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United State Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in Guidelines for Completing National Register form (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries. Use letter quality printer in 12 pitch, using an 85 space line and a 10 space left margin. Use only archival paper (20 pound, acid free paper with a 2% alkaline reserve).

1. Name of Property

historic name Wisconsin Power and Light Berlin Power Plant

other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 142 Water Street N/A not for publication

city, town Berlin N/A vicinity

state Wisconsin code WI county Green Lake code 047 zip code 54923

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	No. of Resources within Property	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	contributing	noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> objects
		<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing:  
N/A

No. of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination      request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets      does not meet the National Register criteria.      See continuation sheet.

[Signature] \_\_\_\_\_ Date 2/12/92  
Signature of certifying official  
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.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting or other official Date  
\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

     entered in the National Register

entered in the National Register.  
     See continuation sheet

[Signature] 3/19/92

     determined eligible for the National Register.      See continuation sheet

     determined not eligible for the National Register.

     removed from the National Register.

     other, (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

[Signature] \_\_\_\_\_ Date  
Signature of the Keeper

6. Functions or Use

Historic Functions  
(enter categories from instructions)

Current Functions  
(enter categories from instructions)

INDUSTRY/energy facility  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Commerce/Warehouse  
Commerce/ Specialty Store  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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7. Description

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Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Materials

(enter categories from instructions)

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Late 19th and Early 20th Century

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American Movements

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foundation concrete

walls brick

roof asphalt

other stone

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Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Wisconsin Power and Light Berlin Power Plant (hereafter referred to as Berlin Power Plant, or plant), sits along Water Street about one block northwest of the downtown commercial district in Berlin, a small community in east-central Wisconsin. The plant sits in an area of mixed uses between the downtown and a residential neighborhood. The plant backs up to the Fox River, which flows through the middle of the city.

Water Street begins downtown, becoming a residential street after several blocks. The street allows for two lanes of traffic with parking on both sides. There is light traffic on the street, especially beyond the power plant. There is little vegetation until the area becomes residential. The neighborhood around the plant is one of older single-family homes that sit on relatively small urban lots with mature lawns, trees, and bushes. Water Street is fully improved with concrete curbs, gutters, and sidewalks.

The power plant sits on a large lot with no lawn and only an occasional bush or small tree. The plant is surrounded by large gravel-covered driveways and parking areas. Beyond the parking area to the east of the plant, there is an unlandscaped grassy area that extends to the east property line and down to the Fox River.

There are two main sections to the mostly two-story power plant. The front section consists of a one and one-half story brick block with Twentieth Century Commercial style details. The front wall of the building rises to form a stepped parapet and the wall is capped with stone at the roofline. Brick pilasters on the front corners of the building are capped with stone pediments, and stone bands that form a "T" decorate the top of the pilasters. Under the stepped parapet on the front of the building are three rows of stone bands in an inverse pyramid over a square made up of the same material.

At one time, the window openings in this section of the power plant were very tall multi-light industrial casement windows with stone sills. They have been enclosed with vertical boards. The window openings are decorated with stone sills. Today, concrete panels separate these window units into two parts. Some rectangular ventilation openings and air conditioner units punctuate these enclosed openings. There are two main entrances sitting at each end of the building. One is enclosed with modern red bricks. Each entrance was recessed behind a shallow frontispiece of plain brick pilasters topped with a modern stone entablature and decorated with small vertical stone bands. The east entrance is still open to the interior of the building.

x See continuation sheet

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The rear section of the power plant is a large two-story block constructed of red brick, and has a raised foundation. Projecting above the east wall is a half-story square tower with two small multi-light industrial type windows. The entire roofline is capped with the same stone as on the front section. The large wall surfaces are punctuated with enclosed window openings. Originally these window openings were filled with various sizes of multiple light industrial type windows that appear to have been double-hung sashes, but may have been industrial casements.

Up until 1952, this plant generated electricity and in the eastern ell between the front and rear sections of the building, there was a set of transformers that helped send the power along the lines. This area is vacant now, and the original small wooden loading dock has been replaced with a large concrete dock with a wooden roof supported by plain posts.

On the west wall of the plant there is a metal fire escape that extends upward to a metal exit door. Windows on this wall are identical as on the other walls of the front section of the building. In the ell between the front and rear sections of the plant on the west wall is a two-story garage section constructed of lighter color red bricks. This section may be a remnant from one of the older buildings on this site that were reportedly demolished when this plant was erected. The ell has two large garage doors on the first floor.

At the rear of this ell is some old brickwork that may have been part of the old plant's rear section that backed up into the Fox River. A photograph from 1912 shows the old plant, and it had a large rear section that had a stone foundation that went all the way down to the river. Today, the rear walls of the current plant end on the raised river bank behind a concrete retaining wall.

The front entrance of the building <sup>leads to</sup> a foyer with offices that flank the hallway. Several staircases lead to the upper floor and to the basement. The interior has an irregular plan. Most of the floors are concrete slabs and some are covered with tile. Wall surfaces are painted and unpainted brick or plaster. Rooms are of various sizes and uses.

Flanking the front hallway of the building are small offices that have paneling or painted brick walls and tile floors. Behind these offices is a large shop area with a service counter, mechanical equipment, tools and parts. This office services electric company route people and is also an appliance repair shop. The walls are painted brick, and the ceiling and floor is concrete. There is also a garage on this level. It has a concrete floor and unpainted brick walls.

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The staircases in the foyer are all made up of painted concrete and have plain metal railings. In the basement of the building there are several small rooms used for Civil Defense, general storage, and some storage tanks. These rooms have painted concrete surfaces. A garage area off of the basement also has concrete walls and floors.

The second floor is made up of two large open spaces. One is a storage area with wood floors made up of wide boards, unpainted brick walls, and a ceiling with exposed rafters and lath. The other open space is a community room. It has a tile floor, painted brick walls, and a suspended acoustical ceiling with fluorescent lighting. In the past, the electric company used this room to host demonstrations of the latest electrical appliances to consumers. At this time, the room is used as a meeting room and a small office.

The Berlin office of the Wisconsin Power and Light Company, based in Madison, Wisconsin, still occupies this one-time power plant as a warehouse and shop for storage, appliance repair, and for supplies needed for electric company route personnel. A small business office for the utility sits across the street from this plant.

8. Statement of Significance

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

Applicable National Register Criteria  A  B  C  D

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

Areas of Significance

(enter categories from instructions)	Period of Significance	Significant Dates
Architecture	1925	1925 (1)
Industry	1925-1941	

Areas of Significance	Period of Significance	Significant Dates
Cultural Affiliation		
N/A		

Significant Person	Architect/Builder
N/A	Unknown

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

The Wisconsin Power and Light Berlin Power Plant is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under criteria A and C. It is being nominated to the National Register under criterion A because it represents the culmination of the historical development of electric power generation and sale in Berlin. It was built at a time when local power plants were common, and when large electric utilities were modernizing their newly-obtained local facilities.

As the twentieth century continued, local power generation gave way to regional power generation fed to local areas by wire and transformer systems. When this plant was erected, the local electric power company had gone through several phases and owners. The 1910s and 1920s saw the consolidation of local companies into larger power corporations, the corporations that provide our power today. This plant represents the time when even large corporations relied on small, local power plants to serve their customers.

This power plant is also being nominated to the National Register under criterion C, because it is an intact example of a type of construction--the local electric power plant of the early twentieth century. Power plants were built with similar details throughout the state, usually large brick buildings with open interior spaces for turbines and engines, and perhaps a small office area. This power plant had a much larger office area because Berlin was the home office for a regional power network operated by Wisconsin Power and Light Company. The building also has some architectural details from the Twentieth Century Commercial Style.

