

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number _____ Page _____

SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 91001988

Date Listed: 1/30/92

Wahle-Laird House
Property Name

Wood
County

WI
State

Multiple Name

This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.

Beth Boland
Signature of the Keeper

2/20/92
Date of Action

=====
Amended Items in Nomination:

This nomination makes the case for significance under criterion B for associations with Helen Connor Laird, as well as under A and C. Therefore, the applicable criteria are A, B, and C, and Helen Connor Laird should be added to the Significant Person blank.

This information was verified by Jim Draeger of the WI SHPO staff.

DISTRIBUTION:

- National Register property file
- Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)

to NPS 1/88



DATE
APPROVED

NPS Form 10-900
(Rev. 8/86)
Wisconsin Word Processor Format (1331D)
(Approved 3/87)

OMB No. 1024-0018

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National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

This form is for the use in nominating or requesting derterminations 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 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 Wahle-Laird House
other names/site number Blodgett, Guy E., House

2. Location

street & number 208 South Cherry Avenue N/A Not for Publication
city, town Marshfield N/A vicinity
state Wisconsin code WI county Wood code 141 zip code 54449

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	No. of Resources within property	
<u>x</u> private	<u>x</u> building(s)	contributing	noncontributing
<u> </u> public-Local	<u> </u> district	<u>2</u>	<u>0</u> buildings
<u> </u> public-State	<u> </u> site	<u> </u>	<u> </u> sites
<u> </u> public-Federal	<u> </u> structure	<u> </u>	<u> </u> structures
	<u> </u> object	<u> </u>	<u> </u> objects
		<u>2</u>	<u>0</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A 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 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.

X *[Signature]* _____ Date 11/25/91

Signature of certifying official

Date

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
- determined eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain:)

Beth Boland _____ 1/30/92

Signature of the Keeper Date

6. Functions or Use

Historic Functions
(enter categories from instructions)

Current Functions
(enter categories from instructions)

Domestic/Single Dwelling
Domestic/Secondary Structure

Domestic/Single Dwelling
Domestic/Secondary Structure

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)

Materials
(enter categories from instructions)

<u>Classical Revival</u>	foundation <u>Stone</u>
_____	walls <u>Wood</u>
_____	roof <u>Asphalt</u>
_____	other <u>Wood</u>

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

General Character

The Wahle-Laird House is located approximately three blocks east of the city's central business district in the area traditionally known as "Pleasant Hill." Sited mid-block on South Cherry Avenue between Second and Third Street, the house is the second structure to occupy the lot. Historically, this neighborhood has been home to many of Marshfield's most prominent citizens. Originally dominated by embellished Queen Anne style homes, after the turn of the century many of the original structures were demolished and a "second generation" of Classical Revival private residences were constructed. Built in 1904, Wahle-Laird House was one of the first "new" homes in the neighborhood, and its style established a trend repeated throughout the neighborhood. The house is bordered by similar period revival homes, constructed in the mid-teens and early twenties.

Constructed over a full basement, the Wahle-Laird House, was built in 1904.¹ The house is a distinguished example of Colonial Revival architecture. Overall, horizontal counter balance is achieved via the repetitious placement of squat balcony balustrades, traditional narrow (three inch exposure) weatherboard cladding, and by extended eaves articulated by modillions and a dentil frieze. Characterized by its strong feeling for symmetry and centrality, this embellished Four-square fronts South Cherry Avenue from the center of its double lot. Set back from the sidewalk by about twenty feet, the two and a half story square plan house has a truncated hipped roof with a "widow's walk."² The main feature of this cubical, thirty six feet by thirty six feet, frame building is its accentuated entry, which serves visually to reinforce the building's centrality. All elevations are pierced by attic gable dormers. Trees and shrubs create an appropriate setting; the landscaping and foundation plantings are managed so as to enhance the formality of the structure. Flower beds flank the front entry steps and serve to emphasize the point of entry.

x See continuation Sheet

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Exterior

The front elevation features a central nine feet wide flight of wood steps which provide access to the partial width entry porch. Approximately four feet above grade, the first level is supported by rusticated ashlar block foundation. The entry portico is supported by two square posts and two rectangular pilasters. The capitals of the latter are of the Corinthian order, exhibiting acanthus leaves and flowers. The forward capitals are cornice mouldings, devoid of embellishment, and thus suspect as replacements. The front entry door is flanked by beveled glass side lights. To the right and left of the entry are paired doors with leaded glass transoms which feature colonial cap casings. These doors open onto an open patio extending to the corners of the front facade and enclosed by a balustrade with turned, squat spindles.

