with the orthopedic and open window functions on one side of the building and the typical elementary school on the other side. Common spaces were located in the middle. A central double-loaded corridor provided circulation throughout the building. Special design considerations were implemented such as eliminating stairs and adding grab bars to the walls. The building was situated to bring in ample natural light to classroom spaces and keep resting areas nestled to the

building's interior. Programs like this were rare in the country. It exemplified the progressive spirit of the people of La Crosse.

The second-floor addition expanded the regular elementary school functions. It was done in a sympathetic way to the original building and was designed by the same architecture firm. The 1970s addition that remains looks like an afterthought and does not contribute the significance of the structure. The two later additions are sympathetic and subordinate to the original structure, but they have a watered down appearance.

Although the original windows have been replaced, the window openings appear to be mostly unchanged. The masonry also retains a high degree of historic integrity.

2. *The structure exemplifies or reflects the broad cultural, political, economic or social history of the nation, state, or community.*

The Emerson Orthopedic School is associated with one of the most influential public building campaigns in United States history. In 1938-1940 there were eight different school construction projects happening simultaneously in La Crosse. This wave of school construction was made possible in part by PWA funding. The La Crosse Tribune outlined the costs of active school projects in 1939. It stated

that “Eight New Schools and Additions Involve Expenditure of \$1,734,161.” The PWA was projected to provide 45% of the funds necessary.<sup>19</sup> The PWA provided funding for much needed community improvement projects across the entire country.

constructed as substantially as the Emerson Orthopedic School can last hundreds of years if properly maintained.

A second nationwide historic event had an equally significant impact on the building. After World War II the “Baby Boom” dramatically increased the demand for classroom space. The second floor was added to Emerson in the mid-1950s as a direct result of this increase in the population. The 1950s saw a building boom for schools nationwide and La Crosse was no exception. This gives the second-floor significance even though the original structure was only a one-story building.

The later additions have much less significance to the building, but the north additions are sympathetic and reflect the ongoing modernization of the building to meet the needs of the community.

This building is a significant and highly intact historic structure contributing to the cultural heritage in the Coulee Region. The fact that the building is still owned and used by the original client almost 90 years after its completion is a testament to the superior design and quality of construction. Buildings

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<sup>19</sup> “Eight New Schools and Additions Involve Expenditure of \$1,734,161.” La Crosse Tribune, July 2, 1939. P5

## D. Bibliography:

### Works Cited:

American Institute of Architects. "The Standard Form of Agreement Between Owner and Architect." 29 April 1947.

Erickson, Emma (Chairman), et. al. A Guidebook For the Parents of Children who attend the La Crosse Public Schools. La Crosse Board of Education, La Crosse. April 1950.

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 2 February 1938.  
 4 February 1938.  
 6 February 1938.  
 13 February 1938.  
 10 September 1938.  
 14 September 1938.  
 25 October 1938.  
 2 July 1939.  
 16 August 1939.  
 24 August 1939.  
 31 December 1939.  
 14 January 1940.  
 19 January 1940.  
 21 January 1940.  
 30 January 1940.  
 8 February 1940.  
 4 January 1955.  
 4 February 1955.  
 28 February 1955.  
 2 January 1983.  
 2 February 1983.  
 19 March 1983.  
 14 May 1983.  
 25 August 1983.  
 2 March 1988.  
 11 March 1988.  
 23 March 1988.  
 14 April 1988.  
 23 January 1992.  
 24 October 2008.  
 3 February 2024.  
 8 February 2024.

Rausch, Joan. *City of La Crosse, Wisconsin, Intensive Survey Report, Architectural and Historical Survey Report*. City of La Crosse, Wisconsin, July 1996.

Sanborn-Ferris Fire Insurance Company. New York: Sanborn Fire Insurance Company. Fire Insurance Maps for La Crosse, Wisconsin. 1939, 1954, located at the La Crosse Public Library Archives.

Steele, Fred E. "Agreement". Owner-Architect. 20 October 1938.

Historic photographs, archived at University of Wisconsin - La Crosse, Murphy Library Special collections and La Crosse Public Library Archives.

### Web Sources:

La Crosse Property and GIS Data:  
<https://experience.arcgis.com/>,  
 Web 01/20/26.

Wisconsin Historical Society.  
 "Architecture and History Inventory."  
 Property Record for 2101 Campbell Rd.  
 AHI #238822. web, 2025.

### E. Aerial Photo:

2101 Campbell Road

La Crosse, WI



Figure 1 – 2024 aerial image of the site, County of La Crosse, WI.

### F. Fire Insurance Maps:

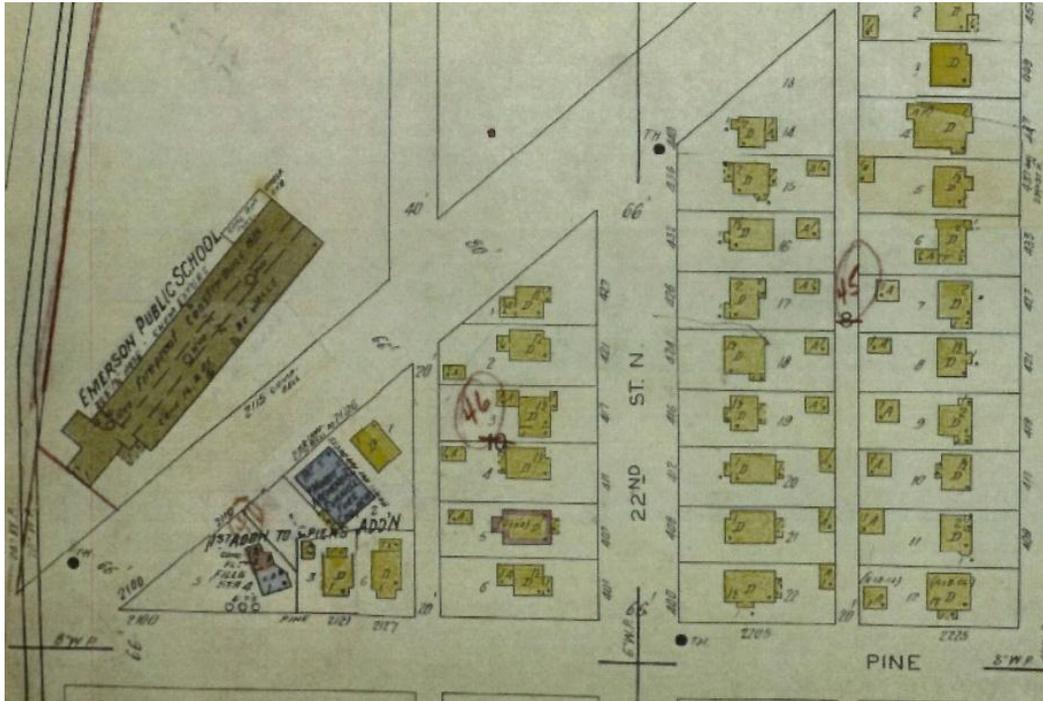


Figure 2 – 1939 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, City of La Crosse, WI. (Original configuration) Courtesy of La Crosse Public Library Archives.

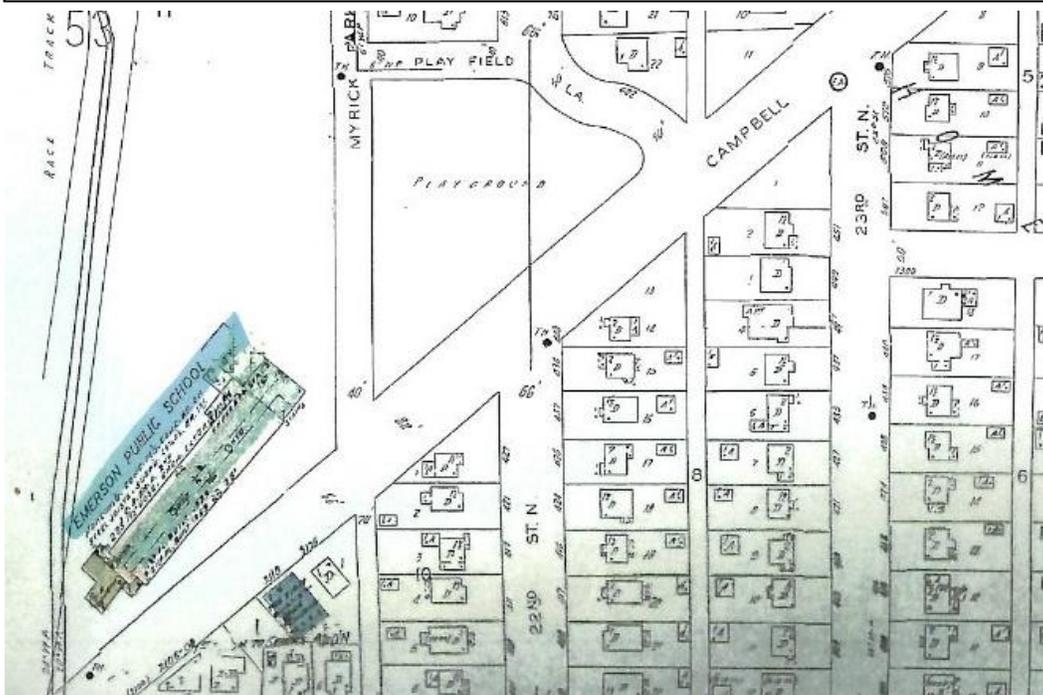


Figure 3 – 1954 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, City of La Crosse, WI. (First north addition shown) Courtesy of La Crosse Public Library Archives.

## G. Historic Building Photos:



Figure 4 – View looking west from Campbell Street. Ca. 1940. Courtesy of University of Wisconsin – La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections.



Figure 5 – View looking northwest at Emerson Orthopedic School Ca. 1946. Courtesy of University of Wisconsin – La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections.



Figure 6 – Second floor construction at Emerson Orthopedic School. Ca. 1956.  
Courtesy of University of Wisconsin – La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections.



Figure 7 – Second floor completed at Emerson Orthopedic School. Ca. 1956.  
Courtesy of University of Wisconsin – La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections.

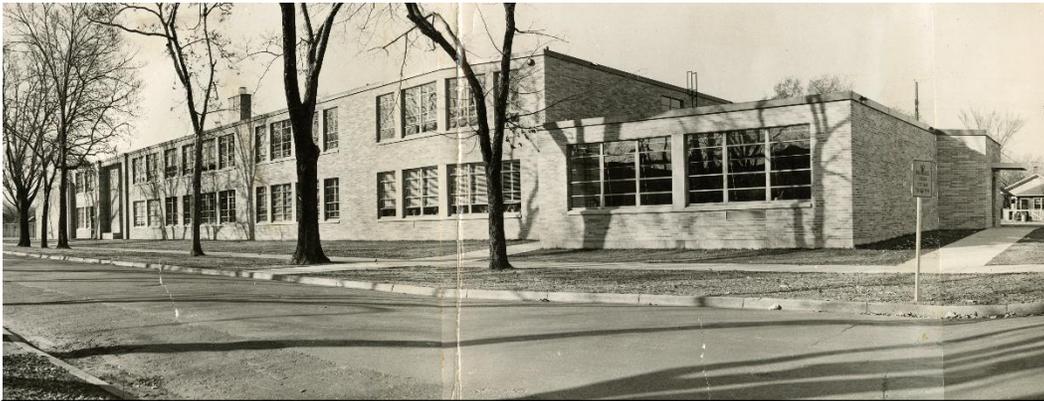


Figure 8 – Back of Emerson Orthopedic School looking southeast. Ca. 1965. Courtesy of University of Wisconsin – La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections.



Figure 9 – New north addition at Emerson Orthopedic School looking west. Ca. 1992. Courtesy of University of Wisconsin – La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections.



Figure 10 – Main entry to Emerson Orthopedic School. Date unknown. Courtesy of University of Wisconsin – La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections.



Figure 11 – Hubbard Hydrotherapy Tank at Emerson Orthopedic School. Ca. 1940. Courtesy of University of Wisconsin – La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections.



Figure 12 – Treatment room at Emerson Orthopedic School. Ca. 1940. Courtesy of University of Wisconsin – La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections.



Figure 13 – First floor corridor at Emerson Orthopedic School. Ca. 1940. Courtesy of University of Wisconsin – La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections.



Figure 14 – Entry vestibule at Emerson Orthopedic School. Ca. 1940. Courtesy of University of Wisconsin – La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections.



Figure 15 – Drinking fountain at Emerson Orthopedic School. Ca. 1940. Courtesy of University of Wisconsin – La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections.

## G. Current Building Photos:

by Marcus Zettler



Figure 16 – View of southeast (front) façade of Emerson School. October 2025.



Figure 17 – View of center entry at southeast (front) façade of Emerson School. October 2025.



Figure 18 – View of the modern main entry at the southwest corner of Emerson School. October 2025.



Figure 19 – Main entry and southwest façade looking northeast at Emerson School. October 2025.



Figure 20 – View of the southwest façade at Emerson School. October 2025.



Figure 21 – View of the northwest (back) façade at Emerson School. Looking south at the gym and classroom additions. October 2025.



Figure 22 – View of the northeast façade of Emerson School. February 2026.



Figure 23 – View of the original main entry at Emerson School. October 2025.



# City of La Crosse, Wisconsin

City Hall  
400 La Crosse Street  
La Crosse, WI 54601

## Text File

File Number: 26-0223

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**Agenda Date:** 2/26/2026

**Version:** 1

**Status:** Agenda Ready

**In Control:** Heritage Preservation Commission

**File Type:** General Item

**Agenda Number:** 4.



# Memorandum

**To:** Certified Local Governments in Wisconsin  
**From:** State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), Certified Local Government Coordinator  
**Date:** February 2, 2025  
**Re:** *National Register of Historic Places* nominations for properties in CLG jurisdictions

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When the *State Historic Preservation Office* (SHPO) receives a *National Register of Historic Places* (NRHP) nomination for a property within the jurisdiction of a *Certified Local Government* (CLG), the preparer will share the nomination with the chief elected official and the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) in that community at least 60 days prior to the State Review Board's consideration of the nomination. The State Review Board meets quarterly, typically in February, May, August, and November.

This is an opportunity for the HPC to comment on the nomination and contribute local knowledge of the property and its history.

As a CLG, your commission's responsibility is to review the nomination and provide an opinion as to whether the property meets the eligibility criteria for the NRHP. Typically, HPCs do this by placing the nomination on the agenda of a regular meeting and allocating time for public comment as well as commission review. It is not within the HPC's responsibility or authority to require or request edits from the nomination preparer. If the commission has concerns or feedback about the content of the nomination, that information should be transmitted directly to the SHPO.

A summary of public comments and/or a letter of the commission's opinion may be submitted, by postal mail or email, to:

Ian Gort  
[ian.gort@wisconsinhistory.org](mailto:ian.gort@wisconsinhistory.org)

State Historic Preservation Office  
Wisconsin Historical Society  
816 State St. Rm. 305  
Madison, WI 53706

The letter may come from the chair of the HPC, the director of the Planning Department, the chief elected official, or any combination thereof. Regardless of whether the SHPO receives correspondence from the CLG, the SHPO will proceed with the nomination process.

Name of Property

County and State

**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.

## 1. Name of Property

Historic name: Fire Station No. 4

Other names/site number: n/a

Name of related multiple property listing: n/a

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

## 2. Location

Street & number: 906 Gillette Street

City or town: La Crosse State: WI County: La Crosse County

Not For Publication:  Vicinity:

## 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

Applicable National Register Criteria  A  B  C  D

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<b>Signature of certifying official/Title:</b>	<b>Date</b>
Tricia Canaday, Wisconsin State Historic Preservation Officer	

### State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

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

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<b>Signature of commenting official:</b>	<b>Date</b>

<b>Title:</b>	<b>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</b>

**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

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**

**Category of Property**

- |                  |                                     |             |                                     |
|------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------|-------------------------------------|
| Private:         | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Building(s) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Public – Local   | <input type="checkbox"/>            | District    | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Public – State   | <input type="checkbox"/>            | Site        | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Public – Federal | <input type="checkbox"/>            | Structure   | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
|                  |                                     | Object      | <input type="checkbox"/>            |

**Number of Resources within Property**

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	Buildings
0	0	Sites
0	0	Structures
0	0	Objects
1	0	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

**6. Function or Use**  
**Historic Functions**

**Current Functions**

GOVERNMENT / fire station

DOMESTIC / single dwelling

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**

LATE 19<sup>TH</sup> AND 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY REVIVALS

**Materials:**

Principal exterior materials of the property: foundation: CONCRETE; walls: BRICK;  
roof: ASPHALT; other: LIMESTONE; STUCCO

**Narrative Description**

**Summary Paragraph**

The Fire Station No. 4 is located at the southeast corner of Gillette Street and Liberty Street, approximately two miles north of downtown La Crosse. The building is roughly rectangular in plan with a complex roofline. The east and south sides of the building comprise a 1 ½-story L-shaped portion with a hipped roof with a lowered eave line and punctuated with wall dormers. The northwest corner of the building contains a 2-story portion with a higher eave line and capped with a hip-and-deck roof. A flat-roofed, 1-story stucco screen porch is located across the north (Gillette Street) elevation, and the large apparatus bay door is located in the west (Liberty Street) elevation. The building is of concrete block and structural clay tile structure and retains several of its original multi-light steel double-hung windows. The building is clad in variegated brownish brick with a historical revival-style cornice and door surround executed in Bedford limestone.

The Fire Station No. 4 is significant under *Criterion A* in the area of Politics/Government for its association with the history of firefighting in La Crosse. The building retains sufficient historic integrity to convey its significance.

## Narrative Description

### Setting

The fire station is located on a corner lot at the intersection of Gillette and Liberty Streets on the north side of the City of La Crosse. Gillette Street, running along the north side of the fire station property, is an arterial street with two driving lanes, on-street bike lanes, and a parking lane on the south side. Liberty Street, on the west edge of the fire station property, is a narrower residential street with parking along both sides and street trees in the grass terraces. On the north, west, and south, the Fire Station No. 4 is surrounded by modest houses dating from the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century. The houses are typically 1- or 1 ½-story in height and are vernacular forms like Gabled Ells, One- and Two-Story Cubes, Side Gabled, or Front Gabled. The one notable exception to the residential surroundings is the “new” Fire Station No. 4, located east of the subject building and completed in 2024 to replace the subject building. The 2024 fire station has a 2-story apparatus bay and a 1-story side wing; it is clad in brownish brick with cast stone accents.

### Exterior

The west (Liberty Street) elevation of the Fire Station No. 4 (Photo 1) consists of the two-story residential block on the north (left) and the double-height apparatus bay on the south (right). The residential block contains one double-hung window centered in each story. The first story window is a one-over-one modern aluminum replacement; the second story window retains its original six-over-six double hung steel sashes. Both windows have stone sills, and the face of the wall is recessed slightly between the two windows, creating a subtle vertical panel. The wall is capped with a limestone cornice consisting of flat blocks (suggestive of stylized dentils) interspersed with simple molding. The bottom edges of each block are rounded, creating a streamlined effect. The cornice is capped with an angled metal molding. Based on original building plans, this molding was originally wood and more elaborate, but was replaced sometime in the 1960s. A metal “K-style” rain gutter, with a flat bottom and a cyma recta face, runs across the edge of the roof.

The apparatus bay occupies the majority of the west elevation. The apparatus bay projects approximately seven feet from the face of the residential portion. At the crook of the two building portions, a steel entry door with two raised panels and a single large light is located in the north (side) wall of the projecting bay; and a standing seam metal shed roof is located above the door. The west elevation of the apparatus bay is dominated by twenty foot-wide segmental-arched vehicular door. The original door leaf, consisting of multiple square panels with two rows of square windows, was replaced sometime after 1967 by the current modern roll-up metal door.<sup>1</sup> The vehicular door opening is framed by a limestone Art Deco-style surround. The face of the door surround is flat, but in silhouette, the outside edges step inward as they rise, corresponding to the divisions of a stylized classical order: pedestal, column (with tapering entasis), architrave, and frieze. Inscribed across the frieze (and highlighted with a painted cream background and

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<sup>1</sup> Based on 1967 photo included in “La Crosse’s ‘New Look’ Fire Dept.,” *La Crosse Sunday Tribune*, Sept. 17, 1967.

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purplish letters) is the name “L. F. D. NO. 4”. The roofline of the 1 ½-story tall apparatus bay is lower than the 2-story residential portion, and the wall is capped with the same stylized block cornice and metal molding. A hip-roofed dormer is centered on the roof above. The dormer contains two aluminum clad six-over-six double hung windows, installed at an unknown date, that retain the light division of the original steel windows. The remainder of the dormer is clad in stucco.

The south elevation of the building (Photos 2 and 3) is the simplest, reflecting the utilitarian space of the apparatus bay within. The south elevation is four bays wide and symmetrically composed. Four large-scaled steel windows are evenly spaced across the elevation. Each window is five lights wide by six lights tall with a six-light hopper set into the overall pattern of fixed lights. Each window had a limestone sill. A metal ventilator unit is set into the upper left corner of the westernmost window, and a metal exhaust pipe is located to the east of this window as well. The elevation is capped with the same stylized block cornice and angled metal molding. Two hip-roofed dormers are centered on the roof above the center two windows below. These dormers, like that on the west elevation, each contain paired six-over-six double hung aluminum windows.

The east (rear) elevation of the building (Photos 3 and 4) is irregular in composition and is five bays wide with a porch extending on the north. The interior of the east elevation contains two stories. The roofline of the 1 ½ story apparatus bay continues around this elevation, and two wall dormers break through the roofline to provide useful space within. From south (left) to north (right), the east elevation contains a pair of steel entry doors with two lower raised panels and single upper lights; the double entry door is capped by a gabled standing seam metal roof. The next bay of the elevation contains two six-over-six double hung steel windows in the first story, and a pair of six-over-six double hung steel windows in a shed-roofed wall dormer at the second story. The next bay contains a six-over-six double hung steel window in each story; the locations of these windows are offset by a half-story from the rest of the elevation since they correspond to an interior staircase landing. The next bay contains a former service door opening that was bricked over prior to the 1960s, and a six-over-six double hung steel window in a hip-roofed wall dormer above. The northernmost bay contains a shorter six-over-six double hung steel window in the first story. The main roofline is capped by the same limestone cornice of stylized blocks, and several louvered ventilators are located along the east roofline.

The north (Gillette St.) elevation (Photo 5) consists of a 1 ½-story eastern portion, and a fully-two-story western portion. A flat-roofed porch is located across the first story of the eastern portion. The porch is one bay deep by three bays wide. Each bay contains a segmental arched opening with wood sills and trim. The west and east (side) bays are divided into two openings, and the north (front) bays are divided into three. The center opening of the center bay contains a wood storm door with a screen transom, flanked by wide screen sidelights with raised panels below. All other openings in the porch are screened. The storm door retains its original street number, 906, plus the painted letters “F D”. Similar painted letters are affixed to the wall above the central bay, reading “FIRE STATION NO. 4”. Inside, the porch has a concrete floor and stucco walls and ceiling (Photo 6). The first story of the exterior wall contains a central wood entry door. On either side are a group of three one-over-one double hung aluminum windows;

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these replaced the original steel multi-light windows at an unknown date. At the second story, visible above the porch, is a hip-roofed wall gable containing a pair of six-over-six double hung steel windows. The wall is capped by the same dropped roofline and limestone cornice.

The eastern (1 ½-story) portion of the north elevation projects forward approximately six feet from the two-story western portion of the elevation. In the west wall of the crook is a single one-over-one double hung aluminum window at the first story. The western two-story portion of the north elevation has a taller roofline and contains two one-over-one double hung aluminum windows in the first story and two six-over-six double hung steel windows in the second story. A recessed panel of brickwork vertically links each set of windows. The elevation is capped with the same limestone cornice and K-style gutter as the west elevation.

### Interior

Inside, the building contains the apparatus bay and residential areas. Character-defining features include use-specific spaces such as the apparatus bay and an internal hose drying shaft; fireproof dividing walls between the apparatus bay and the residential quarters; several extant historic finishes, including concrete floors, plaster walls, and steel sash windows; and other elements such as the living room fireplace and the brass firepoles.

The large apparatus bay occupies the southwest corner of the building. It retains its original concrete floor, painted concrete block walls, and plaster ceiling. The north wall of the apparatus bay contains a wood entry door leading to the residential area, along with two brass fire poles that provide access to the apparatus bay from the former second-story dormitory above (Photo 9). The north corner of the west (back) wall of the apparatus bay contains a steel fire door that accesses a three-story shaft lined with structural clay tile and used for drying fire hoses (Photo 10). A closet with a flat-panel wood veneer door is located next to the hose tower, and another wood entry door leads from the apparatus bay to the residential area of the firehouse (Photo 8). The southern part of the west wall contains the double entry doors (Photo 7). The south wall of the apparatus room contains the four large windows, the easternmost of which has been partially covered on the interior to provide storage and pegboard space.

The remainder of the first floor contains residential areas which are clearly delineated from the apparatus bay by thick walls and exterior doors. The main living areas are located along the north side of the building. The northwest corner originally contained three small rooms (office, bedroom, and bathroom) for the station captain; at the time this nomination was prepared, these spaces were being remodeled into a single larger bedroom. A large living room occupies the center of the residential area. It has a concrete floor and plaster walls and ceiling. A decorative (non-functional) fireplace (Photo 11), faced in rock-faced ashlar limestone and with a tapered plaster chimney breast, is located in the east wall of the living room. The northeast corner of the first floor originally contained a kitchen, also currently being renovated. A corridor runs south from the kitchen; off of this corridor are the steel staircase leading to the second story; a former toilet room (currently being renovated); and a former locker room, which retains its original enamel-painted wood cabinets.

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The second story, above the residential areas, originally contained a large dormitory on the north and a toilet and shower room at the southeast. Both of these areas are currently being remodeled and non-structural wood framing is being added to create additional closet space within the dormitory area. The south wall of the dormitory retains its two character-defining firepoles; access to the poles – and the hole in the floor around them – has been enclosed by doors in order to meet current safety codes. While both the dormitory space and bathroom retain their same location and layout, no historic finishes or materials remain.

Another steel staircase leads up a half-flight from the former bathroom to the attic space above the apparatus bay below (Photo 12). These stairs are accessed by a flat panel veneer door at the bathroom level and a five-panel wood door at the attic level. The attic space (Photo 13) has a wood floor. The inner walls of the dormers are finished in scratch coat plaster, and the remainder of the walls and ceiling are unpainted drywall. Portions of the structural clay tile wall and a brick chimney are visible in the north wall of the attic, along with the exposed upper ends of the brass firepoles. Much of the north wall of the attic is occupied by heating and air conditioning ductwork.

A basement is located under the northeast corner of the building, corresponding to the living room and former kitchen. The rest of the foundation level is unexcavated. The basement contains two rooms, both with painted concrete block walls, painted concrete floors, and painted steel fire doors (Photo 14). The western room contains a furnace, and a steel fire door in the south wall gives access to the base of the three-story hose drying shaft.

### **Landscape**

Landscaping around the Fire Station No. 4 consists of lawn on all four sides (Photos 1 and 2). Sidewalk runs along the north and west sides, and the building's concrete driveway is located on the west side. There is a mature pine tree and a newly-planted street tree at the northwest corner. On the south side of the property is a wide lawn with a row of newly-planted trees and a bioswale; south of these is a large paved parking lot that serves the neighboring active firehouse. The area west of the property, between the Fire Station No. 4 and the new firehouse, is partially grass and contains a large paved driveway for the new firehouse.

### **Integrity**

The Fire Station No. 4 retains integrity in six of the seven aspects. The building remained in continuous use as a firehouse from 1941, the year of its construction, until 2024, the year before this nomination was completed. Changes to the building reflect routine maintenance throughout the years. Major changes to the building include the replacement of several of the original multi-light steel double-hung windows with aluminum double-hungs; the loss of original plaster and trim on the interior residential areas; the loss of original plumbing fixtures in the second-story dormitory bathroom; and the removal of a metal training structure located southeast of the building (removed sometime between 1961 and 1967). Other changes include replacement light fixtures and replacement exterior doors.

The Fire Station No. 4 retains integrity of location and integrity of setting as conveyed through its urban site, its wide driveway and surrounding residential sidewalks, and its minimal

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landscaping. Although the site originally also contained a steel structure used for training exercises, the loss of this structure does not significantly impact the character-defining spatial or architectural features of the firehouse itself.

The building retains integrity of design on its character-defining exterior massing, especially as conveyed through the dropped rooflines, wall dormers, and hipped roofs, all of which visually reduce the scale and mass of the building. With the exception of one bricked-over door on a non-primary elevation, the building retains all of its original window and door openings, including its character-defining apparatus bay door. The fire station also retains integrity of design of its interior arrangement of spaces as conveyed through its large apparatus bay, vertical hose drying shaft, and separate residential areas. Although the original arrangement of the residential areas is being modified for use as a separate apartment, the living areas remain physically and visually separated from the apparatus bay by the original solid masonry walls with limited door access, and the different functional areas of the building remain highly legible.

The building retains integrity of materials on the exterior as conveyed through its original brick cladding, limestone trim, and the majority of its original steel-framed windows. Alterations to the exterior materials, including replacement windows and a new rolltop apparatus bay door, do not detract significantly from character-defining original materials on the building. Inside, the fire station retains integrity of materials through its concrete-floored and concrete block-walled apparatus bay, original brass fire poles, original steel fire doors and large windows in the apparatus bay, painted steel staircases in the residential areas, and the stone-faced decorative fireplace in the living room. Although many of the original finishes and materials in the residential areas have been removed during the current renovation, their loss does not significantly impact the overall integrity of exterior materials and the character-defining interior materials, especially the brass fire poles.

The building retains integrity of workmanship as demonstrated through its exterior masonry work and its interior living room fireplace.

The building retains integrity of feeling. Within the neighborhood, it remains highly legible as a fire station due to its distinctive building form and its large apparatus bay door. Inside, despite the current renovations to the residential areas, the building retains its original feel due to the physical separation of spaces within the fire house. In particular, the intact apparatus bay, with its drying shaft and its brass fire poles, help convey the feeling of the building as a fire station.

The building does not retain integrity of association since it no longer functions as a fire station. However, despite being used for residential and storage functions now, the character-defining exterior design and interior arrangement of spaces remain highly legible and ensure that the Fire Station No. 4 would be immediately recognizable to the original firefighters who occupied the building at its construction in 1941.

**END OF DESCRIPTION, DO NOT DELETE**

## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

- 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

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

**Areas of Significance**

POLITICS / GOVERNMENT

**Significant Person**

n/a

**Period of Significance**

1941-1975

**Cultural Affiliation**

n/a

**Significant Dates**

1941

**Architect/Builder**

J. Mandor Matson, architect  
Peter Nelson and Son, builder

**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph**

The Fire Station No. 4 is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under *Criterion A* in the area of Politics/Government at the local level of significance. The fire station was built in 1941 to accommodate the most up-to-date technology and firefighting equipment at the time of its construction, and with its residential scale, historical revival details, and functional planning, it illustrates a dramatic evolution from the city's older 19<sup>th</sup>-century firehouses. The Fire Station No. 4 is recognized as the first "modern" firehouse in La Crosse.

**Period of Significance and Justification**

The period of significance for the Fire Station No. 4 is 1941, the year of its construction, to 1975, reflecting the fifty year-cutoff since the building remained in continual use as a functioning firehouse until 2024.

**Criteria Consideration**

n/a

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

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The Fire Station No. 4 is being nominated to the National Register as an outstanding resource associated with the history of the La Crosse Fire Department. Although much of the department was developed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the construction of the new Fire Station No. 4 in 1941 was a milestone because it modernized the fire department to 20<sup>th</sup> century standards. The station is the third oldest extant firehouse in La Crosse, and its unique scale and architectural style set it apart from other extant 20<sup>th</sup> century firehouses in the city.

### Historic Context

Present-day La Crosse is located on the ancestral homelands of the Ho-Chunk peoples. When European fur traders and missionaries began moving into the Upper Midwest, the area on the east bank of the Mississippi River became a popular location for fur traders, and a trading post was established there in 1841 in a log building on Barron Island. In 1843, the post was moved to the site of present-day downtown and renamed “La Crosse” after the common name of the field sport that was popular with the native Ho-Chunk tribes that occupied the area as a frequent meeting place and location for trade along the Mississippi River.<sup>2</sup>

Within a decade, the settlement began to see rapid growth. The surrounding prairie proved to be excellent farmland, and the geographical advantage of the high banks of the Mississippi River made the location an excellent dock for river traffic and steamboats as well as being immune to flooding. River trade spurred on economic growth, and the population increased from 573 inhabitants in 1853 to 3,860 people in 1860.<sup>3</sup> The Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul Railroad reached La Crosse in 1858 and offered larger markets for the city’s industries of lumber and grain milling and brewing.<sup>4</sup>

#### *Firefighting in La Crosse*

In a city that was built with lumber, the threat of fire was constant throughout much of the nineteenth century. When La Crosse was established, newly-platted streets ran east from the steamboat landings in the Mississippi River. The earliest buildings were of frame construction and were at high risk of fire, especially from errant cinders or sparks from the steamboat exhaust stacks. In addition, the lumber industry was especially susceptible to fires – and to add insult to injury, most nineteenth-century insurance firms refused to insure lumberyards.<sup>5</sup> Most of the original buildings in the La Crosse downtown commercial district were destroyed by four major fires in 1857, 1862, 1864, and 1867.

Multiple volunteer fire companies were established in response to these fires. The first volunteer company, the Pioneer Company No. 1, was formed in the aftermath of the 1857 fire; and the next year, the city purchased its first hand-pumped fire engine from the Button Fire Engine Company

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<sup>2</sup> Sanford, Albert and H. J. Hirschheimer, *A History of La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1841-1900* (La Crosse: La Crosse County Historical Society, 1951).

<sup>3</sup> Hessel, Susan and Gayda Hollnagel, *A History of La Crosse, Wisconsin in the Twentieth Century*, (La Crosse: La Crosse Historical Society, 2007); Joan Rausch and Richard Zeitlin, *City of La Crosse Intensive Architectural/Historical Survey Report* (La Crosse: City of La Crosse Department of City Planning, 1984).

<sup>4</sup> Rausch and Zeitlin, 17-20.

<sup>5</sup> La Crosse Fire Department, *La Crosse Fire Rescue: Legends and Legacies*, (La Crosse, Wisconsin: La Crosse Fire Department Centennial Book Committee, 1995), 11.

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of Waterford, New York. At least eight other fire companies also were established in the following years, each primarily serving individual wards within the city. Each company had its own equipment and horses, paid for by the city, although personnel were largely volunteer or paid a small salary through ward allocations.<sup>6</sup>

The 1860s and 1870s saw the establishment in the city of large industries, railway lines, banks, local government, and an economy based on transportation and access to a large river port. Because of its river connection to the pineries of northern Wisconsin, La Crosse developed into a lumber boom town, with thirty-three mills located along the Mississippi and Black Rivers. Lumbering helped propel La Crosse into the second largest city in Wisconsin by 1880, with just over 25,000 inhabitants.

As the city grew, small fires often became large fires because of the time it took to summon the fire department. In 1888, the city installed a citywide electric fire alarm system at a cost of \$7,000. Twenty-eight call boxes were installed in four districts around the city. Business owners, policemen, and letter carriers were provided with keys to the call boxes and given instructions on how to use them (“To give an alarm; open the door, pull the hook once and let go, and close the door.”) When an alarm was called, the entire call box network sounded the alarm with a specific number of bell strikes indicating the call box of origin.<sup>7</sup>

In connection with the increased protection from the call boxes throughout the city, the Common Council began authorizing the construction of fire houses. The first city-built firehouse was built for the Washington Hose Company in 1869; followed by engine houses in the 5<sup>th</sup> Ward (1871), the 3<sup>rd</sup> Ward (1872), the commercial district (1886), the 10<sup>th</sup> Ward (1892), and the 8<sup>th</sup> Ward (1895).<sup>8</sup> Each of these fire stations followed the typical pattern of the establishment of a volunteer company, followed by the city-funded purchase of equipment, followed by the city-funded construction of a station in which to store the equipment.

In 1896, the City established a fully-paid firefighting department. To staff the new department, Chief Charles Hunt drew from the ranks of the former volunteer companies, “regardless of politics.”<sup>9</sup> In its first year, the La Crosse Fire Department had twenty-one horses and thirty-five vehicles, including two steam fire engines, two hose carts, four hose wagons, three hook and ladder trucks, five hose sleighs, three hook and ladder sleighs, and a large number of supply and administrative wagons, buggies, and sleighs. The city was equipped with thirty-six miles of water mains, drawing from the Mississippi River, with a pumping capacity of twenty million gallons, and supplied through 355 fire hydrants throughout the city.<sup>10</sup>

As La Crosse prospered, the city grew outwards from its location along the Mississippi River. Large residential neighborhoods were developed east of downtown, on a flat area between the

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<sup>6</sup> *La Crosse Fire Rescue*, 12-15.

<sup>7</sup> *La Crosse Fire Rescue*, 17-20.

<sup>8</sup> *La Crosse Fire Rescue*, 10, 11, 29.

<sup>9</sup> *La Crosse Fire Rescue*, 31.

<sup>10</sup> *La Crosse Fire Rescue*, 37.

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Mississippi and the bluffs to the east.<sup>11</sup> The 1890s saw a decline in growth due to the end of the lumber industry and a nationwide economic recession, and by the 1910s and 1920s, the economy of the city had completely changed, with the lack of both lumber mills and the end of widespread river traffic. Infrastructure such as paved streets, municipal electricity, deep wells and water works, a public health department and hospitals, large public schools, zoning laws, and a park system were all introduced by 1913.

The population of La Crosse reached 30,421 people in 1920.<sup>12</sup> The 1920s saw a renewed growth in the city's economy and in residential home construction, due in no small part to increased enrollments at the La Crosse Normal School (the present-day University of Wisconsin-La Crosse.)<sup>13</sup> The city had a well-established network of ten fire stations, but most of these were late nineteenth century buildings. Even the "newest" fire station had been built in 1906. It became clear that changes were needed to keep the fire stations up-to-date with advances in firefighting techniques and technology. In 1925, the Common Council discontinued the use of fire bells at each fire stations, noting that "the sounding of the bells each time an alarm came in resulted in too much publicity and crowds gathered at fires making it difficult for the department to work. In addition to that the apparatus was interfered with [...] by the large number of automobiles that congregated and followed it to the fire."<sup>14</sup> Improvements in firefighting technology also resulted in the transition from horse-drawn equipment to gasoline equipment. Unlike horses, gasoline equipment did not require feed or veterinary care and had significantly longer lifespans (fire horses commonly had careers of less than three years due to the extreme exertion placed on them).

By the late 1920s, all of the fire stations in La Crosse had made the change to gasoline equipment. Although gas-powered vehicles were more efficient than horse-drawn equipment, they were also significantly heavier, requiring structural modifications to the existing 19<sup>th</sup>-century firehouse buildings. Additional timber bracing was added under the wood floors at three fire stations in the early 1930s in order to support their Pierce-Arrow and American LaFrance vehicles. In 1939, the First Station No. 5 (an 1895 building still extant at 1220 Denton St., NRHP ref. no. 100007159) even removed its entire wood-framed first floor and replaced it with a concrete slab floor supported on cast concrete columns and joists.<sup>15</sup>

#### *Fire Station No. 4: La Crosse's First Modern Firehouse*

<sup>11</sup> Rausch and Zeitlin, 20-23.

<sup>12</sup> Godden, Laura and Paul Beck. *La Crosse, Postcard and History Series*, (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2015); Joan Rausch and Richard Zeitlin, *Historic La Crosse: Architectural and Historic Record: A Summary of an Intensive Survey Report*, (La Crosse: Architectural Researches, Inc. and Historic Resources, Inc., 1984); La Crosse Historical Society, *La Crosse, Wisconsin (Images of America Series)*, (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 1999).

<sup>13</sup> Rausch and Zeitlin, 21-24.

<sup>14</sup> "La Crescent Buys Bell Used Here at No. 5 Fire Station," *La Crosse Tribune and Leader-Press*, December 13, 1929, 6. The Village of La Crescent purchased the fire bell from the First Station No. 5 for \$50. Bells from Stations No. 2, 3, and 4 were also offered for sale; while the fire bell from the central station was intended to be moved to the tower of the city hall.

<sup>15</sup> "Chief Outlines Needed Repairs At Fire Station," *La Crosse Tribune and Leader-Press*, February 17, 1938, 2.

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In 1941, the city built its first new fire station in thirty-five years. The resulting building, the subject of this nomination, modernized the La Crosse fire department and brought 20<sup>th</sup>-century standards to firefighting in the city.

The city council had actually begun planning for the new building in the 1920s as a result of maintenance issues on an older building. The 10<sup>th</sup> Ward Engine House had been built in 1892 near the corner of Gillette and Liberty Streets for the No. 4 firefighting company. By 1925, the building needed its roof replaced along with other upgrades, but as reported by the *La Crosse Tribune and Leader-Press*, “when figures were presented, the aldermen decided they did not want to spend so much money.”<sup>16</sup> Instead, the city council purchased land immediately north of the 10<sup>th</sup> Ward firehouse for \$3,500 in anticipation of building a new fire station.

It took more than a decade for the project to come to fruition, however. Finally, in May 1940, the city council hired architect J. Mandor Matson to design the new Fire Station No. 4. Matson (1890-1963) was a Norwegian-born architect who lived and worked mainly in Racine, Wisconsin, and specialized in the design of public buildings. Matson had recently completed two other projects in La Crosse: a house for Frank and Elizabeth Hoeschler on Losey Boulevard; and the Exchange Building (also commissioned by Hoeschler) at the corner of 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Jay Street downtown.<sup>17</sup> Both of these buildings were strikingly modern, and they may have helped convince the city council that Matson was the right architect for the job.

Matson’s design for the new Fire Station No. 4 stood in sharp contrast to the city’s other firehouses due to its building materials, its arrangement of spaces, and its architectural style. The building itself was designed to be fireproof, with cement block and structural clay tile walls and industrial metal fire doors between the apparatus bay and the residential spaces. Unlike the older Victorian-era firehouses in La Crosse, the new station lacked a full basement and instead had a concrete floor slab on grade that was designed to support heavy firefighting vehicles. The new station also lacked a bell tower, a ubiquitous feature of nineteenth century firehouses, but no longer necessary since the city no longer used fire bells. The new Fire Station No. 4 also incorporated a new approach to drying wet fire hoses. Older stations, such as the 1892 10<sup>th</sup> Ward building next door, typically dried fire hoses by looping them horizontally on the walls of the apparatus bay. Matson created a more efficient system for the new building by designing an internal vertical shaft, lined with structural clay tile and essentially the size of a large closet, that ran the full height of the building and allowed hoses to hang vertically to dry. The design for the new fire station also included an attached drill tower for training exercises; this element was later eliminated due to cost and was replaced by a freestanding metal structure.<sup>18</sup> (See Photo 10 for a view of the hose drying shaft and Figure 6 for a view of the original plan, including the proposed drill tower.)

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<sup>16</sup> “How New Fire Station Will Look,” *La Crosse Tribune and Leader-Press*, Aug. 18, 1940.

<sup>17</sup> The Hoeschler house, completed in 1936 at 117 N. Losey Blvd., is listed in the NRHP as a contributing resource to the 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> Streets Historic District (NR Ref. No. 10000839; AHI 34307). The Exchange Building, completed in 1940 at 201-205 S. 5<sup>th</sup> Ave., is listed in the NRHP as part of the La Crosse Commercial Historic District (NR Ref. No. 94001064; AHI 32302.)

<sup>18</sup> “How New Fire Station Will Look.”

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The spatial arrangement of the new fire station also illustrated a new approach to firehouse design in La Crosse. Rather than placing the residential areas above the apparatus bay within a narrow rectangular footprint, Matson created a more rambling arrangement of interior spaces, with the residential areas interlocking around the apparatus bay in a two-story L-shaped configuration. The main dormitory space remained on the second floor, however, allowing firemen to access the apparatus bay by sliding down ubiquitous brass poles. The inclusion of the fire poles may have been at the request of Fire Chief Fred McGlachlin, who firmly believed, as suggested by a social column in the *La Crosse Tribune and Leader-Press*, that “brass poles are one of the essential things in an up-to-date engine house.”<sup>19</sup> (See Figures 5, 6, and 7 for views of the proposed floor plans. Note that several elements as built differ from the initial plans, including eliminating the attached drill tower and the addition of the internal hose drying closet.)

The most visible difference between the new Fire Station No. 4 and its predecessors was in its exterior appearance. All the other firehouses in La Crosse were tall, vertically-proportioned buildings in 19<sup>th</sup>-century commercial styles of architecture. Matson intentionally designed the size and massing of the new building to reflect the scale of the houses around it, and gave the building architectural details borrowed from historical revival styles that were popular throughout the residential neighborhoods that developed in La Crosse in the 1920s and 1930s. (See Figure 4 for a view of the original rendering of the fire station as proposed.)

