

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

received MAR 6 1986
date entered APR 3 1986

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

1. Name

historic The Douglass-Stevenson House

and/or common The Mill House

2. Location

street & number Southwest corner, Main and Mill Streets not for publication

city, town Fontana vicinity of

state Wisconsin code 55 county Walworth code 127

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	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
	<u>N.A.</u>	<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 Philip and Jean Harvey

street & number P. O. Box 416

city, town Fontana vicinity of state Wisconsin 53125

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Walworth County Courthouse

street & number

city, town Elkhorn state Wisconsin 53121

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

Wisconsin Inventory of Historic Places

title Geneva Lake Intensive Survey has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1984 federal state county local

depository for survey records State Historical Society of Wisconsin

city, town Madison state Wisconsin 53706

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site	
<input 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

The Douglass-Stevenson house is a small, one-and-a-half story, gabled ell structure, constructed in part of stovewood and surfaced in stucco and clapboard. Located on a large corner lot in Fontana, the structure will serve the current owners/restorers as their residence. A portion of the first floor is intended for use as a gift and antique shop. Restoration of the house has been in process since 1981, with great care given to historically appropriate materials and methods.

The original (ca. 1859) stovewood-constructed portion of the house, 16.5 by 24.65 feet, is front-gabled, one-and-a-half storied, and stuccoed. Simple wood trim includes wide boards under the eaves of the low pitched roof and unadorned two-over-two paned windows. Throughout the house, the foundation is uncoursed fieldstone, the roof levels are covered with wood shingles, and most windows are original or of the early 20th century remodeling. The single storied part of the house includes at least two successive additions (see plan).¹ Perpendicular to the original stovewood house, the first addition was built before 1873. Scrollwork spandrels on squared posts decorate the open porch of this one-room addition. Clapboard siding distinguishes this north-gabled portion of the house from the original house and the later addition. The last addition to the house, made about 1909-10,² includes a stucco covered north facing gabled section. The gable wall includes a large window overlooking the garden. A second exterior entry facing Mill Street has a recently reconstructed exterior stoop. This part of the house also includes the clapboarded kitchen section, with gabled roof facing west. Another doorway and storm cellar entry face south in this portion. The odd, U-shaped board formation visible on the south wall of the stovewood section is a puzzle; Professor William Tishler speculated that it may have been applied to keep that wall from sagging out of line.³

In the interior of the house, the original stovewood portion includes a downstairs parlor, small bedroom and (later) bath, with two bedrooms upstairs. Because of the fourteen-inch thickness of the stovewood walls, all the windows in this part of the house have deep sills. Original hardware has been left in place where possible, or similar replacements sought. The one story addition includes the front parlor, rear kitchen, dining room with alcove, and an office to the north. While none of the wood trim is elaborate, it reflects a skilled vernacular carpenter-builder's hand. The archway between parlor and dining room includes round columns. In the dining room's chamfered north corners, handsome leaded glass windows are underscored by window seats. Original copper strips instead of the more common ropes may be seen in the double-hung windows of the dining room and office. Floors throughout the house are unpainted wood. The walls are plastered.

Outbuildings on the Douglass-Stevenson property include a small restored former chicken house to the rear of the house, now clapboarded and used as a woodworking shop. A garage is near the southwest corner of the lot. Neither building detracts from the house or its setting. The grounds of the house are also being restored, using old photographs and Mrs. Harvey's girlhood memories as guides for authenticity. The large lot now includes a fern garden, small orchard, and large vegetable and herb garden. A straight brick walk extends from Mill Street to the front entry and curves around to the north office entry.

1. See drawing in Walworth County Plats, 1873, p. 38.
2. Interview with Philip and Jean Harvey, current owners, October 1985.
3. Interview with William Tishler, on site, September 1984.

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/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1859-1910¹ **Builder/Architect** Carlos Lavalette Douglass¹ /Builder

(Construction-final addition)

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

One of the few remaining stovewood buildings in the United States, the Douglass-Stevenson house is architecturally significant as an exemplification of a distinctive method of construction. Known to have been built before or during 1859,¹ the house is the oldest documented example of this rare vernacular building type in Wisconsin. The house also has significance in the area of exploration and settlement because of its association with Carlos L. Douglass, an early and influential settler in Fontana.

