

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

received **MAR 6 1986**
date entered

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

1. Name

historic Bowman, Abram, house

and/or common Bowman House (preferred)

2. Location

street & number 714 Broadway St. ___ not for publication

city, town Wisconsin Dells ___ vicinity of

state Wisconsin code 55 county Columbia code 021

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<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"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name City of Wisconsin Dells

street & number 300 La Crosse St.

city, town Wisconsin Dells ___ vicinity of state WI 53965

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Register of Deeds, Columbia County Courthouse

street & number East Cook Street

city, town Portage state WI

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

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

date 1974 ___ federal state ___ county ___ local

depository for survey records Historic Preservation Office, State Historical Society of Wisconsin

city, town Madison state WI

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Bowman House, constructed in 1904 for locally prominent citizens Abram and Alberta Bowman, sits on a large lot at the northwest corner of Bowman Park. The house fronts on Broadway Street, a main street which runs through the community of Wisconsin Dells. When the house was constructed, the entire block, most of which is now the park, was part of the Bowman Estate. The house lot is landscaped with large trees, shrubs and well-kept lawns. The two-story frame house is a simple Prairie style design which features many of the architectural elements of the style. It has a long, horizontal appearance with a very low-pitched intersecting hip roof and very wide eaves. Extending the horizontal form of the house, the first floor extends beyond the second into a porch on the west end and a porte-cochere on the east end. These open wings have low-pitched hip roofs with wide eaves and feature large, rectangular, piers. The exterior is clad with wooden shingles, painted white, and the house sits on a large cut stone foundation. There are two broad, flat chimneys rising from the rear of the roof. Again expressing horizontality, the second story of the house extends beyond the first on the north facade, and this extension is "supported" by two enclosed brackets at the corners. The north facing second story facade has a simple bay projection, and there are also bays to the west of the house on both stories, separated by the side porch roof. The windows of the house are all double-hung sashes of varying sizes. Some windows are individually placed on the facade, but most are grouped in two's, three's, or four's. The windows have two large glass panes and most top panes have leaded glass in a diamond pattern. All the windows have small, simple cornice lintels. There are several entrances to this house. To the north, east, west and south (basement entry), the entrances are simple wood paneled and glass doors. The front entrance, however, is covered by the long front porch, with the same large piers as the side porch and the porte-cochere. The entry porch has a wide arch rising from two of these piers, accenting the main entrance to the house.

Upon entering the front door, one is pleasantly struck by the simple, yet elegant use of wood in the long main entry hall, which to the east leads to the exit to the porte-cochere. Immediately across the hall is the stairway which leads to the second story. Adjacent to, and under this stairway in the entry hall is a "nook" with a wooden bench sitting across from a tall red brick fireplace decorated only with corbelling and a high, small wooden mantel shelf. To the west of the entry hall are two doors, one to the parlor, and one to the dining room. The dining room has a large built-in china cabinet with leaded-glass doors in a diamond pattern. There is also another red brick fireplace decorated with brick corbelling "supporting" a wooden mantel shelf. To the south of the dining room is a door which gives access to the kitchen and pantry. Back into the entry hall, upon ascending two steps of the staircase, there is a sunken den to the east, while straight ahead is another access to the kitchen. The kitchen area consists of a narrow pantry, a well-lit kitchen, and a small maid's room to the east. A small bathroom contains one of the original 1904 "water closet" fixtures of the house. An area which now contains a bathtub was probably once a laundry area. The entire downstairs is designed for easy access and convenience. Throughout the first floor are plain, sometimes papered walls, accented by plain woodwork of polished redwood strips. Only the woodwork in the kitchen is painted. The floors are all quarter-inch oak. The central stairway is also undecorated, having a balustrade with narrow square balusters and larger square corner posts.

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This stairway leads to the second floor where its central location means that it is surrounded by the six upper rooms. These rooms have been utilized as separate museum rooms by the Dells Country Historical Society, occupants since 1981, but their original use was as follows. The east front room was a billiard and smoking room and features a sitting area under the large bay window. To the west of the stairway was a suite of two connecting bedrooms with a connecting bathroom. The master bedroom has a plain tan brick fireplace and a large bay window. The connecting doors have been closed up, although one can still see where the original openings were. The floor also has three other small bedrooms and another bathroom. The plain upstairs woodwork is painted and it is not known whether it was painted originally or by any of the later occupants. All of the second floor doors, identical to the first floor doors, have six panels and are somewhat taller and narrower than standard doors.¹

