

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:)

Edson H. Beall

1.19.16

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (check as many boxes as apply)

Category of Property (Check only one box)

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

X private

X building(s)

contributing

noncontributing

public-local

district

1

buildings

public-State

structure

sites

public-Federal

site

structures

object

objects

1

total

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

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE: Organizational

COMMERCE/TRADE: Business

SOCIAL: Meeting hall

7. Description

Architectural Classification

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19TH and EARLY 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS: Classical Revival

foundation GRANITE

walls

BEDFORD LIMESTONE

roof

COMPOSITION

other

ALUMINUM

Name of Property

County and State

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.

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.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Commerce (A)

Social History (A)

Architecture (C)

Period of Significance

1909-1965 (A)

1909 (C)

Significant Dates

1909

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Waters, William

Name of Property

County and State

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:

X 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	16	383160	4893560
	Zone	Easting	Northing

3			
	Zone	Easting	Northing

2			
	Zone	Easting	Northing

4			
	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	Peter Adams	date	February 15, 2015
organization		telephone	920-722-1422
street & number	537 E. Wisconsin Avenue	zip code	54956
city or town	Neenah	state	WI

Name of Property

County and State

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	Umer Sheikh	date	February 15, 2015
organization	Investment Creations LLC	telephone	414-793-7887
street & number	P.O. Box 91	zip code	54957
city or town	Neenah	state	WI

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.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 1

Equitable Fraternal Union Building
Neenah, Winnebago County, WI

Start description on line below

Narrative Description

The Equitable Fraternal Union Building is prominently located on the northeast corner of South Commercial Street and East Doty Avenue, one block south of the central business district in Neenah, Wisconsin. The immediate neighborhood is of local historical importance for its association with the financial, commercial, social, governmental and industrial development of the city. The site is less than an acre and is immediately adjacent to several banks and churches, and directly across the street from the site where the Neenah City Hall once stood. Constructed in 1909, the Equitable Fraternal Union Building is an imposing three story masonry building from the Classical Revival period. The plan configuration is rectangular, 69 by 102 feet, and with a flat roof. The foundation is of granite, the walls are of finished Bedford Limestone, and the roofing material is composition. A pedimented main entrance is centered at ground level of the west facade on South Commercial Street, and a modest rear entrance is just off center at ground level on the east facade at the back of the building. The doors are non-original; there are double doors at each entrance, metal framed, having plate glass and with a single plate glass transom above. The fenestration is formally balanced and composed on the west facade of a single window on each floor arranged in five bays, two windows on each floor in four bays on the east facade, and two windows on each floor in six bays on the north and south facades. Single-paned windows in aluminum frames date from the 1970s, replacing the original double hung sash on the north, south and west facades. On the east facade similarly constructed contemporary window units are divided into five horizontal panes. An undated, stationary, metal fire escape descends from the third floor across the northern half of the east facade. Concrete basement window wells are located on the north, south and east facades; the north and east wells being fitted with pipe railings. On the east facade the pattern of window wells also includes a stone staircase and basement entrance. The earliest and arguably the finest of three Classic Revival style commercial buildings constructed in Neenah, the Equitable Fraternal Union Building is the only one still extant.

At the time of its construction the Equitable Fraternal Union Building was the largest freestanding building in Neenah's commercial district at just over 25,000 square feet. It was also the most visually arresting, being extensively enriched with classical detailing, finished entirely in Bedford Limestone, and designed to be admired on all four sides. Divided into five bays on the main or west facade, the ground level main entrance is located under the center bay in a raised foundation of rusticated masonry. The entrance has a classically inspired surround featuring a triangular pediment and enclosing a tympanum with scrolled decoration, scrolled brackets, and further enriched with architrave molding and paterae. On either side of the entry are two windows, one centered on each of the four flanking bays, with flat arches and rusticated voussoirs. Above this ground level in what would be the

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 2

Equitable Fraternal Union Building
Neenah, Winnebago County, WI

piano nobile, the five bays are dramatically set off by a colonnade of six monumentally scaled, fluted, Ionic columns that rise up from the projecting watertable and are engaged to a recessed wall. Framing the columns at either end of the facade are flat rusticated corner piers. These piers rest on plinths that repeat those employed by the columns, and in place of capitals each pier has an elaborate elongated cartouche. Between the columns the spandrel panels over the five second floor windows are festooned, and above these are Doric order triglyphs. On the third floor, in close proximity to the Ionic capitals and pier cartouches, additional ornamentation was left to compound crosshatch muntins in both the upper and lower sash of the double hung windows that are no longer extant. Above these, across the full width of the building is a classic order architrave, frieze, projecting dentiled cornice and parapet wall. Centered below the cornice was inscribed **EQUITABLE FRATERNAL UNION**, but which now says **EQUITABLE RESERVE ASSOCIATION LIFE INSURANCE**, and above this on the parapet wall is a third, more dominant cartouche, behind which on the roof are three flagpoles. This composition is flanked by laurel garland ornament on parapet wall corner posts located over both piers.

The south facade along East Doty Avenue repeats the same general massing and proportions on a broader scale of nearly twice the linear footage. Overall the composition is much simpler with almost no ornamentation, but the impact in Bedford limestone is equally imposing and dramatic. Here the elevation is divided into six bays with two paired windows on each floor. The raised rusticated foundation and voussoirs are repeated, as are the rusticated corner piers at either end of the second and third floors. Between these the bays are giant pilasters instead of engaged columns, with additional ornamentation limited to triglyphs in the third floor spandrels. Over these the architrave, frieze, projecting cornice and parapet wall on the west facade are fully repeated. The only other principal variation is the omission of a pilaster between the third and fourth bay. This modification in spacing accommodated a secondary ground level entrance in the third bay as part of the original building plan that included first floor private office rentals. The outline of this entrance, partially closed at an unknown date and fitted with a window, is still visible under a bank of rusticated voussoirs and flanked by pilasters. The same overall composition and massing of the south facade is fully repeated on the north facade with two exceptions. Here the spandrels and triglyphs are omitted in favor of a simple string course, and the second and third floor of the third bay projects to the line of the pilasters. This variation is faced with rusticated stonework, fitted with functional windows that provide light to the interior stairway. The composition and massing of the east or rear facade continues the simplification of the north facade divided into four bays. On this facade the ground level entrance is located in the third bay with a contemporary, flat, metal canopy, and there are two windows on every floor of each bay, except directly over the entrance, where the second floor of the third bay has one window and the alarm box. The metal fire escape descends from the third floor windows of the third bay to the second floor windows of the fourth bay, and from there to ground level. A strip of land along the north and east facades that is included in the nomination is currently used for parking. It is not known if this area originally had a different use.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 3

Equitable Fraternal Union Building
Neenah, Winnebago County, WI

The interior repeats a classicism that is similarly clean and yet unexpected. The interior plan is intact, principal public areas have tile floors with mosaic borders, above which is three-quarter height, wood-paneled wainscoting, and wood cornice molding, both dark stained oak and highly polished in the Arts & Crafts style.