Architecture

The stovewood method of construction appears to be a uniquely North American building technique found primarily in the north central states and Canada. Most of the approximately 70 stovewood buildings which have been documented in Wisconsin were built between 1880 and 1910 by northern European immigrants, but architectural historians have speculated that they might have learned the technique from French Canadian loggers who devised it for quick, temporary shelter using readily available materials.² The few European examples of stovewood construction may be attributable to returning American immigrants.³ In stovewood construction, ten- to twenty-inch lengths of small logs, split wood, or slab wood were stacked perpendicular to the wall as if for a woodpile and joined with lime mortar. The resulting wall was usually covered with plaster on the inside and masonry or wooden siding on the outside. The technique was economical, could be accomplished by a single worker, and provided a tight, well-insulated building. According to Professor William Tishler, who has studied most of the stovewood buildings in Wisconsin, the Douglass house is the oldest documented stovewood building remaining in the state, and the only extant example known to have been built by a Yankee. Only one earlier stovewood building is known to exist: the Norris Miller house, built between 1855-56 near Decorah, Iowa.⁴ An earlier Yankee example, built in nearby Williams Bay by David Williams in 1848, was destroyed in 1950.⁵

The additions that were made to the original stovewood house reflect the Douglass family's increasing prosperity, which enabled them to follow contemporary architectural trends. The addition and scrollwork-enhanced porch that comprise the front entry of the house were constructed before 1873,⁶ and reflect the romantic Victorian decorative ideals. The leaded glass windows and brass hardware in the office and dining room illustrate the turn-of-the-century taste of Horace G. Douglass, who acquired the house and mill after his father's death.⁷ From that time until the current restoration, no major changes were made to the house. In restoring the house, care has been taken to preserve the original fabric as much as possible and to duplicate the materials and techniques where the originals were damaged beyond repair. A traditional lime, sand and horsehair plaster was formulated to repair holes in the interior walls and ceilings, and moldings were fabricated to match the existing woodwork. After removal of many layers of paint, the interiors will be restored to the original color scheme. In order that visitors may better understand the method of construction, a plexiglass-covered "window" has been installed in an interior wall, exposing the stovewood ends and mortar to view, but protecting them from probing fingers.

(Continued)

9. Major Bibliographical References (See continuation sheet)

Harvey, Philip and Jean, owners, Interview, October 30, 1985.
Lake Geneva Regional News, January 14, 1898.
Perrin, Richard W. E., "Wisconsin's Stovewood Architecture," Wisconsin Academy Review 20: 2 (1974)

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property Less than one.

Quadrangle name Walworth - WI

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A

1	6	3	7	0	2	1	1	0	4	7	1	1	1	7	1	4	1	0
Zone			Easting						Northing									

B

Zone			Easting						Northing									

C

Zone			Easting						Northing									

D

Zone			Easting						Northing									

E

Zone			Easting						Northing									

F

Zone			Easting						Northing									

G

Zone			Easting						Northing									

H

Zone			Easting						Northing									

Verbal boundary description and justification (See continuation sheet)

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

state code county code

state code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Sharon Crawford and Pat Butler

organization

date November, 1985

street & number 5 South Kenosha Drive

telephone 608-233-5627

city or town Madison

state Wisconsin, 53705

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 National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title

date 2/21/86

For NPS use only

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

Entered in the National Register

date 4/3/86

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

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Douglass-Stevenson house, Fontana, Walworth County, Wisconsin

Continuation sheet

Item number 8

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Exploration and settlement

The Douglass-Stevenson house is intimately associated with its builder, Carlos Lavalette Douglass, who was born in New York state in 1827, and moved to Walworth County as a boy of ten. In 1855 Douglass purchased 160 acres of land in the western portion of Fontana from Richard Montague. Douglass constructed the Big Foot (grist) Mill (not extant) on his property in 1857 and built the house nearby at about the same time. He laid out Main and Mill streets on his property and sold lots, although the land was not officially platted and recorded until 1895.⁹ Besides platting and selling lots in the original village of Fontana, Douglass influenced the shaping of the village in other ways. In 1860, when the citizens of Fontana were ready to build a school, Douglass donated a lot on his hilltop property overlooking the village. He donated another lot nearby in 1887 for the first church building in Fontana (now moved to Kinzie and High streets, Fontana). When a larger school grounds was required in 1893, Douglass sold the village the large lot on which the present Fontana school sits, for \$300. An advocate of free education for all, Douglass was a member of the school board his entire adult life. Also active in politics, he was elected to the Wisconsin legislature in 1873, and served as Chairman of the Board of Supervisors of the town of Walworth for thirteen years.¹⁰

