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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 Cushing Land Agency Building  
other names/site number Baker Land and Title Company Building St. Croix Falls Historical Society Museum

2. Location

street & number	106 South Washington Street	N/A	not for publication
city or town	St. Croix Falls	N/A	vicinity
state Wisconsin	code WI	county Polk	code 095 zip code 54024

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  nationally statewide  locally. (  See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

7/5/05  
Date

Signature of certifying official/Title  
State Historic Preservation Officer-WI

State or 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

Cushing Land Agency Building

Polk County

Wisconsin

Name of Property

County and State

**4. National Park Service 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.  
 determined not eligible for the National Register.  
 See continuation sheet.  
 removed from the National Register.  
 other, (explain:)

*Elson H. Beall*

9.1.05

*pen*

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

**5. Classification**

Ownership of Property (check as many boxes as as apply)	Category of Property (Check only one box)	Number of Resources within Property (Do not include previously listed resources in the count)	
<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	contributing	noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	1	buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> structure		sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> site		structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object		objects
		1	0 total

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

N/A

Number of contributing resources  
is previously listed in the National Register

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE/Business

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE/Business

RECREATION AND CULTURE/Museum

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE VICTORIAN/Queen Anne

**Materials**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Foundation STONE

walls WEATHERBOARD

roof ASPHALT

Other BRICK

**Narrative Description**

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

Cushing Land Agency Building  
Name of Property

Polk County  
County and State

Wisconsin

## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for the National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

### Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT

COMMERCE

ARCHITECTURE

### Period of Significance

1882-1955

### Significant Dates

1882, 1904

### Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked)

N/A

### Cultural Affiliation

N/A

### Architect/Builder

Radcliff, Abraham M.

### Narrative Statement of Significance

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

Cushing Land Agency Building  
Name of Property

Polk County  
County and State

Wisconsin

### 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:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

### 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property Less than 1 acre

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

1 15 527880 5028380  
Zone Easting Northing

3 \_\_\_\_\_  
Zone Easting Northing

2 \_\_\_\_\_  
Zone Easting Northing

4 \_\_\_\_\_  
Zone Easting Northing

See Continuation Sheet

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

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

### 11. Form Prepared By

name/title	Marlys A. Svendsen.	date	October 2004
organization	Svendsen Tyler, Inc	telephone	715/469-3300
street & number	N3834 Deep Lake Road	zip code	54870
city or town	Sarona	state	WI

Cushing Land Agency Building

Polk County

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.)

<b>name/title</b>	Ed Emerson, City Administrator	<b>date</b>	November 2004
<b>organization</b>	City of St. Croix Falls	<b>telephone</b>	715/483-3929
<b>street &amp; number</b>	710 Highway 35 South	<b>zip code</b>	54024
<b>city or town</b>	St. Croix Falls	<b>state</b>	WI

**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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**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

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**Cushing Land Agency Building,  
St. Croix Falls, Polk County, Wisconsin**

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**Narrative Description**

*Site:* The Cushing Land Agency Building<sup>1</sup> is located on the east side of South Washington Street at the corner of State Street in the city of St. Croix Falls, Polk County, Wisconsin. Washington Street roughly parallels the north-south course of the St. Croix River, which is located approximately a block and a half to the west. St. Croix Falls, which bears the name of both the river and community, is located about 500 feet up river of the Cushing Land Agency Building. This is also the location for the Northern States Power (NSP) Company Hydroelectric Dam now known as the Excel Energy Dam. The St. Croix River and its course have been included within the boundaries of the St. Croix National Wild and Scenic Riverway since 1968.<sup>2</sup> Washington Street serves as the principal commercial street in the community with business blocks and public buildings extending for four blocks between Illinois Street on the south and Massachusetts Street on the north with isolated residences in between.

The parcel containing the Cushing Land Agency Building measures roughly 24 feet by 68 feet. The parcel is level along the west edge and gradually slopes up from Washington Street towards the alley located midway between Washington and Adams streets. The change in elevation on the building site is approximately 5 feet. A wide concrete sidewalk extends along the west edge of the property with a narrower sidewalk present along the south edge.

State Road 87 follows the route of Washington Street and is the primary route through St. Croix Falls from north to south. It is a two-lane asphalt paved road with curb and gutter and parking lanes. Washington Street is 60 feet wide with parallel parking located along both sides. The business district includes a mix of one and two-story frame and masonry buildings dating from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century through the 1950s with a few from more recent decades. Most buildings on both sides of Washington Street have been altered through the years as a result of period updating or fire repairs.

The blocks immediately east of the Cushing Building continue to rise steeply from the St. Croix River. They contain a mix of parking lots, one and two-story single-family or multi-family dwellings dating from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century through the 1960s, commercial buildings, and churches. Most residences are of frame construction. The blocks west of the commercial strip along Washington Street drop steeply towards the St. Croix River and contain a mix of storage lots, parking lots, and single-family dwellings. The State Fish Hatchery is located several blocks southwest along the river and the hydroelectric power plant and dam and a city-developed scenic overlook are located several blocks to the northwest. An

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<sup>1</sup>The Cushing Land Agency Building was later known as the "Baker Land and Title Company Building." Although the building was constructed after Caleb Cushing's death and the building's association with the Cushing name continued until after Major Baker retired and his son Harry D. Baker took over operation. The historic name used throughout this nomination reflects the building's name during its first three decades.

<sup>2</sup>The Federal St. Croix National Wild and Scenic Riverway Bill passed in 1968 for the portion of the St. Croix River north of St. Croix Falls. In 1972 the lower segment became "the Scenic" section and the upper segment was designated as "the Wild" section.

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Cushing Land Agency Building,  
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historic view appears below taken in ca. 1910 taken from Minnesota looking east across the St. Croix River towards the power plant and dam with the city of St. Croix Falls in the background.<sup>3</sup> The Cushing Land Agency Building is not visible but its approximate location appears beneath the arrow.



*Contributing & Noncontributing Resources:* The Cushing Land Agency Building is the only contributing resource included in the nomination.

*Building Description:* The Cushing Land Agency Building is an example of a late 19<sup>th</sup> century one-story frame commercial building built in the Queen Anne-Eastlake Style. Small-scale buildings in frontier communities such as the Cushing Building frequently used this style. When originally constructed in 1882 for the Cushing Land Agency, the building measured just 16 feet across the front or west façade and had a depth of 32 feet extending along State Street. An incomplete set of drawings and hand-written specifications for the original 1882 building survive. They were prepared by St. Paul, Minnesota architect Abraham M. Radcliff<sup>4</sup> or representatives of his office. Builders identified in

<sup>3</sup>"Historic View of St. Croix Falls," Available at Home Page for St. Croix Falls Chamber of Commerce <http://www.stcroixfallschamber.com/>, accessed September 27, 2004.

<sup>4</sup>Two spellings have been found for the architect—Radcliff and Radcliffe. The former spelling appears on the plans for the Cushing Land Agency Building and is, as a result, used throughout this nomination. However, the latter spelling is more frequently found in accounts of Radcliff's career and design work in Minnesota.

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**Cushing Land Agency Building,  
St. Croix Falls, Polk County, Wisconsin**

newspaper accounts included Thomas Peck and Charles Carlson. Front and side elevation drawings appear on pages 5 and 6. A one-story rear addition was likely part of a "complete renovation" referred to in an 1887 issue of the *St. Croix Valley Standard*. This addition sustained fire damage in January 1904. Soon after the fire, the 1887 addition was replaced by the present 28 by 24-foot rear addition. The brick walled storage vault set back from the front façade along the north wall was part of the 1886-1887 renovation but not within the addition damaged by fire.

The Cushing Land Agency Building has no basement and is built on a low 16-inch wide rubble foundation that surrounds a shallow crawl space. According to Radcliff's specifications, the foundation was intended to be "well bedded, bonded and laid in good lime mortar." Framing materials for the superstructure include 1 by 6-inch plates, 2 by 10-inch floor joists, 2 by 6-inch ceiling joists, and 2 by 4-inch studs and rafters. All floor joists and studs are set 16 inch to center and the rafters set 24 inch to center. The exterior walls are covered with a combination of panels and lap siding on the front façade and tongue-and-groove wainscoting and lap siding on the south façade. According to the specifications the lap siding was to be laid "4½" to the weather." Additional decorative elements on the front façade include four evenly spaced partially fluted pilasters, a course of dentils along the cornice, and a closed gable end (also lined with dentils) surmounted by a flat base and wrought iron cresting. The current cresting was fabricated during the restoration completed in 2002 using Radcliff's original elevation drawing. Its pattern contains quarter sections of a boat wheel separated by vertical staffs topped by finials. The building's front gable roof has a low pitch and was originally covered with wood shingles. It is currently covered with asphalt shingles installed during the 2002 building restoration. A short side-gable roof extends over the vault.

Openings in the Cushing Land Agency Building's front façade include the original front door located in the south bay. It contains a combination of square and rectangular recessed wood panels and a single rectangular glazed panel measuring 30 by 38 inches. The north bay has a double-hung window with 36 by 34-inch one-over-one sash. The center bay is clad in lapboard and was reserved for posting small signs and advertising broadsides, or according to one contemporary account, a painting of company founder, Caleb Cushing. This newspaper comment may have been speculative or in jest.

The State Street façade originally had two widely spaced one-over-one windows of similar dimensions to the window on the front facade. When the first addition was added to the building, likely during its first decade, a second matching window was added in the private office facing State Street and a rear entrance door was placed in a shed-roofed addition. Following the 1904 fire, the rebuilt rear wing incorporated a doorway with a transom in the same location with a pair of one-over-one double-hung windows in the new, larger rear addition. Prior to completion of the restoration in 2002, this original doorway had been closed and another added in the rear wing. The original doorway was reopened as part of the restoration and the non-original opening closed. The rear or east façade of the rear addition contains a continuous wall of six similar one-over-one double-hung windows above the wainscoting. A concrete pad for the air compressor for the AC system is located at the rear of the building with a short concrete retaining wall topped by a metal railing accommodating the change in elevation.



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The interior floor plan of the Cushing Building shows many of the original elements described in Radcliff's specifications and important changes made in subsequent rehabilitations. The floor plan in the original front half of the building contains a room that likely served as both an office and waiting area. It extends across the full front of the building with the exterior entrance at the south end of the west wall. Interior passage doorways lead to Major Baker's office located along the south wall facing State Street and a hallway that extends along the north side of the building. All doorways have five panel oak doors.

