

United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

For HCRS use only

received MAY 21 1982

date entered JUN 17 1982

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic John J. Suhr House

and/or common N/A

2. Location

street & number 121 Langdon Street not for publication

city, town Madison vicinity of congressional district Second

state Wisconsin code 55 county Dane code 025

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition N/A	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Higgs Investment Ltd., (Barbara Higgs)

street & number 121 Langdon Street

city, town Madison vicinity of state Wisconsin 53703

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Dane County Register of Deeds

street & number 210 Monona Avenue

city, town Madison state Wisconsin 53709

6. Representation in Existing Surveys (continued)

title Designated Madison Landmark has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date submitted 3/1/72, approved 7/15/74 federal state county local

depository for survey records Madison Landmarks Commission, 215 Monona Avenue

city, town Madison state Wisconsin 53709

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Heavily influenced by the French Second Empire style, the Suhr House is a three story building, constructed of cream brick with a cut stone foundation. It is asymmetrical with a front projecting tower containing a vestibule entry at its base. A wraparound porch on the first story has Ionic columns that are repeated along the sides of the main entrance. Adjacent to the end of the porch, a front rectangular bay window supports a small balcony that includes a low balustrade and four posts supporting a triangular pediment containing a sunburst motif. The third story is a shingled mansard roof supported by paired brackets. The roof contains an arched dormer on the northwest corner and a round dormer in the center along the front facade. The tower is incorporated into the mansard roof; it is topped by a cast iron cresting, and is set with an arched dormer in front. The windows of the house vary from arched to flat lintels. The first story windows that look toward the street are headed by leaded glass.

A 1914 photograph¹ of the house shows small ball and cone finials at the top of the dormers and triangular pediments. This finial design is repeated on the top of the flush paneled pedestals of a low balustrade on the top of the main porch. All finials and balustrade along the top of the porch are now removed.

Much of the interior remains intact. The large mantelpiece in the front parlor is backed by a large mirror and has many shelves that are supported by turned posts. Majolica pressed tiles surround the entrance to the fireplace, and one tile in the upper left corner has the head of a woman and a tile in the upper right corner has the head of a man. Large ogee cornice is found in all rooms on the first floor, and most doors are a five panel pattern. The main stairs are winding with square, chamfered newel posts that are topped by ball finials. The banister has square balusters with chamfered edges and are separated by horizontal stretchers of the same design.

The neighborhood in which the Suhr House is located is basically residential, mostly of students. Langdon Street is the location for many fraternities and sororities of the University of Wisconsin as well as regular apartment housing. Chi Omega Sorority borders the Suhr House along the east edge of the property, and a frame, turn of the century, house, now converted to apartment housing, adjoins the west edge of the property.

The east side of the house is somewhat plain except for its arched windows. The west side of the house has a projecting two story, rectangular bay topped by a triangular pediment containing a sunburst motif. The rear of the house has a two story, cream brick projection with a low hipped roof and appears to be original with the main block of the house. This projection has a wooden porch on the south side that enters on the first floor, but is reached by stairs from the ground at the foundation level. A later flat-roofed addition of cement block along the foundation of the west side was apparently designed as a two car garage, and currently has no doors. The ground in the back of the house slopes down from the front to expose the entire foundation.

¹ Wisconsin State Journal, 16 March 1887, p. 4. (Reference obtained from Frank Custer, Madison, Wisconsin).

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other (specify) assoc. with signifi- cant person
Specific dates	1887 (see text)	Builder/Architect	unknown	

1887-1902 (period of significance)

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Suhr House is architecturally significant as one of few remaining examples of the Second Empire period of construction in Madison; its historical significance is based on its association with civically-active businessman John J. Suhr, who founded the German American Bank and was a leader in Madison's 19th century German community. Architecture. This home is one of the last remaining examples of the French Second Empire influence in the city. It is basically intact and seems to contain most of its original features. The interior, which is slightly altered, also contains a high degree of its early fabric. Although the architect has not been pinpointed, the construction of the house for \$7,000 is attributed by a newspaper account to the local mill firm of Fredrickson and Fish.¹

