

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

JUL 31 1979

DATE ENTERED

SEP 20 1979

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

Morse Town Hall

AND/OR COMMON

Mellen City Hall (preferred)

**LOCATION**

STREET &amp; NUMBER

Bennett and Main Streets

\_\_NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Mellen

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

7th

STATE

Wisconsin

CODE

55

COUNTY

Ashland

CODE

003

**CLASSIFICATION****CATEGORY**

\_\_DISTRICT

 BUILDING(S)

\_\_STRUCTURE

\_\_SITE

\_\_OBJECT

**OWNERSHIP** PUBLIC

\_\_PRIVATE

\_\_BOTH

**PUBLIC ACQUISITION**

\_\_IN PROCESS

\_\_BEING CONSIDERED

**STATUS** OCCUPIED

\_\_UNOCCUPIED

\_\_WORK IN PROGRESS

**ACCESSIBLE**

\_\_YES: RESTRICTED

\_\_YES: UNRESTRICTED

\_\_NO

**PRESENT USE**

\_\_AGRICULTURE

\_\_COMMERCIAL

 EDUCATIONAL

\_\_ENTERTAINMENT

 GOVERNMENT

\_\_INDUSTRIAL

\_\_MILITARY

 MUSEUM

\_\_PARK

\_\_PRIVATE RESIDENCE

\_\_RELIGIOUS

\_\_SCIENTIFIC

\_\_TRANSPORTATION

\_\_OTHER:

**OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

City of Mellen; Keith Markee, City Clerk

STREET &amp; NUMBER

Bennett and Main Streets

CITY, TOWN

Mellen

\_\_ VICINITY OF

STATE

Wisconsin 54546

**LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Ashland County Courthouse

STREET &amp; NUMBER

201 West Second Street

CITY, TOWN

Ashland

STATE

Wisconsin 54806

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

Wisconsin Survey of Historic Places

DATE

1977

\_\_FEDERAL  STATE \_\_COUNTY \_\_LOCALDEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

State Historical Society, Historic Preservation Division

CITY, TOWN

Madison

STATE

Wisconsin 53706

# 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 (slightly)	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

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## DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Mellen City Hall is situated in the center of Mellen, a village whose population numbered 1,168 in 1970. Built in 1896, the building has been in continuous use as the city hall.

The exterior of the city hall has changed little since its construction. It is built in the vernacular Queen Anne style and has two stories and a hipped roof. Gablets with semi-circular lights dot the roof. A slightly projecting pavilion, topped with a chimney, appears on the west side. Although the gable of the pavilion is windowless, the characteristic sash windows on this building pierce on the wall. A gabled dormer on the south roof matches the pavilion dormer and is also windowless. The building is further embellished with a wooden belt course above the first floor windows, a wooden water table, and a molded cornice. There are also corner boards. Originally the roof had metal cresting which has since been removed.

The dominant feature on the hall is an octagonal bell tower at the southwest corner. Its ogee roof shelters an open belfry enclosed with a turned wood balustrade. The bell is still operable and is rung every year on the Fourth of July.

The main entrance to the building is on the south wall. There is a bracketed hood that was originally a balcony over the door and transom. In 1921 the balustrade was removed and the double doors were replaced with a single door.

A vehicular entry at the north end of the west wall leads to the fire hall. Originally, the jail was in this portion of the building, but it was moved to another building many years ago. Until the 1940s firefighting equipment was stored in this area. At that time a two door garage was added to the north end of the city hall. The garage was used to house the new fire-fighting equipment and ambulance.

The first floor of the building was originally divided into two long rooms, plus the jail at the north end. The east room was the police office and the west was used for civic affairs. In the north wall the original safe is intact. At some point the belfry room was partitioned off and the police station was housed there. Other city offices then occupied the east room. In 1927 a library was opened in the west room of the building, and in 1976 a museum was opened in the large, open second floor room. The interior is remarkably unchanged. High ceilings, including a vaulted ceiling on the second floor, and wooden floors, woodwork, and staircases are all original.