A half hexagonal, central, projecting bay and balcony rests atop the entry portico roof at the second level. Above this projection is the attic's gable dormer with partial returns. Here the opening is a round-top door which opens onto a small balcony. The vertical theme terminates at the rooftop widow's walk.

The north elevation's most notable feature is the first level dining room's projecting box bay with rooftop balcony. Other windows on this elevation are sash units, of various sizes, placed to respond to floor plan requirements.

Openings on the rear (west) elevation are symmetrically arranged at the first level with one-over-one sash units which are equal distance from the central, pedimented overhang, sheltering the rear entry. The interior stair landing window pierces the facade directly above the entry pediment, and the second level one-over-one sash units are balanced to the left and right. The west elevation attic gabled dormer is the building's only non-ornamented dormer.

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The south elevation is the most modest. One multiple window unit of three sets of one-over-one sash units is placed at the first level near the east corner. Other one-over-one sash units are symmetrically placed.

The 1912 Sanborn fire insurance map atlas indicates that a two story carriage house (demolished date unknown) once stood at the southwest corner of the lot. Subsequently, a two car, frame garage has been built adjacent to the southwest corner of the house. The garage is one story, clapboard-clad and has a low pitch hipped roof. Garage door details indicated its construction period around the mid to late 1920s. An unusual feature of the garage is its drive-thru capacity, accomplished by the placement of paired doors on both the Cherry Avenue and alley elevations. One pair of original east doors has been replaced by a more contemporary overhead door (ca. 1960s).

Interior

The spacious interior of the Wahle-Laird House follows a simple square plan, and facilitates function from a central axis. Unlike the majority of its vernacular Four-square counterparts, the house exhibits a unique layout feature in that the main parlor (living room) extends the entire length of the south portion floor plan. Few changes have been made to the interior; the exception being a small powder room installed at the site of a former understair closet on the main floor. Consistent with other early Colonial Revival types, the interior of the house reflects the eclectic nature of a newly emerging style: both Classical and Craftsman aesthetics are evident throughout the interior. Hardwood floors and substantial millwork reinforce a feeling of warmth and intimacy.

The formal reception hall is reached through a small vestibule which features an interior, single light, beveled glass door with side lights. The spacious, seven by fourteen foot, reception hall is the central axis of the first story floor plan. Varnished cherry strips create a panelized wall surface in the Craftsman tradition. The ceiling is coffered with cherry beams. The dining room, living room, and staircase exhibit substantial millwork detail. Spindled cherry fretwork, with wreath and garland appliques, accentuate openings into adjacent rooms.

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In what was a popular treatment of the period, colonades, in this case, of cherry with Ionic order capitals, accentuate the formality of the living room.^a The interior-wall fireplace features an arched opening with painted brick hearth and painted wood colonial mantle. A wall-mounted mirror hangs over the mantle. A modest raised panel door, just east of the fireplace, facilitated servant access to the room. Occupying the entire thirty six feet of the building's depth, the living room is an unusual floorplan design for an otherwise standard Four-square configuration.

In the dining room, millwork and furnishings distinguish this room from the other more Colonial styled rooms of the house. This room is the only room in the house to be trimmed in oak and features an oak raised panel, five foot eight inch high wainscoat, capped with plate rail. The north wall's box bay embraces a built-in sideboard; deep side wall returns are also of panelized oak. As in the living room, the east elevation opening is a pair of patio doors with a leaded glass transom. The dining room environment strongly reflects the design elements of the Arts & Crafts Movement: clean, uncomplicated, and efficient. It is warmed by the abundance of stained oak. At over two hundred and fifty square feet, the room comfortably facilitated many social gatherings. The interior west wall has a rectangular fireplace with painted brick and plaster moldings that is flanked to the north by the butler pantry's swinging door.

The kitchen and walk-thru butler pantry exhibit a minimal amount of updating since their original construction. Original painted cabinets, Hoosier Kitchen, and enameled double slope wall-mounted sink are original to the house. The kitchen reflects the turn-of-the-century attitude of enthusiasm for cleanliness and perception of the kitchen as a workshop and laboratory.

The four second floor bedrooms, bathroom (with original fixtures), and attic stairway are arranged around a spacious, square, central hall with built-in linen cabinet of cherry. The master bedroom is located at the southeast corner and adjoins a small sitting room that occupies the center front. This sitting room is recognized from the exterior by the center-front projecting bay window. The southwest bedroom features an interior wall fireplace. Overall, the second floor demonstrates the efficient utilization of space generally associated with Four-square design.

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The attic remains partially unfinished. The walls slope to follow the contour of the roof. The south elevation dormer area has been enclosed to accommodate a bedroom with attached bath. The round top door on the east elevation provides access to the front balcony. A ceiling hatch provides access to the widow's walk.