The house remained in the Douglass family through six generations before it was sold to outsiders in 1969. The fifth owner in the Douglass line was Claude D. Stevenson, whose mother had been a Douglass. When Philip and Jean Harvey purchased the house in 1980, they brought it back into the Douglass family line, since Jean Harvey is the granddaughter of Claude Stevenson. They chose the name, the Douglass-Stevenson house, to commemorate both branches of the family. Knowledge of the stovewood construction had been part of the ongoing Douglass family lore, but it was not until the Harveys began seeking more information to help with their restoration of the house that they became fully aware of its historical significance.¹¹

1. Carlos Lavalette Douglass, Ledger Book, 1839-1859 (Local history collection, Fontana Public Library). The ledger notes expenses for construction of the mill of over \$10,000 between 1857-1858. The "mill house" is debited with sundries and labor for a total of \$180 between August and October 1859 (p. 286). From this we conclude that the house was either built by Douglass himself at that time with a part-time helper, or that the house had been built prior to Douglass' acquisition of the property and he spent \$180 on improvements in 1859. The latter seems less likely, since the house is not shown on the 1857 Walworth County Plat map that indicates all buildings then extant.

2. Richard W.E. Perrin, "Wisconsin's Stovewood Architecture," Wisconsin Academy Review 20: 2 (1974) pp. 4, 6.

3. William H. Tishler, "Stovewood Architecture," Landscape 23:3 (1979) pp. 28-31.

4. Interview with William Tishler, 11-13-1985.

5. Paul B. Jenkins, "A Stovewood House," Wisconsin Magazine of History 7 (1923) pp. 189-92; Perrin, p. 4.

6. Atlas of Walworth County, 1873, p. 38.

7. Lake Geneva News Tribune 5-20-1926.

(Continued)

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Continuation sheet

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8. Carlos Lavalette Douglass, Ledger Book, 1839-1859.
9. Walworth County Plats, Vol. 5, p. 94 (Walworth County Courthouse, Elkhorn).
10. C.L. Douglass obituaries: Walworth Observer 1-14-1898; Sharon Reporter 1-13-1898; Lake Geneva Regional News 1-14-1898.
11. Abstract of deeds; Interview with Philip and Jean Harvey.

ITEM 9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Tishler, William H., "Stovewood Architecture," Landscape 23:3, 1979.

Walworth County Plat Maps, 1857, 1873.



