

United States Department of Interior National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form



This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900A). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property
historic name The Silver Dome Ballroom
other names/site number N/A
2. Location
street & number W7670 US Highway 10 N/A not for publication
city or town Town of Hewett N/A vicinity
state Wisconsin code WI county Clark code 019 zip code 54456
3. State/Federal Agency Certification
request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets ploes not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide X locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.) Signature of certafying official Title State Vistoric Preservation Officer-WI State of Federal agency and bureau
In my opinion, the property _ meets _ does not meet the National Register criteria. (_ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)
Signature of commenting official/Title Date
State or Federal agency and bureau

Silver Dome Ballroom		Clark	Wisconsin
Name of Property		County and State	
4. National Park Service	ce Certification		
I hereby certify that the property is: entered in the National Register. See continuation sheet. determined eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet.	Jer -	Land Fith	6/30/97
determined not eligible for the National RegisterSee continuation sheetremoved from the National Registerother, (explain:)			
	Signature of th	e Keeper	Date of Action
5. Classification			
Ownership of Property (check as many boxes as as apply) x	Category of Property (Check only one box) X building(s) district	Number of Resources wite (Do not include previously in the count) contributing non	
public-State public-Federal	structure site object	1 0 to	sites structures objects
Name of related multiple pro Enter "N/A" if property not p isting. N/A		Number of contributing rais previously listed in the	
6. Function or Use			
Historic Functions (Enter categories from instru RECREATION and CULTU		Current Functions (Enter categories from instructio RECREATION and CULTURE)	
7. Description			
Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instru MODERN MOVEMENT		Materials (Enter categories from instructio Foundation Concrete walls Weather Board	ns)
		roof Asphalt	

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

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National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section _ 7 Page _1	Silver Dome Ball	room	
•	Town of Hewett,	Clark County,	Wisconsin

The Silver Dome Ballroom is located at W7670 US Highway 10, in the town of Hewett five miles west of Neillsville, Wisconsin. The Ballroom is situated on three point thirteen acres of land. The main entrance is a single door on the northeast side of the Ballroom. The southeast side contains double doors which aid in bringing in band equipment. To the left of the main entrance the originally used portable ticket booth was replaced with a stationary ticket booth on the inside northwest wall about fifteen years ago. The east side of the Ballroom has two single doors, one on each end; however, the northwest door is sealed. The south side of the building faces U. S. Highway 10. There is a matted grass parking area around the Ballroom's main entrance.

The unique feature of the Silver Dome Ballroom is its dome-shaped lamella roof structure. The exterior of the roof was originally painted with aluminum, hence the name "Silver Dome." Today, the exterior roof is covered with gray asphalt shingles, put on about twenty-four years ago in keeping with the name "Silver Dome." The east and west sides of the roof have three semicircular vents. The southeast side of the roof has a stacked chimney vent. The lamella dome roof sits on walls made of wood which are buttressed by thirty-six concrete piers approximately eight feet apart. The piers are covered with cedar wood and gray asphalt shingles, put on about twenty-four years ago. The exterior cedar wood walls are also painted gray. Between the piers around the entire Ballroom are pairs of double hung windows on the wast side and triple double hung windows on the west side. These windows originally had screens, which the Keller brothers removed due to breakage. Today, the bottom sash of the windows are filled in and there are upper, single, six-light windows between the piers all the way around the building. The benches along the east and west walls under the windows are original.

The Silver Dome is supported by several dozen cement piers buried twelve feet under ground, which raises the Ballroom about a foot off the ground. The piers were created with approximately three train car loads of concrete, and set in a grid pattern. The use of the piers means that underneath the building is open space, allowing air to circulate at the meeting of wood and cement piers, resulting in no humidity, rotting or deterioration of the wood floor.³

¹ V.L. White to Folks, 8 February 1982, Transcropt in the hand of Shirley Simonson, Hrtonville, Wisconsin, 15.

² Site visit to the Silver Dome Ballroom, Town of Hewett, Wisconsin on 11/6/96.

³ Ibid.

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Inside the Ballroom, the interior reveals an extraordinary diamond-shaped network of wood pieces in an engineered lamella roof construction. The arched roof is built up from large concrete abutments outside the Ballroom using relatively short, uniform pieces of wood or lamellas with beveled and bored ends bolted together at an angle, so that each piece of wood is intersected at its midpoint by two adjacent pieces of wood or lamellas. The intersections of these wood pieces or lamellas form an interlocking diamond pattern. The Ballroom's roof is formed using two inch by ten inch pine wood lamellas fastened together with several tons of nails and bolts and tied together at the top. Cornel Moen decided to round the ends of the building for better acoustics, rather than squaring them off. The roof covering or purlins employed to triangulate the diamonds fulfills the stability requirements for the surface of the Ballroom's dome. As more pressure is applied to the roof the lamella frames receive more strength.

The Keller brothers built the Silver Dome Ballroom with a lamella span of 74 feet by 146 feet of unobstructed, open space for a large number of people to dance. Without the use of interior posts, the lamella roof construction of the Silver Dome Ballroom creates an unusual and exquisite architectural appearance. This unobstructed space contributes to the Ballroom's impressive acoustical quality and provides a place for large groups of people to dance. The Ballroom has a 2000 person capacity. The Ballroom's floor is made of finely matched, sanded, and narrow maple hardwood pieces put together to create a "floating floor." The original floating floor still exists. The floating floor was built on cedar wood, shingle-type shims that rest upon the raised cement piers under the building. The maple floor is not tightly attached to the cedar shimmers, so an air pocket allows the floor to give or float when people are dancing on it. The floating floor contains the original raised platform at the north end of the Ballroom for an orchestra or band, as well as a bar and hamburger concession stand at the south end of the Ballroom.

⁴ White, 14.