Matson employed several architectural tricks to visually reduce the size of the new fire station. Instead of having full-height second story walls, Matson lowered the roofline and added wall dormers, a picturesque detail often associated with Tudor Revival- or Colonial Revival-style houses, and hipped roofs, rather than gables, that visually receded and downplayed the size of the roof. At the northeast corner, Matson created a picturesque roofline by introducing a small section with full height two story walls; this section has a hipped roof capped with a flat deck. Matson’s initial design intended for the building to be clad in random ashlar stone, with smooth limestone trim at doors and windows, in an architectural style evocative of vernacular English building traditions that Matson described as “Tudor residential.”<sup>20</sup>

After the city council approved plans and specifications for the new station, the building and grounds committee and the fire chief made changes and additions to the design, increasing the overall cost by approximately ten percent. Matson revised aspects of the design to reduce the cost, including eliminating the drill tower, reusing the brass fire poles from the existing building next door, and eliminating a functional chimney for the living room fireplace.<sup>21</sup>

The largest cost-saving change, however, replaced the exterior stone cladding with brick, a move that changed the Tudor Revival style of the original design into what architectural historian Joan Rausch has described as “a rather untraditional, abstracted historic design.”<sup>22</sup> The resulting revised design incorporated details typically associated with Period Colonial Revival buildings, including the abstract dentil cornice and the symmetrical south elevation with its tall windows

<sup>19</sup> E. H. Hoffman, “Curbstone Pick-ups,” *La Crosse Tribune and Leader-Press*, Feb. 9, 1941.

<sup>20</sup> “How New Fire Station Will Look.”

<sup>21</sup> “Council To Vote On Fire Station Project Tuesday,” *La Crosse Tribune and Leader-Press*, Aug. 17, 1940.

<sup>22</sup> Rausch, 222.

Fire Station No. 4

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and centered dormers. The brick redesign also changed several masonry-clad wall dormers into wood-frame, stucco-clad roof dormers, and eliminated a picturesque small round window in the second story. The vaguely Art Deco apparatus bay door frame remained unchanged, however, along with the original massing and dropped rooflines. (See Photos 1 and 2 for views of the apparatus bay door and the south elevation.)

Construction bids were let in late July 1940, and contracts for the new building were awarded on August 20. Peter Nelson and Sons were awarded the general contract. Other contracts went to George McKoskey (plumbing and heating) and Electric Supply (electrical). The city council also approved Matson's architect fee of \$1,342.<sup>23</sup> Construction got underway in late summer 1940 and continued through the fall and winter. The building was complete by early the next year, and in late February 1941, firemen moved the contents of the neighboring old 10<sup>th</sup> Ward firehouse into the new Fire Station No. 4.<sup>24</sup> After the new building was complete, the former 10<sup>th</sup> Ward Engine House was initially put up for sale by the city, but after receiving only one bid, the city council voted instead for the city board of public works to demolish the building and use its salvaged brick and stone for rip rap along the Black River.<sup>25</sup> The final cost to build the new Fire Station No. 4 was \$26,855.<sup>26</sup> Despite the cost-saving alterations, the building remains a thoughtfully designed and well built structure, and its careful scale and modest historicist details allow it to fit comfortably within the context of its residential surroundings.

#### *Later Fire Stations in La Crosse*

Later firehouses in La Crosse also incorporated technological advancements and functional planning, but the Fire Station No. 4 remained the only one to incorporate residential massing, scale, and details. Fifteen years after J. Mandor Matson's building was complete, the city began building its next new fire station. Fire Station No. 2, located at 626 Monitor Street (AHI 238770), was completed in 1956. It has two large, flat-roofed apparatus bays, and a small one-story, flat-roofed side wing. The side wing has a Contemporary-style recessed entry with planter boxes and picture windows, but the bulk of the building is dominated by the large apparatus bays.

The next firehouses were both built in 1967 when the city consolidated several of its firefighting and emergency responder services into larger, newer facilities. Fire Station No. 1, located at 725 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue South (AHI 238849), is a blocky square Brutalist-style building, with multiple apparatus bays and a projecting second story with narrow slit windows and prominent concrete structural piers. Fire Station No. 3, located at 1710 Losey Boulevard South, is a smaller firehouse, with two apparatus bays and Contemporary-style architectural details including a flat roof with deep overhang and wide metal fascia, and vertically organized windows with projecting brick trim.

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<sup>23</sup> "Advertisement for Bids No. 4 Fire Station," *La Crosse Tribune and Leader-Press*, July 26, 1940; "Award Contracts For New Station," *La Crosse Tribune and Leader-Press*, Aug. 21, 1940.

<sup>24</sup> "Moving Day For Firemen At New No. 4 Station," *La Crosse Tribune and Leader-Press*, Feb. 21, 1941.

<sup>25</sup> "Notice of Sale of Fire Station," *La Crosse Tribune and Leader-Press*, April 22, 1941; "Board Of Public Works Will Wreck Old No. 4 Station, Council's Plan," *La Crosse Tribune and Leader-Press*, May 22, 1941.

<sup>26</sup> "New No. 4 Fire Station Replaces Old-Fashioned Building; Company Dates History Back To Early City Lumbering Days," *La Crosse Tribune and Leader-Press*, Dec. 31, 1940.

When Stations 1 and 3 opened in 1967, they replaced the oldest operating fire station in La Crosse, the Fire Station No. 5, located at 1220 Denton Street and built in 1895. That building was decommissioned, converted to a community center, and later listed in the National Register of Historic Places (NR Ref. No. 100007159; AHI 35305). After Station 5 closed, the Fire Station No. 4 (the subject of this nomination) remained the oldest operating firehouse in La Crosse until the late 2010s.

In 2018, the city began exploring ways to modernize its fire stations. (In a case of history repeating itself, by this time, all of La Crosse’s existing firehouses were once again all more than fifty years old and were outdated and undersized for current technology and equipment.) The Fire Station No. 4 (the subject of this nomination) was initially considered for demolition, but local historic preservation advocates and community members collaborated with the fire department to preserve the building and instead build a new fire station west of the existing one. The new building was designed to be sympathetic to the brickwork and other elements of the neighboring historic building. The new station opened in 2024.<sup>27</sup> The historic Fire Station No. 4 was sold to a private owner, who is currently using the apparatus bay for vehicle storage and converting the former firemen’s living quarters of the firehouse for use as a single residential apartment.

**Comparative Analysis**

Fourteen firehouses are known to have existed in La Crosse since the city’s founding.<sup>28</sup> Six of these still remain standing, including the Fire Station No. 4. Two of the firehouses, No. 5 and No. 3, are late 19<sup>th</sup>- and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century buildings; No. 3 has been significantly altered and No. 5 is NRHP-listed. The other three firehouses were built in 1958 and 1967 and reflect a later stage of modernization that was begun, and is best exemplified by, No. 4, the subject building of this nomination.

**Table 1. Firehouses in La Crosse**

Address	Historic Name	Construction Date	Integrity/Condition	NRHP Status
200 block Main St.	Pioneer Engine Co.	1857	Demolished	n/a
400 block Main St.	Pioneer Engine Co.	1868	Demolished	n/a
631 Copeland Ave.	Washington Hose Co.	1869	Demolished	n/a
508 St. Cloud St.	5 <sup>th</sup> Ward Engine House	1871	Demolished	n/a
829 S. 6 <sup>th</sup> St.	3 <sup>rd</sup> Ward Engine House	1872	Demolished	n/a
512 St. Cloud St.	5 <sup>th</sup> Ward Engine House	1884	Demolished	n/a
414 State St.	Central Station	1886	Demolished	n/a
Gillette and Liberty Sts.	10 <sup>th</sup> Ward Engine House	1892	Demolished	n/a
1220 Denton St.	Fire Station No. 5	1895	Good integrity	NRHP-listed

<sup>27</sup> Olivia Herken, “North Side fire station plan unveiled,” *La Crosse Tribune*, March 17, 2021.

<sup>28</sup> *La Crosse Fire Rescue*, 29.

Fire Station No. 4

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Name of Property			County and State	
829 S. 6 <sup>th</sup> St.	Fire Station No. 3	1906	Low integrity – significantly altered	Not eligible
906 Gillette St.	Fire Station No. 4	1941	High integrity	Subject property
626 Monitor St.	Fire Station No. 2	1958	Good integrity	Not eligible
1710 Losey Blvd.	Fire Station No. 3	1967	Good integrity	Potentially eligible
725 5 <sup>th</sup> Ave. S.	Fire Station No. 1	1967	Good integrity	Potentially eligible

The “old” Fire Station No. 3, at 829 S. 6<sup>th</sup> St and built in 1906, was converted into apartments in the late 1970s and does not retain any of its interior spatial arrangements. In addition, the upper-story windows were reduced in size, the original engine bay openings were bricked shut, several exterior entry doors to individual apartments were constructed, and a large gabled front porch was constructed onto the building. The building consequently retains a low degree of integrity.

Fire Station No. 5 (1220 Denton St., built in 1895) was listed in the NRHP under *Criterion A* for its historic association with firefighting practices and techniques since it retains its overall exterior appearance as well as its character-defining interior spatial arrangement. Fire Station No. 5 represents the early era of firehouses and firefighting methods and technology; and illustrates the transition from horse-drawn firefighting equipment to gasoline-powered vehicles. The No. 5 building has been restored to its original appearance since it was listed in the NRHP, including the recreation of its original bell tower and apparatus bay doors, all of which had been removed. Fire Station No. 4 (the subject property) retains comparable integrity to No. 5. Although No. 5 retained more of its original interior materials and finishes, it had lost its belltower and its apparatus bay doors had been walled over. In contrast, Fire Station No. 4 retains its character-defining double-wide apparatus bay door and has not had any comparable exterior changes to the loss of the bell tower on No. 5.

Fire Station No. 2 (626 Monitor Street, built in 1958) is a Contemporary-style building that was constructed after World War II. The “new” Fire Station No. 3 (1710 Losey Boulevard, built in 1967) and Fire Station No. 1 (725 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue S., built in 1967) are Brutalist- and Contemporary-style buildings. These three firehouses were built after the Fire Station No. 4 and reflect the continuing trend of modernization within the fire department. All three buildings retain integrity equal to No. 4, but the residential scale and the historical revival architectural details set apart the Fire Station No. 4 from the other post-WWII firehouses. As the earliest of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century “modern” firehouses, the Fire Station No. 4 best exemplifies the modernization efforts of the La Crosse Fire Department.

### Concluding Significance Statement

The Fire Station No. 4 remains unique among firehouses in La Crosse. Its historical revival architectural style and residential scale and massing set it apart both from earlier 19<sup>th</sup>-century firehouses as well as later post-World War II fire stations in the city. With its functional planning and its fireproof materials, the station began a trend of modernization that influenced all subsequent firehouses in La Crosse. The building retains a high degree of integrity to its period of significance, and as an illustration of both sensitive contextual design as well as up-to-date

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planning and technology, the Fire Station No. 4 is worthy of inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

**Land Acknowledgement (will be reviewed by the Office of the State Archaeologist)**

This nomination recognizes the depth of human presence here, the ancestral homeland of American Indians for millennia. From as early as the seventeenth century, Euro-American exploration and settlement, military campaigns, and government programs, all had the effect of repeated displacement of Indians of many tribal affiliations. This continuous tribal movement resulted in Wisconsin being home to many tribes who originated from other parts of the country, generating a pattern of immigration, relocation, and formation of a new homeland. Some of these tribes remain in Wisconsin but others may not. We acknowledge that the property that is the subject of this nomination is located on land long occupied by American Indians.

**Archaeological Potential (will be drafted and reviewed by the Office of the State Archaeologist)**

**Preservation Activities**

The Fire Station No. 4 was evaluated as potentially eligible for the NRHP during a survey of La Crosse conducted in 1996. Eligibility was re-affirmed in March 2021, prior to the writing of this nomination.

**END OF STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE DO NOT DELETE**

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

### 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: \_\_\_\_\_

### Wisconsin Architecture and History Inventory # and/or Archaeological Site Inventory #:

33409

## Bibliography

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<https://maps.sco.wisc.edu/whaifinder/>.

*La Crosse County, WI* (2HH-041, 09/30/1967). [aerial photo] U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1967. Accessed from Wisconsin Historic Aerial Imagery Finder:  
<https://maps.sco.wisc.edu/whaifinder/>.

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"New No. 4 Fire Station Replaces Old-Fashioned Building; Company Dates History Back To Early City Lumbering Days." *La Crosse Tribune and Leader-Press*, Dec. 31, 1940.

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\_\_\_\_\_. *Historic La Crosse: Architectural and Historic Record: A Summary of an Intensive Survey Report*. La Crosse: Architectural Researches, Inc. and Historic Resources, Inc., 1984.

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**END OF BIBLIOGRAPHY DO NOT DELETE**

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## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreege of Property:** less than one

### UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or  NAD 1983

1. Zone: 15N Easting: 641192 Northing: 4856311

### Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of the Fire Station No. 4 consists of a square that encompasses the contributing building. The boundary coincides with the current legal parcel, described as Certified Survey Map No. 12, Vol. 20, Lot 4, Doc. No. 1805951. The historic boundary can be described as follows: beginning at the northwest corner of the property, the boundary runs east for 87.45 feet. The boundary then turns and runs south for 88.87 feet. The boundary then turns and runs west for 87.45 feet. Then boundary then turns and runs north for 88.87 feet to return to the point of origin.

### Boundary Justification

The historic boundary has been delineated to include the property's one contributing resource and an appropriate landscape buffer. The boundary coincides with the property's existing legal tax parcel. The boundary is visually defined by the edge of sidewalk on the north (Gillette St.) and west (Liberty St.).

The current legal parcel was created in 2023. Prior to this, the Fire Station No. 4 was located on a larger legal parcel consisting of the site of the former 10<sup>th</sup> Ward Engine House plus the additional parcel purchased by the city in 1927. After the Fire Station No. 4 was constructed and the 10<sup>th</sup> Ward Engine House was demolished, the area south of the Fire Station No. 4 remained empty.

**END OF GEOGRAPHIC DATA DO NOT DELETE**

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### 11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Justin Miller, Architectural Historian  
organization: University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Cultural Resource Management  
street & number: P.O. Box 413  
city or town: Milwaukee State: WI zip code: 53201  
Email: [jcmill@uwm.edu](mailto:jcmill@uwm.edu)  
Telephone: 414-229-3078

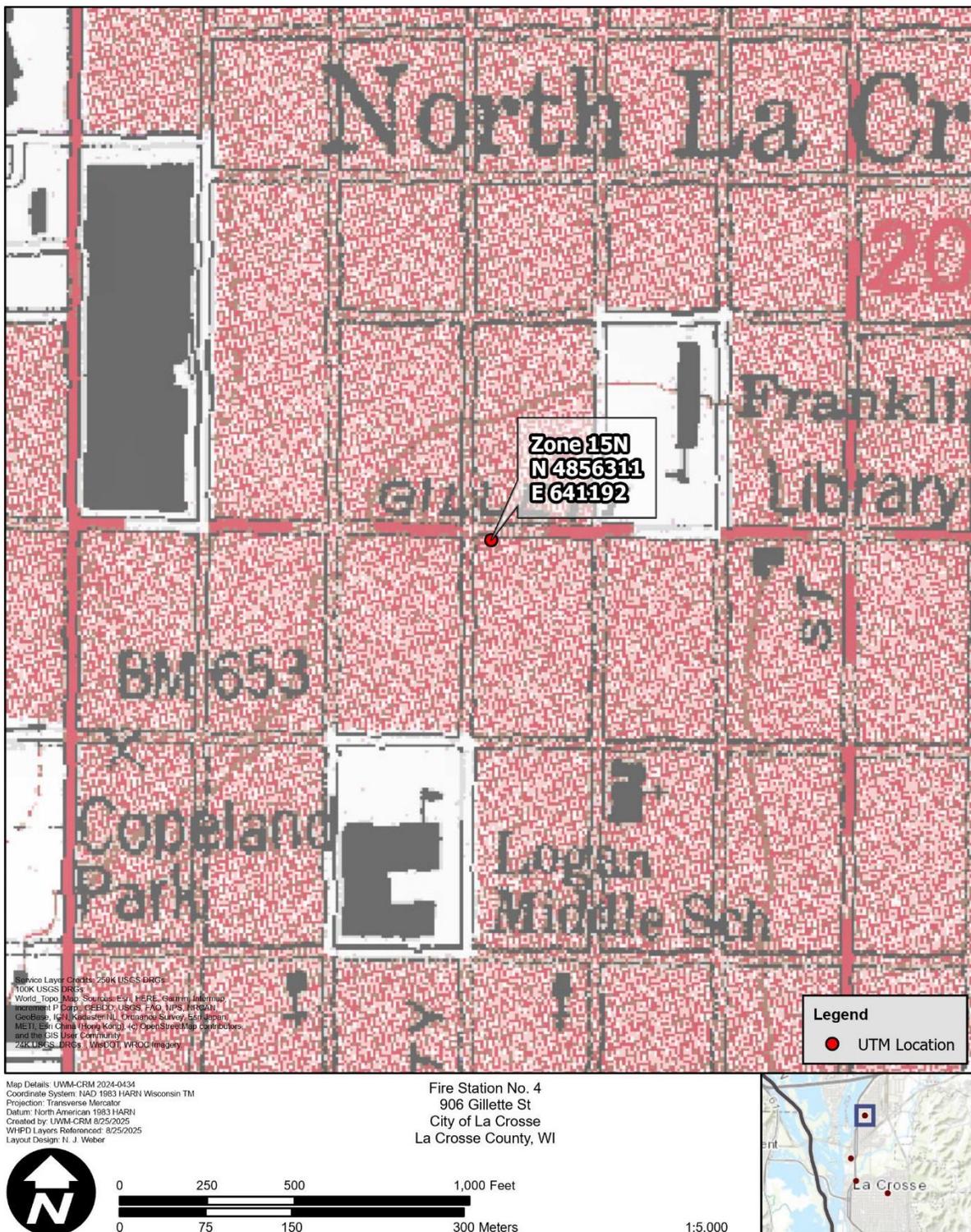
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### Additional Documentation

#### Figure Log

- Figure 1.** USGS map
- Figure 2.** Sketch map
- Figure 3.** Photo key
- Figure 4.** 1940 concept rendering (not built as depicted)
- Figure 5.** Basement plan
- Figure 6.** First floor plan (not built as depicted)
- Figure 7.** Second floor plan (not built as depicted)
- Figure 8.** 1906 Sanborn map
- Figure 9.** 1949 Sanborn map

Figure 1. USGS map



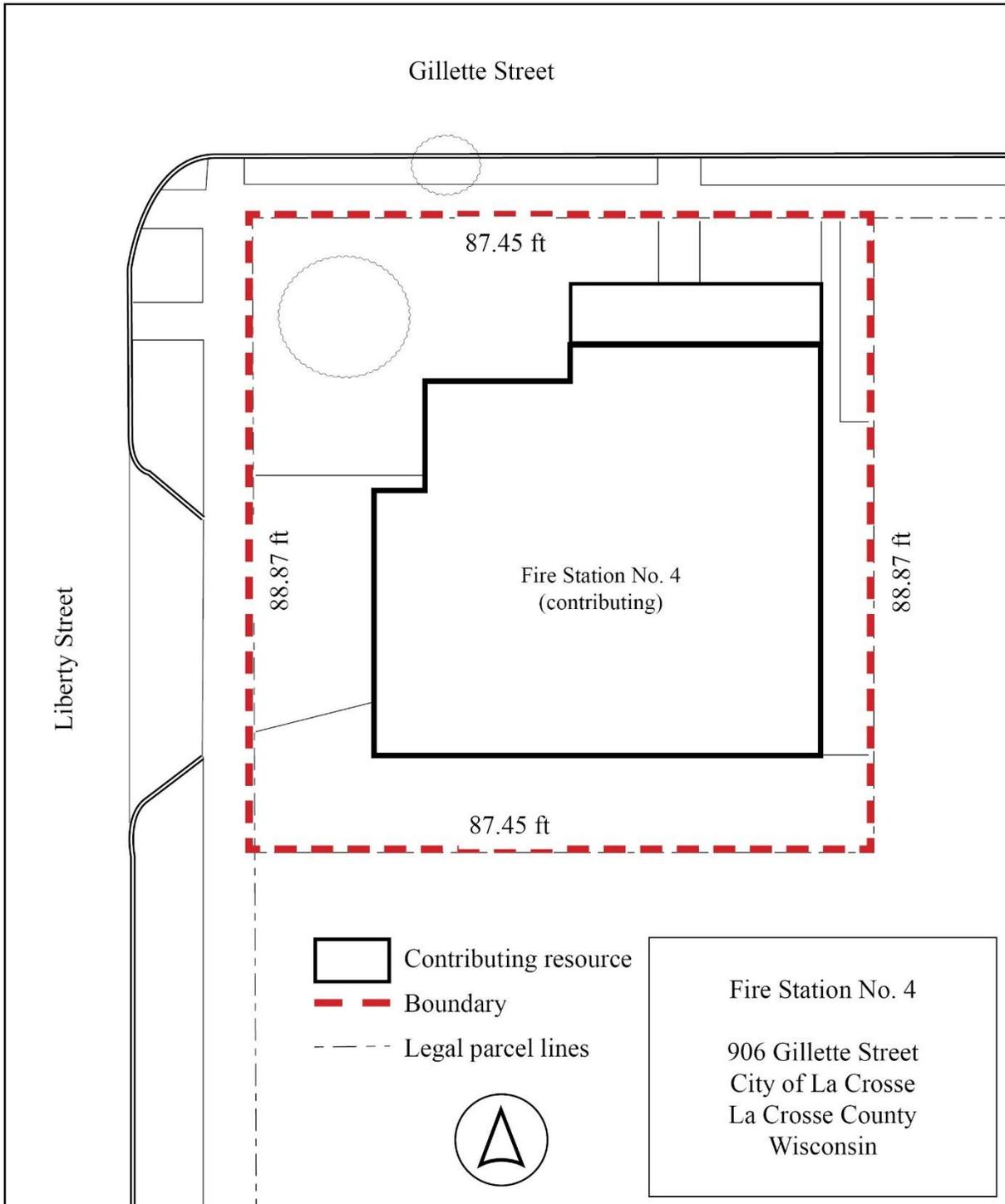
Fire Station No. 4

La Crosse County, Wisconsin

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County and State

**Figure 2.** Sketch map

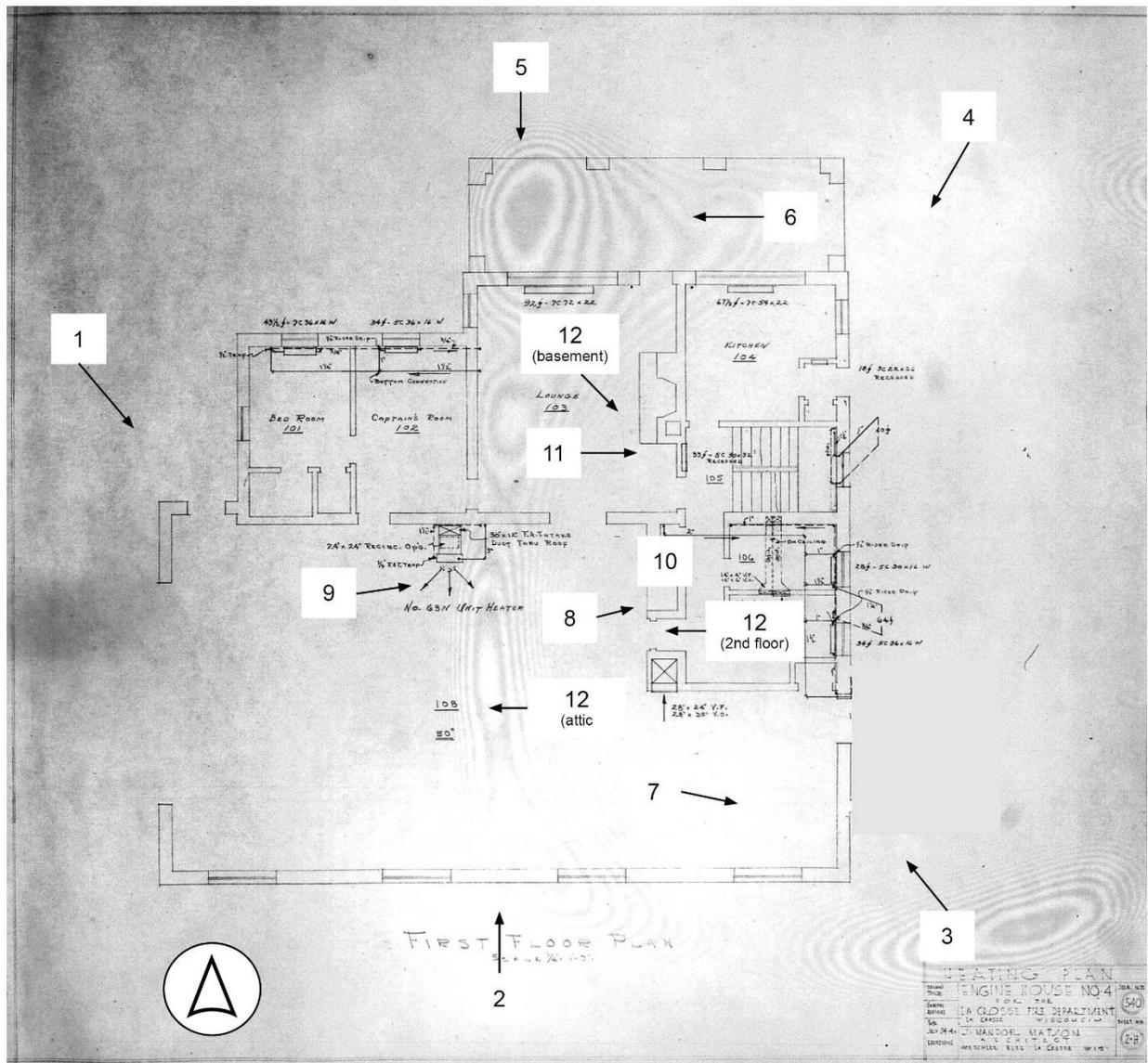


Fire Station No. 4

La Crosse County, Wisconsin  
County and State

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Figure 3. Photo key



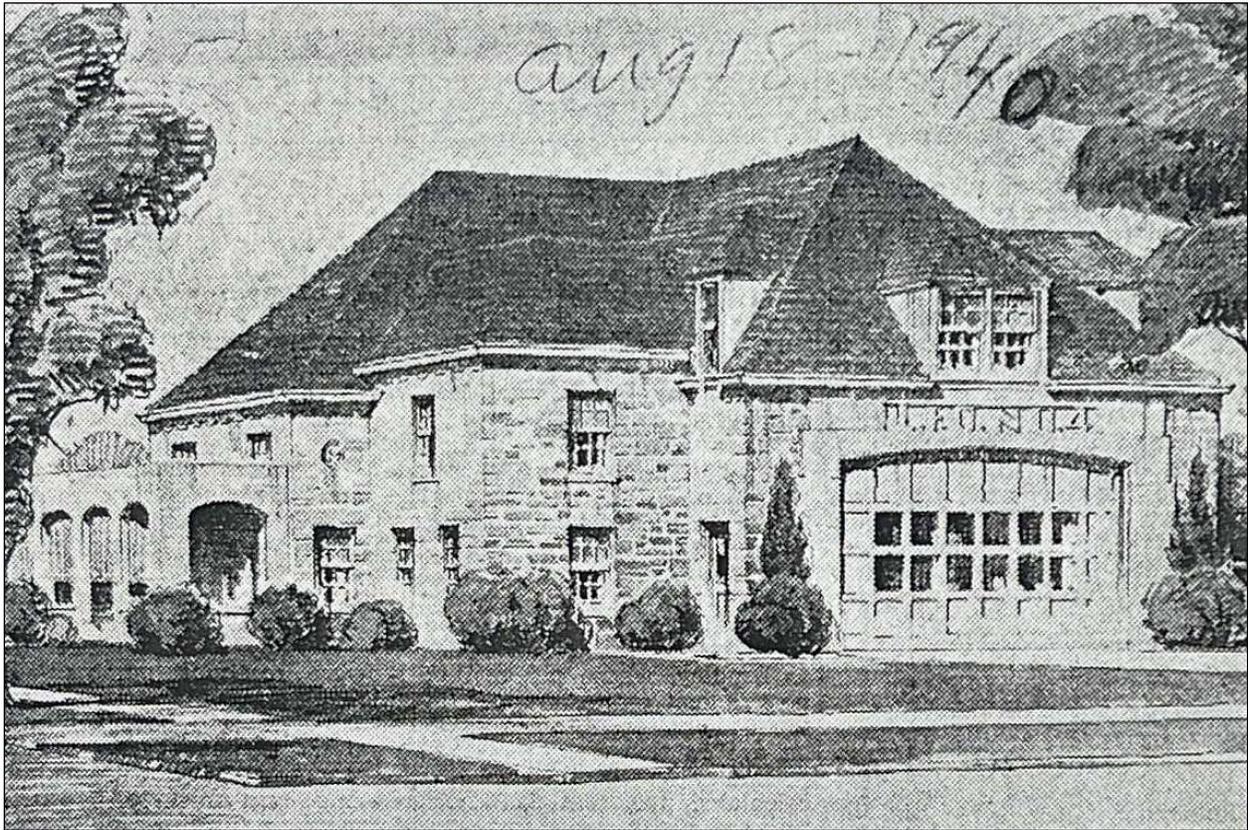
Fire Station No. 4

La Crosse County, Wisconsin

Name of Property

County and State

**Figure 4.** 1940 concept rendering (not built as depicted)



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La Crosse County, Wisconsin

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Figure 5. Basement plan (not built as depicted)

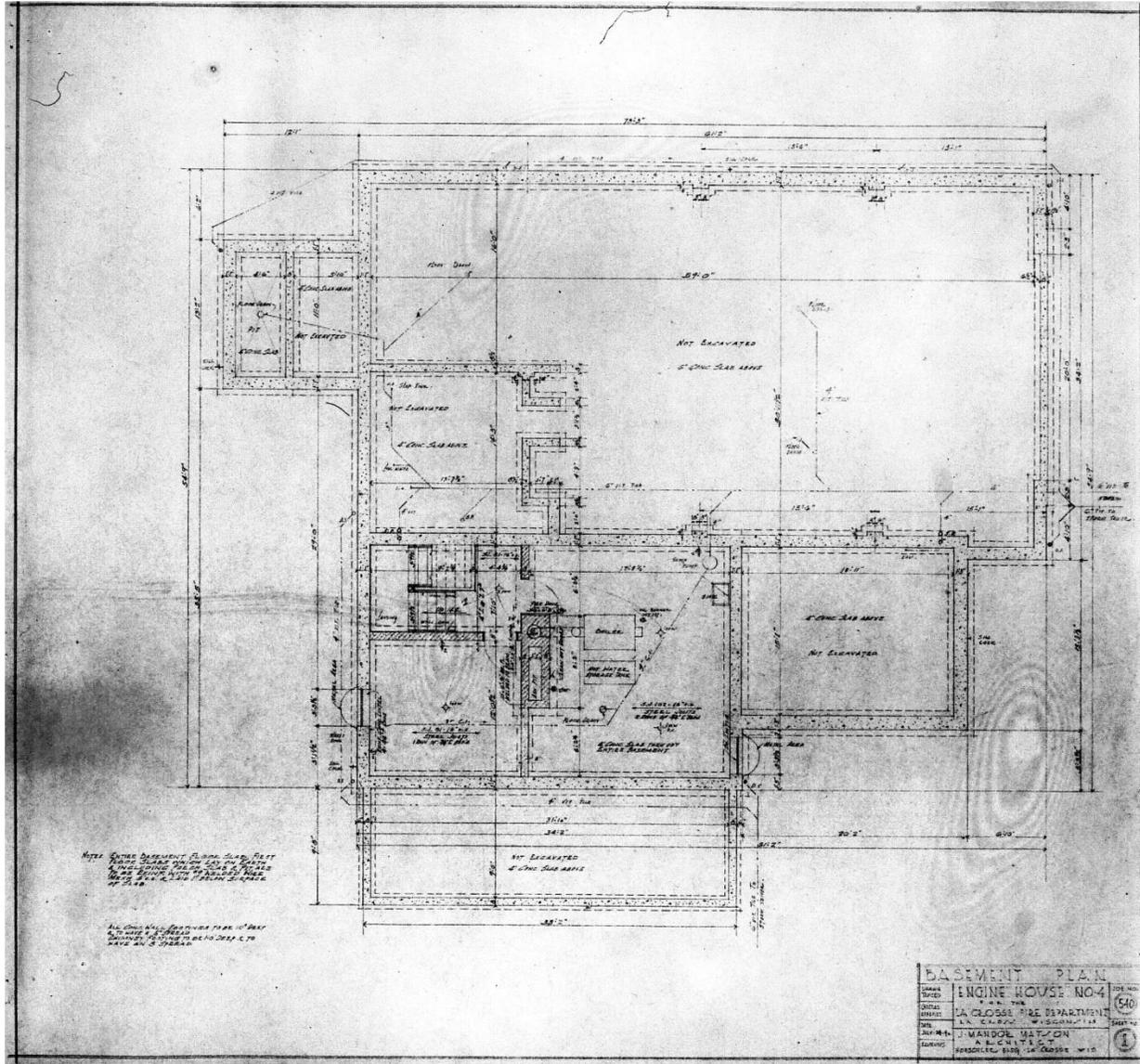
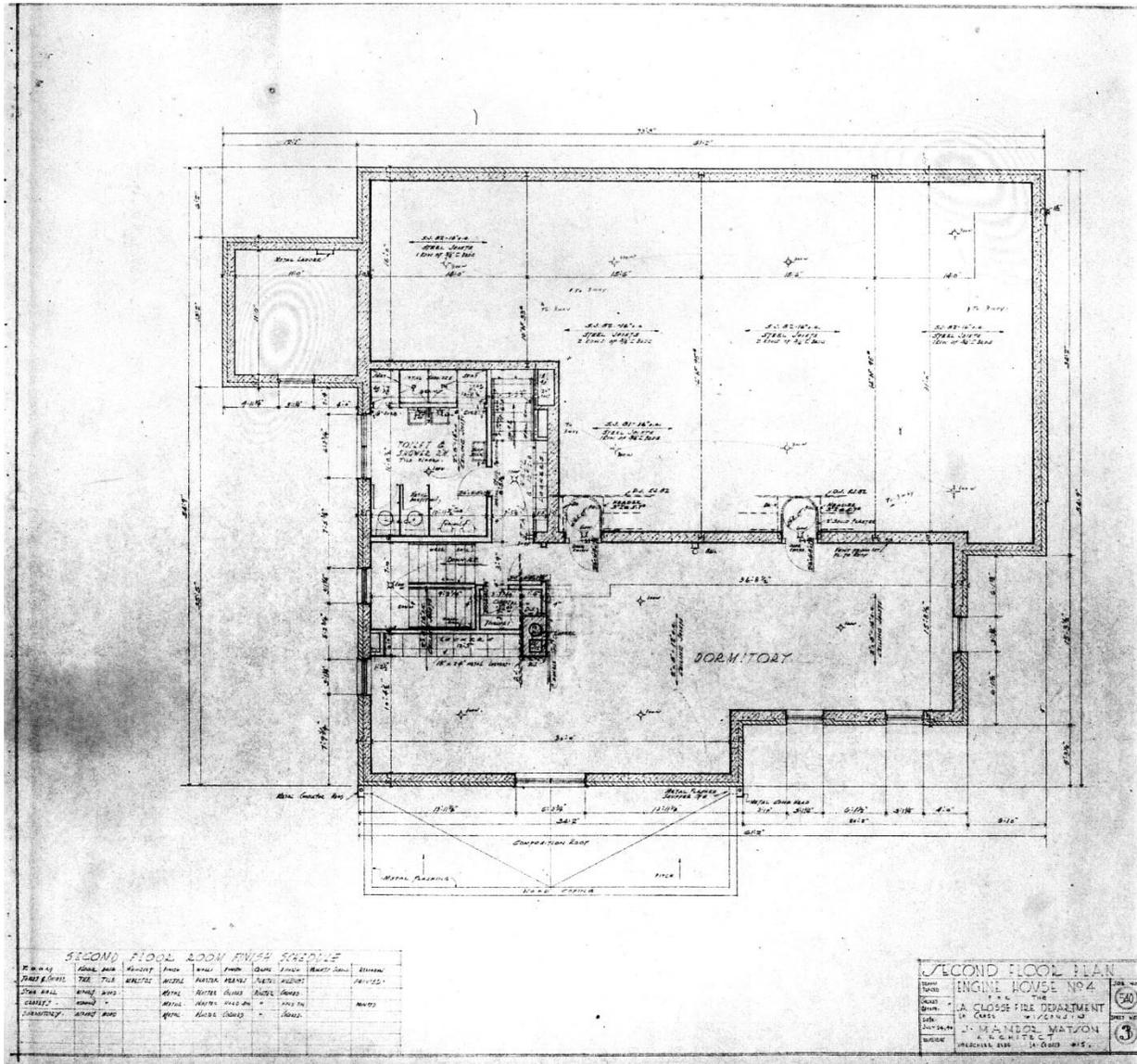


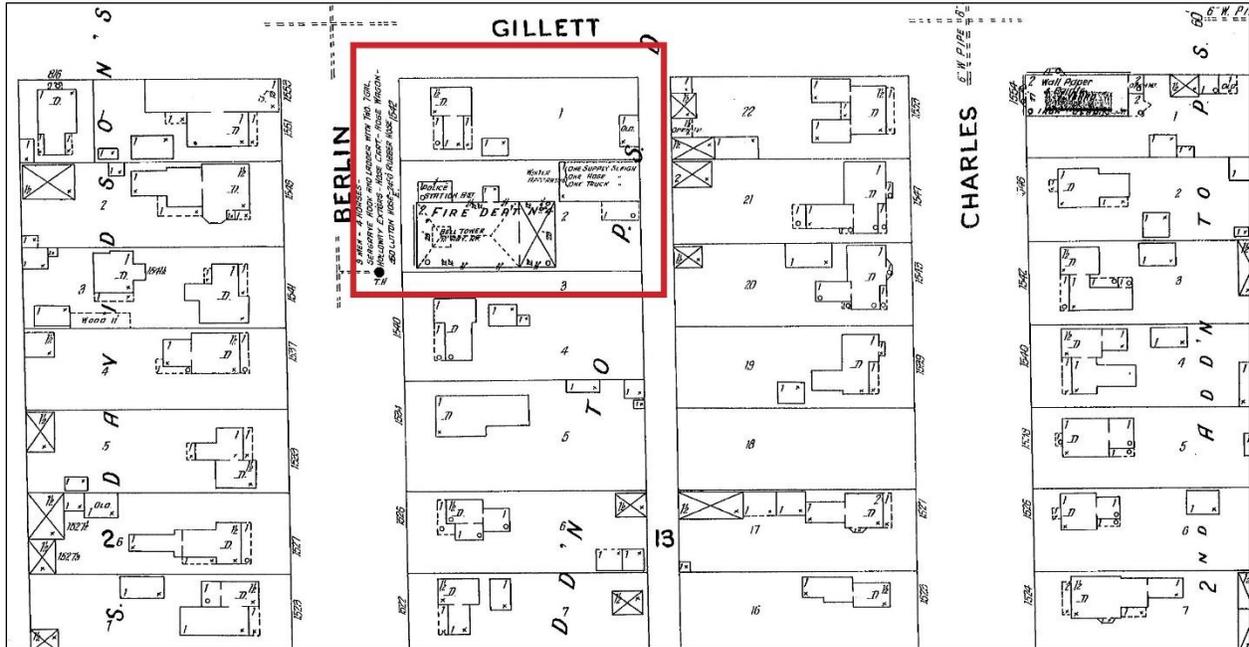


Figure 7. Second floor plan (not built as depicted)

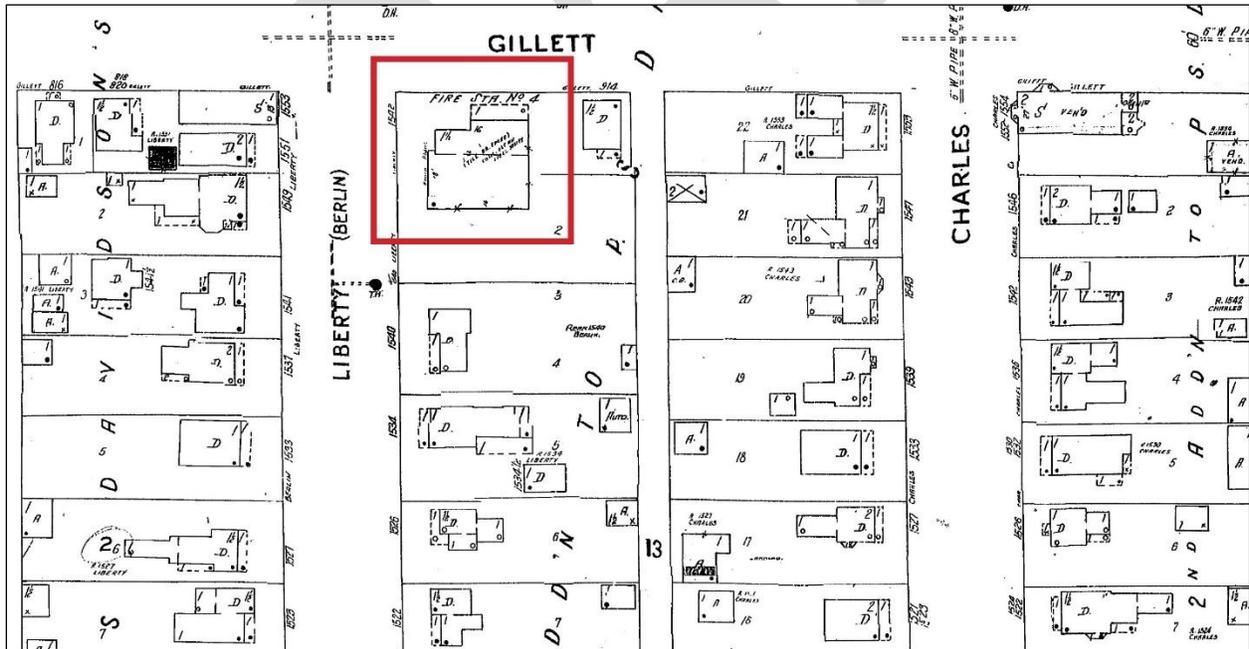


Name of Property

**Figure 8.** 1906 Sanborn map showing old 10<sup>th</sup> Ward Engine House



**Figure 9.** 1949 Sanborn map showing Fire Station No. 4



**END OF FIGURES SECTION DO NOT DELETE**

## Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once in the photograph log. The photograph order must correspond with the photograph log.

## Photo Log

Name of Property: Fire Station No. 4  
City or Vicinity: La Crosse  
County: La Crosse State: WI  
Photographer: Justin Miller  
Date photographed: August 21, 2025

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

1 of 14. WI\_LaCrosse\_FireStationNo4\_0001  
West elevation, looking southeast

2 of 14. WI\_LaCrosse\_FireStationNo4\_0002  
South elevation, looking north

3 of 14. WI\_LaCrosse\_FireStationNo4\_0003  
Southeast corner, looking northwest

4 of 14. WI\_LaCrosse\_FireStationNo4\_0004  
Northeast corner, looking southwest

5 of 14. WI\_LaCrosse\_FireStationNo4\_0005  
North elevation, looking south

6 of 14. WI\_LaCrosse\_FireStationNo4\_0006  
Porch interior, looking west

7 of 14. WI\_LaCrosse\_FireStationNo4\_0007  
Apparatus bay interior, west wall, looking southeast

8 of 14. WI\_LaCrosse\_FireStationNo4\_0008  
Apparatus bay interior, northwest corner, looking east

9 of 14. WI\_LaCrosse\_FireStationNo4\_0009  
Apparatus bay interior, north wall, detail of brass fire poles

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10 of 14. WI\_LaCrosse\_FireStationNo4\_0010  
Hose drying shaft, looking up, camera facing north

11 of 14. WI\_LaCrosse\_FireStationNo4\_0011  
Living room interior, detail of fireplace, looking east

12 of 14. WI\_LaCrosse\_FireStationNo4\_0012  
Second floor interior, detail of stairs to attic above apparatus bay, looking west

13 of 14. WI\_LaCrosse\_FireStationNo4\_0013  
Attic interior, looking west

14 of 14. WI\_LaCrosse\_FireStationNo4\_0014  
Basement interior, detail of fire doors, looking south towards hose drying shaft

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for nominations 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.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for each response using this form is estimated to be between the Tier 1 and Tier 4 levels with the estimate of the time for each tier as follows:

Tier 1 – 60-100 hours  
Tier 2 – 120 hours  
Tier 3 – 230 hours  
Tier 4 – 280 hours

The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting nominations. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive Fort Collins, CO 80525.