Entering from South Commercial Street through the main entrance and a vestibule inlaid with Masonic-type symbols representing the later Equitable Reserve Association, one comes to a small lobby with a wide, marble stairway located straight ahead. To the right of this lobby (the southwest corner of the first floor) is a suite of seven offices. These offices are accessed through a reception room and interior double-loaded corridor. Similarly on the right side toward the rear of the building (the southeast corner of the first floor) is another suite of six offices, interconnected and accessed through a reception room at the rear of the building or through an alternate reception room located off of the corridor in the middle of the building. To the left of this main entrance lobby is a long, single-loaded corridor which accesses a row of offices in the northwest corner. Starting at the west end and moving east down the corridor, there are four offices, an elevator, two toilet rooms and finally a small suite of three interconnected offices in the northeast corner of the first floor. At the end of the corridor is the rear vestibule and entrance. The offices on the south side of the building were rental offices; those on the north side were organizational offices, storage and printing rooms. The central vault is between the long corridor and the southeast suite of offices. The plan and original finishes in the public spaces are intact and an impressive presentation to the visitor. The floors are mosaic tile with inlaid border, the baseboards are of marble. The high, plaster ceilings contribute to the dramatic affect; the high walls are of plaster with two-thirds-height, wood paneled wainscoting. The door surrounds are of wood with tall cornices over the transom windows, the doors are of paneled wood with the top half being a glass panel, and the transoms also have glass. The door and transom hardware are extant. Finally, the wall terminates at a wide, wood cornice. All of the wood is dark polished oak.

From the main lobby, a flight of marble steps straight ahead leads up to the main offices on the second floor. Here the grandeur of the exterior is repeated as the visitor emerges in an even larger paneled hall with the stairs surrounded by a classical balustrade, urn-topped newel posts and square fluted columns with Ionic capitals, and above, wide wood beams create a coffered ceiling, all in dark polished oak. As on the first floor, the hall provides access to a series of offices that served the president, treasurer, secretary, board, examiners rooms and storage, all surrounding the hall and the second floor of a central vault. The plan is roughly U-shaped with the stairs at the bottom of the U, and two, single-loaded corridors extending toward the rear of the building, one corridor on the south and one on the north forming the long sides of the U. At the bottom of the U on each side of the stair are doors that lead to a suite of offices across the west (front) façade of the building. This suite has six large offices (five of which have closets), and a reception area. Along the south single-loaded corridor are four

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 4

Equitable Fraternal Union Building
Neenah, Winnebago County, WI

offices and along the north single-loaded corridor is a stair to the third floor, the elevator, two toilet rooms and two more offices. The finishes of the public spaces are the same as on the first floor: tile floor, marble baseboards, high ceilings, plaster walls with two-thirds-height, wood paneled wainscoting, and door surrounds of wood with tall cornices over the transom windows. The doors are of paneled wood with the top half being a glass panel, and the transoms have glass. The door and transom hardware are extant. In contrast, on the second floor instead of a wood cornice, the ceiling is coffered. Again, all of the wood is dark polished oak.

The smaller side stairway accesses the third floor and rooms originally dedicated to the local fraternal organization chapter and social rooms that served as a benefit to membership. These included the main lodge room, or ballroom, across the entire front of the building, with club rooms, parlor, antechambers and kitchen located off a central hall. The volumes of these large rooms remains intact as well as the hall marble baseboards, dark oak paneled wainscoting and plaster walls, the wood cornice, doors and door surrounds.

The full basement is unfinished and holds the mechanical equipment; there is no attic.

A part of the original design for the building, a small elevator serves all four building levels. The current cab and framing dates from the installation of a 1950s era replacement elevator. The curved door surrounds are brushed aluminum, the flooring is carpeted, and the doors and interior panels are beige painted metal.

Alterations

While the room arrangement on all floors remains largely unaltered, the finishing of the office areas on the first and second floors experienced some modification in 1970s, primarily through the introduction of plywood paneling and dropped acoustical ceilings. The changes, however, were made with a surprising degree of sensitivity to minimizing their impact on the historic building fabric, discovered when the plywood paneling and dropped acoustical ceilings were removed. Fully complimentary in finish to the halls and public areas, these rooms had lath and plaster walls and ceilings, varnished crown molding, window framing with both architrave and dentils at the cornices, wood paneled spandrels beneath each window, simple molded chair rails and baseboards, and hardwood floors. In removing the non-historic contemporary overlays in many of the rooms, the building's original features were found to have been significantly retained, so that while the architectural integrity of these spaces has been lessened by the covering of these original finish materials, the original appearance could be restored. Additionally, the composition and order of the building fabric are still indicative of the building's intended use and aesthetic.

As with the first and second floor offices, the third floor social rooms were altered in the 1970s,

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 5

Equitable Fraternal Union Building
Neenah, Winnebago County, WI

primarily by the addition of plywood paneling, and the installation of suspended acoustical tile ceilings. The removal of these noncontributing materials has revealed that a high degree of architectural integrity remains. These rooms were composed of lath and plaster walls and ceilings, accented by varnished crown molding, window framing with both architrave and dentils at the cornices, wood paneled spandrels beneath each window, simple but evocative chair rails and molded baseboards, and hardwood floors. In most every room these features, although missing in places, were found to be largely or sometimes entirely untouched providing a surprising degree of architectural integrity.

In spite of the identified alteration of historic interior features, most interior finishes are extant (as already described) as well as safes, wall sconces and ceiling fixtures. When the exterior and interior are taken in combination, the Equitable Fraternal Union Building retains an exceptionally high degree of architectural integrity that evokes a significant period of development in the community, when Neenah was not only the headquarters of Kimberly-Clark Corp., but also one of the largest fraternal insurance companies in Wisconsin which was headquartered in this building.

___End of Description of Physical Appearance

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 1

Equitable Fraternal Union Building
Neenah, Winnebago County, WI

___ Insert Statement of Significance

Narrative Statement of Significance

The Equitable Fraternal Union Building is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A, in the area of Commerce at the statewide level of significance for its association with the Equitable Reserve Association, one of the largest unaffiliated fraternal insurance companies in Wisconsin. It is also eligible under Criterion A, in the area of Social History at the local level of significance for its association with the Equitable Fraternal Union, a fraternal organization in Neenah much like the Independent Order of Odd Fellows, or the Masons. And finally, the building is eligible under Criterion C, in the area of Architecture at the local level of significance as an outstanding example of the Classic Revival style. Designed by William Waters of Oshkosh, the 1909 Equitable Fraternal Union Building is a definitive example of the style as described in Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin.

