

United States 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 Forms (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 Wilmanor Apartments
 other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 1419-29 West Sixth Street;
253-255 North Memorial Drive N/A not for publication
 city, town Racine N/A vicinity
 state Wisconsin code WI county Racine code 101 zip code 53404

3. Classification

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

Name of related multiple property listing:
None

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.

[Handwritten Signature]

12 May 1999
Date

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.
___ See continuation sheet

Edson H. Beall

6-24-94

___ determined eligible for the National Register. ___ See continuation sheet

___ determined not eligible for the National Register.

___ removed from the National Register.

___ other, (explain:)

Entered in the
National Register

[Handwritten Signature]

Signature of the Keeper

Date

6. Functions or Use

Historic Functions
(enter categories from instructions)

Current Functions
(enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/multiple dwelling

VACANT/NOT IN USE

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)

Materials
(enter categories from instructions)

Colonial Revival

foundation Concrete
walls Brick
roof Asphalt
other Stone
Wood

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Wilmanor Apartments is a highly intact 33-unit Georgian Revival three-story brick apartment building that occupies a prominent corner lot in one of the city of Racine's older residential neighborhoods. The Wilmanor was developed and constructed between 1928 and 1929 by the Racine-based William M. Christensen Construction Company and upon completion in July of 1929 it became the first large scale modern apartment building in this part of the city and only the second one built in Racine up to that time.¹

The older residential neighborhood that surrounds the Wilmanor is located six blocks west of the downtown section of the city and consists of a mostly flat point of land that is elevated slightly above the Root River. This waterway bounds the Wilmanor's neighborhood to the east, west, and south as it flows eastward a few more blocks to the place where it empties into Lake Michigan. The Wilmanor Apartments is a free-standing building situated on a prominent corner lot, giving it principal facades that face west onto the north-south running North Memorial Drive, which crosses the Root River one block to the south, and north onto the east-west running West Sixth Street, which crosses the river one block to the east. These two thoroughfares are the major arterials in the neighborhood and they are also two of the major thoroughfares in the city, Memorial Drive being a major route through the city and Sixth Street a major route to and from the downtown. Consequently, the intersection where these streets come together is an important one and a highly visible one as well. Wilmanor occupies the southeast corner of this intersection.

The construction of the Wilmanor resulted in the demolition of two earlier frame dwellings located on the site. At that time, two of the other three corners of the Sixth Street-Memorial Drive (then called Lafayette Avenue) intersection were also occupied by frame dwellings as well, dwellings that were probably similar to the Queen Anne and later vernacular form houses that are still found throughout the neighborhood. The fourth (northwest) corner was and is occupied by a brick High Victorian Gothic style church. As the neighborhood slowly transitioned from single family occupancy to multi-family occupancy, and as both Memorial Drive and West Sixth street became increasingly important automobile thoroughfares, these other houses were also demolished and their sites were recycled for automobile-related uses; a filling station (SW corner), and a parking lot (NE corner) for the church across the street.

The Wilmanor is a "U"-plan building having two equal length side wings and a shorter connecting wing. The open end of the "U" faces south. The principal north and west-facing facades are placed flush with the inner edges of the concrete sidewalks that parallel the streets.² The east-facing side elevation faces the lot of the building

¹ The 1990 population of Racine was 84,298, making it Wisconsin's fourth largest city. "Large" in this context means thirty apartments or more.

² Originally there were narrow grassed parkways planted with trees placed between the sidewalks and the streets, but these have been lost to street-widening activity.

8. Statement of Significance

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

Applicable National Register Criteria A B X 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

 1928-29⁵

 N/A

Cultural Affiliation

 N/A

Significant Person

 N/A

Architect/Builder

 Matson, J. Mandor⁶

 Wm. M. Christensen Construction Co.⁷

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

The Wilmanor Apartments building is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) for its local significance under National Register (NR) criterion C. More specifically, the Wilmanor is being nominated because of its associations with the NR significance area of Architecture, a theme that is also identified in the State of Wisconsin's Cultural Resource Management Plan (CRMP). Research centered on the Period Revival Styles subsection of the Architectural Styles Study Unit of the CRMP.⁵ This research identified the Wilmanor as an excellent, highly intact, representative example of a larger scale early twentieth century apartment building design, one whose overall design utilizes Georgian Revival style elements. The Wilmanor was designed by prominent Racine architect J. Mandor Matson and it was built between 1928 and 1928 at a cost of \$260,000 by the Racine-based Wm. M. Christensen Construction Company. The project was initiated and developed by the president and owner of the firm, William M. Christensen, to fill a strong local demand for rental housing. The new building was an immediate success and it was viewed locally as a model of modernity.

The Wilmanor is also significant architecturally as an example of a scarce property type in Racine. When it was built, the city of Racine was Wisconsin's second largest city, with a population [in 1931] of 67,542, and it was then nearing the peak of a major boom period which continued until the early years of the Great Depression. This period saw the expansion of the city beyond its traditional boundaries, the creation of hundreds of new dwellings, and the creation or expansion of numerous local industrial enterprises. All of this activity created a need for

⁵ The Racine Journal-News. Racine, Wisconsin. September 25, 1929, Special eighteen page Wilmanor Apartments Section. The period of significance is the construction date.

⁶ Ibid. Pg. 16.

⁷ Ibid. Pg. 2.

⁸ Wyatt, Barbara (Ed.). Cultural Resource Management Plan, Vol. 2. State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin, 1986. (Architecture), pgs. 2-18 & 2-23.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Wilmanor Apartments, Racine, Racine County, Wisconsin
Section number 7 Page 1

next door. The inward-facing elevations of each of these three wings face a rectilinear-shaped courtyard that comprises the remaining portion of the rectilinear lot that is not covered by the building. The design of the exterior of the Wilmanor is dictated in part by the layout of the interior, which is divided into six separate three-story units, each of which is serviced by its own stairwell. Each of these six stairwells descends to a principal entrance located at ground level and these entrances are each centered in architecturally detailed nearly full-height bays that comprise the most important architectural features of the building's principal elevations.