**Property Owner**

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

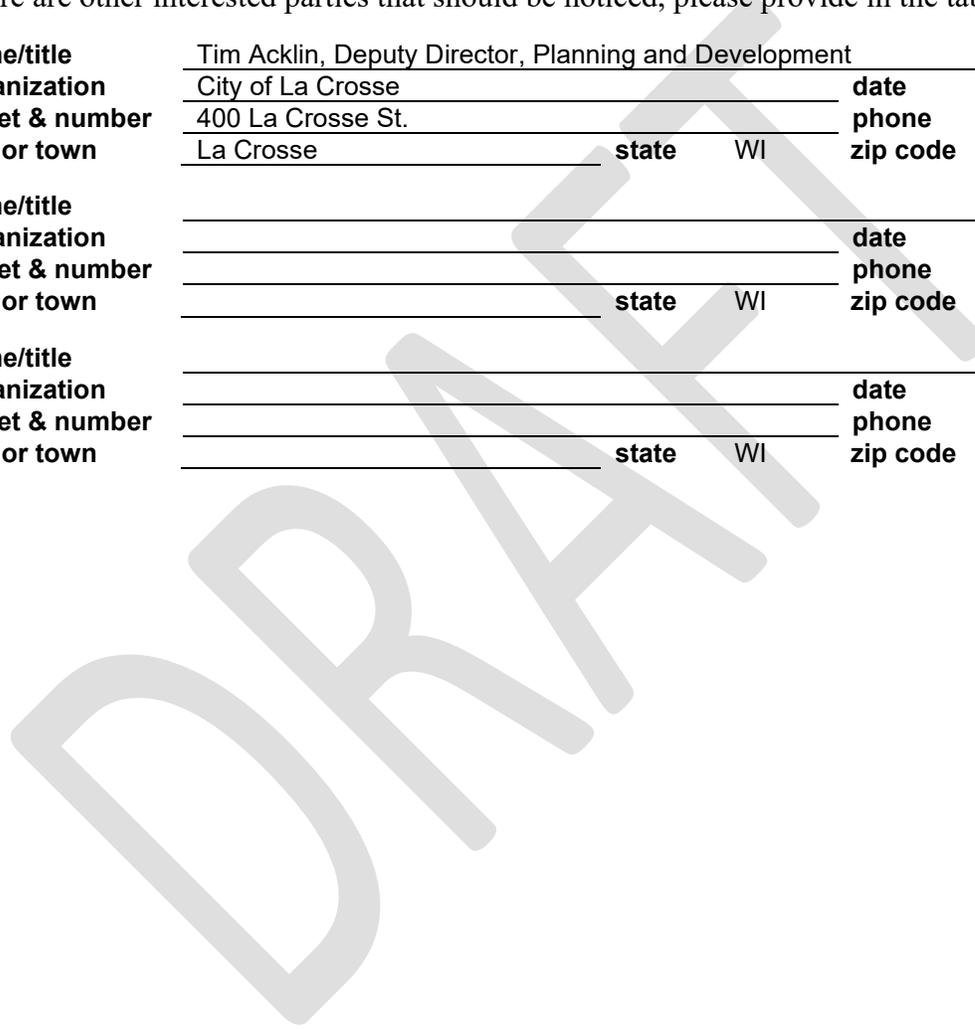
<b>name/title</b>	Jeff and Jill Murphy			<b>date</b>	Dec. 4, 2025
<b>organization</b>				<b>phone</b>	
<b>street &amp; number</b>	W3069 Kreibich Coulee Rd.			<b>zip code</b>	54623
<b>city or town</b>	Coon Valley	<b>state</b>	WI		

If there are other interested parties that should be noticed, please provide in the tables below

<b>name/title</b>	Tim Acklin, Deputy Director, Planning and Development			<b>date</b>	Dec. 4, 2025
<b>organization</b>	City of La Crosse			<b>phone</b>	608-789-7391
<b>street &amp; number</b>	400 La Crosse St.			<b>zip code</b>	54623
<b>city or town</b>	La Crosse	<b>state</b>	WI		

<b>name/title</b>				<b>date</b>	
<b>organization</b>				<b>phone</b>	
<b>street &amp; number</b>				<b>zip code</b>	
<b>city or town</b>		<b>state</b>	WI		

<b>name/title</b>				<b>date</b>	
<b>organization</b>				<b>phone</b>	
<b>street &amp; number</b>				<b>zip code</b>	
<b>city or town</b>		<b>state</b>	WI		





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Fire Station No. 4, La Crosse County, WI 3 of 14



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Fire Station No. 4, La Crosse County, WI 6 of 14



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Fire Station No. 4, La Crosse County, WI 12 of 14



Fire Station No. 4, La Crosse County, WI 13 of 14



Fire Station No. 4, La Crosse County, WI 14 of 14



# City of La Crosse, Wisconsin

City Hall  
400 La Crosse Street  
La Crosse, WI 54601

## Text File

File Number: 26-0224

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**Agenda Date:** 2/26/2026

**Version:** 1

**Status:** Agenda Ready

**In Control:** Heritage Preservation Commission

**File Type:** General Item

**Agenda Number:** 5.



# Memorandum

**To:** Certified Local Governments in Wisconsin  
**From:** State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), Certified Local Government Coordinator  
**Date:** February 2, 2025  
**Re:** *National Register of Historic Places* nominations for properties in CLG jurisdictions

---

When the *State Historic Preservation Office* (SHPO) receives a *National Register of Historic Places* (NRHP) nomination for a property within the jurisdiction of a *Certified Local Government* (CLG), the preparer will share the nomination with the chief elected official and the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) in that community at least 60 days prior to the State Review Board's consideration of the nomination. The State Review Board meets quarterly, typically in February, May, August, and November.

This is an opportunity for the HPC to comment on the nomination and contribute local knowledge of the property and its history.

As a CLG, your commission's responsibility is to review the nomination and provide an opinion as to whether the property meets the eligibility criteria for the NRHP. Typically, HPCs do this by placing the nomination on the agenda of a regular meeting and allocating time for public comment as well as commission review. It is not within the HPC's responsibility or authority to require or request edits from the nomination preparer. If the commission has concerns or feedback about the content of the nomination, that information should be transmitted directly to the SHPO.

A summary of public comments and/or a letter of the commission's opinion may be submitted, by postal mail or email, to:

Ian Gort  
[ian.gort@wisconsinhistory.org](mailto:ian.gort@wisconsinhistory.org)

State Historic Preservation Office  
Wisconsin Historical Society  
816 State St. Rm. 305  
Madison, WI 53706

The letter may come from the chair of the HPC, the director of the Planning Department, the chief elected official, or any combination thereof. Regardless of whether the SHPO receives correspondence from the CLG, the SHPO will proceed with the nomination process.

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**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.

## 1. Name of Property

Historic name: La Crosse City Hall

Other names/site number: n/a

Name of related multiple property listing: n/a

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

## 2. Location

Street & number: 400 La Crosse Street

City or town: La Crosse State: WI County: La Crosse County

Not For Publication:  Vicinity:

## 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

Applicable National Register Criteria  A  B  C  D

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<b>Signature of certifying official/Title:</b>	<b>Date</b>
Tricia Canaday, Wisconsin State Historic Preservation Officer	

**State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government**

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

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<b>Signature of commenting official:</b>	<b>Date</b>

**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

**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 county)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	Buildings
1	0	Sites
0	0	Structures
0	0	Objects
2	0	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

GOVERNMENT / city hall

GOVERNMENT / city hall

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN MOVEMENT / Brutalism

**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: foundation: CONCRETE; walls: CONCRETE, SYNTHETIC; roof: SYNTHETIC

**Narrative Description**

**Summary Paragraph**

The La Crosse City Hall is a large, Brutalist-style complex located in downtown La Crosse and built between 1968 and 1970. The city hall occupies an entire city block and is surrounded by parking lots and a landscaped plaza that was designed as part of the building. The city hall building is constructed of cast-in-place concrete with an exposed aggregate finish. The central part of the building is six stories tall with an additional mechanical penthouse. Lower one- and two-story wings radiate off the central core, creating a dynamic, irregular building massing. The La Crosse City Hall is significant under *Criterion C* in the area of Architecture as an outstanding example of the Brutalist style. The property consists of three contributing resources (the city hall building, an associated garage building, and the landscaped plaza, counted as a site) and retains sufficient historic integrity to convey its significance.

**Setting**

The La Crosse City Hall is set on a full-block urban site in downtown La Crosse. The block is surrounded by multi-lane urban streets and bounded by concrete sidewalks on three sides.

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Adjacent development consists of commercial and institutional buildings. East of the property, across 7<sup>th</sup> Street, is a large parking lot and parking ramp belonging to Western Technical College. South of the property, on the opposite side of Badger Street, is the NRHP-listed Italianate-style Gideon C. Hixon House (NR ref. no. 74000095).

## Exterior

The La Crosse City Hall consists of several distinct building masses whose complex, irregular appearance belies a highly functional plan. The central portion of the building consists of a six-story tower, containing a vertical core with elevators, restrooms, egress stairs, service areas, and a seventh-floor mechanical penthouse. Distinct office areas, each corresponding to a separate city department, are arranged around the north, south, and east sides of the core. (See Figures 3 through 7 for plans of the building and Photos 4 and 11 for representative overall views of the building.)

Additional lower building masses cluster around the base of the central portion; these building masses step back at various heights to create a complex building form. On the north side, a large one-story wing (originally the health department) projects from the central tower. Another one-story wing (containing the common council chamber) projects from the east side of the central tower; a portion of this wing rises to two stories in height. The south side of the building contains the two-story, self-contained police department. The police facilities also contain a covered and secure outdoor parking area on the south and a multi-car garage along the western perimeter of the property. On the west and east sides, concrete walls and a landscaped plaza extend the building onto its full-block site, and a small entry plaza is located on the north.

Despite its irregular form, the building has a rigorous design vocabulary and consists of only three building materials: cast-in-place concrete that has been sandblasted to expose its light-colored aggregate; windows with dark-colored anodized aluminum frames; and synthetic slate panels.<sup>1</sup> Throughout the building, the cast-in-place concrete is used in two ways: as vertical piers or as windowless wall planes.

Each distinct portion of the building is organized as a directional element (i.e. it has “sides” that are distinct from the “end” wall.) The structure of each building portion is expressed through prominent vertical concrete piers near the corner of each end wall. These piers are both taller and project further than the adjacent side and end walls. The concrete side walls are separated from the piers by a recessed vertical reveal, creating the effect of multiple layered planes. The end wall of each portion is recessed from the piers and consists of anodized aluminum windows arranged in full-width bands, alternating with synthetic slate panels whose dark color and taut texture deliberately contrasts with the light-colored exposed aggregate concrete piers and side walls. The same architectural vocabulary extends in a simplified version to the multiple egress stair towers located around the building. As subordinate elements, the egress stairs lack the prominent structural piers and consist instead of concrete side walls and synthetic slate recessed end walls.

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<sup>1</sup> The building originally contained genuine slate; the original slate cladding was replaced between 2002 and 2004 with synthetic panels that replicate the appearance of the originals.

The entire building complex is unified through continuous horizontal expansion joints in the concrete. These expansion joints align with the base of the band of windows in each story and provide a horizontal rhythm to the tower's verticality. Similar horizontal joints are located along the top edge of the low walls around the surrounding plaza; here, the joints provide a human sense of scale and a unifying datum line throughout the landscape.

Each elevation of the building complex is discussed below. All walls and piers are cast-in-place exposed aggregate concrete unless otherwise noted. As mentioned previously, the building is made up of multiple building portions, each originally containing a different city department. For clarity, the distinct building portions will be referred to by the original departments that occupied them. An explanation of subsequent internal rearrangement of department locations follows the narrative description.

*North (La Crosse Street / main parking lot) elevation (Photos 1, 2, 3, and 4)*

The north elevation contains, from west to east (right to left), the one-story former health department wing; the six-story central tower; and the one-story common council chamber. A sunken driveway is located along the western edge of the building and gives access to basement-level receiving and storage areas. An egress stair tower is located on the west end of the health department wing. This stair tower, like all other stair towers on the building, rises above the main body of the health department wing and provides access to its flat roof. The north wall of the stair tower (its "end wall" in the building's architectural vocabulary) is recessed and clad in synthetic slate. An egress door is located at grade and leads to the north parking lot. (Photos 2 and 3).

The health department wing is three bays wide. The outer bays project slightly and are treated as an "end wall," with prominent exposed structural piers that are taller than the main wall height. The area between the piers contains a full-width band of windows with synthetic slate panels above and below. (Photo 3) The middle bay of the three-bay health department wing is recessed and consists of a windowless concrete wall. (Photo 2) The walls and piers, like all others throughout the building, form a low parapet around the flat roof behind and are capped with flat aluminum coping. Another egress stair tower, identical to the western wall, is located on the eastern end of the health department wing.

Viewed in elevation, the eastern bay of the one-story health department wing aligns with the western bay of the central six-story tower, and the top edge of the health department wing aligns precisely with the bottom of the second-story windows in the central tower behind. This alignment is further reinforced by a horizontal expansion joint in the adjacent concrete piers and walls (a design element that continues around the entire exterior). The six-story central tower consists of two "end wall" bays separated by a deep windowless recess. (Photos 1 and 4) Each of the bays continues the same architectural vocabulary with alternating bands of windows and synthetic slate panels. The western bay is wider and the one-story health department wing projects from the base. The deep recess between the two bays of the central tower is clad in windowless concrete walls. Pedestrian bridges are located at the fourth and sixth stories between the two bays; these are expressed on the exterior as windowless concrete boxes that project from

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the back wall of the recessed bay. The recessed bay rises an additional story above the main part of the central tower and contains a windowless mechanical penthouse, clad in the same concrete walls as the rest of the building. (Photo 1)

The eastern bay of the central tower is narrower than the western bay and contains a two-story entry vestibule at its base. The vestibule has several sets of paired glass doors topped by a flat black metal canopy that spans the full width between the concrete piers. The front beam of the canopy bears the title "CITY HALL" in white letters. Above the canopy are double-height windows. Beginning at the third story, the typical alternating bands of synthetic slate and windows fill the upper stories. (Photo 1)

A small landscaped plaza is located in front of the north entry vestibule. The plaza is raised three steps above the sidewalk and parking lot level. A low concrete wall runs along the west edge of the plaza and extends beyond the shallow flight of stairs. At the outermost corner of the low concrete wall is a granite cornerstone bearing the name "CITY HALL" on its eastern face and the dates "JULY 4 , 1891 / JULY 4, 1970", corresponding to the cornerstone ceremony of the preceding city hall building and the dedication of the current building. The remainder of the plaza contains a wide concrete walkway, precisely aligned with the width of the vertical bay, and a square sunken planter bed with a concrete border and containing an ornamental tree. This sunken planter was originally a small pool and fountain that was removed at an unknown date.<sup>2</sup> A similar low concrete wall runs along the eastern edge of the small plaza. (Photo 12)

The common council wing is located at the eastern end of the building, and its north elevation consists primarily of windowless concrete ("side walls," in the architectural vocabulary of the building.) The common council wing contains three bays, corresponding to its roughly cruciform plan. The western bay is two stories in height (originally containing the city treasurer's department on the second story above the council chambers below). A single window is located in the extreme west end of the bay, and a symmetrically-placed egress door is located in the extreme east end of the bay. The remainder of the elevation is blank concrete. The center bay, corresponding to one of the arms of the cruciform plan, projects slightly and is lower. The taller volume of the common council chamber is visible behind the projecting center bay and continues eastward to form the easternmost bay of this wing. Visible at the easternmost end of the north elevation, in profile, are the structural concrete piers on the east "end wall" of the common council wing. (Photo 4)

#### *East (7<sup>th</sup> Street / plaza) elevation* (Photos 4, 5, and 6)

The east elevation consists of the central tower and the common council chamber; the east ends of the health department wing (on the north side of the complex) and the police department wing (on the south side of the complex) are also visible. The east elevation of the central tower and common council chamber are symmetrically composed. The elevation of the cruciform-plan common council chamber consists of a central "end wall" bay, with prominent structural piers, floating side walls, and a windowless recessed wall of synthetic slate panels. The center bay of the common council chamber is flanked by blank concrete walls. In the second story above the

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<sup>2</sup> "A Dignified Landmark: Architects Wanted Distinctive Design," *La Crosse Tribune*, July 2, 1970, p. 22.

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common council chamber, the east elevation of the former treasurer's department is also treated as an "end wall," with structural piers, floating side walls, and a full-width band of windows and synthetic slate panels. The east elevation of the central six-story tower is visible above the projecting treasurer's office. The tower elevation is three bays as well and consists windowless concrete walls in the north and south bays and a central "end bay" with alternating bands of windows and synthetic slate; structural piers; and side walls that project slightly from the flanking walls. (Photos 4 and 5)

Also visible in the east elevation are the east ends of the one-story health department wing on the north and the two-story police department wing on the south. The east elevations of both the wings consist of blank concrete walls with a central egress stair tower with solid concrete east wall and recessed north and south walls clad in synthetic slate. The health department stair tower, on the north, projects above the roofline of the one-story building mass. The police department stair tower, on the south, stops at the same height as the parapet of the two-story building mass. The secure parking area located south of the police department wing is also visible; it is enclosed by a flat-roofed canopy supported on concrete piers with metal security fencing panels between. The roofed parking area is surrounded by a similar lower security wall with concrete piers and gate posts and metal security fencing panels with a driveway and vehicular gate in the east elevation. (Photo 6)

#### *South elevation* (Photos 6, 7, 8, and 9)

The south elevation contains, from east to west (right to left), the common council chamber, the six-story central tower, and the two-story police department. The south elevations of the common council chamber and the central tower are identical to the north elevations described previously, with the blank walls of the cruciform-plan common council chamber save for a single egress door and a single window at the east and west ends, respectively; a glass-walled two-story vestibule in the east bay of the central tower; a deeply recessed bay with windowless pedestrian bridges at the fourth and sixth stories and a seventh-story mechanical penthouse; and a wider western bay with alternating bands of windows and synthetic slate. (Photo 7)

Like the health department wing on the north elevation, the eastern bay of the police department wing aligns with the western bay of the central tower. The two-story police department wing consists of two "end wall" bays separated by a narrower recessed blank bay. An exterior egress stair tower is located on both the east and west ends; the western stair tower rises above the level of the main parapet to provide access to the flat roof. The first story of the police department wing is no longer visible due to the enclosed and roofed secure parking area. This secure parking area was added in 2018. The secure parking area is enclosed by concrete piers (that echo the architectural vocabulary of the original 1970 building) with security fencing panels and a flat-roofed canopy. (Photos 7, 8, and 9)

#### *West (5<sup>th</sup> Street) elevation* (Photos 9 and 11)

The west elevation is almost symmetrically composed and is nearly windowless. From south to north (right to left), the elevation contains the west walls of the two-story police department wing; the six-story central tower; and the one-story health department wing. The west walls of the police department and health department wings are blank concrete, with a central exterior

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egress stair tower in each wing, and the structural piers of the north and south faces of the wing visible in profile. The six-story central tower portion, which rises up behind the lower police and health department wings, is three bays wide. The west elevation of the central tower is three bays wide and is C-shaped in plan. The central bay contains a central blank vertical area corresponding to the location of the elevator bank inside. Flanking this are two narrow vertical strips of alternating window and synthetic slate bands; these windows provide light to the elevator lobbies. In the corners of each side of the central bay are windowless square vertical shafts containing restrooms in each story. The central elevator core rises above the main level of the tower and contains a seventh-story mechanical penthouse. The north and south arms of the C-plan central tower project from the elevator core. Their western faces are treated as “side walls” in the building’s architectural vocabulary and are blank except for the horizontal expansion joints that run around the entire building exterior. (Photo 11)

Although not visible when viewed directly head-on, the projecting building portions that constitute the west elevation contain windowed “end walls” that face into courtyard formed by the C-shaped plan. The courtyard elevations of the health department wing and the police department wing are similar to their respective outer elevations. The south elevation of the health department wing contains from west to east, like the north elevation, a wide bay of windows and synthetic slate; and a wide recessed bay of blank concrete which meets the west wall of the central tower. Similarly, the north elevation of the police department wing contains from west to east, a similar wide bay of windows and synthetic slate; and a narrow recessed bay of blank concrete which meets the west wall of the central tower. (Photo 9)

The western perimeter of the site is bounded by a tall concrete wall. Integrated into the wall, at the southwest corner of the site, is a flat-roofed police garage with four double-wide vehicle bays in its east (courtyard-facing) elevation. Each bay has a modern rolltop metal door. The walls of the garage are the same cast-in-place exposed aggregate concrete as the rest of the building. A horizontal expansion joint runs along the top of the vehicle doors and continues around all four walls of the garage. On the west elevation of the garage, facing the street, in the band above the horizontal expansion joint, are metal letters reading “LA CROSSE CITY HALL”. (Photos 10 and 11) The garage is counted as a contributing building in the resource count for the property.

The remainder of the western edge of the property is lined by a concrete wall. The top edge of the wall aligns with the horizontal expansion joint in the police garage. These walls originally enclosed a grass plaza; a flight of steps led from the street-level sidewalk to the plaza. The plaza was altered in 2018 to provide additional secure parking. The level of the plaza was lowered to the level of the street. The interior walls surrounding the parking courtyard reveal the difference between the original lower part of the wall (which was originally not visible) and the visible upper part of the wall (which was sandblasted to reveal the exposed aggregate.) At the same time the courtyard was altered, the original plaza staircase and its side walls were removed and a metal security fence panel was installed in its place. (Photo 14)

### *Roof*

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All the portions of the building have flat roofs. In 2020, solar panels were installed on a portion of the north health department wing; the roof of the common council chamber; and the roof of the police station wing and canopy. The solar panels are not visible from street level.

### **Interior**

The interiors of the La Crosse City Hall constitute six floors of office and administrative space plus a full basement and a penthouse-level mechanical room. Character-defining features of the interior include the major public spaces such as the main lobby and the common council chamber; the functional arrangement of the various city department offices (developed over a multi-year period of planning and design); and materials and finishes including exposed aggregate concrete, ebonized wood slat paneling, and slate tile flooring.

As described above, the City Hall building consists of a six-story central office tower; a one-story health department wing at the north; the one-story common council chambers at the east; and a two-story police department wing at the south.

#### *Basement*

A finished basement level is located under the entire building apart from the common council chamber. Under the health department wing, the basement contains a large departmental storage area and the former receiving and mailroom. The portion of the basement under the central tower contains custodial and mechanical spaces. The basement of the police department is separate from the rest of the building and is part of the self-contained police department wing. The police basement includes lockers, classrooms, and an indoor firing range.

#### *First floor*

The first floor contains the main public lobby, the common council chamber, and office space in the police department wing and former health department wing. The main lobby is approached by two-story, glass-walled entry vestibules at the north and south. (Photos 15 and 16) The lobby itself is two stories as well, with original slate floors, cast-in-place exposed aggregate concrete walls, and an acoustical tile ceiling. The east and west walls of the lobby are lined with ebonized wood information desks. The west side of the lobby is a wide corridor leading to the banks of elevators. On either side of the corridor leading to the elevator lobby are egress staircases and mechanical spaces. The west wall of the elevator lobby also contains restrooms.

The north section of the first floor originally contained the city health department, including consultation rooms and a laboratory. The space was remodeled several times, and when the health department relocated in 2016 to another building, the space was repurposed as offices and meeting rooms for other city departments. Although the wing no longer retains the waiting room, consultation rooms, or laboratory spaces associated with the health department, the interiors still retain the general layout, with a central corridor flanked by various office space, and many of the original materials and finishes, including ebonized wood doors and exposed concrete walls. The south section of the first floor contains the self-contained police department, which occupies two full floors plus the basement.

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The east side of the main lobby leads to the common council chamber. This large room was renovated in 2020 as part of COVID-era virtual meeting upgrades. The common council chamber has a semicircular bank of seating for alderpeople. The east (back) wall and portions of soffits have been replaced with modern wood paneling; these originally contained the same ebonized slatted wood paneling in the rest of the building. The council chamber retains its exposed aggregate concrete walls and its smooth concrete waffle slab ceiling. (Photo 17) The west part of the common council chamber (the former seating area for the general public) had retractable walls installed to make the space usable for small or large group meetings. These folding accordion-style retractable walls follow the structural bays of the room and the original space and volume of the common council chamber remains legible.

### *Second through sixth floors*

The second story contains office areas, including a full second story of the police department wing, arranged around the central elevator core. A pedestrian bridge leads from the elevators at the west across the upper part of the two-story lobby to the former city assessor's office at the east, above the common council chamber. (Photo 18)

The third through sixth stories each have a similar layout, with three distinct office areas arranged around the central elevator core. The upper stories retain many of their original materials and finishes, including exposed aggregate concrete walls, ebonized slat paneling, polished metal elevator doors, and acoustical tile ceiling. (Photos 19, 20, and 21)

### **Landscape**

The La Crosse City Hall building is located near the southern edge of its full-block site. The west portion of the site contains the walled parking courtyard, formerly a landscaped plaza that was altered in 2018. The north portion of the site contains a large surface parking lot that has remained intact since the building's construction. Immediately adjacent to the north elevation of the city hall building is the small landscaped plaza, described previously. The east portion of the site is bisected by a curved driveway that connects to Badger Street at the south and continues the curve of 6<sup>th</sup> Street. Between the east side of the building and the driveway is a lawn area that is heavily landscaped with mature trees and shrubs. The driveway is lined with angled parking spots. East of the driveway is a triangular plaza that contains grass, a number of trees, concrete walkways, and five seating areas along 7<sup>th</sup> Street. Each seating area is defined by a low exposed aggregate concrete wall that continues the architectural vocabulary of the main building (Photo 13) At the southeast corner of the city hall building is a walled plaza, with concrete walls and metal security fencing panels. This area was originally open and similar to the plaza at the north entrance but was altered in 2018 as part of the security upgrades at the police department.

### **Integrity**

The La Crosse City Hall retains integrity in all seven aspects. The building has remained in use as the home of La Crosse's municipal government since 1970 the year of its construction. Changes to the building reflect continued routine maintenance as well as necessary security improvements, especially related to the police department. Major changes to the building include the construction of the secure covered parking structure on the south elevation of the police

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station wing, interior alterations to the common council chamber, and the replacement of the west exterior plaza with a sunken paved parking area. Other changes include minor interior updates to wall and flooring materials.

The city hall property retains integrity of location and integrity of setting as conveyed through its urban site, its original large north parking lot, and its original landscaped plaza at the east. Although the original western landscaped plaza was altered into a parking lot, the area retains its original concrete walls that define the perimeter of the space and relate to the design and materials of the main building. Similarly, the secure police parking area that was created in 2018 on the south side of the building is located on a non-primary area of the building and does not detract from the overall setting.

The building retains integrity of design as conveyed through its intact plan and exterior elevations, particularly the intact architectural vocabulary of structural concrete piers, broad windowless concrete walls, and alternating bands of windows and cladding panels. The building also conveys its integrity of design through its intact arrangement of interior spaces. Although the secure covered police parking area covered the first story of the police department wing, the original elevation remains intact, and the canopy and piers are sympathetic to the scale, composition, rhythm, and materials of the original building.

The building retains integrity of materials on the exterior as conveyed through its cast-in-place exposed aggregate concrete and its anodized aluminum windows. The building retains integrity of materials on the interior as conveyed through its slate lobby floor, its concrete waffle slab ceiling in the common council chamber, and exposed aggregation concrete walls, ebonized slat paneling, and original acoustical ceiling tiles. Although interior materials have been altered, including paneling in the common council chamber and other materials in various department offices, the majority of character-defining walls and ceilings remain intact.

The building retains integrity of workmanship as demonstrated through its sandblasted concrete elements.

The building retains integrity of feeling as conveyed through its quality as a monumental public building in downtown La Crosse.

The building retains integrity of association and has functioned continuously as the La Crosse City Hall since its construction.

**END OF DESCRIPTION, DO NOT DELETE**

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## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

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(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.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

**Areas of Significance**

ARCHITECTURE

**Significant Person**

n/a

**Period of Significance**

1970

**Cultural Affiliation**

n/a

**Significant Dates**

1970

**Architect/Builder**

Hackner, Schroeder, Roslansky and Associates, architects  
Roger Roslansky, designer  
Peter Nelson and Son, builder

**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph**

The La Crosse City Hall is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under *Criterion C* in the area of Architecture at the local level of significance. With its bold sculptural form, highly functional plan, and extensive use of cast-in-place exposed aggregate concrete, the city hall is an outstanding local example of the Brutalist style of architecture.

**Period of Significance and Justification**

The period of significance for the La Crosse City Hall is 1970, the year of its completion.

**Criteria Consideration (if applicable)**

n/a

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

The La Crosse City Hall is being nominated to the National Register as a notable local example of Brutalist architecture. Brief historic contexts follow for the City of La Crosse and its

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municipal government; a history of the subject property; a discussion of the Brutalist style; and a brief biography of the architectural designers of the building.

### Historic Context

Present-day La Crosse is located in western Wisconsin, on a prairie flanked by tall bluffs at the confluence of the Mississippi and Black Rivers. The Ho-Chunk, Ojibwe, and Sioux used the area as a meeting place and location for trade for centuries. When European fur traders and missionaries began moving into the Upper Midwest in the nineteenth century, the area became a popular location for fur traders, and a trading post was established in 1841 in a log building. In 1843, the post was moved to the site of present-day downtown and renamed “La Crosse” after the name of the field sport that Native Americans had played in the area.<sup>3</sup>

Within a decade, the settlement began to see rapid growth. The surrounding prairie proved to be excellent farmland, and the geographical advantage of the high banks of the Mississippi River made the location an excellent dock for river traffic and steamboats as well as being immune to flooding. River trade spurred on economic growth, and the population increased from 573 inhabitants in 1853 to 3,860 people in 1860.<sup>4</sup> The Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul Railroad reached La Crosse in 1858 and offered larger markets for the city’s industries of lumber and grain milling and brewing.<sup>5</sup>

The 1860s and 1870s saw the establishment in the city of large industries, railway lines, banks, local government, and an economy based on transportation and access to a large river port. Because of its river connection to the pineries of northern Wisconsin, La Crosse developed into a lumber boom town, with thirty-three mills located along the Mississippi and Black Rivers. Lumbering helped propel La Crosse into the second largest city in Wisconsin by 1880, with just over 25,000 inhabitants.

As La Crosse prospered, the city grew outwards from its location along the Mississippi River. Large residential neighborhoods were developed east of downtown, on a flat area between the Mississippi and the bluffs to the east.<sup>6</sup> The 1890s saw a decline in growth due to the end of the lumber industry and a nationwide economic recession, and by the 1910s and 1920s, the economy of the city had completely changed, with the lack of both lumber mills and the end of widespread river traffic. Infrastructure such as paved streets, municipal electricity, deep wells and water works, a public health department and hospitals, large public schools, zoning laws, and a park system were all introduced by 1913.

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<sup>3</sup> Sanford, Albert and H. J. Hirschheimer, *A History of La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1841-1900* (La Crosse: La Crosse County Historical Society, 1951).

<sup>4</sup> Hessel, Susan and Gayda Hollnagel, *A History of La Crosse, Wisconsin in the Twentieth Century*, (La Crosse: La Crosse Historical Society, 2007); Joan Rausch and Richard Zeitlin, *City of La Crosse Intensive Architectural/Historical Survey Report* (La Crosse: City of La Crosse Department of City Planning, 1984).

<sup>5</sup> Rausch and Zeitlin, 17-20.

<sup>6</sup> Rausch and Zeitlin, 20-23.

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The population of La Crosse reached 30,421 people in 1920.<sup>7</sup> The 1920s saw a renewed growth in the city's economy and in residential home construction, due in no small part to increased enrollments at the La Crosse Normal School (the present-day University of Wisconsin-La Crosse), the Wisconsin Business College, and the La Crosse Vocational School.<sup>8</sup> Other early 20<sup>th</sup>-century industries and businesses included implement and carriage manufacturing, button production, rubber boot and shoe production, and beer (and malt and soda products during Prohibition). By the early 1950s, several of La Crosse's larger industries were shuttered. The loss of these industries, along with a catastrophic flood of the Mississippi River in 1965, impacted the historic downtown industrial and business district, along with residential neighborhoods on French Island and the north side of the city. These events served as a catalyst for a series of federally-funded urban renewal projects in the 1960s and 1970s. In turn, the demolition of the city's nineteenth century courthouse, city hall, library, and post office under urban renewal inspired a historic preservation movement to preserve the remaining portions of La Crosse's historic downtown.<sup>9</sup>

### *Municipal government in La Crosse*

La Crosse was incorporated as a city by an act of the Wisconsin State Legislature in 1856. Since its incorporation, the municipal government has been organized around a mayor and a common council made up of members representing each of the city's various wards. The city initially had three wards; in 1860, one of those was split to create a fourth ward. In 1871, the city annexed the neighboring Village of North La Crosse, which became the fifth ward. In the 1880s and 1890s, La Crosse divided each of its wards in two, and then redivided each of those wards in two again.<sup>10</sup> After 1891, the city had twenty wards, ostensibly created to prevent political corruption since it was more difficult to pay off a larger number of aldermen. In the late twentieth century, the number of alderpeople was reduced to seventeen; since 2017, the common council has been made up of thirteen members.<sup>11</sup>

When La Crosse was first incorporated, city government offices were originally located in the county courthouse. The city built a combination city hall and fire house in 1868 on the north side of Main Street between 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Streets (demolished in 1995).<sup>12</sup> In 1892, the city constructed a standalone city hall building at the corner of State Street and 5<sup>th</sup> Street. The "new" City Hall was designed by local architects Stolze and Schick and built at a cost of \$54,000. The building continued to serve as the home of the municipal government until 1970 when the subject

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<sup>7</sup> Godden, Laura and Paul Beck. *La Crosse, Postcard and History Series*, (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2015); Joan Rausch and Richard Zeitlin, *Historic La Crosse: Architectural and Historic Record: A Summary of an Intensive Survey Report*, (La Crosse: Architectural Researches, Inc. and Historic Resources, Inc., 1984); La Crosse Historical Society, *La Crosse, Wisconsin (Images of America Series)*, (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 1999).

<sup>8</sup> Rausch and Zeitlin, 21-24.

<sup>9</sup> Rausch and Zeitlin, 311-313; "Footsteps of La Crosse: Early 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Industry," La Crosse Public Library Archives.

<sup>10</sup> Rausch and Zeitlin, 301-302.

<sup>11</sup> Brad Williams, "Yesterday in La Crosse: The 1973 La Crosse mayor race and the city's first female council member," *WIZM News*, Feb. 28, 2025; accessed from <https://www.wizmnews.com/2025/02/28/the-1973-la-crosse-mayor-race-and-the-citys-first-female-council-member/>.

<sup>12</sup> "La Crosse City Hall, Fire Station, Jail," Wisconsin Architecture and History Inventory record #35003, 413 N. Main St.; "La Crosse's First City Hall is No More," *La Crosse Tribune*, July 25, 1995, A-1.

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building was completed. Following the completion of the subject building, the 1891 city hall was razed as part of an urban renewal project.<sup>13</sup>

### *The La Crosse City Hall: Property history*

The La Crosse City Hall building was the result of a multi-year, multi-phase planning and design process. The La Crosse city government had been housed since 1892 in a Romanesque Revival-style red brick building with a prominent square corner tower. The 25,000 square foot building was a visual landmark in downtown, but by the end of World War II, the old city hall was regarded by many as outdated and too small. Even the *La Crosse Tribune* editorialized: "It is shabby, inadequate, some of its areas unsafe. The wiring is bad. Its stairs sound like the original soundtrack for Inner Sanctum. Vital city records would be lost in case of fire."<sup>14</sup>

As part of broader citywide redevelopment initiatives, in 1960 the Common Council hired the Newark, NJ-based planning firm of Candeub, Fleissig and Associates to produce a masterplan for redevelopment, including new zoning regulations, recommendations on downtown redevelopment, recommendations on industrial and residential development, and identifying areas and projects eligible for federal urban renewal funding.<sup>15</sup> The planning consultants unveiled their recommendations in May 1961, among them a proposed new civic center. The "ideas only" plan included moving the existing Post Office, converting the old county courthouse to an art gallery, demolishing the old city hall, and building new facilities for city and county government offices. The Common Council and County Board both approved the plan, noting that the phased approach would "stop piecemeal development and offers plenty of flexibility."<sup>16</sup>

The county began planning for a new county courthouse and safety building almost immediately, and by 1963 construction was underway. The City followed the next year, and in February 1964, the La Crosse Common Council hired the local architectural firm of Hackner, Schroeder and Associates to study space requirements for a new city hall building. The firm presented their recommendations a month later, estimating that a new building would cost about \$692,000 for a "functional, efficient building, but not an ornate, elaborate one."<sup>17</sup>

Planning for the new city hall proceeded throughout 1964 and 1965. Hackner, Schroeder and Associates (technically only working as planning consultants) developed massing schemes for the new building based on size and functional requirements. As the project progressed, so did the scope and budget. It soon became clear that the new building would cost nearly four times the original estimate. The city began planning for a \$2.8 million bond referendum to fund

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<sup>13</sup> Rausch and Zeitlin, 302; Biographical/Historical Note, "Guide to the La Crosse, Wisconsin, Committee on Buildings and Grounds, Resolutions and Reports Relating to Buildings and Grounds, 1859-1932 (bulk 1874-1932)," La Crosse Series 025, La Crosse Public Library Archives and Local History Department.

<sup>14</sup> Editorial, *La Crosse Tribune*, Oct. 20, 1966, p. 8.

<sup>15</sup> "City Officials Say: Consultant Will Plan For Growth, Redevelopment Of Blight Areas," *La Crosse Tribune*, July 3, 1960, p. 5.

<sup>16</sup> "Preliminary Plan For Civic Center Unveiled: Plan Approved By Commission," *La Crosse Tribune*, May 10, 1961, p. 1; "Ideas' for Civic Center," *La Crosse Tribune*, May 11, 1961, p. 1.

<sup>17</sup> "New City Hall Cost Estimated At \$692,000," *La Crosse Tribune*, March 13, 1964, p. 9.

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construction of the new building. The architects also produced renderings and a large model of the proposed building to help convince aldermen and citizens to approve the bond financing.<sup>18</sup>

In August 1966, Hackner, Schroeder and Associates unveiled the model of a six-story city hall before the Common Council. The building had a monumental central tower flanked by lower wings that spread out into the landscape and rooted the building within its landscaped plaza. Architect Harry Schroeder told the common council that the multistory building was intended “to be a real landmark, a real contribution to the Civic Center.”<sup>19</sup> The bond referendum passed, and with funding secured, Hackner, Schroeder and Associates (still only working as consultants) continued to refine the design of the building.

Preliminary plans for the building were nearing completion in early 1967. The new building would be substantially larger than the old city hall. Each city department had been asked to project how much space would be needed in 1985, and the building was designed to accommodate these twenty-year projections.<sup>20</sup> On Feb. 6, 1967, the Common Council approved the preliminary plans, and three days later formally hired Hackner, Schroeder and Associates as architects of record for the project and instructed them to prepare final plans.<sup>21</sup> Throughout the fall of 1967, the architects met with various city departments to determine office layouts. Working plans for the new building were complete by January 1968. Construction cost by this point was estimated at \$2.29 million, in line with the original bond estimate of \$2.8 million.<sup>22</sup>

While the City was planning its new building, other aspects of the 1961 Candeub & Fleissig masterplan were being implemented. The La Crosse Redevelopment Authority had been formed to oversee urban renewal redevelopment. The Authority was responsible for purchasing and/or clearing development sites with federal urban renewal funds, then reselling those sites to the final client. The City purchased the site for the new city hall in March 1968 from the La Crosse Redevelopment Authority.<sup>23</sup> That same month, the Common Council also approved the closure of Badger, Pine, and 6<sup>th</sup> Streets in order to create the large building site.<sup>24</sup>

Construction bids for the new building were let in March 1968. Several building trades were on strike at the time, however, and most of the bids came in nearly \$500,000 over estimates.<sup>25</sup> Aldermen speculated that uncertainty over wage negotiations had caused some contractors to bid high because of unknown labor costs, and other contractors not to bid at all. The city modified the call for bids, including eliminating an underground parking garage as well as interior vinyl wall covering, and opened a second round of bidding, resulting in low bids of \$2,616,202 that

<sup>18</sup> “Model Shown Of 6-Story City Hall,” *La Crosse Tribune*, Aug. 29, 1966, p. 9.

<sup>19</sup> “Model Shown Of 6-Story City Hall.”

<sup>20</sup> “City Hall Space Estimates Increased,” *La Crosse Tribune*, Feb. 5, 1967, p. 9.

<sup>21</sup> “City Hall Plans Approved,” *La Crosse Tribune*, Feb. 7, 1967.

<sup>22</sup> “New City Hall Plans Ready In January,” *La Crosse Tribune*, Nov. 29, 1967, p. 20.

<sup>23</sup> “Proposals for City Hall Are Explained,” *La Crosse Tribune*, Oct. 8, 1965, p. 9; “Center Money, City Hall Site Recommended,” *La Crosse Tribune*, July 16, 1965, p. 1; “Civic Center Plans Being Prepared,” *La Crosse Tribune*, July 25, 1965, p. 4.

<sup>24</sup> “Fluoridation Referendum Is Rejected By Aldermen, Fest Beer Tent, City Hall Okayed,” *La Crosse Tribune*, Jan. 9, 1968, p. 1.

<sup>25</sup> “2<sup>nd</sup> City Hall Bids To Be Opened May 28,” *La Crosse Tribune*, May 13, 1968, p. 13.

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were more in line with original estimates. Peter Nelson and Son was hired as the general contractor. Other contractors included Healy Plumbing & Heating, St. Paul (plumbing); R.H. Lovold, Inc., La Crosse (heating); Winona Heating and Ventilation (ventilation); and Papenfuss Electric (electrical).<sup>26</sup>

Construction crews began excavating the foundations in June 1968, and by July, footings for the massive concrete building were being poured.<sup>27</sup> Construction continued through the fall, but an unusually cold winter and rainy spring slowed progress. When the weather lifted, construction crews began working overtime during the week and eight hours every Saturday to make up for lost time. By July 1969, the building was up to five stories, and on September 27, 1969, construction crews “topped off” the building after the final cement on the seventh story was poured.<sup>28</sup> Interior work continued throughout the winter and spring, and the building was complete by summer 1970.

The new La Crosse City Hall was formally dedicated on July 4, 1970, exactly seventy-nine years after the cornerstone was laid on the old city hall that it replaced. At 9 a.m., former Mayor C. August (Gus) Boerner cut the ribbon to the new building; Boerner had served as Mayor of La Crosse between 1935 and 1939 and, as a five-year-old, reputedly had attended the dedication festivities of the old city hall in 1891.<sup>29</sup> The current mayor, Warren Loveland, praised the new city hall’s “kaleidoscopic” effect, saying that “whatever side you view it from it looks as if it’s a different building.”<sup>30</sup>

The description was accurate. Architect Roger Roslansky, design director and newly-promoted firm partner at Hackner, Schroeder, Roslansky and Associates, had created a building that was equal parts architecture and modern sculpture. A group of six-story rectangular prisms clustered asymmetrically around a central core. One- and two-story wings pinwheeled off from the main cluster. The building had an undeniable feeling of solidity and monumentality due to its massive exterior walls of sandblasted, exposed aggregate concrete; but the main lobbies and the office floors were surprisingly light-filled thanks to continuous bands of windows that filled the end wall of each wing, interspersed with bands of black slate spandrel panels.

Inside, the building continued the same architectural vocabulary, with sandblasted concrete walls and slate floors in public spaces. The interior also featured ebonized slat wall paneling, special carpeting that incorporated metal filaments to reduce static electricity, rosewood paneling and grasscloth walls in the mayor’s office, and a color palette of oranges, blues, reds, and greens designed by interior design consultants Westburg-Klaus Associates of Minneapolis. Despite the pitch-perfect 1970s color palette, the architects stressed that that they had tried to design a building with “conventional, durable, timeless materials” that were not tied to a specific era but

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<sup>26</sup> “City Hall Low Bids Total \$2.6 Million,” *La Crosse Tribune*, May 29, 1968, p. 1; “City Hall Start Likely Within 2 Weeks,” *La Crosse Tribune*, May 31, 1968, p. 1.

<sup>27</sup> “City Hall Footings Being Poured,” *La Crosse Tribune*, July 16, 1968, p. 6.

<sup>28</sup> “City Officials Tour New City Hall,” *La Crosse Tribune*, July 31, 1969; “Topping Off City Hall,” *La Crosse Tribune*, Sept. 27, 1969.

<sup>29</sup> “Former Mayor Boerner, 86: 2<sup>nd</sup> City Hall Dedication For Him,” *La Crosse Tribune*, July 2, 1970, p. 22.

<sup>30</sup> “A Dignified Landmark: Architects Wanted Distinctive Design” *La Crosse Tribune*, July 2, 1970, p. 22.

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rather would allow the building to be low-maintenance and allow the interior departments to expand as needed over the next decades.<sup>31</sup>

The building has continued to serve as La Crosse's city hall to the present with relatively few changes. Some departments have moved to different areas in the building, notably the health department, which originally was located on the first floor. Some original materials and finishes, especially the original vinyl wall covering and shock-reducing carpet, have been replaced throughout most of the building, but the public spaces and elevator lobbies retain their original character-defining materials of sandblasted concrete and ebonized wood slat paneling. Between 2002 and 2004, the original slate spandrel panels on the exterior were replaced with synthetic panels that replicated the size, color, texture, and joint divisions of the original slate.<sup>32</sup> In 2018, the police department expanded their parking lot and built the existing canopy and secure parking area on the southwest corner of the site.<sup>33</sup> In 2020, during COVID-era shutdowns and social distancing, the Common Council chamber was remodeled to accommodate new technology for virtual meetings and to create additional flexible meeting space out of the former general public seating area of the large room. Other than these changes, the character-defining arrangement of interior spaces – and the striking exterior – remain highly intact, lending City Hall a high degree of integrity as one of La Crosse's finest Brutalist-style public buildings.

