

# INVENTORY FORM FOR NOMINATED PROPERTIES

Name of property: Eagles Club  
Address: 2401 West Wisconsin Avenue  
City: Milwaukee

Owner: Fraternal Order of Eagles  
Owner's address: 2401 West Wisconsin Avenue  
Milwaukee, WI 53233

## REGISTRATION INFORMATION

160 NRHP Certification (date)  
 Listed in NRHP (LI)  
 Determined eligible in DOE process (DD)  
 Determined eligible in nomination process (DN)  
 Additional documentation added to nomination (AD)  
 Boundary increased (BI)  
 Boundary decreased (BD)  
 Delisted (DL)

170 Thematic or Multiple Resource Nomination Name (code)  
West Side Multiple Resource

180 NRHP List Name Eagles Club

190 Level of Significance  
 national (NA)  
 state (ST)  
 local (LO)

200 District Classification  
 pivotal (P)  
 contributing (C)  
 non-contributing (NC)

210 Applicable Criteria  
 event (A)  
 person (B)  
 architecture/engineering (C)  
 information potential (D)

215 Criteria Considerations  
 religious property (A)  
 moved property (B)  
 birthplace or grave (C)  
 cemetery (D)  
 reconstructed property (E)  
 commemorative property (F)  
 less than 50 years old (G)

220 Area of Significance (code)  
Architecture  
Social/Humanitarian

230 Period of Significance  
1927-1936

340 Review Board Date \_\_\_\_\_

70 USGS Quad Map  
SW Milwaukee 7.5 min 1:24,000

80 UTM Coordinates (Format: 99-999999-9999999)  
16-423170-4765280

85 Listed Acreage one acre

60 Verbal Boundary Description Mariner's Addition in  
quarter section 30-7-22, block 2, lots 1-2-3-18-19-20.

STREET: W. Wisconsin Avenue

NUMBER: 2401

SHSW INTENSIVE  
SURVEY FORM

LOCATION

10 County Milwaukee  
20 City or Village Milwaukee  
30 Civil Town \_\_\_\_\_  
35 Unincorporated Community \_\_\_\_\_  
40 Location 2401 West Wisconsin Avenue  
\_\_\_\_\_  
50 Town-Range-Section \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
55 Quarter Sections \_\_\_\_\_  
60 Verbal Boundary Description Mariner's addition in south-  
west quarter sec. 30-7-22, block 2, lots 1-2-3-18-19-20.

PROGRAM REVIEW

250 Tax Case Number \_\_\_\_\_  
260 Compliance Case Number \_\_\_\_\_  
270 A or D Grant  Yes  No  
275 Covenant/Easement Dates \_\_\_\_\_  
320 Ownership  
 private (P)  
 local-public (L)  
 state-public (S)  
 federal-public (F)  
 mixed, private-public (M)  
330 Lead Agency (code) \_\_\_\_\_

SURVEY

90 Photo Codes MI 103-9,10,11,12,13,14  
100 Survey Map 400  
110 Map Code 103-9  
120 Reconnaissance Survey Date 1979  
130 Reconnaissance Surveyor Wenger/Hunton/Jensen  
140 Intensive Survey Name (code) Westside  
150 Intensive Surveyor Wenger/Hatala  
155 Intensive Survey FY 1983  
235 Survey Evaluation  
 eligible (E)  not eligible (N)  
237 Survey District Classification  
 pivotal (P)  non-contributing (NC)  
 contributing (C)  
240 Survey Level of Significance  
 national (NA)  local (LO)  
 state (ST)  
243 Survey Evaluation Criteria  
 event (A)  architectural/engineering (C)  
 person (B)  information potential (D)  
245 Proposed District \_\_\_\_\_  
280 NHL Date \_\_\_\_\_  
290 HABS No. \_\_\_\_\_ 300 HAER No. \_\_\_\_\_  
310 Local Landmark (code) \_\_\_\_\_  
315 Associated Archeological Site(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Street West Wisconsin Avenue

Address 2401

**ARCHITECTURE**

450 Date of Construction (source)

1924 (A)

460 Dates of Alterations/Additions (source)

480 Builder (source)

490 and 500 Designer Type and Name (source)

X architect: Russell Barr Williamson (A)

artist:

engineer:

interior designer:

landscape architect:

other:

510 Style or Form (code)

Mediterranean Revival

520 Building, Structure, Object or Site Type (code)

Lodge

530 Building Materials (code)

(roof)