⁵ site visit

⁶ Z.S. Makowski, ed., Analysis, Design and Construction of Braced Domes (New York: Nichols Publishing Company, 1984), 29.

⁷ White, 15

⁸ Dee Zimmerman, "Good Olde Days," Clark County Press, 27 August 1992, 28.

⁹Site visit

¹⁰White, 15.

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Section 7 Page 3	Silver Dome Ballroom
_	Town of Hewett, Clark County, Wisconsin
for an orchestra or band, as well as a bar and	hamburger concession stand at the north end of the Ballroom

Today, the Ballroom's original interior remains largely intact. The raised platform or stage on the south end of the Ballroom is forty feet wide by twenty feet deep, since eight feet on each side, was added to the original platform. Behind the stage is an uncurtained dressing room eight feet wide and eighteen feet deep on the east side and a storage area on the west side. In the past, this area, along with fifteen feet gained by moving the stage forward, had been a bar for eighteen year olds, while the main bar served patrons aged twenty-one and older. On the north end of the Ballroom the original round bar, with a one hundred foot circumference, remains intact with its cash registers. However, new bar stools have been added. Behind and to the west of the bar are the remains of the original small kitchen area and storage room. In the storage room, a ladder attached to the wall leads to the second floor landing with a window for viewing the bar and bartenders. The window is mirrored on the outside, so that, although the owner could not be seen, he was able to observe any stealing that might have occurred.

Some updating has occurred, such as decorative silver stars in many of the diamond-shaped lamellas, many inconspicuous electrical light fixtures attached to several lamella segments, and speakers attached to lamellas at the center of the east and west walls. A ventilation system was added, part of which extends from the chimney over the bar. On the north side of the bar under the ventilation system over the bar there is a silver metal, trimmed black signboard. Below this are the entrances to the men's and women's rest rooms, which still have original wood stalls in the women's restore and metal in the men's restore. Below the rest rooms is the original basement containing two twenty thousand Btu furnaces, which replaced the four original wood and coal furnaces. These furnaces continuously heat only the basement, since the water from the bar is drained to the basement at the end of the night and the heat rises to protect the plumbing in the rest rooms. There are modern wood chairs and tables along the east and west walls, and stacks of chairs southwest of the bar on the north end of the west wall. The interior painting done about twenty-five years ago included the windows' lower halves and frames in white, the interior walls and doors in black, and the ceiling in light blue.¹¹

¹¹ Site visit

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The Silver Dome Ballroom	with its lamella truss roof is in excellent, sound condition, the

in no way altering its construction. The unique roof construction continues to fulfill its goal of providing open space for dancing, while remaining functional and attractive. The Silver Dome Ballroom is an exceptional structure which should be preserved.

Silver Dome Ballroom		Clark	Wisconsin
Name of Property		County and State	
8. Sta	atement of Significance		
(Mark	cable National Register Criteria "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria ying the property for the National Register .)	Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions) Engineering Entertainment/Recreation	
	Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.		
	Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.	Period of Significance	
	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.	1929-1947	
D	Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.	Significant Dates N/A	
	ia Considerations "x" in all the boxes that apply.)	Significant Person	
Proper	rty is:	(Complete if Criterion B is marked)	
	owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.	N/A	
В	removed from its original location.		
C	a birthplace or grave.	Cultural Affiliation	
_ D	a cemetery.	N/A	
	a reconstructed building, object, or structure.		

Architect/Builder

Moen, Cornel (Builder)

__ G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

_ F a commemorative property.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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Section 8 Page 1	Silver Dome Ballroom
	Town of Hewett, Clark County, Wisconsin

The Silver Dome Ballroom is being nominated under two criteria: Criterion A for its local significance in recreation/entertainment, and Criterion C for the unique architectural construction of its lamella roof.

Historical Significance

The Silver Dome Ballroom is historically significant for its contribution to recreation/entertainment in Neillsville and Clark County, Wisconsin. The Silver Dome Ballroom was built in Clark County between 1929 and 1933 when ballroom dancing and big bands were popular, a period spanning the 1920s into the early 1950s. Today, the Silver Dome Ballroom is the only ballroom that is both standing and maintained in Clark County, Wisconsin.

Historical Background

The Silver Dome Ballroom is located in Neillsville, Wisconsin, which was founded by James O'Neill, Senior. O'Neill along with a small group of men investigated the site in 1844, and a year later they formed the first permanent settlement in Clark County. The first major industry in Neillsville was lumber. Small wood mills were set up, such as James O'Neill's mill with a production capacity of four thousand board feet in twelve hours. Lumbermen initially sought white pine, one-fourth of the timber in Clark County, and then late hardwood. Later the tree stumps were removed to farm hay and grain as cash crops. The legislative act of July 6, 1853 created Clark County and made Weston the county seat. The November, 1854 vote determined that Neillsville would be the county seat thereby reversing the prior legislation. At the turn of the century the seeds were planted to develop the dairy industry in Clark County, where products such as milk, cheese, cream, and butter were produced in large volume. It was in midst of this thriving dairy industry that the Keller brothers built the Silver Dome Ballroom in Neillsville, Wisconsin.

Frank Keller's sons were the builders of the Silver Dome Ballroom. Keller was one of many German immigrants coming to the United States during the 1890s, settling in Wisconsin first in Princeton and Ripon, Fond du Lac County and ultimately moving to Neillsville, Clark County. As an educated German, Keller realized working for an English family as a farm hand would enable him to learn to speak

¹² The Clark County Centennial 1853-1953 (Neillsville, Wisconsin: The Clark County Press 1953), F9-10,17,29,31-35, B12.