### *The Brutalist Style*

The La Crosse City Hall is being nominated to the National Register as an outstanding example of the Brutalist style of architecture. Brutalism was popular in Wisconsin between the 1950s and 1970s. Brutalism is most often recognizable by its extensive use of exposed concrete, often with rough textures or intentionally “unfinished” in appearance. Brutalist buildings also often have a rugged, bulky appearance and incorporate simple geometric forms and bold expression of the structural framing.

The term “Brutalism” takes its name from two possible sources: the *béton brut* (“raw concrete”) used by Swiss architect Le Corbusier; or a nickname for the first British architect who popularized the style. Several of Le Corbusier's most influential works in bare concrete included his designs at Chandigarh, the new capital for the Indian state of Punjab (begun in 1950) following the partition of India; the chapel in Ronchamp, France (built 1954); and the Unité d'Habitation apartment building in Marseilles, France, and the La Tourette monastery near Lyon, France, (both completed in 1956).<sup>34</sup> Around the same time, British architects Alison and Peter Smithson began using bare concrete as the basis for affordable, functional building during the post-World War II era. Peter had gained the nickname “Brutus” during university days owing to his resemblance to busts of the ancient Roman; the Smithsons later claimed the term “Brutalism” to identify their philosophy of design, which they described as “an ethic, not an aesthetic.”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> “A Dignified Landmark.”

<sup>32</sup> Building Permit Application no. Muni 2004-1, dated 3/2/04, on file at City of La Crosse Department of Building and Inspections.

<sup>33</sup> Building Permit Application no. 004789, dated 7-9-18, on file at City of La Crosse Department of Building and Inspections.

<sup>34</sup> Le Corbusier, “Le béton brut”, in *Le Corbusier: Ouvre complète*. (De Gruyter, 1995) pp. 180–189.

<sup>35</sup> Whiffen, 279-280; Banham, Peter Reyner. “The New Brutalism”. *Architectural Review*. 1955, 12, pp.354–361.

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Brutalist design in Great Britain by the Smithsons and others became associated with postwar civic projects such as public housing developments, hospitals, libraries, universities, and government buildings. Internationally, Brutalism became entwined with progressive ideals for civic structures, urban design, and housing: in Canada, in the work of Moshe Safdie; in Japan, in the work of Kenzo Tange; and across Latin America, Central Europe, and the Soviet bloc.

In America, architects often turned to Brutalism as a way of achieving monumentality. One architect whose work would have a significant impact on the development of Brutalism in the United States was Louis Kahn, whose 1953 design for the Yale Art Gallery in New Haven, CT, is considered a prototypical example of the style in America.<sup>36</sup> Other influential Brutalist buildings in the U.S. include Boston City Hall (Kallmann McKinnell & Knowles, architects); Freeway Park in Seattle (NRHP-listed, NR ref. no. 100004789) designed by landscape architect Lawrence Halprin; and the acclaimed and highly influential Yale Art and Architecture Building, also in New Haven (Paul Rudolph, architect).

In the Midwest, notable examples of Brutalism include the NRHP-listed Riverside Plaza apartment complex in Minneapolis (Ralph Rapson, architect; NR ref. no. 100001090); the Cleo Rogers Memorial Library in Columbus, IN (I.M. Pei, architect); and the Northwestern University Library and the Regenstein Library at the University of Chicago, both located in Chicago and designed by architect Walter Netsch.

In Wisconsin, like other states, the popularity of the Brutalist style coincided with federally-funded initiatives such as urban renewal legislation and redevelopment and postwar education construction fueled by the Baby Boom and the GI Bill. As a result, Brutalist buildings can be found everywhere across the state. Typical examples in Wisconsin include the University State Bank in Green Bay (1819 University Ave., AHI 24937); the Sentry Insurance complex in Stevens Point (1800 North Point Dr., AHI 217201); or Curtin Hall at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (3243 N. Downer Ave., AHI 220239).

Two of the best high-style examples of Brutalism in the state are found on the University of Wisconsin-Madison campus: the Conrad Elvehjem Building (800 University Ave., AHI 79531), a warm, humanly-scaled jewel box of a building; and the neighboring Mosse Humanities Building (445 N. Park St., AHI 70069), a dramatic masterpiece of the style that has delighted and frustrated occupants since it opened. Both the Elvehjem and the Humanities building were designed by Chicago architect Harry Weese and both are listed in the NRHP as part of the Bascom Hill Historic District (NR ref. no. 74000065.)

All of these buildings illustrate that Brutalism, unlike some other architectural styles, is less a kit of parts and more a design philosophy focused on structural expression and honesty of materials. British architectural critic Reyner Banham, in his seminal 1955 essay "The New Brutalism," defined three criteria for the style: 1) Memorability as an image; 2) Clear exhibition of structure;

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<sup>36</sup> Whiffen, 283.

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and 3) Valuation of material “as found”.<sup>37</sup> Banham’s definitions helped to codify the style, and his later monograph of the same title included examples of Brutalism from around the world.

In practical terms, the character-defining features of Brutalism all serve to reinforce what American architectural historian Marcus Whiffen called a style of “mass, weight, roughness, and solidity.” Brutalist exteriors are bulky and rugged, and the structural frame of the building is usually visible. Brick and stone are sometimes used, but concrete is the ubiquitous material associated with the style – concrete walls, concrete columns, concrete beams, concrete roofs. Brutalist concrete is always left exposed and is often rough-textured, either from the marks of the wooden formwork, or roughened afterwards with hammers, brushes, or sandblasting. Brutalist buildings often emphasize the contrast between broad wall surfaces and deep-shadowed openings.<sup>38</sup>

The La Crosse City Hall exemplifies both the physical characteristics as well as the critical definitions of the Brutalist style. City Hall has a bulky, massive exterior, thanks to its fourteen-inch-thick concrete walls. The structure of the building is clearly expressed as tall structural piers and broad expanses of blank wall. Strong contrasts are created between the light-colored concrete walls and the recessed dark-framed windows and slate-colored spandrel panels. This contrast is repeated on a smaller scale at each corner of the building, where the thick walls are separated from the structural piers by a recessed vertical strip, giving the effect that the building is made up of multiple layered planes.

Throughout the building, the cast-in-place concrete is left exposed and is not covered by other finishes, stressing its “as found” character. The majority of the concrete in the building is sandblasted to expose the light-colored limestone aggregate, although interior ceilings in the Common Council chamber and other areas are smooth waffle slabs. Beyond its physical components, the City Hall is also a memorable visual landmark in downtown La Crosse – the first of Reyner Banham’s criteria for the Brutalist style. City Hall has a monumental presence, and its surrounding landscaped plaza provides a horizontal counterpoint to the complex verticality of the building.

All of these elements – its striking visual appearance; its clear expression of structure; its textured, cast-in-place concrete – make City Hall an outstanding example of Brutalist architecture in La Crosse and worthy of inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

*Hackner, Schroeder, Roslansky and Associates, architects*

The firm of Hackner, Schroeder, Roslansky and Associates designed La Crosse City Hall. The firm was founded by Robert Hackner (1921-2016), who earned degrees in architecture from Notre Dame in 1942 and the University of Pennsylvania in 1948. Hackner opened his own office in La Crosse in 1953, and in 1956 went into partnership with Harry Schroeder. Schroeder (1924-2009) studied at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (1948) and Rice University (1952). The firm designed a number of public and institutional buildings in La Crosse, including the now-

<sup>37</sup> Peter Reyner Banham, “The New Brutalism,” *Architectural Review*, 1955, 12, 354–361.

<sup>38</sup> Whiffen, 279; “Brutalism,” (architectural style fact sheet), Wisconsin Historic Preservation Office, 2025.

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demolished County building; the city hall; the public library; the municipal airport; and several buildings at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse as well as several residential buildings for the La Crosse Housing Authority. The firm is known today as HSR Associates and remains in existence in the office building they built for themselves in 1972.

The chief designer of the La Crosse City Hall was Roger Roslansky (b. 1934). Roslansky studied architecture at Iowa State University and graduated in 1961. He worked briefly in Minneapolis after graduation and joined Hackner, Schroeder and Associates in 1964.<sup>39</sup> Roslansky was recognized as a talented designer, and he was promoted to associate in 1965 and then design director and partner in the firm in 1968.<sup>40</sup> Roslansky eventually served as president of HSR. He retired from HSR in 1998 and opened his own firm.

### Comparative Analysis

The La Crosse City Hall is being nominated as an outstanding local example of the Brutalist style of architecture. There are several other Brutalist buildings in La Crosse; the three best comparable examples are the La Crosse Public Library, the Dahl Family YMCA, and the La Crosse Masonic Temple.<sup>41</sup> None of these buildings are listed in the National Register. The La Crosse City Hall retains equal or better integrity to all three comparable examples.

#### *Dahl Family YMCA*

The Dahl Family YMCA (148 West Ave. S., AHI 242976) was designed by architect Carl W. Schubert & Associates and built in 1969.<sup>42</sup> The building is clad in a combination of brick and exposed aggregate concrete, used most visibly in the dramatic angled posts that support the deeply projecting second story. The YMCA has had two later additions: an 11,000 square foot addition less than a decade after the building opened; and another 22,000 square foot addition completed in 2017. While both additions (particularly the 2017 project) are sensitive to the scale, composition, rhythm, and materials of the original building, the later expansions have changed the original architectural character of the 1969 portion. In comparison, the La Crosse City Hall retains better integrity due to fewer exterior alterations. The City Hall can be considered a more thorough and intact example of the Brutalist style.

#### *Masonic Temple*

The current Masonic Temple (116 8<sup>th</sup> St. S., AHI 246702) was constructed as a 1971 Brutalist-style addition to an older Neoclassical-style Masonic lodge.<sup>43</sup> Designed by architect Carl W. Schubert (the same designer of the original YMCA building), the Masonic Temple has brick

<sup>39</sup> "Architects Are Named Associates," *La Crosse Tribune*, Oct 23, 1965, p. 8.

<sup>40</sup> "Business," *La Crosse Tribune*, Apr. 28, 1973.

<sup>41</sup> The Wisconsin Architecture and History Inventory (AHI) only classifies the Masonic Temple as Brutalist in style; the other two buildings are classified as "Contemporary." Additional searches of the AHI did not identify any other concrete or brick buildings that were of comparable scale or architectural finesse.

<sup>42</sup> "Groundbreaking," *La Crosse Tribune*, Dec. 1, 1967.

<sup>43</sup> "Masons To Lay Cornerstone In New \$350,000 Temple," *La Crosse Tribune*, May 28, 1971, p. 11; Jeff Rand, "Neighbors Making History: Alexander Gordon & An Artistic Jewel," La Crosse Public Library Archives and Local History Department, 2024. The 1902 Masonic lodge, fronting onto Main Street and addressed as 724 Main St., has since been subdivided from the 1971 Brutalist addition and currently serves as a branch office of Ho-Chunk Nation.

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cladding with concrete window sills and front roof canopy. The building also incorporates deeply-set openings with dalle de verre windows (also known as slab glass or faceted glass), consisting of thick chunks of colored glass set into a textured concrete matrix. Despite its small size, the Masonic Temple has a massive, monumental quality that is typically associated with good examples of Brutalism. The La Crosse City Hall displays comparable integrity to the Masonic Temple. In addition, City Hall is on a much larger and more visible site, and its all-concrete exterior set it apart from the brick cladding on the Masonic Temple.

### *La Crosse Public Library*

The La Crosse Public Library (800 Main St., AHI 238877) was designed by the same architects of the La Crosse City Hall (Hackner, Schroeder, Roslansky and Associates), and completed three years before City Hall, in 1967. Unlike City Hall, the library is constructed primarily of a warm-colored brick that imbues the building with human scale and texture. The library is comprised of several distinct and interlocking building masses that are unified through a common architectural vocabulary of panelized wall sections, vertical slit windows, and ground-level “piloti.” At its completion, the La Crosse Public Library was one of seven libraries nationwide (out of 200 entries) to receive a citation of merit in a national award program sponsored by the American Institute of Architects, the National Book Committee, and the American Library Association.<sup>44</sup> Despite its unified appearance, the library was actually constructed in three phases, with later additions in 1980 and 1995. In its current appearance, the library retains its character-defining exterior elements. As of 2025, the library is undergoing an interior renovation to update classrooms, meeting rooms, and social areas, as well as to upgrade technology and connectivity. The interior renovations are not anticipated to significantly alter any of the character-defining interior spaces, including the double-height atrium or the functional arrangement of book stacks in various library departments. The La Crosse City Hall is comparable to the library in terms of integrity. However, unlike the library, the City Hall (with the exception of the recent secure police parking area) was constructed as a single building designed at a single point in time, rather than as later additions. Additionally, because of its prominent downtown location and larger size, the City Hall remains a more visible example of the Brutalist style.

### **Concluding Significance Statement**

The La Crosse City Hall is a prominently sited visual landmark in downtown La Crosse. The building was constructed in 1970 to serve as the city’s third courthouse, and its functional design is the result of a multi-year planning process. The building retains a high degree of integrity to its period significance; and with its dramatic structural expression, its massive, monumental quality, and its extensive use of heavily-textured concrete, the La Crosse City Hall is one of the best examples of the Brutalist style of architecture in the city and is therefore worthy of inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

### **Land Acknowledgement (will be reviewed by the Office of the State Archaeologist)**

This nomination recognizes the depth of human presence here, the ancestral homeland of American Indians for millennia. From as early as the seventeenth century, Euro-American exploration and settlement, military campaigns, and government programs, all had the effect of

<sup>44</sup> “Miss Thurow Gets Award For Library,” *La Crosse Tribune*, July 7, 1968, p. 5.

La Crosse City Hall

La Crosse County, Wisconsin

Name of Property

County and State

repeated displacement of Indians of many tribal affiliations. This continuous tribal movement resulted in Wisconsin being home to many tribes who originated from other parts of the country, generating a pattern of immigration, relocation, and formation of a new homeland. Some of these tribes remain in Wisconsin but others may not. We acknowledge that the property that is the subject of this nomination is located on land long occupied by American Indians.

**Archaeological Potential** (will be drafted and reviewed by the Office of the State Archaeologist)

### Preservation Activities

The La Crosse City Hall was evaluated as potentially eligible for the NRHP during a survey of La Crosse conducted in 1996; at that time, the building was less than fifty years of age and was recommended to be re-evaluated when it achieved sufficient age. Eligibility was re-affirmed in 2016.

END OF STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE DO NOT DELETE

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

### 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: \_\_\_\_\_

### Wisconsin Architecture and History Inventory #

and/or Archaeological Site Inventory #: 79951 (City Hall building);  
248419 (garage); 248420 (landscaped plaza)

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

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Building Permit Application no. 004789, dated 7-9-18, on file at City of La Crosse Department of Building and Inspections.

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- “City Hall Start Likely Within 2 Weeks.” *La Crosse Tribune*. May 31, 1968.
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- “City Officials Tour New City Hall.” *La Crosse Tribune*. July 31, 1969.
- “Civic Center Plans Being Prepared.” *La Crosse Tribune*. July 25, 1965.
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- “Footsteps of La Crosse: Early 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Industry,” La Crosse Public Library Archives, 2021.
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- Godden, Laura and Paul Beck. *La Crosse, Postcard and History Series*. Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2015.
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- Hessel, Susan and Gayda Hollnagel, *A History of La Crosse, Wisconsin in the Twentieth Century*. La Crosse: La Crosse Historical Society, 2007.
- “‘Ideas’ for Civic Center.” *La Crosse Tribune*. May 11, 1961.
- Jeanneret, Charles-Édouard [Le Corbusier]. "Le béton brut", in *Le Corbusier: Ouvre complete*, Willy Boesiger, ed. New York: De Gruyter, 1995.

“La Crosse City Hall, Fire Station, Jail,” Wisconsin Architecture and History Inventory record #35003, 413 N. Main St.

La Crosse County, WI (3N-67, 06/27/1954) U.S. Department of Agriculture.

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“Model Shown Of 6-Story City Hall.” *La Crosse Tribune*. Aug. 29, 1966.

“New City Hall Cost Estimated At \$692,000.” *La Crosse Tribune*. March 13, 1964.

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La Crosse City Hall

La Crosse County, Wisconsin

Name of Property

County and State

“2<sup>nd</sup> City Hall Bids To Be Opened May 28.” *La Crosse Tribune*. May 13, 1968.

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Wyatt, Barbara, ed. *Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin*. Madison: Wisconsin State Historical Society, 1984.

**END OF BIBLIOGRAPHY DO NOT DELETE**

## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreeage of Property:** 4.4 acres

### UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or  NAD 1983

1. Zone:	<u>15N</u>	Easting:	<u>640821</u>	Northing:	<u>4853048</u>
2. Zone:	<u>15N</u>	Easting:	<u>640980</u>	Northing:	<u>4853054</u>
3. Zone:	<u>15N</u>	Easting:	<u>640986</u>	Northing:	<u>4852950</u>
4. Zone:	<u>15N</u>	Easting:	<u>640879</u>	Northing:	<u>4852886</u>
5. Zone:	<u>15N</u>	Easting:	<u>640823</u>	Northing:	<u>4852935</u>

### Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of the La Crosse City Hall consists of a roughly rectangular shape that coincides with the current legal parcel, described as T. Burns, H.S. Durand, S.T. Smith, & F.M. Rublees Addition, all of Block 2; and the north ½ of vacated Badger St. adjacent on the south; and the west ½ of the vacated street adjacent on the east; excluding the north 14 feet taken for La Crosse St.; and excluding that part taken for 4<sup>th</sup> St.; and all of Block 7 and vacated alley; and the east ½ of the vacated street adjacent on the west; and the north ½ of that part of vacated Badger St. adjacent to Lot 1 on the south excluding the north 14 feet for the street (City Hall).

The boundary can be described as follows: beginning at the northwest corner of the property, the boundary runs east for approximately 505 feet. The boundary then turns and runs south for approximately 333 feet. The boundary then turns and runs west for approximately 215 feet. The boundary then turns slightly and runs southwest for approximately 224 feet. The boundary then turns and runs north for approximately 146 feet. The boundary then turns and runs west for approximately 188 feet. The boundary then turns and runs north for approximately 318 feet, angles slightly, and continues northeast for approximately 53 feet to return to the point of origin.

### Boundary Justification

The boundary has been delineated to include the property's two contributing buildings, one contributing site, and the parking lot and historically and functionally associated with the resource. The boundary coincides with the property's existing legal tax parcel. The boundary is visually defined by the edge of sidewalk on the west (4<sup>th</sup> St.), north (La Crosse St.), east (7<sup>th</sup> St.), and a portion of the south side (Badger St. and 6<sup>th</sup> St.); and by the existing building face of the enclosed police parking area on the south.

**END OF GEOGRAPHIC DATA DO NOT DELETE**

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### 11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Justin Miller, Architectural Historian  
organization: University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Cultural Resource Management  
street & number: P.O. Box 413  
city or town: Milwaukee State: WI zip code: 53201  
Email: [jcmill@uwm.edu](mailto:jcmill@uwm.edu)  
Telephone: 414-229-3078

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### Additional Documentation

#### Figure Log

**Figure 1.** UTM map

**Figure 2.** Sketch map

**Figure 3.** Basement plan (courtesy of University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections and Archives)

**Figure 4.** First floor plan (courtesy of University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections and Archives)

**Figure 5.** Second floor plan (courtesy of University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections and Archives)

**Figure 6.** Third and fourth floor plans (courtesy of University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections and Archives)

**Figure 7.** Fifth and sixth floor plans (courtesy of University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections and Archives)

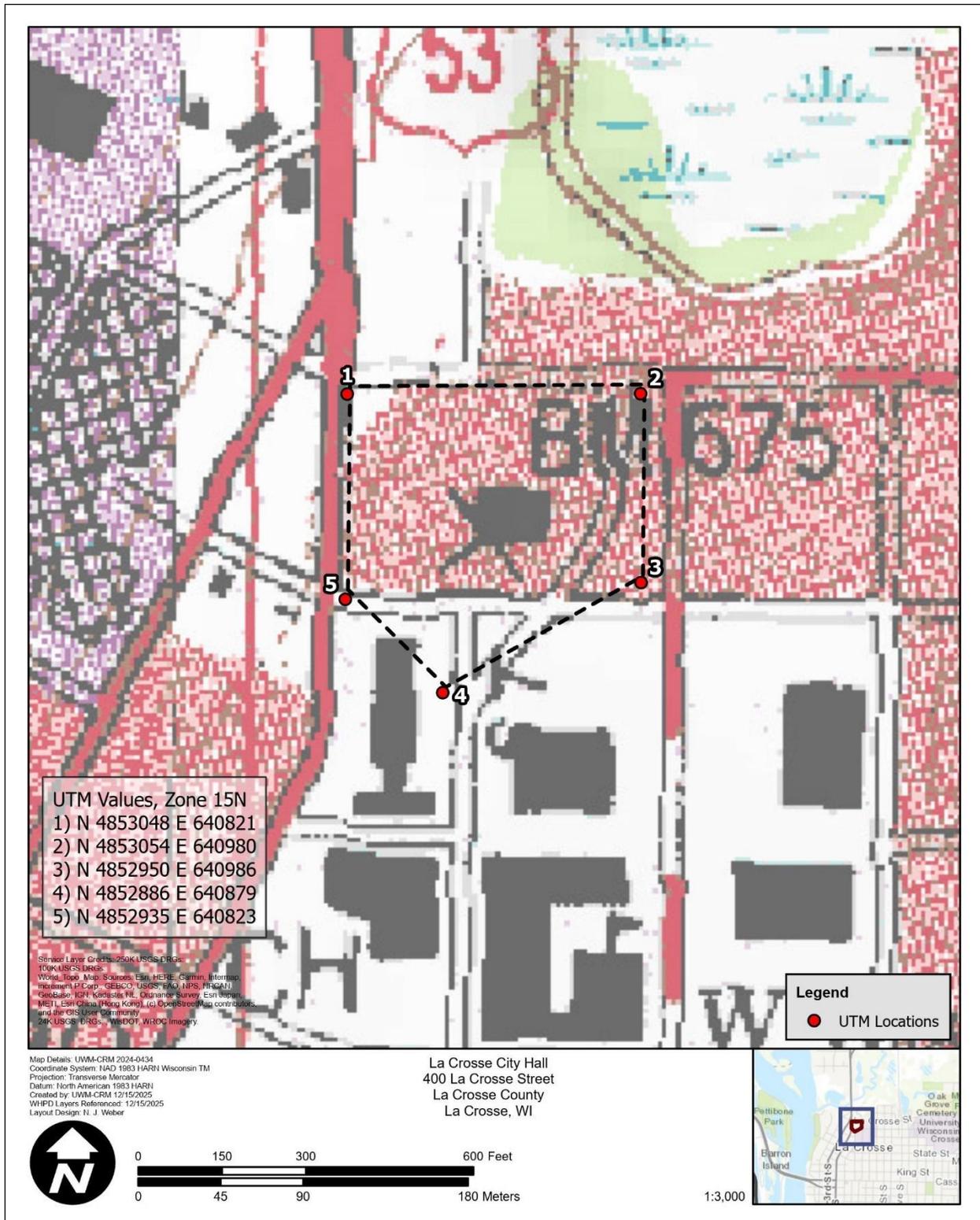
**Figure 8.** Photo key, exterior

**Figure 9.** Photo key, interior

**Figure 10.** Photograph of model, *La Crosse Tribune*, Sept. 25, 1966 (courtesy of La Crosse Public Library Archives)

**Figure 11.** Architects' rendering of entry plaza, *La Crosse Tribune*, Nov. 3, 1966 (courtesy of La Crosse Public Library Archives)

**Figure 1. UTM map**



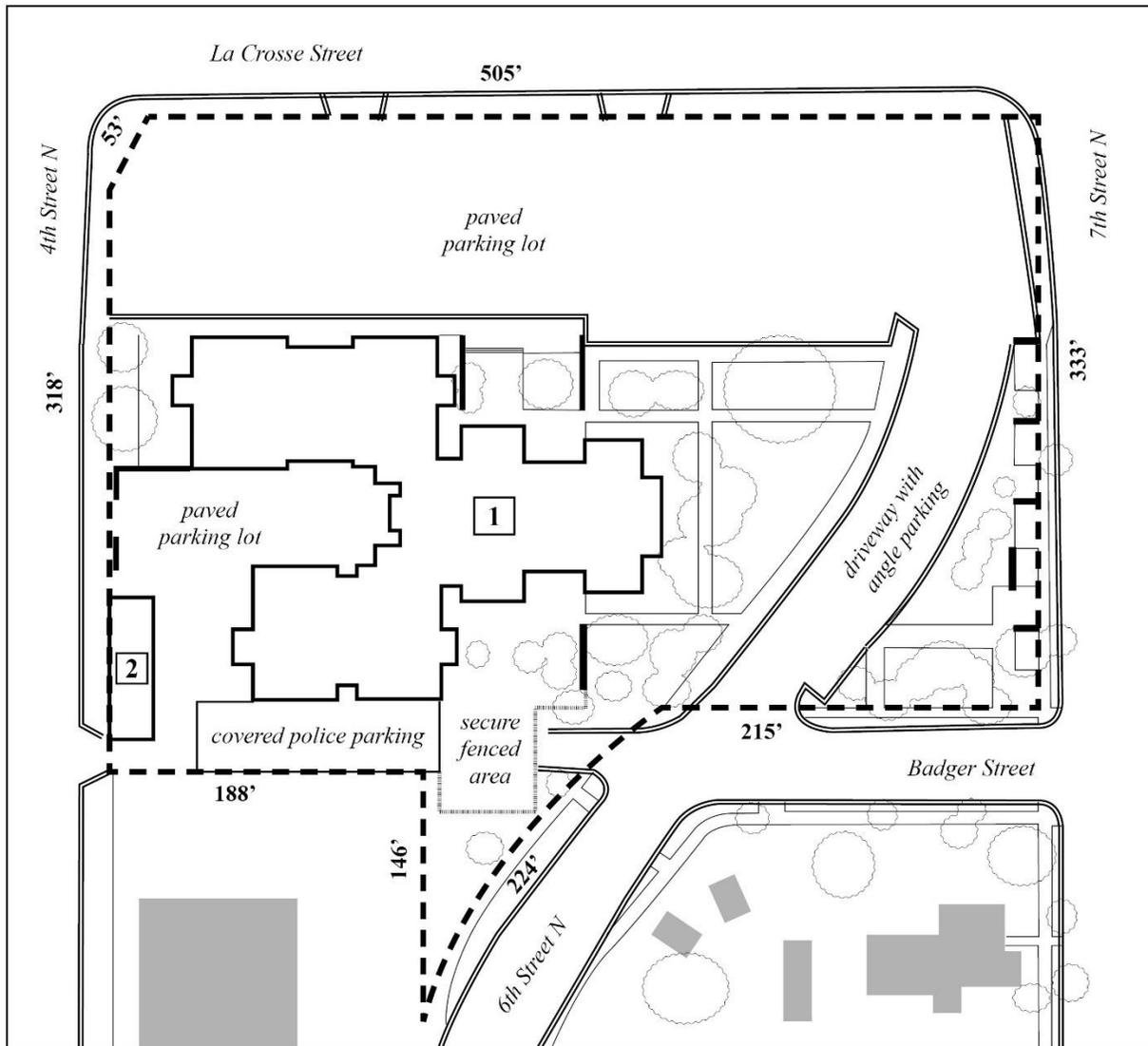
La Crosse City Hall

La Crosse County, Wisconsin

Name of Property

County and State

**Figure 2.** Sketch map



- National Register boundary
- 1 City Hall (contributing)
- 2 Garage (contributing)
- Plaza walls (contributing)
- Non-associated buildings

La Crosse City Hall  
 400 La Crosse Street  
 La Crosse, Wisconsin



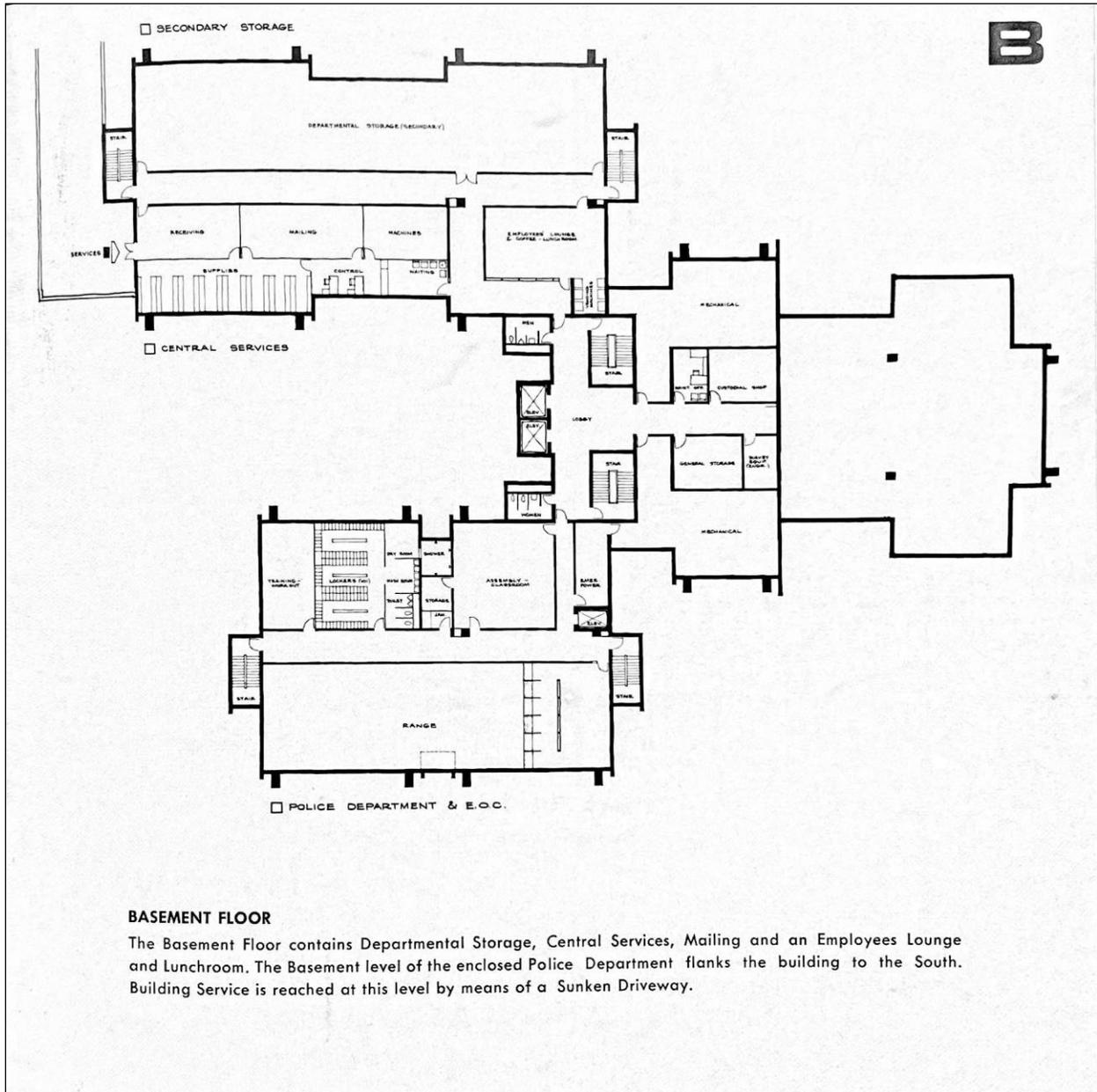
La Crosse City Hall

La Crosse County, Wisconsin

Name of Property

County and State

**Figure 3.** Basement plan (courtesy of University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections and Archives)



**BASEMENT FLOOR**

The Basement Floor contains Departmental Storage, Central Services, Mailing and an Employees Lounge and Lunchroom. The Basement level of the enclosed Police Department flanks the building to the South. Building Service is reached at this level by means of a Sunken Driveway.

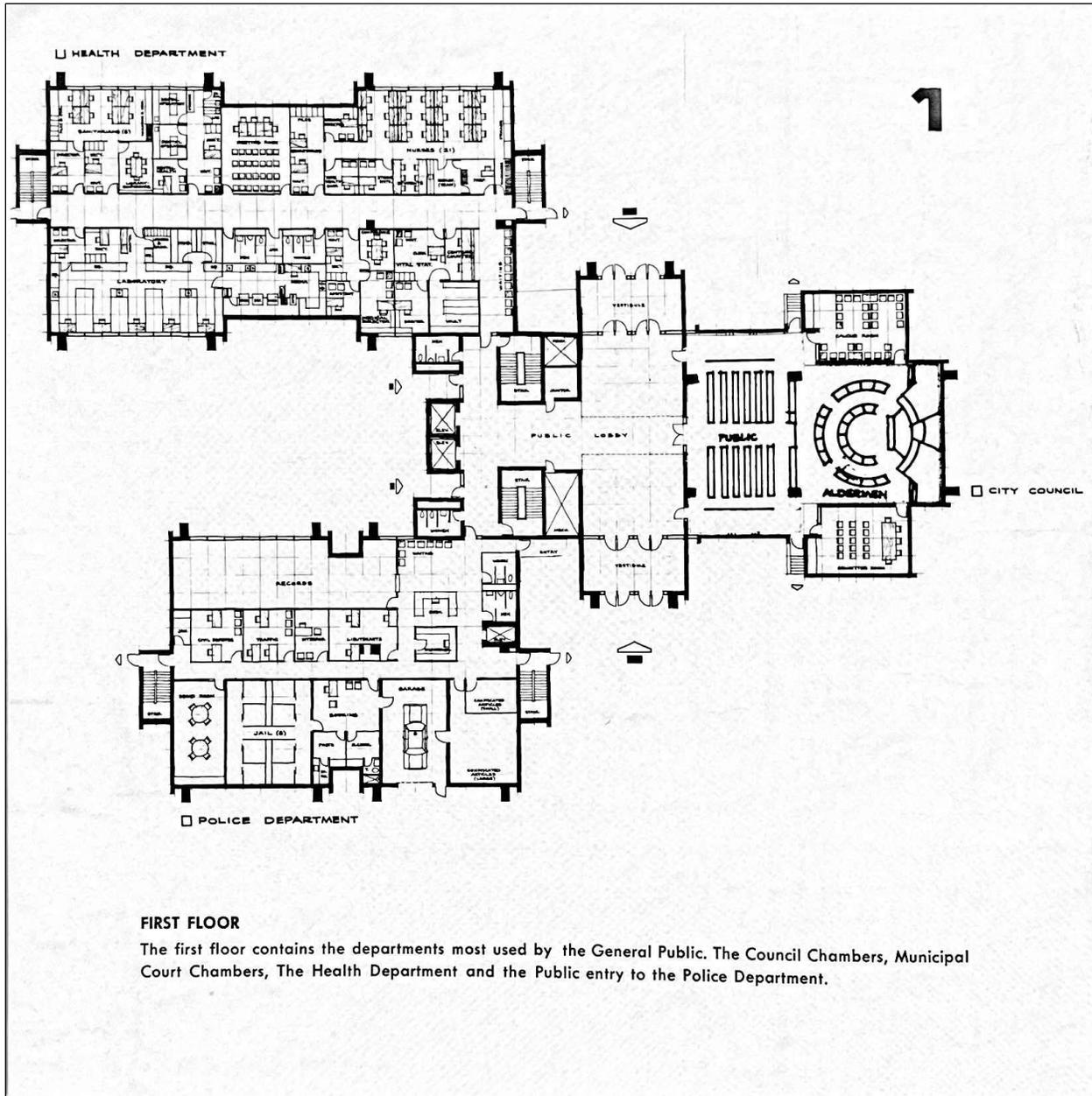
La Crosse City Hall

La Crosse County, Wisconsin

Name of Property

County and State

**Figure 4.** First floor plan (courtesy of University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections and Archives)



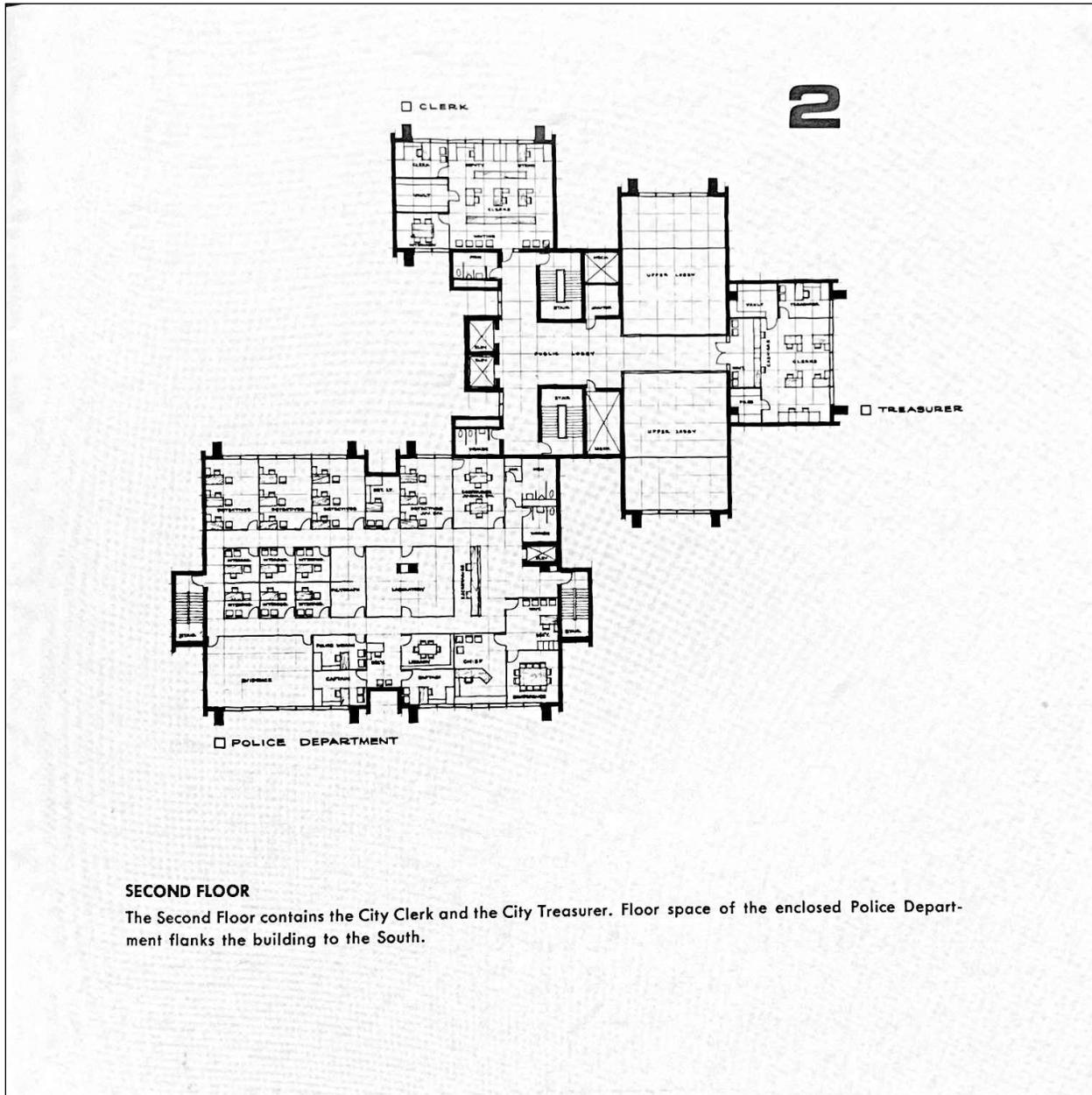
La Crosse City Hall

La Crosse County, Wisconsin

Name of Property

County and State

**Figure 5.** Second floor plan (courtesy of University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections and Archives)



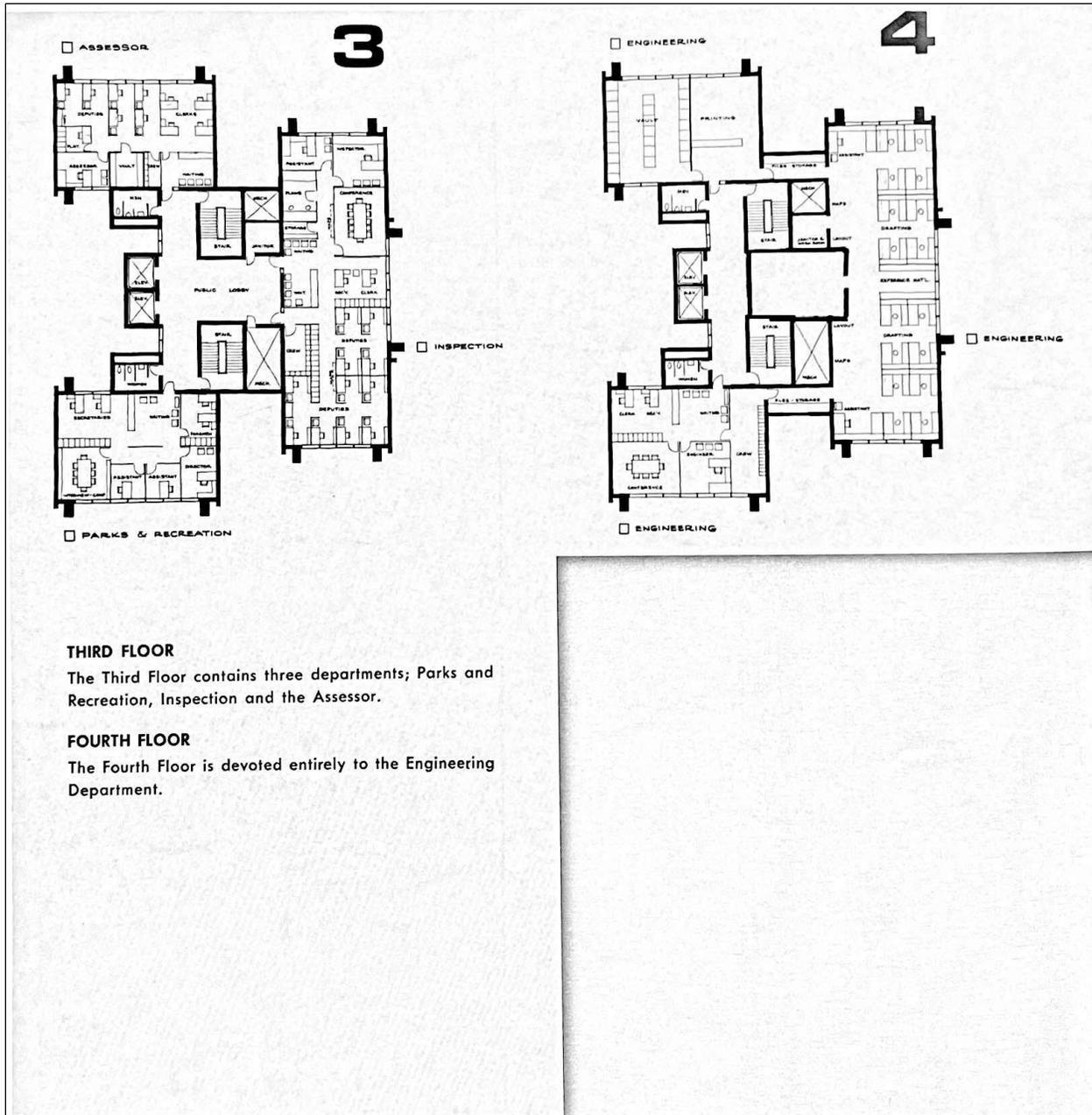
La Crosse City Hall

La Crosse County, Wisconsin

Name of Property

County and State

**Figure 6.** Third and fourth floor plans (courtesy of University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections and Archives)