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FOOTNOTES

1. Insurance Maps of Marshfield Wisconsin (New York: Sanborn Map Co. 1904 and 1912).
2. Virginia and Lee McAlester, A Field Guide to American Houses (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), 32.
3. Jan Jennings and Herbert Gottfried, American Vernacular Interior Architecture (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, Inc., 1988), 250.

8. Statement of Significance

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

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance

(enter categories from instructions) Period of Significance Significant Dates

<u>Architecture</u>	<u>1904</u>	<u>N/A</u>
<u>Social History</u>	<u>1924-1941</u>	
	<u>Cultural Affiliation</u>	
	<u>N/A</u>	
<u>Significant Person</u>	<u>Architect/Builder</u>	
<u>N/A</u>	<u>Unknown</u>	

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

Significance

The Wahle-Laird House is being nominated to the National Register for its local significance in the area of architecture under Criterion C as a distinguished example of the Classical Revival style applied to a Four-square form, and for its state and local significance under Criterion A for social history because of its direct association with the individual and collective lives of the Laird family, "a name synonymous with community service at the local, state, and national level."¹

Architectural Significance

The Wahle-Laird House is architecturally significant as one of Marshfield's most distinguished examples of the Classical Revival style. In 1904, the house was occupied by physician and surgeon Dr. Henry Wahle. In 1921, the home was occupied by successful businessman and civic leader Guy Blodgett before being purchased in 1923 by W.D. Connor. In 1924, Connor presented the house as a gift to his daughter, Helen Connor Laird, and son-in-law, Melvin Laird (Marshfield City Directories 1904, 1908, 1921, 1924).

X See continuation sheet

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Much of the country's domestic architecture constructed between 1895-1910 reflects the transition from Victorian to Classical Revival style preference.

The revival of interest in classical design at the turn of the century was largely a consequence of the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago. The exposition featured a formal plan with classically-detailed buildings designed by some of America's most noted architects. The exposition was widely publicized and exerted a strong influence on urban planners, architects and artists and others who spread the Classical Revival style throughout the country. The style became the preferred design idiom for banks, public buildings and typically showed a formal, academic influence. In residential architecture, classical design was more frequently seen in architectural details than in the overall massing, form or design.

In Wisconsin, residences typically are vernacular forms or other architectural styles such as the eclectic Queen Anne which borrow detailing from classical sources. It was popular from 1895 to around 1920 when it was largely eclipsed by the rising popularity of the period revival styles. Its major characteristics include a formality of composition, use of classical and sometimes colonial design motifs such as porticos, Ionic and Corinthian columns, dentils, festoons, and elaborated entrances.²

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The Wahle-Laird House exhibits elements of the friendly competition for preference which occurred between "period" and "modern" styles in the first decade of this century. The early emphasis on period styles was interrupted, almost overwhelmed, by the first wave of architectural modernism which, in the form of the Craftsman and Prairie styles, dominated American houses built in the first two decades of this century.³ The eclectic combination of historic and modern details present in the Wahle-Laird House--in some sense, the product of the Four-square/Classical Revival mixture--reflects the countervailing forces of tradition and change in both the architectural and social environments at the turn of the century.⁴ For example, the Wahle-Laird House displays an interesting hybridized expression of the two predominate entrance forms: the porch deck extends the full width of the front, but the roofed portion is limited to the center twelve feet of this elevation. The installation of patio doors (to provide porch access from living and dining rooms) rather than windows is a feature unique to the Wahle-Laird House in the Cherry Avenue neighborhood.

A feature which further distinguishes Wahle-Laird House from other Classical Revival counterparts is its multiple, projecting, balustrade balconies on the front elevation. The vertical progression of these balconies, which terminate at the widow's walk, serve to accentuate the central entrance; in profile, this expression has a tier effect.

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The presence of both traditional and modern interior design schemes at the Wahle-Laird House assists in visualizing the preference transitions which were occurring within turn-of-the century design styles and society. The turned spindles, garland spandrels, and Ionic capitals of the reception hall and living room contrast sharply with the simplistic styling of the Arts and Crafts decor of the dining room.

Historian Alan Gowans asserts that buildings serve as visual metaphors in which social values and aesthetics are linked; that architecture provides visual continuity with our history and beliefs.⁵ Adherence to, or preference for, a particular style, design, or aesthetic are often perceived as concurrent with the owner's basic values and philosophy. Adherence to a specific style, amidst generations of social and architectural change, may be representative of an owner's unwaivering commitment to the values represented by his or her selected style.