City offices still occupy the building, but their relocation is imminent. The city has bought another building, but has yet to renovate it. When renovation is complete, everything but the museum are scheduled to move. The city is not planning on heating the old city hall, thus rapid deterioration of the building and collections is certain.

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CONTINUATION SHEET

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7. DESCRIPTION continued

The Mellen Area Historical Society is very interested in having the building preserved, restored, and maintained as a viable community center. They would like to see the building insulated and weather-proofed, and would like to restore the original balcony and double doors. Further, they feel that community interests could be better served if the library were to remain in the building after city offices have moved.

8. SIGNIFICANCE continued

Other community affairs that occurred at City Hall included rummage sales, bingo games, suppers, lectures, political rallies, and even "exhibition boxing, wrestling and harmony singing" (Mellen Weekly Record, 2-10-21). During a brief period prior to 1901 the Immanuel Lutheran Church held services in German at the city hall.

Movies and plays were often featured in the "Opera House" on the second floor. The first silent movies were shown here, accompanied by a three piece orchestra. The proprietor, Theodore Steinmetz, sometimes spoke the dialogue with his partner, Mr. King.

Prior to construction of a new school in 1911 the city hall was often used for graduation ceremonies, school plays, and debates and oratorical contests. For nearly a year after the old Mellen School burned in 1910 the sixth grade through high school classes were taught in the city hall.

The library has occupied City Hall since it was organized in 1927. A local woodsman, August Rohloff, bequeathed \$1,500 to the city to establish a library (Margaret McCarthy, interviewed by Mary Maller, February 1979). Interest is still drawn on this account. The museum began in 1976 as a Bicentennial project. Collections include rare local photographs, ledgers, diaries, and old books, regional tools and household appliances, and uniforms from World War I.

The most far-reaching claim to fame by the Mellen City Hall was its appearance in the 20th Century Fox movie, "Hemingway's Adventures as a Young Man." According to the director, Marty Ritt, "Mellen was selected out of dozens of others because it had neither lost the charm of an upper Midwest village at the time of World War I, nor had it been allowed to become derelict"

(cont.)

# 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 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY) Major social center
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1896<sup>1</sup>

BUILDER/ARCHITECT H. Asselstine/Wildhagen & Reteauhaus<sup>2</sup>

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Mellen City Hall is significant as a long time seat of local government activities, as well as the scene of many social, educational, and cultural events. There is no other building in the small town of Mellen that has touched the lives of nearly all residents with such a variety of functions. The building was designed by a notable northern Wisconsin architect and is typical of many of the public buildings he designed in the northwestern part of the state. It has changed very little on both the exterior and interior since its construction in 1896.

The existing Mellen City Hall was the first structure to house city government offices in this community. Offices of the city clerk, treasurer, justice of the peace, and police are all housed here. Taxes have been collected, elections conducted, town meetings held, and an occasional marriage ceremony performed at City Hall. In the early days of the city hall's existence prisoners were housed here and, since 1907 when the city was incorporated, fire-fighting equipment has been stored here.

Ever since its construction, the city hall has served the community as a key focus of social, educational, and cultural activities. Several community groups have gathered in the meeting rooms of City Hall. The Commercial Club, whose membership included area farmers and businessmen, met there from 1913 until about 1923. The American Legion and the Women's Auxiliary of the American Legion both met at City Hall. Established in 1919, the American Legion met in the downstairs west room until the library occupied that space. Then they began meeting upstairs.

For several years the American Legion sponsored dances every Friday night. Mr. Charles Markee recalls that music was provided by the "one-man-band" from Butternut, a Mr. Klein. This versatile musician played his concertina, drums, and other instruments to create waltzes, polkas, and two-steps (Charles Markee, interviewed by Mary Maller, February 1979). Other dances were held there too. Mrs. Minnie Anderson recalls that "during World War I whenever a contingent of enlistees would leave Mellen to go to the war, there was always a farewell dance given upstairs in City Hall" (Minnie Anderson, interviewed by Mary Maller, February 1979).