Periods of Significance

The periods of significance for the Equitable Fraternal Union Building include the following:

Criterion A, in the areas of Commerce and Social History has the same period of significance: 1909-1965. These dates represent the years the fraternal insurance company occupied this building which are the same years the fraternal organization was located here. The fraternal organization constructed this building and developed the insurance company. Although the insurance company and the fraternal organization both operated in this building until 2012, the period of significance ends in 1965 following the 50-year rule for the National Register of Historic Places program.

Criterion C, in the area of Architecture: 1909, the date of construction.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Neenah began in 1835 as a religious mission serving the Menomonee Indians and included blacksmithing and agricultural training. Its early white settlement, attracted by the waterpower and transportation of the Fox River, started a few years later. Developing in the 1850s as part of the state's second largest flour milling center, Neenah's industrial economy evolved into a nationally prominent center of paper production dominated by Kimberly-Clark Corporation. After the turn of the century the local paper industry turned from bulk papers to consumer products, a move that resulted in continued industrial expansion during the 20th century. Kimberly-Clark led the way through the development of

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 2

Equitable Fraternal Union Building
Neenah, Winnebago County, WI

Cellucotton products, which products like Kleenex and Kotex would ultimately provide both the company and the community with an international presence.

The phenomenal success of the paper industry in Neenah produced a nearly dichotomous social structure dominated at the top by some of the most influential families in the Fox River Valley and the state, and with laborers at the opposite end of the spectrum. As with most Wisconsin communities, this economic disparity was further fragmented by the ethnic diversity of the population, of which in the late 19th century, a full 50 percent of adults were foreign born. Within this context, churches and fraternal organizations played an essential role in providing social cohesion. This was particularly true for Neenah's small retail and professional middle class, and for its large laboring population, most of whom were precluded from participating in the social events and leadership activities available to the industrial elite.

Socially, churches offered the strongest sense of community, particularly to Neenah's sizable ethnic populations, which in 1880 were served by eleven congregations offering services in a language other than English. Fraternal organizations, however, played a complimentary and in some cases integrating social function. Initially represented by the Independent Order of Odd Fellows (1849) and the Elisha Kent Kane Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons (1855), both popular with migrating New Englanders, German fraternal would soon join the roster. The largest of these was the Schuetzen Bund, organized in 1870, complete with a purpose built hall and theater, as well as a shooting range and beer garden overlooking Lake Winnebago. Danes similarly had the Danish Brotherhood Lodge, founded in 1882, which like the Schuetzen Bund offered members a minimal form of life insurance that paid out funds to cover funeral expenses. And yet with only one or two exceptions, for all of their popularity and significance to the social fabric, these organizations failed to construct or maintain meeting halls or other facilities that would survive as a permanent part of the built environment. A majority of these 19th century fraternal organizations have disbanded.

Eligibility under Criterion A

Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin identifies the development of fraternal organizations as potentially both a positive and negative force within a community. On the one hand such groups provided fellowship and diversion to members, as well as financial assistance, scholarships, and contributions to public projects. At the same time, fraternal organizations have been seen as a response to rigid exclusionary class structures, in the process making them breeding grounds for racism, bigotry and intolerance. Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin also presents the history of fraternal organizations in four historic periods: Origins and Growth (1823-1865), Peak Activity (1866-1910), Transformation (1911-1945) and Decline (1945-present). The Origins period relates generally to those fraternal organizations organized by early settlers from the Eastern seaboard. During the Peak period

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 3

Equitable Fraternal Union Building
Neenah, Winnebago County, WI

the growth in numbers and size was fueled largely by immigration. This period was followed by a period of transformation, in which fraternal organizations adapted to changing social patterns, while the Decline period in turn traces the gradual reduction in the size and number of organizations. Within this context the Equitable Fraternal Union Building in Neenah can be seen as an important representative of both the peak and transformation periods of this history.

Founded in 1897, the Equitable Fraternal Union had much in common with the dozen or more secret and fraternal organizations operating in Neenah at that time. Membership was limited to men, who gathered in individual assemblies or lodges. Meetings emphasized secret activities and involved ceremonies and symbolism, and officers enjoyed such honorific titles as Supreme Warden and Supreme Examiner. What distinguished the Equitable Fraternal Union was the far reaching objective of providing the working class with the financial security of affordable life insurance, expanding the standard fraternal coverage of burial costs to include disability and death. Equally significant was the provision that membership, while initially limited to white males only, was not based on place of origin, religion or socio-political cause. The astonishingly impartial goal was to impart morality without religious differences, patriotism without partisanship, and brotherhood without class.

There were, however, some explicit exclusions to membership: those involved in the manufacture of alcoholic beverages, professional football and baseball players, glass blowers, marble cutters, and contortionists.¹ This clause was very much in keeping with the Modern Woodmen of America, which most likely served as a model and inspiration to the Equitable's movers and shakers. Founded in 1883 in neighboring Iowa, the Woodmen sought to protect families from the death of the breadwinner. Unaffiliated with any specific religion and allowing even agnostics and atheists to join, membership was nevertheless limited to white males living in the Midwest, which organizers considered the healthiest part of America. Women, however, were not admitted until the late 1920s, and there was a surprisingly long list of professions that were prohibited from joining, either as morally questionable or exceptionally dangerous, these being layered on top of the blanket exclusion of all urban populations. In spite of these idiosyncrasies, the Woodmen proved to be a phenomenal success story, having in force \$1 billion in life insurance policies by 1902, and one million members by 1910.²

The nature of the Modern Woodman's success would not have gone unnoticed in Neenah, where the Equitable's promise of greater financial security was all the more attractive given the hard economic times. In the decade following the Panic of 1893, local conditions were far from stable, leading just after the turn of the century to a long period of labor unrest and double digit inflation. Even the paper industry was hit hard, first by a decline in the supply of water power, and then by increased

¹ Post-Crescent; September 16, 2001.

² Modern Woodmen Historical Timeline, www.modern-woodmen.org.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 4

Equitable Fraternal Union Building
Neenah, Winnebago County, WI

competition from Canadian paper manufacturers. Within this context, the Equitable Fraternal Union was able to attract a dedicated leadership distinguished for its character, status and composition. Initially headed by paper manufacturer Frank T. Russell, officers included two doctors, a dentist, a lawyer, four bankers, and a former school superintendent. Two of these men, Edwin A. Williams and Merritt L. Campbell, would go on to be elected mayor and then Wisconsin State Assembly representative - one a Republican the other a Democrat. Top officers would eventually include Milwaukee Jewish civic leader and political Progressive, Benjamin Poss.³

With the reassuring array of leadership, the social and economic benefits of membership easily attracted a sizable constituency. Within one year of its founding the Equitable Fraternal Union had 61 assemblies scattered across the state. After four years it became the first fraternal in Wisconsin to admit women, and by 1906 it had a membership of 18,000 people.⁴ The growth precipitated a move from second floor offices in the downtown to a purpose built structure that would reflect the organization's new-found status as one of Wisconsin's up-and-coming fraternal insurance companies and was designed with specific spaces for both the insurance company (on the first and second floors) and the fraternal organization (on the third floor). Strategically located between the banks and Neenah City Hall, the chosen site would appropriately face onto the newly renamed Commercial Street, heralding a long awaited southern expansion of the central business district. Designed by Oshkosh architect William Waters, the Classical Revival style, building scale, and Bedford limestone construction, all conveyed a sense of dignity and permanence that was far greater than any other building in Neenah to that point in time.