Architecture, mementos, and household possessions are the material relics which convey an awareness that the present develops from a past still inherent in it. The Wahle-Laird House embodies a symbolic fascination and sense of place and time. Its quiet beauty and restraint bespeak domestic serenity and a certain quality of life. Its form carries connotations of intelligence, restraint, and patriotism. As each age differs from the next, it becomes increasingly important to recognize our architectural history as a visual landmark of life style and attitude of earlier times. Architectural examples such as the Wahle-Laird House illuminate the process of history and assist in maintaining the past as integral to our sense of identity.

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CRITERION A: Social History

The Wahle-Laird House has served as the host environment to nearly a century of Wisconsin politicians, educators, physicians, and social reformers. It is directly associated with Helen Connor Laird: businesswoman, suffragette, lobbyist for the World Court, poet, journalist, lecturer, political and civil rights activist, and educator, and with her husband, Reverend Melvin R. Laird: Doctor of Divinity, Presbyterian minister, director of the Connor Lumber and Land Company, chairman of the Wood County Citizen's Committee on Public Welfare, member of the board of the Wood County Asylum, Marshfield, member and chairman of the Wood County Board of Supervisors, and State Senator.

Purchased for Helen Connor Laird and her family in 1923 by Mrs. Laird's father William Duncan Connor (1864-1945), pioneer lumberman, Republican party leader, former Lieutenant Governor (1907-1909), 208 South Cherry Avenue was often the social and political gathering place for the Wisconsin Central Republican Party behind-the-scene caucuses and debates.

Convinced, as she wrote in 1913, that "a hand in government will make of woman a true, active human being with a broader horizon in life, and a brighter, more interesting outlook,"⁶ Helen Connor Laird dedicated her life to the educational, cultural, and political enrichment of the citizens of Marshfield and the women of the state of Wisconsin. She was celebrated as "a dedicated woman who believed strongly in a quality level of education, a person who contributed heartily to the quality of life in Marshfield,"⁷ and as one who "spoke for those unrepresented and for those who had no voice at all."⁸ Governor Walter Kohler called her "one of Wisconsin's most talented women,"⁹ and Governor Oscar Rennebohm described her "a woman of vision who knows the score."¹⁰

The first surviving child of William Duncan Connor and Mary Witter Connor, Helen was born in Wood County (Grand Rapids) on August 22, 1888, and moved with her family from Auburndale to

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Marshfield in 1895. Her oratorical skills were sharpened in the Marshfield high school. There she delivered speeches against the trusts, criticized Standard Oil for refusing to open its books to the courts, other corporations for dealing out money to one party in one state and another in another, not for the promotion of political principles, but solely for selfish interests. In 1904, when she was sixteen, she became active in state politics. Her father was State Chairman of the Republican Party then and managing Governor La Follette's turbulent campaign for re-election. Helen placed La Follette signs throughout the Pleasant Hill neighborhood, even in the yards of homes she knew to be of stalwart persuasion. She delivered the valedictory oration upon graduation from Marshfield High School in 1906, attended Milwaukee Downer College where she impersonated Presidential candidate Robert Taft in a mock election in 1908, and won the applause and the vote by claiming she "was not a vote getter but a conviction getter."¹¹ She transferred to the University of Wisconsin, Madison, where she majored in English at first, but switched to journalism because she "wanted some straight writing."¹² She became a founding member of the Wisconsin chapter of the women's journalism society, Theta Sigma Phi, in 1912, the year she graduated. She returned to her father's home and in 1913, married the Reverend Melvin Robert Laird, who had come to Marshfield in 1911 as pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, the church attended by the Connor family and in which W. D. served as a Deacon.

The newlyweds moved to Lincoln, Illinois where Rev. Laird served as President of Lincoln College and pastor of the First United Presbyterian Church. In Lincoln, Mrs. Laird organized a local Women's Club and launched a pure milk campaign, tirelessly writing letters to the Illinois State Food Commission and State Board of Health. She fought for a public playground for children and for a YMCA "where men and boys of all classes will find a welcome"; spoke publically on behalf of clean streets, sanitary schools, inspected meat and cheap gas, and convinced that "to protect the interest of the modern home, women must have a voice in government," and that "a hand in government will make woman a truer, more active being with a broader horizon," vigorously championed the cause of female suffrage.

