

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM**

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE: Wisconsin	
COUNTY: Jefferson	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER 71-1155-0007	DATE 11/23/71

1. NAME

COMMON:
* Octagon House

AND/OR HISTORIC:
Richards (John) Octagon House

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER: 919 Charles Street

CITY OR TOWN: Watertown

STATE: Wisconsin CODE: 53094 COUNTY: Jefferson CODE: 055

Congressmen to be notified:
Sen. William Proxmire
Sen. Gaylord A. Nelson
Rep. Robert W. Kastenmeier

3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Object <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Structure 	<input type="checkbox"/> Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both 	<input type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress 	Yes: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input type="checkbox"/> No
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment 	<input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input type="checkbox"/> Military <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Museum 	<input type="checkbox"/> Park <input type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific 	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify)

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME: Watertown Historical Society

STREET AND NUMBER: 919 Charles Street

CITY OR TOWN: Watertown STATE: Wisconsin CODE: 53094

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.: Jefferson County Courthouse

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN: Jefferson STATE: Wisconsin CODE: 53549

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY: Historic American Buildings Survey

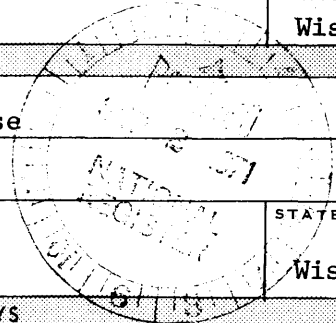
DATE OF SURVEY: 1941 Federal State County Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS: Library of Congress

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN: Washington STATE: District of Columbia CODE: 11

SEE INSTRUCTIONS



STATE: Wisconsin
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7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
	(Check One)			(Check One)		
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input type="checkbox"/> Unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The octagon house completed in 1854 by John Richards, who planned and built it, is situated on a hilltop on the west bank of the Rock River in Watertown. It is a three-story buff brick structure with a full ground floor level below the first floor, and with a cupola. There are thirty-two rooms (fifty-seven if one includes halls and closets). The house measures 50 x 50 feet and rests on a seventeen-inch thick foundation which is completely beneath the surface. Of solid brick construction with thirteen-inch walls and eight-inch partitions, the house has never settled: casement windows and built-in linen chest drawers still work perfectly.

Probably the most striking and interesting feature of the interior is the cantilever staircase, a hanging spiral which rises through the center of the house directly from the first floor to the cupola. It is simple but beautiful in design, with a hand-molded rail and hand-turned spindles of solid cherry from trees grown on the Richards land. It is also an integral part of the heating system, as each of the four stairwell walls contains a flue which ends in a separate chimney at the top of the cupola.

In the basement is a wood-burning hot air furnace that accommodated six-foot logs. There were hot air registers on the first and second floors. The entire house has only one fireplace, which is in the parlor on the first floor. The furnace also contained a coil for heating water.

An air-conditioning or circulating system is another unusual feature for the period that Richards built into the house. It consisted of vents in the outside brick walls, with air intakes below the eaves and outlets in each of the major rooms. The water system originated in the roof, which is funnel-shaped. A pipe leading down through the center of the house carried water into a cement-lined basswood tank on the third floor, and from there to an overflow cistern in the basement. Any overflow from the cistern was channeled outside and downhill to the river. At two levels on the staircase there are niches in the wall containing crude faucets from which water could be drawn for filling pitchers for the bedrooms, and in one bedroom is a permanent wash basin with a faucet.

Off the dining room is a dumb-waiter which carried food up from the kitchen in the basement. The kitchen contains a Dutch oven which has sufficient capacity to bake twenty-four loaves of bread at a time.

All windows have hand-cut stone lintels and sills and louvered wood shutters. The broad cornice is supported by heavy brackets, the treatment being Italianate Villa in style. The cupola has rails and balusters between the four chimneys and its cornice is also supported by brackets matching those of the main roof.