The Wilmanor is of steel frame and reinforced concrete construction, and features steel joists and reinforced concrete floors and roof. The building is founded on a poured reinforced concrete foundation, a five-foot-tall rusticated portion of which is visible above grade on the east, north, and west elevations. This portion of the foundation has an encircling, slightly projecting water table course just above it and a similar plinth course at its base. Its rusticated appearance was created by incising the concrete with deep "V"-tooled horizontal grooves, creating five equal-width courses.³ Much of the basement story of the building is raised above grade and the common rooms such as the laundry and storage spaces and the original utility service rooms are all located on this floor along with an underground parking garage under the courtyard. All three of the principal elevations are clad in a mixture of dark and light brown pressed brick that is laid in an American or common pattern bond.

The West Sixth Street facade is approximately 101-foot-long and three-stories in height and it is the shortest of the three main elevations. This facade is symmetrical in design and is seven-bays-wide, the second and sixth bays from the left (east) of which contain the nearly full-height entrance bays. Each story of the other five bays on this facade contains a group of flat-arched six-over-one-light wooden sash double hung windows. These groups are of two types. The groups in the first, third, fifth and seventh bays each contain three windows that are separated from each other by narrow wooden mullions and each of these groups has a common concrete sill. The group in the fourth bay, however, consists of a pair of windows, each pair of which also has a common concrete sill, and each of these windows is also separated from the other by a wooden mullion. All of these window groups also features a brick lintel composed of soldier course brick with square stone blocks at each end. The basement story windows consist of triple window groups in bays one, five and, seven and paired groups in bays three and five. All of the basement windows are now covered with plywood sheets.

The main entrances on this facade are located in the second and sixth bays. The entrances are identical and one reaches them by ascending a flight of concrete

³ The site slopes very slightly to the east and it exposes more of this plinth course as it does so.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Wilmanor Apartments, Racine, Racine County, Wisconsin
Section number 7 Page 2

steps (six steps in bay #2 and four in bay # 6) that are flanked by low concrete wing walls. The steps ascend to a landing at the foot of each entrance door opening. Each entrance consists of a wide flat-arched slightly recessed opening that contains a single multi-light wood door flanked by leaded glass two-third length sidelights. These three elements are set into a wood frame that has thin fluted pilaster strips with bases and small fluted capitals attached to the mullions between each of the elements. There are also thin recessed panels below each of the sidelights. The opening is then enframed by a simple massive concrete surround upon which has been affixed cut stone elements of classically inspired design. These elements consists of fluted pilasters on either side of the opening, both of which feature bases and a square cut stone panel located at the top of each pilaster where a capital would normally be. These panels sports a stylized carved flower motif and a third square panel of identical size and design is centered in the lintel over the door opening. Shorter but equally wide version of the fluted shafts of the pilasters that flank the opening are then used to span the distance between the center panel and the squares at the tops of each pilaster. The entire entrance is then sheltered by a large, flat, metal canopy that has a classically derived cornice-like profile. This canopy has a large recessed panel on its underside, recessed, built-in lighting fixtures, and is secured by a pair of chains that are anchored to the building.

The remaining two-and-a-half story portion of the bay above each entrance features a centered flat-arch window opening placed at the landing level between the first and second stories. This opening contains a pair of ten-light leaded glass casement windows set in a wood frame and it has a concrete sill and a brick lintel composed of soldier course brick decorated with square stone blocks at each end. Directly above is an identical opening placed at the landing level between the second and third stories. This opening also contains a pair of ten-light casement windows, but it differs in being surmounted by a ten-light fanlight that has a semi-circular arched soldier course lintel that features a centered cut stone keystone. These windows are enframed by slightly projecting two-story brick pilaster strips onto which have been affixed slightly less wide cut stone pilasters. These pilasters are placed so as to correspond to the pilasters below that flank the entrance and they have bases, smooth shafts, and are surmounted by foliated capitals. Spanning the distance between the two capitals is a cut stone pediment that has both a broken apex and a broken base and that features an urn at its center.

A cut stone cornice is located just above the third floor windows and the elevations are then surmounted by a tall simple brick parapet that is terminated with a cut stone coping course. The only other decoration on the facade is the cut stone quoining that decorates the corners.

The west-facing Memorial Drive facade is approximately 141-feet-long, and it too is three-stories in height. This facade is asymmetrical in design, is eleven-bays-wide, and it utilizes all of the design elements found on the north-facing Sixth

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Wilmanor Apartments, Racine, Racine County, Wisconsin

Section number 7 Page 3

Street facade just described. In essence the seven right-hand bays of the west facade are an almost exact duplicate of the seven-bay-wide north facade, the major difference being that the west facade has been lengthened by the addition of four more bays (the four left-hand bays) at its north end. Each story of these four bays also contains one or more flat-arched six-over-one-light wooden sash double hung windows. When these windows are arranged in groups they are of two types. The groups in the first and third bays from the left each contain two windows that are separated from each other by narrow wooden mullions and each of these groups has a common concrete sill. The groups in the third bay from the left each contain three windows that are each separated from the other by a wooden mullion, and each of these groups of windows also has a common concrete sill. All of these window groups also features a brick lintel composed of soldier course brick with square stone blocks at each end. The second bay from the left, however, differs from the others in that it is thinner and projects slightly from the facade and each story contains just a single window of the type described above, although they also each have a brick lintel like the others (these windows provide light for bathrooms). The basement story windows in bays one, two and three consist of paired window groups while the second bay contains a single window opening. All of these basement windows are also now covered with plywood sheets.

The remainder of the west facade is identical with the north facade. Each of the three upper stories of the fifth, seventh, ninth and eleventh bays from the left (which correspond to the first, third, fifth and seventh bays from the left on the north facade) contain groups of triple windows, while the eighth bay from the right contains groups of paired windows. The sixth and tenth bays from the right contain the entrances to the units on this facade and these entrances are identical with the ones on the north facade except that the difference in the slope of the land here means that they have only a single step leading up to them. The west-facing facade differs from the north-facing facade in two other ways as well. All the basement window groups in bays five, seven, eight and nine are paired groups while the opening in the basement story of the eleventh bay from the left (this is the southernmost bay) is taller and spans nearly its entire width. This opening contains the metal overhead door that is the entrance to the now unused underground parking garage.