Construction took only one year at a cost of \$90,000, and in 1909 the gala grand opening ceremonies took place over two days, drew an attendance of 5,000 people, and included a parade, speeches, a band concert and steamboat rides on Lake Winnebago.⁵ These were then notably followed by a dance that showcased the third floor ballroom, parlor, dining room and kitchen. Central to the social benefits of Equitable Fraternal Union membership, these highly desirable club rooms that were open to everyone were clearly seen to exceed the more exclusive public rooms of the 1901 Neenah Opera House. Built through a subscription that was hotly contested among the city's industrial elite, the opera house failed to meet its fundraising objectives and had to be taken over by a private men's club. Within this context the not-for-profit Equitable Fraternal Union demonstrated something quite remarkable for its time: that through cooperation and selfless dedication, the common man could erect the largest and most sumptuous commercial building in Neenah, one that even rivaled what the city's leading industrialists could put their hand to.

³ The Milwaukee Sentinel; June 5, 1952.

⁴ Equitable Reserve Association 1897-2012: Commemorative Edition, page 6 Umer Sheikh Collection.

⁵ Oshkosh Northwestern; August 20, 1989.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 5

Equitable Fraternal Union Building
Neenah, Winnebago County, WI

So while most other fraternal organizations spent the first decades of the 20th century in search of new relevance in the face of a declining membership, the Equitable Fraternal Union spent these same years dealing with the realities of sustaining growth in the face of increasing competition and rising costs of providing insurance. A not-for-profit would seem to have a distinct advantage over other companies, but much the same issues were at hand. As operations expanded to 29,000 members throughout in the Midwest, Great Plains, and the West Coast, the cost of operations and sales, as well as payment on policies, grew steadily. By the mid-1920s the fiscal problems were sufficiently acute that a merger with another comparably organized fraternal insurance company was determined to be the best means of achieving growth and controlling costs. This was ultimately accomplished in 1930 after lengthy negotiation with the Fraternal Reserve Association of Oshkosh, founded in 1902. The merger allowed for the operation of a single home office building in Neenah, and for a sizable reduction in a redundant national sales force. With little or no change in its fraternal activities or insurance coverage, the larger Equitable's asset value of \$5.7 million increased in a single stroke to \$7.4 million.⁶ The merger also proved to be a master stroke given the stock market crash of 1929 and the depression years that followed.

Operating under the new name of Equitable Reserve Association, the merger also transformed the two organizations, now with 70,000 members, into one of the largest fraternal insurance companies in Wisconsin.⁷ This feat was made possible by an even broader base of leadership, with officers drawn from communities across Wisconsin, as well as from Michigan and Minnesota. Chief among these was Judge John C. Karel of Milwaukee. As Supreme President, Karel's resumé included experience as a bank president, state assembly representative, newspaper man, Democratic gubernatorial candidate and European diplomat. Corporate attorney Karel had been an officer for nearly 20 years at the time of the merger, which also, thanks to Karel, brought with it the honor of membership in the National Fraternal Congress of America. This organization was founded by 16 leading fraternalists to use their size and influence to lobby for uniform insurance legislation nationwide. Also adding to the talent pool was Milwaukee attorney Benjamin Poss, whose association with several banks, as well as the Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance Company in Milwaukee, brought an expertise to operations that were not locally available.

And yet in spite of these human resources and the increased visibility in the industry, the Equitable was unable to maintain a lasting national presence. Growth in assets and policies in force were regularly reported as record breaking, but the largest expansion opportunities continued to be through mergers: with Germania Mutual Life of Milwaukee in 1949, and with the Royal League of Illinois in 1970.

⁶ History of Neenah, page 256.

⁷ The Milwaukee Sentinel; September 12, 1929.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 6

Equitable Fraternal Union Building
Neenah, Winnebago County, WI

There eventually remained only eight fraternal insurance companies located in Wisconsin, and only two others that were open to anyone, as the Equitable was.⁸ Policies continued to increase every decade - from \$72 to million in 1964 to \$137 million in 1974, and to \$182 million in 1984 - but these numbers lagged far behind the \$1 billion in policies in force as early as 1954 at Aid Association for Lutherans in neighboring Appleton. While sound at its founding, the freedom from church affiliation meant the Equitable operated without the significant leverage of an unpaid national marketing network. At the same time fraternal social activities were proving to be less and less an attraction to membership. By 2011 the Equitable's policies had risen to \$505 million, but membership had fallen to 19,000. In 2012, after operations had lost money for seven consecutive years, the Equitable Reserve Association announced that it was merging with Modern Woodmen of America, closing the doors to the Neenah home office just three months shy of its 115th anniversary.⁹

Through this history the Equitable Fraternal Union Building is of state significance under Criterion A in the area of Commerce for its association with the Equitable Fraternal Union, later the Equitable Reserve Association, one of the largest unaffiliated fraternal insurance companies in Wisconsin. It is also locally significant in the area of Social History, for its association with a fraternal organization influential in the community. The Equitable Fraternal Union is an excellent example of a fraternal union organization, representing the Peak Growth, Transformation, and Decline periods of the state's fraternal organization history as presented in Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin. The growth, development, and leadership of the organization similarly exemplifies the progressive social agenda that had taken root in the state during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Eligibility under Criterion C

Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin defines Neoclassical Revival more in terms of its historical development than key architectural features. Citing the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago, the popularity of its dramatic grouping of classical buildings resulted in an unprecedented production of Neoclassical buildings from 1895 to 1935, primarily as applied to public, institutional, commercial and financial buildings. The 1900 State Historical Society Building and the 1906 Capitol Building are cited as exceptional examples of the style in Wisconsin. Other architectural reference books more specifically define Neoclassical Revival as a style inspired by the architecture of ancient Greece and Rome, with designs that philosophically emphasizes order, balance, and harmony. Other key features include the use of classical architectural elements, the utilization of symmetrical arrangements and massing, the presence of classical orders, and an overall feeling that is austere, pure, clean and masculine. All these elements are found in the Equitable Fraternal Union Building, providing

⁸ Post-Crescent; September 16, 2001.

⁹ The Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel; May 24, 2012.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 7

Equitable Fraternal Union Building
Neenah, Winnebago County, WI

a design narrative to the structure that emphasized its permanence as well as the fraternal's principals of simplicity, order and brotherhood.