(foundation)

Cut Stone

(trim)

540 Interior Visited Yes X No

550 Structural System (code)

570 Number of Stories

5

580 Roof Shape (code)

Flat

590 Additional Description

620 Condition

X excellent good fair poor ruins

650 Related Buildings (code)

**HISTORY**

430 Common/Current Name

Eagles Club

440 Historic Names (source)

660 Associated Individual(s) (dates) (source)

670 Associated Event (source)

680 Commercial/Industrial Historic Uses (source)

DESCRIPTION

The Eagles Club headquarters is a monumental five-story structure designed by local architect Russell Barr Williamson and completed in 1927. It occupies nearly a quarter block at the southwest corner of 24th Street and Wisconsin Avenue. Inspired by the Mediterranean Revival that was so popular in the 1920s, the facade features a series of rich decorative elements played against the starkness of the plain stone wall surface. A central projecting pavilion contains three rectangular entrances which are surmounted by three arched windows that rise for two stories. The pavilion is capped by what had once been an open balustraded arcade roofed with terra cotta tiles. A parapet wall hides the fifth floor. An eagle-topped urn once graced each side of the arcade. To either side of the entrance pavilion is a tier of three windows, the top most surmounted by a tympanum with a carved eagle while the second floor window below it has a balcony. In addition to such Mediterranean features as the tile roof, twisted columns and pierced balustrade, Sullivanesque foliated forms appear in all the spandrels and cartouch-like arrangements of similar foliation border each of the two-story windows. A noteworthy feature is the running frieze of human and winged, eagle-headed humanoid forms which decorate the cornice on either side of the entrance pavilion. The stiff poses are reminiscent of Assyrian art.

Four urns and two saucer-like planters at the entrance complete the facade ornamentation. The entrance has been marred in recent years by the addition of a metal canopy. A landscaped reflecting pool once filled the area between the entry and Wisconsin Avenue, but this has been replaced by a black-topped parking area. The open arcade has been boarded up and is used for storage. The west elevation is utilitarian in composition reflecting the variety in interior spaces. The east facade has banks of windows grouped in pairs and separated by pilaster-like vertical members. This elevation has been altered by the removal of an entry at the north corner and windows have been blocked up.

(See attached)

ARCHITECTURAL/ENGINEERING STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Eagles Club house is of local architectural significance as one of the most unique buildings in Milwaukee. Unlike the office block appearance of the Milwaukee Athletic Club (1917) or the Georgian residential style of the University Club (1926) (two popular clubs of the period), The Eagles Club design is a much freer and more inventive building which combines elements of the Mediterranean Romansque style with the stripped classicism of the 1920s and 1930s.

The Eagles Club is also an important design in the work of local architect Russell Barr Williamson. His use of the Mediterranean style was infrequent since he worked mostly in the Prairie Style.

890 BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES (SOURCES)

- A. Milwaukee City Building Permit.
- B. Milwaukee Journal. April 9, 1977.
- C. Milwaukee Public Library. Unidentified Clippings in file on Eagles Club. January 30, 1939; August 13, 1941; August 15, 1941; March 1, 1944; July 17, 1946; January 22, 1948; February 18, 1948; October 10, 1948, January 30, 1955; March 7, 1955, and March 9, 1939.
- D. Milwaukee Sentinel. June 6, 1984; April 8, 1983 Let's Go Section.

700 STUDY UNITS (CODE)

_____	_____
_____	_____

350 Demolished

360 Date Demolished

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

### Description Cont.

The interior is relatively stark and carries through the Mediterranean theme with stuccoed walls, iron railings and wrought iron light fixtures. Replacement fixtures and alterations in the layout have been somewhat unsympathetic. The clubhouse is planned for multiple functions. There is a 75'x 50' swimming pool, a two-story gym, bowling alleys, lounge and restaurant. The athletic facilities were designed to meet the standards of the Amateur Athletic Union. The building's crowning glory, however, remains the top floor oval ballroom measuring 200'x 130'. It was built with a stage 50' wide by 48' deep and 80' high, large enough to accommodate any New York Theater Group. Two tiers of columns ring the space and define the balcony area and are topped with eagle-headed capitals. The large dome is suspended by cables attached to girders under the actual roof of the building. It was damaged by fire in 1955 but has been restored. New flooring has been installed to accommodate basketball games.

#### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Eagles organization was founded on February 6, 1898, in Seattle by six men who wanted to establish "an order of good things" and to help the underprivileged. The original name, Order of Goodfellows, was changed in 1899 to the Eagles. Local chapters are called Aeries.

The Milwaukee Aerie #137 was organized in 1901 by a group of theater men. Most of the 58 charter members were actors, managers, and other men connected with the stage. The first president was Bart Rudells, press agent for the Bijou Theatre. Meetings were often held after 11:00 p.m. when theatres closed and employees were off work. Early meetings featured vaudeville acts to attract new members; most of the acts were performed by members. Membership grew quickly and it was not unusual for several hundred men to be initiated at each meeting.

When their original headquarters on 2nd Street between Michigan and Wisconsin burned, the Eagles temporarily moved to 6th Street between Michigan and Wisconsin while they looked for a permanent site. In 1924 the Eagles bought the Franz Wollaeger residence at the southwest corner of 24th and West Wisconsin Avenue at a cost of \$100,000. Wollaeger had been an officer of the Pritzlaff Hardware Company. The site was said to be the best of 30 inspected. The original plan called for the handsome 16-room mansion to be used for administrative purposes while a \$500,000 clubhouse was to be built elsewhere on the 150' x 374' tract. Unfortunately, this did not happen. Instead, the residence was replaced with a new structure constructed at the staggering cost of \$1,250,000. Excavation began April 16, 1925, the cornerstone was laid on July 29, 1926, and dedication made April 26, 1927. At least 25,000 visitors toured the opulent building when it opened. The architect was Russell Barr Williamson and the general contractor was Immel Construction of Fond du Lac and Milwaukee. The U.F. Durner Company was responsible for the mosaic eagle in the entrance lobby.

By 1941 Milwaukee's Aerie was the largest in the country with 9200 members in the city and some 29,000 throughout Wisconsin. It was followed in rank by the founder city, Seattle, which

(See Attached)

#### HISTORICAL STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Eagles Club in Milwaukee is of statewide significance as the first organization of its kind in Wisconsin. Founded in 1901 as Milwaukee Aerie #137, it was a fraternal club for purely social purposes. The Milwaukee Aerie has consistently dominated the development of the Eagles in the state by virtue of its massive membership, entertainment, athletic and education programs, and club house facilities. Begun by a group of men largely associated with the local stage, its membership grew significantly to become probably the largest fraternal organization in the city and state. It was not unusual for several hundred men to be initiated at each meeting. When the current structure was begun in 1925, the Milwaukee Aerie was the second largest in the country. This not only reflected the popularity of the organization, but the phenomenal growth of fraternal clubs in Milwaukee from the turn of the century to the Great Depression.

## Historical Background Cont.

had approximately 8800 members. By 1948, Milwaukee's membership had grown to 16,000.

The lavish clubhouse included a 75'x 30' swimming pool and athletic facilities designed to meet the standards of the Amateur Athletic Union. The crowning glory of the structure was the ballroom. Measuring 200'x 130', complete with a stage 50' wide, 48' deep, and 80' high, was deemed large enough to accommodate any New York theatrical group. It was dubbed Devine's Million Dollar Ballroom after being leased to George J. Devine in 1939. Devine had prior experience managing the Wisconsin Roof Garden, a ballroom atop the Carpenter Building at the northeast corner of 6th Street and West Wisconsin from 1926-1929. Devine continued in this capacity at the Eagles until 1962-63 when his son Robert T. Devine took over operations. Big band dancing had been a favorite through the 1950s after which it declined in popularity. Entertainment oriented from the start, the club sponsored its first big rock concert in 1964 with the appearance of the Dave Clark Five. Other celebrities such as Bob Hope, Red Skelton, and Dinah Shore have performed in the ballroom as well. In 1983 the ballroom hosted local rock groups, periodic big band concerts, and basketball games.

The Eagles Club has had a history of benevolent activities. Money was given to Fr. Flannagan's Boys Town. The group sponsored a well-baby clinic and the first community institute in America to study employment for the physically handicapped. Funds were donated to numerous medical institutions such as the Joseph P. Kennedy Memorial Hospital and Cedars of Lebanon Hospital. The Eagles pushed for legislation to expand facilities, educations, and medical benefits for veterans following World War II. They also lobbied for legislation on Worker's Compensation, mother's pensions, and so on. (B,C,D)

Increasingly, (largely in the last 50 years), the Eagles have had substantial political influence as well; membership for some politicians has become a necessary obligation.