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Mrs. Laird returned to Marshfield with her two children during the First World War while her husband served as an army chaplain in France. On November 10, 1918, she marched in the victory parade and was the keynote speaker at Marshfield's Armistice Day Celebration. In October, 1919, upon Rev. Laird's return from the military service, the family moved to Omaha, Nebraska. In the spring of 1924, the Lairds returned to Marshfield to take up life long residence at 208 South Cherry Avenue which had belonged to their friend, Dr. Henry Wahle. W.D. bought the house for Helen and her family on December 19, 1923, because it was directly across the street from his own and because he thought it "the place that will be most agreeable to you to live in, and best for the children."¹⁴

On May 29, 1924, W.D. Connor and Mary Witter Connor presented Helen the deed to 208 South Cherry Avenue for the traditional one dollar and other considerations. Helen's return to Marshfield marked the official beginning of a lifetime of political and community activity. On October 30, 1924, Mrs. Laird introduced speaker Mrs. Charles Schuttler at a political meeting for women at the Marshfield City Hall. By 1926, Helen Connor Laird had an established reputation as an effective speaker and an activist for the World Court--"I'm for the world court for I think it's the most honest, conscientious effort thus far to prevent war. It may not be perfect, but I think it is one step toward making it more difficult to get into a war"¹⁵ --and for women's rights and responsibilities in the areas of politics, health, and the environment. As keynote speaker at a gathering held in Forest County for the re-election of Senator Lenroot (another supporter of the World Court), Helen advocated educated participation by women in making wise political decisions. During her speech she said

the time has come when women must speak when called upon and do more than just speak. You women were included here today because you are voters. Ten years ago you might have been invited out of courtesy, or to help feed the multitude, but today you're here for the same reason the men are, because you have a vote to cast and because it is up to you to get all the information you can on every public question before you cast that vote... the success of government like ours depends on the integrity, the loyalty, and the judgment of the individual voter.¹⁶

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On September 22, 1931, Helen Connor Laird accepted the presidency of the Marshfield Women's Club, an organization with which she had been affiliated since 1908 when she and her mother became founding members. At the time of her taking office, her comments included:

There is a place for this Club in this community to enrich the life of the community, to better understand history and international relations, to be of help in this unemployment situation, to register workers, to help safeguard the health of women, and to provide a meeting ground for strangers and new women.¹⁷

Over the next six years, Mrs. Laird also served as district vice-president, president of the Seventh District of Women's Clubs, and district chair of the department of international relations. She also was a very active member of the Women's Club of the Presbyterian Church, the P.E.O. (a secret national association of women dedicated to the advancement of women through education), the League of Women Voters, and the Daughters of the American Revolution (D.A.R.). In April 1933, as chair of the D.A.R. legislative committee, she presented a comprehensive review of bills before the state legislature.

By 1937, Mrs. Laird was the Wisconsin chairperson of a national organization: The Cause and Cure of War, an organization founded by early feminist and suffragette leader Carrie Chapman Catt; this organization merged with the Council on World Affairs. In the years between 1936 and 1941, Helen Connor Laird lectured to women's clubs and social organizations, conducted workshops (often held in her home at 208 South Cherry Avenue) to educate women in international affairs, authored and distributed international relations study materials to groups and organizations state-wide, and maintained petition campaigns directed to people in power to act for the good of the nation. In a 1936 letter to Eddie Cantor, she wrote

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To save ourselves we must help prevent all war and what does that mean but a policy of co-operative effort with other nations to obtain security. . . we must begin training diplomats and stop handing out foreign posts as political plums. We have neglected that vastly important field; are often outwitted by shrewder, better trained men. Our citizens have lost confidence in this first line of defense where wars are made or prevented.¹⁸

On October 7, 1940, Mrs. Laird presided over a discussion: "Problems of the Pacific-America and the Far East," at the Fourth Wisconsin Conference on the Cause and Cure held in Madison. On October 31, 1940, she wrote Secretary of State, Cordell Hull:

I had considerable misgivings when I read that the embargo on machine tools to Russia had been lifted and that sixty million worth had been shipped, but I was sore distressed when I heard that the planes completed for Sweden were now also destined for Russia. . . I would like authentic information. As one who supported the Thomas amendment against aid to aggressor nations, I would want to protest if the foregoing is true. . . I am deeply interested in making some talks and want the truth.¹⁹

With the passing of her mother in 1935, Helen Connor Laird quickly assumed her mother's role as Connor family hostess and confidant. She shared her father's antagonisms, friendships, and interest in Republican politics; she also shared his dedication to quality education, the arts, and free, well-stocked libraries. She accompanied Marshfield librarian, Miss Alice Millard, to Madison in 1926 when the library commission held a conference where methods of county work were discussed and suggestions made for improving the same. She maintained her library promotion enthusiasm over the years and, in 1930, became the president of the Marshfield Library Board. During the period 1930-1940, she regularly contributed signed book reviews of adult books and commented on the children's collections in "The Book Corner" of the Marshfield News Herald. She demonstrated her commitment to education through her service to the Marshfield Board of Education. She was elected President of the Board--the first woman to be so honored-- in 1940.

