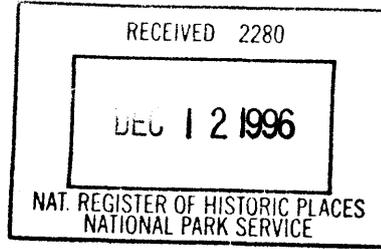


1570

United States Department of Interior
National Park Service



National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900A). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name North, Sterling, House
other names/site number North, Thomas Jr., House

2. Location

street & number 409 West Rollin Street N/A not for publication
city or town Edgerton N/A vicinity
state Wisconsin code WI county Rock code 105 zip code 53534

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this 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 meets ~~does not meet~~ the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title
State Historic Preservation Officer-WI

Date
1/22/96

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.
(See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

Name of Property

County and State

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

entered in the National Register.

See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the National Register.

See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the National Register.

See continuation sheet.

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (check as many boxes as apply)

- X private
public-local
public-State
public-Federal

Category of Property (Check only one box)

- X building(s)
district
structure
site
object

Number of Resources within Property (Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Table with columns: contributing, noncontributing buildings, sites, structures, objects, total. Values: 2, 0.

Name of related multiple property listing: (Enter "N/A" if property not part of a multiple property listing.)

None

Number of contributing resources is previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/single dwelling

AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTENCE/barn

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/museum

EDUCATION/library

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

QUEEN ANNE

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

Foundation stone

walls shingle

weatherboard

roof asphalt

other wood

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section 7 Page 1 Sterling North House, Edgerton, Rock County, WI

INTRODUCTION

The Sterling North House is a two-story frame building with Queen Anne massing and detailing typical of its period. It was built in 1894¹ by Sterling North's grandfather, Thomas North, Jr. The house is the setting for the national best seller, Rascal: A Memoir of a Better Era, first published in 1963, winner of the Dutton Animal Book Award. The book sold over two million copies, was translated into 21 languages and filmed by Walt Disney.² It tells the story of the author's life in the year 1918, when he and his father occupied the house and he was allowed to raise an orphaned raccoon. Numerous features of the house, the barn in the back yard and the large oak tree which still stands next to the barn, are mentioned in the book.

The house has over-all dimensions of approximately 45' by 30' and contains ten rooms, including four second-floor bedrooms, one of which is a garret over the kitchen that is reached from another bedroom. Downstairs the house has two front parlors, a bedroom, bath, a dining room and a kitchen and pantry. There is a full basement, with an outside entrance from the

¹Commemorative Biographical Record of the Counties of Rock, Green, Grant, Iowa and LaFayette, Wisconsin, Chicago, J.H. Beers and Co., 1901. p. 200: "Thomas North, Jr." Retired to Edgerton in 1894 "erecting the handsome home in Edgerton which he now occupies."

² Wisconsin Literary Travel Guide, Madison, Wisconsin Library Association, 1989

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Continuation Sheet**

Section 7 Page 2 Sterling North House, Edgerton, Rock County, WI

rear (south.) The house is in a residential area of mostly frame houses. The house was originally adjacent to the Methodist Episcopal Church. A 20th century bungalow now occupies a narrow lot between the North house and the church.

SETTING

Edgerton is a village with a population of about 5000, located on the northern edge of Rock County, Wisconsin, near Lake Koshkonong. It is a marshy landscape, with numerous streams and ponds, an ideal setting for a tale about a boy with a pet raccoon and who is building a canoe. According to a 1953 Centennial Week program, The Edgerton Story, the village was platted a century earlier. The nearby village of Albion had been in existence since the 1830s, and the North family settled near there in 1847. Thomas North Jr. married Sarah Brailsford in 1851. (A century later their grandson would use his grandmother's name in "Brailsford Junction," his literary name for Edgerton.) Members of the North family continued to live on and near the family farm, which appears in several incidents in Rascal. Sterling's father, David Willard North, went to school at the Albion Academy, where he was taught by the eminent Swedish naturalist, Thure Kumlein, whose farm adjoined the Norths'.³ A remaining building of the academy still stands on the village square in Albion, preserved as a small museum. Kumlein recorded the flora and fauna of the region. His intellectual inheritance and his love of this landscape, transmitted to David North, may well be the wellspring of Sterling North's love of nature and his ability to describe it with feeling and accuracy.

³This information is on a 1960 "Wisconsin Official Marker" in front of the building and is confirmed in the text of Rascal.

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North's novel, The Wolfling (1969) recalls the area as it was in the 1870s. ⁴ The Sterling North Society's pamphlet "Edgerton's Sterling North," contains maps of Edgerton and of the surrounding area with sites from the book, Rascal, indicated.

Edgerton prospered with the coming of the railroad and became, in the 1880s, the "Tobacco Center of the World," according to its centennial program. A 1908 history ⁵ gives the population as 3000; "Very large amounts of money, considering the size of the place, pass through (the Tobacco Exchange) bank every year because of the immense trade in cigar leaf tobacco, which centers here," it reports. The local paper, the Tobacco Reporter, had an international circulation and was the "recognized authority on the tobacco market." Today large brick tobacco warehouses still dominate the center of the village. On the side streets are two-story frame houses on generous lots, 60' to 80' wide. Most appear to date from the period 1880 to about 1910.

DESCRIPTION

The house is currently being restored to its 1918 condition by the Sterling North Society. Asbestos siding has been removed, revealing intact shingles and weatherboard. Other original exterior features

⁴ Graham, Elliott, "Sterling North," originally published in "Dutton News," E.P. Dutton, Penguin, USA, Inc. reproduced in "Edgerton's Sterling North," by the Sterling North Society, Edgerton, WI, (1989)?

⁵ Brown, William Fiske, ed., Rock County, Wisconsin--A New History Chicago, C.F. Cooper, 1908 Vol. II, p. 648

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including brackets at the corners of the eaves, spindlework on the front porch and decorative window and door casings are intact. The interior enclosed stairway will be restored to its original configuration. Most interior plaster has been removed; the walls and woodwork will be restored to their original appearance, based on the materials found under subsequent paint and partitions. On the east side of the house a ramp is being constructed to allow wheelchair access to the building, and an original entrance from a side porch has been widened to provide wheelchair access. The Society plans to use the house as a museum and literary center.

The foundation of the house is of cut, rusticated limestone with ribbon pointing, rising from 2 1/2 to 5 feet as the lot slopes to the rear. The plan of the house is irregular. A two-story front-facing gabled wing has cut-away corners forming large first and second floor bays on the west side of the front facade, which faces north. Where the cut-away corners meet the overhanging roof there are decorative brackets in Eastlake style, with spherical wooden knobs and incised floral motifs. Extending to the east, a two-story wing has a small, front-facing gable roof wall dormer in its axial wall and a narrow porch, supported on stone piers, running its full length, sheltering the main entrance. The porch has a slightly flared roof, recalling the late Victorian styling popular at the time. The porch is decorated with a spindlework frieze, turned posts, scroll-cut brackets and a spindlework balustrade. On the east-facing wall is a one-story bay, also with a flared roof, matching the roof of the entry porch. The gable has a pair of second floor windows above the bay. Extending south from the rear of the east wing, a slightly lower 1 1/2 story wing contains the dining room and kitchen, and on the second floor, two connecting bedrooms. A porch, supported on brick piers, extends along half its length. Tall windows and a door open to the porch from the dining

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room. (Handicapped access will be provided to the building by a ramp to this side porch.) The porch has a hipped roof supported by turned posts. In the second floor wall above the porch a small gable-roofed wall dormer contains a single window. To the rear, above the kitchen window, is a low window giving into the garret bedroom at the back of this wing.

The rear (south) elevation of the house is even more complex, consisting of the gabled end of the kitchen-dining room wing, with a small, shed-roofed entry porch to the kitchen and a second-floor window in the gable end. Attached to this wing is a one-story, gabled cellar entrance vestibule. There is an interior kitchen chimney. The kitchen-dining room wing is attached to a full two-story central section of the house, which has a roof that is hipped to the front and sides and is gabled to the rear. There is a chimney breaking its west slope. Following the ell formed by the kitchen wing and this central section is an L-shaped one-story enclosed extension. Part of the roof of this extension is a small porch, reached from the second floor hall.