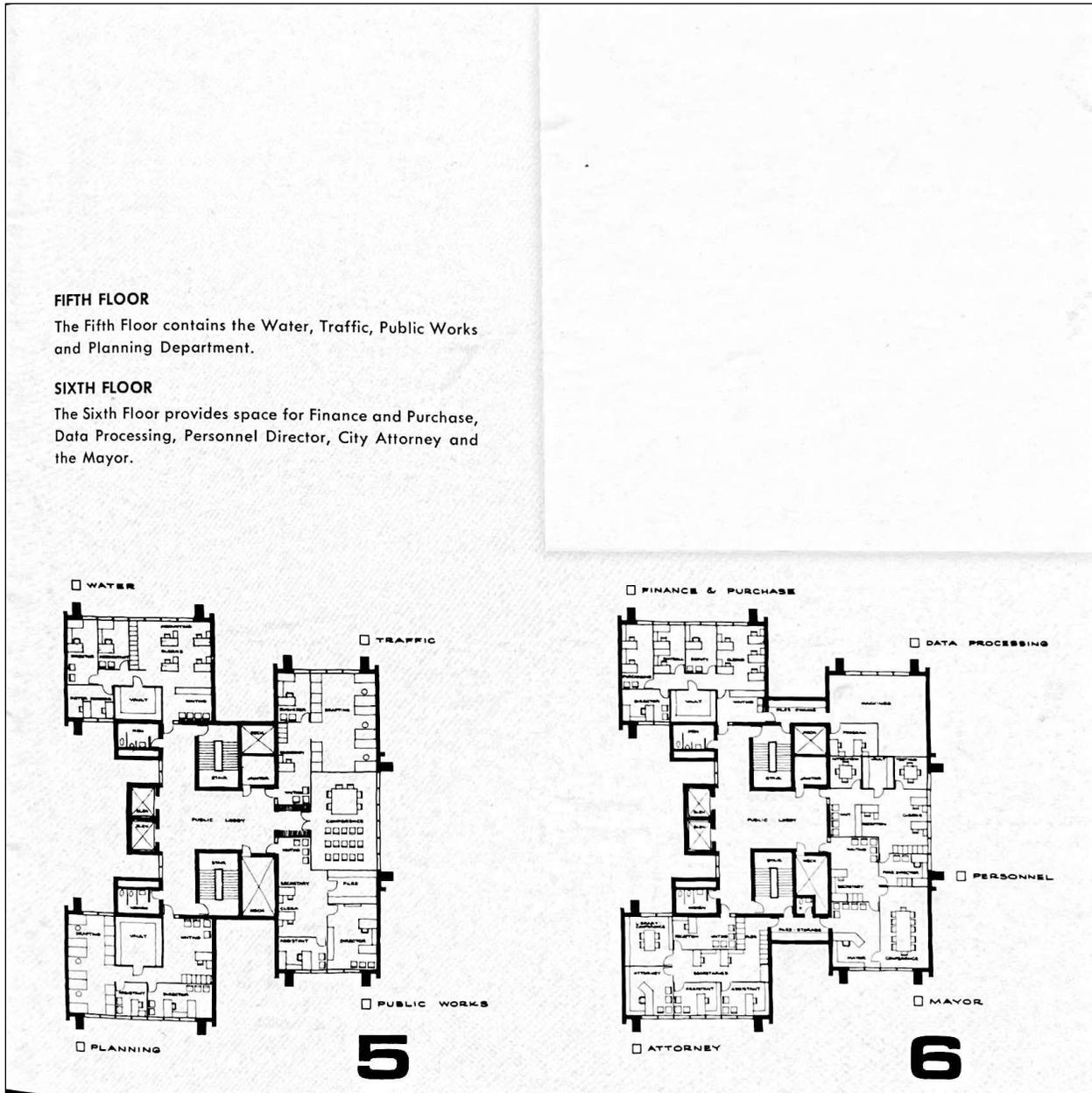
La Crosse City Hall

La Crosse County, Wisconsin

Name of Property

County and State

**Figure 7.** Fifth and sixth floor plans (courtesy of University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections and Archives)



La Crosse City Hall

La Crosse County, Wisconsin

Name of Property

County and State

**Figure 8.** Photo key, exterior

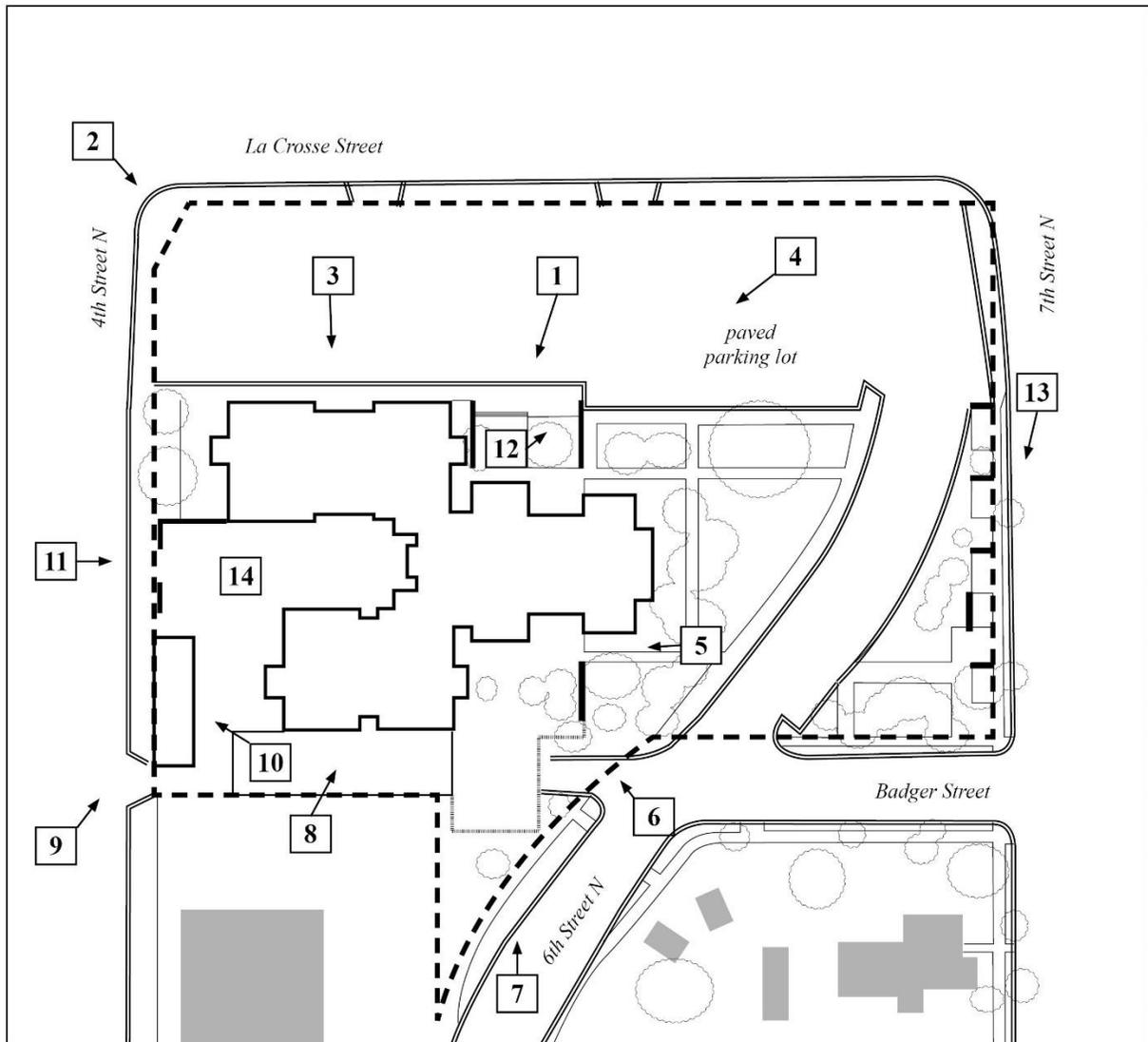


Photo Key - Exterior  
La Crosse City Hall  
400 La Crosse Street  
La Crosse, Wisconsin

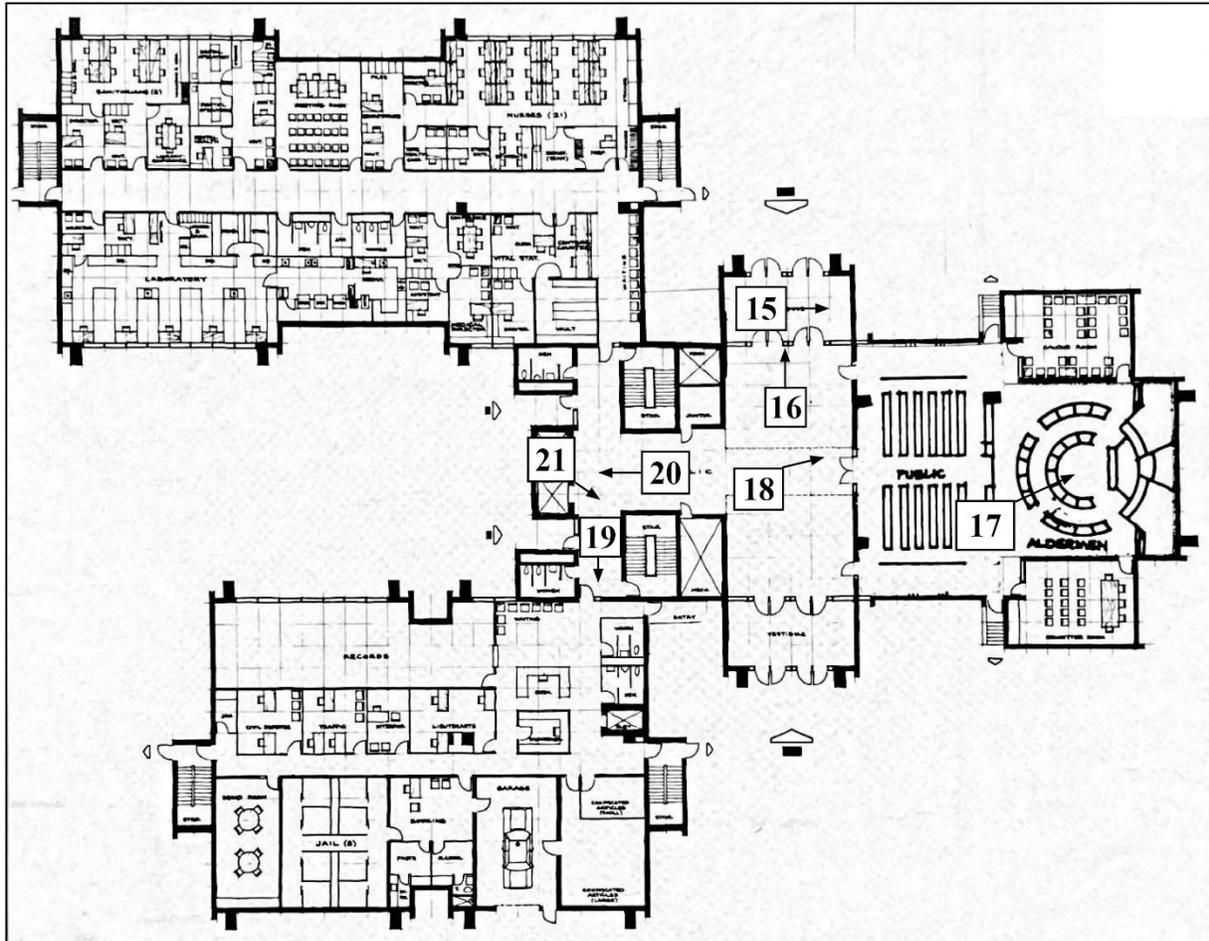
La Crosse City Hall

La Crosse County, Wisconsin

Name of Property

County and State

**Figure 9.** Photo key, interior



- Photos 15, 16, 17: First Floor
- Photo 18: Second Floor bridge
- Photo 19: Third Floor
- Photo 20: Fifth Floor
- Photo 21: Sixth Floor



Photo Key - Interior  
La Crosse City Hall  
400 La Crosse Street  
La Crosse, Wisconsin



La Crosse City Hall

La Crosse County, Wisconsin

Name of Property

County and State

**Figure 10.** Photograph of model, *La Crosse Tribune*, Sept. 25, 1966 (courtesy of La Crosse Public Library Archives)



## LA CROSSE'S NEW CITY HALL? 9/25/66

An architect's model of the proposed city hall for La Crosse, as viewed from La Crosse Street, is shown here. The six-story tower in the middle will house administrative offices, the 1½-story wing on the left will be the Common Council chambers, and the one-story wing on the right will house the

health department. The architect, Hackner, Schroeder and Associates, estimates the project cost—including architectural fees and construction—at 2.8 million. Voters Nov. 8 will decide whether the city will sell \$2.8 million in bonds to finance the project.

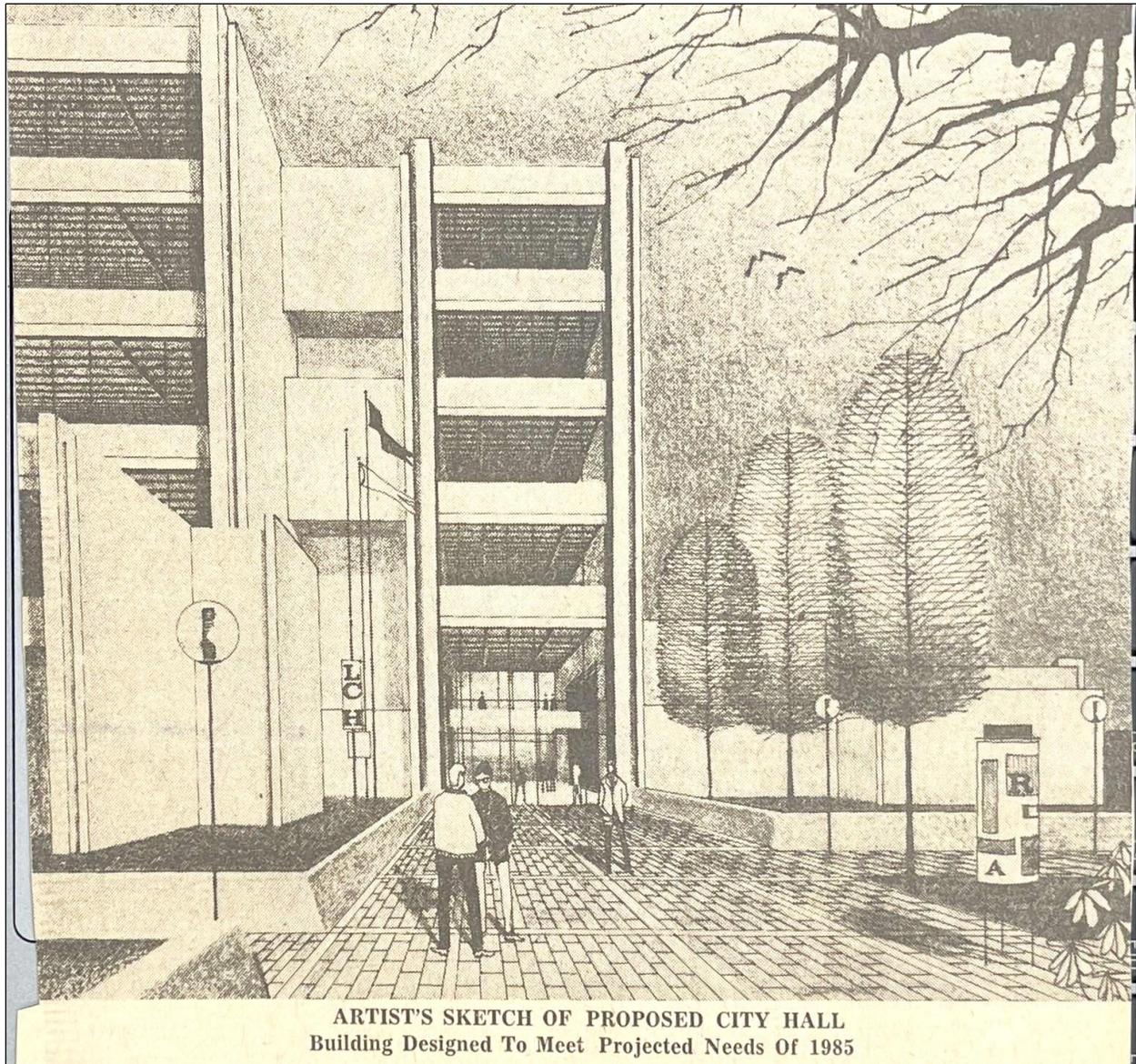
La Crosse City Hall

La Crosse County, Wisconsin

Name of Property

County and State

**Figure 11.** Architects' rendering of entry plaza, *La Crosse Tribune*, Nov. 3, 1966 (courtesy of La Crosse Public Library Archives)



**END OF FIGURES SECTION DO NOT DELETE**

DRAFT

## Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once in the photograph log. The photograph order must correspond with the photograph log.

## Photo Log

Name of Property: La Crosse City Hall  
City or Vicinity: La Crosse  
County: La Crosse State: WI  
Photographer: Justin Miller  
Date photographed: August 21, 2025

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

1 of 21. WI\_LaCrosse\_LaCrosseCityHall\_0001  
North elevation, looking southwest

2 of 21. WI\_LaCrosse\_LaCrosseCityHall\_0002  
Northwest corner, looking southeast

3 of 21. WI\_LaCrosse\_LaCrosseCityHall\_0003  
North elevation of former health department wing, looking south

4 of 21. WI\_LaCrosse\_LaCrosseCityHall\_0004  
Northeast corner, looking southwest

5 of 21. WI\_LaCrosse\_LaCrosseCityHall\_0005  
East elevation, looking northwest

6 of 21. WI\_LaCrosse\_LaCrosseCityHall\_0006  
Southeast corner, looking northwest

7 of 21. WI\_LaCrosse\_LaCrosseCityHall\_0007  
South elevation, looking north

8 of 21. WI\_LaCrosse\_LaCrosseCityHall\_0008  
South elevation of secure police parking area, looking northeast

9 of 21. WI\_LaCrosse\_LaCrosseCityHall\_0009  
Southwest corner, looking northeast

La Crosse City Hall  
Name of Property

La Crosse County, Wisconsin  
County and State

10 of 21. WI\_LaCrosse\_LaCrosseCityHall\_0010  
East elevation of police garage, looking northwest

11 of 21. WI\_LaCrosse\_LaCrosseCityHall\_0011  
West elevation, looking east

12 of 21. WI\_LaCrosse\_LaCrosseCityHall\_0012  
North entry plaza, looking northeast

13 of 21. WI\_LaCrosse\_LaCrosseCityHall\_0013  
7<sup>th</sup> Street plaza, looking southwest

14 of 21. WI\_LaCrosse\_LaCrosseCityHall\_0014  
Concrete walls on west perimeter of site, looking northwest

15 of 21. WI\_LaCrosse\_LaCrosseCityHall\_0015  
Interior, north vestibule, looking east

16 of 21. WI\_LaCrosse\_LaCrosseCityHall\_0016  
Interior, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor lobby bridge, looking north to vestibule

17 of 21. WI\_LaCrosse\_LaCrosseCityHall\_0017  
Interior, common council chamber, looking northeast

18 of 21. WI\_LaCrosse\_LaCrosseCityHall\_0018  
Interior, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor lobby bridge, looking northeast

19 of 21. WI\_LaCrosse\_LaCrosseCityHall\_0019  
Interior, 3<sup>rd</sup> floor corridor, looking southeast

20 of 21. WI\_LaCrosse\_LaCrosseCityHall\_0020  
Interior, 5<sup>th</sup> floor elevator lobby, looking west

21 of 21. WI\_LaCrosse\_LaCrosseCityHall\_0021  
Interior, 6<sup>th</sup> floor corridor, looking south

La Crosse City Hall  
Name of Property

La Crosse County, Wisconsin  
County and State

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for nominations 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.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for each response using this form is estimated to be between the Tier 1 and Tier 4 levels with the estimate of the time for each tier as follows:

- Tier 1 – 60-100 hours
- Tier 2 – 120 hours
- Tier 3 – 230 hours
- Tier 4 – 280 hours

The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting nominations. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive Fort Collins, CO 80525.

DRAFT

**Property Owner**

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

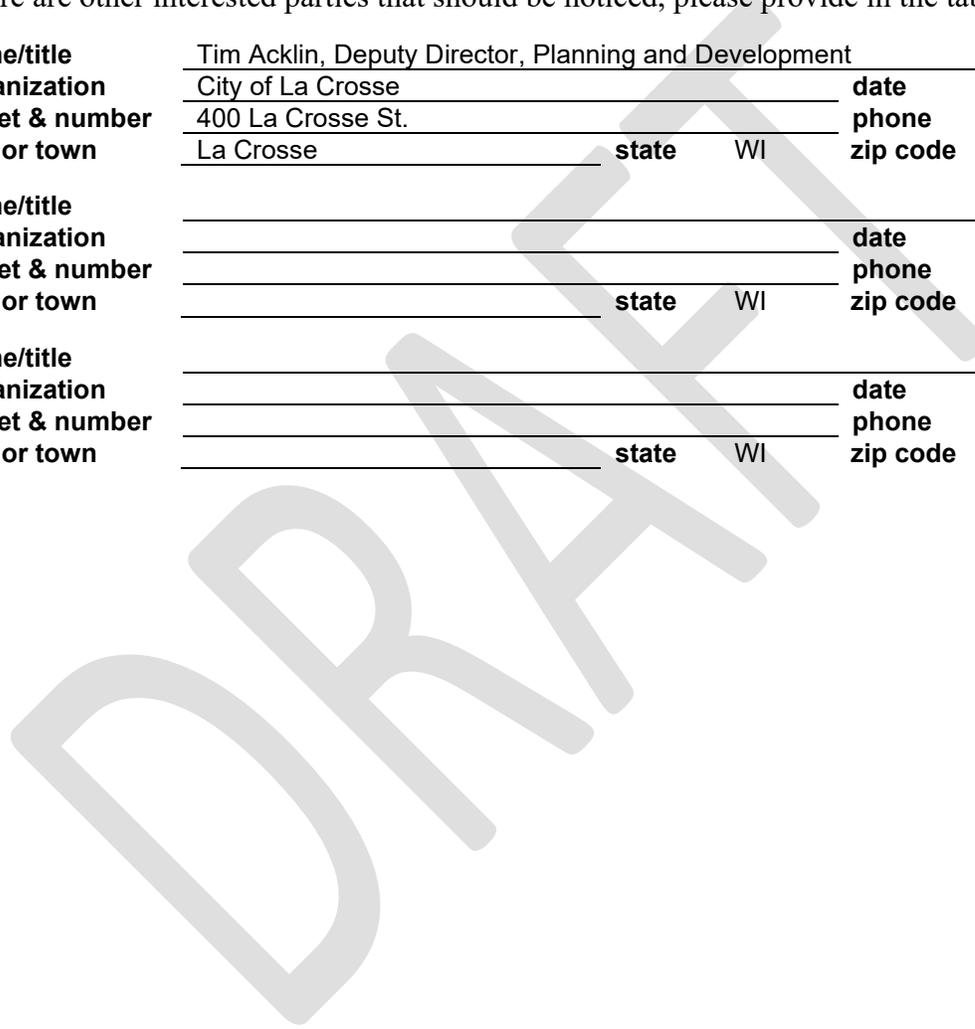
<b>name/title</b>	Jim Flottmeyer, Facilities and Marine Operations Manager		
<b>organization</b>	City of La Crosse, Parks & Rec Division	<b>date</b>	Dec. 4, 2025
<b>street &amp; number</b>	400 La Crosse Street	<b>phone</b>	608-789-7559
<b>city or town</b>	La Crosse	<b>state</b>	WI
		<b>zip code</b>	54623

If there are other interested parties that should be noticed, please provide in the tables below

<b>name/title</b>	Tim Acklin, Deputy Director, Planning and Development		
<b>organization</b>	City of La Crosse	<b>date</b>	Dec. 4, 2025
<b>street &amp; number</b>	400 La Crosse St.	<b>phone</b>	608-789-7391
<b>city or town</b>	La Crosse	<b>state</b>	WI
		<b>zip code</b>	54623

<b>name/title</b>	_____		
<b>organization</b>	_____	<b>date</b>	_____
<b>street &amp; number</b>	_____	<b>phone</b>	_____
<b>city or town</b>	_____	<b>state</b>	WI
		<b>zip code</b>	_____

<b>name/title</b>	_____		
<b>organization</b>	_____	<b>date</b>	_____
<b>street &amp; number</b>	_____	<b>phone</b>	_____
<b>city or town</b>	_____	<b>state</b>	WI
		<b>zip code</b>	_____





La Crosse City Hall, La Crosse County, WI 1 of 21



La Crosse City Hall, La Crosse County, WI 2 of 21



La Crosse City Hall, La Crosse County, WI 3 of 21



La Crosse City Hall, La Crosse County, WI 4 of 21



La Crosse City Hall, La Crosse County, WI 5 of 21



La Crosse City Hall, La Crosse County, WI 6 of 21



La Crosse City Hall, La Crosse County, WI 7 of 21



La Crosse City Hall, La Crosse County, WI 8 of 21



La Crosse City Hall, La Crosse County, WI 9 of 21



La Crosse City Hall, La Crosse County, WI 10 of 21



La Crosse City Hall, La Crosse County, WI 11 of 21



La Crosse City Hall, La Crosse County, WI 12 of 21



La Crosse City Hall, La Crosse County, WI 13 of 21



La Crosse City Hall, La Crosse County, WI 14 of 21





La Crosse City Hall, La Crosse County, WI 16 of 21



La Crosse City Hall, La Crosse County, WI 17 of 21





La Crosse City Hall, La Crosse County, WI 19 of 21



La Crosse City Hall, La Crosse County, WI 20 of 21



La Crosse City Hall, La Crosse County, WI 21 of 21



# City of La Crosse, Wisconsin

City Hall  
400 La Crosse Street  
La Crosse, WI 54601

## Text File

File Number: 26-0225

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**Agenda Date:** 2/26/2026

**Version:** 1

**Status:** Agenda Ready

**In Control:** Heritage Preservation Commission

**File Type:** General Item

**Agenda Number:** 6.



# Memorandum

**To:** Certified Local Governments in Wisconsin  
**From:** State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), Certified Local Government Coordinator  
**Date:** February 2, 2025  
**Re:** *National Register of Historic Places* nominations for properties in CLG jurisdictions

---

When the *State Historic Preservation Office* (SHPO) receives a *National Register of Historic Places* (NRHP) nomination for a property within the jurisdiction of a *Certified Local Government* (CLG), the preparer will share the nomination with the chief elected official and the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) in that community at least 60 days prior to the State Review Board's consideration of the nomination. The State Review Board meets quarterly, typically in February, May, August, and November.

This is an opportunity for the HPC to comment on the nomination and contribute local knowledge of the property and its history.

As a CLG, your commission's responsibility is to review the nomination and provide an opinion as to whether the property meets the eligibility criteria for the NRHP. Typically, HPCs do this by placing the nomination on the agenda of a regular meeting and allocating time for public comment as well as commission review. It is not within the HPC's responsibility or authority to require or request edits from the nomination preparer. If the commission has concerns or feedback about the content of the nomination, that information should be transmitted directly to the SHPO.

A summary of public comments and/or a letter of the commission's opinion may be submitted, by postal mail or email, to:

Ian Gort  
[ian.gort@wisconsinhistory.org](mailto:ian.gort@wisconsinhistory.org)

State Historic Preservation Office  
Wisconsin Historical Society  
816 State St. Rm. 305  
Madison, WI 53706

The letter may come from the chair of the HPC, the director of the Planning Department, the chief elected official, or any combination thereof. Regardless of whether the SHPO receives correspondence from the CLG, the SHPO will proceed with the nomination process.

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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.

## 1. Name of Property

Historic name: HSR Building

Other names/site number: Arengo Office Building

Name of related multiple property listing: n/a

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

## 2. Location

Street & number: 100 Milwaukee Street

City or town: La Crosse State: WI County: La Crosse

Not For Publication:  Vicinity:

## 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

Applicable National Register Criteria  A  B  C  D

<b>Signature of certifying official/Title:</b>	<b>Date</b>
Tricia Canaday, Wisconsin State Historic Preservation Officer	
<b>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</b>	
In my opinion, the property <input type="checkbox"/> meets <input type="checkbox"/> does not meet the National Register criteria.	
<b>Signature of commenting official:</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>Title:</b>	<b>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</b>

**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

**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 county)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	Buildings
0	0	Sites
0	0	Structures
1	0	Objects
2	0	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

**Current Functions**

COMMERCE / professional

COMMERCE / professional

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**

MODERN MOVEMENT

**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: walls: EARTH; CONCRETE  
foundation: CONCRETE; roof: ASPHALT

**Narrative Description**

**Summary Paragraph**

The HSR Building is located approximately one mile north of downtown La Crosse. The one-story office building has sloped earthen berms, heavily-textured exposed concrete retaining walls, and a flat roof with deep overhangs, making it an excellent – as well as the only known local – example of an Earth Shelter-style building. The building was designed in two phases in 1972 and 1977 by HSR and Associates, Inc., an architecture and engineering firm that has used the building as their own headquarters from the time of its construction to the present. The HSR Building retains historic integrity of the character-defining features that make it an excellent example of an earth shelter building.

**Setting**

The HSR Building is located at the southeast corner of Milwaukee Street and Buchner Place in an industrial and office park west of US Highway 53 (Copeland Avenue). A large paved parking lot is located south of the building and is accessed by a driveway running along the east edge of the lot and a small circular entry drive at the southwest corner of the lot. The lots around the

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HSR Building are large and contain buildings with similar large setbacks and similar construction dates from the early and mid-1970s. A two-story apartment building is located directly east of the HSR Building, with a similar three-story apartment building to the north, on the opposite side of Buchner Place. Diagonally across the intersection is the one-story office of an industrial manufacturer, and on the opposite side of Milwaukee Street, to the west, is a one-story small office building. The area south of the HSR Building contains large industrial buildings with large parking and loading areas.

### Exterior

A six-foot-high sloping earthen berm surrounds the building. In the center of each elevation, sloping concrete retaining walls project from the building and interrupt the berm, creating bays in which the full height of the building wall is exposed. These bays contain full-height windows on the north and south and entry vestibules on the east and west. The concrete retaining walls have a sandblasted finish; in silhouette, their outer edges taper inward as they rise. Above the berm, a three-foot-tall ribbon of clerestory windows runs in a continuous band around the entire building. The windows consist of fixed lights in anodized aluminum frames with thin rectangular profiles. Above the clerestory band is a flat roof with dramatic six-foot-deep overhangs. The roof structure is three feet six inches deep, and the outer fascia of the overhang is clad in anodized aluminum vertical panels arranged in overlapping horizontal bands. The current cladding was installed around 1995 and replaced the badly deteriorated original fascia material of cedar plywood with vertical grooves.

The building was constructed in two phases, both with identical materials and architectural details. The earlier portion was constructed in 1972 and was square in plan, measuring 91 feet on each side. Five years later an additional section, measuring 35 feet deep by 112 feet long, was added to the south of the existing building, creating the current upside-down T-shaped plan. The addition is approximately ten feet wider than the earlier portion on the east and west, and its east and west end walls consist of full-height, 10 inch-thick windowless concrete walls that contrast with the earth berm exterior of the rest of the building. These concrete walls, like the retaining walls, have a sandblasted finish and have a trapezoidal silhouette. When the building was expanded in 1977, the existing south exterior walls were kept in place and remain intact as space-dividing walls in the interior.

The west (primary, Milwaukee Street) elevation consists of the original 1972 northern portion of the building at the left, and the 1977 addition at the south (right). The majority of the 1972 portion consists of the earth berm, capped by the continuous band of clerestory windows and the wide roof fascia. The main entrance is located in the center of the west elevation and is flanked by concrete retaining walls. The entrance consists of a projecting vestibule with aluminum-framed window walls and doors. The vestibule forms an air lock, with similar aluminum window walls on the interior. The west (exterior) wall of the vestibule originally contained a solid wood entry door flanked by solid wood panels; these wood panels were replaced with the current window wall configuration around 1995. The south end of the west elevation consists of the blank concrete end wall of the 1977 addition.

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The south elevation is symmetrical. The elevation is bookended by the tapering concrete walls. In the center of the elevation is a 20-foot-wide bay containing four full-height windows flanked by concrete retaining walls. On either side of the center bay are similar berms, clerestory window band, and roof fascia.

The east elevation is similar to the west elevation and consists of the blank concrete end wall of the 1977 addition at the south; and the bermed 1972 portion with a center entryway. The earthen berm does not extend all the way to the south on this elevation. Rather, a concrete retaining wall located at the northeast corner of the 1977 addition creates a small paved service entrance. In the center of the 1972 portion of the east elevation is a similar entry vestibule to the west elevation. This vestibule contains a projecting east wall consisting of an aluminum-framed glass door flanked by solid panels clad in wide cypress clapboards. The other walls of the entry vestibule are aluminum-framed glass window walls.

The north (Buchner Place) elevation is symmetrical. Like the south elevation, it has a central bay with full-height windows and a glass exit door flanked by concrete retaining walls with earthen berms on either side. The continuous clerestory band and the wide roof fascia run across the top of the full elevation.

### **Interior**

The interior of the HSR Building consists of a central core, containing restrooms, a kitchen area, and a conference room, surrounded by open office space. The character-defining features of the interior include the original exposed concrete walls, the continuous band of clerestory windows, and the arrangement of the service core surrounded by open floor area, a concept often referred to as “universal space.”

The structural concrete walls that form the perimeter of the building are left exposed on the interior and have a sandblasted finish. These walls are approximately six feet tall. Two freestanding concrete walls, L-shaped in plan, are also located near the southern end of the interior; these walls were part of the 1972 section of the building and were retained when the building was expanded in 1977. The perimeter concrete walls are topped with a continuous band of aluminum-framed fixed-light clerestory windows. The current windows (which are double paned and have better energy efficiency) were installed in the early 2000s and replicate the size, rhythm, and frame profile of the originals. The top of the clerestory band aligns precisely with the plane of the ceiling. The ceiling is clad in panelized acoustical tiles with a combination of recessed small round can lights and larger troffer lights. The current acoustical tile ceiling and lights were installed in the early 2000s and replicate the materials and proportions of the original suspended ceiling and lighting.

The service core of the building is located at the center of the original 1972 portion of the building. The full-height walls of the service core are clad in a combination of drywall and opaque glass panels. The arrangement of spaces within the service core were modified slightly in the early 2000s. In the west part of the service core is a large conference room that was created out of two smaller spaces. The center part of the core is open and contains a large walk-through kitchen area lined with counters, cabinetry, and storage. The east part of the core contains men's

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and women's restrooms that are accessed through a small entry lobby at the east. The restrooms were originally located in this area in 1972 but opened into the center kitchen area. The restrooms were enlarged in the early 2000s and the entrance was moved to the east.

The majority of the floor space around the central core consists of open offices with shoulder-height cubicle partitions. The interior of the building does not contain any structural columns, creating a flexible and open space. Often associated with modernist architect Mies van der Rohe, this concept of "universal space" emphasized the removal of fixed partitions and structural elements in order to create interiors that could be adapted to changing needs and uses. Since there are no full-height interior partitions, all wiring (electrical, telephone, internet, etc.) is located above the suspended ceiling and then routed down to floor level through a series of brushed aluminum thin columns that are located throughout the open floor plan. Two enclosed rooms are located at the southwest and southeast corners of the building. The southwest room originally contained an enclosed office for Roger Roslansky, the design director of HSR from 1968 until his retirement in 1998. The southeast room originally contained blueprinting equipment and currently contains a large plotter and other supplies.

### **Landscape**

A prominent concrete sign is located along the sidewalk at the west (primary) entrance to the building. The sign consists of a low concrete wall with the firm's stylized "HSR" logo stamped into the concrete and highlighted with red paint at the north end of the wall. The sign dates to 1972, the same year as the construction of the first portion of the building. The earthen berms form the primary landscape elements around the building. The berms consist of mowed lawn up to the drip line of the roof, and are covered in wood mulch in the section beneath the roof overhang. At the east and west entrance vestibule and at the north and south full-height window bays are small planter beds with ornamental grasses. The remainder of the landscaping consists of mature trees at the northwest corner and along the southwest and east sides. A bioswale with native plants is located on the south side of the property, between the building and the nearby paved parking lot.

### **Integrity**

The HSR Building retains integrity for the majority of the seven aspects. Changes to the building include the in-kind replacement of exterior windows and interior ceiling; modifications to the spaces within the service core; and the replacement of the original roof fascia on the exterior.

The HSR Building retains integrity of location and setting as conveyed through its corner site in its surrounding office park; the location of the original parking lot south of the building; and its character-defining earthen berms with minimal landscaping.

The HSR Building retains integrity of design as conveyed through its rectilinear plan; integrated earthen berms; Brutalist-style exposed facades; and juxtaposition of horizontal and vertical elements on the exterior. The building also conveys its integrity of design on the interior through the unchanged location of its central service core; the universal space of the surrounding office area; and the precise details such as the alignment of windows, ceilings, and concrete wall heights.

The building retains integrity of materials as conveyed through its character-defining earthen berms and exposed concrete retaining walls. On the exterior, the building does not retain integrity of materials on the wide roof soffit, which was originally vertical plywood and was replaced with the current horizontal metal cladding in the early 2000s. The building's original windows also have been replaced, although the current windows match the size, shape, configuration, and frame profile of the originals.

The building retains integrity of workmanship as conveyed through its sandblasted exposed concrete.

The HSR Building retains integrity of both feeling and association as conveyed through its arrangement of interior cubicle partitions; its central core that contains service areas for the surrounding office space; and its continued use as the headquarters of an architecture and engineering professional office.

**END OF DESCRIPTION, DO NOT DELETE**

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## 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.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location

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- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

DRAFT

**Areas of Significance**

ARCHITECTURE

**Significant Person**

n/a

**Period of Significance**

1972-1977

**Cultural Affiliation**

n/a

**Significant Dates**

1972; 1977

**Architect/Builder**

Hackner, Schroeder, Roslansky & Associates, Inc., architects

**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph**

The HSR Building is being nominated to the National Register under *Criterion C* in the area of Architecture at the local level of significance. With its earthen berms, its narrow clerestory windows, its deeply overhanging roof, and its expressive exposed concrete retaining walls, the HSR Building is an excellent and well-preserved example of an Earth Shelter-style building.

**Period of Significance and Justification**

The period of significance for the HSR Building is 1972 to 1977, coinciding with the first and second phases of construction of the building.

**Criteria Consideration**

n/a

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

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The HSR Building is being nominated to the National Register as an outstanding example of an earth shelter building. Brief historic contexts follow for the City of La Crosse; a history of the subject property; a discussion of earth sheltered construction; and a brief biography of the architectural designers of the building.

## Historic Context

Present-day La Crosse is located in western Wisconsin, on a prairie flanked by tall bluffs at the confluence of the Mississippi and Black Rivers. The Ho-Chunk, Ojibwe, and Sioux used the area as a meeting place and location for trade for centuries. When European fur traders and missionaries began moving into the Upper Midwest in the nineteenth century, the area became a popular location for fur traders, and a trading post was established in 1841 in a log building. In 1843, the post was moved to the site of present-day downtown and renamed “La Crosse” after the name of the field sport that Native Americans had played in the area.<sup>1</sup>

Within a decade, the settlement began to see rapid growth. The surrounding prairie proved to be excellent farmland, and the geographical advantage of the high banks of the Mississippi River made the location an excellent dock for river traffic and steamboats as well as being immune to flooding. River trade spurred on economic growth, and the population increased from 573 inhabitants in 1853 to 3,860 people in 1860.<sup>2</sup> The Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul Railroad reached La Crosse in 1858 and offered larger markets for the city’s industries of lumber and grain milling and brewing.<sup>3</sup>

The 1860s and 1870s saw the establishment in the city of large industries, railway lines, banks, local government, and an economy based on transportation and access to a large river port. Because of its river connection to the pineries of northern Wisconsin, La Crosse developed into a lumber boom town, with thirty-three mills located along the Mississippi and Black Rivers. Lumbering helped propel La Crosse into the second largest city in Wisconsin by 1880, with just over 25,000 inhabitants.

As La Crosse prospered, the city grew outwards from its location along the Mississippi River. Large residential neighborhoods were developed east of downtown, on a flat area between the Mississippi and the bluffs to the east.<sup>4</sup> The 1890s saw a decline in growth due to the end of the lumber industry and a nationwide economic recession, and by the 1910s and 1920s, the economy of the city had completely changed, with the lack of both lumber mills and the end of widespread river traffic. Infrastructure such as paved streets, municipal electricity, deep wells and water works, a public health department and hospitals, large public schools, zoning laws, and a park system were all introduced by 1913.

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<sup>1</sup> Albert Sanford and H. J. Hirschheimer, *A History of La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1841-1900* (La Crosse: La Crosse County Historical Society, 1951).

<sup>2</sup> Susan Hessel and Gayda Hollnagel, *A History of La Crosse, Wisconsin in the Twentieth Century*, (La Crosse: La Crosse Historical Society, 2007); Joan Rausch and Richard Zeitlin, *City of La Crosse Intensive Architectural/Historical Survey Report* (La Crosse: City of La Crosse Department of City Planning, 1984).

<sup>3</sup> Rausch and Zeitlin, 17-20.

<sup>4</sup> Rausch and Zeitlin, 20-23.

The population of La Crosse reached 30,421 people in 1920.<sup>5</sup> The 1920s saw a renewed growth in the city's economy and in residential home construction, due in no small part to increased enrollments at the La Crosse Normal School (the present-day University of Wisconsin-La Crosse), the Wisconsin Business College, and the La Crosse Vocational School.<sup>6</sup> Other early 20<sup>th</sup>-century industries and businesses included implement and carriage manufacturing, button production, rubber boot and shoe production, and beer (and malt and soda products during Prohibition). By the early 1950s, several of La Crosse's larger industries were shuttered. The loss of these industries, along with a catastrophic flood of the Mississippi River in 1965, impacted the historic downtown industrial and business district, along with residential neighborhoods on French Island and the north side of the city. These events served as a catalyst for a series of federally-funded urban renewal projects in the 1960s and 1970s. In turn, the demolition of the city's nineteenth century courthouse, city hall, library, and post office under urban renewal inspired a historic preservation movement to preserve the remaining portions of La Crosse's historic downtown.<sup>7</sup>

The HSR Building (subject of this nomination) is located in an industrial park that was developed following World War II. The city of La Crosse is geographically divided into a north side and a south side by the La Crosse River and its surrounding marshes. Historically, Copeland Avenue (Highway 53) was a causeway that ran across the open marshes between downtown and the north part of the city. Beginning in the 1920s, city and business leaders began considering the possibility of filling in the wetland areas to create industrial spaces. A 1938 proposal to dredge and fill the marshes was rejected by the Public Works Administration, and a 1946 reclamation and floor control plan by a Chicago engineering firm was voted down by the City Council.<sup>8</sup> The following year, a private developer began dredging and "reclaiming" the area along Copeland Avenue. Max Bemel, the owner of an automobile and metal scrap yard, eventually created a new development area of approximately ten city blocks on the west side of the causeway, along with a frontage strip on the east side of the causeway.<sup>9</sup> Bemel also constructed the first building in the

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<sup>5</sup> Laura Godden and Paul Beck. *La Crosse, Postcard and History Series*, (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2015); Joan Rausch and Richard Zeitlin, *Historic La Crosse: Architectural and Historic Record: A Summary of an Intensive Survey Report*, (La Crosse: Architectural Researches, Inc. and Historic Resources, Inc., 1984); La Crosse Historical Society, *La Crosse, Wisconsin (Images of America Series)*, (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 1999).

<sup>6</sup> Rausch and Zeitlin, 21-24.

<sup>7</sup> Rausch and Zeitlin, 311-313; "Footsteps of La Crosse: Early 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Industry," La Crosse Public Library Archives.

<sup>8</sup> "Another Flood Year? Remedies Since 1952 Face Test Next Month," *La Crosse Tribune*, March 21, 1965, p. 6; "La Crosse River Marsh: History of an Urban Wetland," La Crosse Public Library Archives, [undated], accessed from <https://archives.lacrosselibrary.org/local-history/la-crosse-river-marsh/city-s-comprehensive-plan/>.

<sup>9</sup> "Dredge Removing Black River Sand To Fill Causeway Marsh," *La Crosse Tribune*, June 15, 1947, p. 4.

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new development: a Piggly Wiggly grocery store at 65 Copeland Avenue, completed in October 1948 and designed by local architects Boyum, Schubert, and Sorensen.<sup>10</sup>

Additional new retail and industrial buildings went up along the causeway in the next few years, and in 1950, the western part of the industrial park was officially ready for development after the installation of sewer mains.<sup>11</sup> By 1967, the *La Crosse Tribune* could report “No Building Sites Left: Businessmen Optimistic Along City’s Causeway,”<sup>12</sup> and a handful of industries had relocated to the western section of the industrial park along Causeway Boulevard and Kraft Street. In the early 1970s, the character of the northern part of the industrial park began changing as a residential developer successfully rezoned several sites for apartment buildings along Buchner Place. Around the same time, two professional office buildings were built at the intersection of Buchner Place and Milwaukee Street: an accounting office at 99 Milwaukee Street, designed by architects Hackner, Schroeder, Roslansky and Associates (HSR); and HSR’s own new headquarters at 100 Milwaukee Street, the subject building of this nomination.

*Hackner, Schroeder, Roslansky and Associates, architects*

The firm of Hackner, Schroeder, Roslansky and Associates was founded by Robert Hackner (1921-2016), who earned degrees in architecture from Notre Dame in 1942 and the University of Pennsylvania in 1948. Hackner returned to La Crosse and worked for architects Boyum, Schubert, and Sorensen before becoming licensed and opening his own office in 1953.<sup>13</sup> Hackner’s family had religious connections: his grandfather, Egid, founded the eponymous E. Hackner Altar Company, a prominent regional producer of church furnishings that was later run by Robert’s father. Perhaps as a result of family connections, Robert Hackner’s first independent architectural commission was for Newman Catholic High School in Wausau, WI, built between 1954 and 1956.<sup>14</sup> Another Catholic commission soon followed, for Pacelli High School in Stevens Point, also completed in 1956.