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Mrs. Laird's professional experiences were not limited to her commitments to public service. Her incisive intellect and quick grasp of issues made her an astute business woman, and she was closely involved in the family's lumber business. During the twenties, she often held W.D. Connor's proxy at American National Bank meetings, the bank of which he was president. In 1929, W.D. invited her to join him at the company's Jordan River, British Columbia logging operation to "help us study some of the problems and there are some here."²⁰ In the thirties, she along with her husband and father, endured the tensions of successfully holding the lumber company's assets together in spite of bankruptcy reorganization. At many family conferences held at 208 South Cherry Avenue, Helen functioned as family advisor guiding and reviewing all aspects of the lumber business's sales figures, law suits, changes in company organization, distribution and products.

Her home at 208 was not only the scene of business and political meetings, and the meetings of the various women's clubs with which she was associated, but also, in the thirties, when the Marshfield Clinic brought the renowned German dermatologist, Dr. Stephen Epstein and other foreign doctors to Marshfield, the scene of musical and literary evenings. Holding the view that the arts could lift people beyond the petty and superficial; that the arts held the power to deepen an understanding of common humanity; and, that the arts performed an essential social function, Helen Connor Laird and her husband formed a book discussion group with the dual purpose of enabling the newcomers to feel more at home in the community, and through reading and discussion to perfect their English. Her hospitality to newcomers and her quiet charity to those in need are well remembered even today in Marshfield.

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208 South Cherry was also home to Helen Connor Laird's four sons: Connor (1913-1943); Richard (1915-1967); Melvin Robert (1922-) David (1927-)-- and to her husband, Reverend Melvin Robert Laird.

Born on his father's farm in Pike County, Illinois, August 1878, the fifth of ten children, Melvin R. Laird distinguished himself early as a gifted student who had a calling. He received his B.A. from Illinois College at Jacksonville. After a period teaching school and serving as principal of Barry High School in Pike County, he earned enough money to pursue a higher education, and went on to study at Princeton. He also attended the Universities of Wisconsin and Chicago prior to receiving his Doctor of Divinity Degree from McCormick Theological Seminary, Illinois. He served in Prairie du Sac from 1906 until 1911 when he received the call to Marshfield. In Marshfield, he was an active member of the men's clubs: the Rotary, the Masons and the Elks, and he organized the city's first Boy Scout Troops. On April 16, 1913, he married Helen Melissa Connor. The Reverend George E. Hunt, Christ Presbyterian Church, Madison, who gave the benediction to the distinguished international assemblage when the University of Wisconsin celebrated its fiftieth jubilee in 1904, performed the Lairds' marriage ceremony. He also provided the following recommendation as the minister sought a new parish to begin married life.

The Reverend Melvin Robert Laird is a clear headed thinker. . . . He brings to the preparation of his sermons a mind which has ranged over the best of everything in human literature and philosophy, and a heart tender and sympathetic in all of the human experiences. At the present time in his present charge-- which is an important one in this Synod--he has two large companies of Boy Scouts, well organized and well trained, who worship the ground he walks on. He is remaking the boyhood and thus directing the young manhood of Marshfield.²¹

The couple moved to Lincoln, Illinois, where Mr. Laird served as pastor of the First Presbyterian Church and President of Lincoln College. In 1917, Mr. Laird volunteered for service and received a commission as chaplain in the 335th Regiment. After W.W.I, in

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impact on county matters. On October 4, 1937, he wired the Honorable Paul Alfonso, State Capitol: "We have followed your stand on the relief bill with great interest. . . Wood County is on record as favoring the Relief Bill as amended to embody the recommendations made by the County Board Association. We expect that you will work for and support this bill." In 1940, with years of experience in Wood County government, and a solid reputation in the area as a fair, intelligent man who sought the general good, Mr. Laird ran for the State Senate. He was elected, and, in 1941, he began to serve his district and his state in Madison.

Mr. Laird's abilities as a business-man and civic leader were coupled with a deeply sensitive nature and sympathetic heart. In Memorial Day speeches at Flander's Field in Marshfield, and in Stratford, and at the funerals over which he continued to preside, including that of former Governor Upham, November 19, 1931, he revealed what Dr. Karl Doege, one of the founder's of the Marshfield Clinic, described as a capacity to "look deep into the souls of men, [and] to clarify thoughts that people had but could not express."²² Glenn A. Tinkham, Marshfield businessman, and Principal of Marshfield High School who attended rural farm meetings, meetings at the University Club and in the Laird home with Mr. Laird, claimed his "dignity, poise, leadership, business ability and character constitute a heritage which will be a constant source of pride and inspiration to all in the years to come."²³

During the period 1924-1941, both Helen and Melvin Laird demonstrated an unwaivering commitment and unselfish service not only to their own family of four sons, but to their community, their state and their country. Deeply patriotic, they exemplified by their actions their sense of the privilege and the obligation of being Americans.