The east-facing side elevation of the Wilmanor is identical to the west-facing facade, but is a mirror image of it. The only difference between east and west is that there is no entrance to the parking garage on the east elevation. Consequently, the basement story of the southernmost bay on the east elevation contains a paired group of windows, as do the other bays.

The south-facing elevation of the Wilmanor is largely hidden from public view by the adjacent house and it is much more utilitarian in appearance. It consists of the rear south-facing end elevation of the Memorial Drive wing and the rear south-facing end elevation of the east wing; the space between them consisting of the open south

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Wilmanor Apartments, Racine, Racine County, Wisconsin
Section number 7 Page 4

end of the otherwise enclosed courtyard. The west part, the rear elevation of the Memorial Drive wing, is visible from the street. Consequently, it is also sided in the same brown brick that is used on the principal facades. This portion of the south elevation is three-stories in height, is approximately 30-feet-wide, and it has only a single bay, which is slightly inset and placed just to the right of center. The exposed portion of the reinforced concrete basement story is as tall as the same portion on the other elevations but it is unrelieved by the horizontal grooves that give them a rusticated appearance and it has no openings. In addition, only the left corner (this is the streetside corner) of the upper stories of this elevation exhibits cut stone quoining and the cut stone cornice that encircles the other three elevations is not continued across this one. The only openings of any kind on this elevation are located in the centered bay. Each story of this bay contains a single flat-arched six-over-one-light double hung wooden sash window that provides light for a bathroom inside. These windows each have a concrete sill and a lintel that is composed of soldier course bricks and square cut stone panels.

The second part of the overall south-facing elevation consists of the south-facing rear of the east wing. This elevation faces onto the rear yard of the house next door and it is barely visible from the street. Consequently, it is clad in common brick above the concrete basement story. Otherwise it is identical to but is a mirror image of the rear elevation of the Memorial Drive wing just described, it being one bay-wide with this bay also being slightly inset but placed just to the left of center. The windows in each story of this bay are also identical to those in the other rear elevation except that they do not have decorative brick lintels.

The exterior of the Wilmanor then turns a plain face inward. The three-sided courtyard that is enclosed by the wings is also faced in common brick and its most notable features are the two reinforced concrete balconies that almost completely encircle the three sides. These simple balconies have iron pipe railings and they give the courtyard an unexpected and rather modern appearance when contrasted with the period revival design of the outside-facing exterior walls. There is also a concrete canopy above the third floor balcony. This canopy is identical in size and design to the balconies below it and it provides shelter from the weather, for the third story occupants. All of the apartments in the building have grouped or individual six-over-one light double hung wood sash flat-arched windows and individual flat-arched doors that either open onto these balconies or onto the concrete first story patio below them. The floor of the courtyard is the concrete roof of the underground parking garage and it features two large slightly raised rectangular shape planting beds.

Interior

The interior of the Wilmanor is also still largely intact although well-worn in many places. When the Wilmanor was built the interior was touted as a model of cleanliness and efficiency. Newspaper accounts of the opening of the building detailed the interior appointments and the description they contained is still an accurate summary of the interior.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

CONTINUATION SHEET

Wilmanor Apartments, Racine, Racine County, Wisconsin

Section number 7 Page 5

The building itself is built in a "U" shape, the ends of the "U" embracing a central court and a flower garden. Two large concrete basins will be filled with earth and landscaped to provide the "garden" effect for apartment dwellers. It is below the large court that the garage has been built. In the circle of the "U", facing on Sixth Street are the three five room apartments, each consisting of dining room, living room, kitchen, and two bedrooms in addition to the bath.

Along each extremity of the "U" will be 24-four-room apartments. Each of these will have kitchen, dining room, living room, bedroom and bath, together with appropriate appointments designed for the utmost in comfort and convenience. Six three-room apartments situated at the far extremities of the "U" will consist of kitchen, dining room, combination living room and bedroom, and bath.

Inadoor (Murphy) beds are furnished as standard equipment for the combined bedroom-living room. Instead of being one of the disagreeable features of apartment life, the inadoor bed has proved one of its delightful features, since it provides all the facilities of two rooms in one. A feature of all the apartments, whether three, four, or five rooms, is the generous proportions of the closets. All clothing in current use may be placed in the closets. Excess baggage has a place in the basement, where individual lockers are available to residents of the apartments.

Six different colors were used in finishing the walls and trimmings of the rooms and hallways. Radio attachments are already installed, and residents who wish entertainment need only plug in to the wall socket. Housewives who plan to live in the Wilmanor apartments will delight in the kitchen and bathroom fixtures. All bath-tubs are built in and fitted with a shower attachment. Roomy medicine and toilet cabinets are built in above the lavatories, the door holding a mirror. Kelvinator electric ice refrigerators, steel cabinets and kitchen sink are all built in one unit, making utensils and other kitchen paraphernalia easily accessible.

The hot water regulated heat system will keep each apartment at the same heat the year round, if desired. A system for regulation makes it possible for one apartment to have a standard temperature of 78, and the one adjacent a temperature of 70. Heat for the central system is provided by an oil burning apparatus.

In the basement is found room for all of the "out of door" activities necessary in the ordinary household. Large and roomy storage, laundry and drying rooms have been provided. Opening onto Lafayette avenue (Memorial Drive) is the reception room. Occupants of Wilmanor apartments will have free use of this for staging individual parties, or for holding community affairs. The basement also houses the garage. Measurements show that from 26 to 30 automobiles can easily be accommodated there. The drive enters from Lafayette avenue.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET
Wilmanor Apartments, Racine, Racine County, Wisconsin
Section number 7 Page 6

Running the full length of the inside court are broad concrete balconies on the second and third floors. They have been so built that they can accommodate chairs and swings for summer use.