The west (side) elevation of the house rises two stories and has a pair of small gable-roofed wall dormers containing windows to the bath and front bedroom on the second floor. A side entrance on this elevation, to be removed, gave access to a remodelled stair to a second floor apartment.

The exterior wall surfaces are weatherboard, with corner posts. The window casings are decorated with small wood cornices, corner blocks and a row of small dentils. Above the eave line the wall dormers and main gable ends in the front and side walls are covered in machine-cut hexagonal shingles. There are bull's-eye windows in the front and east gable ends.

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As mentioned, the roof form is very complex, with three gabled wings radiating from a central section with a peaked hip roof. The eaves have a wide overhang, enclosed rafters, and are decorated with architrave moldings. The roofing material is asbestos shingle.

The main entrance to the house leads directly into a parlor, which has a bay window on the east wall. To the rear of this parlor, reached by a wide doorway, is the dining room, which has an outside entrance. To the rear of the dining room is the kitchen, pantry and bath. A rear hall connects these rooms and the stair. To the west at the front of the house is a second parlor, also connected by a wide doorway, which occupies the front-gabled wing of the house. Access to the downstairs bedroom is through this room or the bath. The west parlor has a nearly hexagonal shape due to the cut-away corners of the wing it occupies.

The woodwork throughout the house is wide, with generous use of architrave curves and beading. The bay window in the main parlor is wainscotted and panelled. In the dining room the windows flanking the outside entrance are almost floor-to-ceiling. The floors are narrow-width maple.

The house is set approximately 30-feet back from Rollin Street. The lot is 82.5-feet-wide, and 132 feet deep. At the rear of the lot is a two-story barn, approximately 20' by 30', with a simple gabled roof. The barn is covered in wood drop-siding. A crude inscription, carved into the siding about 4' off the ground, reads "Damn Kaiser Bill." There is a sliding door over a second floor opening in the gabled west wall of the barn and two modern garage doors in its axial wall, facing Rollin Street. In the first story of the rear axial wall, facing south, are three windows and a door at irregular intervals and heights, as well as two small framed openings in the corners at ground level. There are small glazed windows

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in the gables and small, ground-level openings in the west wall, one of which, covered with a metal plate, may be the opening made by Sterling North when he built a cage for Rascal against the side of the barn. The "Rascal Oak" stands west of the barn, near the rear lot line. Its branches reach across the back yard, almost to the house.

The house, barn, oak tree and lot are convincingly evocative of scenes from Rascal. Illustrations by John Schoenherr in the original edition include three views with details that are consistent with the house: the back porch, the tree and barn, and the Christmas tree enclosure. The bay window in the main parlor recalls the boy's strategy of using it to enclose the family Christmas tree with chicken wire to protect it from Rascal's curiosity, while the generous size of the room recalls the boat that was under construction in the parlor throughout the story. The second floor garret bedroom, the kitchen door and porch and the first floor bedroom and bath are also mentioned in the book. ⁶

Sterling North's parents were living in Edgerton in 1913, when his

⁶ Three details mentioned in the book cannot be verified: a fireplace, whereas the house apparently had stoves, the cleats Sterling nailed to the back of the house near the end of the story, and the hole five feet up the trunk of the oak tree where Rascal was placed before he took up residence in the house.

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grandfather Thomas North Jr., died.⁷ His mother died the same year. By 1918 Sterling and his father, David Willard North, were living in the house. The tale told in Rascal is explicitly autobiographical; North states in a forward, "All my friends in this book, both animal and human, were real and appear under their rightful names. A few less lovable characters have been rechristened." Despite his stated affection for the times and most of the setting of the book, the latter category apparently includes the village of Edgerton, renamed Brailsford Junction. North graduated from Edgerton High School in 1925 and never again lived in Edgerton after leaving that year for Chicago.⁸

The title to the house is difficult to trace because the lot is part of a parcel that was originally a brickyard and was never platted into lots. Sarah, wife of grandfather North, acquired title to a lot 4 rods by 8 rods in 1892. To cure a defect in title, Sarah was awarded a quit claim deed to a lot 5 rods by 8 rods (the present dimensions of the lot) in August of 1894, the same year the house was built. Following the death of Thomas North Jr. in 1913, a series of transactions between his five surviving children transferred the property to Sterling's father, David Willard

⁷ Edgerton Reporter August 1, 1913. The 1901 Commemorative Biographical Record identifies David Willard North as "a resident of Edgerton." Sterling North states in Rascal that he, himself was born near Lake Koshkonong. Prior to that David North and his wife Sarah Elizabeth Nelson North lived in Madison, and Evansville, Illinois, according to her obituary in the Edgerton Reporter, April 4, 1913.

⁸ Edgerton Reporter December 26, 1974, "Funeral Services Held for Noted Author Sterling North."

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North. He remarried early in the 1920s after which he never lived in the house.⁹ For many years it was a boarding house, occupied mainly by teachers in the Edgerton Schools. ¹⁰ Later, the conversion to two apartments was made, with a new stairway from an outside side entrance and a second floor kitchen in the rear bedroom. (Both changes will be reversed in the current restoration. Siding, probably applied in the 1940s, has also been removed.) In 1959 the property was sold by David Willard North for \$6500. (This may have been the recording of a satisfied land contract, as Mrs. Olson believes that the property was sold years earlier.) The Sterling North Society acquired the property in 1992.

Despite the conversion, the house and neighborhood, even prior to the current restoration, recalled the scenes recorded in Rascal. The book is precise and highly evocative in its description of the physical settings of the story, most of which takes place in and around the house. The restoration of the house and its opening to the public will preserve a meaningful cultural resource.

⁹ Telephone interview with Ariel North Olson, 8/25/95

¹⁰ Interview with David Kotwitz, Edgerton, 8/24/95

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria
(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for the National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Areas of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions)

Literature

Period of Significance

1914-1925

Significant Dates

1918-19*
*date given in novel Rascal

Criteria Considerations
(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Significant Person
(Complete if Criterion B is marked)

North, Sterling

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

unknown

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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Section 8 Page 1 Sterling North House, Edgerton, Rock County, WI

INTRODUCTION

The Sterling North House is the setting for author Sterling North's best selling memoir, Rascal, set in 1918 and first published in 1963. The book has sold over 2 1/2 million copies, been translated into 21 languages, was filmed by Walt Disney,¹ and is a staple of literature for animal lovers and for young people. Located at 409 West Rollin Street, in the village of Edgerton, Wisconsin, the house was built by Sterling North's grandfather, Thomas W. North, Jr., upon his retirement from farming in 1894. The house, the barn behind it, and the large oak tree in the back yard are described in the book. In 1992 the property was acquired by the Sterling North Society, of Edgerton, and is currently (1995) being restored to its 1918 appearance. The house has local and state significance in the National Register category "Literature" as the authentic setting for an outstanding and popular literary achievement by a well-known author, whose family was one of the earliest and best known in the Edgerton area. Unique in its popular appeal, Rascal belongs to a genre of nature writing and reminiscence that is well represented in works by Wisconsin authors.

¹ Information from a pamphlet "Edgerton's Sterling North" by the Sterling North Society, Edgerton, WI (1989?) and from North's obituary in the Edgerton Reporter, December 26, 1974.

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Section 8 Page 2 Sterling North House, Edgerton, Rock County, WI

Sterling North (1906-1974) was already a distinguished author and literary editor when the book was published.² The author occupied the house with

² He is described in 1951 in American Novelists of Today, by Henry R. Warfel: "...He now conducts his own book review syndicate and probably reaches through twenty newspapers more readers than any other reviewer....Plowing on Sunday (1934,) his first novel, pictures the prosperity and optimism of the year 1913 in the life of a Wisconsin dairy farmer, Stud Brailsford...Night Outlasts the Whippoorwill (1936) studies the effect of World War I on the people in the small town of Brailsford Junction, Wisconsin in 1917-18..."