The most prominent feature of the front room is a large built-in Eastlake Style storage cabinet installed along the south wall. Radcliff provided fairly detailed specifications for its location, design, and finish that are not reflected in the construction of the finished cabinet. Instead of being located adjacent to the central chimney, it was built along the south wall where it could be substantially larger. Instead of glazed doors in the upper half as specified by Radcliff, it contains wood paneled doors. Other details such as the design for the plain molded cornice and the placement of the drawer height as "a continuation of the wainscoting cap" faithfully reflect his specifications. The front room measures approximately 15 by 14½ feet. The walls have fluted oak wainscoting and picture rail with painted plaster upper walls. The openings have Eastlake Style bull's eye corner blocks also fabricated of oak. Flooring is tongue-and-groove maple that was refinished during the 2002 restoration. The ceiling was lowered at this time from 12 feet to 11 feet in the front room to allow installation of recessed ductwork with the new ceiling surface clad in gypsum board. The previous owner had removed the original light fixtures throughout the building, and a period reproduction fixture was installed in the front room with similar fixtures placed elsewhere in the building during the restoration.

Two doorways are located along the east wall of the front room. The north door leads to the hallway that extends along the north side of the building. This narrow corridor retains its original 12-foot ceiling height and horsehair plaster. The lower walls in the hallway are clad in a wider soft wood wainscoting that, like the plaster, is painted. A brick walled vault is accessed off the north side of the hallway through a segmental arched opening. The custom steel door bears the name of the safe manufacturer, Hall's Safe & Lock Company of Cincinnati. It was installed in 1886 according to an article published on February 18, 1886 in the *St. Croix Valley Standard*, which stated that Baker was installing a large fire-proof vault in his land office and that it was the first vault in Polk County.

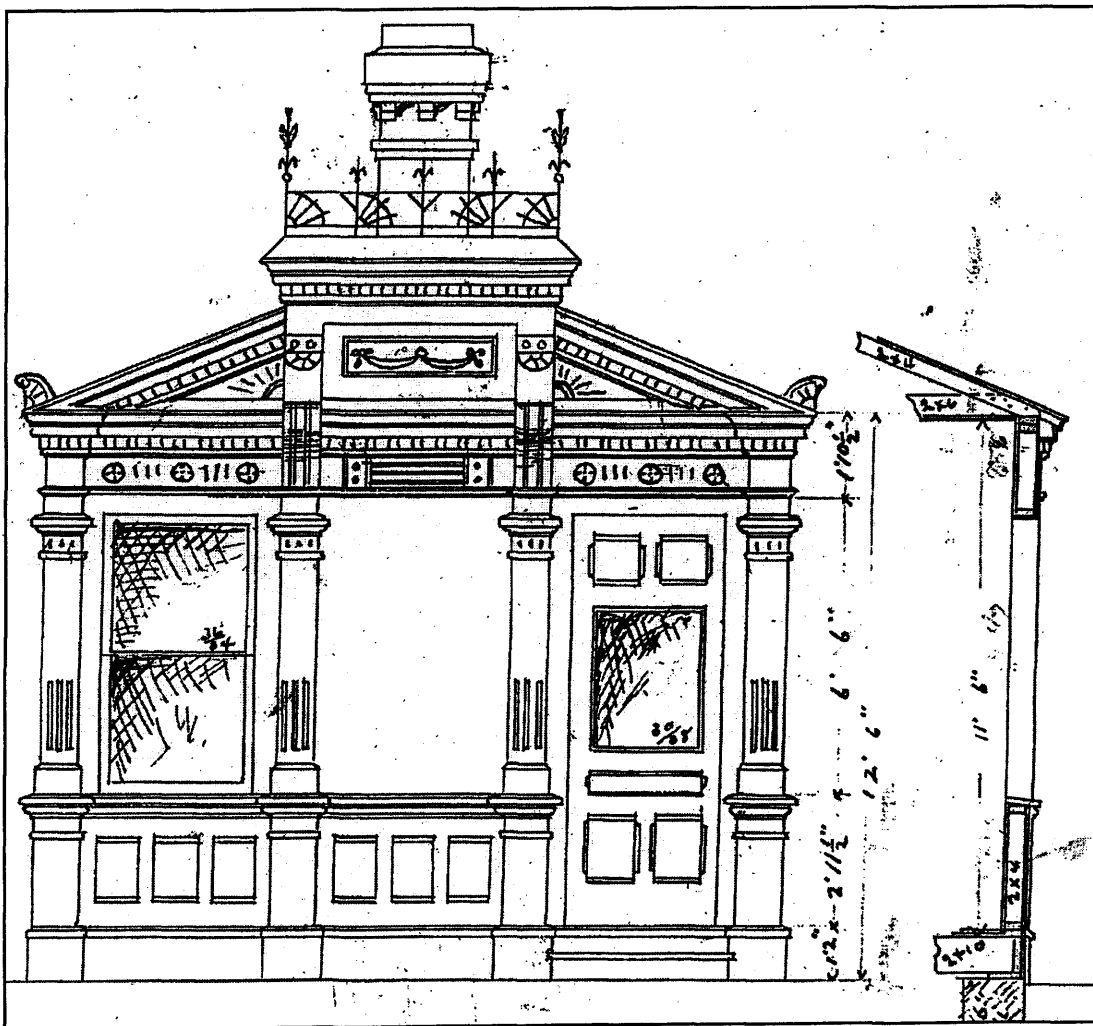
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**Cushing Land Agency Building,  
St. Croix Falls, Polk County, Wisconsin**

**“Front Elevation” for Cushing Land Agency Building, 1882**  
(Architectural Drawing by Abraham M. Radcliff from St. Croix Falls Historical Society Collection, St. Croix Falls, Wisconsin)



The second doorway along the east wall of the front room leads to the principal office in the building commonly referred to as “Major Baker’s office.” The room measures 9½ by 17 feet with two windows facing State Street. Additional doorways from this office open onto the north hallway and the rear entrance hall. Like the front room, this office has fluted oak wainscoting and Eastlake Style oak trim around the openings with bull’s eye corner blocks. The balance of the walls and ceiling are the original horsehair plaster and oak picture rail trim. The original maple floor remains in place.

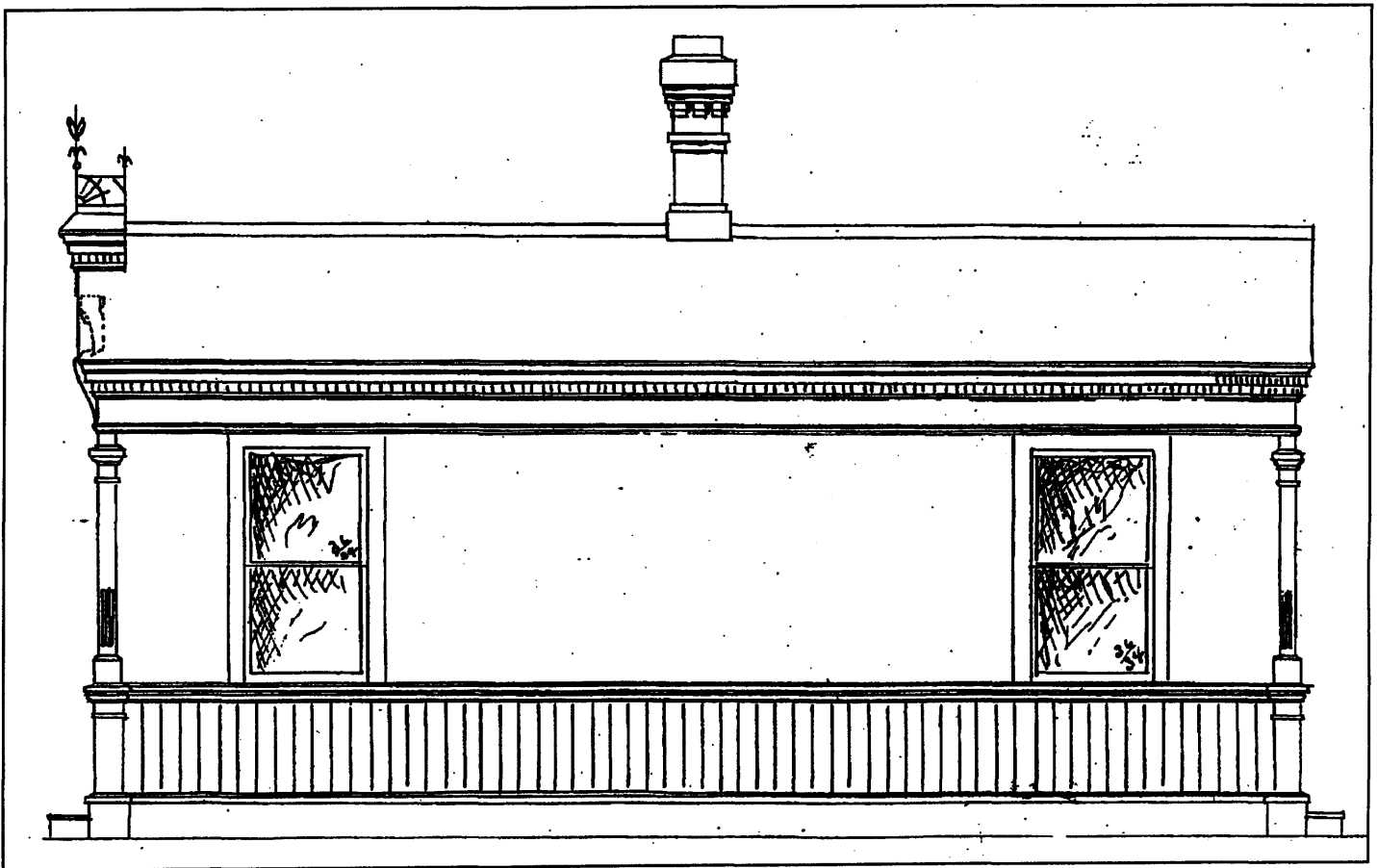
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St. Croix Falls, Polk County, Wisconsin**

**“Side Elevation” for Cushing Land Agency Building, 1882**  
(Architectural Drawing by Abraham M. Radcliff from St. Croix Falls Historical Society Collection, St. Croix Falls, Wisconsin)



The rear addition built after the 1904 fire contains additional office space. Its rear entrance hall serves as an entrance vestibule for the rear addition's offices as well as Major Baker's office. This rehabilitated area has painted wainscoting and plaster walls, a tile floor, and an acoustic tile ceiling. A small storage closet in this area also houses the current chimney. The entrance vestibule adjoins the north hallway forming an L-shaped corridor from the front room into the rear addition. The other rooms in the rear addition include a modernized restroom, a former office area now designated as the Emma Fisk Reading Room, and a former private office used by Harry Baker now used for museum administration and storage space. The two latter rooms are elevated two steps above the front of the building. The reading room is located in the south half of the addition and functions as a conference room and library space for the St. Croix Falls Historical Society. Walls have a high beaded

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**Cushing Land Agency Building,  
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wainscoting with a painted finish. A non-original exterior doorway located along the south wall was removed during the 2002 restoration. The reading room measures approximately 15 feet by 17 feet and has a maple floor.