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Section 8 Page 2	Silver Dome Ballroom
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English. While serving in the German army he had learned to play the flute and violin. Keller became a good farmer and learned new skills in stone masonry and plaster to become his own contractor. To learn the new trade Keller began as an apprentice doing tasks such as tending mortar, cutting stone, and heavy labor. This trade gave Keller the extra income needed for his family, allowing him to buy a farm, and build a home. Frank Keller married Mary Louise Behms, whose parents came from Germany and had a farm in Green Lake Center near Princeton, Wisconsin. Frank and Mary Keller had eleven children, whom they raised on farms in Princeton, Ripon, and later in Neillsville, Wisconsin. ¹³

The four Keller brothers responsible for building the Silver Dome Ballroom were Albert, Paul, Henry, and Walter Keller. Albert Keller was Frank and Mary Keller's fourth child. Albert was taught farming, masonry, and to play the violin and bass viol. He had an aptitude for mechanics, did all the farm repairs and some shoeing of horses. Albert had a good business head, was cautious, and saved more money than the rest of the family. As a result, Albert was able to provide the needed capital for family ventures. When the Keller brothers built The Fireplace, a bar and restaurant, they put in pinball machines. Albert collected money from the pinball machines, repaired them when necessary, and ran the pinball machine business in Neillsville, Wisconsin.

Paul was Frank and Mary Keller's fifth child. Paul, like Albert, was taught farming, masonry, and to play the violin and bass viol. Paul joined his father, older brother, William, and Albert to form a dance band playing for German and Polish weddings and wedding dances in the Princeton area. Paul farmed until his wife died of cancer, and he eventually sold the farm. He worked for the Clark County Highway Department as a grader and truck driver. Paul helped build the Silver Dome Ballroom and continued to work there as a handyman, part-time bartender, cook, dishwasher and butcher.

Henry was Frank and Mary Keller's eighth child. The family financial situation improved, so Henry and future children did not need to work as hard on the farm. Henry played the saxophone in the school orchestra at Neillsville High School and in a pick-up band. Henry's first job was selling the Wisconsin Agriculturist, a farm journal, to farmers around the state. He held a barber's license, so he worked as a barber in Milwaukee and later Neillsville, Wisconsin. Henry also worked as a bartender in Wausau, Wisconsin. ¹⁴

14 White, 6, 6a, 11-13

¹³ White, 2-3

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Walter was Frank and Mary Keller's tenth child. Although not taught the skills, Walter helped with the farming and masonry. Walter did not learn to play a musical instrument, although he was a good singer. At Neillsville High School he was a good student, active in many activities including organizing an annual art show. He contributed most of the pen and ink drawings to the art show. After taking a Washington, DC correspondence art school course Walter tried unsuccessfully to get a job in Milwaukee, Wisconsin with a lithographic printing firm. This led Walter to a job with Gimbels Department Store repairing vacuum cleaners and washing machines. He moved back to Neillsville, Wisconsin after one year. Walter helped his brother-in-law drive a truck to Escanaba, Michigan and took a job with Avery Corporation for two years. He took voice lessons hoping to be an opera singer, but only sang with traveling bands and orchestras. Walter served in the "D" Day Invasion with the 3rd Army and as an intelligence officer in Austria. He was discharged with honors and received a Bronze Star. Walter was active in the family ventures including The Fireplace and Silver Dome Ballroom in Neillsville.

Herbert was the eleventh and last child of Frank and Mary Keller. Herbert learned to play the clarinet and saxophone. During high school, he played football and basketball. Herbert acquired the pinball machine business from Albert and was brought into The Fireplace and Silver Dome Ballroom projects after graduating from high school. In 1947, Herbert joined the Howie Sturtz Orchestra that played for dances at the Silver Dome, and was lead saxophone for over thirty years. The Sturtz Orchestra was booked two years in advance, playing all over Wisconsin and parts of Minnesota. It later played regularly for a television station in Wausau, Wisconsin. Herbert's instrument cases wore out quickly, so he made his own and formed a business to make instrument and gun cases for others. Herbert was the custodian at the old and new Clark County Courthouses until he retired on a pension. ¹⁵

The idea for a tavern in Neillsville, Wisconsin blossomed while Henry Keller worked as a bartender in Wausau, Wisconsin. Henry, with the help of Albert, Paul, and Walter Keller, on about ten acres of land five miles west of Hwy. 10 on a level area east of Wedges Dam, built The Fireplace Tavern. It began as a basement tavern during Prohibition serving "near beer." The Fireplace expanded to the first floor which contained a fieldstone fireplace made of natural stones and split stones. Initially, a Chinese cook Chinese food counter at the end of the bar that was very popular. Ultimately, the Keller Brothers ran the Fireplace Tavern as a supper club.

¹⁵ White, 20-25.

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A good dance hall was needed in conjunction with the popularity of The Fireplace Tavern and this provided the inspiration for the Silver Dome Ballroom. Walter Keller, a good artist with an interest in architectural design, discovered a new building concept of a dome structure for dance halls or large auditoriums known as lamella truss construction from an engineer in Madison, Wisconsin. To use the German patent for this arch style lamella roof, the Keller brothers paid a \$1,000 royalty fee. Although Paul and the other Keller brothers helped build the Silver Dome Ballroom, they hired Cornel Moen as the carpenter of the project. Although the Kellers used the original design, they changed the squared off ends of the arch, thereby creating curved ends and sides for better acoustics. Moen, realizing there was no electricity available at the site and the project required the cutting of many heavy thick joints and beams, made a table saw powered by a four cylinder gasoline engine from an old model "T" Ford. It was made portable for use anywhere on the site by mounting a rear axle with rubber wheels under the platform of the table saw.