1. Minutes of Mellen City Council, filed at Mellen City Hall.  
 2. Ibid.

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Anderson, Minnie. Interviewed by Mary Maller, February 1979.  
Ashland Daily Press, 3-24-20.  
 McCarthy, Margaret. Interviewed by Mary Maller, February 1979.  
 Markee, Charles. Interviewed by Mary Maller, February 1979.  
 Mellen Chamber of Commerce and Area Development Association. Nick Adams' Home  
Town, Mellen, Wisconsin. 1962.

(continued)

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY .172 acre

QUADRANGLE NAME Mellen, Wisconsin

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:62,500

UTM REFERENCES

A 1 5 | 6 8 10 1 5 10 | 5 1 3 2 8 5 10  
 ZONE EASTING NORTHING

B    |    |     
 ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C    |    |   

D    |    |   

E    |    |   

F    |    |   

G    |    |   

H    |    |   

## VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The City Hall occupies the west 75' of lots 10 and 11 in Block B of the original plat of the village of Iron City, now Mellen.

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Mary Maller, President

(continued)

ORGANIZATION

Mellen Library Board

DATE

March 1979

STREET & NUMBER

High Springs Farm

TELEPHONE

(715) 274-5242

CITY OR TOWN

Mellen

STATE

Wisconsin 54546

# 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL   

STATE   

LOCAL X

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 National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

*Richard Mewey*

TITLE Director, State Historical Society of Wisconsin

DATE

7/25/79

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

*William H. Brasham*  
 ATTENDANT TO THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE 9.20.79

ATTEST: *Constance Sage*  
 CHIEF OF REGISTRATION  
 Regional Coordinator

DATE 9-20-79

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ITEM NUMBER 8

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8. SIGNIFICANCE continued

(Mellen Chamber of Commerce and Area Development Association, 1962).  
The city hall was included in some scenic views of the city.

The city hall was designed by Henry Wildhagen, a prominent Ashland architect. Between 1893 and his death in 1920 Wildhagen designed many public buildings in northern Wisconsin" (Ashland Daily Press, 3-24-20, p. 1). Several of his buildings were of frame construction with interesting details, such as the bell tower on the Mellen City Hall. Wildhagen's South Shore Public School (1903) is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

Although the building has little architectural significance beyond the community of Mellen, its local importance is considerable when compared with other Mellen buildings. A feature comparable in design and embellishment to the bell tower cannot be found elsewhere in the community. One of the notable aspects of the city hall is its practically unchanged state. The building retains its original floors, ceilings, and woodwork. It is one of the few city halls in Wisconsin that was spared the addition of a dropped acoustical tile ceiling and linoleum flooring.

The city hall is the dominant focal point in Mellen. It is the first building seen when one enters town from any direction and is the outstanding example of nineteenth century architecture in Mellen. Local pride in the building is strong, in part demonstrated by the enthusiasm exhibited in the collection of information for this nomination.

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9. BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES continued

Mellen Weekly Record, 2-10-21.