Current Biography, 1943, chose to emphasize North's social conscience, noting, "North's list of 'Hates' is unquestionably a valid one. Headed by Colonel Robert R. McCormick and Father Coughlin, the list also includes...Martin Dies, Westbrook Pegler...and is climaxed by Superman and Little Orphan Annie...One of the things of which North is proudest is a diatribe he once wrote in which he lashed out violently on (the comics.) This article was reprinted in forty-two newspapers and fourteen magazines, many of which carried comic strips...Requests for copies poured in upon North at the rate of 5,000 a week, and it was republished in leaflet form..." The article also notes that North "has written a prodigious number of articles for magazines such as the Atlantic Monthly, the Yale Review, Esquire, the Saturday Review of Literature, and the Reader's Digest."

Contemporary Authors, 1943, although it gave more space to his sister, Jessica, identified him as an "American literary editor, critic, novelist, author of books for children, naturalist, conservationist." In the 1963-69 edition, he receives fuller treatment, including a list of awards, four of them for Rascal and is quoted: "It has been my life-long crusade to fight the comics and the terror TV shows, while editing and writing books which I hope will give bright young Americans a deeper and richer sense of our culture, past and present." At the time of the article there were 104 translations of his work, into 50 languages.

Obituaries appeared in The New York Times, Bookmans' Weekly, Time, and Publishers' Weekly.

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Section 8 Page 3 Sterling North House, Edgerton, Rock County, WI

his father from some time after 1914 until he left Edgerton to attend the University of Chicago in 1925. In the year 1918, when North was eleven, he acquired a pet raccoon. The year the boy and the raccoon spent together was one of rapid maturation for both. The book is a classic coming-of-age story, with the added attraction of beautiful descriptions of the natural and human surroundings, the romance of companionship with a wild animal, and charming illustrations by John Schoenherr.

THE NORTH FAMILY IN EDGERTON

Sterling North was in his 50s when he wrote Rascal, which was to lift his reputation from that of respected working author and critic to creator of a literary classic. Subtitled A Memoir of a Better Era, the book is an idyll of boyhood. The author recalls being almost free of supervision, provided with all of the necessities of life and surrounded by adults who were, if neglectful by modern standards, nonetheless supportive:

"No one was concerned about the hours I kept. I was a very competent eleven-year-old. If I came home long after dark, my father would merely look up from his book to greet me vaguely and courteously. He allowed me to live my own life, keep pet skunks and woodchucks in the back yard and the barn, pamper my tame crow, my many cats, and my faithful Saint Bernard. He even let me build my eighteen-foot canoe in the living room...When we had visitors, they sat in the easy chairs surrounding the canoe, or skirted the prow to reach the great shelves of books we were continuously lending."

Yet the story is tinged with sadness, not only for lost youth, the safety and trustfulness of the community, and the natural beauty of the woods and wetlands, but also for the death of North's mother, four years before the beginning of the story, the absences, of the sister, Jessica, who raised

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Section 8 Page 4 Sterling North House, Edgerton, Rock County, WI

him but now was away at college, his brother Herschel, fighting in WWI, and his sister Theodora, who was grown and married, and for the physical strength he lost to polio not long after the close of the story.

Sterling's mother, Elizabeth Nelson North, was a graduate of Lawrence College and the University of Wisconsin. Born in 1864 in South Wayne, WI, she was "intellectually a very bright woman ...a member of the Methodist Church and the WCTU." She died of pneumonia after "...a brave fight for life as she felt she was needed in the home..."³ Her place in the community of Edgerton is indicated in a card of thanks in the Edgerton Reporter (April 10, 1914) acknowledging the contributions of Eastern Star, the WCTU, the Knights of Pythias, the Ladies Aid, Church Choir and Adult Bible Class of the Methodist Church. An article by Elliott Graham, first published in "Dutton News" and reproduced in a pamphlet by the Sterling North Society ⁴ states that she "entered college at the age of fourteen and graduated at the head of her class...was a brilliant linguist and biologist... she also taught her children to read and write almost as soon as they could walk." All her children wrote poetry, and each won the St. Nicholas magazine gold medal, Sterling at age 8 for "A Song of Summer:"

Vacation's come,
And in the trees
The birds are singing.
I hear the hum

³ Edgerton Reporter April 3, 1914

⁴ op. cit.

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Of golden bees
On daisies swinging.

By grassy stream
The long-legged crane
Is deeply wading.
In pink and cream,
Beyond the lane,
The sun is fading.

Sterling's sister, Jessica was also a published poet. At the time of the story she was a student at Lawrence College, in Appleton. Her reappearance, at the end of 1918, marks the beginning of the end of an unfettered existence for both boy and raccoon. In 1923 she published a volume of poems ⁵ including one about her relationship with her brother:

Thirteen

Remember how you cut my hand that year?
I held an apple steady
You with your sharpened pocket-knife played Tell.
Trustful I waited. Ready!
The blow fell.

Mother wept at the wound, but I was vain.
You were my hero. You could do no wrong.
Wakeful I lay at the window all night long
Proud of the pain.
I watched the dark woods tossing in the rain

⁵ A Prayer Rug, Chicago, Will Ransom, 1923

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With pungent smell,
And early morning coming down the lane.

Strangers, almost, we meet. We lead our lives
So far apart.
We smile together at the things behind us,
Sweet wounds of hand or heart.

Thirteen! And the wild lake, wind-driven,
Woods sweet with rain
And wet gray morning coming down the lane,
And mother's face that nothing under heaven
Can buy for us again.

Jessica had a distinguished career, becoming a staff member at Poetry magazine, and later, editor of the Bulletin of the Art Institute of Chicago and author of two books of poetry, two novels and Introduction to Paintings (1941.)⁶

In Rascal, there is also sadness over the aloofness of Sterling's father, who while he gave him approval and freedom amounting to license, rarely gave him his full attention. (The father is characterized in Rascal: "Living much in the past, and never in the worrisome future, his outlook was so tranquil that he drifted pleasantly from 1862 to 1962--seven months short of a full century--with very little sense of personal or international tragedy. Curiously enough, this lifelong detachment accompanied an excellent university education, a vast store of

⁶ Information from Contemporary Authors.

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disorganized knowledge, and a certain amount of charm.") If Sterling's father was distant, that was preferable to other male role models available to him in Edgerton, such as his best friend's father: "I doubt he had ever said anything kind to anyone in his life. Oscar was very much afraid of him and risked a whipping if he were not at home in time to help with the milking." Or his uncle, Fred, who refused to send his boys to college: "Uncle Fred was the only uncle on either side of my family who had left college before graduation. I had heard him say that he didn't want any of his boys to get the superior notion that they knew more than he did." Or a neighbor, Rev. Thurman, a coward who threatened to shoot Rascal. It is not surprising that North left Edgerton for good when he left for college, returning only to marry his high school sweetheart, Gladys Buchanan, in 1927. That his maturation continued in Chicago is suggested in his novel, Seven Against the Years (MacMillan, 1939) which he later said was partly autobiographical. It concerns the Depression years, the social chaos of Chicago, and the struggles of a group of college classmates of the class of 1929. Night Outlasts the Whippoorwill, set in 1917-18, and published in 1936, gives a less rosy view of Edgerton than North gave in Rascal. The Book Review Digest quotes a reviewer who states: "The book gives a distinct impression that Mr. North has very little admiration for small-town life...Nevertheless, the satirical portraits of the people of Brailsford Junction...point a moral for 1936, when the mist of prejudice and hate again obscures our vision."