Both the men working at the site and the hardwood used in building the Ballroom were probably brought in from Neillsville and Clark County, Wisconsin. They used 2 inch by 10 inch pieces of wood cut on an angle at the ends and bolted to form large diamond shapes. Large concrete abutments were placed around the outside of the building, and from these the diamonds were built upwards in a curve tied into each other at the top to form a dome. The construction of the Silver Dome Ballroom began in 1929 and took four years to complete. The total construction cost was \$12,000, which was a large investment during the Great Depression.¹⁷

The grand opening was Wednesday, July 12, 1933 with dancing to Johnny Davis and his 11-piece NBC Orchestra for forty cents per person. The Keller brothers sold one thousand four hundred ninety-four tickets, almost meeting the two thousand person capacity. The admission typically ranged from forty cents to ten cents with a come back in the 1940s of thirty cents depending upon whether the bands playing were locally or nationally known. In the late 1930s the Kellers advertised free wedding dances at the Silver Dome, free corporate sponsored dances by local dealers, and dances following events such as city

¹⁶ White, 14.

¹⁷ Zimmerman, 28

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baseball games or Eagles annual picnics. 18	Roller skating was advertised for a while, but it was stopped
when the Keller brothers thought it would d	amage the floor. 19

The Keller brothers hired both nationally and locally known bands to play at the Silver Dome Ballroom. The national bands included Duke Ellington, the Six Fat Dutchmen, Fezz Fritchie, Ty-Leroy and the Scotch Highlanders, Dux Brother's Orchestra, Bennie Graham and His 8 Musicians, Harvey Cox and His Montana Cowboys Radio and Stage Stars, Harvey King and his Orchestra, Castilians Orchestra, Frank Sphotty and His Famous Old Time Orchestra, Al Nickels and His Orchestra, Art Klarich and His 7 Musicians, and Whoopie John and His Radio Recording Orchestra. Several of the Wisconsin Old Tyme bands included Lawrence Duchow, Romy Gosz, Blue Denim Boys, Bernie Roberts, Jerry Gilbertson and more. The local bands were Wally Ives, Art and Louis Nemitz, Pat Lautenbach and the Varsity Band, the Merrymen, Jack Kolbeck of Marshfield, Vic Carpenter Band of Abbotsford, Rhode Bros. of Greenwood, the Pine Valley Dutchmen, the Howie Sturtz Orchestra, and the Keller's 8-piece Band. Several local pick-up bands also played at the Silver Dome Ballroom. Coming from a family of accomplished musicians, it is not surprising that the Keller brothers played in bands, played at the Silver Dome, and hired well known big bands to come to the Silver Dome.

The Silver Dome Ballroom was very popular with the public attracting people from all over Wisconsin and the Twin Cities, Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota. Along with weekly dances, there were wedding receptions at the Silver Dome Ballroom on Friday and Saturday. During an evening of dancing at the Silver Dome Ballroom people went to eat at the Silver Dome Supper Club, formerly the Fireplace Tavern. Many parents brought their children dancing with them, since the modern idea of baby-sitting had not been developed. The children learned to waltz by age seven and then learned to polka, fox trot, and schottische. The dance floor of the Silver Dome Ballroom was the place where these parents and many other couples met for the first time. From its creation in 1933 until today the Silver Dome Ballroom has remained one of the social centers of Neillsville and most of Clark County, Wisconsin changing ownership six times. The Kellers sold the Silver Dome Ballroom to Mr. Weber in the 1940s who later

²⁰ Zimmerman, 28.

¹⁸ Advertisements, Neillsville Press, 7/6/33; 7/13/33, 2; 11/30/33,5; 1/4/34, 5; 6/7/34, 8;12/20/34, 8; 6/2/38,5; 7/7/38, 2; The Clark County Press, 7/8/43, 3

¹⁹ Simonson, Shirley, Telephone Interview by Ann Fuhrman, 7/26/96, Madison, Wisconsin

²¹ White, 15.

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sold it to Mr. Mulcolm. He sold it to Mr. John Labor who in turn sold it to Mr. Keith Johnson. In 1972, the current owner, Mr. Louis Kessler, bought the Silver Dome Ballroom from Mr. Johnson. 22

Although Herbert Keller retired from the Howie Sturtz Orchestra in the 1970s, the Orchestra still plays in Wisconsin and parts of Minnesota. Today, the Howie Sturtz Orchestra and other well known big bands still play, despite being expensive to hire. Although the era of the big bands big bands and ballroom dancing is fading, the Silver Dome Ballroom s still being used today with a variety of musical groups ranging from dance and polka bands to rock groups. Occasional dances are still held on Fridays and Saturdays along with some Sundays with attendance known to go to one thousand people. Wedding receptions are still held at the Ballroom with catering available for up to four hundred fifty people. Couples can bring their own bands or choose from a list of bands in the area for wedding receptions or other events at the Silver Dome Ballroom. Today, many couples that met on the dance floor are celebrating their fiftieth and sixtieth wedding anniversaries at the Silver Dome Ballroom, such as Herbert and Velma Keller who celebrated their fiftieth anniversary on June 21, 1986. It is important to these couples, their families, and the current owner that the Silver Dome Ballroom remain an active part of the social life in Neillsville and Clark County, Wisconsin. Silver Dome Ballroom remain an active part of the social life in Neillsville and Clark County, Wisconsin.

Entertainment/Recreation Background

During the era of big bands and dance music, the Keller brothers built the Silver Dome Ballroom to bring this popular form of entertainment and recreation to Neillsville, Wisconsin. The foundations for dance music and dance bands began in the l910s, with jazz and ragtime played in dance halls that were not places in which members of polite society could appropriately frequent. In these circles, dances and balls had always been held as private functions. By l914, the Fox Trot was a significant catalyst in developing the popularity of ballroom dancing. This was enhanced and popularized by dance teams such as Irene and Vernon Castle and Joan Sayer and Rudolph Valentino dancing the Fox Trot, the Tango, the Charleston, and many other popular dances. These dance teams began the society dance craze, which led to the

²² Site visit

²³ Zimmerman, 28.