Harry Baker's former office is located in the northeast corner of the addition. The walls separating the reading room from his office are constructed of high wainscoting with glazed panels in the upper half to allow Harry to monitor his staff. The bank of six windows across the rear façade provides generous lighting for both rooms. Harry Baker's office measures approximately 7½ feet by 11½ feet and also has a maple floor.

In 1959, according to an account in the *St. Croix Falls Standard-Press*, siding was added to the exterior of the Cushing Building. The material was wood or Masonite cladding with a vertical channel-cut design. The project likely involved removal of the decorative metal cresting on the gable peak. (see photo on page 35) On December 31, 1999 the Cushing Building was acquired by the St. Croix Falls Historical Society. Plans were made for restoration using historic photographs and copies of Radcliff's original plans. The channel-cut siding was removed from the exterior revealing the original clapboard siding and decorative wood trim intact. Deteriorated sections were repaired and new metal cresting was fashioned for the front gable peak based on the original building plans. Interior work included new wiring and electrical fixtures, plaster repairs, installation of central air conditioning, painting, and floor refinishing. Floor plan changes included reopening of the rear entrance door facing State Street to provide ADA access. David and John Cavallin completed primary work on the restoration with the assistance of volunteers.

A floor plan for the Cushing Land Agency Building as it currently appears is on the following page and historic views of the building as well as a view of the building prior to the 2002 restoration appear at the end of the nomination.

*Summary:* The Cushing Land Agency Building is a one-story frame commercial building located in downtown St. Croix Falls. Designed by architect Abraham M. Radcliff, the building is an example of the Queen Anne-Eastlake Style. The building's decorative finish includes a paneled front with fluted pilasters framing the openings, decorative millwork and dentils finishing the gable end, and ornamental iron cresting atop the gable peak. Together, the design and ornamentation make the Cushing Land Agency Building a downtown landmark.

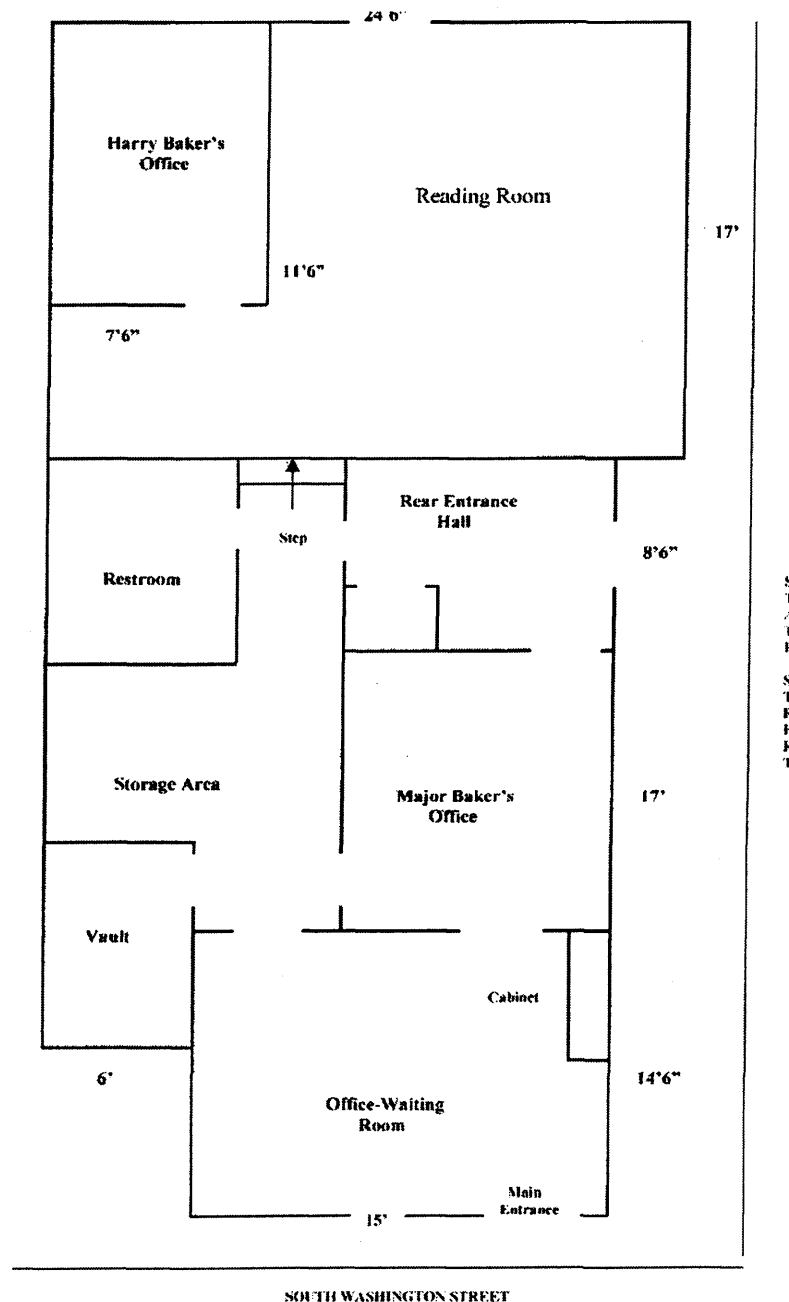
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**Cushing Land Agency Building,  
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FLOOR PLAN - Cushing Land Agency Building ← N End of Description



SOUTH WASHINGTON STREET

of Physical Appearance \_\_\_ Insert Statement of Significance

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**Cushing Land Agency Building**  
St. Croix Falls, Polk County, Wisconsin

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**Statement of Significance:**

*Summary:* The Cushing Land Agency Building is significant locally under National Register Criteria A and C. Under Criterion A, it derives significance from its association with the settlement of the St. Croix River Valley in the 1880s and continuing through the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Built for the Cushing Land Agency, later known as the Baker Land & Title Company, the building was the center for the major real estate company in Polk County and a party to property sales, banking, and insurance transactions for more than 100 years. Under Criterion C, the Cushing Land Agency Building is eligible for the National Register as an example of a small Queen Anne-Eastlake Style commercial building design by an early and important Minnesota architect, Abraham M. Radcliff.

*Historical Overview:* The community of St. Croix Falls was first settled in 1838 just two years after the Wisconsin Territory was formed. The town was platted in 1857, but not incorporated as a village until 1888 and as a city in 1958. The town was located at the foot of St. Croix Falls just upstream of the Dalles on the St. Croix River, a highly picturesque location on the western edge of Polk County in west central Wisconsin. Located about 50 miles northeast of Minneapolis and St. Paul and about 100 miles south of Duluth, St. Croix Falls was named for the falls.

Alleged to be the first permanent white settlement on the St. Croix River, St. Croix Falls was established by a group of land and lumbering speculators who came from Minnesota, Iowa, and Illinois. Seven men formed the St. Croix Falls Lumber Company in 1838 and began building a log boom, dam, and mill at the town site that year. The company's plans were slow to materialize. Disputes over land ownership among the partners and a shortage of financial backing immersed the company in controversy. After the mill was finally completed in 1842, a flood the following year destroyed the boom and millrace. Although construction of new mills shifted downstream in subsequent years, interest persisted in the St. Croix Falls Lumber Company and its waterpower resources.

In 1845 Caleb Cushing, a Massachusetts lawyer and the representative for a group of wealthy Boston investors, visited western Wisconsin on behalf of the newly formed St. Croix and Lake Superior Mineral Company. Formed to pursue copper mining opportunities along the St. Croix River that were identified in an early 1845 federal mining report, the venture proved unsuccessful for its intended purpose. However, the visit to St. Croix Falls prompted Cushing's general interest in the area, and the following year, Cushing led a group that acquired the interests of the St. Croix Falls Lumber Company including its preemption rights, land, mills, mill privileges, dam, booms, buildings and fixtures. Residents of the region were pleased with the prospect for a substantial outlay of capital signaled by the Cushing group's acquisition. This failed to materialize, however, when both national events and family affairs drew Cushing's attention. In Cushing's absence, disputes ensued over ownership of the company's land claims with numerous cases making their way through Wisconsin courts. In a move to establish better control over his Wisconsin holdings, Cushing formed the Cushing Land

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**Cushing Land Agency Building**  
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Agency in 1854. A series of successive agents retained by Cushing over the next twenty years managed the lumber company property and his other regional holdings. By 1869, these holdings included most of the land within the city of St. Croix Falls, the waterpower property of the St. Croix River falls, and about 33,000 acres of unimproved timberlands in northern Polk County. Cushing acquired most of the land in 1869 from the State of Wisconsin under provisions of the Morrill Land Grant Act. Groups of Swedish and Danish immigrants arrived in later years settling on the "Cushing Lands" as these agricultural college lands in Polk County came to be known.<sup>5</sup>

Cushing's attempts to turn his absentee investment in St. Croix Falls into a success had been impeded through the years by his inability to retain competent managers and land agents. Following the Civil War, Cushing finally retained a skilled agent, Major Joseph Stannard (J.S.) Baker, who had served as a regimental commander during the war. Suffering from war injuries that included a partial hearing loss, Baker established a series of unsuccessful business enterprises in Lansing, Michigan after the war. In 1874 while working in the state land office in Lansing, he was recruited by Caleb Cushing to serve as agent for the Cushing Land Agency. Baker went west to Hudson, Wisconsin where his brother Henry C. Baker, an attorney, was in partnership with Senator John C. Spooner, and after a brief stay went up river to St. Croix Falls. Baker relocated his family to St. Croix Falls from Michigan the following spring. By 1875, the Cushing Land Agency's land holdings totaled approximately 45,000 acres including most of the undeveloped portions of the town plat of St. Croix Falls and the waterpower property associated with the falls itself. Baker's business and land management skills were recognized by townspeople soon after his arrival as he went about reorganizing the complex operations of the Cushing Land Agency. "Baker at once adopted methodical and able plans for bringing order out of the financial chaos. His appearance marked the end of thirty years of mismanagement resulting from absentee landlordism, controversial claims, lack of policy, and negligence."<sup>6</sup>

Baker's business prowess was paying off for Cushing by the end of the 1870s. Land purchased through the Morrill Land Grant Act at \$1.25 per acre was being advertised by the Cushing Land Agency for sale at \$3.00 to \$5.00 per acre. Total timber output in the St. Croix Valley had reached 200 million board feet annually by 1879. Baker managed some timber sales on behalf of his employer as well as the rental and sale of stumpage lands. Prospects looked good for Cushing's other land investments with a rail connection linking Minneapolis and St. Paul with Taylors Falls on the opposite bank of the St. Croix River nearing completion. This transportation link along with other rail routes planned for the east side of the river would dramatically improve St. Croix Falls' prospects for commerce and settlement.