While some of the rooms in the larger apartments are slightly larger, a general average has been struck to apprise housekeepers of the dimensions they may expect at the Wilmanor. All ceilings are 8 feet 6 inches high. Six different color combinations have been used with the direct object of obtaining coordination with size and design. The kitchen is 8 feet by 11 feet, and is floored with linoleum. Bedrooms average 12 by 12 feet in size. Bathrooms are approximately 5 by 8 feet in size. There is ample room for built in tub, lavatory and toilet. Crane fixtures and fittings lend a distinct touch of individualism in the Wilmanor apartments. Floors and wall bases are done in tile, the floor being finished in a pleasing contrast of colors, while the walls from the floor to a height of approximately four and one-half feet, are in pure white. Lavatories (sink units) are placed just within the bathroom door within easy access and are provided with all the accessories, such as tooth brush racks, convenient soap holder, and medicine chest. On the opposite side of the room is the bathtub, set into the wall to eliminate dust and dirt.⁴

Other noted interior features were the plaster walls and ceilings and the floors, which consisted of a parquet-like product called "cellized" oak flooring. This consisted of units of three or more impregnated oak strips joined by a steel spline, which at the Wilmanor were laid directly on the reinforced concrete subfloor.

Integrity

The exterior of the Wilmanor Apartment building is in deteriorated but almost completely original condition. The most visible change is a temporary one; all of the basement story window groups and many of the first story ones are now covered with plywood sheets. The windows themselves, however, are mostly intact. Other changes include the loss of the original main entrance doors and some of the sidelights that flank them, although here too, many of these windows are intact behind the plywood sheets that now hide them from view.

The interior is also in largely original condition but spot changes have occurred in many areas. Many of the original oak front doors of the apartments, and their oak frames, have been replaced with metal door and frames. Most of the apartments still retain their original woodwork, which consists of oak in the living room and dining room and painted wood in the bedrooms, but the woodwork has been removed in a few apartments. Some of the original "Cellized" oak flooring, which was laid in blocks of three joined by a steel spline, and which has the appearance of parquet flooring, has lifted or separated and much of the rest has been covered over with carpeting.

⁴ Racine Times-Call. Racine, Wisconsin. July 26, 1929, pg. 19.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Wilmanor Apartments, Racine, Racine County, Wisconsin

Section number 7 Page 7

A few of the tile floors in the bathrooms have also been partially destroyed for plumbing repairs, but the majority are still intact, as are the original partially tile-covered walls in these rooms and the built-in tubs and original sinks. A number of the original metal cabinets in the kitchens have been replaced with wooden ones and a few of the living room closets in the three-room apartments have been stripped of their original doors and concealed Murphy beds and have been remodeled with shelving. The most sweeping change has been the replacement of the original central steam heating system with individual furnaces in each apartment. These have been placed in closets or pantries, along with new duct work--usually positioned overhead in hallways or connecting spaces. By and large, however, all the apartments are still largely intact and it is the intent of the new owners to restore them to a close approximation of their original appearance while modernizing and upgrading such features as appliances and utilities.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Wilmanor Apartments, Racine, Racine County, Wisconsin
Section number 8 Page 1

rental housing in and near the downtown area and resulted in the construction of several large scale (30 or more units) apartment buildings in Racine between 1925 and 1931. The Wilmanor was the second of these and it was the first and only one built in the West Sixth Street neighborhood area, which was then an older middle class neighborhood within walking distance of the downtown. The Wilmanor Apartments is one of only five large scale apartment buildings in Racine that date from the years prior to the end of WWII and its significance as a resource type is enhanced by the building's high degree of historic integrity.

Historic Context

An overview of the history of the city of Racine and its architecture is included in the intensive survey report for that city.⁹ Consequently, the history that follows is concerned primarily with the city of Racine in the 1920s and with the development of the Wilmanor Apartments.

The city of Racine is the county seat of Racine County and it is located on the Lake Michigan shore in southeastern Wisconsin between the city of Milwaukee and the city of Chicago. This location placed it at the confluence of all the usual transportation routes of the time and by the late 1920s the city was proudly calling itself "The City of Advantages."

Where the Root River gently flows into spacious Lake Michigan stands Racine, the second largest city in the state of Wisconsin. Here in 1834 was established the city that now ranks second in point of population and industrial production in the state, being surpassed only by Milwaukee. Nature endowed Racine's location with many advantages and to these men have added many accoutrements which make it a desirable place within which to work and play, with the result that the city has had a constant normal growth in area, in population, in commerce and industry, in cultural development and in civic enterprise. Famed as an industrial center, Racine has the advantage of being in close proximity to two great metropolitan centers--Milwaukee 25 miles to the north, and Chicago 65 miles to the south. These cities provide an easy market for much of our manufactured, as well as agricultural product, while excellent transportation facilities by rail, water and highway enable Racine shippers to supply the markets of the world with the minimum of elapsed time in transit.

Racine's chief bid for fame lies in its industrial prominence. Of its 190 manufacturers many have national and international distribution. According to latest statistics available, Racine's annual manufactured output is valued at approximately \$125,000,000.¹⁰

⁹ Karr, Susan E. The Architectural and Historical Survey of the City of Racine, Wisconsin. Racine Landmarks Preservation Commission, 1979.

¹⁰ Wright's Racine City Directory. Wright Directory Company, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1931, pg. 13.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Wilmanor Apartments, Racine, Racine County, Wisconsin
Section number 8 Page 2

Chief among these establishments were the J.I. Case Co., manufacturers of agricultural implements, and the S.C. Johnson and Son Co., manufacturers of floor wax. Other firms included those that manufactured such diverse products as automobiles and accessories, electrical equipment, shoes, leather and leather goods, malted milk, furniture, cards and books, clothing, iron, steel, brass, aluminum and malleable castings.