ITEM 10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

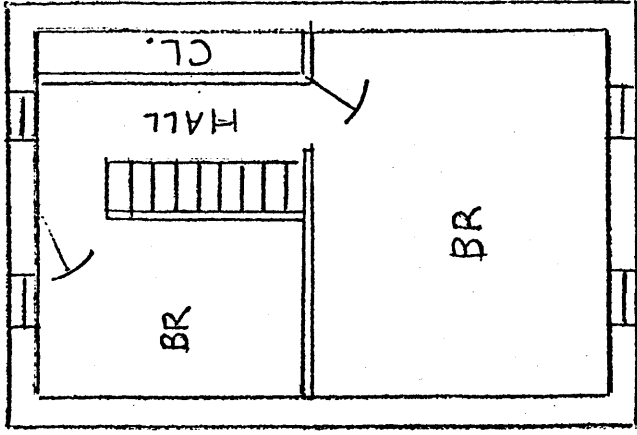
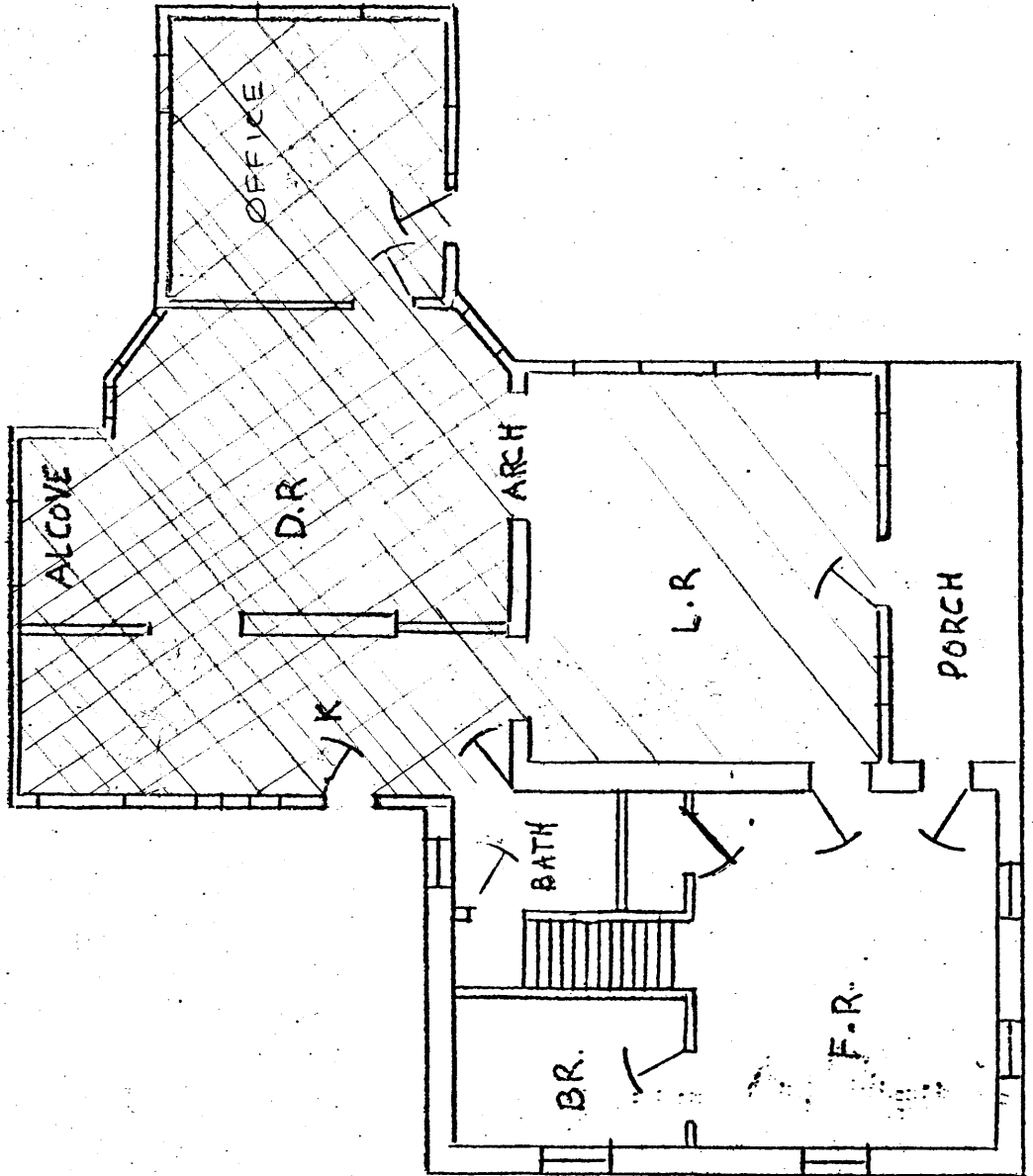
Verbal boundary and justification:

Lot 1 in Block 2 of C.L. Douglass Subdivision, Village of Fontana, Walworth County, Wisconsin, excepting therefrom the following described land: An area of Lot 1 in Block 2 Assessor's Plat No. 1 C.L. Douglass Addition to the Village of Fontana, Walworth County, Wisconsin, described by the following lines: Beginning at the S.E. corner of Lot 1 Block 2 Assessor's Plat No. 1 C.L. Douglass Addition to the village of Fontana, Walworth County, Wisconsin, thence running to the North 100 feet along the eastern border of said lot, thence running directly west to the western border of said lot, thence running to the south along the western border of said lot to the S.W. corner of the lot, thence running to the east along the southern border of said lot to the place of beginning.

DOUGLASS-STEVENSON HOUSE
FONTANA, WISC.

KEY:

	STONE WOOD C. 1859
	FIRST ADDITIONS C. 1873
	SECOND ADDITIONS C. 1909-1910

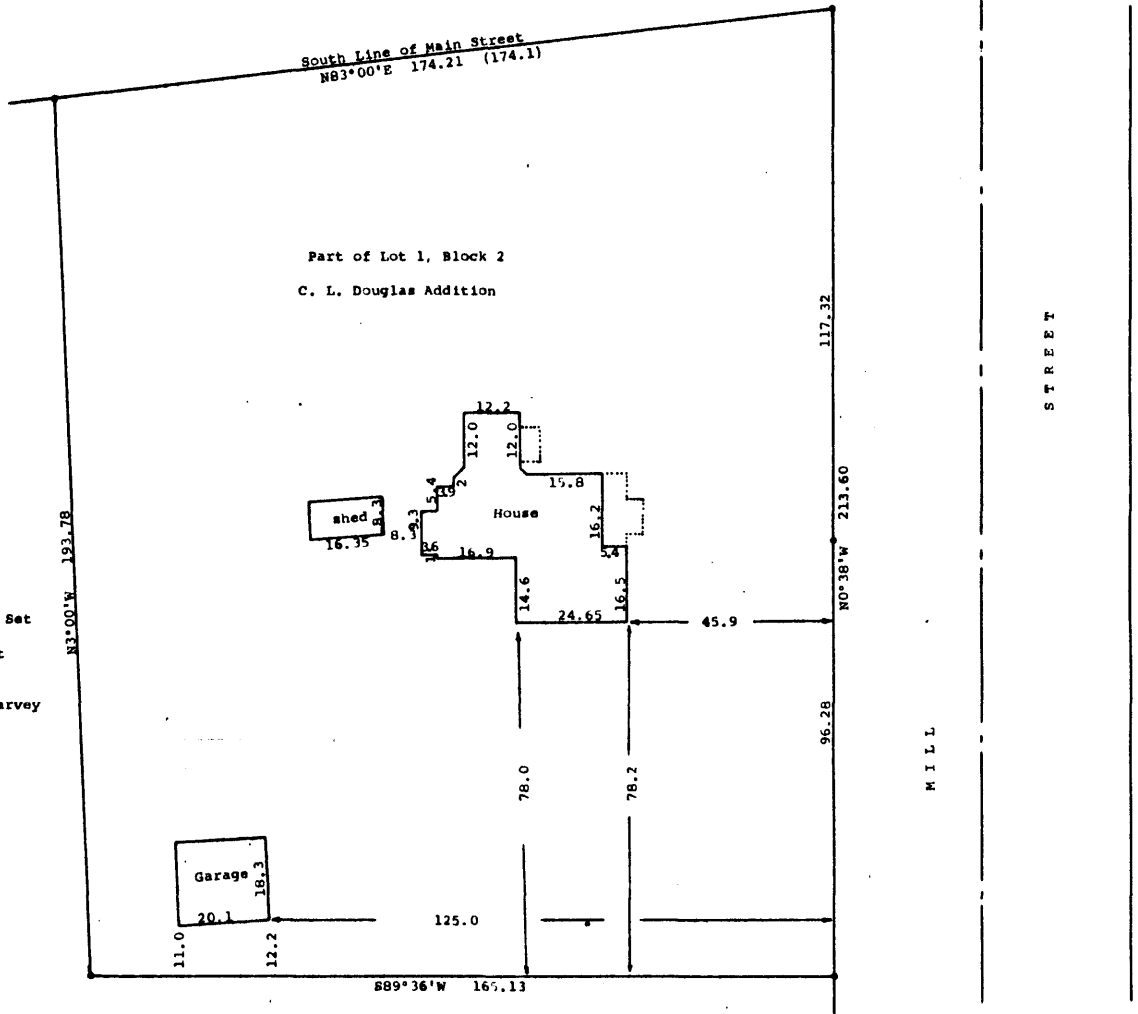


THE DOUGLASS-STEVENSON HOUSE

DUNHAM SURVEYING, S.C.
 SURVEYING & SUBDIVIDING
 DELAVAN, WISCONSIN 53115

N

scale - 1" = 20'
 ● = 1" Iron Pipe Found
 ● = 3/4" X 18" Iron Pipe Set
 (0.00) = recorded distance
 Bearings referenced to the west line of Mill Street with the recorded bearing of N0°38'W
 Owners: Philip R. & Jean S. Harvey
 Mill Street
 Fontana, WI 53125



STATE OF WISCONSIN)
 COUNTY OF WALWORTH) ss

I, George T. Dunham, Surveyor, certify that I have surveyed the property described as follows:

Lot 1, Block 2 of C. L. Douglas Subdivision, Village of Fontana, Walworth County, Wisconsin, Excepting therefrom the following described land: An area of Lot 1, Block 2, Assessor's Plat No. 1, C. L. Douglas Addition to the Village of Fontana, Walworth County, Wisconsin, described as follows: Beginning at the southeast corner of Lot 1, Block 2 Assessor's Plat No. 1, C. L. Douglas Addition to the Village of Fontana, Walworth County, Wisconsin, thence running to the north, 100 feet, along the easterly border of said lot; thence running directly west to the western border of said lot; thence running to the south along the western border of said lot, to the southwest corner of the lot; thence running to the east along the southern border of said lot to the place of beginning. (Above description is taken from the deed from Foerster to Harvey in Volume 338, Page 435, Walworth County Records.)

and that the above map is a true representation thereof and shows the size and location of the property, its exterior boundaries, the location of all visible structures and dimensions of all principal buildings thereon, boundary fences, apparent easements, roadways and visible encroachments, if any, and I have surveyed the property hereon described according to the official records, to the best of my knowledge and belief.
 October 15, 1985

George T. Dunham
 George T. Dunham, Surveyor