Then, several disasters befell the Cushing Land Agency. The first was Caleb Cushing's death in 1879.

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<sup>5</sup>"Register of the Baker Land and Title Company Records, 1879-1958," State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Archives Division, River Falls, Wisconsin, p.2.

<sup>6</sup>"Alice Smith, "Caleb Cushing's Investments in the St. Croix Valley," *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, September 1944, p.18.

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Baker continued as agent managing the lands held by the Cushing family until the estate was settled some years later. The disputed land claims of the St. Croix Falls Lumber Company remained unresolved until some years after Cushing's death. The second disaster came the year following Cushing's death. At the time, the Cushing Land Agency's offices were located on the first floor of the Cushing House, a three-story frame hotel (nonextant), located on Washington Street, St. Croix Falls' main business thoroughfare. The hotel building also housed the offices of the United States Land Office at the time. In May 1880 a disastrous fire destroyed the Cushing House. The Cushing Agency's land records were saved by Major Baker's heroic efforts to retrieve the company safe in the midst of the fire. After the fire, operations of the Cushing Land Agency were temporarily moved to the Baker residence (nonextant).

The following year, plans were made by Major Baker for the erection of a new building to house the land agency. Abraham M. Radcliff, a well-known architect from St. Paul, Minnesota, was retained to prepare specifications and plans for a new frame office building. It was to be located a half-block south of the former hotel at the intersection of St. Croix Falls' main street – Washington Street – and the state road that entered town from the southeast – State Street. This prominent, centrally-located intersection was well chosen by Baker for the land agency's new quarters.

Radcliff's plans were completed sometime during 1881 or early 1882, and construction began in the spring of 1882. Carpenters Thomas Peck and Charles Carlson were retained as builders with Major Baker most likely serving as supervisor. Progress on the building was noted in regular accounts that appeared in the *Dalles of St. Croix* during the spring and early summer of 1882:

- March 31, 1882 – “J.S. Baker will put up an office across the street from the land office.” [probably referred to the U.S. Land Office]
- May 12, 1882 – “J.S. Baker has the rock on the ground for the underpinning of his new Land office.”
- May 19, 1882 – “J.S. Baker has the foundation laid and the lumber on the ground for his new Land office.”
- May 26, 1882 – “Thomas Peck and Charles Carlson are the workmen on Baker's office.”
- June 9, 1882 – “H. [sic] S. Baker is getting along finely with his new office. It is rather contracted though for a broad gauge town.”
- June 23, 1882 – “J.S. Baker's Land office, of unique design, is nearing completion.”
- June 30, 1882 – “The dome [base for cresting] is being put on to Baker's office building.”
- July 14, 1882 – “J.S. Baker's land office is nearly completed and it is a beauty. The observatory is enclosed by a wire fence, in order we suppose to prevent the observers from falling from the dizzy hight [sic]. In the decending [sic] order box pleats and tucks rapidly succed [sic] each other to the very base, which rests on solid masonry. A cosy [sic] recess has been left in the front wall for the reception of a life sized portrait of the founder. We are not very much on architecture, but from our limited knowledge, we judge this to be the most elaborately designed edifice in the St. Croix valley.”



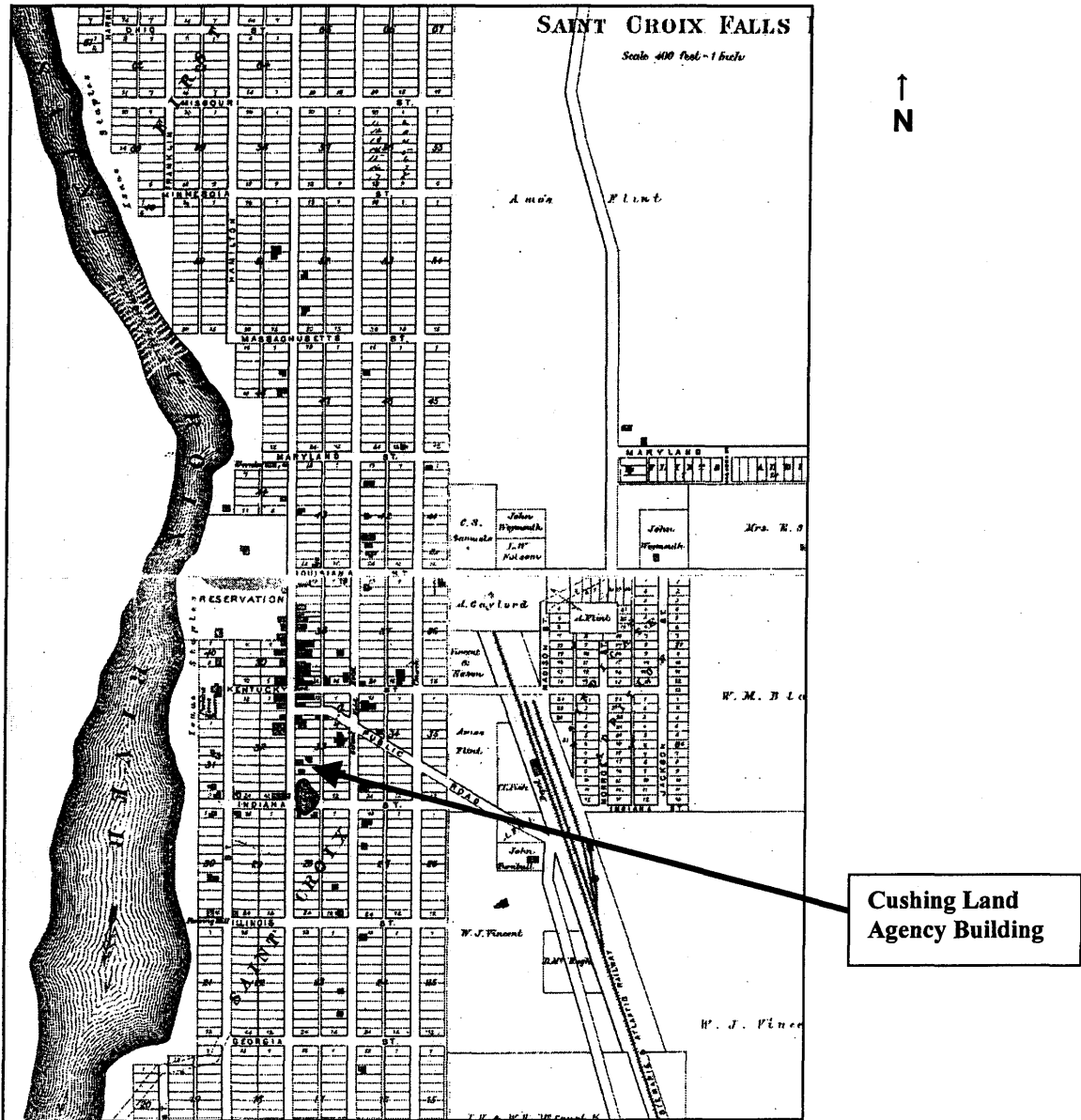
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Saint Croix Falls, Polk County, Wisconsin, 1887  
(Polk County Plat Maps, (Minneapolis, Minnesota: C.M. Foote & Co.), 1887)



The chagrin expressed by the writer at the building's modest size – “rather contracted though for a

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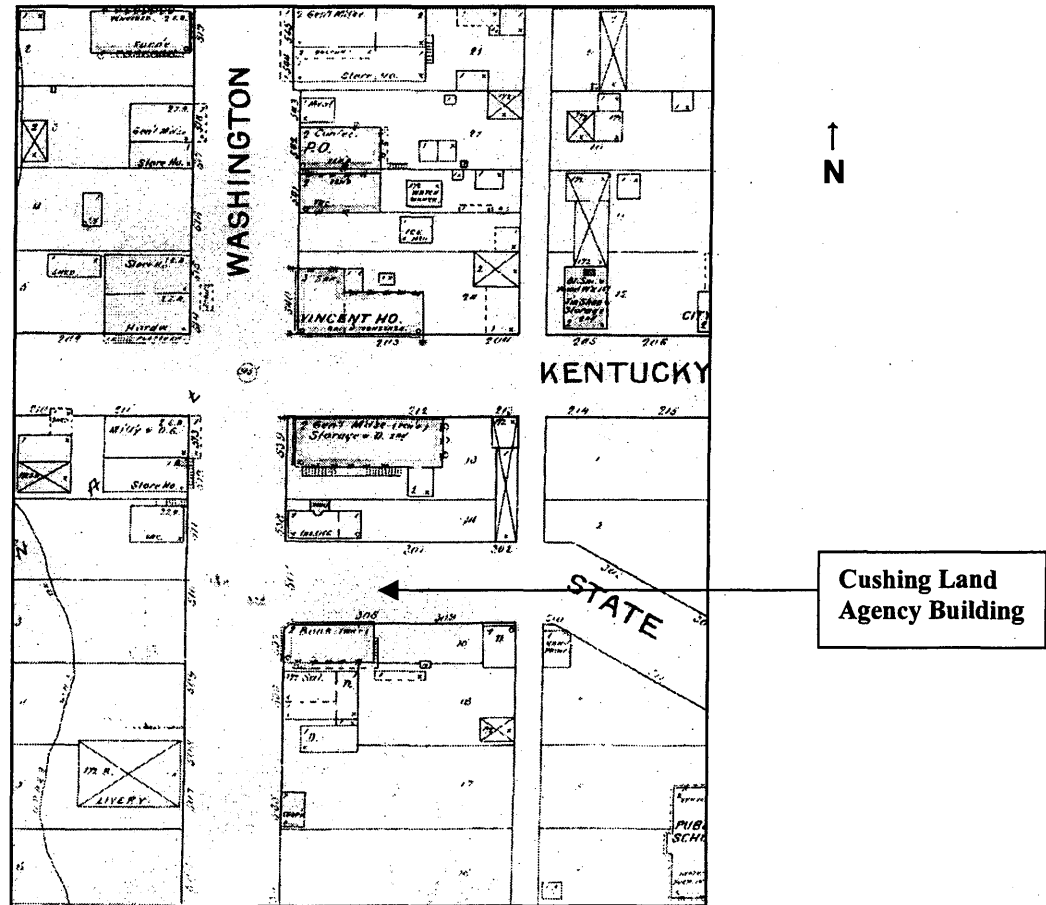
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broad gauge town” – was set aside once it was completed. The new headquarters for the Cushing Land Agency housed a commodious office for Major Baker as well as space for rental, mortgage, abstract, and land sales transactions, bookkeeping operations, and, eventually, a fire insurance business.<sup>7</sup> Within a decade the balance of Washington Street was showing considerable development, as the plat map (previous page) and the November 1892 St. Croix Falls Sanborn Map (below) show.