The house was designed with the most modern conveniences. It originally had hot water heat with radiators in every room. The lights could be either gas or electric, as could the kitchen stove. There were double switches in each area so one could choose whether gas or electric lighting or cooking was desired or needed. The gas plant was buried 15 feet at some distance from the house to avoid the dangerous consequences of an explosion. The cellar of the house still has the artifacts of this system. Original gas connections can still be seen there, and on a post near where the boiler would have been, are penciled notes, still visible, monitoring gas levels between December 24, 1904 and November 11, 1907. Since completion of the house was in October, 1904 and Abram Bowman's death was in December of 1907, these dates correspond to the occupancy dates of the Bowmans. There are two brick rooms in the large basement, one was a fuel room, the other a root cellar.²

To the rear and east of the building is the stable or carriage house, constructed shortly after the house. The two-story, square frame building complements the design of the house. It has a high-pitched hip roof topped with a small, vented cupola. The building has wide eaves, and originally, had a number of openings, some grouped, again, complementing the house design. Unfortunately, the building was recently sided and most of the openings closed up, but the basic form of the building has not changed except for a small shed addition to the rear. The stable is now used for storage, and despite the problems of integrity, is considered contributing to the property because it is the original carriage house constructed for the Bowman House, and still retains its original basic appearance.

Note

¹"Improvement Note Handsome New Building Erected in Kilbourn." [Kilbourn] Mirror Gazette, September 8, 1904, p. 1. This article gives a detailed description of the Bowman House shortly before it was completed.

²Ibid.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1904-1936		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

Specific dates 1904¹ Builder/Architect Unknown

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Bowman House is significant for architecture because it is a good example of the Prairie style, an important regional architectural style which brought new and significant design concepts to the field of architecture during the early years of the twentieth century. The Bowman House is a particularly good example of the basic concepts of the Prairie School of architecture: an emphasis on a long, horizontal appearance, plain architectural details, and "craftsman" quality, both in exterior construction and in interior design. The Bowman House was a relatively early (1904) Prairie design, and features some transitional details from the still-popular "Victorian" architectural era, however, it was still a radical departure from that form, which was holding its own in small Wisconsin communities during the early twentieth century.

The history of the Bowman House extends back over 50 years before it was ever constructed. Abram Bowman, who had the house built, was born in the old village of Newport, three miles from Kilbourn (now Wisconsin Dells) in 1861. His father, Jonathan Bowman, a New York lawyer, came to Wisconsin in 1851 and in 1853, with Joseph Bailey, founded and promoted old Newport village on the basis that the railroad line would run through it. In 1862, when the railroad went instead to Kilbourn, Jonathan moved his family there, and shortly became a leader in promoting that community's growth and development. During Jonathan's tenure in Kilbourn, he invested successfully in real estate, became president and later owner of the Kilbourn Bank, and was elected to the State Assembly and State Senate.²

Jonathan Bowman's eldest son, Abram, was destined to follow in his father's footsteps. In 1887, after finishing school and working in Chicago, Abram joined his father in the banking and real estate business in Kilbourn. In 1895, upon Jonathan's death, Abram took over management of the family estate and his father's business interests. Abram married in 1902, and in June of 1904 began construction on the Prairie style house on the entire city block of Broadway Street, Kilbourn's "main" street. The land belonged to Abram's mother, who later deeded it to him (September, 1904). The house was finished in the late fall of 1904 and the Bowmans lived there until Abram's death in December of 1907. It seems that Abram never was as ambitiously aggressive as his father, possibly because poor health interfered with his career. His obituary indicates he had a severe stomach ailment for a number of years and was in failing health for several years before he died at age 46. And, his life was always linked to his prominent father. Even after Abram's death, his father's memory, through his sister, came to overshadow him even in his own home.³

Abram and Alberta Bowman had no children and after a few years Alberta sold their home and land to Abram's two unmarried sisters, Jennie and Emma Bowman, and then moved to California. Jennie and Emma never married, and Jennie lived in Abram's old house until her death in 1934. Having never worked, and almost a recluse,

9. Major Bibliographical References

Brooks, H. Allen. The Prairie School. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1972.
 "Death of A. D. Bowman." [Kilbourn] Mirror Gazette, December 14, 1907, p. 2.
 "Improvement Note Handsome New Building Erected in Kilbourn." Mirror Gazette, September 8, 1904, p. 1.
 Last Will and Testament of Jennie Bowman of the city of Wisconsin Dells, Columbia County,

10. Geographical Data

Wisconsin, Probated July 26, 1935, Columbia County, Wisconsin, No. 211973.