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Architecture

This power plant is significant for architecture because it is a good and intact example of an early twentieth century electric power generating plant. Built of sturdy red brick, this building replaced a haphazard array of brick and frame buildings that locally-owned power companies had used to generate electric power for a number of years.

The new power plant was a model of efficiency, with large open rooms housing the large turbines and generators at the back of the building, and a spacious front office area for business offices. And, while the large equipment used in the generation of power is no longer extant in the building, and some of the open spaces have been subdivided, the original brick walls, concrete floors and ceilings, and utilitarian features still exist in the building. Even some exposed rafters exist on the second floor. So much original fabric exists in this building that it can be used as a source to further our information about these types of buildings.

This building also has details from the Twentieth Century Commercial style, a common style used in business blocks in Wisconsin. The Twentieth Century Commercial style was popular between 1895 and 1930 in Wisconsin. According to Wisconsin's Cultural Resource Management Plan, common characteristics of the style include regular fenestration of large divided rectangular windows and little exterior ornamentation. Many Twentieth Century Commercial buildings in Wisconsin have details that suggest the Prairie Style. (2)

In the case of this building, the Twentieth Century Commercial style ornaments an otherwise vernacular, utilitarian building. But, the raised parapet, stone details, and the stone bands over the square trim on the front wall are details that resemble those of Twentieth Century Commercial business blocks throughout the state. The frontispieces covering the front entrances are an unusual detail; in particular, the cornice is an unusual, abstract version of a classical entablature, and gives the entrance a distinctive appearance.

There have been few changes to this building since its construction date. Interior walls have been painted, some tile has been laid over floors, and power generating equipment has been removed, but the basic plan and details of the building are still intact. And, even though the windows have been enclosed, along with one of the front entrances, the size and shape of the original openings is clear and reversible. Historic photographs exist so that future renovations can return these and other historic details to the exterior and interior of the building.

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There were no other electric power generating plants in Berlin, and this plant is on the site of historic electric power plants. Because this plant is a fine and intact example of an early twentieth century electric power plant, it is an important architectural entity in Berlin.

Commerce

While the early generation of electric power was related to industrial activities, the production and sale of energy is now more closely related to commercial activity. The Wisconsin Power and Light Berlin Power Plant is significant for history because it is the only extant power generating plant in the city. The plant, built in 1925, was a new facility erected by new corporate owners of electric power in the city, the Wisconsin Power and Light Company. It was an up-to-date, modern plant that provided electrical power until 1951, and today, still serves the electric utility as a shop and warehouse.

The Berlin Electric Light Company, a privately owned power company, erected the first electric power plant in Berlin in 1890. A small one and one-half story brick-veneered plant along the Fox River generated enough power to serve early customers. These customers were almost entirely downtown businesses and homes close to the power plant. The rudimentary electric services only reached a few customers, and interest in the new utility was slow to grow. By 1895, a small coal storage area had been added to the original building. (3)

Around 1900, the electric company was reorganized under the name, Berlin Lighting, Heating, and Power Company. This company issued bonds for \$32,500, and \$100,000 in 1900 and 1902. But the growth of the company was faster than the revenues and the company was soon in financial trouble. In 1904, the circuit court appointed a receiver to the company and it was declared insolvent. The receiver was O. C. Irwin, manager of the plant, and under his direction, the debts were slowly paid off, and he made modest improvements made as finances allowed. (4)

In 1910, after the debts had been paid, the court permitted the Berlin Public Service Company to purchase the utility. O. C. Irwin and his son were executives in the new company. By 1911, a much larger power generating plant was shown on the Sanborn-Perris map. And, in 1912, a local publication published a photograph of the plant. The photograph showed a one story brick structure with a large two-story brick structure in the rear and a storage building next to the east wall of the plant. (5)



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Inside the power plant in 1912 were two 250-kilowatt alternating current generators driven by Corliss steam engines. The heat generated by this equipment was first wasted, but Irwin installed equipment for heating water, steam-driven pumps for circulating the hot water, and began to distribute it as heat to nearby businesses and homes. This central heating system remained in use until 1951. (6)