**Cushing Land Agency Building, 1892**  
(Map of St. Croix Falls, Wisconsin, Sanborn Map Company, November 1892.)



<sup>7</sup>An extensive set of business records survives from the company and is presently housed at the Wisconsin Historical Society's Regional Research Center at the University of Wisconsin River Falls.

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The decade of the 1880s saw Baker's business grow. By 1887 the waterpower properties in St. Croix Falls owned by the Cushing estate had been divested with Major Baker handling the sale to Isaac Staples of Stillwater. Most of the Cushing Lands in Polk County were sold off a short time later. An advertisement for the Cushing estate properties that was published in the *Polk County News* on October 1, 1885 appears below:

**FOR SALE !**  
BY  
**J. S. BAKER,**  
—OF THE—  
**CUSHING**  
**LAND AGENCY,**  
St. Croix Falls, Wis.  
40,000 acres of choice Farm-  
ing and Timber Lands, at  
Low Price, and on Reasonable  
Terms.  
1200 Lots in village of St.  
Croix, also,  
The Great Water Power at  
St. Croix Falls.

Primary among the purchasers of the Cushing Lands in transactions handled by Baker during this period were Scandinavian immigrants. The first group of Swedish settlers had begun arriving in ca. 1869, prior to Baker's employment. Some of these early land transactions were mishandled causing scandal and considerable expense for Cushing to correct. During the next two decades, however, Danish settlers acquired Cushing Lands through Major Baker. These properties were located in parts of three townships in Polk County, primarily in the vicinity of the community of Luck. Evidence of the

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continued importance of immigrant sales even following the disposal of all Cushing Lands is shown in the bank records maintained by Baker's company from 1887 through 1914. For example, bank account books show that an account with the Importers and Traders National Bank of New York City was maintained throughout the period to enable smooth transfer of funds.<sup>8</sup>

The balance of the Cushing Lands *not* suitable for farming included hardwood timberland in northern Polk County. Baker eventually saw much of this land transferred to Brown & McKeever, real estate speculators of Chicago, who sold the property a short time later to William J. Starr, a successful lumberman from Eau Claire, who was responsible for much of the logging completed in far northwest Wisconsin. Throughout the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century logging in the St. Croix River basin provided jobs for thousands of men and the basis for the burgeoning economy of the region. Substantial mills were built downstream of St. Croix Falls in Osceola, Wisconsin and Marine, Stillwater, and Bayport across the river in Minnesota. Between 1839 and 1898, more than ten billion log feet of timber were harvested from the St. Croix River basin.<sup>9</sup> Land sales such as those handled by Baker were a key element in the development of the logging industry and the post-logging settlement patterns.

Prior to Cushing's death, Major Baker began acquiring land in his own right. By 1876 Baker was using his experience in government land transactions to acquire local land in Polk County and surrounding counties through the process of tax certificate purchases. These purchases allowed Baker to secure real estate for the relatively low price of the delinquent property taxes due on a property. If the unpaid taxes remained unpaid by the owner of record for three years, title to the land passed to Baker. He set up a system for the delinquent owners to pay him interest on the property taxes due should the owners wish to redeem the tax certificates. This allowed some owners to reestablish title. Overtime, Baker turned these tax certificate land purchases into a substantial land rental and sales business allowing him to acquire thousands of acres in three counties. These property acquisitions formed the basis of his business after the Cushing Lands and waterpower properties were sold.

Population in northwest Wisconsin in the 19<sup>th</sup> century grew slowly until the arrival of the railroads. According to Federal Census figures, Polk County's population was just 1,677 in 1860, grew to 10,018 in 1880, and stood at 17,801 in 1900. St. Croix Falls was platted in 1857 and its population in 1860 was 374. It grew to 542 in 1880, was formally incorporated in 1888, and by 1900 stood at 622. These decades and those immediately after the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw Polk County transition from logging to farming – first wheat farming and eventually dairying. By 1909 Polk County had 20 creameries in place.<sup>10</sup> St. Croix Falls' population dropped slightly to 569 in 1910.

Baker saw his business transition during the decades leading up to the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and not

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<sup>8</sup>Baker Land & Title Co. Records, 1879-1958: Boxes 2 and 3, Bank Books, October 1887 – May 1916 Files, University of Wisconsin – River Falls, Area Research Center Collection.

<sup>9</sup>*St. Croix Falls 1838-1938*, (St. Croix Falls, Wisconsin: The St. Croix Falls Historical Society), 1988, p. 12.

<sup>10</sup>Augustus B. Easton, *The History of Saint Croix Valley, Vol. II*, (Chicago: H.C. Cooper, Jr. & Co.), 1909, p. 985.

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always for the better. From 1889 to 1892 his oldest son, Ray Stannard Baker, joined the company as his father's assistant. Ray's help was especially welcome due to Major Baker's increasing deafness. Ray was unhappy in the business, however, and left to pursue legal studies and eventually a Pulitzer Prize winning writing career. In November 1893 his younger brother, Harry D. Baker, left college in Michigan to return to the family business. At the time, Major Baker found himself in financial straits despite owning thousands of acres of land. Harry later recounted that by late 1893 his father was heavily in debt and that his father thought he "might even be bankrupt." Harry reviewed the situation and convinced his father that he was "land poor," and that Harry would need to sell sufficient property to get his father out of debt. Major Baker held little hope for this option saying that after 19 years in the St. Croix Valley, people knew where to find him if they wanted to buy property. Harry persisted and eventually convinced his father to try advertising to potential buyers outside of the area. By 1898, Baker's debts were paid and Harry's strategy had been proven successful.<sup>11</sup> Major Baker retired from the company thereafter.

In ensuing years, the business continued to include the management and real estate sales for both Baker family property and those of absentee owners and potential buyers. Correspondence in the Baker Land & Title Co. Records Collection maintained by the Wisconsin Historical Society provides numerous examples of how the company operated on a day to day basis. For example, a letter dated July 1892 between John Lindstrom of Volga, Wisconsin and Harvey Jones of Hillsborough, New Hampshire had Major Baker serving as the go-between for a land contract that allowed Lindstrom to cut and remove wild hay on a parcel of ground for \$10 per year. Other correspondence dealt with land transactions for clients in other parts of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, Maryland, and Washington. On occasion, the Bakers were brought into transactions based on business affiliations that extended over many years. One such example involved referrals from the Minneapolis, St. Paul, and Sault Ste. Marie Railway. Henry C. Baker, Major Baker's older brother, served as attorney for the Soo Line and as late as 1916, the Right of Way Department for the railway shared the name of a real estate prospect from Lewis, Wisconsin with the St. Croix Falls' branch of the Baker family.

In 1902 the Cushing Land Agency was formally incorporated with Major Baker named as president, Ray as vice-president (in name only), and Harry as secretary and treasurer. In light of Major Baker's total deafness and Ray's departure for a writing career in Chicago and New York City, Harry was left to serve as the managing corporate officer. A setback for the company occurred in the winter of 1904 when a second fire hit the Cushing Land Agency. Early on January 29<sup>th</sup> a hot stove set the rear portion of the building on fire. The *St. Croix Standard* account described the "Cushing Land Agency [as] Scorched." The fire was largely contained and the business was temporarily relocated to a building across the street. As the fire repairs were in the planning stage, a decision was made to enlarge the building with a substantial rear addition. Construction took place during the spring and summer and by

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<sup>11</sup>Baker Land & Title Co. Records, 1879-1958: Box 6, Oral History Interview, 1950 File, University of Wisconsin - River Falls, Area Research Center Collection, p. 15.

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the first week in August, the work was completed. "The office building of the Cushing Land Agency, which was damaged by fire, has been fully repaired, and made more convenient and attractive than before, with its handsome suite of rooms, vault, registers, etc."<sup>12</sup>

In 1911 the company's articles of incorporation were amended changing the name to "Baker Land and Title Company." Capital stock was expanded from \$20,000 to \$100,000 enabling the company to expand its operations and staff. The same year, the company launched the first of several banking ventures. The first involved purchase of a controlling interest in the Polk County Bank in Balsam Lake that had deposits of \$36,000. Within three years, the bank's deposits grew to \$200,000. So successful was this banking investment that when new banks were launched in ca. 1915 in Siren and Cushing, the Baker Land Company acquired controlling interest in both banks. Growth of the Baker Land and Title Company, especially its banking investments, paralleled population growth in the county after 1900. Polk County grew from 17,801 in 1900 to 21,367 in 1910 and 26,567 in 1920. This proved to be an ideal setting for the establishment of small-town banks throughout the county.

By the end of World War I, Harry D. Baker served as the president of at least four Polk County banks including the Polk County Bank in Balsam Lake, the Citizens State Bank in Clayton, the Bank of Cushing, and the Bank of Dresser Junction. The banks were relatively small with capital of \$25,000 or less. Their advertisements stressed their community links - the Bank of Dresser Junction claimed it was "the Bank that grows on local soil." Each bank offered diverse services including commercial and farm loans, property insurance, and fireproof vault for storage of valuable papers. Other acquisitions by Baker Land and Title Company included the Burnett County Abstract Company in Grantsburg and several other branch real estate sales offices, all prior to World War I. By 1915 the workforce of the company had grown to include 13 at the St. Croix Falls office and another 14 at the banks and branch offices.<sup>13</sup>

Amidst this flurry of growth and general prosperity, Major Baker died in 1912 at the age of 74. Though he had continued to be involved in the business, his latter years had focused on reforestation efforts for cutover lands that he owned. Of particular interest was a 120-acre parcel on the north side of Deer Lake about 6 miles east of St. Croix Falls. He sought and received guidance from the United States Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Forestry in 1903. The plan prepared by the Division of Forest Extension included a 17-page report with recommendations for plantings for various sections of the property. Major Baker saw more than 30,000 trees planted on this property based on the USDA Forest Extension plan between 1903 and 1910.<sup>14</sup> According to his son Harry, when his father was asked about his intentions for the planting made so late in his life, Major Baker said simply "Some

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<sup>12</sup>"New Office Ready, Cushing Land Agency Move into a New Suite," *Taylor Falls Journal*, Taylor Falls, Minnesota, August 3, 1904.

<sup>13</sup>*The Big Booster Edition of The St. Croix Standard*, St. Croix, Wisconsin, February 11, 1915, p. 15.