Acreage of nominated property Less than 1

Quadrangle name Wisconsin Dells North, Wis.

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM References

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2	7	6	7	5	0
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4	8	3	3	9	5
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 Zone Easting Northing

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 Zone Easting Northing

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Verbal boundary description and justification

Legal Description: Original Plat, Pt. Block 62 as follows: beginning in NW corner, then S 220', then E 150', then N 100', then W 30', then N 120', then W 120' to point of beginning.

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

state	code	county	code
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state	code	county	code
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11. Form Prepared By

name/title Carol Lohry Cartwright, Historic Preservation Consultant

organization _____ date 11/1/1985

street & number 945 Dane St. telephone 608-251-4784

city or town Madison, WI state WI

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 *[Signature]*

title DIRECTOR OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION, date 2/20/86

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

[Signature] Entered in the National Register date 4/3/86
 Keeper of the National Register

Attest: _____ date _____

Chief of Registration

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Jennie Bowman, nevertheless, successfully invested her money and was known to have "worshipped" her father, Jonathan's memory during her life. Upon her death in 1934, she left a memorial to her father in the form of a somewhat surprising bequest. She gave all the land in Block 62, except that upon which the house and stable stood, to the City of Wisconsin Dells. She requested that this land be preserved as a park to be called the "Jonathan Bowman Memorial Park" and she left a sum of money for its care and upkeep. The house was donated to the First Wisconsin Trust Company, to be held in trust, for them to establish and administer the operation of a free vacation home for working women over 45. The women would stay at the home free of charge for a maximum of two weeks (time determined by the Trustee), and she donated additional money to fund this project. She also requested that a plaque be placed on the house stating: "Jonathan Bowman Home for Women." Jennie Bowman's vacation home bequest has never been fully explained, except as the obvious memorial to her father, but the result was that Jonathan Bowman's name became fixed firmly and literally to the house and property which Abram built and owned, and which Jonathan, having died nine years earlier, never even saw.⁴

The Jonathan Bowman House for Women operated between 1934 and 1977. During that time it did exactly what Jennie Bowman wanted, provided a free facation retreat for working women over 45. Jennie Bowman's will stated that if the house could not be maintained, the title would pass to the City of Wisconsin Dells, to be used for public and municipal purposes. Therefore, in 1978, when the vacation home closed, the house and stable became the official property of the city. For a while the city used the house for offices of the park board and considered using it as a senior citizen center. In 1981, with no real future for the house in mind, the city council suggested burning the building as a training exercise for the local fire fighters. Motivated into action, concerned local citizens formed the Dells Country Historical Society in April of 1981 and presented the city with plans to use the house as its local museum. The city agreed to this proposal and since 1981 the city has maintained ownership of the house, but the historical society keeps up the property, repairs the house, operates a museum, and opens the house to the public on a regular basis.⁵

After Abram and Alberta Bowman built their Prairie style home in the summer of 1904, the local newspaper published an article on page one about the new "improvement" in the community. The newspaper called the house "beautiful," and gave its design full coverage, but seemingly puzzled by the odd style of the house, the article stated, "The aim of Mr. and Mrs. Bowman seems to be to arrange for convenience and comfort first and beauty second. The plan as viewed from the outside is very plain, there being no fancy work in evidence. The interior of the house is of the same plain style. . . ." While the newspaper was puzzled about the house, the article's comments indicate that the essential design goals of the Prairie style were met in the Bowman House: an efficient and comfortable home, devoid of excess detail, yet well-built with simple, high-quality materials both inside and out. The article mentions no architect, only that "the arrangement of the house was planned by Mrs. Bowman. . . ." An exhaustive search of existing records resulted in no information about either an architect or a builder of the Bowman House. It is possible that Alberta Bowman was a "modern" upper-class woman--she came from a

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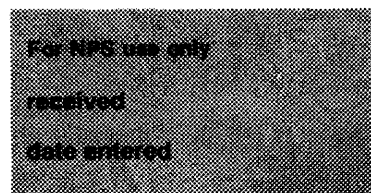
wealthy family--who, like others in the midwest, became interested in the Prairie style via designs published in women's and home magazines of the day. For example, the Bowman House bears some resemblance to a Frank Lloyd Wright design published in the Ladies Home Journal in February, 1901, "A Home in a Prairie Town." Wright's design is more elaborate, with "ribbon" windows, stucco exterior, and a much more "open" interior plan. But, the overall shape of the design with a projecting second story; and a similar roofline, side porch, opposite side porte-cochere, arched entry, and front porch resembles the plan of the Bowman House. The Bowman House is even sited on the block as Wright suggested in the article. This, of course, is only speculation, but it is a possibility that Alberta Bowman could have worked with a local "unknown" architect or builder, using such a design, to construct the house. It is hoped that more information becomes available about the house and the possibility of an architect or builder being involved with the design with or without Mrs. Bowman.⁶