Sterling North was born in a farmhouse on Lake Koshkonong, within bicycling distance of the house in Edgerton. It is important to the sense of familiarity and security with which North and his raccoon explored and played that his great-grandfather was among the first settlers near

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Section 8 Page 8 Sterling North House, Edgerton, Rock County, WI

Edgerton.⁷ Thomas North, Sr. arrived in 1847 with his family, including Thomas North, Jr. The father had been a Wesleyan minister in England and was known as a "godly" man. In 1851 Thomas Jr. married Sarah Brailsford. They had ten children, of whom five survived at his death in 1913, including Sterling's father, David Willard North. Thomas North, Jr.'s obituary in the Edgerton Reporter, August 1, 1913, states, "From the time Edgerton was a wilderness until now his life has been a benediction. Around his memory there will always be a halo of glory." The Commemorative Biographical Record of 1901 identifies him as a "prominent member of the Albion Prairie Methodist Episcopal Church...Politically...a Prohibitionist. He is a conscientious Christian, a patriotic citizen, a sympathetic friend and neighbor and the many most estimable traits of himself and family have given them the affection and high regard of a wide acquaintanceship." Certainly the attachment to the Methodist church remained firm: one son became a Methodist minister in nearby Milton, and a daughter was also married to a Methodist minister. The farm was being worked in Sterling's boyhood by his uncle Fred and wife, Lillie. Lillie is painted in Rascal as a saintly stand-in for Sterling's mother, as in this passage in which Lillie asks Sterling what he wants to be when he grows up:

"I think I know what your mother would have wished," Aunt Lillie said. And she looked so much like my mother as she said it that I wondered to whom I was talking in the lamplight of this fog-enshrouded world. I listened as though it were indeed my mother speaking. "I think she would have wanted you to be a writer."

"A writer?"

"And then you could put it all down," Aunt Lillie said, "The way

⁷ Commemorative Biographical Record of the Counties of Rock, Green, Grant, Iowa and LaFayette, Wisconsin, Chicago, J.H. Beers and Co., 1901 pp 199-200

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Section 8 Page 9 Sterling North House, Edgerton, Rock County, WI

it is now...case weather, the fog, the lantern light...and the voices of the men--hear them--coming in for breakfast. You could keep it just like this forever."

The story of the North farm is interwoven with that of Thure Kumlien, a Swedish naturalist who had settled the adjoining farm in 1843. Kumlien was a collector of birds and author of an article in the 1877 volume Madison, Dane County and Surrounding Towns.⁸ He sent mounted specimens to the university at Upsala, Sweden, and was also a painter.⁹ Kumlien taught at the Albion Academy, and one of his pupils was Sterling North's father. His influence is vivid in a passage in Rascal in which the boy and his father pay a visit to the Kumlien farm:

"We had no time to visit the site of the cabin where my father had been born or the big brick house on the same homestead where he had spent his boyhood. If we were to reach the Kumlien property we must...walk through meadowland along the old Milwaukee trail, long since abandoned. Up this trail from Galena, Illinois had once moved heavy ox carts pulled by six or eight yoke of oxen....Down this same trail from Milwaukee had come such early settlers as Thure Kumlien from Sweden and my ancestors from England...
. . .my father, Rascal, and I walked through the gathering dusk accompanied only by the shadows of pioneers long dead, moving through

⁸ William J. Park, ed. 1877

⁹ Main, Augie Kumlien, "Thure Kumlien, Koshkonong Naturalist" Wisconsin Magazine of History 27:17-39, 1943-44. The article records the friendship of the two families.

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Section 8 Page 10 Sterling North House, Edgerton, Rock County, WI

fields and forests of memory. Above us circled the nighthawks searching insects, their aerial acrobatics graceful and erratic.

"Notice the ovals of white under each wing, : my father said.

"That is one of the few ways you can tell nighthawks from whippoorwills."

"What other ways?"

"The whippoorwill's call, of course, and his whiskers,"

"How can you get near enough to see a whippoorwill's whiskers?"

"You seldom can," my father admitted, "but on those which Kumlien mounted, they were obvious enough: stiff bristles on either side of the wide mouth, probably for sensing the flying insects he scoops up for food."

The Edgerton area of Sterling North's boyhood and of his father's boyhood has been portrayed by North in Rascal, The Wolfling (1969,) Night Outlasts the Whippoorwill (1936,) and Plowing on Sunday (1934.) The house on West Rollin street is the site that today best recalls the North family's history in the community. Other sites associated with the family include the original homestead on Bingham Road northeast of the village, the house where Sterling was born, now on the grounds of Oaklawn Academy, also northeast of Edgerton, the Albion Academy building in Albion, and several burial sites. Sterling North was listed in 1950 by Rachel Salisbury ¹⁰ along with poet Ella Wheeler Wilcox, Frances E. Willard, founder of the Womens' Christian Temperance Union, and John Savage, engineer of the Grand Coulee dam, among the distinguished persons of Rock County.

¹⁰ "The Rock County Historical Society," Wisconsin Magazine of History, Vol 33, p 423.

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STERLING NORTH'S CONTRIBUTION TO DESCRIPTIVE WRITING ABOUT WISCONSIN

North's works set in Wisconsin are a relatively small part of his lifetime production. North never lived in Wisconsin as an adult, yet his accurate and detailed recollections, in Rascal, of the scenes of his boyhood and his reconstruction of those of his father's boyhood in The Wolfling place him in a tradition of descriptive writing about childhood in Wisconsin that includes Ben Logan's The Land Remembers, set near Gays Mills, Zona Gale's novels and short stories set in Portage, Hamlin Garland's A Son of the Middle Border and A Daughter of the Middle Border, set in West Salem, Glenway Wescott, whose portrayals of the middle west in The Apple of the Eye and The Grandmothers reflect his boyhood in Kewaskum, and Laura Ingalls Wilder, whose Little House in the Big Woods is about homesteading near Pepin. Other writers who recorded their Wisconsin childhoods include Mark Schorer, who wrote of Sauk City in A House Too Old, and Horace Gregory, who depicts a Milwaukee boyhood in The House on Jefferson Street.¹¹

Although children as characters are noticeably absent in his work, August Derleth over his entire career minutely and prolifically recorded the social scene and natural surroundings of his native Sauk City. Derleth, like North, was also a literary critic (his column appeared in the Madison Capital Times) and an editor. They are alike in the variety of their production: both produced work for both children and adults, both wrote novels, biographies and poetry (although North apparently gave up poetry after publication of his youthful efforts in Harper's, The Dial and

¹¹ Information on Wisconsin authors from Wisconsin Literary Travel Guide, Wisconsin Library Association, 1990.

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Poetry) and both were editors of specialty book series: Derleth's Arkham House, which published science fiction and North as founder and editor of North Star Books, for children. Their careers contrast strongly in that while Derleth chose to "go it alone," running his own publishing house in Sauk City and becoming known as a regional writer, North set out immediately from college to work on a big city newspaper (the Chicago Daily News), his work was brought out by large national publishers, and he became a nationally syndicated literary critic. Both suffered from early, even precocious success, followed by long careers marked by mixed reviews. North's production of 34 books is about a third of Derleth's total. ¹²

While he did make substantial contributions to children's literature as editor of North Star Books and as author of a number of biographies for children, and Rascal has great appeal to children and young adults, North, when he wrote about Edgerton, was writing for a general audience. Carol Ryrie Brink, whose Caddie Woodlawn stories are set in Menomonee, Ellen Raskin, whose The Westing Game is set in Sheboygan, Marie Hall Etts, who wrote of childhood near Antigo, and Elizabeth Enright, author of Thimble Summer, set near Spring Green, are examples of authors writing about Wisconsin childhood specifically for children.

As a nationally known writer about nature, who has a Wisconsin connection, North stands in the company of Aldo Leopold, the ecologist and nature writer whose Sand County Almanac is famous for its beautiful writing as well as its revelation of natural biologic and ecological process in central Wisconsin, Mel Ellis, long time staff writer for the Milwaukee Sentinel, whose work included a syndicated column of nature writing and

¹² The author wrote a National Register nomination for Derleth's house, Place of Hawks, listed in 1990. The number of North's works is from his obituary in the Edgerton Reporter, December 26, 1974

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two books that were made into films, and Carl Sandburg, who wrote for the Milwaukee papers from 1907 to 1912. (North was literary editor of the Chicago Daily News at the same time that Sandburg was on its staff.)

Other Wisconsin properties, listed in the National Register, and associated with well-known authors include August Derleth's house in Sauk City, two sites associated with Zona Gale: the William and Jessie Breese House, later the William Breese and Zona Gale house, in Portage, and Bonnie Oaks, the home of her close friend Mildred Ormsby Green, a retreat for young authors during the 1920s and '30s, and the Hamlin Garland House in West Salem. Aldo Leopold's famous shack in Sauk County is also listed in the National Register. Another house listed for its association with an author is that of poet and professor William Ellery Leonard, in Madison.