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Historical Background:

From 1941 until his sudden death in 1946, Mr. Laird served with distinction on important committees in the Wisconsin State Senate: the Committee of Committees, the Agricultural and Labor Committee, and the Legislative Procedure Committee. His work on the agricultural committee was highlighted with the passage of the Bang's Disease bill, a bill dealing with the control of communicable diseases, including tuberculosis, among domestic animals, a bill of great interest to the agricultural and medical communities, and to families, including the Lairds, who first began fighting for safe milk in 1913. His work on behalf of this bill earned him the gratitude of Professor V.E. Kivlin, Dean of the College of Agriculture, University President Edwin B. Fred, and the Wisconsin State Medical Society. In 1943, Mr. Laird, drawing on his years of experience in county administration, sponsored Bill 13S, a bill regulating the election of County board chairmen and specifying their functions. Henceforth county board chairmen would serve the same function from district to district and be elected in the same democratic manner by fellow members of the county boards. In the field of education, Mr. Laird worked on behalf of Bill 147A which increased state aid to the smaller vocation schools of the state. In 1942, Mr. Laird was elected a member of the Wisconsin Academy of Science, Art and Letters. In February, 1943, he served as chairman of the Wisconsin Legislative Interim Committee on the Study of the State Budget. Laird's legislation (No. 60, 1943 (Jt. Res. 35-S)) resulted in amending the state Constitution relieving the Secretary of State of the duty of acting as state auditor, authorizing the legislature to provide by law for the auditing of state accounts and simplifying the state budget and accounting procedures; it also facilitated a coordination of the activities of various state spending and revenue raising agencies.

On June 2, 1943, John Wyngaard, syndicated political columnist, wrote in his column, "State Capitol Close-Ups" in the Wisconsin State Journal, that the Marshfield senator should be considered for the 1944 gubernatorial nomination. He had, Wyngaard wrote, "made a

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strong impression by reason of his earnestness, capacity for work and study, and temperament" and was

a man who has won the universal respect of his colleagues. . . . never a narrow partisan, and yet a man who has effectively represented the Republican point of view in legislative activities, Laird has a rich background of professional work, a broad and thoughtful interest in public affairs, a quiet dignity and an effective speaking style which ought to put him in the forefront of any list of political candidates for the governorship. . . . he cannot escape serious and favorable notice.

Laird, convinced that Governor Goodland would again be a candidate in the Republican primary, and that "with six or more candidates in the field Goodland would win the nomination," did not make a run for the governorship. He was re-elected to the state senate in 1944 and served with distinction on the Committee on Committees and the Legislative Procedure Committee. On February 8, 1945, he introduced Resolution No. 26 S, a resolution relating to the distinguished career of his father-in-law William Duncan Connor, former Lieutenant Governor, prominent figure in Wisconsin business, political and civic life, who died on November 20, 1944. The resolution was adopted by unanimous rising vote in both chambers. On March 19, 1946, Melvin Laird's promising political career ended abruptly with his death.

The death of Senator Melvin R. Laird constitutes a loss that will be felt far beyond the limits of the community in which he lived and the senatorial district which he served, for Melvin Laird gained such stature during his five years in the Senate of Wisconsin that he had come to be an influence of good in the entire State. . . . Wisconsin is poorer for his death.²⁴

Recognized as both a scholar and humanitarian, Senator Laird's character and contributions to society were summarized by the Wisconsin State Legislature Joint Resolution No. 7 (1947):

He was a man of great sympathy and kindness. . . the dignified manner in which he conducted himself while serving in the

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Senate will long leave an impression on these legislative halls. In view of the outstanding character of this man and because of his valuable contribution to the welfare of his community and faithful manner in which he held public office and performed his duties; now therefore, be it resolved by the Senate, the Assembly concurring, that the foregoing Resolution be spread in full upon the Senate Journal.

Melvin R. Laird Jr., who, as a young man of eighteen, had assisted his father in the campaign of 1940, made a successful run to fill his father's Senate seat. His distinguished service as State Senator, United States Congressman, and Secretary of Defense is familiar to all students of American history.