In selecting Oshkosh architect William Waters (1843-1917) the Equitable chose one of the state's most prolific and versatile architects. Over the years Waters had designed nearly every major public building, school, commercial block and large private residence in Neenah, many of which are now listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Best known for his Queen Anne houses, the Equitable project represented relatively new territory for Waters, whose practice by 1909 extended back more than 40 years. Honored as the architect for the Wisconsin State Building at the Columbian Exposition, his exposure to the fair's Neoclassical designs - by some of the nation's most renowned architects - can be seen to have become part of his design repertoire. In fairly quick succession he turned out the Green Lake County Courthouse (1899), the Oshkosh Public Library (1900), the Old Ladies Home in Oshkosh (1902), the Oshkosh Yacht Club (1903) and the New German American Bank in Oshkosh (1904).

In his design for the Equitable Fraternal Union Building, Waters exhibits a fine understanding of the classical orders. The exquisite detailing of the classically-inspired framing around the main entrance is clear evidence of his knowledge and appreciation of ancient design precedent, as is the scrupulous reproduction the Ionic order in the colonnade and the festooned lintels. Equally impressive is Waters' inclusion of the cartouche ornamentation, which give the composition a slightly feminine and delicate Beaux Arts touch. And while the massing and composition of the colonnade bears a marked resemblance to the State Historical Society Building, his design is far from derivative, exhibiting rather a highly skilled dexterity and sophistication in applying Neoclassicism to contemporary structures. This facility of Waters is most clearly evident in the north, south and east facades, where highly visible facades are nearly stripped of all ornamentation, relying instead on the massiveness and strength of the masonry to convey an even stronger formality and sense of the austere and masculine elements of ancient orders. In doing so, Waters, an architect whose life work is almost entirely rooted in the 19th century, demonstrates a vision of architecture that addresses the future in the language of an historic vocabulary.

Arguably one of the finest neoclassical buildings to be constructed in Neenah, it was the largest and most expensive in its day. Preceded by the Neenah Public Library in 1904, the Equitable Fraternal Union Building was then followed by two nearby financial buildings: the First National Bank Building in 1919 at West Wisconsin Avenue and South Commercial Street, and the National Manufacturers' Bank Building at East Wisconsin Avenue and South Commercial Street in 1922. The brick library building was designed by Van Ryn & DeGelleke of Milwaukee, the banks by Childs & Smith of Chicago. The firm of Van Ryn & DeGelleke was best known for its public buildings, Childs & Smith for its predominately revivalist specialization. All three were significantly smaller in size than the

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 8

Equitable Fraternal Union Building
Neenah, Winnebago County, WI

Equitable Fraternal Association Building, each encompassing about 9,000 square feet, the library costing \$28,000, and the First National Bank Building costing \$80,000 at a significantly higher per square foot cost. Taken together, these four buildings architecturally promised a bright and expanding future for Neenah that was ultimately checked by the depression years that followed. Radical transformations in operations resulted in the demolition of the other three buildings: the First National Bank in 1969, the National Manufacturers' in 1972, and the Neenah Public Library in 1998. The only other Neoclassical building in Neenah is the even smaller 1902 unattributed facade of the original National Manufacturers' Bank building. Located at 109 West Wisconsin Avenue, it is a contributing resource within the National Register-listed Wisconsin Avenue Historic District.

Within this architectural context the Equitable Fraternal Union Building is of local significance under Criterion C as an outstanding example of the Neoclassical Revival style and rare survivor of this stylistic period of construction in Neenah. The largest and most costly to have ever been built within the city limits, it exemplifies the hopeful expectation of greatness that defined the opening years of the 20th century in America. As the product of the city's leading fraternal organization, the architectural style represents a significant expression of the emergent progressivism what would characterize Wisconsin history in this time period.

Statement of Integrity

Exterior changes have been limited to door and window replacements within the original openings.

These changes do not detract from this building's stylistic identity which is still easily discernible having retained original construction materials and the character defining features that exemplify the style. The interior integrity of this building is particularly notable. The original floor plan is largely intact and it retains original floor, wall and ceiling finishes and rich ornamentation on the first and second floors. Original terrazzo floors, marble stairs, marble baseboards, stained wood wainscoting and plaster walls, stained wood cornice molding, coffered ceilings, doors and transoms, and classical columns are all intact and continue to evoke the grandeur of the building. Offices and rooms on the third floor has been altered with the addition of suspended acoustical ceiling tiles and plywood wall paneling although the original finishes are extant behind these contemporary finishes. The Equitable Fraternal Union Building is an excellent example of the Classical Revival style retaining a high degree of integrity, particularly on the interior, and is the best example of the style in Neenah.

___End of Statement of Significance

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 9 Page 1

Equitable Fraternal Union Building
Neenah, Winnebago County, WI

Insert References

Bibliography

Reports of the Executive Officers of the Equitable Fraternal Union: June 6, 1905 to June 1, 1926. Equitable Fraternal Union Home Office. Neenah, Wisconsin.

Adams, Peter J. Neenah Historical and Architectural survey and Nomination Project. City of Neenah, 1982. Neenah, Wisconsin.

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Shattuck, S. F. (ed). History of Neenah. Printed privately, 1958. Menasha, Wisconsin.

Wyatt, Barbara. Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin. State Historical Society of Wisconsin 1986. Madison, Wisconsin.

Other Resources

Umer Sheikh Collection: Equitable Fraternal Union Building Blueprints, Equitable Reserve Association Historical Documents File, Equitable Reserve Association 1897-2012: Commemorative Edition.

The Milwaukee Sentinel: June 5, 1952; September 12, 1929.

The Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel: May 24, 2012.

Oshkosh Northwestern; August 20, 1989.

Post-Crescent: September 16, 2001.

Modern Woodmen Historical Timeline, www.modern-woodmen.org.

End of References

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 10 Page 1

Equitable Fraternal Union Building
Neenah, Winnebago County, WI

___Insert Boundary Descriptions

Verbal Boundary Description:

South one-half of lot 17, all of lot 18, and the south 100 feet of lot 19, block D, Plat of Winnebago Rapids.

Boundary Justification:

Boundaries are based on the legally recorded boundary lines of the lots historically associated with the nominated property.

___End of Boundary Descriptions

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section photos Page 1

Equitable Fraternal Union Building
Neenah, Winnebago County, WI

 Insert Photo Descriptions

Name of Property: Equitable Fraternal Union Building
City or Vicinity: Neenah
County: Winnebago
State: WI
Name of Photographer: Peter Adams
Date of Photographs: October 2014
Location of Original Digital Files: Wisconsin Historical Society

- WI_Winnebago County_Equitable Fraternal Union Building_0001
West elevation, camera facing northeast.
- WI_Winnebago County_Equitable Fraternal Union Building_0002
South elevation, camera facing northeast.
- WI_Winnebago County_Equitable Fraternal Union Building_0003
East elevation, camera facing northwest.
- WI_Winnebago County_Equitable Fraternal Union Building_0004
North elevation, camera facing southwest.
- WI_Winnebago County_Equitable Fraternal Union Building_0005
West elevation, entry detail, camera facing east.
- WI_Winnebago County_Equitable Fraternal Union Building_0006
South elevation, former entrance detail, camera facing north.
- WI_Winnebago County_Equitable Fraternal Union Building_0007
East elevation, entry detail, camera facing west.
- WI_Winnebago County_Equitable Fraternal Union Building_0008
East elevation, basement entry detail, camera facing north.
- WI_Winnebago County_Equitable Fraternal Union Building_0009
South elevation, window well detail, camera facing west.
- WI_Winnebago County_Equitable Fraternal Union Building_0010
Main entrance detail, vestibule floor, camera facing east
- WI_Winnebago County_Equitable Fraternal Union Building_0011
First floor hallway, camera facing west.
- WI_Winnebago County_Equitable Fraternal Union Building_0012
Marble staircase from second floor, camera facing west
- WI_Winnebago County_Equitable Fraternal Union Building_0013
Second floor hall, camera facing south
- WI_Winnebago County_Equitable Fraternal Union Building_0014
Second floor hall, camera facing northwest

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section photos Page 2

Equitable Fraternal Union Building
Neenah, Winnebago County, WI

WI_Winnebago County_Equitable Fraternal Union Building_0015

Second floor stairs to third floor, camera facing north

WI_Winnebago County_Equitable Fraternal Union Building_0016

Second floor office, southwest corner, camera facing south

WI_Winnebago County_Equitable Fraternal Union Building_0017

Second floor vault, camera facing west.

WI_Winnebago County_Equitable Fraternal Union Building_0018

Third floor hallway, camera facing northwest

WI_Winnebago County_Equitable Fraternal Union Building_0019

Third floor ballroom, camera facing southwest

WI_Winnebago County_Equitable Fraternal Union Building_0020

Third floor parlor, camera facing southeast

___End of Photo Descriptions

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Equitable Fraternal Union Building
Neenah, Winnebago County, WI

Section Figures Page 1

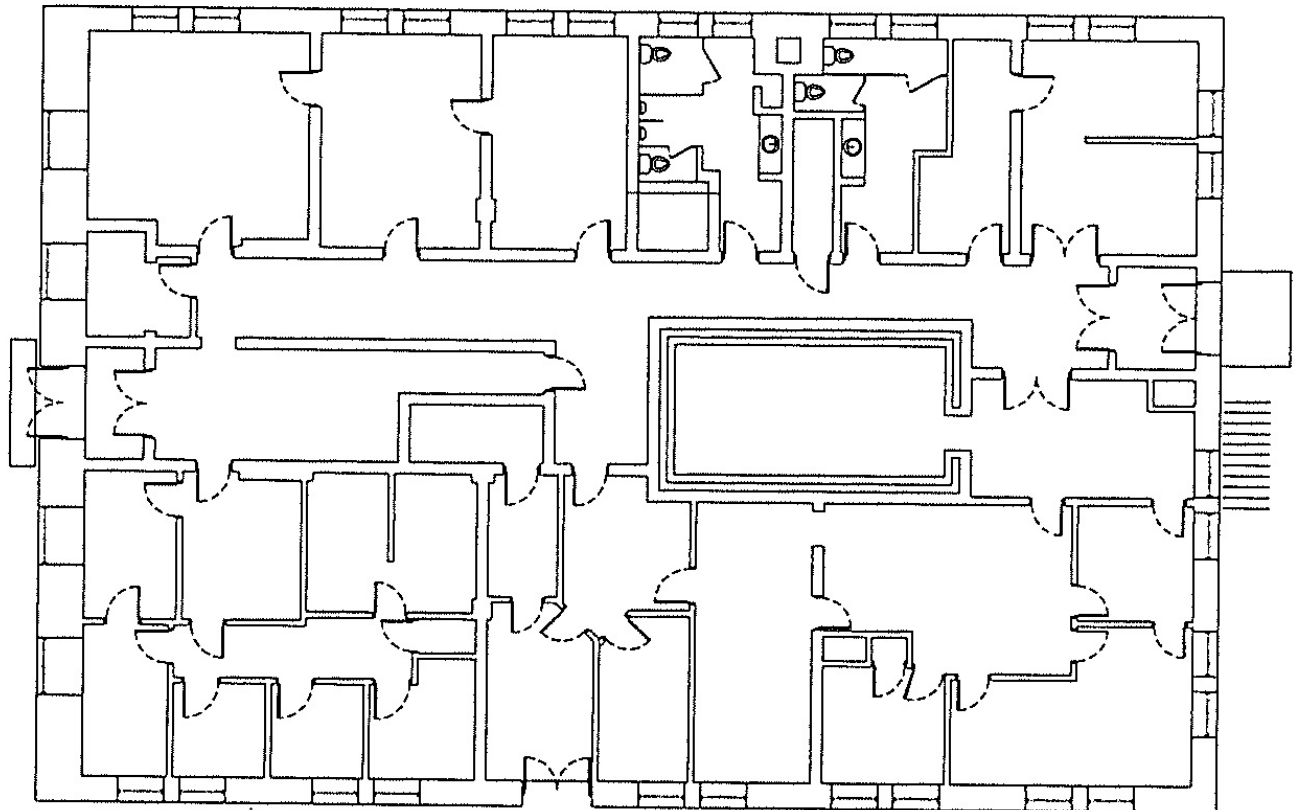
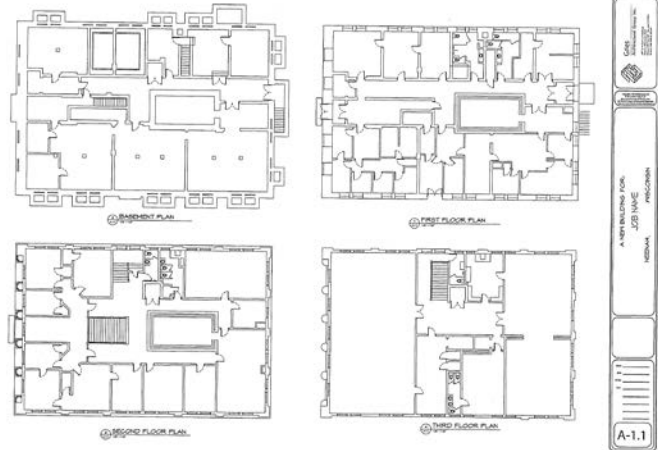
___ Insert Figures

Plan Drawings
Not-to-Scale

North ↑

Figure 1 of 2: First Floor

Figure 2 of 2: Second and Third Floors



① FIRST FLOOR PLAN
A-1.1 1/8" = 1'-0"