After the turn of the century, the demand for electricity in the area grew at a rapid pace, as new electric wiring and fixtures were installed in old and new houses. During the 1910s, the power company installed a turbine-generator of 1,250-kilowatts capacity in the plant. Three hand-fired boilers produced steam to operate it. Later, the company installed modern stoker equipment. (7)

The 1910s was also an era of consolidation of local power companies into larger corporations, and in 1916, the Wisconsin Power, Light and Heat Company acquired the Berlin Public Service Company. In 1924, the Wisconsin Power and Light Company absorbed this company. Wisconsin Power and Light became one of the most significant energy utilities in the state. (8)

Shortly after Wisconsin Power and Light Company acquired the Berlin Public Service power plant, it made plans for the construction of a new power plant that would be a modern electric plant serving the city. The new plant was built around the old buildings, which were demolished at a later date for the completion of the new building. The 1926 Sanborn-Perris Fire Insurance Map indicates that a new facility had replaced the old complex. (9)

Power generation at this plant continued until 1951, when electric utilities began serving their customers with large regional power plants and began phasing out local plants. The building has remained a Wisconsin Power and Light Company shop and warehouse up to the present time.

The sale of electric power is one of the most significant industrial activities in any community since it affects almost everyone. Electric power is taken for granted, but mass use of this power only became widespread in the early twentieth century. The development of electric power in Berlin is typical of other communities. A small, local company builds a power generating plant. Gradually, business increases and expanded, or new, larger plants are built. Eventually, the local company is taken over by a large utility and local power plants are phased out in favor of regional power plants.

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This building represents the era of the maturing of electric power service in Berlin. Built on the site of all of its historic predecessors, the Wisconsin Power and Light Berlin Power Plant was a modern, twentieth century local power plant, reflecting the modern image the corporate owner wished to convey and able to generate the type and volume of power needed for early twentieth century customers. It was also built so that the company could generate electric power in the most efficient manner. And, even though the old generating equipment is gone, the basic layout of the building is intact, and details that have been altered have not been altered irreversibly. Because of its high integrity and importance in the history of the commercial generation of electric power in Berlin, this building is a significant historical entity in the city.

Notes to Section 8:

(1) Sanborn-Perris Fire Insurance Maps for the City of Berlin, on file in the Archives of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin; "Lines in the Sky - X, Berlin District - 1," article on file at the Administrative Services and Real Estate Office of the Wisconsin Power and Light Company, Madison, Wisconsin. The date of construction was arrived at after comparing information on the Sanborn-Perris maps with information in the historical article.

(2) Barbara Wyatt, ed., Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin, Vol. II, Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1986, p. 2-20.

(3) "Lines in the Sky," p. 1, Sanborn-Perris Maps.

(4) "Lines in the Sky," pp. 1-2.

(5) Ibid., p. 2; "Berlin Evening Journal Carriers' Greeting, Berlin in 1912," pamphlet published by the Berlin Evening Journal, 1912, on file in the History Files of the Berlin Public Library, Berlin, Wisconsin, n.p.

(6) "Lines in the Sky," p. 2.

(7) Ibid.

(8) Ibid.

(9) Ibid., p. 4; Sanborn-Perris maps.



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WISCONSIN POWER AND LIGHT BERLIN POWER PLANT, 142 Water St., Berlin, Green Lake  
County, WI. Photos by Carol Cartwright, April, 1991. Negatives at the State  
Historic Preservation Division of the State Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin.  
Views:

- 1 of 10: Site view, from the east.
- 2 of 10: Front section, view from the northeast.
- 3 of 10: East wall, view from the east.
- 4 of 10: West wall, view from the northwest.
- 5 of 10: Rear walls, view from the west.
- 6 of 10: Interior staircase.
- 7 of 10: Repair shop.
- 8 of 10: Upper floor storage room.
- 9 of 10: Upper floor storage room.
- 10 of 10: Auditorium.