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11. continued

Barbara Wyatt

State Historical Society, Historic Preservation Division

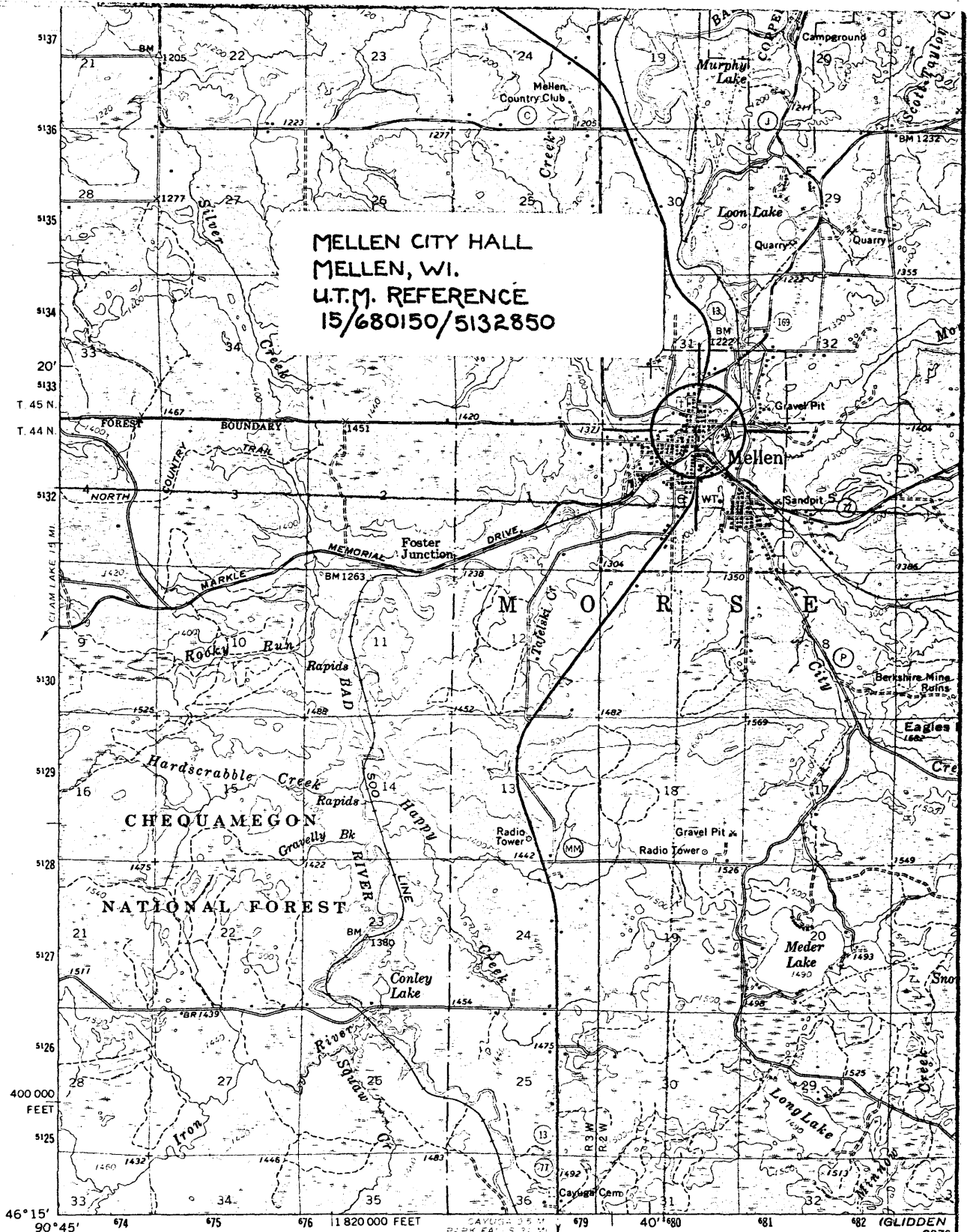
March 1979

816 State Street

(608)262-8904

Madison

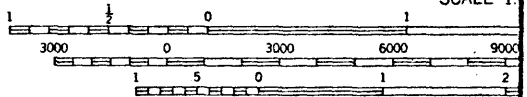
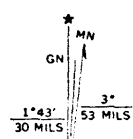
Wisconsin 53706



Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey in cooperation with the Wisconsin Highway Commission and Wisconsin Geological and Natural History Survey. Control by USGS and USC&GS.

South half compiled in 1968 from 1:24,000-scale maps dated 1967. North half topography by photogrammetric methods from aerial photographs taken 1965. Field checked 1967. Supersedes planimetric map dated 1942.

Polyconic projection. 1927 North American datum. 10,000-foot grid based on Wisconsin coordinate system, north zone. 1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks, zone 15, shown in blue.



CONTOUR INTERVAL 20 FEET  
DOTTED LINES REPRESENT MEAN DATUM

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACT  
FOR SALE BY U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY  
AND BY THE WISCONSIN GEOLOGICAL AND NATURAL HISTORY SURVEY  
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS