

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

received NOV 7 1984

date entered DEC 6 1984

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

1. Name

historic W. H. C. Folsom House (preferred)

and/or common Knowlton House

2. Location

street & number 109 Blackhawk Avenue ~~are~~ not for publication

city, town Prairie du Chien vicinity of

state Wisconsin code 55 county Crawford code 023

3. Classification

| Category | Ownership | Status | Present Use |
|---|--|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> district | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied | <input type="checkbox"/> agriculture |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s) | <input type="checkbox"/> private | <input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial |
| <input type="checkbox"/> structure | <input type="checkbox"/> both | <input type="checkbox"/> work in progress | <input type="checkbox"/> educational |
| <input type="checkbox"/> site | Public Acquisition | Accessible | <input type="checkbox"/> entertainment |
| <input type="checkbox"/> object | <input type="checkbox"/> in process | <input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted | <input type="checkbox"/> government |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> being considered | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted | <input type="checkbox"/> industrial |
| | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N.A. | <input type="checkbox"/> no | <input type="checkbox"/> military |
| | | | <input type="checkbox"/> museum |
| | | | <input type="checkbox"/> park |
| | | | <input type="checkbox"/> private residence |
| | | | <input type="checkbox"/> religious |
| | | | <input type="checkbox"/> scientific |
| | | | <input type="checkbox"/> transportation |
| | | | <input type="checkbox"/> other: |

4. Owner of Property

name State Historical Society of Wisconsin

street & number 816 State St.

city, town Madison vicinity of state WI 53706

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Crawford County Courthouse

street & number 220 N. Beaumont St.

city, town Prairie du Chien state WI

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Wisconsin Inventory of Historic Places has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1976 federal state county local

depository for survey records Historic Preservation Division, State Historical Society

city, town Madison state WI 53706

7. Description

Condition

excellent
 good
 fair

deteriorated
 ruins
 unexposed

Check one

unaltered
 altered

Check one

original site
 moved date _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Located in the central business district of Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, the W. H. C. Folsom house is a one and one-half story Greek Revival structure which stands out as a historical and architectural landmark among the commercial buildings of the district. Built c. 1842, this red brick structure possesses many of the Greek Revival details commonly found decorating residences of mid-nineteenth century Wisconsin. The building is a simple rectangle on a rubble foundation, with a low-pitched gable roof, and it presents its long side to the street. Two interior chimneys project from each gable end of the asphalt-shingled roof. The building has a wooden frieze and cornice with returns on the exposed gable end. The windows of this building are largely of two types. Most are six-over-six light sash type and are symmetrically placed on the front and exposed west side facades. A band of "eyebrow" windows with green louvered shutters are placed right under the frieze on the front facade. The rear facade has two sash windows, one "eyebrow" window, and one casement window (which may have been a later addition). The front and rear entrances have two-paneled solid wood doors with wooden screens. The front entrance is decorated with sidelights and a small twentieth century porch. The porch has a gable roof, returned eaves, and is decorated with "cut-out" designs. A brick-walled flower bed (also a twentieth century addition) extends on each side of the porch across the front facade.

The exterior of this building appears to be in its original condition, however, Sanborn-Perris insurance maps from 1884 to 1924 do indicate additions to the building which are no longer there. In 1884, the building had a rear one-story frame wing, and no front porch. By 1899, a one-story porch existed along the entire front facade. A turn-of-the-century photograph shows this porch to have been of plain design with little trim. At this time, as well, the building stood free of its neighbors. By 1912, the building was attached to its neighbor to the east, as it appears today, by both the main block and the rear frame addition. By 1924, the large front porch and the rear frame addition were gone from the building.

The interior of the building has lost some integrity due to minor remodelings, but many nineteenth century details remain. The first floor is one large room (partitions were removed in 1923 when the building became a League of Women Voters' headquarters) with two identical wood-manteled fireplaces decorated with pilasters at each end of the room. Door and window trim is plain and painted, and there are exposed beams spanning the ceiling. An enclosed staircase (moved from the center of the building to the northwest wall during the 1923 remodeling) leads to both a full basement and the upstairs half-story. The second floor also has little elaborate detail and the floor plan includes three bedrooms (now offices), and a staircase off a central hallway, with a small bathroom at the end of the hallway.

Even though the building is in only fair condition at the present time, it has retained most of its mid-nineteenth century character. Its location among mostly two-story commercial buildings is much different than in 1842, when the building was on the "edge" of Prairie du Chien, and sat on a large, sloping lot. But given the building's frequent use as an office or service building, it is appropriately located in the primary commercial area of the community. Since the early twentieth century, when the League of Women Voters purchased the building, until the present time under the ownership of the State Historical Society, the building has been preserved as a historic structure, and is currently leased by the Society to various local commercial and/or service organizations as office space.

8. Significance

| Period | Areas of Significance—Check and justify below | | | |
|---|--|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric | <input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric | <input type="checkbox"/> community planning | <input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> religion |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499 | <input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic | <input type="checkbox"/> conservation | <input type="checkbox"/> law | <input type="checkbox"/> science |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599 | <input type="checkbox"/> agriculture | <input type="checkbox"/> economics | <input type="checkbox"/> literature | <input type="checkbox"/> sculpture |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699 | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> education | <input type="checkbox"/> military | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> social/ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799 | <input type="checkbox"/> art | <input type="checkbox"/> engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> music | <input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899 | <input type="checkbox"/> commerce | <input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement | <input type="checkbox"/> philosophy | <input type="checkbox"/> theater |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-1934 | <input type="checkbox"/> communications | <input type="checkbox"/> industry | <input type="checkbox"/> politics/government | <input type="checkbox"/> transportation |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> invention | | <input type="checkbox"/> other (specify) |

Specific dates c. 1842¹ **Builder/Architect** unknown

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The W. H. C. Folsom house is locally significant for architecture, as an example of the Greek Revival style; and social/humanitarian, for its association with the Prairie du Chien chapter of the League of Women Voters during the twentieth century.

The W. H. C. Folsom house has had a varied history, both as a residence and commercial building. The house was originally constructed as a residence for W. H. C. Folsom, a New Englander who came to Wisconsin in the late 1830s, settled briefly in Prairie du Chien, and moved in 1845 to Taylors Falls, Minnesota, where he became prominent as a developer of the lumber industry in that area, and a state politician.² In 1847, E. W. Pelton, a local entrepreneur, purchased the building. Pelton, who operated the first grist mill in Prairie du Chien, and ran hotels and mercantiles in the community, rented the building as office space. It is during this time that Captain Wiram Knowlton probably had his law offices there. Knowlton was a locally prominent lawyer and was later judge of the Sixth Judicial Court.³ By 1874, John A. Newton, one of Pelton's mercantile business partners purchased the building and used it as his residence. It remained a residence until 1923, when the Prairie du Chien chapter of the League of Women Voters established their headquarters there. The League owned the building until 1960, when the members donated it to the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, which has leased the building to community businesses or service organizations ever since.⁴

Architecture

The W. H. C. Folsom house was built c. 1842, a time when the Greek Revival style still flourished in frontier Wisconsin. But in Prairie du Chien, either because buildings have lost too much integrity, or the style never really developed, there are few good extant examples of the Greek Revival style. Many of Prairie du Chien's early houses have the shape and symmetry of the style, but lack the details which are found in the Folsom house example. While the Folsom house is not an outstanding example of the style, when compared to others in the state, it does have the classic Greek Revival frieze, returned cornice, "eyebrow" windows, and entrance with sidelights. It also has the rectangular form and low-pitched roof common to many simpler Greek Revival buildings in Wisconsin. Reported to be the first brick building constructed in Prairie du Chien, this building is well-constructed, having withstood over 140 years of use as both a residence and an office block.

Although the building is currently in need of some renovation, it has suffered little from unsympathetic remodeling and retains much of its 1842 character. Its location in the dense downtown commercial district makes its site integrity somewhat lessened, since, in 1842, it was located in open spaces on the "edge" of the town. However, its historical use as an office block makes the current location historically appropriate. Because the building retains much of its integrity and its level of preservation is good, and because it is the best example of the Greek Revival style in the community, the building is a significant architectural landmark in Prairie du Chien.

9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation page

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property less than 1

Quadrangle name Prairie du Chien

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM References

A 15 650920 47680110
Zone Easting Northing

B
Zone Easting Northing

C

D

E

F

G

H

Verbal boundary description and justification

Union Plat North, Block 1, Lot 6 except east 12'; and east 8' of the west 100' of block 9. This is the legal description of the property.

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

state code county code

state code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Carol Lohry Cartwright

organization Historic Preservation Division

date 8/31/84

street & number 816 State Street

telephone (608) 262-1339

city or town Madison,

state WI 53706

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title Director of Historic Preservation

date October 23, 1984

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

Entered in the National Register

date

12/6/84

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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

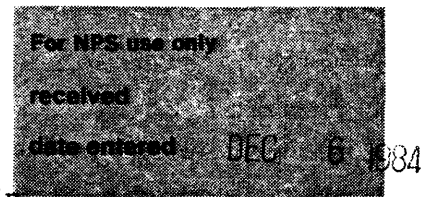
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SIGNIFICANCE (continued)

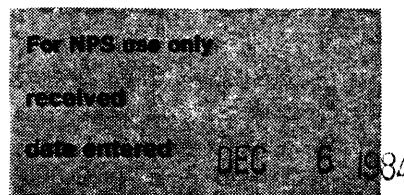
Social-Humanitarian

When the women suffrage amendment was passed in 1919, suffrage groups across Wisconsin turned to new activities through the League of Women Voters organization. In Prairie du Chien, the women who were active in the suffrage movement formed their local chapter of the League of Women Voters on July 16, 1920. Like other League groups, the Prairie du Chien chapter of approximately 50 members concentrated their activities on voter education and civic improvements. In 1923, the members purchased the W. H. C. Folsom house, renovated it, and made it their headquarters. It was reported that they were the first League group in the state to own their own headquarters.⁵

It is significant that Prairie du Chien (population in 1920: 3,537) had such an active League of Women Voters chapter, so much so that they were able to purchase their own building in a prominent location in the community. Their activities were wide-ranging, including historic preservation. Their purchase of the Folsom house was lauded as a means to save a local landmark, and the group also was active in local history and the preservation of other historic buildings.⁶ Because of its association with this group in the early twentieth century, the Folsom house has obtained further historical significance in the community.

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Notes

¹ Deed records show that W. H. C. Folsom purchased the lot the building is on from H. L. Dousman in 1842. Local historical sources indicate an 1842 construction date, and Folsom's memoirs indicate he was residing in Prairie du Chien at the time.

² Theodore Christianson, Minnesota A History of the State and Its People. Chicago and New York: The American Historical Society, 1935, Vol. I, p. 283, Vol. II, p. 56, Vol. IV, p. 575; W. H. C. Folsom, Fifty Years in the Northwest. St. Paul: Pioneer Press Company, 1888, pp. 5-18; John G. Gregory, Southwestern Wisconsin: A History of Old Crawford County. Chicago: S. J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1932, pp. 209-210.

³ John R. Berryman, History of the Bench and Bar of Wisconsin. Chicago: H. C. Cooper, Jr., & Co., 1898, Vol. I, pp. 103-104; Prairie du Chien Patriot, September 22, 1846; Crawford County Register of Deeds, Deeds, Vol. F, p. 97, Crawford County Courthouse, Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin; Herb Beierles, "House of Many Callings," Prairie du Chien Courier-Press, April 25, 1956; "State Historical Society Accepts League of Women Voters Building," Prairie du Chien Courier-Press, January 27, 1960.

⁴ Beierles, "House of Many Callings;" "State Historical Society Accepts League of Women Voters Building."

⁵ Gregory, pp. 289-290; Prairie du Chien Courier, March 27, 1923; Crawford County Press, Special League of Women Voters' Issue, March 21, 1923.

⁶ Crawford County Press, Special League of Women Voters' Issue, March 21, 1923.

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Knowlton Law Office, Prairie du Chien, Crawford County, Wisconsin

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Major Bibliographical References

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- Berryman, John R. History of the Bench and Bar of Wisconsin. Chicago: H. C. Cooper Jr., & Co., 1898, Vol. I.
- Christianson, Theodore. Minnesota A History of the State and Its People. Chicago and New York: The American Historical Society, 1935.
- Crawford County Register of Deeds. Deeds, Vol. F, p. 97, 144. Crawford County Courthouse, Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin.
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