During the 1920s Racine underwent an especially rapid expansion in population and in economic activity. This expansion was accompanied by the development of new suburbs on the outskirts of the city and it also affected Racine's historic downtown commercial district as well, by producing a demand for more, bigger and more modern buildings in the area. This demand had a considerable impact on the residential neighborhoods that surrounded the downtown, one of which was the Southside district, historically Racine's most prestigious residential neighborhood. Here, as in similar neighborhoods in other cities, proximity to the downtown resulted in a significant physical impact on the district's superb historic ensemble of large nineteenth and early twentieth century residences. Although many of these houses continued in use as single family homes, others, such as the Emerson House at 842 Main Street, were transformed into multi-unit buildings, and some were demolished and replaced with new buildings that were different in both function and size.

The physical changes that were occurring during the second half of the 1920s in that part of the Southside neighborhood that was closest to the downtown were epitomized by the construction of several large scale apartment houses in this area. By the middle of the decade, a new group of potential tenants had emerged in Racine who were demanding more modern and more luxurious accommodations than could be found in the few existing apartment houses in the city. Many of these tenants were themselves former homeowners in the Southside neighborhood who were looking for smaller but still fashionable quarters in which to retire and who were not satisfied with the quarters that were then available. The first building in Racine specifically designed to cater to this group was the 35-unit Tudor Revival style Bull Manor (1130 Main Street - Southside Historic District, NRHP 10-18-77), built in 1925 to a design by Racine architect J. Mandor Matson. This excellent building has a "U"-plan with wings built around a courtyard, and it was soon filled with the widows and retirees of the district.¹¹ Even its success, however, did not immediately spawn imitators since the number of potential candidates for housing of this sort was limited in a city the size of Racine.

Matson's second essay in this type of building was the Wilmanor Apartments, which he designed in 1928 for William M. Christensen, a very successful Racine building contractor. This building was more in the mainstream of apartment building construction of the time in larger cities, it being designed to house young upwardly

¹¹ Rintz, Don. Racine Southside Historic District Walking Tour Guide. Racine: Racine Landmarks Preservation Commission, n.d., pg. 18.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Wilmanor Apartments, Racine, Racine County, Wisconsin
Section number 8 Page 3

mobile couples and families. The potential market for an apartment building designed to appeal to this segment of the market was much larger than for the Bull Manor type and it was this potential that the Wilmanor was designed to tap. In order to do so Christensen and Matson clearly gave a great deal of thought to the problem of how to overcome the initial reluctance of persons accustomed to or aspiring to life in single family dwellings.

The key to overcoming this problem proved to be combining an emphasis on quality and traditional home values with modernity. The core of this appeal was nicely summed up in one of the newspaper articles written about the Wilmanor at the time of its grand opening.

Apartment houses, the trademarks of city dwellers, are keeping pace with twentieth century individualism, comfort, and convenience. Two decades ago [1909] the gregarious instinct led to evolution of the flat. People herded together in the city: farms became subdivisions, subdivisions became gardens back of dwellings. And the dwellings were subdivided and the flat came into use. Ten years later apartment houses entered the scene on a minor scale, but with the note of success attached to them because they filled a basic need--that of comparatively small families desirous of privacy in their own home and convenient to retail and business centers.

Today the apartment house is emerging from a period of evolution into what promises to be a bright era of popularity and usefulness. It is no longer a dreary place shunned because of myriad faulty accommodations. It has been made into a roomy, cheerful home site equipped with everything modern from radio connections and electric refrigerators to reception halls, playgrounds, and flowered courts. The apartment house is slowly digging its way to permanency with people who live in the city. Here and there exemplary standards and quality is found. Such are the Wilmanor apartments at Sixth and Lafayette, under construction by the William M. Christensen Construction Company, Inc. to be finished and ready for occupancy soon. This building represents the latest and best contemporary practice in apartment house building and appointment.¹²

One of the most important decisions that Christensen made was the location of his new building. The site he chose was a prominent lot situated on the southeast corner of West Sixth Street and Lafayette Avenue (now North Memorial Drive). This gave him a highly visible location in a well established residential neighborhood located just six blocks from Racine's downtown and at the place of intersection of two of Racine's busiest thoroughfares. Modern transportation options were readily available. Double streetcar tracks passed the site on West Sixth Street and

¹² "Wilmanor Apartments Ready for Occupancy Soon with Latest Residence Features." Racine Times-Call. Racine, Wisconsin. July 25, 1929, pg. 19.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET
Wilmanor Apartments, Racine, Racine County, Wisconsin
Section number 8 Page 4

Christensen's plans called for heated underground automobile parking for his tenants. Traditional values were also close at hand with a church being located diagonally across the intersection and Jefferson grade school and McKinley junior high school being located two and eight blocks west, respectively, on Sixth Street. In addition, the downtown and neighborhood shopping areas were within easy walking distance. The location also provided the building with the maximum amount of natural light, thanks to the courtyard design and corner exposure.

The building permit for the work was taken out in April of 1928¹³ and by July of 1929 building was nearly finished and ready for occupancy. The grand opening of the Wilmanor occurred on July 26, 1929, and it was hosted by William M. Christensen, the building's owner and contractor and his assistants. It is clear that Christensen understood the value of advertising as well since the Wilmanor got the largest play in the local media that any building in Racine had ever received. Both the local newspapers devoted special sections to the opening of the Wilmanor, but the eighteen page section put out by the Racine Journal-News was, by the paper's own admission, "the largest single edition of its kind in this city."¹⁴ Not only did this paper print a special section for the event but it also played up on the fact that the Wilmanor was wired for radio by having its radio station, WRJN, make a special broadcast from the building. The special edition amounted to an almost complete documentation of the building and the copious advertising it included comprised a complete listing of the mostly local firms who did the subcontracting for the work. No effort was spared to tie the building to local businesses, in what was clearly a two-way transaction for Christensen. Local decorators and related businesses furnished a number of model apartments, a local auto dealer filled the parking garage with his automobiles, and area merchants who sought the trade of the new tenants placed ads as well. Not surprisingly, such complete coverage for that time had the desired affect. The day following the opening hundreds of people had turned up to see the new building which it called "the biggest improvement in the history of Sixth Street."¹⁵ By 1931, the date of the first city directory published after the opening, the building was fully rented and full occupancy was the rule for the next several decades.