²⁴Site visit

²⁵ Zimmerman, 28.

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ballrooms.²⁶

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change in social patterns that had	l existed for many years. This was aided by dance teams which created
dance schools frequented by wea	lthy clientele, and opened resorts, night clubs, and grand public

By the close of World War I, America's obsession with dancing endured with the growing number of dance spots in pavilions, road houses, night clubs, hotels, restaurants, cabarets, and public ballrooms. The dancing fulfilled the need of hard-working Americans to dispel their excess energy by dancing to the new music in unconstrained ways. The new ragtime and jazz dances were easy to master unlike the polka or schottische, so between 1912 and 1914 over one hundred dances were composed to go with the music such as the Fox Trot, Cakewalk, Texas Tommy, Bunny Hug, Grizzly Bear, Horse Trot, Crab Steps, Kangaroo Dip, Camel Walk, The Snake, and Possum Trot. The music of ragtime, jazz, and blues served to inspire dance couples, popularize the Fox Trot, influence the creation of new dances, and create new

There is conjecture as to who the first leader was that organized a dance band. More than likely no one leader was responsible for creating dance bands, but they resulted from growing trends in syncopated music. The nationally known band leaders who began their careers in the early 1910s included James Reese Europe, Charles Elgar, Charley Straight, Earl Dabney, Paul Specht, Fred Waring, Meyer Davis and Ted Lewis. The significant pioneering leaders that continued into the 1920s were Art Hickman and Isham Jones. Hickman's band was unusual for having ten musicians prior to the early 1920s and innovative for using a string bass rather than tuba or brass bass, since it would not be largely copied for over a decade. Prior to 1912, the typical dance orchestra was made up of the violin as the lead instrument, piano, drums, and sometimes a banjo, their music was simple melodically, and band members usually worked part-time. As music patterns changed, and society audiences developed their own venues in better class hotels and dance halls, it meant full-time employment with great economic benefits for dance band members.

During the 1910s, new music for dance bands was spread by sheet music and primarily by records. These records were crude by current standards, but were popular and by 1912 double-sided discs were common. In addition, a large amount of commercial Ragtime was performed and recorded by pianists, banjoists and military bands. While nationally known dance bands had their boom years in the early

technology that ushered in the era of the great public ballrooms in 1920.²⁷

²⁶ Albert McCarthy, The Dance Era (New York: *The Hamlyn Publishing Group Limited*, 1974), 9.

²⁷ Lon A. Gault, *Ballroom Echoes* (Andrew Corbet Press, 1989), 1-4.

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1920s, many released records prior to this. There were many advertisements for records and record players throughout the years prior to the close of World War I. There were several record companies recording dance music including Victor and Columbia.²⁸

In the 1920s dance music received its greatest stimulus from the growth of radio. Radios and radio technology were in the research stage during World War I, and later had a remarkable increase in popularity. Radios went from being the hobby of the wealthy minority, to becoming a household item for the majority of Americans. This was due both to an increased demand in the national consumer culture for entertainment products and to technological developments that empowered radio manufacturers to sell them at a price affordable to most segments of society.²⁹ It was out of the new radio technology that the first practical microphones and amplifiers were invented. Capitalizing on these inventions led to the start of commercial radio broadcasting. This meant that no matter how the music was played, the sounds of the bands could be reproduced outside of the dance halls using the new technology of the amplifier and loudspeaker in a quality sound production that could not be reached even by the finest acoustic phonograph.³⁰ Most dance bands in the 1920s earned local reputations in connection with particular radio stations which led to national recognition from exposure on large networks. The goal of any dance band that had a chance to broadcast was to generate sufficient enthusiastic responses from listeners to acquire a sponsor. It did not take a sponsor long to realize that the rising popularity of dance bands gave them an appealing proposition, as a way to achieve large listening figures. The search for the largest attainable listening audience meant sponsors favored famous names and methods of established success. This meant that the great black bands were rarely featured on regularly sponsored shows while most well-known white bands of the 1920s had little difficulty getting sponsors and regularly scheduled programs with large audiences anxious to hear them live.

The popularity of radio caused the record industry to suffer temporarily. Despite providing a significant revenue and publicity for band leaders, several saw them as less important than the chance for regular broadcasts. By 1924, experimentation with electric recording was a means of competing with radio to gain a new prosperity. These technological developments were not made known immediately,

²⁸ McCarthy, 10-12, 15-16.

²⁹ McCarthy, 18-19.

³⁰ John Rublowsky, *Popular Music* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1967), 29.

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and record companies waited a year to advertise the new system after they began using it. American

and record companies waited a year to advertise the new system after they began using it. American Columbia and RCA Victor record companies jointly shared the patent with Western-Electric. The wait was due to fear that the improved sound attained by the electric process would render their entire catalogue outdated. The announcement resulted in the competition either buying the new techniques or going bankrupt, and manufacturers making improved gramophones to play the electric recordings for the greatest benefit.

The popularity gained for dance bands through radio and records meant that the audience would go to see them in live performances. In the 1920s, this meant that dance halls increased in towns with considerable populations. Several of the dance halls were ornately styled and a number were nationally famous due to radio broadcasts. The dance halls supplied a large amount of work to local musicians, and performed a significant role in producing centers in which touring bands could play for several days or just one night. The nationally known dance bands in the 1920s playing in public dance halls, night clubs, resorts, and hotel ballrooms included the Coon-Sanders Nighthawks; the bands of Jean Goldkette, Ben Pollack, Isham Jones, Paul Whiteman, George Olsen, Ben Bernie and Abe Lyman; the California Ramblers; and Fred Waring's Pennsylvanians. The famous African-American bands, such as McKinney's Cotton Pickers, Fletcher Henderson's, Luis Russell's, Bennie Moten's and Duke Ellington's were essentially big jazz bands rather than dance bands. Despite this, McKinney's and Russell's bands were playing for dancers in the late 1920s.