THE STERLING NORTH HOUSE AS THE SETTING FOR RASCAL

If he had written nothing else, Sterling North would be remembered for Rascal. The house where the story takes place is locally significant for having put Edgerton on the national literary map, and for its association with a prominent family. North's significance for Wisconsin rests on his place among a number of writers who have written about the special qualities of their Wisconsin childhoods, many of them with emphasis on the natural setting. But it is the authenticity of the scenes described in the best-selling classic, Rascal, which can be instantly recognized by a visitor, that make the house worthy of recognition and preservation. In the first pages of the book, North describes the neighborhood, which is largely intact:

"...I started up First Street toward Crescent Drive where a

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semicircle of late Victorian houses enjoyed a hilltop view. Northward lay miles of meadows, groves of trees, a winding stream, and the best duck and muskrat marsh in Rock County."

A few pages farther on we find the first mention of the nearby Methodist Church, the belfry of which was the home of his pet, Poe-the-Crow:

"I asked some of these questions of Reverend Hooton, the Methodist minister whose church and parsonage adjoined our property..."

The yard behind the house is the setting for several incidents. The first takes place the day the raccoon makes its first independent foray:

"Rascal meantime was living in a hole some five feet above the ground in our big red oak tree...I (was) alerted by a quavering trill at the hole in the tree, and there we saw a small black mask and two beady eyes peering out at the wide world beyond..."

Soon the raccoon acquires the run of the house:

"Several nights later I was startled and delighted to hear Rascal's trill from the pillow beside me...So from that night on we became bedfellows, and for many months we slept together. I felt less lonesome now when my father was away."

But they are temporarily evicted by sister Theo, who has come to put their lives in order:

"Giving Theo the downstairs bedroom didn't worry me. She always took this big room with its adjoining bath...(but Rascal) also preferred a room with a bath. Each evening I closed the drain of the big

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lavatory and left a few inches of water in the basin so that Rascal could get a drink at any time during the night, or perhaps wash a cricket before he ate it."

The bedroom figures again at the end of the story, when Theo finally prevails and a housekeeper is hired:

"Mrs. Quinn was said to be qualified in every respect: middle-aged, ugly, cranky-clean, and no nonsense. She examined our house minutely, ran her finger over the furniture to show us the dust, and demanded my bedroom for herself."

..."I decided to build a second line of defense. The presently unoccupied back bedroom on the second floor was virtually impregnable after I fitted a strong lock on the door and pocketed the key...Opening off the large and airy bedroom was a small study at the very rear of the house. One window at the end of the gable offered enticing possibilities.

"Cutting neat cleats, each eighteen inches in length, I nailed them one above another at convenient intervals up the house to that back window. Now Rascal could climb to see me whenever he wished. I could also conveniently entertain some of my other more-or-less human friends--boys of twelve for the most part."

Two other incidents in the book are particularly evoked by a visit to the house. At Christmas, the boy must reconcile his desire to decorate a tree with the curiosity of Rascal. He solves the problem by placing the tree in the bay window in the main parlor and enclosing it with chicken wire, even remarking that it was only necessary to drive nails into the woodwork at the corners. Another easily recognized setting is the west wall of the

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barn, which becomes part of the enclosure Sterling is forced to build after Rascal starts raiding the neighbors' gardens. A hole in this wall appears to be the entrance the boy made so that Rascal could have the run of a box stall inside the barn.

The canoe whose construction in the living room of the house paces the story and becomes a metaphor for the tension between boyhood, raccoons and good housekeeping was unfortunately lost in a museum fire in 1966. Happily, the Sterling North Society of Edgerton has acquired the house and is restoring it, with plans to open it to the public. Much of the physical setting described in a famous literary classic will be preserved, to delight those familiar with the book. Rascal chose to return to the wild from the canoe during a ride on Lake Koshkonong. One can hope that his descendants would approve the preservation of the house.

The Sterling North House is therefore being nominated to the National Register under Criterion B because of its close associations with North and with his famous book, Rascal, which was based on North's youthful experiences in the house and which brought its author worldwide fame. Rascal has never been out of print since it was written in 1918 and its importance as a work of literature and as a significant example of nature writing is widely accepted. In addition, the house that is the subject of this nomination is still largely intact and is in the process of being carefully restored as a museum and memorial to North.

Sterling North House
Name of Property

Rock,
County and State

Wisconsin

9. Major Bibliographic References

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous Documentation on File (National Park Service):

- 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:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less Than One Acre _____

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	<u>1/6</u>	<u>3/3/1/0/0/0</u>	<u>4/7/4/4/6/0/0</u>	3	_____	_____	_____
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
2	_____	_____	_____	4	_____	_____	_____
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing

See Continuation Sheet

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title	Jane Eiseley, Hist. Preservation Consultant	date	8/29/95
organization		telephone	(608) 249-8818
street & number	3433 Richard Street	zip code	53714
city or town	Madison	state	Wisconsin

Sterling North House
Name of Property

Rock,
County and State

Wisconsin

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional Items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name/title	David C. Kotwitz	date	8/29/95
organization	Sterling North Society	telephone	(608) 884-9350
street&number	PO Box 173	city or town	Edgerton
city or town	Edgerton	state	Wisconsin
zip code	53534		

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects, (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Section 9 Page 1

Sterling North House, Edgerton, Rock County, WI

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Continuation Sheet**

Section 10 Page 1

Sterling North House
Edgerton, Rock County, WI

Verbal Boundary Description

A part of that portion of Block 15 platted as Brickyard, in Plat of Village of Edgerton in the SE 1/4 of Section 4, Township 4North, Range 12East of the City of Edgerton, county of Rock, State of Wisconsin, described as follows: Beginning on the south margin of Rollin Street at the northwest corner of Lot 18 in said Block 15; thence south along the west boundary line of Lots 18 and 17, 8 rods; thence west parallel to the south margin of Rollin Street, 5 rods; thence north to the south margin of Rollin Street, 8 rods; thence east 5 rods to the point of beginning.

Verbal Boundary Justification

The boundaries encompass the entire lot which constituted the property during the period of significance.

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Section Photos Page 1

Sterling North House
Edgerton, Rock County, WI

Photo #1 of 10
NORTH, STERLING, HOUSE
Edgerton, Rock County, WI
Photo by Jane Eiseley, February, 1995
Neg. at State Historical Society of Wisconsin
View looking South

Photo #2 of 10
NORTH, STERLING, HOUSE
Edgerton, Rock County, WI
Photo by Jane Eiseley, February, 1995
Neg. at State Historical Society of Wisconsin
View looking Southwest

Photo #3 of 10
NORTH, STERLING, HOUSE
Edgerton, Rock County, WI
Photo by Jane Eiseley, February, 1995
Neg. at State Historical Society of Wisconsin
Detail of Southeast corner

Photo #4 of 10
NORTH, STERLING, HOUSE
Edgerton, Rock County, WI
Photo by Jane Eiseley, February, 1995
Neg. at State Historical Society of Wisconsin
View looking Northeast

Photo #5 of 10
NORTH, STERLING, HOUSE
Edgerton, Rock County, WI
Photo by Jane Eiseley, February, 1995
Neg. at State Historical Society of Wisconsin
Detail of front gable

Photo #6 of 10
NORTH, STERLING, HOUSE
Edgerton, Rock County, WI
Photo by Jane Eiseley, February, 1995
Neg. at State Historical Society of Wisconsin
Rascal oak and barn looking Northeast

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Section Photos Page 2

Sterling North House, Edgerton, Rock County, WI

Photo #7 of 10
NORTH, STERLING, HOUSE
Edgerton, Rock County, WI
Photo by Jane Eiseley, February, 1995
Neg. at State Historical Society of Wisconsin
View of rear yard and Methodist steeple, looking East

Photo #8 of 10
NORTH, STERLING, HOUSE
Edgerton, Rock County, WI
Photo by Jane Eiseley, February, 1995
Neg. at State Historical Society of Wisconsin
Interior, front entrance and entry to west parlor