The Wilmanor opened in 1929. In that and the following year Racine saw the planning and construction of a several projects that were to become central to its civic identity. Chief among these were the new \$350,000 City Hall (extant), for which plans were being drawn in 1929 by J. Mandor Matson, and the imposing new Racine County Courthouse designed by Holabird and Root (NRHP - 7/28/80). 1929 also saw the planning and construction of several more large scale apartment buildings, all of

¹³ "Building Projects Among Southern Wisconsin Cities." The Master Builder.
Appleton, Wisconsin: May, 1928, pg. 27.

¹⁴ "Wilmanor Section Part of 'This Issue.'" The Racine Journal-News. Racine: July 25, 1929, pg. 1.

¹⁵ Ibid. July 26, 1929, pg. 4.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET
Wilmanor Apartments, Racine, Racine County, Wisconsin
Section number 8 Page 5

which were located in the area just south of the downtown. These included: The Elms at 826 South Main Street, with 34 units; the Lakeview Apartments at 806 Lake Street; and the Park Lane, at 1024 South Main Street, with 52 apartments and which was Racine's largest apartment building until well after World War II. All of the buildings are still extant, are in excellent condition, and are now a part of the Southside Historic District. The Wilmanor, however is the second oldest of Racine's five historically and architecturally important apartment buildings, and it is also the only one that was located across the Root River and away from the downtown as the city expanded west. All of these projects, the Wilmanor included, were on a larger scale than anything Racine had known before and they were thus seen locally as proof of the city's stature.

The Wilmanor continued to enjoy a good reputation until well into the post WWII years, but gradually, as the neighborhood around it changed, the type of tenants attracted to the by now somewhat deteriorated building changed as well. The building went through a succession of new owners who performed basic maintenance and who, fortunately, did little to alter it, but the building was clearly in a downward spiral until its recent purchase by its present owner, the Madison, Wisconsin-based Alexander Company. Many of the houses and other buildings in the neighborhood that surround the Wilmanor have also been turned into multi-family dwellings, but the neighborhood has not suffered too greatly from demolition or rebuilding and it still, like the Wilmanor, largely retains its historic appearance.

Architecture

The Wilmanor apartments is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places as a fine representative example of a larger scale 1920s apartment building, a rare resource type in the city of Racine. The Wilmanor was built in 1928-29, the second such building of this type built in Racine, and it was the collaborative effort of William M. Christensen, the building's owner and a very prominent Racine contractor, and J. Mandor Matson, one of Racine's most prominent architects. As such, it is a fine representative example of the Matson's work in the city and it is one of the buildings in Racine for which both he and Christensen are best remembered.

The Wilmanor Apartments was developed and constructed by the Racine-based Wm. M. Christensen Construction Company, which, in 1928, was headed by its founder and namesake, William C. Christensen. Christensen was born on a farm in Denmark on March 16, 1883, and he attended the neighboring schools until the age of thirteen, after which he learned the mason's trade. After a five-year apprenticeship and a brief stint in the Danish army he emigrated to the United States, arriving in Racine in 1906. For a year-and-a-half he worked in the plant of Horlick Malted Milk, one of Racine's major industries. During this period he met and married Christina Jensen, who was also of Danish descent, in 1907. In 1932, a brief biography of Christensen that appeared in the four volume history of southeastern

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET
Wilmanor Apartments, Racine, Racine County, Wisconsin
Section number 8 Page 6

Wisconsin entitled Southeastern Wisconsin: A History of Old Milwaukee County, provided a good picture of the career to that date of a man who had even then left an enduring mark on Racine and on Wisconsin.

[In 1909] he then took up his trade and worked as a brick-mason until 1915, when he engaged in contracting in partnership with Peter Bondgard. They erected many large public buildings in southeastern Wisconsin in addition to the performance of a considerable amount of construction work for private individuals. Their handiwork is exemplified in Memorial Hall, the McKinley school at Racine, the Washington junior high school of this city, the Victor Memorial Hospital at Waukegan (Illinois) and other ornate structures. The partnership was dissolved in 1925 and in the intervening period of six years Mr. Christensen has been awarded the contracts for the field house at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, the Washington senior high school of Racine, the (UW) student's infirmary at Madison, the hardware Mutual Insurance building at Stevens Point, three buildings for the criminal insane at Waupun, the Wisconsin Telephone Company building at Kenosha, the Morgandale school at Milwaukee and the barracks at the Soldier's Home in Milwaukee. He built and owns the Wilmanor at Sixth and Lafayette avenue, Racine, an imposing building containing thirty-three modern apartments, and has done much to improve and beautify this and other cities in Wisconsin. His employees average one hundred men and the organization he heads is noted for enterprise and reliability as well as for the high quality of its work.¹⁶

At the time that Christensen was developing the Wilmanor, his firm was also completing the new \$800,000 Washington Park High School (1901 Twelfth Street) in Racine.¹⁷ Thus, the firm was well-equipped to tackle the construction of the Wilmanor and Christensen was literally building on the strength of his organization when he decided to fill the strong local need for rental housing by developing this new apartment building.

The architect of the Wilmanor Apartments was J. Mandor Matson, who had been born in Arndahl, Norway, in 1890. Matson was an architect for 55 years, during most of which time he practiced in Racine. At the time of the completion of the Wilmanor, a column devoted to him in the special Wilmanor section of the Racine Journal-News recapitulated his career to that point as follows:

Impressive in its simplicity and yet artistically a gem the new Wilmanor apartments is but another achievement in the many building projects executed by J. Mandor Matson. Specializing in schools, Mr. Matson has to his record the

¹⁶ Gregory, John G. (Ed.). Southeastern Wisconsin: A History of Old Milwaukee County. Chicago: The S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1932, Vol. IV, pgs. 168-69.