With or without a significant architect, the Bowman House has many of the significant features of the Prairie style. The low, long design stresses the horizontal, and the porch and porte-cochere extend the line further. There is little detail, except for the arched entryway and leaded glass windows. The use of wood shingles for the exterior and standard double-hung sashes which do not really have the appearance of "ribbon" windows, makes the house from the exterior less "academic" than more famous Prairie School designs. But, its early construction date (1904) and unknown architect may account for this "simpler" interpretation of the style. The interior, as well, has a more traditional closed room plan. Only the entry hall on the first floor, and the open second story hall suggests a difference from a more traditional Victorian interior. The details of the interior, however; the use of plain woodwork, particularly in the entry hall; the built-in china cabinet in the dining room and the plain brick fireplaces, differentiate this house from the Queen Anne or Period Revival interiors of the same era. Both the exterior and the interior, therefore, show some transitional details which merge the Prairie style with some of the elements of other styles.

The integrity of this house is very high. The adjacent park retains the original setting of the house, and the exterior has been well-maintained over the years. Only the barn has suffered from the small shed addition at the rear and the application of new siding, yet its basic original form is still intact. The Bowman House interior has had a few minor changes, such as the closure of some connecting doors and some ceiling repairs, but overall, the house is as it was in 1904, when its design somewhat puzzled the local papers, even though at the same time, another Prairie style house was being constructed. This other house, the Sherman House, is the only other house in Wisconsin Dells with a Prairie style of architecture. It is located a couple of miles northwest of the Bowman House and is closer to the Wisconsin River. The Sherman House has been documented as a Robert C. Spencer, Jr. design, and was a summer home for wealthy Chicago residents. Constructed in the summer of 1904, the Sherman House is typical of several of Spencer's early Prairie School designs. It has a stuccoed exterior, grouped casement windows, a two-story projecting bay section on the front facade, and its interior details, particularly the placement and design of the woodwork,

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resemble a number of his published designs between 1900 and 1910. In particular, the Sherman House resembles the larger, grander design of Spencer's August Magnus house (1905) in Winnetka, Illinois. Because of the date of construction being almost identical as the Bowman House (summer, 1904), an attempt was made to connect Spencer with both houses. However, the significant differences in the exterior and interior of the houses and the lack of any evidence linking Spencer to the Bowman House ruled this assumption out. While the Sherman House is also a good example of an early Prairie School design and can be attributed to a master architect, this does not detract from the importance of the Bowman house in the community. Clearly both houses are good examples of the Prairie style in their own right, and the Sherman House lacks listing in the National Register only because no one has pursued it. Neither is the "best" example of the style in the community because the Prairie School had a number of variations, and both houses are good examples of how the style was interpreted in two different buildings at two different sites.

Because the Bowman House is an early and intact example of one interpretation of the Prairie style, and because it retains a high degree of integrity and level of preservation, it is a significant architectural landmark in the community of the Wisconsin Dells. Its future preservation ensured (it is assumed) by its use as a museum, it contributes to the architectural fabric in a small Wisconsin community which is fortunate in having two examples of this important architectural style.

Notes

¹There are no existing tax rolls for Wisconsin Dells for 1904 and other standard dating references did not indicate a date of construction. Two newspaper sources, though, established a date. "Local Tips." [Kilbourn] Mirror Gazette, June 9, 1904, p. 5: "A. D. Bowman had work commence on his new residence Tuesday." Also, see "Improvement Note Handsome New Building Erected in Kilbourn." Mirror Gazette, September 8, 1904, p. 1.

²"Death of A. D. Bowman." [Kilbourn] Mirror Gazette, December 14, 1907, p. 2.

³Ibid.

⁴Last Will and Testament of Jennie Bowman of the city of Wisconsin Dells, Columbia County, Wisconsin, Probated, July 26, 1935, Columbia County, Wisconsin, No. 211973.

⁵Ibid.; Starr, Mary A., "Jonathan Bowman Home: Free Vacation Spot for Older Professional Women." Wisconsin State Journal, July 8, 1974, Section 3, p. 1.

⁶"Improvement Note," Brooks, H. Allen. The Prairie School. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1972, pp. 23-25.

⁷Brooks, pp. 57-61, 90-98.