Photo #9 of 10
NORTH, STERLING, HOUSE
Edgerton, Rock County, WI
Photo by Jane Eiseley, February, 1995
Neg. at State Historical Society of Wisconsin
Interior, view from dining room to east bay window

Photo #10 of 10
NORTH, STERLING, HOUSE
Edgerton, Rock County, WI
Photo by Jane Eiseley, February, 1995
Neg. at State Historical Society of Wisconsin
Interior, view from second floor rear porch

NPS Form 10-900-a
(Rev. 8-86)
Wisconsin Word Processing Format
(Approved 1/92)

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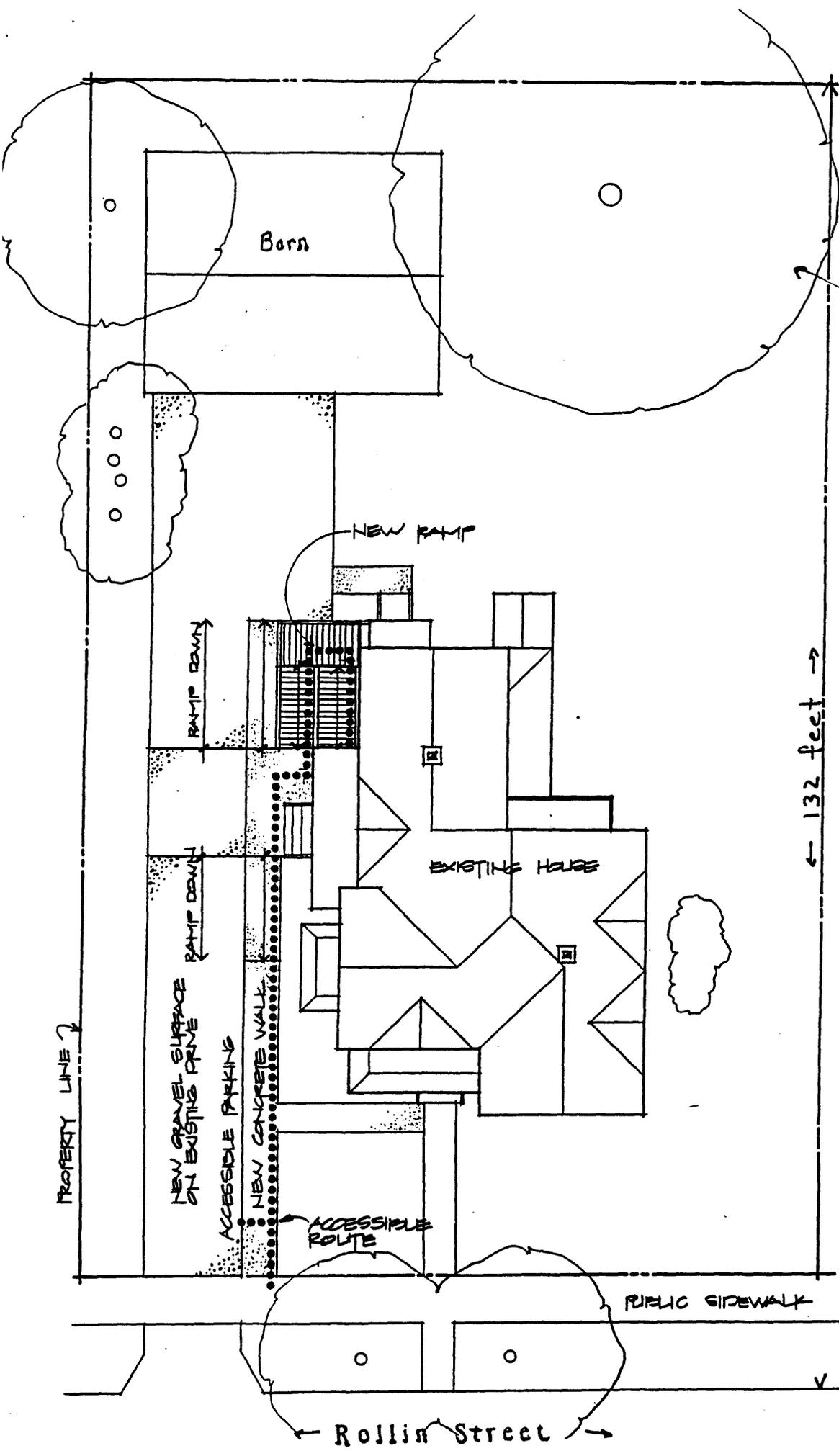
**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section Owner page 1

Sterling North House
Edgerton, Rock County, WI

The owner of the Sterling North House is the

Sterling North Society, Ltd.
David C. Kotwitz, Pres.
P.O. Box 173
Edgerton, WI 53534



Rascal Oak

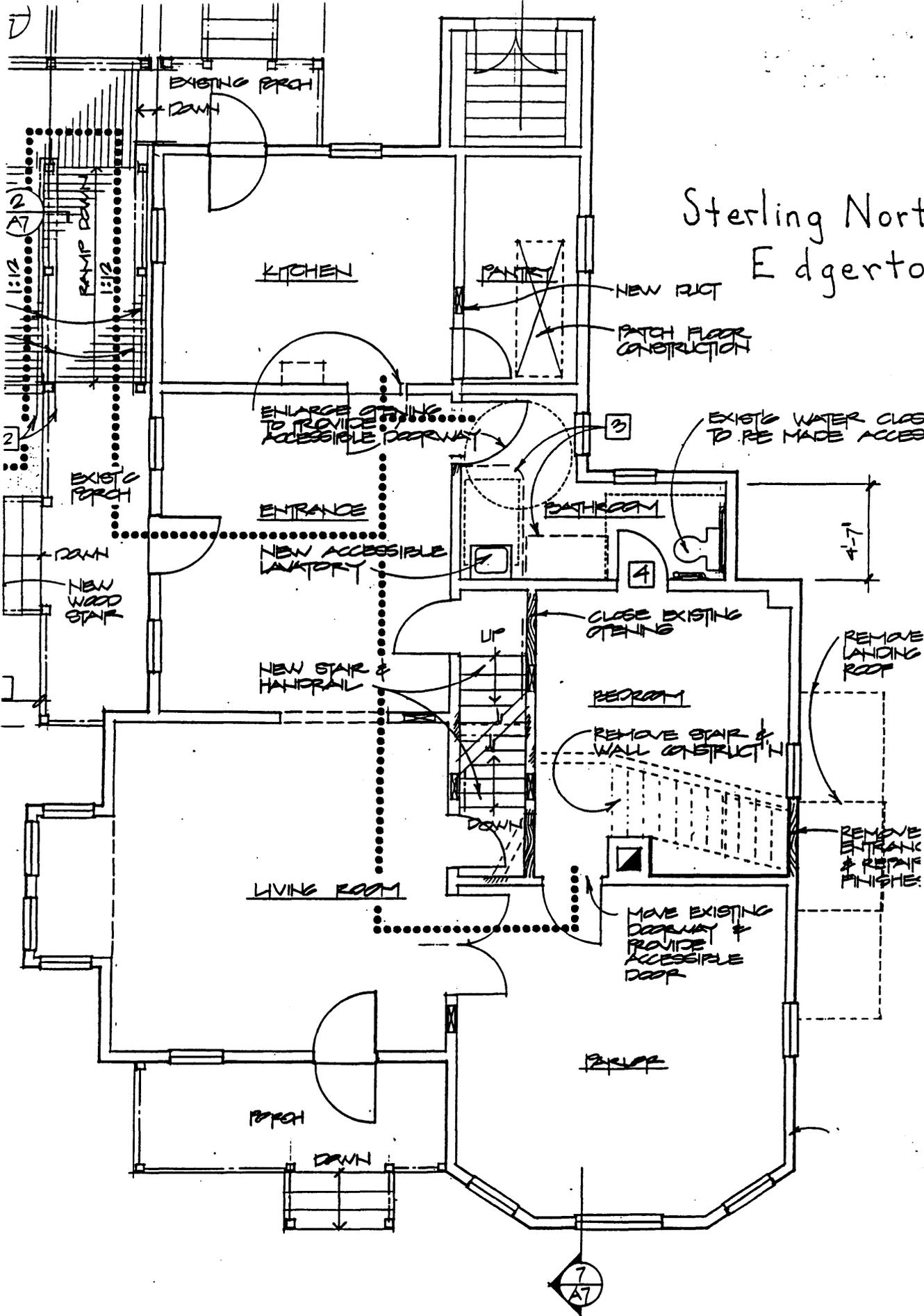
Sterling North House Edgerton, Rock County, WI