<sup>14</sup>Baker Land & Title Co. Records, 1879-1958: Box 1, Historic Documents, 1888-1921 File, University of Wisconsin - River Falls, Area Research Center Collection.

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people in this world want big white monuments; I will take a green one.”<sup>15</sup>

Following Major Baker's death, day-to-day management continued in the hands of Harry Baker though his older brother remained the titular president of the company. Harry's management style remained the same with extensive company advertising and promotion the key to its success. The Baker Land and Title Company name appeared on maps and advertisements in plat books and booster publications for St. Croix Falls, Polk County, and the St. Croix Valley. An advertising campaign in 1914 by the Baker Land & Title Company sold Polk County to prospective buyers through the distribution of county maps. Maps such as the one that appears on the following page claimed the area was “The Banner Dairy and Stock Region of Upper Wisconsin.” Advertisements in *The Big Booster Edition* published the following year were aimed at potential sellers claiming that the high advertising budget of the company - \$4,000 per year - accounted for robust annual farm sales of more than \$300,000 by Baker Land & Title Company.<sup>16</sup>

Advertising continued to be the company's mainstay after World War I. When the promotional publication *A Souvenir: Polk County, Wisconsin* appeared in 1919, the Baker Land and Title Company ran ads on 12 of the publication's 100 pages for its real estate business and four banks. The other key to the company's success was its presence throughout the county. One of the *Souvenir* advertisements identified representatives in 12 Polk County towns at either branch real estate offices or in Baker controlled banks - nine separate banks in Polk County and adjacent counties. This allowed Baker Land and Title Company to, as one prominent advertisement stated, provide “A Land Selling Service That Saves Time and Money. An efficient land selling organization with branch offices in all parts of the county, bringing buyer and seller together to the satisfaction of both... We are well acquainted with the land and people and work on the principle of big sales and small profits. Our annual sales total is in the millions...nearly half of this immense business is done with home people...”<sup>17</sup>

Other salesmen from the company traveled extensively in Illinois and Iowa finding a good market among tenant farmers who were eager to buy Wisconsin farms that sold considerably cheaper than

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<sup>15</sup>Baker Land & Title Co. Records, 1879-1958: Box 6, Oral History Interview, 1950 File, University of Wisconsin - River Falls, Area Research Center Collection, p. 8.

<sup>16</sup>“Map of Polk County, Wisconsin.” Published by Baker Land & Title Co., 1914 from Baker Land & Title Co. Records, 1879-1958, University of Wisconsin - River Falls, Area Research Center Collection; *The Big Booster Edition of Standard Press*, St. Croix, Wisconsin, February 11, 1915, p. 40.

<sup>17</sup>*A Souvenir of Polk County, Wisconsin*, (Minneapolis, Minnesota: C.J. Haines, Publisher), 1919, inside cover.

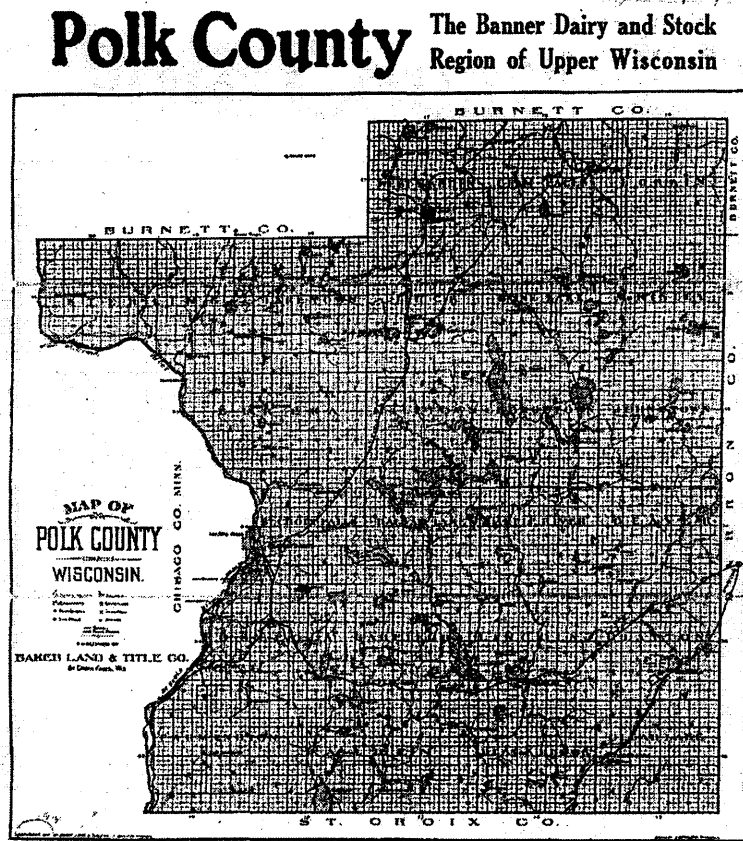
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Polk County, Wisconsin, 1914  
("Map of Polk County, Wisconsin, published by Baker Land & Title Co., 1914.)



**We Have Thousands of Acres of Wild and Improved Land**

Principally Hardwood Lands of Excellent Quality. Having Loamy Clay and Silt Soils of Great Fertility. Suitable for General Farming, Dairying and Fruit. Convenient to Creameries and Cheese Factories on main "Soo" Line, Twin Cities to Twin Ports. Is a well developed and prosperous region having 130 good schools and over 50 churches. With Ready Markets for Stock, Produce, and Timber Products of all kinds and low freight rates. Well watered with many beautiful lakes and streams. Healthful in climate and with plenty of rainfall. For prices and particulars, see

**Authorities on Farming Say This is an Ideal Stock and Dairy Region**

Hon. W. D. Hoard, Editor of Hoard's Dairymen, says: "I believe that Northern Wisconsin is going to prove the most successful dairy region of the Northwest. The peculiar salubrity of the air, the moderate heat of summer, the abundant and pure water, the good subsoil and luxuriant growth of grasses all conspire to make it an ideal dairy region." Prof. Thomas Shaw says: "Intending settlers should not lose sight of the fact, that the timber on much of this land will more than pay for the clearing; that it immediately produces the finer pasturage, so that it need not be plowed until the stumps decay; that no cyclones pass over it in summer, nor blizzards in winter, that because of the abundance of varied food crops grown, "No better country for live stock can be found."

Established 1854  
Present management 1874  
Capital and Surplus, \$200,000  
References—Merchants National Bank, St. Paul, Minn.; Importers & Traders National Bank of New York, or any bank in Northwestern Wisconsin.  
Ole Lindstrom, Cashier, City of St. Croix Falls, Wis. Representative

**Baker Land & Title Co.**

ST. CROIX FALLS, WISCONSIN

Ole Lindstrom, Cashier, City of St. Croix Falls, Wis. Representative



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farmland further south. A former Baker Company employee, Percy Weinhardt, described the prospective buyers as arriving on the trains in droves and being met by salesmen from competing real estate companies eager to secure buyers recruited by the Baker Company.<sup>18</sup> He noted that the Baker Company business was largely in Polk and Burnett counties although they frequently bought and sold tax delinquent lands in Washburn and Bayfield counties further north.

Over time real estate transactions of the Baker Land and Title Company grew to include sales of lakeshore property and cottages. Establishment of the Interstate Park along the Wisconsin and Minnesota border in the 1890s helped stimulate recreational interest in Polk County lands. The Minnesota Interstate Park was established in 1895 while Interstate Park in Wisconsin, the states' first state park, was not established until 1899. Land for the bi-state park was located along the St. Croix River just south of St. Croix Falls and Taylors Falls. It drew significant interest of recreational visitors, especially from urban residents of Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota located 40 miles to the south. Harry Baker became a champion of expansion for the Wisconsin Interstate Park and its expansion in succeeding years. He authored entries describing Interstate Park in the *Wisconsin Blue Book* for 1903, 1905, 1907, and 1901 (attributed). He wrote numerous letters to landowners adjacent to the park encouraging them to sell their land for park use and was successful in persuading many to accept reasonable rather than inflated values for these transactions.<sup>19</sup>

After automobiles became more popular after World War I, the sale of land for cottages, lake cabins, and tourist resorts accounted for a growing share of real estate sales. The *Souvenir* identified "picturesque scenery" in an advertisement in 1919 for Polk County property while a 1924 Polk County plat book advertisement highlighted Baker Land and Title Company as the oldest real estate firm in the county offering "land, loans [and] lake shore" to clients.<sup>20</sup>

After peaking in 1920 at 26,870 people, countywide population declined and then stabilized during the 1920s and 1930s. Polk County population stood at 26,197 in 1940 and continued to fall during the following decade to 24,944 in 1950. St. Croix Falls' population, which had stood at 622 in 1900 shrank to 569 in 1910 before rebounding to 825 in 1920 and continuing to rise to 1,065 by 1950.

Harry Baker continued to head the Baker Land and Title Company following World War I, through the Great Depression years, and the post-World War II period. In 1929 he assumed a leadership role among bankers in Wisconsin when he was elected to the board of directors of the Wisconsin Bankers

<sup>18</sup> "Baker Land and Title Celebrates 100<sup>th</sup> Birthday," *The Dalles Visitor*, Summer, 1974.

<sup>19</sup> Eileen M. McMahon and Theodore J. Karamanski, *Time and the River: A History of the St. Croix, A Historic Resource Study of the Saint Croix National Scenic Riverway*, (Omaha: Midwest Regional Office, National Park Service, United States Department of the Interior), 2002, p. 228.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* p. 56; *Plat Book, Polk County, Wisconsin*, (St. Paul, Minnesota: The Farmer, Webb Publishing Co.), 1924, p. 32.

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Association. The following year he was selected as vice-present for the organization's Group 1 Bankers in the northwest region of the state. The Baker Land and Title Company's land sales remained strong during the 1920s despite a general deflation in farmland prices in the State. On the eve of the Great Depression in March 1929, the company's real estate sales were described as "the largest land selling concern in Wisconsin outside of Milwaukee."<sup>21</sup> The next decade, however, saw the national banking crisis combine with the continuing decline in farm prices and mortgage foreclosures to worsen northwest Wisconsin's economy. The majority of Harry Baker's banking investments in Polk County came to an end during the 1930s.

In 1942, Harry Baker was made president of Baker Land and Title Company. This move came just four years before the death of his brother Ray in 1946. Harry continued to head the company for the next 25 years seeing real estate sales for farms and lakeshore property rebound during the 1950s and 1960s. According to a description of him related by a former employee, he was a "strictly upright, demanding, humorless boss...very stern."<sup>22</sup> Employees said that the half-glass walls surrounding his office in the rear wing of the Cushing Building were evidence of his vigilant monitoring. Throughout his life he played leadership roles in local booster projects and community affairs. He served as village president, a member of the school board, and a county supervisor. He also chaired civic efforts such as the 1922 Red Cross committee to assist victims of the tornado and the war bond drives during both World War I and World War II.