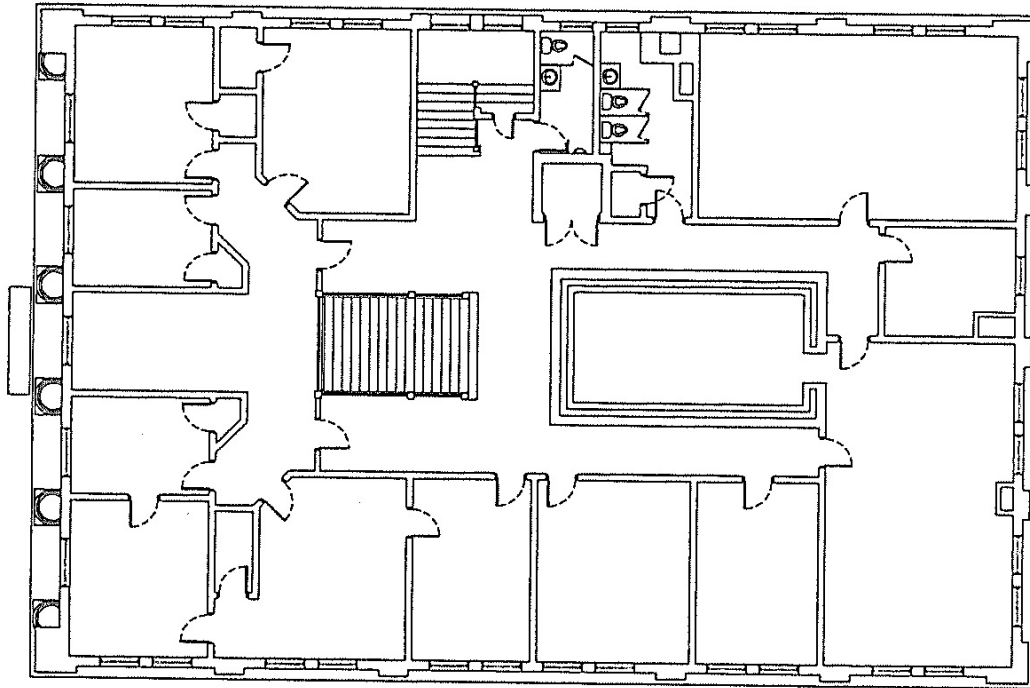
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

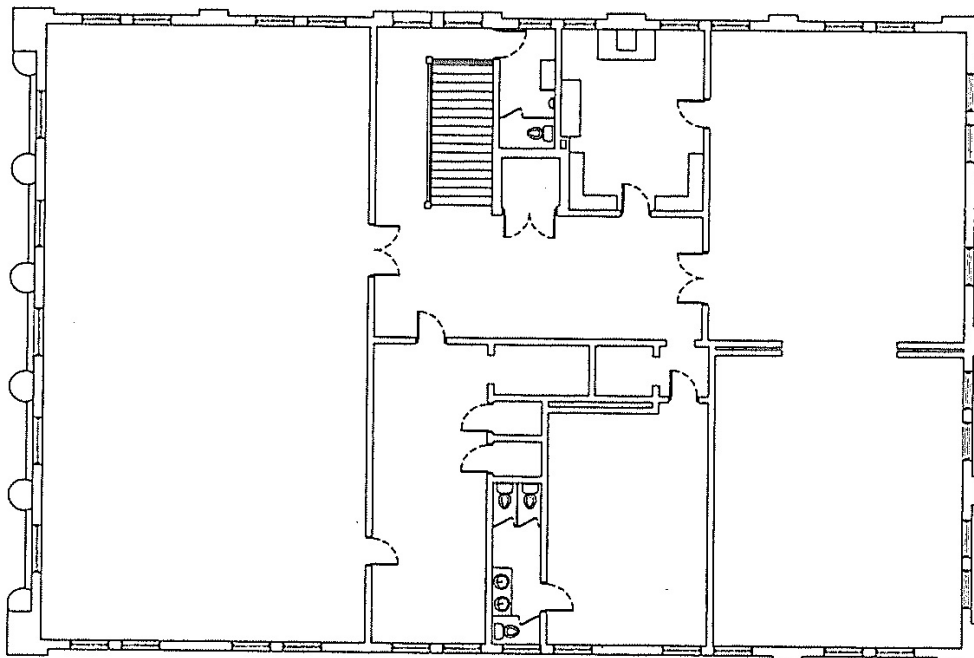
Equitable Fraternal Union Building
Neenah, Winnebago County, WI