The same year the Catholic high schools were completed, Hackner went into partnership with Harry Schroeder. Schroeder (1924-2009) was born in Racine and had studied at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Rice University, earning degrees in 1948 and 1952, respectively.<sup>15</sup> The newly-formed firm of Hacker, Schroeder & Associates, Inc. opened an office with five employees in the Rivoli Building in downtown La Crosse.

<sup>10</sup> “Piggly Wiggly Building Store In Bemel’s Industrial Addition,” *La Crosse Tribune*, July 11, 1948, p. 11. Max Bemel was also working concurrently with the same architects (Schubert, Boyum & Sorensen) on the design and construction of the Congregation Sons of Israel synagogue at 1820 Main Street (AHI 33259). Bemel was the congregation president as well as the head of the building committee and is widely credited with having been primarily responsible for the fundraising and construction of the new synagogue. Congregation Sons of Israel was designed in 1947 and completed in 1948, so it seems likely that Bemel returned to Schubert, Boyum & Sorensen for the new Piggly Wiggly store while the synagogue construction project was already underway.

<sup>11</sup> “Causeway Development Grows With \$100,000 In Additions,” *La Crosse Tribune*, Jan. 2, 1950, p. 9.

<sup>12</sup> Apr. 29, 1967, p. 4.

<sup>13</sup> George S. Koyl, ed., *American Architects Directory*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (New York: R.R. Bowker Company, 1962), p. 275; Reid Magney, “Architecture Firm Celebrates 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary,” *La Crosse Tribune*, Oct. 22, 2006, p. H-1

<sup>14</sup> Charish Badzinski, “Exploring the E. Hackner Altar Company Legacy in La Crosse and Beyond,” *Past Present & Future*, (La Crosse Historical Society), vol. 45, no. 1, March 2024; “The History of Newman Catholic Schools,” accessed from: <https://www.newmancatholicschools.com/about-ncs/history>.

<sup>15</sup> Koyl, 624.

The firm's first major commission in La Crosse was for the Schuh Homes (1305 St. James St.), the first public housing complex built in the city and constructed between 1958 and 1959. The success of the project led to several other public housing developments in La Crosse as well: Stoffel Court (333 7<sup>th</sup> St. S., built 1964); Stokke Tower (421 6<sup>th</sup> St. S., built 1968); Mullen Homes (1305 St. James St., built 1968); and Sauber Manor (1033 Liberty St., built 1971).<sup>16</sup> In the early 1960s, the firm also completed out-of-town work including new elementary schools and a new high school in Sparta; a new school and an addition to St. Gabriel's Catholic Church in Prairie du Chien; and an addition to the Oneida County federal building in Rhinelander.<sup>17</sup>

Throughout the 1950s and early 60s, most of the architectural work in La Crosse had gone to Minneapolis firms or to one of two local architectural offices: Boyum, Schubert & Sorensen (Hackner's former employer) or the office of Frank Fuchs.<sup>18</sup> The young firm of Hackner, Schroeder & Associates began to establish themselves as an architectural contender within La Crosse, however, and beginning in the 1960s, the majority of their projects were in their own hometown.

Three of these La Crosse projects were for Catholic organizations: the modernist church of St. Thomas More (inspired by another church of the same name in Chicago, designed by architects Barry & Kay); a new grade school (now known as St. Joseph the Workman Cathedral School); and the New Formalist-style Roncalli Newman Center at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse.<sup>19</sup> The firm also received the first of several major institutional and government projects when they were chosen to design the new gymnasium at UW-La Crosse, completed in 1964 (now named Mitchell Hall).<sup>20</sup> Other major projects included a \$2.2 million addition to the Lutheran Hospital, built between 1963 and 1965.<sup>21</sup>

In 1960, Hackner, Schroeder & Associates began a decade-long series of projects with the county and municipal governments of La Crosse. The city was in the process of envisioning a new civic center to be built as a federal urban renewal project, and Hackner, Schroeder & Associates were selected to design the new county courthouse and safety building.<sup>22</sup> While

<sup>16</sup> Jenny DeRocher, "The La Crosse Housing Authority, 1946-1985," La Crosse Public Library Archives, Aug. 3, 2023, accessed from: <https://archives.lacrosselibrary.org/blog/the-la-crosse-housing-authority-1946-1985/>.

<sup>17</sup> "Welcome, Students," *La Crosse Tribune*, Sept. 9, 1962, p. 13; "School Board Given \$5,000 Trust Fund," *La Crosse Tribune*, Dec. 17, 1963, p. 13.

<sup>18</sup> "Oral History Interview with Robert Hackner" by William Clayton [recorded 1987]. University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Oral History Program. UW-La Crosse Murphy Library Digital Collections. Accessed from: [https://digitalcollections.uwlax.edu/jsp/RcWebAudioPlayer.jsp?doc\\_id=aa172543-df64-469f-9585-15a8bb4e56e4/wlacu000/00000018/00000006](https://digitalcollections.uwlax.edu/jsp/RcWebAudioPlayer.jsp?doc_id=aa172543-df64-469f-9585-15a8bb4e56e4/wlacu000/00000018/00000006).

<sup>19</sup> "Plans For Catholic Grade School OK'd," *La Crosse Tribune*, July 17, 1968, p. 21.

<sup>20</sup> "Revised Plan 'Favorable'" *La Crosse Tribune*, Dec. 19, 1961, p. 1; "Bids Too High, LSC Building Is Delayed," *La Crosse Tribune*, Apr. 26, 1963, p. 1; "Reynolds Signs Contract For LSC Gymnasium," *La Crosse Tribune*, Sept. 18, 1963, p. 1.

<sup>21</sup> "Permit Granted for Lutheran Hospital Work," *La Crosse Tribune*, Apr. 9, 1963

<sup>22</sup> "Preliminary Plan For Civic Center Unveiled: Plan Approved By Commission," *La Crosse Tribune*, May 10, 1961, p. 1; "Ideas' for Civic Center," *La Crosse Tribune*, May 11, 1961, p. 1.

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courthouse planning and construction was underway, the firm was also hired in 1964 by the City of La Crosse to study space requirements for a new city hall building.<sup>23</sup>

The firm of Hackner, Schroeder and Associates was growing and had a large number of projects underway. In 1964, the office hired a draftsman named Roger Roslansky. Roslansky (b. 1934) studied architecture at Iowa State University and graduated in 1961. He worked briefly in Minneapolis before joining Hackner, Schroeder and Associates.<sup>24</sup> Roslansky was recognized as a talented designer. He was quickly named as the chief designer of the ongoing City Hall project, and within a year was promoted to associate in the firm. Roslansky briefly left the firm over personnel differences, but in 1968 Hackner and Schroeder persuaded him to return, making Roslansky a full partner and naming him as design director of Hackner, Schroeder, Roslansky and Associates (HSR).<sup>25</sup>

Running a large architectural firm entails more than just design work, however, and the three partners soon settled into distinct leadership roles. Robert Hackner specialized in business development and was often the “public face” of the firm. Harry Schroeder managed the office and business affairs. And Roger Roslansky worked as the firm’s primary architectural designer, overseeing a team of associates and draftsmen.<sup>26</sup>

Roslansky served as chief designer of the La Crosse City Hall, which had progressed from space planning in 1963 to preliminary design by 1966 to final design and construction between 1968 and 1970.<sup>27</sup> Roslansky also designed the *La Crosse Tribune* Building and the new La Crosse Public Library, which, at its completion in 1967, won a national award of merit from the American Institute of Architects, the National Book Committee, and the American Library Association.<sup>28</sup>

By the early 1970s, HSR had projects underway for a residence hall at UW-La Crosse; the La Crosse Municipal Airport; the Wisconsin Rapids City Hall; and apartment buildings in La Crosse and Prairie du Chien.<sup>29</sup> The firm was still located in its same offices in the Rivoli Building downtown, a 1920 Neoclassical building. The firm was steadily growing, and by the end of the decade, it would be the second largest in Wisconsin, with 80 employees.<sup>30</sup> To accommodate the

<sup>23</sup> “New City Hall Cost Estimated At \$692,000,” *La Crosse Tribune*, March 13, 1964, p. 9.

<sup>24</sup> “Architects Are Named Associates,” *La Crosse Tribune*, Oct 23, 1965, p. 8.

<sup>25</sup> Author interview with Kurt Schroeder, Aug. 20, 2025. According to firm lore, management at the firm refused to promote Roslansky, so he quit.

<sup>26</sup> Kurt Schroeder interview.

<sup>27</sup> “Model Shown Of 6-Story City Hall,” *La Crosse Tribune*, Aug. 29, 1966, p. 9; “City Hall Plans Approved,” *La Crosse Tribune*, Feb. 7, 1967; “City Officials Tour New City Hall,” *La Crosse Tribune*, July 31, 1969; “Topping Off City Hall,” *La Crosse Tribune*, Sept. 27, 1969; “A Dignified Landmark: Architects Wanted Distinctive Design” *La Crosse Tribune*, July 2, 1970, p. 22.

<sup>28</sup> “National Award of Merit : Architects Hackner, Schroeder & Associates, La Crosse Public Library, La Crosse, Wisconsin.” *Wisconsin Architect* 39 (May 1968): 8–11; “Miss Thurow Gets Award For Library,” *La Crosse Tribune*, July 7, 1968, p. 5.

<sup>29</sup> “Merit Award: Blackhawk Apartments, Housing for the Elderly, Prairie du Chien.” *Wisconsin Architect* 43 (May 1972): 4–12.

<sup>30</sup> Robert Hackner oral history. HSR remains in existence to the present and continues to provide architectural, engineering, and interior design services.

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increased number of employees, HSR decided to build its own office that reflected its modern corporate identity.

### *The HSR Building*

Planning for the new building got underway in 1971. As with most projects in large architectural offices, designing a building is a collaborative affair, and a single specific designer of the new HSR building has not been identified. However, the functional spatial arrangement of the interior and the sculptural qualities of the exterior, combined with the symbolic nature of the building as the firm's own headquarters, all suggest that Roger Roslansky (head of design for HSR) was the chief designer of the HSR Building. Roslansky also stamped the final set of construction drawings for the building, which were drafted by Dave Lien.<sup>31</sup> Drawings were complete by December 1971, with minor revisions two months later. Around the same time, the company purchased the building site and construction began later that spring.<sup>32</sup> The building was completed the same year and the company moved from its former location in the Rivoli Building into its new professional offices.

In 1977, five years after its construction, the building was expanded to the south to accommodate a larger office staff. The addition was designed to blend with the existing portion of the building, but used exposed exterior concrete walls on the east and west to differentiate from the earthen berms on all four sides of the 1972 part. The designer of the 1977 expansion has not been identified either; the plans were drafted by "WDE" and the final drawings were stamped by architect Ronald Siggelkow. Following the construction of the addition, HSR continued to occupy the southern portion of the building while the area north of the central core was subdivided and leased as office space to several other companies. By the early 2000s, HSR had resumed occupancy of the entire building. The former subdivided offices in the north half of the building were removed, thereby recreating the open floor plan of the original building. As part of the renovations, HSR also combined two smaller conference rooms into a single large room and redesigned the bathrooms. HSR remains the single sole occupant of the building to the present.

### *Earth Shelter Architecture*

Earth sheltered buildings use earth around, and sometimes over, a structure to moderate temperature changes. There are three types of earth shelter buildings: earth berm, hillside, and underground.<sup>33</sup> The most common occurrence of earth sheltering is an earth berm building, with a berm of earth piled against one or more exterior walls (as at the HSR Building, subject of this nomination.) Structures can also be built into an existing slope or hillside. Roofs may be earth-covered as well, often over precast concrete structural planks. In Wisconsin, fully underground buildings, with atriums or light wells, are rare. Instead, most earth sheltered buildings have at least a portion of the building exposed. The visible elevations of the building often display architectural styles of the era, such as Ranch, Usonian, Neo-Expressionist, or (as at the HSR

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<sup>31</sup> "Arenco Office Building, La Crosse, Wisconsin, HSR 71066," dated Dec. 71, rev. Feb. 12, 1972, building plans on file at HSR Associates, Inc. The construction of the building was set up as a different corporate entity, named Arenco, rather than handled directly through the HSR company.

<sup>32</sup> "Property Transfers," *La Crosse Tribune*, Jan. 16, 1972, p 22.

<sup>33</sup> Moreland Associates, 6.

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Building) Brutalist, with its chunky concrete walls that contrast with the deep-set band of clerestory windows.<sup>34</sup>

Earth shelter buildings were constructed in Wisconsin between the 1970s and the 1990s. The style remains relatively rare in the state, and a comprehensive survey to identify earth shelter buildings in Wisconsin has yet to be undertaken.

Humans have been building earth sheltered structures for millennia, both for defense and in response to climate conditions. In North America, the Ancestral Pueblo people built underground rooms known as kivas for religious and social uses in the present-day southwestern United States; and in the Great Plains, the Mandan peoples built semi-underground earth lodges with sod walls, a building technique later adopted by nineteenth-century white settlers and immortalized by popular children's author Laura Ingalls Wilder.<sup>35</sup> In the twentieth century, architect Frank Lloyd Wright experimented with earth shelter techniques at Taliesin West in Arizona and at the Jacobs II house in suburban Madison, Wisconsin, but general interest in earth sheltered and underground building did not become widespread until the 1960s.<sup>36</sup>

Scholars have identified two distinct factors that influenced the development of earth sheltered design in the 1960s. Residential interest in building underground was related to the emerging ecological design movement in America, which promoted environmental awareness, ecological conservation, and the preservation of natural landscapes. Such houses were initially called "architecture of little presence," "conservation architecture," or "nonbuildings."<sup>37</sup> At the same time, major cities around the world were beginning to build underground shopping centers and parking structures where urban space was at a premium. In America, architects explored underground designs for similar places, often on university campuses, which either lacked sufficient space to build or were constrained by monumental or landmark buildings and plazas. At Harvard University, for example, the Nathan Marsh Pusey Library was constructed under the landscape of Harvard Yard.<sup>38</sup> In the Midwest, architect David Bennett designed Williamson Hall at the University of Minnesota to house the campus bookstore and the admissions office. Nearly all of the building's 83,000 square feet were placed underground to preserve the views of surrounding 19<sup>th</sup>- and early-20<sup>th</sup>-century university buildings.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Michael Bridgeman, ed., "Earth Shelter," [architectural style guide], Wisconsin State Historic Preservation Office, 2025.

<sup>35</sup> Boyer 4; Duchman 12; MacAlester 130, 132. See also *On the Banks of Plum Creek* (first published in 1937; multiple later editions), the fourth volume of Laura Ingalls Wilder's autobiographical *Little House* series of novels.

<sup>36</sup> Harboe Architects, "Taliesin West Master Plan," Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, 2015; University of Pennsylvania Stuart Weitzman School of Design, "Historic Structure Report: The Cabaret at Taliesin West," Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, Spring 2023; Marsha Weisiger et al., "[Herbert and Katherine Jacobs House II](#)", Buildings of Wisconsin, Marsha Weisiger and contributors. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2017, 463-464.

<sup>37</sup> Kenneth Labs, "The Earth-Covered Building Movement: A Perspective," 258, 263. See also, for example, Malcom Wells, "Nowhere to Go but Down," *Progressive Architecture*, February 1965, 174-179.

<sup>38</sup> Labs, 257-258; Maureen Meister, "[Harvard Yard Libraries](#)", [[Cambridge, Massachusetts](#)], SAH Archipedia, eds. Gabrielle Esperdy and Karen Kingsley, Charlottesville: UVaP, 2012—, <http://sah-archipedia.org/buildings/MA-01-HY19>.

<sup>39</sup> Duchman, 11; Loretta Hall, "Building Underground With a Light Touch," *Underground Buildings: Architecture and Environment*, 2024, accessed from <https://www.subsurfacebuildings.com/BuildingUndergroundwithaLightTouch.html>.

During the 1970s, earth sheltered design in the US became closely associated with energy conservation, particularly in the aftermath of the 1973 oil embargo imposed by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), which resulted in fuel shortages and caused energy prices to nearly triple in less than six months. A second energy crisis occurred in 1979 as a result of decreased oil production following the Iranian Revolution.<sup>40</sup> Against the background of rapidly rising energy costs, earth sheltered buildings were touted as one of the easiest and most effective techniques of saving energy, along with other benefits such as security and protection against damage from earthquakes, fires, and tornadoes. A variety of how-to publications and courses were organized, including national conferences dedicated to earth shelter building technology.

By the early 1980s, private research and government-sponsored studies had amassed quantifiable data related to environmental, energy, and economic aspects of earth shelter construction.<sup>41</sup> Despite its benefits, earth sheltered construction remained an unconventional method of construction, largely due to excavation costs, the need for specialized drainage and waterproofing materials, and increased structural requirements. By the late 1990s, the Passive House construction standards (which rely on airtight building envelopes and super-insulated materials) and LEED certification had replaced the earth sheltered movement as the primary focus for energy- and environmental-conscious design in the US.<sup>42</sup>

The HSR Building, subject of this nomination, is an excellent example of the Earth Shelter style. The HSR Building is an “earth berm” building, as demonstrated by the six-foot-tall sloped berms that surround all four sides of the building. The HSR Building also displays a secondary architectural style in the parts of the building that are visible – in this case, the Brutalist style, as exhibited by the sandblasted concrete walls; the narrow, deeply-set band of clerestory windows; and the contrast between the projecting concrete retaining walls, the large void of the exposed central bays, and the hovering quality of the prominent flat roof.

The broad unbroken swaths of grassy berms play an important part of the building’s composition, as well. The dimensions and slope of the berms relate to the size and depth of each set of concrete retaining walls in the center of each façade. Additionally, the berms at the northwest and northeast corners do not form a simple right angle but are modified in plan, forming elongated triangular corners that extend the building into its site and reinforce its strong horizontality. Such careful consideration of the relationship between landscape and building elevates the earthen berms from being merely an energy-saving feature to being an integral component of a cohesive, three-dimensional architectural design.

The construction date of the HSR Building also adds to its significance as an Earth Shelter-style building. The building was completed in May of 1972, a full year before the OPEC oil embargo and energy crisis increased public concerns over energy efficiency and helped spur interest in the

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<sup>40</sup> Labs, 265-266; Duchman 4, 12-13; Boyer and Grondzik, 3.

<sup>41</sup> Boyer and Grondzik, xvii-xviii. See also, for example, Moreland Associates, “Earth-Covered Buildings: An Exploratory Analysis for Hazard and Energy Performance,” prepared for the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), November 1981.

<sup>42</sup> McAlester, 768.

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earth shelter building movement. Roger Roslansky's Earth Shelter design for the HSR Building can therefore be seen not as a superficial adoption of a "trendy" architectural style, but as a masterful design that demonstrated to clients that HSR was a thoughtful design firm, well aware of current architectural philosophies, and on par with other leading firms in the region.

The HSR Building retains good integrity of its character-defining earthen berms and its secondary Brutalist-style facades. The building embodies the distinctive characteristics of its style and is therefore worthy of inclusion in the National Register as an example of the Earth Shelter style.

### Comparative Analysis

Known examples of earth sheltered construction in Wisconsin are extremely rare. There are three Earth Shelter properties recorded in the Wisconsin Architecture and History Inventory (AHI). There are likely other examples in the state that have not been surveyed. In addition, "earth shelter" was recently added to the AHI as a defined style category, so other examples may be classified under a different style or form in AHI but cannot be identified as no thematic or intensive survey has been undertaken.

The three properties identified in AHI area:

*Pat Clark and Emogene Nelson House*  
*N8064 975<sup>th</sup> St., River Falls, Pierce County (AHI 246848)*

Designed in 1972 by architect Mike McGuire, this house as a type of earth shelter construction popularly known as a "Hobbit house" for its resemblance to the underground dwellings of the Hobbits in the stories of author J.R.R. Tolkien. The house has a rambling plan and is built of corrugated steel half-round vaulting coated with white concrete on the interior and earth completely covering the walls and roof on the exterior. The exposed end walls of the house contain wood-framed doors and glass. Inside, the house has built-in mahogany seating, bookcases, cabinetry, and light fixtures; as well as curved fireplace chimneys, round skylights, and rounded wall edges.

The HSR Building retains equal integrity to the Clark and Nelson House but represents a different stylistic interpretation of earth shelter construction. The exposed facades and interior detailing of the Clark and Nelson House are related to the Organic modernism of architects such as Bruce Goff or Jacques Couëlle. The curved elements and rambling, organic feel of the house are a strong contrast to the HSR Building, with its rectilinear plan; precise juxtaposition of horizontal and vertical elements; and intentional contrast between the "softness" of the earthen berms and the "hardness" of the concrete retaining walls.

*5312 S. Stone Rd., Town of Parkland, Douglas County (AHI 246845)*

This large compound was completed in 1979 in rural Douglas County, approximately fifteen miles southeast of Superior. Illustrating the "hillside" type of earth sheltered construction, the building is partially built into the natural slope of the topography and has concrete walls and prestressed hollow core concrete ceiling slabs covered in sod. The multi-family complex contains three three-bedroom units and several large shared common areas, as well as additional

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service buildings for wind generators and other off-the-grid technology. The exposed facades of the building are Contemporary in style, with stone veneer cladding, groupings of large picture windows and sliding glass doors, and long horizontal rooflines with vertical metal fascias.<sup>43</sup>

The HSR Building retains overall equal integrity to this compound. In comparison to the rural location of this property, however, the HSR Building is notable as an urban example of a earth shelter building located on a city lot rather than in a large natural setting. The HSR Building also retains a higher degree of design and composition, with its well-articulated exterior symmetry and the flexible “universal space” of its interior.

#### *Gerald and Menzi Klodt House*

*3409 Stevens St., Madison, Dane County (AHI 222652)*

The Gerald and Menzi Klodt House was built in 1981. Like the Clark and Nelson House in River Falls, the Klodt House is built of a semicircular vault and has sod-covered walls and roof with exposed end walls. The two exposed facades are planned for function, not aesthetics. The street elevation has vertical board cladding, a front entry door with sidelight, and a single window. The rear elevation faces south and has five groups of windows and sliding patio doors, each a different size and staggered in placement, reflecting multiple floor levels on the interior. Inside, the house has typical residential finishes, including tile and carpet floors and wood paneled walls. Gerald Klodt, designer of the house, was a consultant and educator who specialized in earth shelter design and published a book on the topic several years after the construction of the house.

The HSR Building (subject of this nomination) retains equal integrity to the Klodt House but represents a significantly different approach to incorporating earth shelter principles into the overall design of the building. The Klodt house appears to have been designed solely for energy efficiency, not for its appearance.<sup>44</sup> The HSR Building, in contrast, uses its earth sheltered berms as part of the overall design of the building, which was designed by a formally trained architect who was well-versed in the principles of modernism and who understood that, especially for an architectural office, the appearance of the building played an equally important role as its functional aspects.

#### **Concluding Significance Statement**

The HSR Building is a unique example of earth shelter construction. The building was constructed in two phases in 1972 and 1977 and was designed by the architectural firm that still occupies it. The building retains a good degree of integrity to its period of significance, and with its earthen berms, its exposed concrete retaining walls, and its low, horizontal roof, the HSR

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<sup>43</sup> “See Inside this Survivalist Compound For Sale near Superior,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, March 14, 2024.

<sup>44</sup> The emphasis on energy efficiency at the expense of aesthetics and other factors was discussed by Kenneth Labs, who noted in 1981 that “It is an irony that the only concepts of underground developments that might have been movements – landscape preservation or nature conservation – have had no appreciable following. [...] In the present rush to dig in for energy dollars, the quality of design is too often too willingly sacrificed. And, unfortunately, it is mostly this generation of underground buildings that will be judged as to what underground architecture is.” (p. 266).

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Building is arguably the best (in addition to being the only) example of earth sheltered construction in La Crosse and is therefore worthy of inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

**Land Acknowledgement (will be reviewed by the Office of the State Archaeologist)**

This nomination recognizes the depth of human presence here, the ancestral homeland of American Indians for millennia. From as early as the seventeenth century, Euro-American exploration and settlement, military campaigns, and government programs, all had the effect of repeated displacement of Indians of many tribal affiliations. This continuous tribal movement resulted in Wisconsin being home to many tribes who originated from other parts of the country, generating a pattern of immigration, relocation, and formation of a new homeland. Some of these tribes remain in Wisconsin but others may not. We acknowledge that the property that is the subject of this nomination is located on land long occupied by American Indians.

**Archaeological Potential** (will be drafted and reviewed by the Office of the State Archaeologist)

**Preservation Activities**

The HSR Building was evaluated as potentially eligible for the NRHP during a survey of La Crosse conducted in 2019. The building remains unchanged since that time, and eligibility was re-affirmed prior to the completion of this nomination.

**END OF STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE DO NOT DELETE**



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**END OF BIBLIOGRAPHY DO NOT DELETE**

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## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of Property:** 1 acre

Provide either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

### UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or  NAD 1983

1. Zone:	<u>15N</u>	Easting:	<u>640560</u>	Northing:	<u>4854123</u>
2. Zone:	<u>      </u>	Easting:	<u>      </u>	Northing:	<u>      </u>
3. Zone:	<u>      </u>	Easting:	<u>      </u>	Northing:	<u>      </u>
4. Zone:	<u>      </u>	Easting:	<u>      </u>	Northing:	<u>      </u>

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

The boundary of the HSR Building is roughly trapezoidal in shape and coincides with the current legal parcel, described as Mid-City Industrial Park Addition, Lots 6, 7 & 8, Block 3. The boundary can be described as follows: beginning at the northwest corner of the property, the boundary runs east for approximately 207 feet. The boundary then turns and runs south for approximately 198 feet. The boundary then turns and runs west for approximately 272 feet. The boundary then turns and runs north, following the curve of the property line, for approximately 212 feet to return to the point of origin.

### Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary has been delineated to include the property's contributing building and sign. The boundary was drawn to exclude the parking lot south of the building. Although this parking lot was historically and is currently associated with the property, it is located on a separate legal parcel and was therefore excluded from the boundary of the nominated property. The boundary coincides with the legal tax parcel but lacks any landscape or streetscape elements to visually identify the boundary.

**END OF GEOGRAPHIC DATA DO NOT DELETE**

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### 11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Justin Miller, Architectural Historian  
organization: University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Cultural Resource Management  
street & number: P.O. Box 413  
city or town: Milwaukee State: WI zip code: 53201  
Email: [jcmill@uwm.edu](mailto:jcmill@uwm.edu)  
Telephone: 414-229-3078

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### Additional Documentation

#### Figure Log

**Figure 1.** UTM map

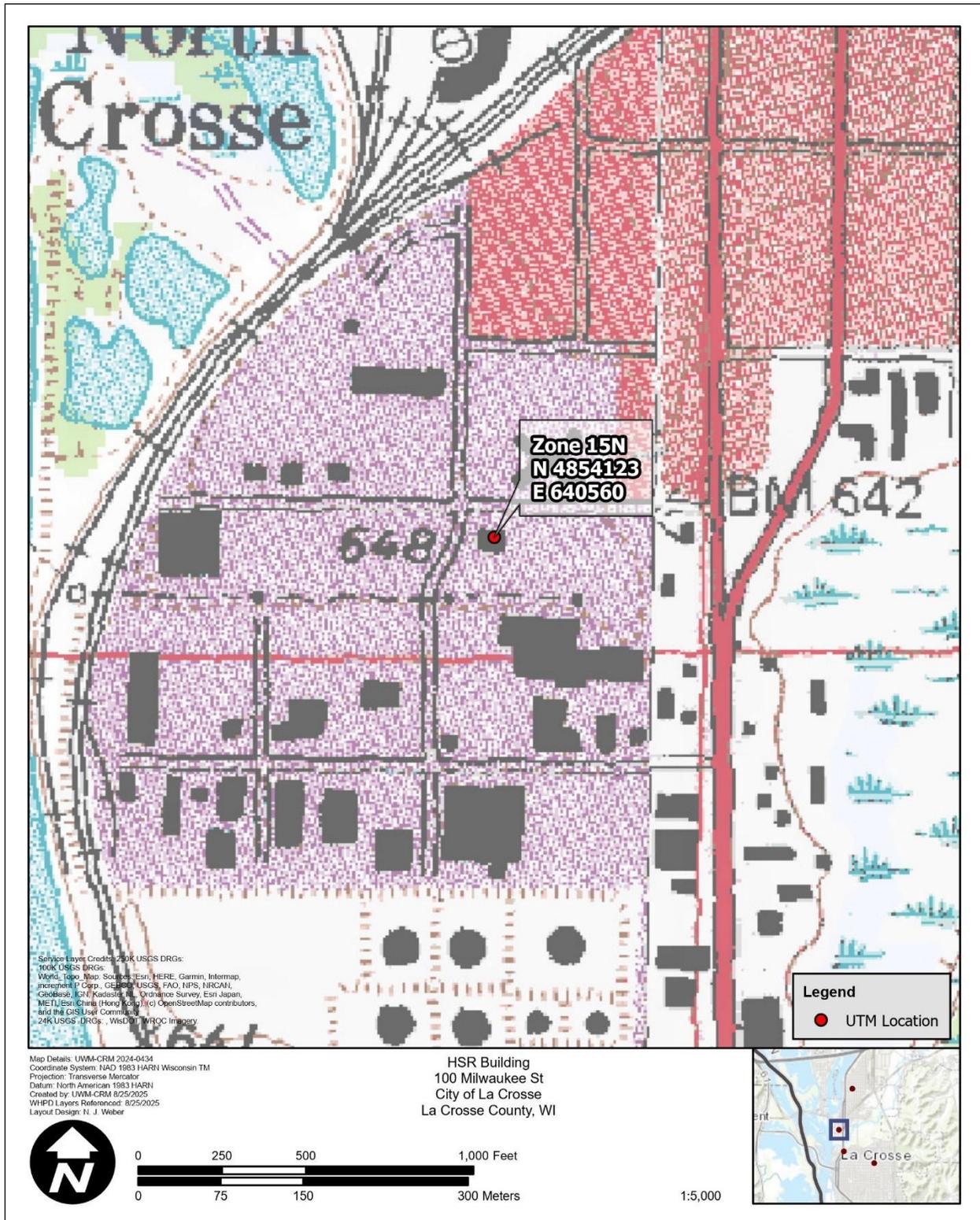
**Figure 2.** Sketch map

**Figure 3.** Photo key

**Figure 4.** Plan of 1972 building and 1977 addition (drawing courtesy of HSR Associates, Inc.)

**Figure 5.** Detail of 1977 elevations (drawing courtesy of HSR Associates, Inc.)

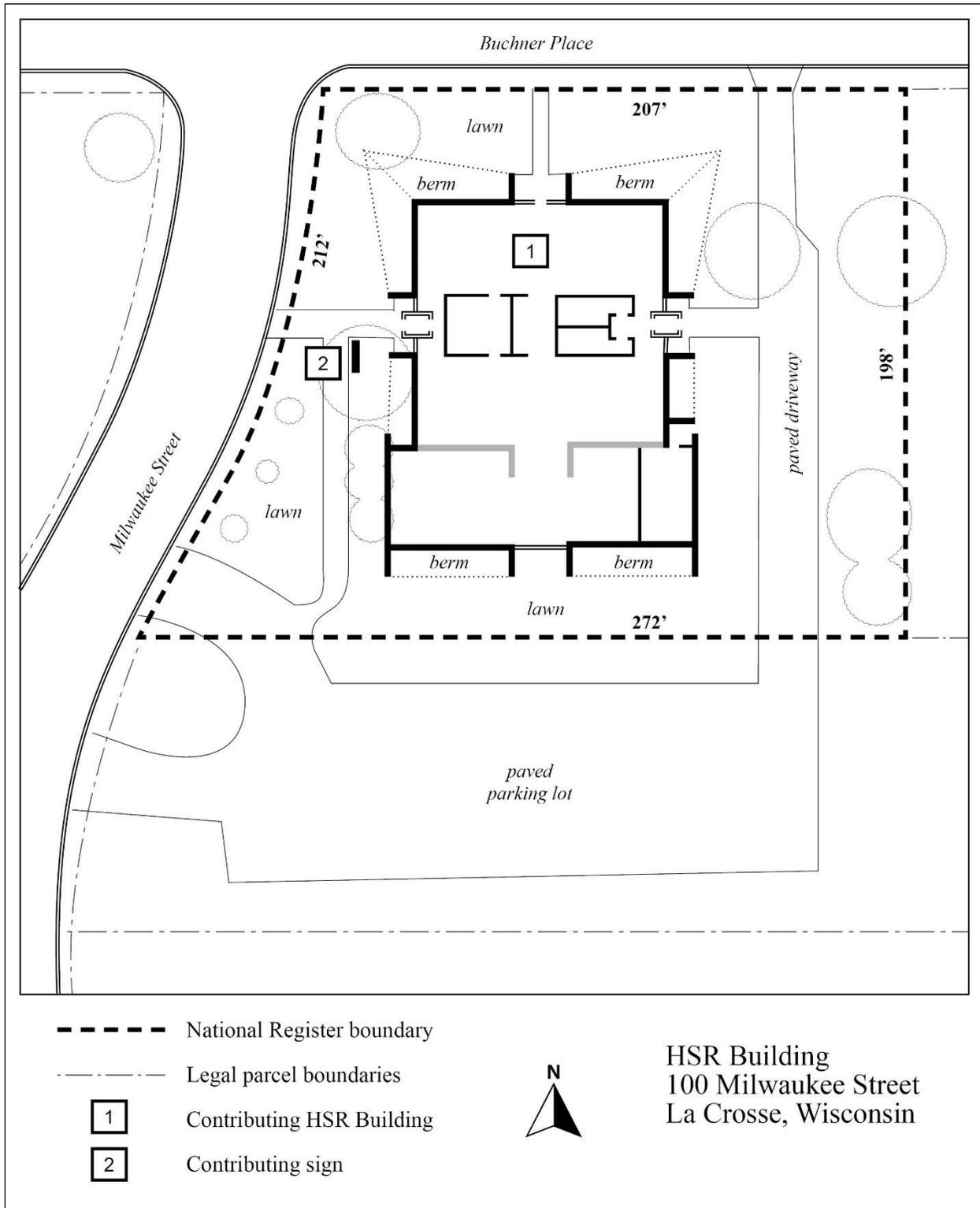
**Figure 1. UTM map**



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**Figure 2.** Sketch map

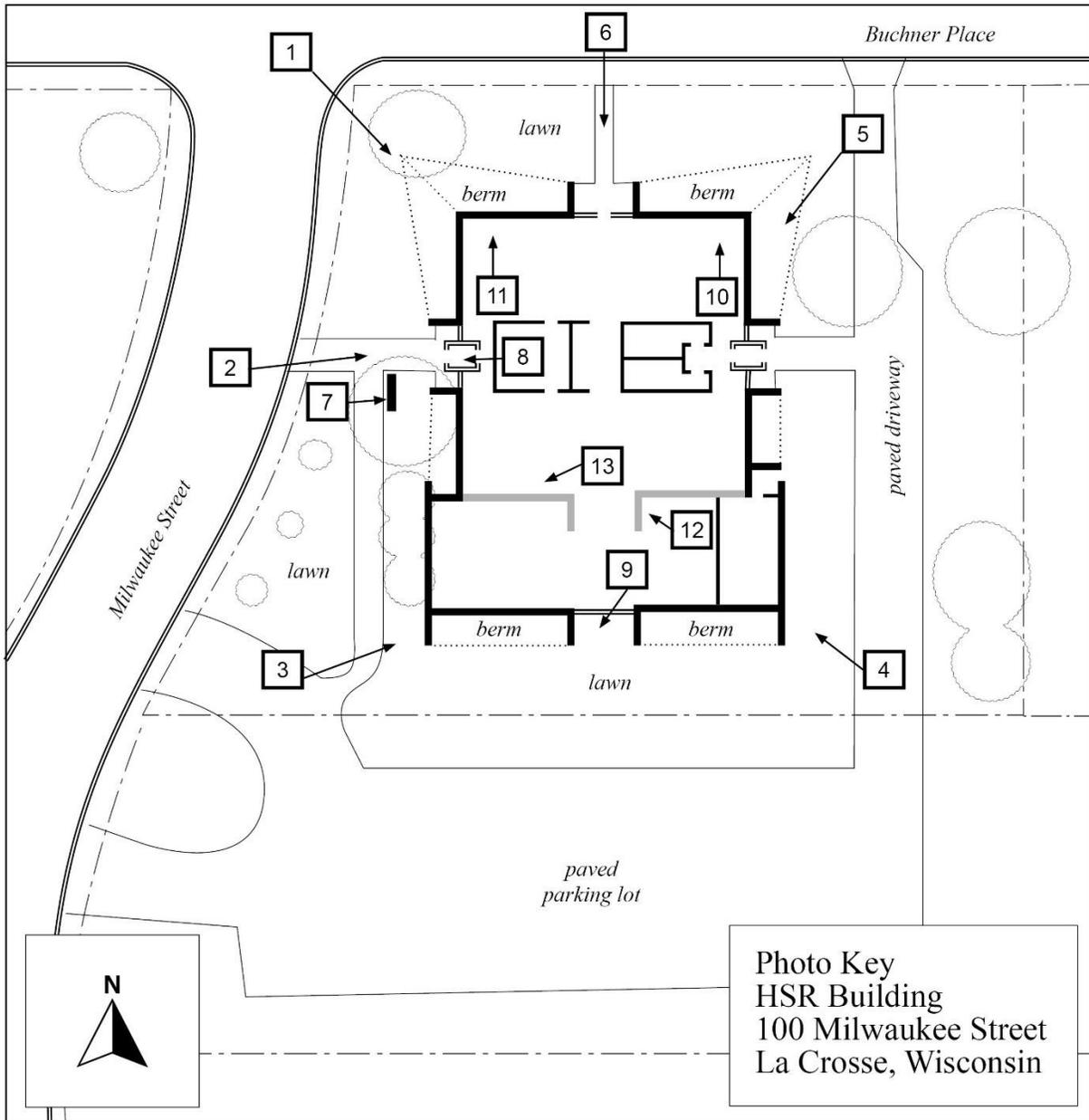


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**Figure 3.** Photo key

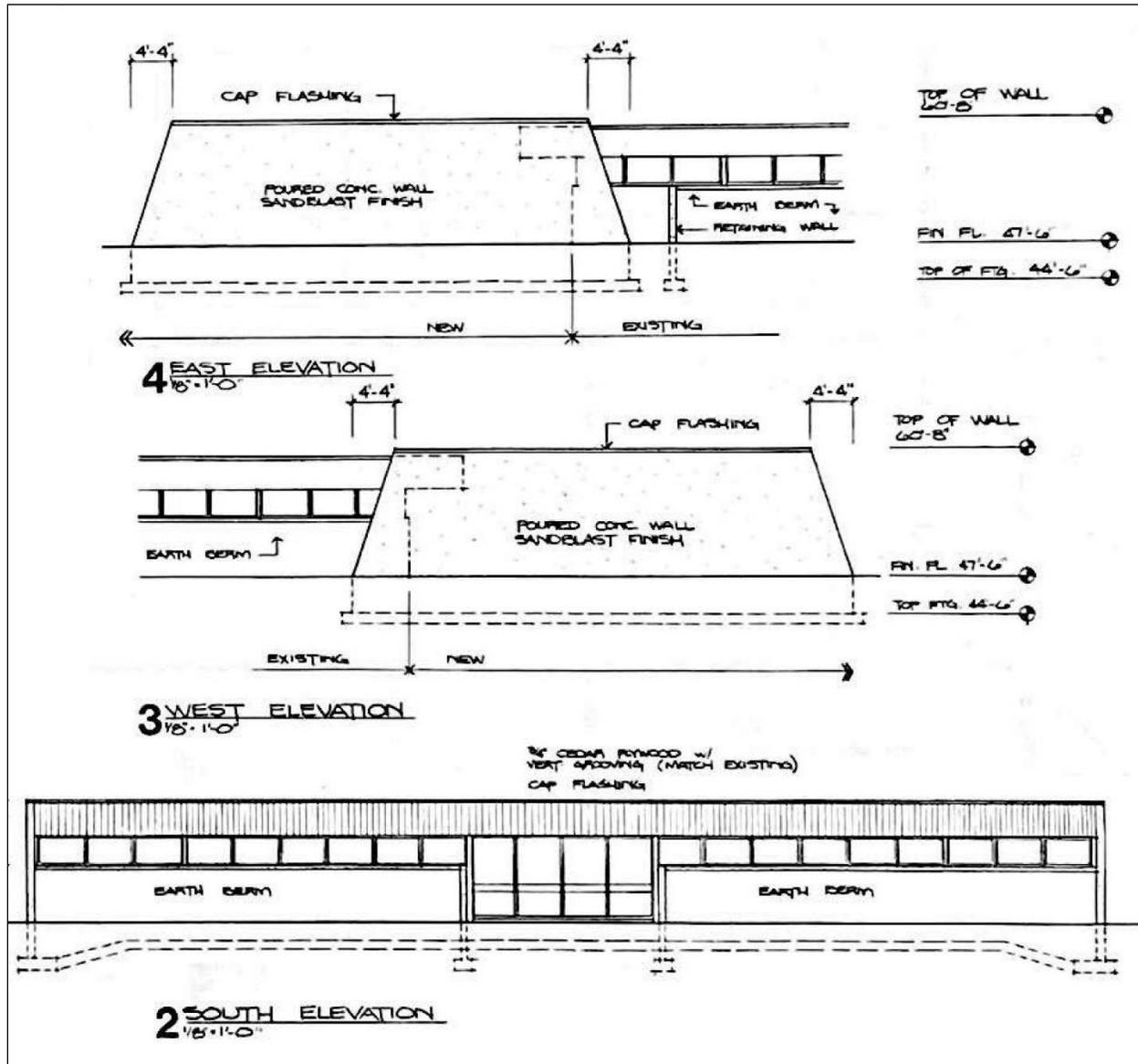




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Figure 5. Detail of 1977 elevations (drawing courtesy of HSR Associates, Inc.)



END OF FIGURES SECTION DO NOT DELETE

## Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once in the photograph log. The photograph order must correspond with the photograph log.

## Photo Log

Name of Property: HSR Building  
City or Vicinity: La Crosse  
County: La Crosse State: WI  
Photographer: Justin Miller, UW-Milwaukee Cultural Resource Management  
Date photographed: August 20, 2025

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- 1 of 13. Overview of west elevation, looking southeast.
- 2 of 13. West elevation, looking east.
- 3 of 13. Southwest corner, looking northeast.
- 4 of 13. Southeast corner, looking northwest.
- 5 of 13. Northeast corner, looking southwest.
- 6 of 13. North elevation, looking south.
- 7 of 13. Detail of HSR sign, looking east.
- 8 of 13. Interior, detail of west vestibule, looking southwest.
- 9 of 13. Interior, detail of south windows and retaining wall, looking southwest.
- 10 of 13. Interior, detail of east wall, looking north.
- 11 of 13. Interior, detail of west wall, looking north.
- 12 of 13. Interior, detail of south face of former 1972 exterior wall, looking northwest.
- 13 of 13. Interior, detail of north face of former 1972 exterior wall, looking west.

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for nominations 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.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for each response using this form is estimated to be between the Tier 1 and Tier 4 levels with the estimate of the time for each tier as follows:

- Tier 1 – 60-100 hours
- Tier 2 – 120 hours
- Tier 3 – 230 hours
- Tier 4 – 280 hours

The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting nominations. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive Fort Collins, CO 80525.