Although the 1920s ended with the country in the midst of a disastrous depression, the greatest big band boom in United States history was only six years away. After the Wall Street crash of 1929, every area of the entertainment industry, like all of society, was interested in surviving instead of expanding. While most of society was living in excessive poverty and a number of well-known bands were dissolving, many musicians were able to realize some economic security. This was attributed to the need for entertainment during disasters as a way to escape the harsh realities that make up ordinary life. During hard times buying a record or concert ticket appeared to be a inexpensive way to maintain morale and help one remember that better times were soon to come. Despite this, several record companies failed and a new company, Decca, was formed. In 1932, RCA Victor released several long-playing records, specially recorded instead of being created from 78pm master records, prior to the microgrove era. In the 1930s the technical growth of jukeboxes was a help to record companies. Although Automated Musical Instruments Company and J. P. Seeburg Company were producing and selling coin operated jukeboxes

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³¹ McCarthy, 29-30, 36, 56.

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with an electrically operated and amplified phonograph in 1927 and 1928 respectively, the other two giants in jukebox production, Wurlitzer and Rock-Ola, did not enter the market until 1933 and 1935 respectively. In 1938, the furniture approach to design of the jukebox was changed forever with the creation of translucent plastic, which resulted in the birth of the modern juke box with the novelty of illuminated plastic. The Golden Age of jukeboxes, 1937 to 1948, in terms of their design and significance to American culture was evidenced ³² as jukeboxes were used all over America, revealing new markets, advertising the bands and music, and setting the stage for the hit parade.

The bands of the 1930s were divided into two groups, the swing bands and the traditional, more conservative dance bands. The median between these were the commercial bands such as the successful bands led by pianists Carmen Carvello and Eddie Duchin. One of the most interesting and influential dance bands of the 1930s was the Casa Loma Orchestra, which was a transition between the swing dance orchestras and traditional dance bands. The many nationally known pre-swing and dance bands included the Dorsey Brothers Orchestra; the bands of Ray Noble, Guy Lombardo, Sammy Kaye, Kay Kyser, Shep Fields, Lawrence Welk, Gus Arnheim, Ted Weems, Leo Reisman, and Hal Kemp. The band Isham Jones led in the 1930s was musically his best; and the most successful all-female band was led by Ina Ray Hutton.³³

The era of swing bands began in August, 1935 with Benny Goodman's orchestra at the Los Angeles Palomar Ballroom. The bands varied in the amount of success they attained, the more successful bands included those of Benny Goodman, Tommy Dorsey, and Artie Shaw; and the vastly different approaches used by bands was typified in those of Benny Goodman, Bob Crosby, Woody Herman, and Charlie Barnet. The variance and framework of jazz and dance music within swing bands was determined by the band's leader and arrangers. To become better known, they developed an array of innovations in sound such as using three trombones instead of one in the Dorsey Brothers Orchestra, five trumpets instead of one, the addition of a harp, corning it up on the clarinet, and doubling up on the lead trumpet. Typically, the format in an evening of dancing consisted of the band playing twelve dances or sets, made

³² Vincent Lynch, American Jukebox-The Classic Years (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1990), 12-13.

³³ McCarthy, 56-57,61-62,64,66-67,69,70-73/

³⁴ McCarthy, 122-123.

³⁵ George T. Simon, *The Big Bands* (New York: McMillan Publishing Company, Inc., 1971), 141-157.

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up of three to five songs with several minutes between sets to ease the exchange of partners. The pattern of dances was decided by local custom. Commonly this meant the first dance and dances after the intermissions were Fox Trots followed by an arrangement for some Latin American sets and several waltzes. Sometimes, the choice of the dance program was left to the discretion of the band leader.³⁶

World War II and its aftermath created and shortly sustained an emotional environment more beneficial for the progress of extrovert music such as swing. Shortly after World War II broke out, many musicians were recruited together into service bands such as the Squadronaires, the No. l Balloon Centre Dance Orchestra popularly known as the Skyrockets, the Royal Army Ordnance Corps Blue Rockets, the naval Blue Mariners, the Joe Loss band, and the Rabin-Davis Band. Several of the popular civilian bands of the 1940s included bands led by Glen Miller, Benny Goodman, Guy Lombardo, Jimmy Dorsey, and Tommy Dorsey. These bands slowly moved from swing music to sentimental ballads, a process that continued to develop during the war. The gimmick of boogie woogie caused a shift away from ballads and into old-fashioned jazz. The war years also brought a dispute between the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers and the radio networks; and a contract between the record companies and the American Federation of Musicians to avoid a strike and set restrictions on record recordings. In addition, many vocalists who gained popularity before the war found the 1940s brought them box-office appeal equal to the band they associated with. ³⁹

During the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s dance halls were greatly attended due to the opportunities they brought customers to hear and dance to popular music, to mingle with friends, to carry on courtships, to develop new friendships, to adapt to peer expectations, and to observe and listen to popular bands. People were prompted to frequent ballrooms from listening to distant radio broadcasts and records of big bands; reading the releases from fan clubs; reading articles about band leaders, vocalists and sidemen in magazine and newspaper articles; and viewing the top bands in movies. Poster advertising in windows around towns and in subway and electric line cars, along with announcements at previous dances also attracted the public to ballrooms.

³⁶ Gault, 8-9.

³⁷ McCarthy, 146-147, 149, 157.

³⁸ Simon, 95.

³⁹ McCarthy, 157.