Site Plan

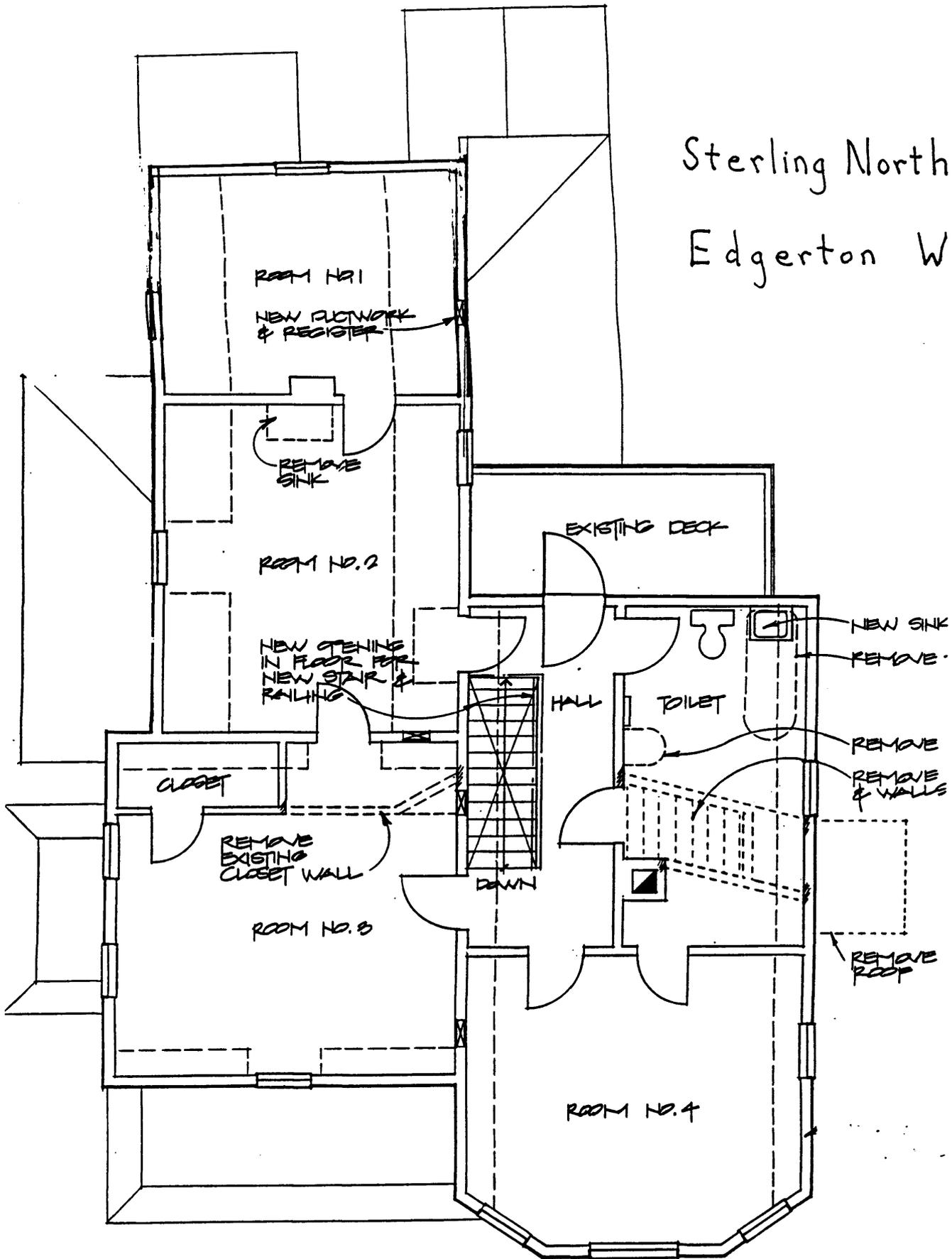
No scale

Sterling North House Edgerton, WI



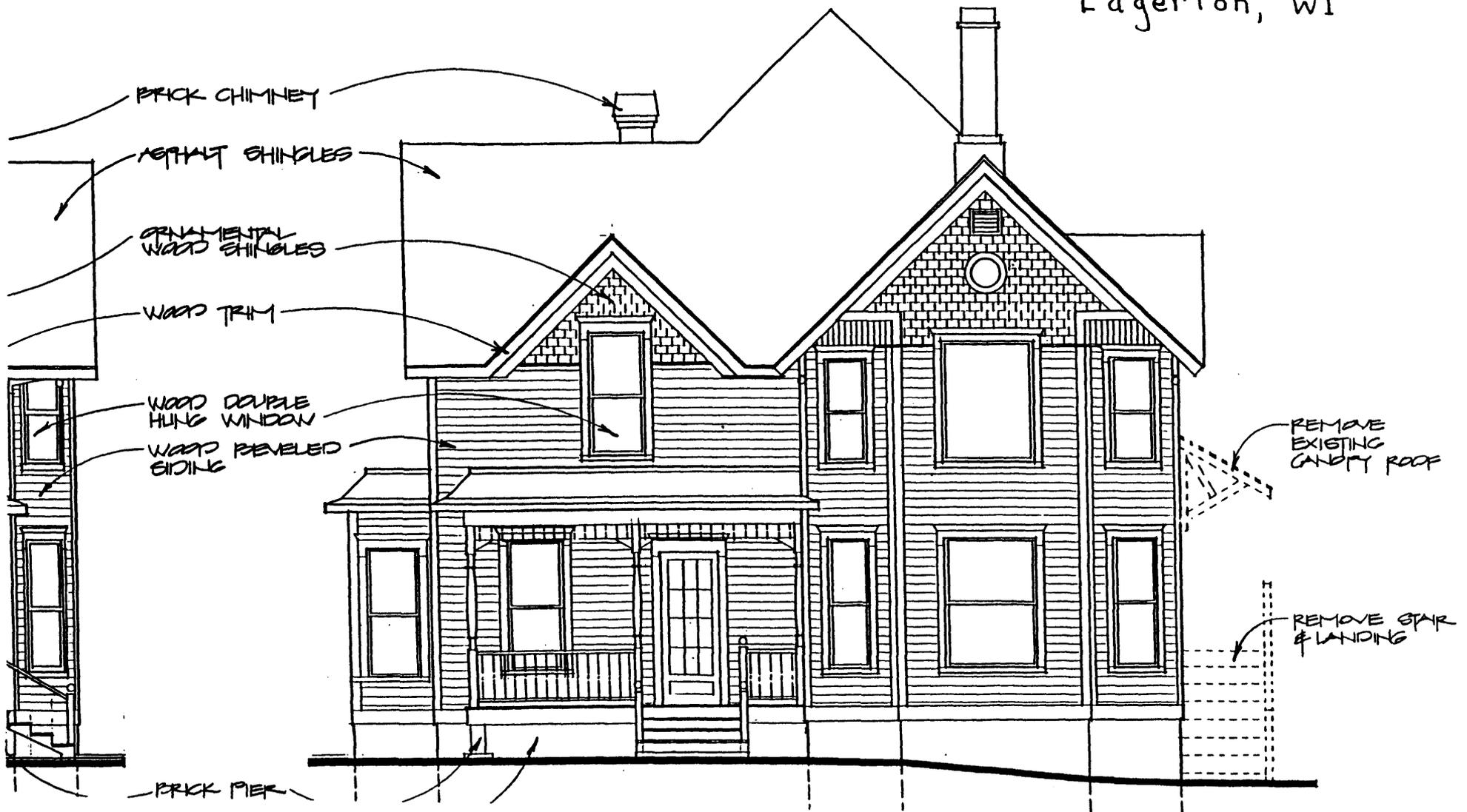
FIRST FLOOR PLAN

Sterling North House
Edgerton WI



SECOND FLOOR PLAN

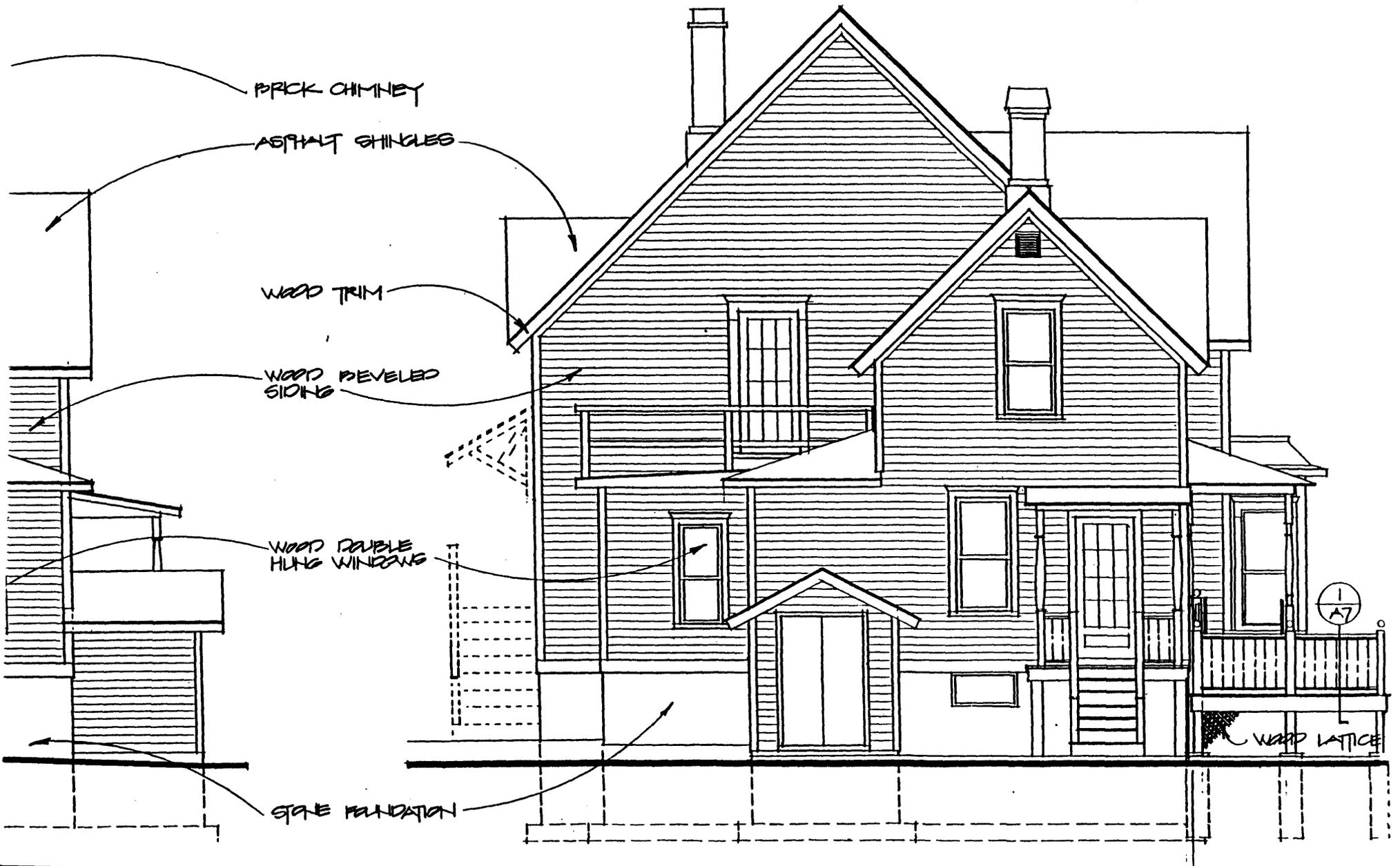