The major alteration to the house was the necessary removal some years ago of the continuous verandas on the first two floor levels as a safety measure. The house still bears the marks of the attachment of the verandas, and each major room on the first two floors has tall casement windows which led onto the veranda. Some thought has been given to replacing the verandas, but the expense involved makes the value of such restoration questionable. Actually the house is more handsome without them. Otherwise the house is well pre-

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- | | | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pre-Columbian | <input type="checkbox"/> 16th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 18th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 20th Century |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 15th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 17th Century | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 19th Century | |

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) 1854

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- | | | | |
|--|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal | <input type="checkbox"/> Education | <input type="checkbox"/> Political | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry | <input type="checkbox"/> Science | _____ |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agriculture | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture | _____ |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce | <input type="checkbox"/> Military | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications | <input type="checkbox"/> Music | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation | | | |

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Richards Octagon House is Wisconsin's outstanding example of the octagonal dwellings which were a fad in the mid-nineteenth century due largely to the popularization of this style by Orson Fowler in his book, A Home For All. John Richards, who planned and built it, incorporated a number of features of his own design which make the dwelling unique among some twenty such houses of its type that were built in Wisconsin. Completed in 1854 after two years of planning and three of construction, the Octagon House is credited with being the largest single family dwelling in Wisconsin's pre-Civil War period.

Rexford Newcomb characterizes the house by saying, "In fact, probably the best-planned octagon in the country is the John Richards House at Watertown, Wisconsin..."¹ Of the more than fifty structures listed in the Wisconsin section of the 1941 Historic American Buildings Survey catalog, the Richards Octagon House is the only one chosen for an illustration. Richards' original plans are still extant and copies are in the HABS files in the Library of Congress.

Richards, while not a prominent figure in state political affairs, was nevertheless active in service to his own community. Schooled at Williams College and a lawyer by profession, he came to Wisconsin from Massachusetts in 1836 and became a pioneer settler of Jefferson County. Across the Rock River from the site where he later built his house, he operated a grist mill. Richards soon became active in public affairs, and Territorial Governor Henry Dodge appointed him district attorney of Jefferson County--the first man to hold that office. He was a justice of the peace and one of Watertown's early mayors.

In 1840 Richards returned to Massachusetts and married Eliza Forbes. He is said to have promised to build his bride the largest and finest house in the town he considered to have the best potential in the Wisconsin Territory. This he did, and the stately Octagon House he designed and built stands today as a museum, a showplace, and in addition to being an outstanding piece of architecture, a link between Watertown's early days and the present.

1. Newcomb, Rexford, Architecture of the Old Northwest Territory, p. 150.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Ivey, Zida C., "The Famous Octagon House at Watertown," Wisconsin Magazine of History, 24(2):167-173, 1940.
 Perrin, Richard W. E., Historic Wisconsin Buildings, Milwaukee Public Museum, Milwaukee, 1962, 64-65.
 Perrin, Richard W. E., The Architecture of Wisconsin, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, 1967, 40-41.
 Whyte, Bertha K., Wisconsin Heritage, Chas. T. Branford Co., Boston, 1954, 109-113.
 Newcomb, Rexford, Architecture of the Old Northwest Territory, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1950, 150.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			OR	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE		LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds		Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds	
NW	0 ' "	0 ' "	N 43 ° 10 ' 47 "	W 88 ° 42 ' 21 "		
NE	0 ' "	0 ' "				
SE	0 ' "	0 ' "				
SW	0 ' "	0 ' "				

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 2.4

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE:
Donald N. Anderson, Asst. Director, Historic Sites & Markers Division

ORGANIZATION: State Historical Society of Wisconsin DATE: March 17, 1971

STREET AND NUMBER:
816 State Street

CITY OR TOWN: Madison STATE: Wisconsin 53706 CODE: 55

12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

As the designated State Liaison Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National State Local

Name James Morton Smith
 James Morton Smith

Title Director, State Historical Society of Wisconsin

Date AUG 30 1971

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

Ernest A. Connelly
 Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

NOV 23 1971

Date _____

ATTEST:
William Neustach
 Keeper of The National Register

Date NOV 23 1971

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