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Further, the mobility provided by the invention of the automobile prompted attendance at public ballrooms, but driving could be an adventure during the l920s and l930s. Thousands of roadsters, convertibles, Model Ts and Model As could be seen on country roads and city highways taking couples to the ballrooms. During the late l930s, this was assisted by car radios playing remote broadcasts from popular places such as the Meadowbrook, Glen Island Casino or Chicago's Aragon Ballroom, which aided passengers to relax before a night of dancing. During the l930s and l940s, public transportation was an acceptable way to travel in cities, so many men and women walked together to transportation stops to get to and from the ballrooms. In the l930s and l940s many young men and women went to the dances as singles where they usually gathered on one side of the ballroom, while the couples met on the opposite side. Typically, men asked the women to dance, which ultimately led to many couples meeting and getting married.

As a result of growth and development of dance music during the 1920s, 30s, and 40s, the necessity for constructing free standing ballrooms as well as ballrooms within hotels became an important business. Some of these ballrooms, such as Divine's Million Dollar Ballroom at the Eagles Club in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, were sponsored by fraternal organizations. Other ballrooms, such as the Silver Dome Ballroom and the Pla Mor in Kansas City, Missouri were built as independent ventures, which typically had a bar and restaurant facilities attached or near by. Likewise, ballroom facilities were installed in the union buildings of major universities for use by the student population.

In the late 1940s, the decline in dance music was seen despite a brief interest in big bands in the early 1950s. By the late 1950s, adverse developments in the popular music industry meant that the big band era would become part of history. One additional development was that the wartime tax on entertainment clubs was not rescinded. This meant that the following results occurred: many owners could not afford large bands; television was less of a benefit to bands; and country music and rhythm and blues or rock 'n' roll came to dominate and shape popular entertainment in upcoming years.⁴¹

Although the era of the big bands has ended, the Silver Dome Ballroom still offers popular dance music, occasional dance lessons, and fully catered wedding receptions. Since the grand reopening for the

⁴⁰ Gault, 5-8, 12, 29-31, 140-141.

⁴¹ McCarthy, 162.

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Silver Dome's 60th anniversary in July, 1993, the current owners, Louis and Shirley Kessler, have offered a variety of dance music including country with line dance lessons, polka, waltz, and rock'n'roll. ⁴² Hopefully, the Kesslers will continue to provide Neillsville and the surrounding area with music for dancing at the Silver Dome Ballroom well into the future.

Architectural Significance

The Silver Dome Ballroom is locally significant under Criterion C for its unique roof construction known as an engineered lamella roof. The lamella roof was invented in Dessau, Germany in 1908 by City Architect Herr Zollinger. Zollinger patented his design for roof and wall construction in the United States in 1924. This architectural construction was initially used in the United States in 1925. The patent was assigned to Lamella Roof Syndicate, Inc. of New York in 1928. To use the design in the United States, the builder would have to pay a royalty to the holder of the patent. If the royalty was not paid, the builder would be subject to infringement liabilities or violating the patent. The Keller brothers paid \$1,000 to use the patent to build the lamella roof of the Silver Dome Ballroom.

A lamella roof is a frame made up of a series of intersecting skewed arches. These arches consist of relatively short members known as lamellas bolted or welded together at an angle, so that each is intersected by two comparable adjacent members at its midpoint to form a network of interlocking diamonds. This network of lamellas creates a structure of mutually braced and strengthened units, arching over the structure between supports. When the arched lamellas are combined with sheathing, it makes a diaphragm that is resistant to vertical and lateral loads. The lamella roof has been constructed in a variety of shapes such as spherical domes, parabolas, sections of cones, and hyperbolic parabolas.

⁴² Pat Adamson, "The Chance to Dance Again," *Leader-Telegram*, 5/9/93, 9E. Geri Parlin, "Under Neillsville Dome, It's Not-So-Strictly Ballroom" *LaCrosse Tribute* 7/17/93, 1B.

⁴³ Dr. G.R. Kiewitt, The New Look of Lamella Roofs, *Architectural Record*, February 1960, 226.

⁴⁴ Patent Number 1,483,037, 2/5/24, U.S. Patent Office; Patent Number 1,659,471, 2/14/28, U.S. Patent Office

⁴⁵ Zimmerman, 28.

⁴⁶ American Institute of Timber Construction Englewood, Colorado, *Timber Construction Manual* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1974), 5.

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Silver Dome Ballroom
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The efficient use of the triangle for stability in the surface pattern of lamella diamonds creates the large unobstructed span which can withstand excessive wind loading along with fire and seismic disturbances. Builders and architectural engineers are attracted to the experimentation with structural geography in architectural engineering. This structural design uses lamellas, short lengths of wood, in a broad spanned dome created with tons of bolts and nails, and that the construction may be built with nearly all unskilled workers was a further benefit to builders and architectural engineers. Ultimately, the geodesic dome, created by Buckminster Fuller, improved upon the lamella dome.⁴⁷

The Keller brothers hired Cornel Moen as the carpenter of the project to build the Silver Dome Ballroom. Moen was a native of Neillsville, Wisconsin. Walter Keller and his brothers chose the lamella roof design, a new, experimental building concept of a dome structure for dance halls or large auditoriums, that they found employed by an engineer in Madison, Wisconsin. It is possible that they were also influenced by the readily available and somewhat inexpensive lumber supply in northern Wisconsin and that the short lamellas could easily be cut on site. Moen worked with the Kellers to adjust the design, so that the ends of the lamellas were round rather than squared off for better acoustics. Further information about Cornel Moen is unavailable.

Many lamella roof structures have been built in the United States, however there are only five known lamella roof dance halls in Wisconsin. These are the Waverly Beach Ballroom in the Town of Harrison, Calumet County, built from 1929 to 1933 and later demolished; the Dance Hall at Mayflower Lake in the Birnamwood area, Marathon County, built from 1929 to 1933 and its current status is unknown; the Dance Hall in Soldiers Grove, Crawford County, built in 1934 and its current status is unknown; the Dance Hall in Pulaski, Brown County, designed by Wisconsin architect Max Hanish and built in 1933; and the Silver Dome Ballroom in Neillsville, Clark County, built in 1933. Today, the two

⁴⁷ Makowski, 30-33, 293-294.