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Edgerton, WI

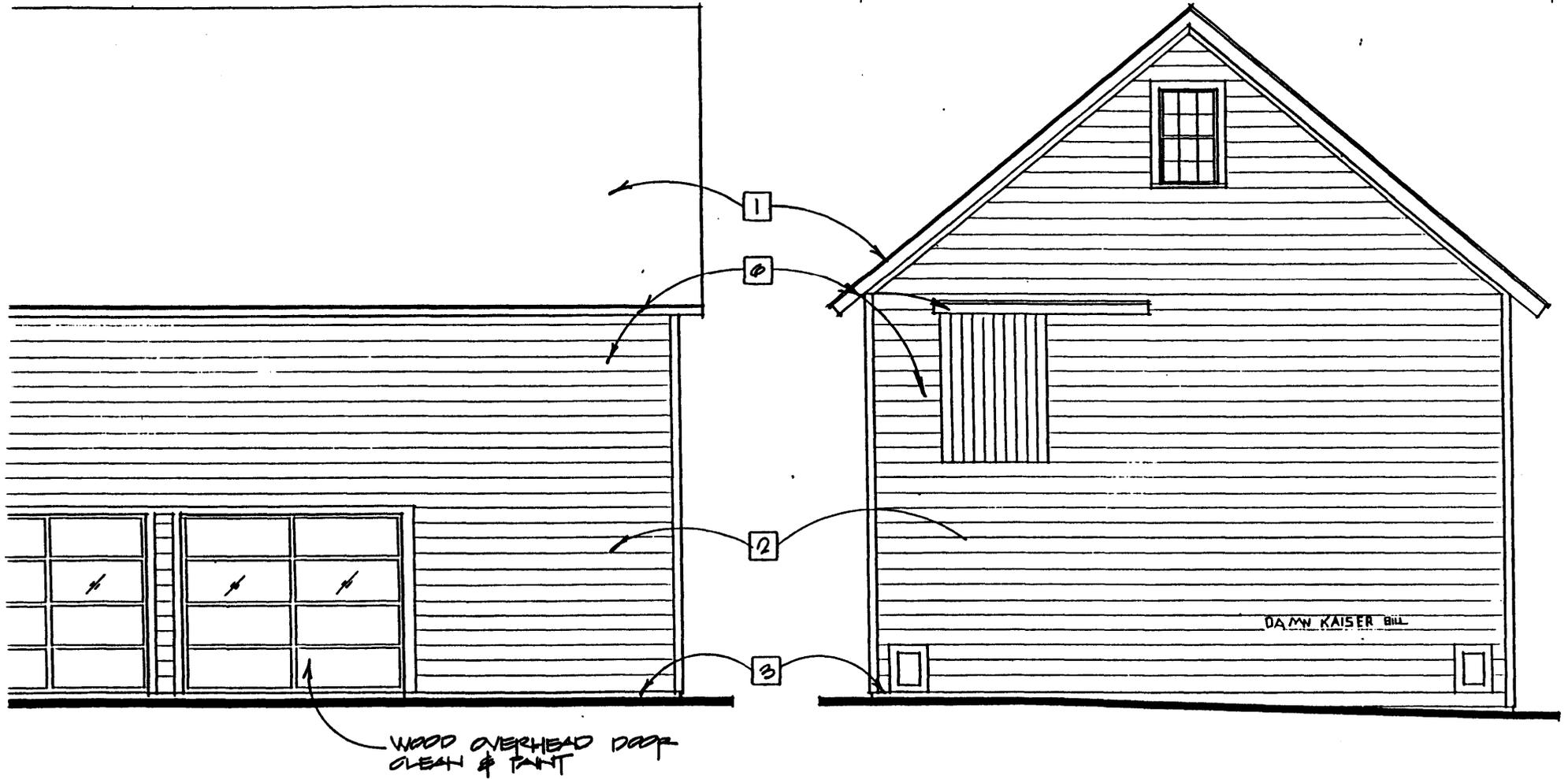


Front Facade, facing North

Sterling North House
Edgerton, WI

Rear Facade, facing South





LEVATION

WEST ELEVATION

Sterling North House
Edgerton, WI

~ Barn