Helen Connor Laird survived her husband by thirty six years, living in the memory-filled family home at 208. She assumed her husband's position as Secretary of the Connor Lumber and Land Company after his death, continued to fight for causes she believed in, and to serve her community and state. In 1943, she became director of the Wisconsin War Fund. In January, 1945, she delivered a radio address broadcast from Steven's Point: "What Should Be America's War and Peace Aims?" In that year, convinced that "art knows no national or ethnic boundaries and to discriminate on the basis of race, creed, or gender, rather than on merit, is a grievous and short-sighted error,"²⁵ she filed a formal protest and submitted her resignation to the D.A.R. when the organization sponsored a "white artists only" showing in Washington, D.C. and would not let Marian Anderson sing.

In 1950, Governor Oscar Rennebohm appointed Mrs. Laird as a Trustee to the State Library Board. State Library Commissioner Walter Botsford wrote of Mrs. Laird in a University of Wisconsin News Service Press release published April 7, 51: When she was appointed, she took hold so quickly she amazed us all. She was invaluable in pointing out the weaknesses in our budget and in putting her finger on the flaws in our methods."

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Mrs. Laird's years of service to education--she was president of the Marshfield Board of Education 1940-1942 and continued to serve on the board until 1946--culminated in her appointment by Governor Walter Kohler in 1951 to the Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin. Following Governor Kohler's appointment, the University News Service Press release noted:

A Wisconsin woman long prominent in the business, political, and educational life of the state took her seat on the University Board of Regents Saturday. . . . Serving on boards in the public interest is not a new occupation for Mrs. Laird.

In 1955, Mrs. Laird was selected by her fellow regents to serve on the newly formed Coordinating Committee for Higher Education. "It was not a matter of gallantry, but a clear recognition of her discerning questions and wise counsel."²⁶

In March, 1984, two years after her death, the University of Wisconsin Board of Regents resolved to name the new Fine Arts Building at the Marshfield campus in her honor. In an editorial published in the Marshfield News Herald, March 13, 1984, editor William Heath wrote

It is a fitting memorial to a dedicated woman, who believed strongly in a quality level of education and a person who contributed heartily to the quality of life in Marshfield. . . . The Laird name has been synonymous with community service at the local, state and national level.

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FOOTNOTES

1. "Center Building Given A Name," Opinion, Marshfield News Herald, (Marshfield, Wisconsin: March 13, 1984.) p.4.
2. Letter from James Draeger to Helen L. Laird, Aug. 21, 1991.
3. Clem Labine, "The Comfortable House." Old House Journal, Jan. 1982, Vol X, No. 1, p. 73.
4. McAlester, p. 321.
5. Jan Jennings and Herbert Gottfried, American Vernacular Design, 1870-1940 (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1985), xii.
6. MS Helen Connor notes for speech to Lincoln, Illinois, Women's Club, Oct. 1913. Helen L. Laird collection.
7. "Center Building Given A Name," Marshfield News Herald, Opinion, March 13, 1984, p.4.
8. "Fine Arts Facility Named for Mrs. Laird," Marshfield News Herald, October 12, 1984, Vol. 64, No. 186., p.1.
9. MS Helen Connor Laird speech delivered at Silver Lake Pavillion, Forest County, August 1926. Helen L. Laird collection.
10. "Helen Laird: Life of Serving," Marshfield News Herald, April 27, 1982, (clipping, Marshfield Library files).
11. Milwaukee Downer Yearbook, 1909. Helen L. Laird collection.
12. "Melvin Laird's Mother Earned Her Own Fame," Milwaukee Sentinel, March 13, 1969, p. 8.

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13. MSS Helen Connor Laird speeches, 1914. Helen L. Laird collection.
14. Letter from W.D. Connor to Helen C. Laird, December, 1923. Helen L. Laird collection.
15. MS Helen Connor Laird. Helen L. Laird collection.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Letter from W.D. Connor to Helen C. Laird, Feb. 15, 1919. Helen L. Laird collection.
21. Letter from George E. Hunt to Mr. P.L. Hastings, Nebraska, March, 1913. Helen L. Laird collection .
22. Letter from Karl Doege to Melvin R. Laird, July 23, 1927. Helen L. Laird collection.
23. Letter from Glenn A. Tinkham to Helen Connor Laird, March 23, 1947. Helen L. Laird collection.
24. "Melvin Laird, Senator," Obituary, Marshfield News Herald, March 20, 1946, p. 4.
25. Letter from David Laird to Dr. Norbert Koopman, Dean, University of Wisconsin Center, Marshfield, Sept. 4, 1984, Helen L. Laird collection.
26. Resolution passed by Board of Regents, July 11, 1959. Minutes of the Regents, 1959, Madison, Wisconsin.

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