

INTENSIVE SURVEY FORM Historic Preservation Division State Historical Society of Wisconsin

1 City, Village or Town: Balsam Lake		County: Polk	Surveyor: Frank J. Werner, J. Sewell, D. Filipowicz	Date: 9/81, 10/81	Street Number	
Street Address: Main Street		Legal Description: W 135 feet of Block 22, Gov't Lot 2, Sec 10, T34N, R17W		Acreage: less than 1		
Current Name & Use: Polk County Museum		Current Owner: County of Polk; Attn: Elroy Spangenberg, County Clerk				
Film Roll No.	Affix Contact Prints			Current Owner's Address: Courthouse, Balsam Lake, WI 54810		
Negative No.				Special Features Not Visible In Photographs: None - see Description of interior, Architectural Statement, Item 3		
Facade Orient.				Interior visited? <input type="radio"/> Yes <input checked="" type="radio"/> No		

2	Original Name & Use: Polk County Courthouse	Source	Previous Owners	Dates	Uses	Source	Town Range Section
	Dates of Construction: 1899	Source A					
	Architect and/or Builder: Orff & Guilbert, Minneapolis	Source B, D					

3	Architectural Significance <input type="radio"/> Represents work of a master <input type="radio"/> Possesses high artistic values <input checked="" type="radio"/> Represents a type, period, or method of construction <input checked="" type="radio"/> Is a visual landmark in the area <input type="radio"/> Other: _____ . <input type="radio"/> None.	4 Historical Significance <input type="radio"/> Assoc. with lives of significant persons <input type="radio"/> Assoc. with significant historical events <input type="radio"/> Assoc. with development of a locality <input type="radio"/> Other: _____ . <input checked="" type="radio"/> None.	Section
	Statement of Architectural Significance: Description: The Polk County Courthouse at Balsam Lake is a sixty-foot-square, two-story building of red pressed brick, with an attic under the hipped roof and basement level for storage and services. The symmetrical design is based on a tower rising in the center of the front (west) facade and four corner "towers" suggested by construction of thick brick pilasters under four corner pyramidal roofs. Contrasting bands of pale brick suggest alternate stone courses in the raised basement; matching		

5	Sources of Information (Reference to Above)	Statement of Historical Significance: Originally part of Crawford County, Michigan, present Polk County became part of St. Croix County, Wisconsin Territory in 1840. In 1853 Polk County was awarded its own identity, and included parts of Barron, Chippewa, and Ashland Counties, as well as all of present Polk, Bayfield, and Douglas Counties (Source C, p. 981). At that time, the county was divided into two voting precincts, one at Le Roy and another at St. Croix Falls; the latter was then the county seat, and court was first held in the schoolhouse. ^C A vote taken in 1853 was unanimous in favor of a move to Osceola, and records were there moved, subsequent to which, in 1863, all county records were stolen. (Information about early proceedings of the county is therefore spare.) In 1898 the seat was	Map Name
	A Inscription stone on building.		
	B Blueprints.		
	C History of the St. Croix Valley, Vol. II, A.B. Easton, Ed., H.C. Cooper & Co., Chicago, 1909.		
	D "Report of the Building Committee," Polk County Press, November 26, 1898.		

6	District Classification District Name: _____ <input type="radio"/> Pivotal <input type="radio"/> Contributing <input type="radio"/> Non-Contributing Initials: _____ Date: _____	Map Code
	7 Representation in Previous Surveys: <input type="radio"/> NRHP <input type="radio"/> WRL <input type="radio"/> Local Landmark <input checked="" type="radio"/> Other: WIHP	

8 Eligibility for the National Register <input checked="" type="radio"/> Eligible <input type="radio"/> Not Eligible <input type="radio"/> Unknown local Initials: DHF Date: 10/81

Historical Statement (cont.):

again moved by popular vote to its present location in the village of Balsam Lake; the nominated building (now county museum) was the first courthouse constructed at that location financed with the construction of a jail and sheriff's residence through the sale of local bonds totalling \$25,000.^D Due to rivalry involved in retention/relocation of the county seat in 1898, the larger Polk County Press in Osceola did not cover construction of the new building in Balsam Lake, and little mention of the process was made in the Balsam Lake News. The History of the St. Croix Valley^C mentions that the building is of red brick with a slate roof. (A new courthouse in Balsam Lake was constructed in 1975, and the former sheriff's residence and jail was recently demolished to provide a site for a new community housing project.)

Architectural Statement (cont.):

pale brick in a chain pattern forms broad borders at the tops of the corner towers and across the ground-level frontispiece covering the entrance. Wide entablatures and capitals under the cornice, and lintels over the paired or singular rectangular openings on the first story, are likewise composed of pale brick. The main entrance is recessed between brick columns (distyle-in-antis) in the center of the frontispiece; half-size paired windows with transoms are set between wide brick pilasters at the sides. An inscription stone ("18 POLK COUNTY 98") and ball finial of stone decorate the center of the patterned parapet overhead. Exterior alterations include replacement of windows and the original glazed double door with aluminum-framed plate glass, installation of a small brick bulkhead and fire escape against the south side, and construction of a two-story brick vault (1963) against the rear.

With wholesale remodelling in 1965, little of the interior is of note. The original drawings indicate that decoration was spare: stairways were bordered by simple turned-wood balustrades, walls were finished with (vertical) wood wainscoting, and doors were paneled wood. A pediment supported by pairs of Doric columns was to be constructed (and is still extant) behind the judge's bench. Inside the front door, a vestibule rose to a perpendicular north-south corridor from a half-flight of stairs. The treasurer, judge, clerk of courts, and registrar had offices in the corner "towers" of the first floor, each with an adjoining vault. The county clerk's suite, between offices of the treasurer and judge, faced the entry. On the second floor, the courtroom was located in the southeast corner, with jury rooms to the north, and judge's, city attorney's, and commissioners' rooms across the hall to the west.

The site in the commercial sector of Balsam Lake is well-tended; the wide lawns are shaded by tall trees and enclosed by a low stone wall. A plaque records the dedication of the building and site "to the people" as the Polk County Museum in 1976.

Significance: A local landmark with its Victorian-era colorism and Richardsonian Romanesque references, the Polk County Courthouse of 1898 (now the Polk County Museum) represents a period of construction. Little mentioned in historical accounts, the construction of the building marks the ultimate resting place of the county seat. Attribution of the design to architects Orff & Guilbert of Minneapolis is firmly based on blueprints for the building, and mention in the local press. The former courthouse is among the most important buildings of historical interest in an unsurveyed portion of the state.