Section Figures Page 2

Figure 2

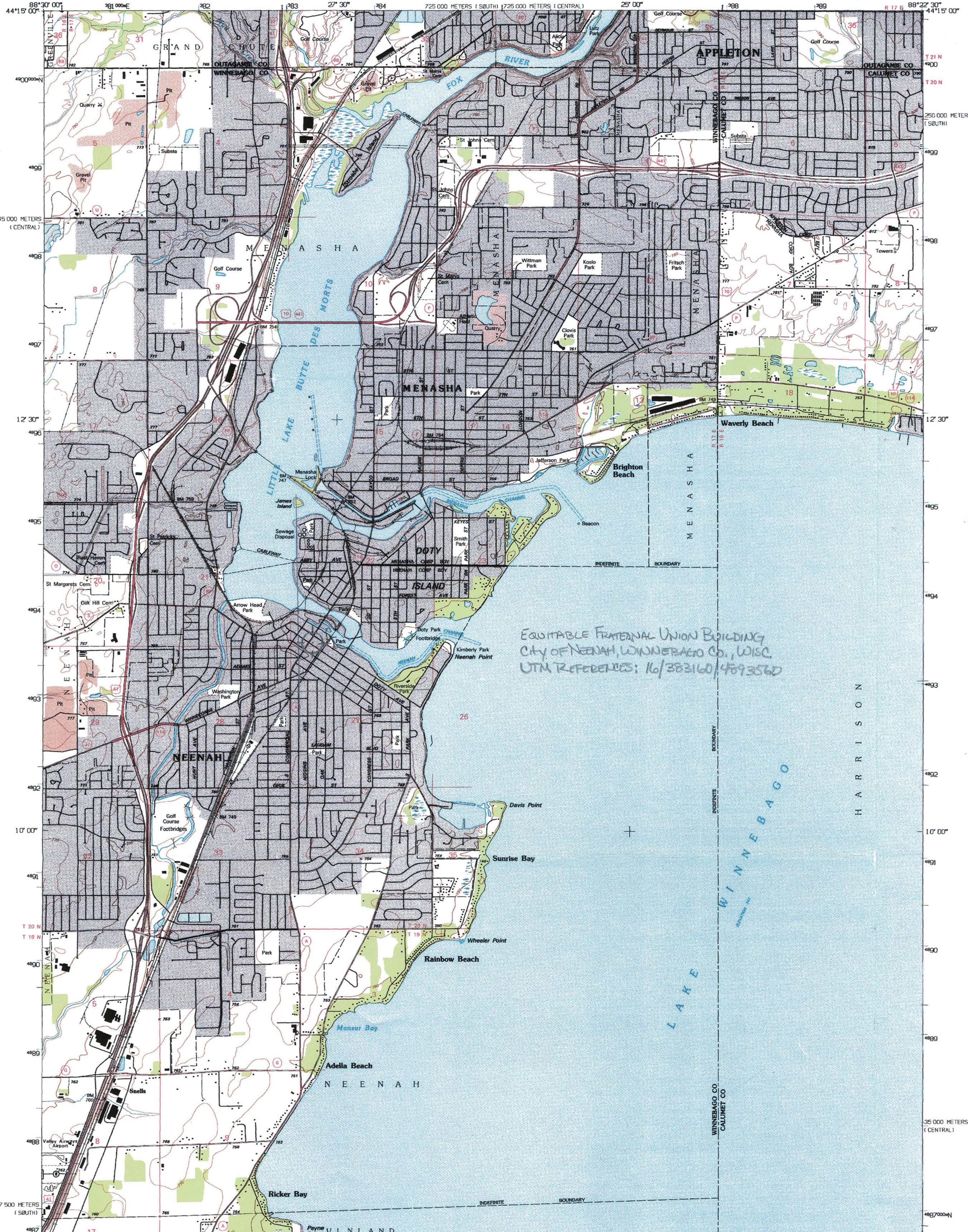


2 SECOND FLOOR PLAN
A-1.1 1/8" = 1'-0"



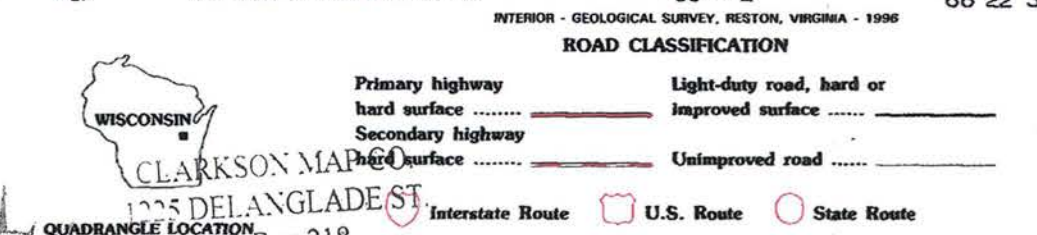
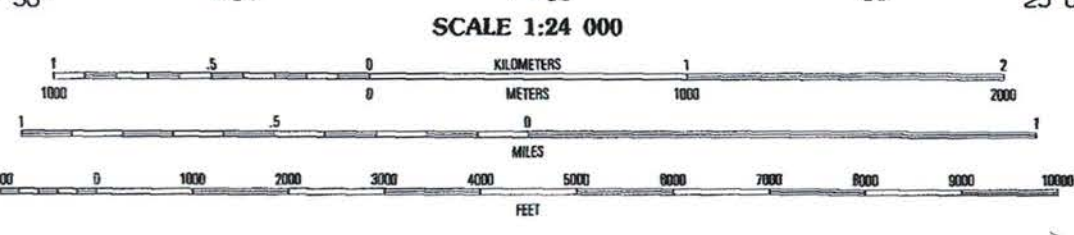
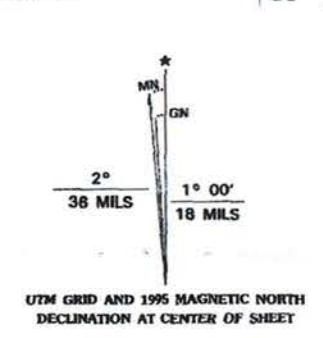
4 THIRD FLOOR PLAN
A-1.1 1/8" = 1'-0"

End I

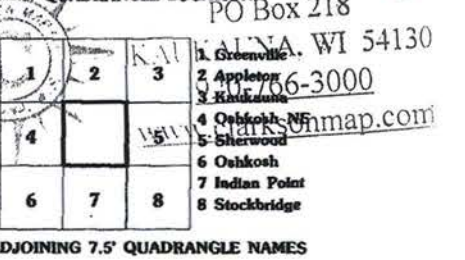


EQUITABLE FRATERNAL UNION BUILDING
CITY OF NEENAH, WINNEBAGO CO., WISC.
UTM REFERENCES: 16/383160/4893560

Produced by the United States Geological Survey
Compiled from imagery dated 1953. Revised from imagery dated 1992. PLSS and survey control current as of 1995. Contours and elevations current as of 1995. Map edited 1995. North American Datum of 1983 (NAD 83). Projection and blue 1000-meter ticks: Universal Transverse Mercator, zone 16. 2500-meter ticks: Wisconsin Coordinate System of 1983 (south and central zones). North American Datum of 1927 (NAD 27) is shown by dashed corner ticks. The values of the shift between NAD 83 and NAD 27 for 7.5-minute intersections are obtainable from National Geodetic Survey NADCON software. There may be private inholdings within the boundaries of the National or State reservations shown on this map.



SCALE 1:24 000
CONTOUR INTERVAL 10 FEET
NATIONAL GEODETIC VERTICAL DATUM OF 1929
THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS
FOR SALE BY U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY
DENVER, COLORADO 80225, OR RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092
AND WISCONSIN GEOLOGICAL AND NATURAL HISTORY SURVEY, MADISON, WISCONSIN 53706
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST



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1992
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COMMERCIAL



100

100





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ASSOCIATION
116


EQUITABLE RESERVE
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ASSOCIATION













Dynamic Insights





208

206



D

insights



Emergency
Exit Only



209













UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY Equitable Fraternal Union Building
NAME:

MULTIPLE
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: WISCONSIN, Winnebago

DATE RECEIVED: 12/04/15 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 1/04/16
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 1/19/16 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 1/19/16
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 15000989

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N
REQUEST: N SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: N NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

ACCEPT RETURN REJECT 1.19.16 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

**Entered in
The National Register
of
Historic Places**

RECOM./CRITERIA _____

REVIEWER _____ DISCIPLINE _____

TELEPHONE _____ DATE _____

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N

If a nomination is returned to the nominating authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the NPS.



WISCONSIN
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY

RECEIVED 2280

DEC 04 2015

Nat. Register of Historic Places
National Park Service

TO: Keeper
National Register of Historic Places

FROM: Peggy Veregin

SUBJECT: National Register Nomination

The following materials are submitted on this 30th day of November 2015,
for the nomination of the Equitable Fraternal Union Building to the National Register
of Historic Places:

- 1 Original National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form
- 1 CD with NRHP Nomination Form PDF Document
- Multiple Property Nomination form
- 20 Photograph(s)
- 1 CD with electronic images
- 1 USGS map(s)
- 2 Sketch map(s)/figure(s)/exhibit(s)
- Piece(s) of correspondence
- Other:

COMMENTS:

- Please insure that this nomination is reviewed
- X This property has been certified under 36 CFR 67
 The enclosed owner objection(s) do do not
 constitute a majority of property owners.
- Other:
-

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