In ca. 1966 Harry Baker retired at the age of 92 and sold both the business and the Baker Land and Title Co. Building to Edward Zulliger. Zulliger had been an employee of Baker Land and Title Company since 1929 and continued to operate the business under the Baker Company name until 1986. At that time he sold the firm to Maurice Stokka, who later sold it to Tom Bonneville and his partner Tom Christianson. The company continued to operate as a general real estate business but with a focus on rural properties until its partners formed separate real estate companies in the 1990s. On December 31, 1999 the building was sold to the St. Croix Falls Historical Society. Title was transferred at that time to the City of St. Croix Falls and the historical society became a tenant under a 99-year lease

Since that time, the Cushing Land Agency Building has been restored by the St. Croix Falls Historical Society. Space on the interior was converted to museum displays, a reading room, storage, and office space for the St. Croix Falls Chamber of Commerce. Restoration was completed in November 2002.

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<sup>21</sup>"Baker Land & Title Company Sells Farms; Is a Constant Booster," *St. Croix Standard-Press*, St. Croix Falls, Wisconsin, March 14, 1929.

<sup>22</sup>Comments about Harry D. Baker by Mrs. Schnur, from clippings file of St. Croix Falls Historical Society, undated, p. 9.

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*Architectural Background:*

As was noted above, the original design for the Cushing Land Agency Building was prepared by Minnesota architect Abraham M. Radcliff (1827- ?). Radcliffe was a native of New York City and before moving to Minnesota held positions in a succession of architectural firms beginning with a partnership with E.A. and R.L. Stevens in Hoboken, New Jersey (pre-1849). From there he moved west following American settlement patterns. He established practices in Elmira, New York (1849-1852) and Fort Wayne, Indiana (1852-1857) before moving to Minnesota. Here he opened an office in Minneapolis in 1857 and the following year opened a second office in the new capital city of St. Paul. During the Civil War, records show that he operated a practice in Winona, Minnesota (1862-1865).

From here he returned once again to the Twin Cities where his design work included a number of important public buildings, residences and commercial buildings. He kept his Minneapolis office open until 1868 thereafter maintaining his architectural practice from offices in St. Paul. For the next twenty years his practice flourished. Though all of Radcliff's work has not been documented, a number of important commissions have been recorded. Two significant public buildings – the Pence Opera House (nonextant) and Washington School (nonextant) – were completed in Minneapolis in 1867. Before the decade was out he had completed work on several projects in Hastings, a Mississippi River town just south of the Twin Cities. They included a revision of the original plan for the Gothic Revival style LeDuc House (extant) completed between 1863 and 1866 and the design for the French Second Empire style Dakota County Court House (extant, altered) constructed 1869-1871. Another commission attributed to Radcliff and completed in 1871 was the Union Presbyterian Church (extant) in St. Peter, Minnesota. Designed in the Gothic Revival Style, this stone landmark is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

These major works are an indication of a growing workload for Radcliff. As a result, over the next decade he employed and/or partnered with a series of young architects who eventually gained prominence for their own design work. Edward P. Bassford worked as an apprentice draftsman from 1868-1871 and went on to become a prominent St. Paul architect. Leroy S. Buffington, who was a partner from 1871-1875, became a successful architect in Minneapolis during the 1880s. But the most famous of Radcliff's associates was the nationally acclaimed architect Cass Gilbert, who obtained his first professional training as an apprentice draftsman in Radcliff's office in 1876.

During the decade of the 1870s Radcliff's firm was retained to complete the design for the remodeling and expansion of Minnesota's first state capitol (nonextant) in 1872 and 1873 in St. Paul. As the decade progressed his firm completed several commissions in St. Croix Valley towns. Isaac Staples, a

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prominent lumber baron in the region, hired Radcliff to design his Stillwater, Minnesota residence (nonextant) in 1875 in the French Second Empire style. This commission likely led in turn to the design work that Radcliff did for the Stillwater's Grand Opera House (nonextant) five years later. Down river in Hudson, Wisconsin, Radcliff's office completed the design for the Philo Boyden House in 1879 (extant).

The early 1880s saw Radcliff's firm complete a number of notable projects in and around the Twin Cities. As the decade opened, work was under way on the Stillwater Grand Opera House. Work was completed in downtown St. Paul on Market Hall (nonextant) and Mannheimer Block (nonextant) in 1881 and 1882 respectively. 1882 also saw work underway on major Radcliff residential commissions along St. Paul's Summit Avenue (National Register historic district) – the Senator Henry Rice House (nonextant), the Charles Pauls House (extant), the W.J.S. Trail House (extant), and most significantly, the \$150,000 French Second Empire Style house built for the family of Commodore Norman Kittson (nonextant).

These projects were all in the drawing stages or underway when Radcliff's office received the commission for the new building to house the Cushing Land Agency in St. Croix Falls in 1881. The choice of Radcliff for the project may be explained in several fashions. St. Croix Valley historian William Scott has suggested the possibility that Major Baker's personal and business relationship with Isaac Staples provided the incentive for Radcliff to take this comparatively modest project. Scott also speculated that the prominence of the Cushing Land Agency in the region might have tempted Radcliff to take the project.<sup>23</sup> Another possibility might simply be that Radcliff's expanding architectural office staff needed to be kept busy with both large and small projects.

Less is known about Radcliff's work between 1883 and his departure from Minnesota in ca. 1889. The presence of new architectural firms in the prospering capital city saw competing firms establish themselves. His firm continued to complete commercial and residential commissions, and out side of the Twin Cities, at least one collegiate project was completed – the Ladies Hall (nonextant) at Carlton College in Northfield, Minnesota in 1883. He also continued to do work for the State of Minnesota through his position as the supervising architect at the Minnesota State Prison in Stillwater, a position to which the governor appointed him.

In 1889 Abraham Radcliff closed his practice for unknown reasons and left Minnesota for San Francisco. Here he briefly joined the engineering and contracting firm of Randell, Hunt & Co. while

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<sup>23</sup>Scott, William. "A Saint Croix Landmark Preserved," *The Taylors Falls Historical Society Journal: Life & Times in Taylor Falls*, Volume 7, No. 1, Spring 2000, Taylors Falls Historical Society, Taylors Falls, Minnesota, pp. 14-17.

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residing across the bay in Alameda. After 1890, directories no longer list him with the firm. No additional biographical information has been documented for his California years and no building designs have been credited to him after his departure from St. Paul.<sup>24</sup> In his early 60s, it is possible that Radcliff's move to San Francisco was part of a planned retirement.

*Summary:* The Cushing Land Agency Building is locally significant for its association with the settlement patterns and land sales of the St. Croix River Valley beginning in the 1880s and continuing through the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Built in 1882 for the Cushing Land Agency, later known as the Baker Land & Title Company, the building was the headquarters for the major real estate company in Polk County. The business grew to include nine banks in Polk and Burnett counties, an abstracting service, and insurance sales, as well as a diverse real estate business during its more than 90 years of operation by the Baker family. The Cushing Land Agency Building derives additional architectural significance as an example of a small, Queen Anne-Eastlake Style commercial building designed by an early and important St. Paul, Minnesota architect, Abraham M. Radcliff. Radcliff's regional architectural practice included courthouses, churches, opera houses, commercial blocks, and some of the premiere residences of the Twin Cities from the 1860s to 1880s. The Cushing Land Agency Building is one of only a handful of surviving works by Radcliff's firm.

The period of significance for the property begins with the construction of the building in 1882 and continues to the end of the historic period in 1955. The building remained in the same use during the entire period of significance.

End of Statement of Significance

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<sup>24</sup>Donald R. Torbert, "Minneapolis Architecture and Architects, 1848-1908: A Study of Style Trends in Architecture in a Midwestern City, Together with a Catalogue of Representative Buildings" Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1951, pp. 54-55.

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**10. Verbal Boundary Description**

North 25 feet of the west 68 feet of Lot 14 in Block 33 of the Original Plat of the City (formerly Village) of St. Croix Falls, said lot being in Government Lot 1, Section 30-34-18, Polk County, Wisconsin.

**Boundary Justification**

This parcel includes the building acquired by the St. Croix Falls Historical Society on December 31, 1999 and immediately sold thereafter to the City of St. Croix Falls. This is a portion of the parcel historically associated with the building.

\_\_\_ End of Boundary Descriptions

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Insert Photo Descriptions

**Photographs:** Photographs taken June 30, 2004 by Marlys A. Svendsen with Svendsen Tyler, Inc., Sarona, Wisconsin.  
Negatives stored with St. Croix Falls Historical Society, 106 South Washington Street, St. Croix Falls, Wisconsin.

1. Cushing Land Agency Building, exterior, looking northeast
2. Cushing Land Agency Building, front façade, looking east
3. Cushing Land Agency Building, rear, exterior, looking northwest
4. Cushing Land Agency Building, exterior, looking southeast
5. Cushing Land Agency Building, interior, Major Baker's office, looking west through room