¹⁷ "New High School Dedicated Here." Racine Journal-News. Racine: March 8, 1929, pg.1

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET
Wilmanor Apartments, Racine, Racine County, Wisconsin
Section number 8 Page 7

execution of the St. Edwards school, and the beautiful new William Horlick High School that was opened only last fall. Mr. Matson has also designed a pretentious home in South Milwaukee for Emil B. Hansen of Racine, as well as the new Armstrong Foundry.

The remodeling of the store for Peter Ronsholdt, Uptown, was only recently completed. Store buildings and apartments now nearing completion are those for Olson Bros., Max Kieslow and J. H. Philip. These plans have all come from the drafting room of this outstanding architect.

The Union Tabernacle on Center Street, planned at Mr. Matson's office, has attracted great interest and inquiries have been received from several states. As a result of this plan the Portage Park Tabernacle at Chicago was planned by Mr. Matson. Some of the homes now under construction and nearing completion are those for Leo A. Piel in North Racine, the Taylor Brokaw home on Main street and the parish home for the Sacred Heart church. A recent building completed by Mr. Matson and noted for its attractiveness is the combined residence store and filling station for Paul Hansen on the Milmine and Newman roads. Three theaters have been completed since 1927, the Crown on Sixteenth street, the new Granada recently opened and the Plaza Theater at Burlington.¹⁸

At the same time that the Wilmanor was under construction, Matson was also working with Christensen on the excellent Tudor Revival style Washington Park High School as well, which may have accounted for his receiving the Wilmanor Commission. The projects listed above show that Matson was typical of his time in being able to move freely within a number of different architectural styles. Probably his best known work in Racine is the large \$350,000 three-story Neoclassical revival style Racine City Hall that he designed in 1930. This building, located at 730 Washington Avenue and West Sixth Street, is one of the downtown's most impressive buildings and it is located about six blocks due east of the Wilmanor, from whose front steps it can easily be seen. Matson was also capable of changing with the times, though, as his later work shows. Among these works is the 1937 Art Deco-inspired Henry Mitchell school on Drexel Street in Racine, and the Art Moderne style Exchange Building, 201-205 Fifth Avenue, built in 1940 in La Crosse, Wisconsin.¹⁹

¹⁸ "Wilmanor Plans Work of Matson." Racine Journal-News. Racine, Wisconsin. July 29, 1929, pg. 16. Special section devoted to the Wilmanor Apartments. Of the three theaters mentioned, only the facade of the Granada at 1415-27 Charles St. is still extant.

¹⁹ U.S. West, Inc. La Crosse Commercial Historic District NRHP Nomination form. La Crosse, 1992. On file at the State Historic Preservation Division, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, WI.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Wilmanor Apartments, Racine, Racine County, Wisconsin
Section number 8 Page 8

Matson last work as an architect was in 1952, and he died in 1963 at the age of 72. His obituary mentioned the following Racine buildings as his best work: Racine City Hall, Washington Park and William Horlick High schools, Roosevelt and Mitchell schools, the Wilmanor and Bull apartments, Holy Innocents' Church, Zion Lutheran Church and the Crown, Granada, and Douglas theaters.²⁰

Apartment buildings were still an unusual building type in Racine when Christensen and Matson began their collaboration on the Wilmanor. In 1920, there were only nine apartment buildings listed in the Racine city directory and even as late as 1924 the largest apartment building in Racine was a sixteen unit building. The construction of Bull Manor in 1925, however, gave Matson a grounding in this type of building, which he put to expert use in his work on the Wilmanor.

The Wilmanor Apartments that Christensen and Matson collaborated on is a fine representative example of its particular resource type. The building type that the Wilmanor represents was a common one in the larger cities of the period and Matson could have found many examples to borrow from in Milwaukee and in the various architectural publications of the day. Examples of this type of 2-5 story apartment building are most typically found on the main thoroughfares in suburbs of the same period that abut older, more established downtown neighborhoods. The design of such buildings run the gamut of stylistic interpretation, some of them being beautifully detailed examples of Period Revival styles, while many others are little more than Astylistic Utilitarian vernacular form designs that have only a minimal amount of period detailing. The design of the Wilmanor falls in between these extremes. The Georgian Revival detailing of its entrance bays, the use of multi-light wooden sash windows and the use of dark brown brick as an exterior wall cladding are all elements that were common in the domestic architecture of the day and they all served to reinforce a home-like imagery of the Wilmanor that was undoubtedly important in attracting tenants for whom apartment life was still something of a novelty. The most important selling points of the building, however, judging from the articles that were written about it, were cleanliness, convenience, and ease of maintenance, all of which were tied into the perception of this type of building as being one associated with larger cities.

The floor plans of the Wilmanor were also designed to accentuate a home-like feeling. Dividing each floor into six separate self-contained zones served to shorten hallways, thus avoiding the hotel-like feeling sometimes associated with large apartment buildings. The same device also maximized the amount of rentable space as well and provided owners with a maximum number of units.

The resulting design was typical of buildings of this type and period and it appears to have fulfilled its intended purpose well. The Wilmanor was also the first large apartment building west of the Root River and it is locally significant as such.

²⁰ "Architect of Public Buildings, J. Mandor Matson Dies." Racine Journal-News. Racine, Wisconsin. May 24, 1963. Obituary of J. Mandor Matson.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET
Wilmanor Apartments, Racine, Racine County, Wisconsin
Section number 8 Page 9

The high integrity of the Wilmanor Apartments allows it to faithfully represent its historic place in the city's history. It was also a significant work in the larger opus of J. Mandor Matson, one of Racine's finest Period Revival style architects, and it was an especially important work in the opus of its builder, owner, and namesake, William M. Christensen. Finally, the Wilmanor was a prominent local landmark for decades and it still occupies a pivotal place in its neighborhood.

Archeological Potential

It is known that there was once an earlier frame construction dwelling on this site, but the present building completely covers the footprint of this now demolished building and it is doubtful that any historic remains survived the construction of the new building.