DRAFT

**Property Owner**

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

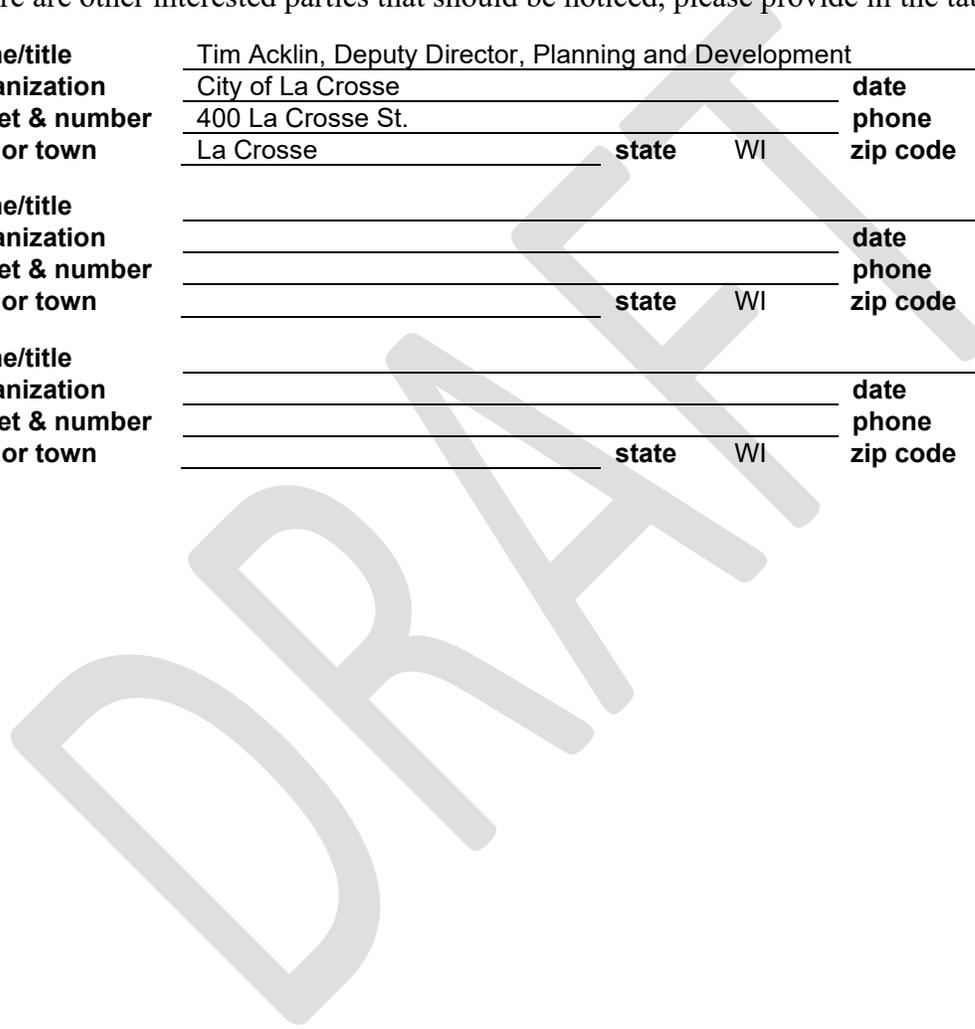
<b>name/title</b>	Hans and Susan Schroeder		
<b>organization</b>	Woodvale Development Company, LLC	<b>date</b>	Dec. 30, 2025
<b>street &amp; number</b>	215 20 <sup>th</sup> Street S.		
<b>city or town</b>	La Crosse	<b>state</b>	WI
		<b>zip code</b>	54601

If there are other interested parties that should be noticed, please provide in the tables below

<b>name/title</b>	Tim Acklin, Deputy Director, Planning and Development		
<b>organization</b>	City of La Crosse	<b>date</b>	Dec. 30, 2025
<b>street &amp; number</b>	400 La Crosse St.		
<b>city or town</b>	La Crosse	<b>state</b>	WI
		<b>zip code</b>	54623

<b>name/title</b>	_____		
<b>organization</b>	_____	<b>date</b>	_____
<b>street &amp; number</b>	_____		
<b>city or town</b>	_____	<b>state</b>	WI
		<b>zip code</b>	_____

<b>name/title</b>	_____		
<b>organization</b>	_____	<b>date</b>	_____
<b>street &amp; number</b>	_____		
<b>city or town</b>	_____	<b>state</b>	WI
		<b>zip code</b>	_____





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# City of La Crosse, Wisconsin

City Hall  
400 La Crosse Street  
La Crosse, WI 54601

## Text File

File Number: 26-0226

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**Agenda Date:** 2/26/2026

**Version:** 1

**Status:** Agenda Ready

**In Control:** Heritage Preservation Commission

**File Type:** General Item

**Agenda Number:** 7.



# Memorandum

**To:** Certified Local Governments in Wisconsin  
**From:** State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), Certified Local Government Coordinator  
**Date:** February 2, 2025  
**Re:** *National Register of Historic Places* nominations for properties in CLG jurisdictions

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When the *State Historic Preservation Office* (SHPO) receives a *National Register of Historic Places* (NRHP) nomination for a property within the jurisdiction of a *Certified Local Government* (CLG), the preparer will share the nomination with the chief elected official and the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) in that community at least 60 days prior to the State Review Board's consideration of the nomination. The State Review Board meets quarterly, typically in February, May, August, and November.

This is an opportunity for the HPC to comment on the nomination and contribute local knowledge of the property and its history.

As a CLG, your commission's responsibility is to review the nomination and provide an opinion as to whether the property meets the eligibility criteria for the NRHP. Typically, HPCs do this by placing the nomination on the agenda of a regular meeting and allocating time for public comment as well as commission review. It is not within the HPC's responsibility or authority to require or request edits from the nomination preparer. If the commission has concerns or feedback about the content of the nomination, that information should be transmitted directly to the SHPO.

A summary of public comments and/or a letter of the commission's opinion may be submitted, by postal mail or email, to:

Ian Gort  
[ian.gort@wisconsinhistory.org](mailto:ian.gort@wisconsinhistory.org)

State Historic Preservation Office  
Wisconsin Historical Society  
816 State St. Rm. 305  
Madison, WI 53706

The letter may come from the chair of the HPC, the director of the Planning Department, the chief elected official, or any combination thereof. Regardless of whether the SHPO receives correspondence from the CLG, the SHPO will proceed with the nomination process.

Congregation Sons of Abraham

La Crosse County, Wisconsin

Name of Property

County and State

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.

### 1. Name of Property

Historic name: Congregation Sons of Abraham

Other names/site number: n/a

Name of related multiple property listing: n/a

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

### 2. Location

Street & number: 1820 Main Street

City or town: La Crosse State: WI County: La Crosse

Not For Publication:  Vicinity:

### 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

Applicable National Register Criteria  A  B  C  D

<b>Signature of certifying official/Title:</b>	<b>Date</b>
Tricia Canaday, Wisconsin State Historic Preservation Officer	
<b>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</b>	
In my opinion, the property <input type="checkbox"/> meets <input type="checkbox"/> does not meet the National Register criteria.	
<b>Signature of commenting official:</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>Title:</b>	<b>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</b>

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#### 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

#### 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 county)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	Buildings
0	0	Sites
0	0	Structures
0	0	Objects
1	0	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

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**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RELIGION / religious facility

RELIGION / religious facility

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN MOVEMENT

**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: foundation: CONCRETE; walls: BRICK;  
roof: ASPHALT

**Narrative Description**

**Summary Paragraph**

The Congregation Sons of Abraham is a 1-story Contemporary-style synagogue that was constructed in 1948. The building has a compact plan and balanced massing consisting of several flat-roofed building portions; their heights and placement are dictated by interior function. The building is clad in brick with limestone trim. The exterior of the building is almost entirely devoid of ornament except for two limestone plaques located in a tall front entry portal. Significant features of the interior include the historic sanctuary and its associated religious objects; classrooms; and a lower-level social hall. Congregation Sons of Abraham is significant under *Criterion C* in the area of Architecture both as an example of the Contemporary style and as an example of a synagogue property type. The building retains sufficient historic integrity to convey its significance.

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## Narrative Description

### Setting

The Congregation Sons of Abraham synagogue is located in a predominately residential section of Main Street, one of the primary east-west streets in La Crosse that runs from the downtown business district directly to the bottom of Granddad Bluff, where it turns into Bliss Road and ascends the bluff that overlooks the city and the river beyond. The synagogue is located on the south side of Main Street and is bordered on the east and west by single-family houses with residential landscaping. Directly across Main Street is a large paved parking lot for a social services organization located in the former La Crosse Hospital building at the corner of Main Street and 17<sup>th</sup> Street North (AHI 33204). The houses south of the synagogue are part of the NRHP-listed Cass and King Street Residential Historic District (NR ref. no. 97001410), although the houses immediately east and west of the synagogue are not included within the historic district boundaries.

### Exterior

The Congregation Sons of Abraham synagogue is roughly barbell-shaped in plan, with distinct cubic masses of varying heights and a tall, deep entry portal extending from the front elevation. The building is clad in golden brick laid in common bond with limestone sills and decorative panels. The building has a concrete foundation and a flat roof; the exterior brick walls form a low parapet and are capped with metal coping.

#### *North (primary) elevation (Photos 1, 2, 6, 7, and 8)*

The north elevation is symmetrical and consists of the tall entry portal flanked by the lower front walls of the main building. (Photos 1 and 2) Each of the side bays is identical and contains two glass block basement-level windows. A projecting brick water table is located along the base of each elevation. The water table has a decorative stringcourse of rowlock brick along its base and cap. These stringcourses continue around all four elevations of the building, and a small, decorative limestone accent cube is located at each outside corner of the stringcourses on each elevation. In the northwest corner of the building, a limestone cornerstone is set into the masonry wall. The cornerstone contains a Star of David and the date 1948 in English and Hebrew letters. (Photo 6)

Above the stringcourse, in the symmetrical east and west bays of the north elevation, is a large three-part picture window with a sloped limestone sill and a concealed steel lintel. The windows consist of a large central window with three vertical fixed lights and amber-colored glass with a dimpled texture commonly known as "hammered glass." Each central window is flanked by side windows with five horizontal lights and similar amber hammered glass. Each of the symmetrical large windows has a five-light aluminum storm windows consisting of three fixed lights flanked by tall fixed lights above a single-hung operable lower light. Each of the symmetrical east and west bays of the north elevation is capped by the same aluminum coping that continues around the entire building.

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The central portal is taller than the flanking bays. The flat-roofed portal is rectangular in plan and consists of thick side walls at the east and west around a large rectangular opening. The north (front) edges of the thick side walls are ornamented with vertical grooves of recessed brick, suggesting stylized fluted classical pilasters. A wide band of brick masonry, supported by a hidden steel lintel, stretches across the top of the portal between the side walls. The floor of the portal is raised up three steps from the sidewalk and has concrete stairs and floor.

Each of the side walls of the portal contains a carved limestone panel set flush into the brick wall surface. The east (left) wall depicts the two arched tablets of the law, containing the Ten Commandments in Hebrew, and surmounted by a Star of David. (Figure 7) The west (right) wall contains the text "MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR ALL PEOPLES / ISAIAH," surmounted by a Star of David. (Figure 8) Below the panel in the west wall is a metal mailbox.

The north side of the main building forms the rear (south) wall of the entry portal. A pair of wood-clad steel entry doors are centered in the wall. The doors contain semi-circular glass lights set into a recessed panel. These doors were installed in 2000; the original doors had been replaced at least once prior to this as well. Above the front entry doors is a large opaque panel that stretches to the ceiling of the entry portal. Originally this panel contained an abstract window of amber hammered glass designed by craftsman Roland Holy of the Segelke-Kolhaus Company.<sup>1</sup> Because of security concerns, in the late 1970s the original window was covered with the current panel, leaving a circular cutout where the Star of David from the original window remains visible. This alteration occurred after the period of significance for the building but reflects its continuous use to the present as a house of worship by its Jewish congregation.

#### *West elevation (Photo 3)*

The west elevation also displays two later alterations that reflect the ongoing use of the building to meet the needs of its congregation. The west elevation consists of several flat-roofed building masses of varying heights that project and recess to create a complex cubic composition. From north to south (left to right) the elevation consists of the blank west wall of the entry portal; the blank wall of the projecting northwest corner building portion; the taller wall of the sanctuary; a projecting addition at the southwest corner; and the side wall of the tall square chimney on the south elevation. The projecting northwest bay of the west elevation contains a single glass block window in the raised basement. The central bay contains three visible glass block windows in the basement story and a large opening with a limestone sill in the first story (corresponding to the sanctuary inside). The window opening above originally contained tall steel sashes. Because of previously-mentioned security concerns, the original windows were replaced in the late 1970s with the current stucco-over-wood frame infill and three tall fixed-over-hopper windows.

A flat-roofed projecting addition is located at the southeast corner of the west elevation. The addition was constructed in 2000 to improve accessibility to the building by adding an elevator. The lower part of the addition is clad in light orange brick and continues the same water table, stringcourses, and limestone corner blocks as the original portion of the building. Above, the

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<sup>1</sup> Rausch, 53.

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walls of the addition are clad in stucco, and the addition is capped with flat metal coping. A small flat-roofed porch is located at the southeast corner of the addition and is supported square metal piers with brick bases. The addition contains a single vertical fixed-light window at the north (corresponding to the sanctuary-level elevator lobby) and a single steel entry door at grade at the south corner.

#### *South (rear) elevation (Photos 4 and 5)*

From west to east (left to right), the south elevation contains the ADA-compliant elevator addition (constructed in 2000), and the symmetrical portion of the original 1948 building. The elevator addition has the same light orange brick cladding to the height of the water table and is topped by stucco cladding. A single vertical fixed-light window is centered in the wall of the addition. The original 1948 elevation is three bays wide. The east and west bays each contain the same water table and stringcourse as the other elevations. Centered in the first story of each bay is a large glass block window opening with limestone sills and two inset hoppers in each window. Visible above the walls is the set-back taller volume of the sanctuary space, whose parapet walls contain cast-stone drainage scuppers. The center bay of the south elevation contains a square exterior chimney with two basement windows (one glass block, one metal louvers) at its base. The chimney steps back in three stages as it rises: the first step back is at the water table stringcourse level. The second step back is at the top of the bay wall, which itself is taller than the flanking bays. This portion of the chimney is capped by a thick concrete band. The upper portion of the chimney, above the bay wall, has a thin concrete cap and a metal ventilator.

#### *East elevation (Photo 5)*

The east elevation is partially obscured due to landscaping and its proximity to the adjoining residential properties. The east elevation is four bays wide and continues the same brick cladding patterns as the other elevations. Like the west elevation, the west elevation consists of several flat-roofed cubic masses of varying heights which project and recede according to the barbell-shaped plan and entry portal. The southern (left) bay is blank and projects slightly. The next bay is taller, corresponding to the sanctuary inside, and contains three glass block basement windows and a large main-floor opening with limestone sill, four tall fixed-over-hopper windows, and stucco-over-frame infill that replaced the original single-pane steel windows in the late 1970s due to security concerns. The next bay projects slightly and contains a single glass block basement window. Visible at the northern end of the east elevation is the blank side wall of the taller entry portal.

### **Interior**

The interior of the synagogue contains an entry vestibule, the main sanctuary space, two classrooms, the rabbi's office, a secondary staircase, and the elevator and lobbies on the first floor. The basement level contains a social hall, a kitchen, restrooms, and a furnace room.<sup>2</sup>

Character-defining features of the interior include architectonic elements such as the Torah ark, a recessed cabinet containing the Torah scrolls, and the bimah, the platform and reading table from

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<sup>2</sup> Floor plans, overt descriptions, and current photos of the interior arrangement of the synagogue are not included out of a respect for security concerns.

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which the Torah is read; and spatial elements such as the main sanctuary containing congregation seating; educational classrooms; and a social hall with kitchen facilities. Other character-defining features include the eternal light above the Torah ark; several wall-mounted Yahrzeit boards, ornamental panels bearing the names of deceased congregation members; and original materials and finishes such as amber-colored hammered glass windows and doors, tiled entry vestibule, plaster walls, and acoustical tile ceilings.

The entry vestibule is a split-level space, with the main entry doors located at the landing. A wide staircase leads up to the sanctuary, and narrower staircases along the side walls lead down to the social hall. The sanctuary stairs are bordered by a half-height wall. The staircase treads, risers, and baseboard, as well as the top edge of the half-height wall, are clad in the original small tile of variegated shades of buff, browns, and blues. (Figure 5) The upper and intermediate landings have cream-colored linoleum tile floors with a deep red border. The entry vestibule also contains original hanging light fixtures with cylindrical milk glass shades with floating polished brass collars and turned fittings.

The sanctuary is roughly square in plan and retains its original wood-and-hammered glass entrance doors topped with a tall, three-light amber-colored hammered glass transom. (See Photo 12 for a representative door) The Torah ark is located at the front of the sanctuary space, opposite the main entrance. The ark is recessed into the wall and has wood paneled doors that slide into hidden side pockets to reveal the Torah scrolls inside. A wide wood band runs across the bottom of the ark and is ornamented with a carved Star of David, and carved wood panels depicting the two Tablets of the Law are inset into the wall above the ark. (Photos 10 and 11) Each door of the ark, and the areas above and below it, were originally paneled with single large slabs of wood; and the walls on either side of the ark were covered with wide flush-joined vertical paneling. In the late 1970s, the current paneling was installed over the original wood. The ark is normally covered with a modern ark curtain. (Photo 9) An electric eternal light known as the ner tamid, consisting of an upturned candelabra bulb within a small oval frame, is suspended from the ceiling above the ark.

The bimah, consisting of a raised platform and the original wood-paneled reading desk, is located in front of the ark. The front of the bimah platform is faced with its original wood and is accessed by small staircases on either side. The walls on either side of the bimah are curved, lending a streamlined, Art Moderne touch to the recessed area containing the bimah and ark. Additionally, the curved walls, like a theater proscenium, also help with acoustics in a space where the reading of the Torah and spoken sermons are an integral part of the worship service. (Figure 6) In one side wall of the recessed area, a simple, unornamented doorway leads to the rabbi's office.

The side walls of the sanctuary originally contained large multi-light steel-framed windows with single pane hammered glass. In the late 1970s, as a security precaution, the congregation made the decision to eliminate the large expanses of glass. A wood framed wall was constructed within the original large openings and narrower fixed-over-hopper windows were installed. The infill section is recessed from the face of the main wall and the original window sills remain, leaving the location, size, and scale of the original openings plainly visible. Around the same time as the

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window replacement, the original plaster side walls of the sanctuary were covered with the current wood paneling, and the original acoustical tile ceiling was replaced with the current acoustical tile ceiling.

The sanctuary retains its original rows of wood pews, the endcaps of which each contain a carved Star of David. (Figure 6) The space also retains its original movable lectern, clad in the same wood as the reading desk, and now located on the main floor of the sanctuary in front of the bimah. In addition to its wood furniture, the sanctuary also contains a pair of bronze electric Temple menorahs, along with four bronze Yahrzeit boards, tablets inscribed with the names of deceased congregation members and commemorating the yearly anniversary of their deaths. (Photo 13) The Temple menorahs and the Yahrzeit boards were added after the period of significance and reflect the ongoing usage and evolution of the building as a worship space.

Two classrooms are located on the main floor. They retain their original tall folding doors, consisting of two leaves, each with narrow rails and stiles surrounding three lights of amber-colored hammered glass. (Photo 13) The classrooms also retain original entry doors, with wood frames, amber hammered glass, and paired push bar hardware. (Photo 12) The classrooms also retain their original plaster walls and acoustical tile ceiling, although carpeting was installed over the original linoleum floors around the year 2000.

The building also contains a social hall, with original wood paneled walls and a replacement acoustical tile ceiling. A raised stage is located at one end of the social hall. Adjoining the social hall are a kitchen and restrooms (which were remodeled in 2001).

### **Landscape**

The synagogue is located in a residential neighborhood and has moderately dense landscaping, primarily along its north (street) side. Four mature street trees are located along Main Street at the north (front) of the property, and several additional mature trees are located in the property's grassy front yard and at the northwest corner. The building has foundation plantings consisting of flowers and low ornamental shrubs on its north side. The west side of the property contains a large raised flower bed along the street, and the remainder of the west landscape consists of a large mowed grass area. The south (rear) of the property contains a blacktop parking lot, and the east side of the building contains a narrow strip of lawn between the synagogue and a line of mature trees on the adjoining residential properties.

### **Integrity**

The Congregation Sons of Abraham synagogue retains historic integrity in five of the seven aspects. Alterations after the period of significance have somewhat impacted two aspects of integrity. However, these alterations directly reflect issues and events faced by the building's Jewish congregation that have occurred throughout the building's continuous use as a house of worship. Additionally, the building retains enough overall historic integrity to convey its architectural significance as a Contemporary-style synagogue.

Major changes that occurred after the period of significance include the late 1970s-era replacement of the original large sanctuary windows with smaller windows and a solid infill

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wall, offering increased security against potential antisemitic violence. The original masonry openings remain legible and unchanged: on the exterior, the infill sections are clad in a contrasting stucco to differentiate them from the historic wall fabric, and on the interior, the infill wall section is recessed from the main wall, leaving the shape of the original opening highly legible. In addition, the wood-framed infill wall could conceivably be reversed and the original steel-framed hammered glass windows could be replicated based on original architectural plans. Similarly, the original large stained glass window in the front elevation has been partially covered with opaque panels and the original wood front entry doors were replaced with modern steel entry doors. The original masonry opening remains legible and unchanged, and the original window, which remains intact under the opaque panels, could be uncovered and restored. The only other major change to the exterior consists of the elevator addition, constructed in 2000 to accommodate an aging congregation. This addition is located at the rear of a non-primary elevation; is small in size; and is sympathetic in scale, massing, and materials to the original building. In addition, the original brick exterior wall remains nearly completely intact behind the addition, with only a single new doorway to connect the historic space to the new elevator addition.

Interior alterations include the replacement of the original large windows in the sanctuary, discussed previously, and the addition of wood paneling over the original plaster on the side walls of the sanctuary. Although the wood paneling changes the character of the sanctuary somewhat, the replacement materials do not detract from the character-defining volume of the sanctuary space; the original curved walls that frame the bimah; or the character-defining original placement and spatial relationship of the Torah ark, the bimah platform and reading desk, and the congregation seating.

The synagogue retains integrity of location and setting: it has remained on the same residential street and has retained its urban setting of adjacent street, grass terrace, and sidewalk, along with its landscape of mature trees and ornamental plantings.

The synagogue retains integrity of design as conveyed through its Contemporary-style flat-roofed cubic massing; the deep rectangular frame of its entry portal; and its minimal exterior ornamentation. The building also retains integrity of design as conveyed through the unchanged interior arrangement of spaces (entry space, worship space, classroom space, social space). The building also conveys integrity of design through the original placement of the congregation seating, the bimah platform, and the ark, the spatial relationship of which are character-defining elements of a synagogue. Although the later elevator addition and alterations to the sanctuary windows have somewhat altered the historic appearance of the exterior, they do not significantly detract from the symmetrical composition of the primary façade or the character-defining shape and massing of the building.

The synagogue retains integrity of materials on the exterior as conveyed through its original brick cladding, limestone sills, limestone decorative panels, hammered glass classroom windows, and glass block basement and rear windows. The synagogue retains integrity of materials on the interior as conveyed through original tiled staircase, wood and hammered glass doors, hammered glass transoms, plaster walls in classrooms, and paneling and acoustical tile ceiling in the social

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hall. The original furnishing in the sanctuary, including the original pews, original reading desk, and original pulpit, all contribute to the interior integrity. The changes of materials in the interior, especially the installation of wood paneling in the sanctuary, do not significantly detract from the character-defining exterior materials that make the building a good example of the Contemporary style.

The building retains integrity of workmanship as conveyed through its original carved limestone panels in the portal, its exterior masonry, its interior tilework in the vestibule, and its original wood-and-hammered glass interior doors.

The building retains integrity of both feeling and association. The building has functioned continuously as a synagogue since its construction, and its Contemporary-style exterior and its character-defining interior spaces remain just as recognizable today as they did when Congregation Sons of Abraham was dedicated nearly 80 years ago.

**END OF DESCRIPTION, DO NOT DELETE**

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## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

- 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

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave

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- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

**Areas of Significance**

ARCHITECTURE

**Significant Person**

n/a

**Period of Significance**

1948

**Cultural Affiliation**

n/a

**Significant Dates**

1948

**Architect/Builder**

Boyum, Schubert & Sorenson, architects  
Theo. Molzahn & Sons, Inc., general contractor

**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph**

The Congregation Sons of Abraham synagogue is significant under National Register *Criterion C* in the area of Architecture at the local level of significance. Described as “modernistic” at its completion in 1948, the synagogue remains an outstanding example of the Contemporary style with its flat-roofed cubic massing, its broad exterior expanses of brick, and its minimal ornamentation. Congregation Sons of Abraham is the only extant synagogue in La Crosse, and the character-defining elements of its interior set it apart from other Christian houses of worship in the city and make it a good example of a well-defined synagogue property type. The building retains historic integrity to its period significance. As both a good example of the Contemporary

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style of architecture, as well as an intact (and only local) example of a distinctive property type, the Congregation Sons of Abraham synagogue is being nominated to the National Register under *Criterion C*.

### Period of Significance and Justification

The property is being nominated to the National Register under *Criterion C* in the area of Architecture. The period of significance for Congregation Sons of Abraham is 1948, the year of its construction.

### Criteria Consideration

The Congregation Sons of Abraham synagogue is both owned by a religious institution and used for religious purposes. Such properties typically are not eligible for listing in the National Register. However, Congregation Sons of Abraham meets Criteria Consideration A since it is being nominated for its architectural significance alone, not for any religious associations.

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### Narrative Statement of Significance

The Congregation Sons of Abraham synagogue is an architecturally significant Contemporary-style building completed in 1948. It was the first “modern” religious building in La Crosse, and its distinctive architectural style sets it apart from other Christian churches in the city. The synagogue was built by the city’s oldest active Jewish congregation, and although the building is not being nominated for its historic associations, the history and legacy of the Jewish community in La Crosse adds to the significance of the building as a synagogue, a property type that traditionally encompasses worship, learning, and social gathering.

The following historic context includes a brief history of La Crosse and its Jewish community; the planning and construction process of the Congregation Sons of Abraham synagogue; a brief biographical statement on the architects of the building; and discussions of both the synagogue as a property type as well as the Contemporary style.

### Historic Context

Present-day La Crosse is located in western Wisconsin, on a prairie flanked by tall bluffs at the confluence of the Mississippi and Black Rivers. The Ho-Chunk, Ojibwe, and Sioux used the area as a meeting place and location for trade for centuries. When European fur traders and missionaries began moving into the Upper Midwest in the nineteenth century, the area became a popular location for fur traders, and a trading post was established in 1841 in a log building. In 1843, the post was moved to the site of present-day downtown and renamed “La Crosse” after the name of the field sport that Native Americans had played in the area.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Sanford, Albert and H. J. Hirschheimer, *A History of La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1841-1900* (La Crosse: La Crosse County Historical Society, 1951).

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Within a decade, the settlement began to see rapid growth. The surrounding prairie proved to be excellent farmland, and the geographical advantage of the high banks of the Mississippi River made the location an excellent dock for river traffic and steamboats as well as being immune to flooding. River trade spurred on economic growth, and the population increased from 573 inhabitants in 1853 to 3,860 people in 1860.<sup>4</sup> The Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul Railroad reached La Crosse in 1858 and offered larger markets for the city's industries of lumber and grain milling and brewing.<sup>5</sup>

The 1860s and 1870s saw the establishment in the city of large industries, railway lines, banks, local government, and an economy based on transportation and access to a large river port. Because of its river connection to the pineries of northern Wisconsin, La Crosse developed into a lumber boom town, with thirty-three mills located along the Mississippi and Black Rivers. Lumbering helped propel La Crosse into the second largest city in Wisconsin by 1880, with just over 25,000 inhabitants.

#### *The Jewish Community in La Crosse*

The Jewish community has been part of La Crosse since the earliest days of the city. Two of the area's first white settlers were a Jewish family: John Meyer Levy and his wife Fredericka Augusta Levy, who came to La Crosse in 1845, three years after the first permanent trading post was established. Throughout his career, John was an entrepreneur, hotel keeper, banker, alderman, and three-time mayor of La Crosse.<sup>6</sup> In the 1850s and 1860s approximately seventeen Jewish families settled in La Crosse, coming predominantly from German states. Members of the German Jewish community were prominent in business and trade and settled largely in the eastern part of present-day downtown.<sup>7</sup>

The first Jewish communal organization in La Crosse, the Hebrew Indigent, Sick, and Burial Society (later known as the Hebrew Benevolent Society) was founded in 1857 to establish a cemetery and provide funeral and burial services. The Congregation Anche Chesed (a Reform congregation) developed out of the benevolent society around the same time. Anche Chesed initially held religious services at the Masonic Lodge building until the congregation established a synagogue in an existing building near Jay St. and 5<sup>th</sup> St. North in 1867. In 1880, Congregation Anche Chesed moved again, to 521 4<sup>th</sup> St. South.

La Crosse's Jewish community also established fraternal organizations in the late nineteenth century, including chapters of the Independent Order B'Nai B'rith and the Keshet Shel Barzel, along with a Hebrew Ladies Benevolent Society.<sup>8</sup> By the 1890s, La Crosse had the second

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<sup>4</sup> Susan Hessel and Gayda Hollnagel, *A History of La Crosse, Wisconsin in the Twentieth Century*, (La Crosse: La Crosse Historical Society, 2007); Joan Rausch and Richard Zeitlin, *City of La Crosse Intensive Architectural/Historical Survey Report* (La Crosse: City of La Crosse Department of City Planning, 1984).

<sup>5</sup> Rausch and Zeitlin, 17-20.

<sup>6</sup> "Congregation Sons Of Abraham Synagogue Dedication Marks More Than 100 Years Of Jewish Activity In La Crosse Area," *La Crosse Tribune*, Sept. 12, 1948, p. 4.

<sup>7</sup> Rausch, 292-293.

<sup>8</sup> "Congregation Sons Of Abraham Synagogue Dedication Marks [...]"; Dedication booklet, p. 32.

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largest Jewish community in Wisconsin, surpassed only by Milwaukee. As noted in *Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin*,

In 1891, [La Crosse's] community of nearly 100 German Jews flourished among a population of approximately 25,090 people. Its members were economically secure and enjoyed a high degree of social acceptance by the general La Crosse populace. But 30 years later, all but one of the original Jewish families had disappeared. Though one or two had married non-Jews and assimilated into the larger La Crosse community, most moved to larger cities with more flourishing Jewish communities. With the decline of La Crosse's lumber industry in the 1890s, many lost hope that La Crosse would one day become a thriving metropolis. In their attempt to become part of a functioning Jewish community, one large enough to furnish their children with spouses, to provide various social and philanthropic activities, and to support a viable synagogue, most of La Crosse's German Jewish settlers and their children eventually moved to larger cities such as Milwaukee, Chicago, New York, St. Louis, and Minneapolis.<sup>9</sup>

All of these German Jewish families were part of Congregation Anche Chesed, and as families moved away from La Crosse, the congregation dwindled in size. By the turn of the twentieth century, the congregation consisted of only fourteen members, and the Anche Chesed Reform synagogue held its last service in 1901.<sup>10</sup>

Around the same time, however, between about 1890 and 1915, another group of Jewish settlers had begun to immigrate to La Crosse in a pattern similar to the rest of the state. Unlike the earlier German Reform Jews, this second wave of Jewish immigrants to La Crosse came primarily from Eastern Europe and Russia and followed Orthodox Jewish traditions. Members of the Orthodox community initially held religious services at members' homes. By the early twentieth century, the community had established its own religious congregation, Sons of Abraham, named for congregation organizer (and owner of a metal foundry) Abraham Goldish.<sup>11</sup> The congregation purchased a former Lutheran church in 1905 at 414 11<sup>th</sup> St. North and established their Orthodox synagogue.<sup>12</sup> Congregation Sons of Abraham continued to serve La Crosse's Jewish community for the next four decades.

#### *Plans for a New Synagogue*

The congregation began planning for a new building in the early 1940s, referred to throughout the subsequent planning process as the "shule" (a Yiddish term for synagogue) or the "center," reflecting the building's role as a community gathering place. As recorded in the Sons of Abraham congregation minutes from May 2, 1943,

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<sup>9</sup> Wyatt, Religion.

<sup>10</sup> "Congregation Sons Of Abraham Synagogue Dedication Marks [...]"; Dedication booklet, p. 31.

<sup>11</sup> Hessel and Goldnagel, 400.

<sup>12</sup> Dedication booklet, 31-32; Hessel and Goldnagel, 400; "Congregation Sons Of Abraham Synagogue Dedication Marks [...]".

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“Mr. Max Bemel [the congregation president] spoke about building a shule and suggested to buy a lot, and to take up with the City Council and see whether they would permit us to build a shule. A motion by brother Bemel seconded by brother Lindenberg that the president appoint a committee of five members namely bros. Heend, Ebin, Epstein, Bemel, Glickman and Lindenberg. The president to be chairman of this committee to take an option on a lot not to exceed \$2,000 subject to the approval of the congregation.”<sup>13</sup>

Discussions and fundraising for a new synagogue building moved forward slowly throughout 1943 and 1944 since the congregation was also managing a refugee committee to assist displaced European Jews as well as actively fundraising for relief aid organizations such as the United Jewish Appeal and the United Charity Institutions of Jerusalem.<sup>14</sup>

By June of 1945, the congregation’s building committee had raised about \$10,000 towards construction costs. The committee had also purchased a plot of land for \$2,800 on Main Street, directly east of the Green Bay & Western Railroad tracks. Later that autumn, congregation president Max Bemel once again spoke of the urgency of the project, imploring the building committee to start building as soon as possible. Bemel also stressed the need to hire a rabbi, particularly to instruct the children of the congregation.<sup>15</sup> President Bemel’s encouragement proved fruitful, and a few months later, the building committee hired the architectural firm of Boyum, Schubert & Sorensen to design their new synagogue.<sup>16</sup>

#### *Boyum, Schubert & Sorensen, Architects*

The firm of Boyum, Schubert & Sorensen was formed in 1928 and maintained offices in La Crosse and Winona, Minnesota, approximately thirty miles upriver from La Crosse on the opposite bank of the Mississippi River. Benjamin Boyum (1884-1954) graduated from the University of Minnesota with a degree in engineering and worked in the architectural office of Long & Long (later renamed Long, Lamoreaux & Long). Boyum briefly established his own office in Saskatoon, Canada and then returned to the US, setting up an architectural and civil engineering office in Peterson, Minnesota (approximately 30 miles due west of La Crosse.)<sup>17</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Minutes included in “Sons of Abraham Congregation (La Crosse, Wis.) Records, 1918-1958,” box 1, folder 1. Congregation minutes from 1939-1945 (in Yiddish with later English translations in pencil) are included at the back of a financial ledger titled in the finding aid as “Records of Cash receipts and disbursements, bank, deposits, and check register, 1944-1945.”

<sup>14</sup> Dedication booklet, 33; multiple charitable donation receipts included in “Sons of Abraham Congregation (La Crosse, Wis.) Records, 1918-1958,” box 1, folder 1.

<sup>15</sup> Congregation minutes, June 25, 1945; Oct. 7, 1945, “Sons of Abraham Congregation (La Crosse, Wis.) Records, 1918-1958,” box 1, folder 1.

<sup>16</sup> “Congregation Sons Of Abraham Synagogue Dedication Marks [...]”. The details of how Boyum, Schubert & Sorensen were selected remain unclear. However, the firm also designed a small auto tire and repair shop for Max Bemel and included a photo in the 1948 monograph of their work (without noting an address or construction date, unfortunately.) Bemel had opened Max’s Auto Wrecking Company in 1934 in an existing building, so it is possible that Boyum, Schubert & Sorensen designed his auto shop prior to receiving the synagogue commission. A brief history of the company can be found at: <https://archives.lacrosselibrary.org/blog/maxs-auto-wrecking-company/>.

<sup>17</sup> Firm and biographical information taken from “Questionnaire for Architects’ Roster” and Supplemental Data Sheets, dated Oct. 3, 1947; May 3, 1949; May 9, 1949; and Feb. 10, 1953, on file at American Institute of Architects and accessed at [http://public.aia.org/sites/hdoaa/wiki/AIA%20scans/Rosters/BoyumSchubertSorenson\\_roster.pdf](http://public.aia.org/sites/hdoaa/wiki/AIA%20scans/Rosters/BoyumSchubertSorenson_roster.pdf).

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Carl Schubert (1898-1988) was born in La Crosse and attended Lawrence College in Appleton, Wisconsin, and the University of Minnesota before working as a draftsman-architect for the La Crosse office of the Standard Oil Company. Roy Sorensen (1891-1960) was also born in La Crosse and did not formally study architecture at a university. After graduating from high school, Sorensen worked as a draftsman for the Trane Company, a La Crosse-based producer of heating products, and then briefly as superintendent of the Wood Parts Division of the Curtiss Aeroplane & Motor Company in Buffalo, New York, during its World War I wartime production efforts. Sorensen later returned to La Crosse and apprenticed in the architectural office of his father Ori Sorensen, a contractor, builder, architect, and two-term mayor of La Crosse.

In 1928, Boyum, Schubert, and Sorensen went into partnership. The firm established two independent offices in La Crosse and Winona, Minnesota. The firm's early work consisted of public buildings, and Boyum helped secure several lucrative commissions in Winona, including the Winona Athletic Club, five private and public schools, and the Winona City Hall (an imposing Stripped Classicism-style New Deal-era project funded by the Public Works Administration.)<sup>18</sup>

The firm also completed a vocational school and four elementary and junior high schools in La Crosse in the late 1930s, as well as a new high school building in Tomah, Wisconsin. Like many firms, design work slowed during World War II as construction came to a halt. After the war, the firm would go on to design county hospitals for Trempealeau, La Crosse, and New Richmond Counties; numerous schools and university buildings in Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Iowa; industrial buildings; public housing; office buildings; and religious works before the firm was reorganized and sold in 1973 to Kratt-Lachecki-Meyers & Solberg.

When Boyum, Schubert & Sorensen received the commission for the new Congregation Sons of Abraham synagogue in 1946, their most prominent project in La Crosse was the recently-completed Sears-Roebuck store at the corner of King St. and 5<sup>th</sup> Ave. South (AHI 32305). The building had Streamline Moderne-style wide horizontal banding that incorporated ranks of ribbon windows and incised concrete ornamentation. Their design for the new synagogue pushed the "modernistic" style even further and reduced the building to a composition of cubic forms whose graceful proportions and broad expanses of golden-colored brick became the ornament itself.

#### *Groundbreaking, Construction, and Dedication*

The congregation applied for a building permit for the new synagogue on August 4, 1947, and the groundbreaking ceremony was held the next day.<sup>19</sup> A few days later, the *La Crosse Tribune* published the architects' rendering of the new building, calling it "modernistic in exterior

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<sup>18</sup> Many of the firm's Winona commissions are listed in the National Register: the Winona Athletic Club, built 1931 (NR ref. no. 10005359); Central Grade School, built 1930 (NR ref. no. 12000071); Madison School, built 1932 (NR ref. no. 12000073); Washington-Kosciusko School, built 1934 (NR ref. no. 12000074); Jefferson School, built 1938 (NR ref. no. 120072); and the Winona City Hall, built 1939 (NR ref. no. 99000806).

<sup>19</sup> "Officially Beginning Construction," *La Crosse Tribune*, Aug. 5, 1947, p. 2.

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design” and highlighting the building’s planned interior facilities.<sup>20</sup> The flat-roofed building would have looked quite distinctive from other religious buildings in La Crosse. Modern architectural styles had begun to appear in the city – a few Art Moderne commercial buildings downtown and a handful of International-style houses along Losey Boulevard – but all of the other churches in La Crosse were traditional structures in historicist styles, with steeply-pitched Gothic roofs, rugged Romanesque towers, or Neoclassical colonnades and pediments. The calm and compact new synagogue was both distinctive architecturally and perhaps the congregation’s way of quietly asserting their unique Jewish identity in a city full of Christian churches.

The new synagogue was completed at a cost of approximately \$70,000 and was dedicated on September 12, 1948, during an afternoon program and evening dinner attended by religious clergy, city officials, and community leaders. Members of the building committee took place in the symbolic dedication of the building: Mrs. Lewis Phillips unveiled the cornerstone, Mrs. Sam Levy cut the ribbon across the entrance doors, and Mrs. Max Bemel unlocked the doors. Rabbi Abraham Album then lit the eternal light above the ark, and the congregation’s Torah scrolls were transferred from the old synagogue into the new building. Louis Ebin, chairman of the building committee, symbolically presented the key of the new building to Max Bemel, the congregation president; and Bemel, Ebin, and Rabbi Album all offered remarks, interspersed with choral music sung by the choir from Adath Jeshurun synagogue in Minneapolis, along with their cantor, Morris Amsel.<sup>21</sup> (The *La Crosse Tribune* noted that the dedication was so well-attended that it was necessary to seat part of the overflow audience in the two classrooms while other people stood on the stairs in the entry lobby.)

The afternoon events were followed by an evening dedication banquet. The banquet began with the singing of “America,” followed by an invocation by Rabbi Album. A string trio played during dinner (the menu of which was not recorded but which cost \$664.60, according to congregation records); afterwards speakers gave remarks, including La Crosse Mayor Charles Beranek; Rev. Harold Stoffel (representing the English Lutheran Church); Rev. Ralph Kuether (representing the La Crosse Area Federation of Churches); the Rt. Rev. Monsignor George Hammes (representing the Catholic Diocese of La Crosse); and Rabbi Album, the congregation’s own spiritual leader.<sup>22</sup>

The main speaker of the evening was Rabbi Morris Gordon, also of Adath Jeshurun Synagogue in Minneapolis. Gordon spoke on the shared ideals of the Jewish congregation and their fellow Americans, citing the Bible as the shared wellspring of Judeo-Christian faith, American democratic ideals, and shared prayers among Christians and Jews. In a printed message in the dedication booklet, Rabbi Gordon also addressed the challenge presented to the congregation, using the three concepts traditionally associated with a synagogue building:

<sup>20</sup> “New Synagogue Will Be Modernistic In Style,” *La Crosse Tribune*, Aug. 10, 1947, 8.

<sup>21</sup> “Plan Dedication [...]”; “Congregation Sons Of Abraham Dedicates New City Synagogue,” *La Crosse Tribune*, Sept. 13, 1948, 10; Dedication booklet, 37.

<sup>22</sup> Congregation minutes, Sept. 18, 1948, “Sons of Abraham Congregation (La Crosse, Wis.) Records, 1918-1958,” box 1, folder 1; “Congregation Sons Of Abraham Dedicates [...]”.

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It calls upon us as Jews to make of it a “Beth Tefilah,” a “Home of Prayer,” so dignified and so inspiring that we might never leave its precincts but be uplifted for having worshipped there. It bids us make of it a real “Beth Medrash,” a “House of Learning,” so modern and so progressive that our children will delight in studying the history of our past in this pleasant atmosphere of our present. It seeks of us to make of it a true “Beth Keneseth,” a “House of Assembly,” so attractive to young and old that it will become a vibrant Synagogue Center, bringing its rays of spiritual strength to every Jewish heart in La Crosse.<sup>23</sup>

Just over a decade after it was constructed, the synagogue was vandalized, an event that led the Wisconsin State Legislature to change the state law regarding religious and racial crimes. On a Friday evening in early January 1960, two large red swastikas and the words “Jews Get Out” were painted on the doors of the building. Local police began an investigation, and several days later, five teenagers were arrested. Three of the boys were juveniles under age 18 and were not charged. The other two, ages 18 and 19, admitted to the vandalism and were charged with criminal damage to property. During the course of the investigation, the two also admitted to burning the Star of David at the synagogue three months earlier, an event that had been investigated but not publicly reported by the local newspaper.<sup>24</sup>

The La Crosse police chief downplayed the incidents, referring to the boys as “pranksters” who did not realize the serious of their actions. Wisconsin Attorney General John Reynolds stepped into the case, dispatching the superintendent of the state crime laboratory to assist local police, and issuing public statements noting that:

The crime of desecrating synagogues and churches is one of the most heinous ones that society can be confronted with. I wish to make it perfectly clear that the full power of the attorney general’s office and the State of Wisconsin and all the facilities at our command will be brought to bear to bring those responsible for perpetrating such crimes to justice.

The State and local governments of Wisconsin do not intend to treat these crimes as merely boys’ pranks and to permit them to continue.<sup>25</sup>

The desecration at Congregation Sons of Abraham in January 1960 was actually part of a worldwide wave of anti-Jewish incidents that scholars later termed the “swastika epidemic” of 1959-1960. Beginning on Christmas morning in 1959, antisemitic slogans and symbols began appearing on synagogues in West Germany and quickly spread to 34 countries around the globe. In the US, the Anti-Defamation League recorded 637 antisemitic incidents in 236 cities during

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<sup>23</sup> Dedication booklet, 4.

<sup>24</sup> “5 Youths Admit Painting Swastikas At Synagogue,” *La Crosse Tribune*, Jan. 14, 1960, p. 1; “Investigation Set For Synagogue Desecrators,” *La Crosse Tribune*, Jan. 15, 1960, p. 1.

<sup>25</sup> “Wilson To Aid In Probe Of Paint Incident,” *La Crosse Tribune*, Jan. 12, 1960, p. 9.

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the span of December 1959 through March 1960.<sup>26</sup> In La Crosse, the two boys charged with desecrating Congregation Sons of Abraham pleaded guilty. However, because Wisconsin state law only classified property damage as a misdemeanor, regardless of the property type, the presiding judge was only able to impose community service as a sentence, despite community outcry.<sup>27</sup>

That same month, as a direct result of the trial and ensuing verdict, Wisconsin Attorney General Reynolds drafted a new bill that would make vandalism based on religious or racial hatred a felony.<sup>28</sup> Governor Vernon Thomson gave his blessing to the bill, and the Wisconsin Assembly unanimously passed the legislation in May 1960, resulting in stiffer penalties of fines or up to three years in prison.<sup>29</sup>

The synagogue saw another act of vandalism as well. In August of 1980, one of the large sanctuary windows was broken.<sup>30</sup> No one was arrested for the vandalism, and the event was one of the main factors that led the congregation to replace the original large windows with the current smaller windows and solid walls.

Congregation Sons of Abraham has continued to use the synagogue to the present. Its congregation increased from the thirty-five families who built the new synagogue, peaking in the late 1990s, and then decreasing slightly again to its current membership.

### *The Synagogue as a Property Type*

The Congregation Sons of Abraham building is significant for two interrelated reasons: as a distinct property type that incorporates the interior spaces that are historically associated with a synagogue; and as an example of the Contemporary style of architecture, which expresses the purpose and function of the interior as structural forms on the exterior.