History. John J. Suhr, the first owner and builder of the house, was born in Bremen, Germany, in 1836, and arrived in Madison in 1856. He worked as a bookkeeper in the State Bank, and in 1871 he founded the German American Bank, which is presently the American Exchange Bank. Suhr married Louise Heicke and had five children. He was concerned with community affairs and was a member of the school board, the Madison Turnverein Society, and served as president of the Madison Free Library.² Suhr died at his Langdon residence on April 11, 1901.³

In 1887, Suhr obtained the property for his house from William Vilas and began construction. This is substantiated by newspaper accounts of work on the house⁴ and the tax roll first lists Suhr owning the lot in 1887 and a large increase in the property assessment from \$2,000 in 1887 to \$4,500 in 1888.⁵ Also, the city directory of 1886-87 lists Suhr living at 310 West Washington Avenue, and the 1888-89 directory lists him living at 121 Langdon Street.⁶ The house remained in family hands until about 1964 when the last of John Suhr's children died and the property was sold to Chi Omega sorority for use as an annex.⁷ Chi Omega, which is located beside the Suhr House, sold the home to Higgs Investment Limited on July 13, 1973.⁸ Higgs Investment currently owns the house and uses it for renting rooms.

¹ Wisconsin State Journal, 16 March 1887, p. 4. (Reference obtained from Frank Custer, Madison, Wisconsin.)

² _____, Biographical Review of Dane County, Wisconsin, (Chicago: Biographical Review Publishing Company, 1893), p. 466.

³ Wisconsin State Journal, 12 April 1901, p. 8.

⁴ Wisconsin State Journal, 16 March 1887, p. 4; and 6 December 1887, p. 4. (reference obtained from Frank Custer, Madison, Wisconsin).

(footnotes continued)

9. Major Bibliographical References

City Directory of Madison, W.G. Hogg and Company, 1886-87.

City Director of Madison, Madison: Angell and Hastreiter, 1888-89.

(continued)

10. Geographical Data

Acreege of nominated property approx. 1/4 (10,890 Sq. Ft.)

Quadrangle name Madison West, WI

Quadrangle scale 7.5

UMT References

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Zone Easting Northing

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Zone Easting Northing

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Verbal boundary description and justification

Block 61, original plat, northeast 1/4 of lot 5 and all of lot 6, parcel #1, 0709-144-1103-1.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code
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state	code	county	code
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11. Form Prepared By

name/title Christopher S. Witmer

Landscape Architecture 875

organization University of Wisconsin date March 25, 1981

street & number 336 W. Wilson, #1 telephone 608/256-4010

city or town Madison state Wisconsin 53703

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation 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 Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature Richard M. Mearns

title Director, State Historical Society of Wisconsin date 4/29/82

For HCRS use only

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

Alvin Byers
Keeper of the National Register

Entered in the National Register date 6/17/82

Attest: _____ date _____

Chief of Registration

United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service
National Register of Historic Places
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received
date entered

JOHN J. SUHR HOUSE, Madison, Dane Co., WI

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Footnotes (continued)

- ⁵ Tax Roll for the City of Madison, 1886, p. 24; 1887, p. 24; and 1888 p. 26.
- ⁶ _____, City Directory of Madison, (W.G. Hogg and Company, 1888-87), p. 190.
- _____, City Directory of Madison, (Madison: Angell and Hastreiter, 1888-89), p. 207.
- ⁷ Hobbins, Edward, great-grandson of John Suhr, telephone interview at American Exchange Bank, March, 1981.
- ⁸ Letter to Charles Sandborn, of Madison Landmarks Commission, June 25, 1974, (letter on file at 215 Monona Avenue, Madison Landmarks Commission).

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES (continued)

_____, Bibliographical Review of Dane County, Wisconsin, Chicago: Biographical Review Publishing Company, 1893.

Tax Roll for the City of Madison, 1886, 1887, and 1888.

Wisconsin State Journal, Madison, Wisconsin.

**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

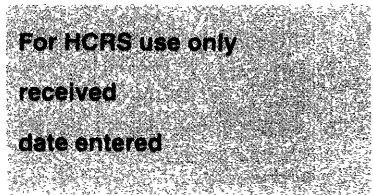
**National Register of Historic Places
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JOHN J. SUHR HOUSE, Madison, Dane Co., WI

Continuation sheet

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6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS (continued)

Wisconsin Inventory of Historic Places

10/13/72, revised 5/8/74

Historic Preservation Division, State Historical Society of Wisconsin

816 State Street

Madison, WI 53706