⁴⁸ Zimmerman, 28.

⁴⁹ White, 14.

⁵⁰ Site visit.

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Town of Hewett, Clark County, Wisconsin
dance halls known to be standing are the dance hall in Pulaski, Wisconsin and the Silver Dome Ballroom in Neillsville, Wisconsin. 51

The Silver Dome Ballroom was built in the moderne architectural design. This design followed the Art Deco period of the 1920s. Despite the Great Depression's sobering effects, it forced architects to more imaginatively use the limited resources available in their designs. Moderne design was used extensively throughout the United States during the 1930s. It placed less stress on heavy ornamentation and accentuated smooth surfaces, weighty cubic and cylindrical volumes, horizontality, and curving shapes. In moderne designed buildings the windows are grouped in bands and the spandrels are shown as continuous horizontals. The moderne design of the Silver Dome Ballroom creates an architectural expression of structural details, such as the roof structure and exterior buttresses. The Silver Dome Ballroom is architecturally significant for its method of construction as an excellent example of moderne architectural design using the new experimental architectural engineering method of the lamella roof.

The Silver Dome Ballroom represents an era of architectural and structural innovation brought on by the harsh economic realities of the Great Depression. The difficult building climate encouraged architects, engineers, and builders to experiment with new materials, techniques, and processes. Social and cultural changes resulting from technology such as the advent of the automobile and radio broadcasting created a demand for new building types such as the Silver Dome Ballroom. The lamella was one of a number of structural systems such as the wooden glue-lam arch and steel bar-web joist developed to allow for the broad, unencumbered spaces required for many of these new uses. The Silver Dome Ballroom may be seen as a significant precursor to many open span contemporary structures, such as shopping centers and stadiums.

Many people in Neillsville remember dancing every Saturday night, such as one woman and her friends who remember going ballroom dancing at the Silver Dome "to find our husbands." For many people in Neillsville and Clark County the Silver Dome Ballroom provides many happy memories and

⁵¹ Information on file in the Historic Preservation Division at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison.

⁵²Carole Rifkind, A Field Guide to American Architecture (New York: A Plume Book New American Library, 1980), 218, 220-221.

⁵³ Zimmerman, 28.

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Town of Hewett, Clark County, Wisconsin
continues to be a place for making joyful wedding memories. The Silver Dome Ballroom should be preserved for the use and enjoyment of future generations.

Silver Dome Ballroom	Clark	Wisconsin
Name of Property	County and State	
9. Major Bibliographic References		

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

Previous Documentation on File (National Park Service):

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

Primary location of additional data:

X State Historic Preservation Office

- _ Other State Agency
- _ Federal Agency
- _ Local government
- _ University
- _ Other

Name of repository:

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Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title	Ann Fuhrman, Graduate Student/Interr	1			
organization	State Historical Society			date	12/31/96
street & number	816 State Street			telephone	608/264-6500
city or town	Madison	state	Wisconsin	zip code	53706

Silver Dome Ballroom

Clark

Wisconsin

Name of Property

County and State

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional Items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

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

name/title	Louis and Shirley Kessler				
organization	Silver Dome Ballroom			date	12/31/96
street&number	N3565 Fairground Avenue			telephone	715/743-2743
city or town	Neillsville	state	Wisconsin	zip code	54456

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects, (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Section 9 Page 1

Silver Dome Ballroom
Town of Hewett, Clark County, Wisconsin

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Section 10 Page 1

Silver Dome Ballroom
Town of Hewett, Clark County, Wisconsin

Verbal Boundary Description:

Parcel of land 3.13 acres in the northwest northwest, 13-24-3W commencing at the northwest corner of subsection and running due south 715 feet more or less then due east 33 feet to the east right of way line of the town road as laid out and the point of beginning then continuing due east 150 feet then due south 200 feet to the north right of way line of US Highway 10 as now laid out, then 80 degrees 10 seconds east along the north right of way line of said US Highway 332.94 feet north 9 degrees fifty seconds east 182.57 feet then north 53 degrees 36 seconds then west 632.69 feet to the east right of way line of said town road then due south along the right of way line 298.71 feet to the beginning, except beginning at a point 715 feet due south and 33 feet east of the northwest corner of the northwest northwest running then east 150 feet then north 188.1 feet more or less to the southerly line of old US Highway 10 then 53 degrees 36 seconds west a distance of 186.3 feet more or less to the east line of Town Road situated along the west line of said quarter section and south 298.71 feet to the point of beginning, except the highway right of way described in volume 495 page 214 in section 12 Township 24 NR3W.

Boundary Justification:

Property boundary encompasses the entire parcel historically associated with the property.

National Park Service Form 10-900-a (Rev. 8-86) Wisconsin Word Processing Format (Approved 1/92)

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Section Photos Page 1

Silver Dome Ballroom Town of Hewett, Clark County, Wisconsin

All information identical except as indicated below for individual photographs:

The Silver Dome Ballroom
Town of Hewett, Clark County, Wisconsin
Photographed by Jim Draeger
Negatives at the State Historic Society of WI
Photograph 1 of 7
Building camera facing northwest

Photograph 2 of 7
Main entrance camera facing west southwest

Photograph 3 of 7
Band entrance camera facing southwest

Photograph 4 of 7 Interior facing bar area camera facing north

Photograph 5 of 7 Interior facing bandstand camera facing south

Photograph 6 of 7 Bar area camera facing north

Photograph 7 of 7 Detail of construction camera facing south