The Jewish synagogue is one of the world's oldest property types, and its basic functional requirements, an enclosed space in which a congregation can assemble for worship and hear the reading of the Torah, have remained unchanged for millennia.<sup>31</sup> The three primary elements in the interior of every synagogue are the ark (*aron ha-kodesh* in Hebrew), a cabinet that houses the Torah scrolls, the most sacred objects in a synagogue; the *bimah*, a platform from which the Torah is read aloud to the congregation; and an eternal light (the *ner tamid*) located near the ark and kept burning constantly to recall the menorah that burned in the Temple in Jerusalem before its destruction. The synagogue must also include seating for the congregation, as well as good

<sup>26</sup> Howard Ehrlich, "The Swastika Epidemic of 1959-1960: Anti-Semitism and Community Characteristics," *Social Problems*, vol. 9, no. 3 (Winter, 1962) p. 264-265; "Anti-Jewish Acts Spread From West Europe To Australia, US," *La Crosse Tribune*, Jan. 4, 1960, p. 1; "Swastikas Linked To Hoodlums, Pranksters," *La Crosse Tribune*, Jan. 10, 1960, p. 2.

<sup>27</sup> Editorial page, *La Crosse Tribune*, Feb. 11, 1960, p. 4.

<sup>28</sup> "Swastika Case Spurs State Plan for Stiff Penalty," *Wisconsin State Journal*, Jan. 16, 1960, p. 1.

<sup>29</sup> "Lawmakers Dusting Off Bundle of Old Bills For Legislative Session," *La Crosse Tribune*, May 13, 1960, p. 2.

<sup>30</sup> "Windows Broken," *La Crosse Tribune*, Aug. 11, 1980, p. 22.

<sup>31</sup> Dr. Julian Morgenstern, "The Temple and the Synagogue: To 70 C.E.," in Peter Blake, ed., *An American Synagogue for Today and Tomorrow*, (New York: The Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1954), 23-27; Gruber, 15.

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acoustics, sufficient illumination, and clear sight lines between the congregation, the bimah, and the ark.<sup>32</sup>

The location of the ark and the bimah has varied throughout history based on the denomination and ancestral rituals and traditions of the congregation. In the Sephardic tradition (historically associated with Spain and Portugal) the ark and bimah were placed at opposite ends of the room, and congregation members “turn their heads from one to the other, as if the two furnishings were in dialogue.”<sup>33</sup> In contrast, Ashkenazi Jews (associated with Germany and Eastern Europe, and the ethnic group from which the Congregation Sons of Abraham descends) placed the ark in the end wall and the bimah in the center of the room, with worshipers seated in a U-shape around the bimah and facing the ark. This placement later evolved in the nineteenth century and the bimah moved to directly in front of the ark, creating a stage-like platform that was the focal point of the space, with congregation seating arranged facing forward as in a theater or auditorium.<sup>34</sup>

Paradoxically, although the placement of the ark, bimah, and seating has been the central and unchanging character-defining feature of any synagogue, the exterior appearance of a synagogue has varied widely over the centuries, as emphatically stated in a post-World War II handbook on synagogue design: “...An important question must surely be: Was there ever such a thing as a single architectural style which synagogues alone possessed and which distinguished them from the architecture of their surroundings? The answer is: No.”<sup>35</sup>

The exteriors of synagogues historically adopted the prevailing architectural style of their surroundings, often as a direct result of political insecurity and economic uncertainty.<sup>36</sup> Throughout much of Europe up until the nineteenth century, Jewish culture was suppressed, including restrictions on owning property or on building size, resulting in synagogues that were “as inconspicuous as possible from the exterior to avoid drawing the attention of the often hostile populations within which the Jews lived.”<sup>37</sup> Beginning in the nineteenth century, however, Jews began to receive the same civil rights and legal privileges as other European citizens, leading to the construction of architecturally ambitious synagogues in urban centers which had large Jewish populations.<sup>38</sup>

With few historic precedents to draw on, nineteenth-century European Jewish congregations often adopted Greek or Roman temple styles for their houses of worship in order to distinguish them from Christian (read: Gothic-style) churches. The Moorish style, which combined Byzantine, Oriental, and Arab elements, was another popular architectural option, with

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<sup>32</sup> Gruber, 15; Geva, 31-32.

<sup>33</sup> Gruber, 17.

<sup>34</sup> Geva, 32-33; Gruber, 17, 19. A more detailed analysis of the history and meaning of bimah placement can be found in Lee Shai Weissbach, “The Architecture of the Bimah in American Synagogues: Framing the Ritual,” *American Jewish History*, vol. 91, no. 1 (March 2003), 29-51.

<sup>35</sup> Dr. Franz Landsberger, “From 70 C.E. to the Present,” in Blake, 35.

<sup>36</sup> Wischnitzer, 3.

<sup>37</sup> Les Vollmert and Carlen Hatala, “Congregation Beth Israel Synagogue, Milwaukee County, Wisconsin, National Register #92000107,” National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1992), sec. 8, p. 9.

<sup>38</sup> Vollmert and Hatala, sec. 8 pp. 9-10; Gruber 24-25.

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prominent examples in the main synagogues of Dresden, Vienna, Budapest, and Berlin.<sup>39</sup> Early American Jewish congregations followed a similar general arc, with classically-inspired synagogue architecture, including Georgian Revival and Greek Revival examples. In the second half of the nineteenth century, many German-American Jewish congregations in urban centers had become prosperous enough to build large synagogues; some of them turned to the contemporaneous Moorish style that was a reassuring reminder of their European homelands.

Beginning in the early twentieth century, American congregations increasingly turned to historical revival styles for new synagogue construction, including high-style classicism inspired by the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition or grand domed examples inspired by the Hagia Sophia and other Byzantine structures.<sup>40</sup> In Wisconsin, this trend is perfectly illustrated by the two most architecturally significant synagogues in Milwaukee, home of the largest Jewish population in the state. Congregation Beth Israel (2432 N. Teutonia Ave., AHI 29082, NR ref. no. 92000107), built in 1925, is a massive, twin-towered Byzantine Revival building with brown tapestry brick, elaborate stone trim, and paired copper domes. In contrast, Temple Emanu-el B'ne Jeshurun (2419 E. Kenwood Blvd., AHI 15931), built three years earlier, is a sober limestone Neoclassical-style building with a shallow-domed classical auditorium.

Despite their various architectural styles, the synagogue as a property type had retained its same basic functional requirements for worship. Synagogues also often became the center of Jewish life and community identity, serving as religious schools and places for social gatherings. This threefold function – often referred to as a House of Prayer, a House of Study, and a House of Assembly – formed the basis for most synagogues constructed prior to World War II.<sup>41</sup> The three components of the building (a worship space, classroom space, and a social hall) could be arranged as a straightforward rectangular building, with the sanctuary on the main floor, the social hall in the basement, and classrooms tucked in on either floor; as a one-story linear arrangement, with all three components on one level; or extended out into a multi-building complex, often arranged around a courtyard. The three components of social hall, classroom space, and worship space with ark, bimah, and eternal light, constitute a distinct synagogue property type that was widely used until World War II.

Another synagogue property type also emerged beginning in the 1920s with the addition of recreational spaces to the already-existing synagogue elements. Commonly referred to as “synagogue centers,” these facilities offered recreational and entertainment programs to augment Jewish education and to strengthen Jewish identity. Initially, the social center was usually located in a separate building near the synagogue, but by the end of World War II, architects and congregations began exploring multi-purpose space and flexible open plans that accommodated all the needs of the congregation within a single building or complex. Synagogue centers were most commonly built in newly-developing post-WWII suburbs, where they offered a mix of religious and secular activities aimed at retaining the Jewish identity of their congregation, particularly its children.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Gruber, 24.

<sup>40</sup> Kline, 39-43; Gruber, 25-68.

<sup>41</sup> Gruber, 18; Alexander Kline, “The Synagogue in America,” in Blake, 46.

<sup>42</sup> Wischnitzer, 136-137, 165, 8; Gruber 83.

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Synagogue property types occur less frequently in Wisconsin than houses of worship of other denominations. The Jewish population of the state has always been extremely small, and Wisconsin's population was historically predominantly Roman Catholic and Lutheran, largely due to immigration patterns and ethnicities. In 1950, two years after Congregation Sons of Abraham was built, there were 34,741 Jews in Wisconsin, approximately 1% of the state's total population of 3.4 million.<sup>43</sup> Similarly, although the total number of extant synagogues in Wisconsin has not been identified, the Wisconsin Architecture and History Inventory (AHI), an online, publicly-accessible database of historic properties maintained by the Wisconsin State Historic Preservation Office, records 28 synagogues out of 3,293 total houses of worship in the state, making synagogues a relatively rare resource type.

Congregation Sons of Abraham (the subject building of this nomination) is one of these twenty-eight known examples in the state. Although Congregation Sons of Abraham was built after World War II, it represents the earlier synagogue property type, more suitable to its modestly-sized urban lot and its relatively small congregation of thirty-five families. Within its compact footprint, the Congregation Sons of Abraham building incorporates the three "House of Prayer, House of Study, House of Assembly" elements required for a synagogue property type. It retains the original configuration of its sanctuary, with the ark, bimah, and eternal light. It retains its two classrooms in their original configuration. It retains its social hall in its original configuration with attached kitchen and restrooms. The Congregation Sons of Abraham synagogue retains integrity of its character-defining interior spaces and spatial relationships of elements within those spaces. It embodies the distinctive characteristics of a synagogue property type and therefore is eligible for listing in the National Register under *Criterion C*.

#### *The Contemporary Style*

Congregation Sons of Abraham is being nominated to the National Register as a good example of the Contemporary style of architecture. The character-defining functional features of the synagogue mirror the principles of the Contemporary style, where a modern form is built from the inside out and expresses the purpose, function, and spirit of the interior in structural forms visible on the exterior.

The Contemporary style is recognized in Wisconsin as one of several architectural styles that rose in popularity after World War II. The style reflected new building materials and building technologies developed in the 1930s and 1940s. The Contemporary style embodied an approach to building design that was guided by the requirements of the specific building, rather than starting with an exterior appearance and then making the interior plan fit within those constraints – a perfect illustration of the Modernist axiom of "form follows function." Architectural historian Virginia Savage McAlester, author of the *Field Guide to American Houses*, observes of the Contemporary style:

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<sup>43</sup> Ben B. Seligman, "United States: Jewish Population Estimates," in Morris Fine, ed., *American Jewish Year Book*, vol. 52, (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1951), 21.

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Earlier [historical revival] styles were generally defined by the types of decorative detail applied to their exteriors – on doors, windows, porch supports, wall surfaces, dormers, and roof-wall junctions. The Contemporary style rejects this approach and is instead [...] created from the inside out, with the attention not on details visible as one approaches [...] but rather on the functionality of the interior space [...]<sup>44</sup>

Because of its innate flexibility, the Contemporary style was used on nearly every type of building: residences, commercial and industrial buildings, schools, and civic buildings. The Contemporary style was especially popular for houses of worship since it could easily accommodate larger building complexes that often grew to include worship spaces, schools, administrative offices, social halls, and recreational spaces.<sup>45</sup> Character-defining elements of Contemporary-style houses of worship can include long or rambling one-story plans; flat roofs, sometimes supported on exposed rafters; recessed entrances; broad, uninterrupted wall surfaces; and compositions that contrast the contrast between vertical and horizontal elements.<sup>46</sup> Natural materials are popular, especially wood, stone, or brick. Contemporary-style houses of worship typically have minimal ornamental details, and when it is present, ornament is often integrated into the overall design in the form of architectural sculpture or panels with text inscriptions.

Congregation Sons of Abraham is an excellent example of the Contemporary style as shown through its plan and massing; its exterior materials; and its minimal, yet carefully chosen, details. The building was planned from the inside out, and its exterior forms are determined by the interior functions. The symmetrical “cubes” on the front of the building are smaller spaces, with lower ceilings, that are placed next to the main circulation space of the vestibule. The sanctuary, at the heart of the building, has a taller ceiling because it is both a larger and a more important space. And the furnace chimney – a necessary but not attractive element – is placed at the rear, on the least visible side of the building. The prominent front entry portal, in addition to providing a vertical contrast on the front elevation, creates a recessed entryway and gives the building a dignified and monumental presence within its residential surroundings.

Windows and entrances are placed on the exterior according to interior functions, and the broad expanses of windowless walls create “restful bare surfaces,” a favorite motif of midcentury synagogue designers.<sup>47</sup> The golden-colored brick walls, likewise, create a rich, warm texture that emphasizes the inherent nature of the material. Ornamental details on the exterior are limited to the smooth limestone windowsills, small limestone blocks in the brick stringcourses, and the two carved panels in the entry portal. All of these elements come together to illustrate that even a modestly-sized building can embody a fully-realized example of a distinct architectural style. With its functional arrangement of flat-roofed building masses; its broad, uninterrupted wall surfaces; and its minimal ornamentation, the Congregation Sons of Abraham synagogue remains an outstanding example of the Contemporary style.

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<sup>44</sup> McAlester, 630.

<sup>45</sup> Geva, 29.

<sup>46</sup> McAlester, 629-630, 632.

<sup>47</sup> Wischnitzer, 139, 142.

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### Comparative Analysis

Congregation Sons of Abraham is being nominated to the National Register under *Criterion C* in the area of Architecture as an example of the Contemporary style and as a synagogue property type.

#### *Synagogue Property Type*

There are no comparable synagogues in La Crosse. As noted previously, synagogues remain a relatively rare property type in Wisconsin. The Wisconsin Architecture and History Inventory records 28 synagogues out of 3,293 total houses of worship in the state. Similarly, the statewide directory maintained by the Milwaukee Jewish Federation lists only 36 active synagogues in Wisconsin.<sup>48</sup> Congregation Sons of Abraham is the only synagogue in La Crosse County. The closest synagogues are located in Eau Claire (Eau Claire County); Rochester (Olmsted County, Minnesota); and Madison (Dane County).

*Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin*, the state's guiding document to preservation activities, notes that "very little has been written about Jewish settlement and cultural development in the state" and recommends the identification of synagogues and other related structures as a preservation priority.<sup>49</sup> To date, only four synagogues in Wisconsin have been individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places: Old Synagogue in Madison (AHI 16103, NR ref. no. 70000030); Temple Beth Israel in Stevens Point (AHI 27631, NR ref. no. 07000101); Temple Zion in Appleton (AHI 42667, NR ref. no. 78000123); and Congregation Beth Israel in Milwaukee (AHI 29082, NR ref. 920000107).

All of these are nineteenth-century buildings. Madison's Old Synagogue has been moved; Temple Zion in Appleton has been extensively altered; and Congregation Beth Israel in Milwaukee was converted to a Baptist church in the 1960s. Of the four NRHP-listed synagogues, Temple Beth Israel retains the best integrity of its interior character-defining spaces, although it no longer serves as a house of worship. Congregation Sons of Abraham retains equal integrity to the character-defining features of the NRHP-listed Temple Beth Israel.

#### *The Contemporary Style*

Congregation Sons of Israel is also being nominated as a good example of the Contemporary style. There are six other post-WWII houses of worship in La Crosse recorded in AHI. All six of these are Christian churches, and all of them were constructed after Congregation Sons of Israel, making the synagogue the earliest example in La Crosse of a "modernistic" style religious building. Congregation Sons of Abraham retains equal or better integrity than all the examples except one. The First Congregational Church (designed by the same architects as Congregation Sons of Abraham) can be considered a slightly more intact example of the Contemporary style since it retains its original sanctuary windows.

*St. Joseph the Workman Cathedral*  
530 Main St., AHI 33133

<sup>48</sup> Milwaukee Jewish Federation, *A Guide to Jewish Wisconsin 5768 / 2025-2026*, accessed from: <https://www.milwaukeejewish.org/communityguide/>.

<sup>49</sup> Wyatt, Religion.

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Edward Schulte, architect, completed 1962

*St. Thomas More Catholic Church*

2000 Weston St., AHI 33785

Hackner, Schroeder, Roslansky & Associates, architects, built 1961

St. Joseph the Workman Cathedral and St. Thomas More Church are both classified as Art Deco in AHI. St. Joseph the Workman's prominent tower incorporates the step-backs typically associated with Art Deco, and its dramatic interior represents a transitional style that merges elements of Art Deco and Late Gothic Revival. St. Thomas More is teardrop-shaped in plan with an Art Deco tower. Neither of these churches are considered comparable in style to Congregation Sons of Abraham.

*St. Paul's Lutheran Church*

420 West Ave. S., AHI 80210

Edward Sovik, architect; built 1956

St. Paul's Lutheran Church consists of a tall, shallow-pitched gable-roofed sanctuary and an adjoining 2 ½ story educational wing which forms a C-shape around a central courtyard. The church has the ubiquitous broad expanses of bare wall; here they are clad in rough Lannon stone and smooth Kasota limestone, which contrast with sections of panelized window walls. The church closed in 2019 and the building no longer serves as a house of worship. Congregation Sons of Abraham retains equal integrity to St. Paul's.

*Seventh Day Adventist Church*

2117 La Crosse St., AHI 238856

architect unidentified, built c. 1960

The Seventh Day Adventist Church has a shallow-pitched gabled roof with deep overhangs and exposed beams. The exterior is clad in broad expanses of Lannon stone alternating with a panelized window wall assembly with alternating bands of glass and solid panels. The church represents a different, and later, phase of the Contemporary style than Congregation Sons of Abraham. Both buildings display relatively similar numbers of character-defining features, and the synagogue retains equal integrity to the Seventh Day Adventist Church.

*First Congregational Church*

2503 Main St., AHI 247174

Boyum, Schubert & Sorenson, architects; built 1955

The First Congregational Church is the most comparable to Congregation Sons of Abraham as an example of the Contemporary style, perhaps because both buildings were designed by the same architectural firm. First Congregational was completed seven years after Congregation Sons of Abraham, and like the synagogue, it has a flat-roofed cubic massing, a tall, deeply-set entry portal, and broad expanses of uninterrupted wall. First Congregational Church is significantly larger than the synagogue and incorporates three distinct building wings within a large complex.

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Congregation Sons of Abraham retains comparable integrity to the exterior materials, workmanship, and cubic composition of the church; however, this Christian church retains slightly better integrity than the synagogue since it retains its original large windows in the sanctuary.

*First Baptist Church of La Crosse*

1209 Main St., AHI 247371

Harry Schroeder, architect; built 1962

First Baptist Church has a shallow-pitched gabled roof, a combination of smooth limestone and panelized brick cladding, and vertical slit windows. The overall building complex incorporates three distinct building masses in a rambling, asymmetrical plan. Congregation Sons of Abraham retains equal integrity to First Baptist, although the finer proportions, balanced composition, and the quality of its masonry workmanship make the synagogue a better example of the Contemporary style.

**Concluding Significance Statement**

The Congregation Sons of Abraham was the first “modernistic” religious building in La Crosse when it was completed in 1948, and its functional plan, flat-roofed cubic massing, broad expanses of wall, and minimal ornamentation make it an outstanding local example of the Contemporary style. Congregation Sons of Abraham also retains the distinct character-defining elements associated with Jewish synagogues, including the sanctuary with its ark, bimah, eternal light, and seating; classroom space; and a social hall, making it a good and intact example of a distinctive property type. Synagogues are a comparatively rare property type in Wisconsin, and the fact that the building has remained in continuous use by its original congregation adds to its significance as a house of prayer, a house of study, and a house of assembly. Its Contemporary-style architectural design and its distinct property typology make the Congregation Sons of Abraham synagogue worthy of inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

**Land Acknowledgement (will be reviewed by the Office of the State Archaeologist)**

This nomination recognizes the depth of human presence here, the ancestral homeland of American Indians for millennia. From as early as the seventeenth century, Euro-American exploration and settlement, military campaigns, and government programs, all had the effect of repeated displacement of Indians of many tribal affiliations. This continuous tribal movement resulted in Wisconsin being home to many tribes who originated from other parts of the country, generating a pattern of immigration, relocation, and formation of a new homeland. Some of these tribes remain in Wisconsin but others may not. We acknowledge that the property that is the subject of this nomination is located on land long occupied by American Indians.

**Archaeological Potential (will be drafted and reviewed by the Office of the State Archaeologist)**

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### Preservation Activities

The Congregation Sons of Abraham was evaluated for the NRHP during a survey of La Crosse conducted in 1984, at which time the property was less than fifty years of age. Eligibility was reaffirmed prior to the writing of this nomination. This nomination is being funded by the City of La Crosse as a Heritage Preservation initiative.

END OF STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE DO NOT DELETE

DRAFT

Congregation Sons of Abraham  
Name of Property

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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

### 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: University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Murphy Library Archives

### Wisconsin Architecture and History Inventory # and/or Archaeological Site Inventory #:

AHI 33259

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

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**END OF BIBLIOGRAPHY DO NOT DELETE**

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## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreeage of Property:** less than one

### UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or  NAD 1983

1. Zone:	<u>15N</u>	Easting:	<u>642461</u>	Northing:	<u>4852448</u>
2. Zone:	<u>      </u>	Easting:	<u>      </u>	Northing:	<u>      </u>
3. Zone:	<u>      </u>	Easting:	<u>      </u>	Northing:	<u>      </u>
4. Zone:	<u>      </u>	Easting:	<u>      </u>	Northing:	<u>      </u>

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

The boundary of the Congregation Sons of Abraham synagogue consists of a roughly rectangular shape that coincides with the current legal parcel, described as Hosley's Addition, Block 4, Lots 2, 3, and 11.

The boundary can be described as follows: beginning at the northwest corner of the property, the boundary runs east for approximately 100 feet. The boundary then turns and runs south for 194 feet. The boundary then turns and runs west for 114 feet. The boundary then turns and runs slightly northeast for approximately 195 feet to return to the point of origin.

### Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary has been delineated to include the property's one contributing building and to provide an appropriate landscape buffer around the resource. The boundary coincides with the property's existing legal tax parcel. The boundary is visually defined by the edge of sidewalk on the north (Main Street). There are no visual landscape markers to define the boundary on the east, south, or west sides.

**END OF GEOGRAPHIC DATA DO NOT DELETE**

Congregation Sons of Abraham  
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### 11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Justin Miller, Architectural Historian  
organization: University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Cultural Resource Management  
street & number: P.O. Box 3413  
city or town: Milwaukee State: WI zip code: 53201  
Email: [jcmill@uwm.edu](mailto:jcmill@uwm.edu)  
Telephone: 414-229-3078

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### Additional Documentation

#### Figure Log

**Figure 1.** UTM map

**Figure 2.** Sketch map

**Figure 3.** Photo key (interior photo locations not shown on key for security reasons)

**Figure 4.** Historic exterior photo, circa 1948. From *Architecture and Design*, vol. XII no. 8 (August 1948)

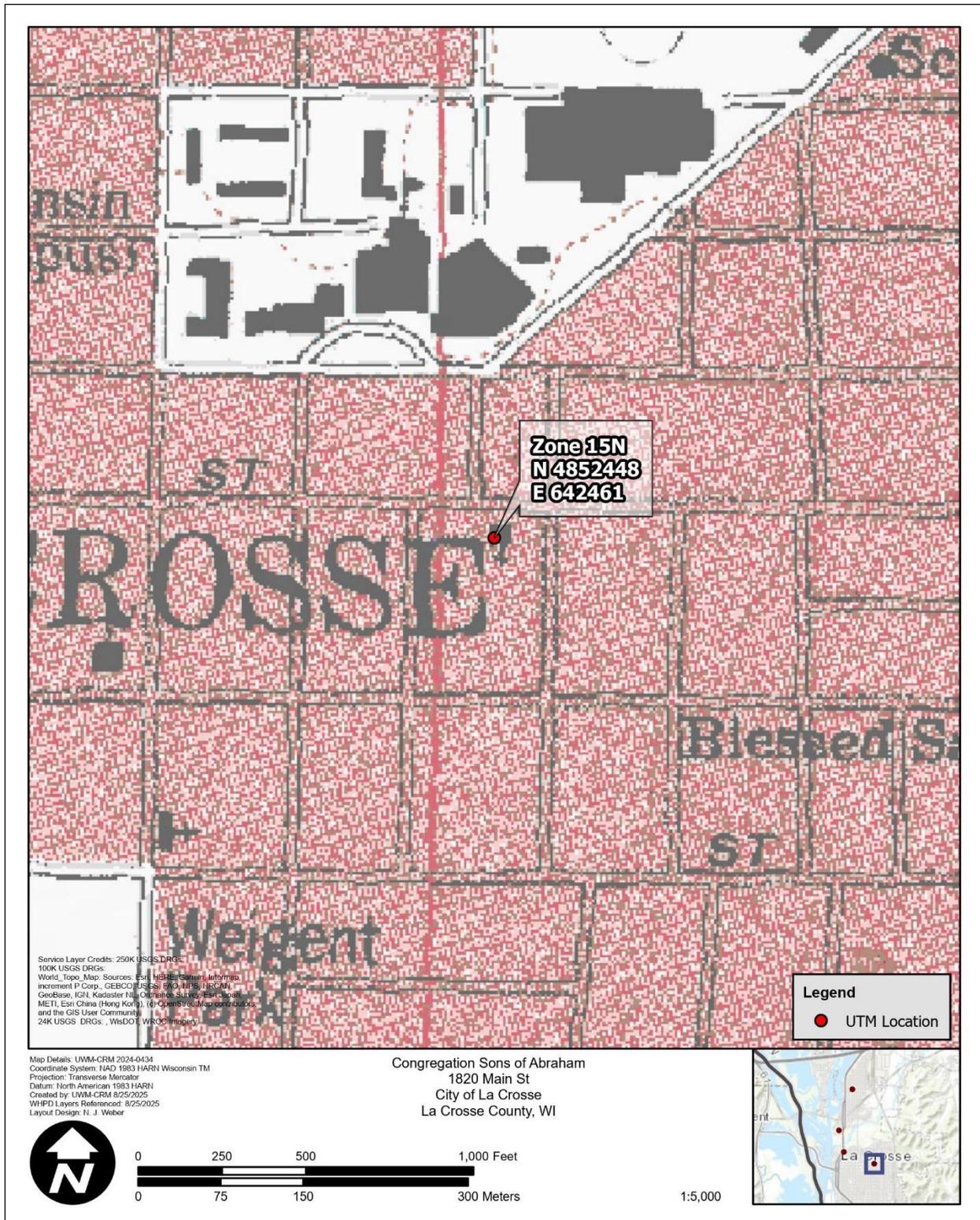
**Figure 5.** Historic interior photo of vestibule, circa 1948. From *Dedication of the New Sons of Abraham Synagogue, La Crosse, Wisconsin* (courtesy of University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections and Archives)

**Figure 6.** Historic interior photo of sanctuary, circa 1948. From *Dedication of the New Sons of Abraham Synagogue, La Crosse, Wisconsin* (courtesy of University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections and Archives)

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Figure 1. UTM map



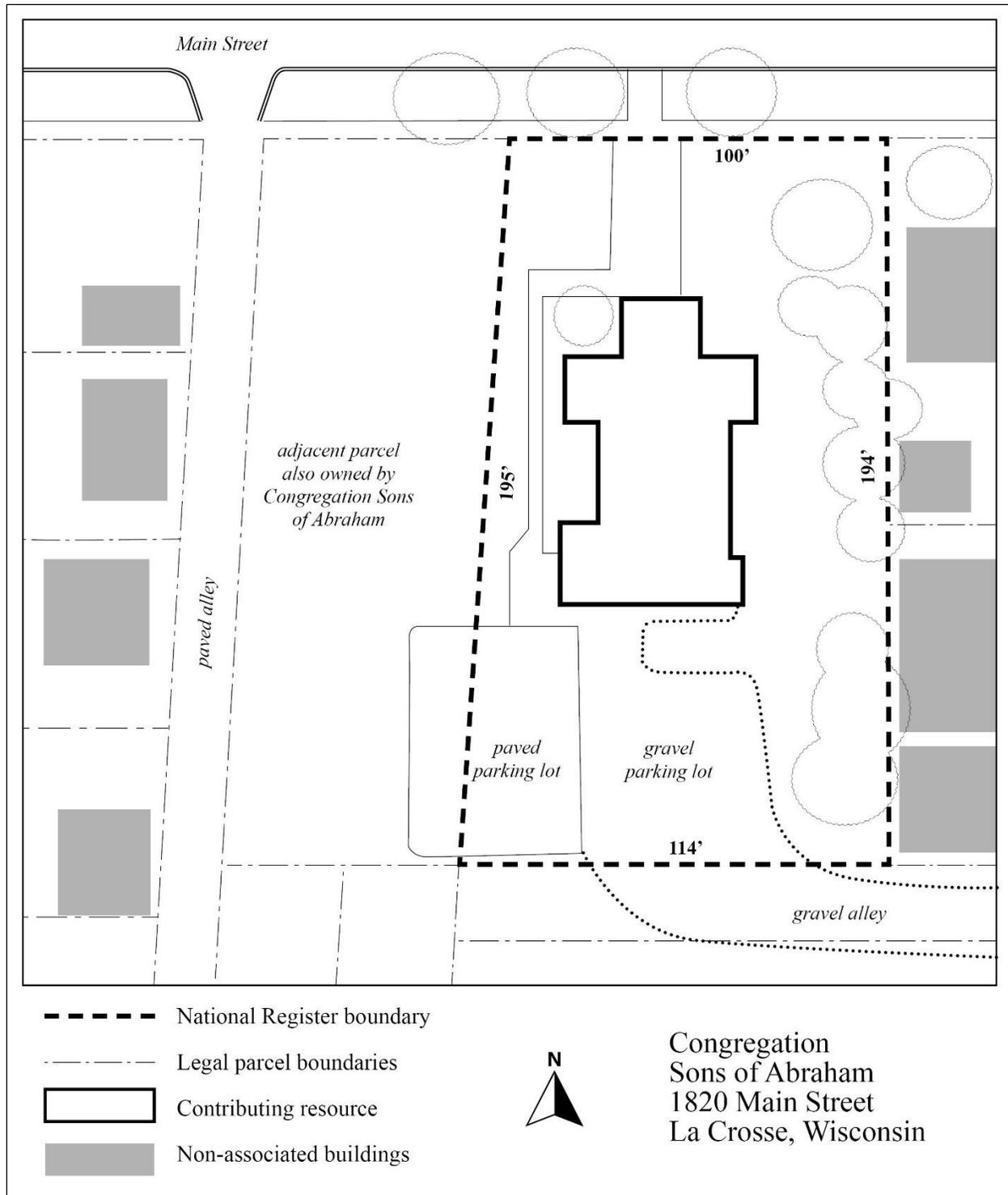
Congregation Sons of Abraham

La Crosse County, Wisconsin

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County and State

**Figure 2.** Sketch map



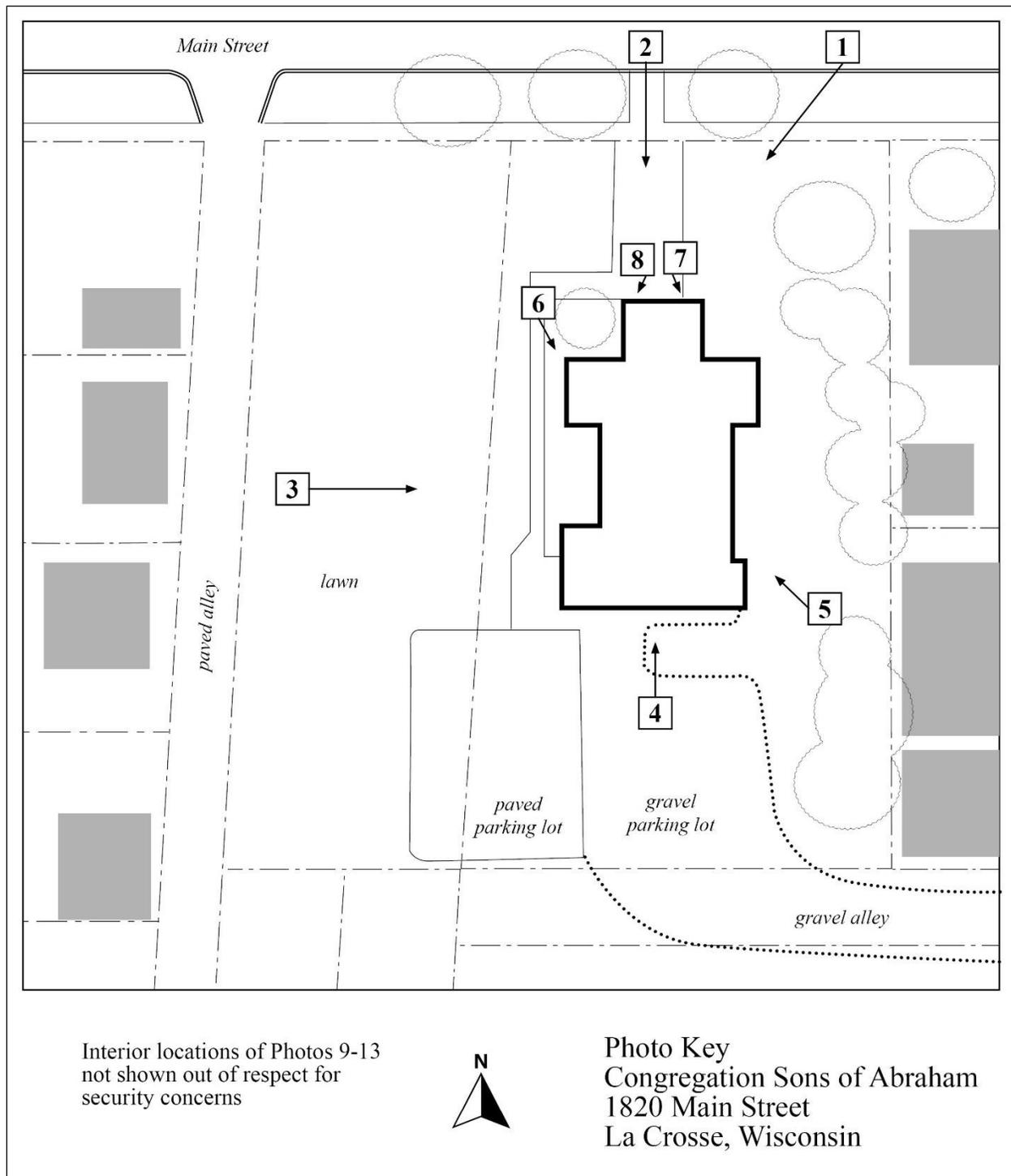
Congregation Sons of Abraham

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**Figure 3.** Photo key (interior photo locations not shown on key for security reasons)



Congregation Sons of Abraham

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**Figure 4.** Historic exterior photo, circa 1948. From *Architecture and Design*, vol. XII no. 8 (August 1948)



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**Figure 5.** Historic interior photo of vestibule, circa 1948. From *Dedication of the New Sons of Abraham Synagogue, La Crosse, Wisconsin* (courtesy of University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections and Archives)



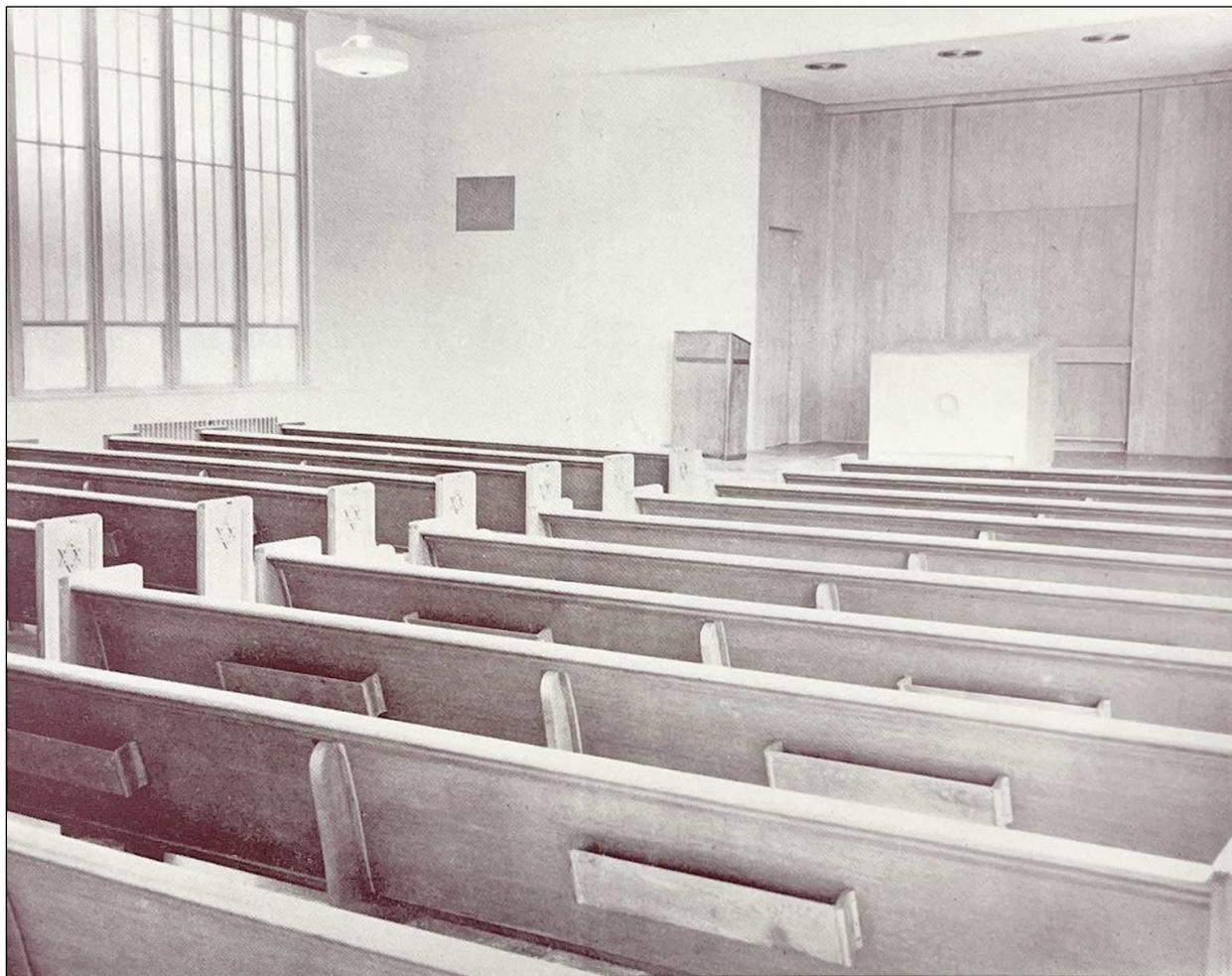
Congregation Sons of Abraham

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**Figure 6.** Historic interior photo of sanctuary, circa 1948. From *Dedication of the New Sons of Abraham Synagogue, La Crosse, Wisconsin* (courtesy of University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections and Archives)



END OF FIGURES SECTION DO NOT DELETE

Congregation Sons of Abraham  
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## Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once in the photograph log. The photograph order must correspond with the photograph log.

## Photo Log

Name of Property: Congregation Sons of Abraham  
City or Vicinity: La Crosse  
County: La Crosse County State: WI  
Photographer: Justin Miller, UW-Milwaukee Cultural Resource Management  
Date photographed: August 19-20, 2025 (photos 1-8); December 18, 2025 (photos 9-13)

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

**Photo 1 of 13.** Overview of north (primary) elevation, looking southwest

**Photo 2 of 13.** North elevation, looking west

**Photo 3 of 13.** West elevation, looking east

**Photo 4 of 13.** South (rear) elevation, looking north

**Photo 5 of 13.** South and east elevations, looking northwest

**Photo 6 of 13.** Detail of cornerstone, looking southeast

**Photo 7 of 13.** Detail of panel in east wall of entry portal

**Photo 8 of 13.** Detail of panel in west wall of entry portal

**Photo 9 of 13.** Interior, detail of ark curtain

**Photo 10 of 13.** Interior, detail of ark (closed)

**Photo 11 of 13.** Interior, detail of ark (open) and Torah scrolls

**Photo 12 of 13.** Interior, detail of typical interior door

**Photo 13 of 13.** Interior, detail of bifold glass doors; Yahrzeit board visible at left

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**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for nominations 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.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for each response using this form is estimated to be between the Tier 1 and Tier 4 levels with the estimate of the time for each tier as follows:

- Tier 1 – 60-100 hours
- Tier 2 – 120 hours
- Tier 3 – 230 hours
- Tier 4 – 280 hours

The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting nominations. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive Fort Collins, CO 80525.

Congregation Sons of Abraham  
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**Property Owner**

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

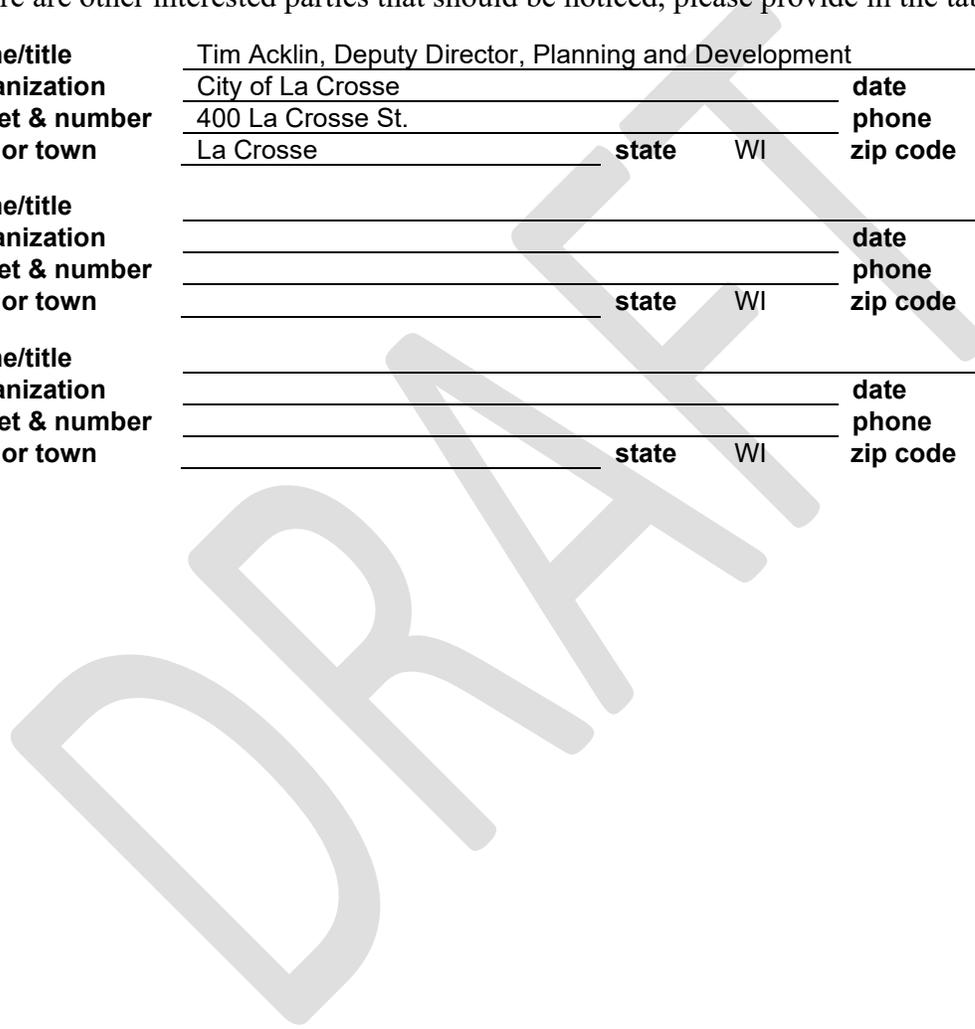
<b>name/title</b>	Adam Reich, Congregation President		
<b>organization</b>	Congregation Sons of Abraham	<b>date</b>	Dec. 19, 2025
<b>street &amp; number</b>	1820 Main Street	<b>phone</b>	608-784-2708
<b>city or town</b>	La Crosse	<b>state</b>	WI
		<b>zip code</b>	54623

If there are other interested parties that should be noticed, please provide in the tables below

<b>name/title</b>	Tim Acklin, Deputy Director, Planning and Development		
<b>organization</b>	City of La Crosse	<b>date</b>	Dec. 19, 2025
<b>street &amp; number</b>	400 La Crosse St.	<b>phone</b>	608-789-7391
<b>city or town</b>	La Crosse	<b>state</b>	WI
		<b>zip code</b>	54623

<b>name/title</b>	_____		
<b>organization</b>	_____	<b>date</b>	_____
<b>street &amp; number</b>	_____	<b>phone</b>	_____
<b>city or town</b>	_____	<b>state</b>	WI
		<b>zip code</b>	_____

<b>name/title</b>	_____		
<b>organization</b>	_____	<b>date</b>	_____
<b>street &amp; number</b>	_____	<b>phone</b>	_____
<b>city or town</b>	_____	<b>state</b>	WI
		<b>zip code</b>	_____





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Congregation Sons of Abraham, La Crosse County, WI 6 of 13





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MY HOUSE  
SHALL BE CALLED A  
HOUSE OF PRAYER  
FOR ALL PEOPLES

ISAIAH





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Congregation Sons of Abraham, La Crosse County, WI 10 of 13



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