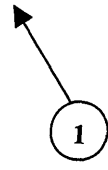
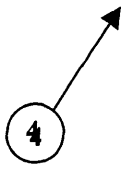
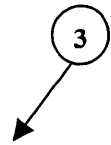
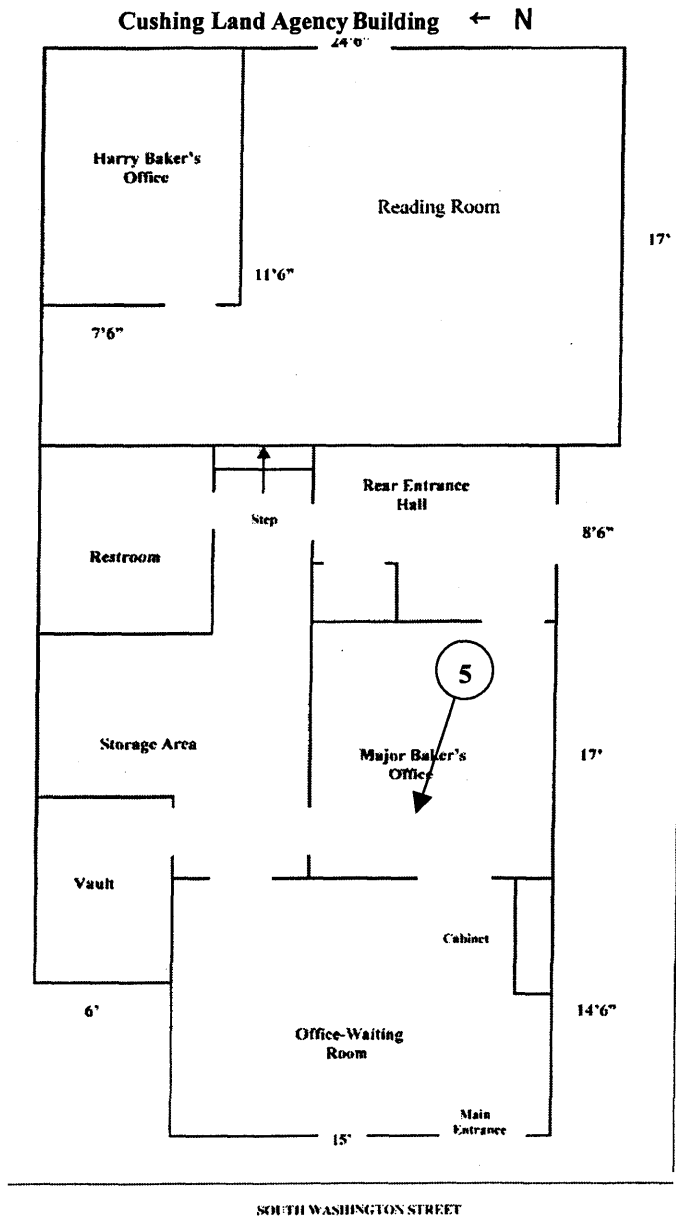
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**PHOTO  
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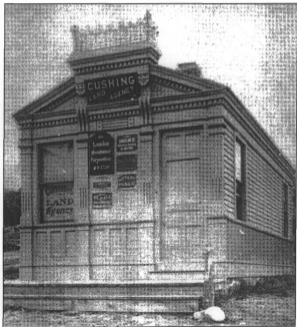
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Cushing Land Agency Building,  
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**Historic View of Front façade of Cushing Land Agency Building, ca. 1880s**

(Photo courtesy of Rosemarie Bratz; appears in William Scott's "A Saint Croix Landmark Preserved," *The Taylors Falls Historical Society Journal: Life & Times in Taylors Falls, Volume 7, No. 1, Spring 2000, Taylors Falls Historical Society, Taylors Falls, Minnesota, p. 15*.)



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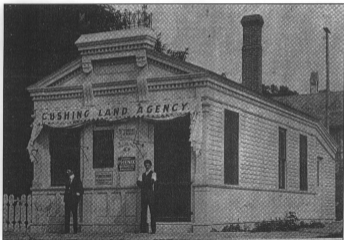
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Cushing Land Agency Building,  
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Historic View of Front façade of Cushing Land Agency Building, ca. 1900

(Photo courtesy of H. Durand Blanding appearing in "Baker Land and Title Celebrates 100<sup>th</sup> Birthday," *The Dulles Post*, Summer, 1974, p. 3)



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**Historic View of Interior of Front Office-Waiting Room, Cushing Land Agency-Baker Land and Title Company  
Building, ca. 1915 (Photo from collection of St. Croix Falls Historical Society)**



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**View of the Cushing Land Agency Building prior to restoration, 1998**  
(From "Preservation of a Landmark, Northern Currents *The Leader*, July 15, 1998.)



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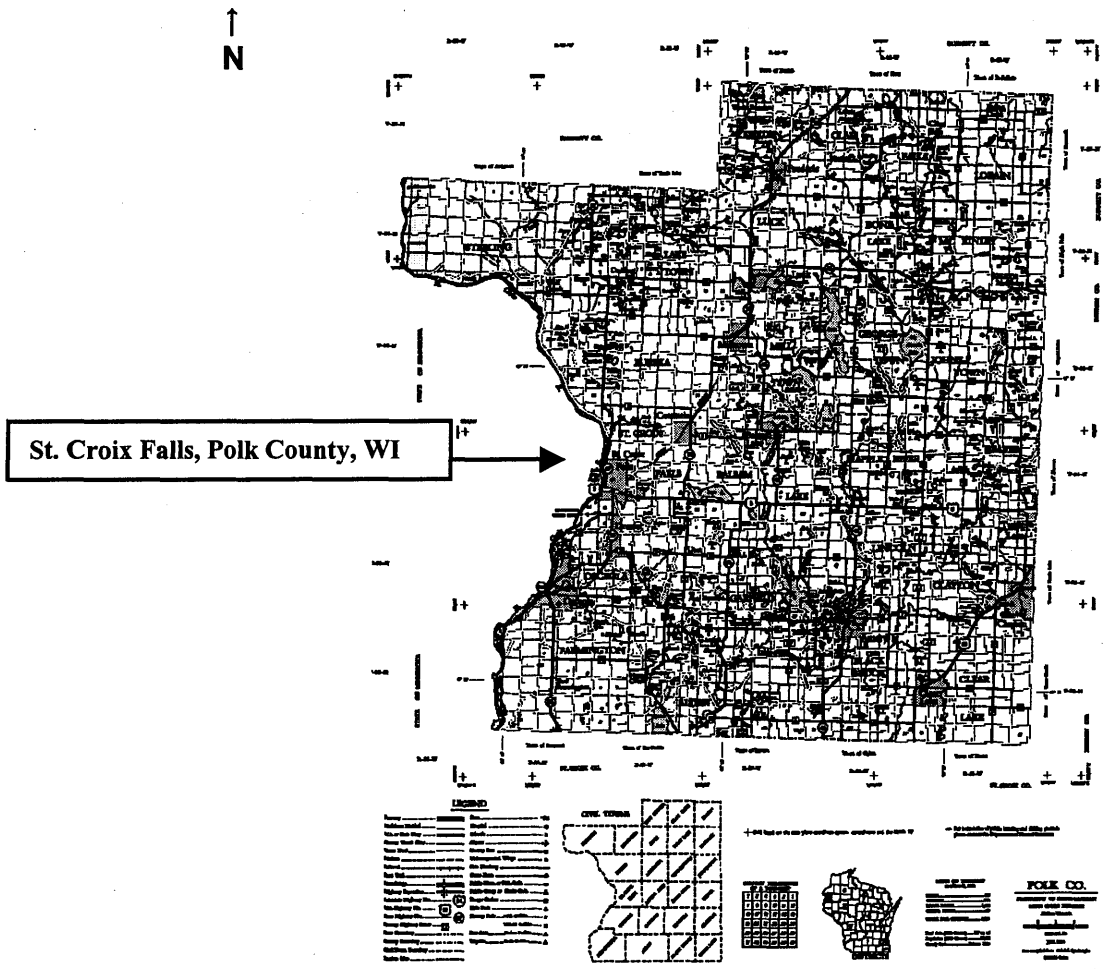
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Map of Polk County, Wisconsin, 2004 (Wisconsin Department of Transportation County Map available at <http://www.dot.wisconsin.gov/travel/maps/county.htm>; accessed September 24, 2004)



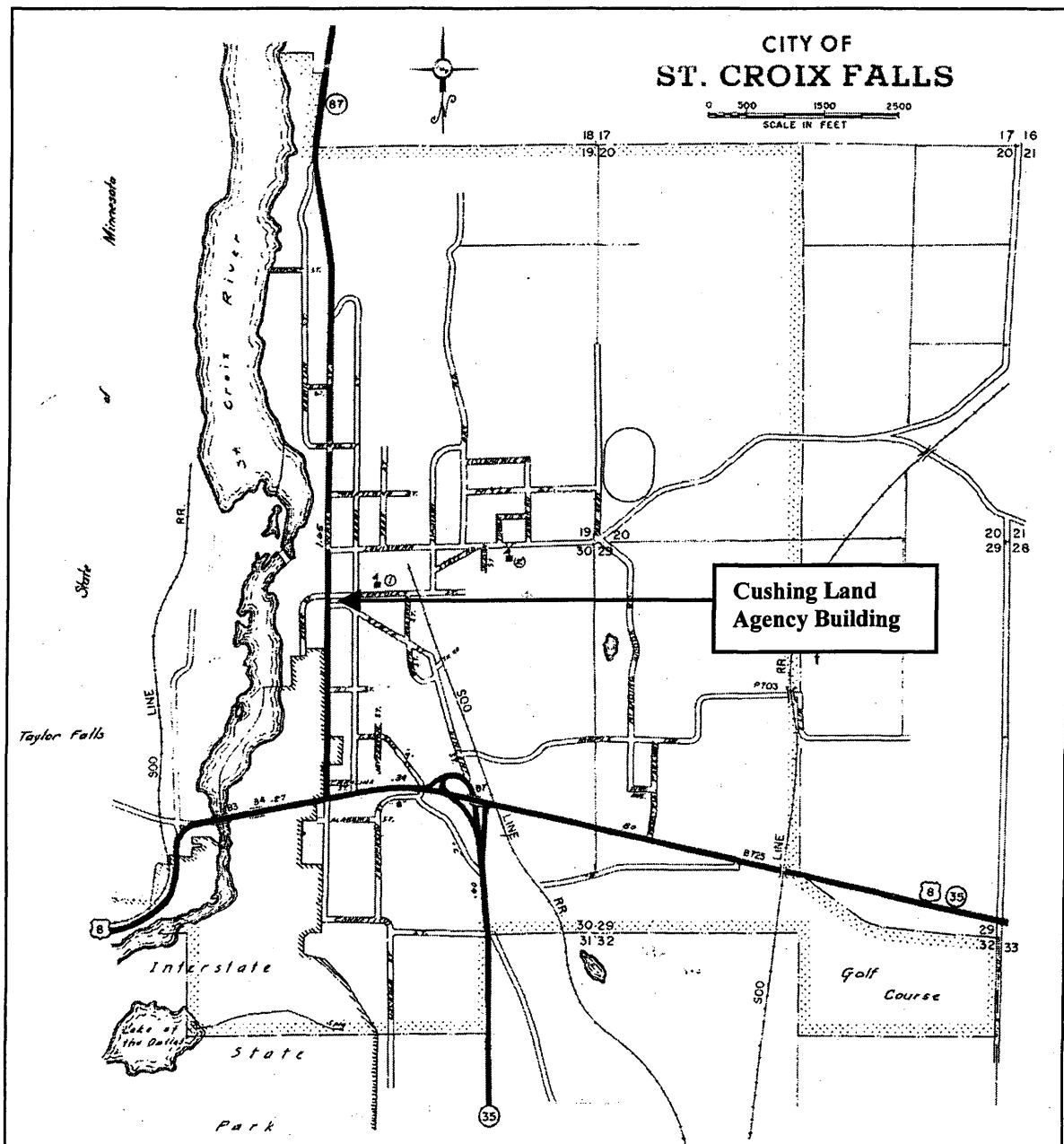
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Map of St. Croix Falls, Wisconsin, 2004



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