9. Major Bibliographical References

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Previous documentation on file (NPS): X See continuation sheet

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:
 X State Historic preservation office
 Other State agency
 Federal agency
 Local government
 University
 Other
Specify repository:
 Consultant

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property Less than one acre

UTM References

A 1/6 4/3/4/6/2/0 4/7/3/0/4/4/0 B / / / / / / / / / / / /
Zone Easting Northing Zone Easting Northing
C / / / / / / / / / / / / D / / / / / / / / / / / /

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The legal description of the boundaries of the Wilmanor is: Lot 1, Riverside Addition. according to the recorded plat thereof, excepting therefrom that part conveyed to the city of Racine for street purposes recorded in Volume 1643, page 114, Document No. 1103084. Said land being in the City of Racine, County of Racine, State of Wisconsin.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundaries encompass all the land historically associated with the Wilmanor Apartments.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Timothy F. Hegglund/Consultant for:
The Alexander Company, 660 W. Washington Avenue
organization Madison, Wisconsin, 53703 date December 10, 1993
street & number 1311 Morrison Street telephone (608)-251-9450
city or town Madison state Wisconsin zip code 53703

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET
Wilmanor Apartments, Racine, Racine County, Wisconsin
Section number 9 Page 1

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET
Wilmanor Apartments, Racine, Racine County, Wisconsin
Section number Photo Page 1

Items a-d are the same for each photo

Photo 1

- a) Wilmanor Apartments Building
- b) Racine, Racine County, Wisconsin
- c) Timothy F. Heggland, November 21, 1993
- d) State Historical Society of Wisconsin
- e) General view, facing SE
- f) Photo 1 of 7

Photo 2

- e) Main facade, facing S
- f) Photo 2 of 7

Photo 3

- e) Main facade, east entrance bay detail, facing S
- f) Photo 3 of 7

Photo 4

- e) West facade, facing E
- f) Photo 4 of 7

Photo 5

- e) Detail of west facade entrance, facing S
- f) Photo 5 of 7

Photo 6

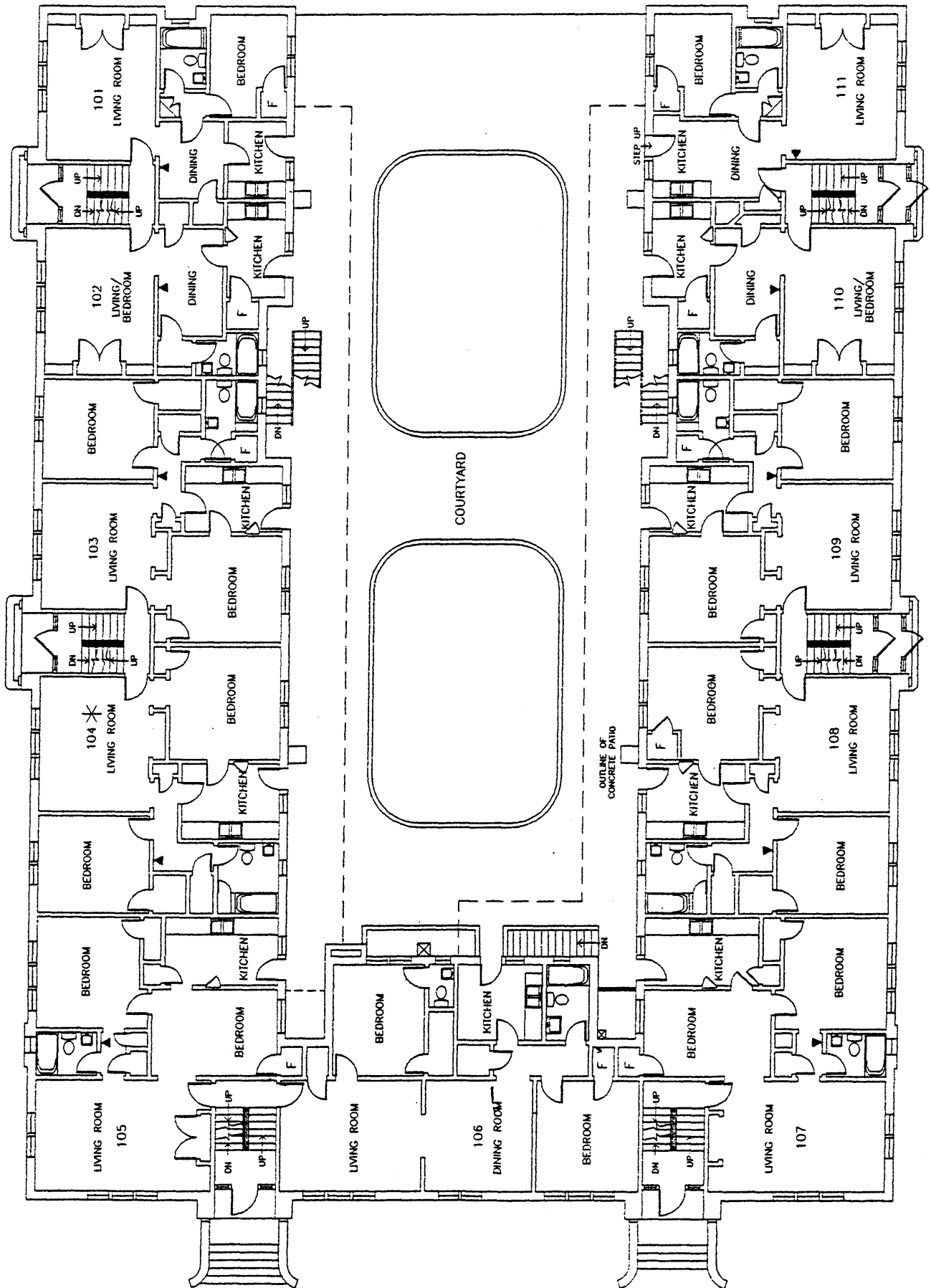
- e) West facade, facing NE
- f) Photo 6 of 7

Photo 7

- e) South elevation, facing N
- f) Photo 7 of 7

Wilmanor Apartments
Racine, Racine County, WI

Not to Scale
contributing building



* THESE UNITS HAVE
ELECTRIC BASEBOARD
HEAT

FIRST FLOOR PLAN