

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

JUL 16 1987

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

NATIONAL  
REGISTER

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

## 1. Name of Property

historic name MILLS, SIMEON HOUSE  
other names/site number Elmside; Mills Folly

## 2. Location

street & number 2709 Sommers Avenue N/A not for publication

city, town Madison N/A vicinity

state Wisconsin code WI county Dane code 025 zip code 53704

## 3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing _____ Noncontributing _____ buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	1 _____ - _____ sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	_____ structures
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	_____ objects
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	1 _____ - _____ Total

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

## 4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.

Signature of certifying official

7/10/87

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

## 5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this 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.

*Melvin Byers* Entered in the National Register 8-13-87

- removed from the National Register.  
 other, (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

**6. Function or Use**

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Domestic / Single Dwelling

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Domestic / Multiple Dwelling**7. Description**

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Italianate

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation sandstonewalls sandstoneroof asphalt (shingles)other wood

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

Sitting conspicuously on the south side of Sommers Avenue is 2709 Sommers, a massive sandstone structure built in the Italianate style in 1863.

The irregularly shaped (see drawing), two-story house takes up portions of four city lots and sits approximately seventy-five feet from Sommers Avenue on a spacious, well-groomed lawn. Constructed of brown sandstone laid in random ashlar bond, the house's setting and mass offers a striking appearance that is further accentuated by a low pitched gable roof. The building is set on a rock-faced stone foundation. The first floor windows are tall four-over-four double hung sash windows and the second story has four-over-four arched windows. All of the windows (except for the arched windows on the lower center section of the house) have rather elaborate stone enframements. Besides the sheer massing of the house, the most striking features immediately noticeable are the five large boxed cornices with partial overscale cornice returns. Double brackets are found on the frieze board below the cornice returns and on each corner of the house. The wide frieze board extends along the entire perimeter of the house. The roof itself is covered in asphalt shingles. An unusual feature is four, hooded wall dormers found on the middle section of the house over the arched windows on the east and west sides of the house. The main entry to the house is located in the front-facing ell of the main block, while secondary entrances are located on the side and rear elevations.

The interior of the house has been altered to accommodate eight separate apartments and it is likely that the original floor plan has been altered considerably. The interior's high ceilings, floor materials and small amounts of original trim are still visible in places.

The house appears to have retained a great deal of its historic exterior integrity. The front elevation does, however, show signs of a large open porch which at one time likely covered the main front entrance. Presently there is only a concrete stoop at the front entrance. Fire escapes have also been added to the side and rear elevations.

## **8. Statement of Significance**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally     statewide     locally

Applicable National Register Criteria     A     B     C     D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions)     A     B     C     D     E     F     G

### **Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)**

Politics/Government

Commerce

Architecture

### **Period of Significance**

1863-1869

### **Significant Dates**

1863

### **Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

### **Architect/Builder**

unknown

### **Significant Person**

Mills, Simeon

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

2709 Sommers Avenue, historically known as "Elmside" or "Mills Folly," derives its significance from its association with Simeon Mills, one of Madison's earliest settlers and most prominent citizens in the 19th century. Mills' varied roles as local Justice, County Commissioner, State Senator, village trustee, real estate speculator, banker and railroad developer placed him in a position of sizable influence over the development and direction of the young community of Madison and the south-central region of the state. The Mills House is also an outstanding example of a Victorian Italianate residence constructed of local sandstone.

### **Association with Simeon Mills**

Simeon Mills (1810-1895) was one of Madison's most outstanding citizens in the 19th century. Born in Norfolk, Connecticut and raised in Ashtabula, Ohio, Mills made his way to the Wisconsin territory in 1835 and spent time in the village of Mineral Point and was present at the establishment of the Wisconsin territorial government in Belmont.<sup>1</sup> Mills traveled to the site which was to be the new territorial capitol (Madison) and there he decided to settle. He built a log cabin and opened a small grocery store in 1837, thus making him one of the very first settlers in Madison and one of its very first commercial entrepreneurs.

Mills rapidly made a prominent reputation for himself in the fledgling village by becoming the first mail carrier between Madison and Milwaukee in 1837. He made the run twice weekly until 1842 and it is noted that he never failed in making the trip.<sup>2</sup> His civil activities included serving as the district's first Justice of the Peace in 1839, as one of Dane County's first three commissioners and as Dane County's first senator upon the achievement of Wisconsin statehood in 1848. As senator, Mills introduced the bill that enacted into law the founding and chartering of the University of Wisconsin and he played an active part in its growth throughout the 19th century. In 1861 Governor Randall charged Mills with the recruitment of volunteers for the Union Army in Wisconsin which he did with great success and Randall also appointed him as State Paymaster General, a post he held from 1861-1865. Locally he served as village trustee and village treasurer in Madison through the 1850s, and was

## **9. Major Bibliographical References**

"Magazine of Western History" vol 6, No. 1 May 1887. Williams Publishing Co., Cleveland, Ohio.

History of Dane County, Biographical & Genealogical. Western Historical Assoc., Madison, WI.

Mollenhoff, David V. Madison, A History of the Formative Years. Kendall/Hunt Publishing Co. Dubuque, Iowa, 1906

Capital Times "For 58 Years Mills had a Finger in all the Pies of Pioneer Madison" Madison, February 8, 1967.

See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- 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:

- State historic preservation office  
 Other State agency  
 Federal agency  
 Local government  
 University  
 Other

Specify repository:

Historic Preservation Division  
Dept. Planning & Development, Madison WI

## **10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of property less than one acre

UTM References

A	1   6	3   0   9	2   2   0	4   7   7   3   5   8   0
Zone	Easting	Northing		
C	_____	_____	_____	_____

B	_____	_____	_____	_____
Zone	Easting	Northing		
D	_____	_____	_____	_____

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

Parcel "B" of Certified Survey Map No. 278 Recorded in Dane County Register of Deeds in Vol. 2 page 16 of Certified survey.

Beginning at the NE corner of lot 4 of said parcel then 132 feet west to the NW corner of Lot 6, then south 150 feet, then SE 136 feet to a point on lot 13 and north 186 feet to the point of beginning.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The property being nominated is the modern property parcel upon which the house sits. It is a tiny fraction of the original 180 acre estate which was developed in several stages as residential subdivisions. The last division of the property occurred c. 1969 when the apartment house behind the Mills house was constructed.

See continuation sheet

## **11. Form Prepared By**

name/title William Wright, Historian

organization State Historical Society of Wisconsin

date 3/10/1987

street & number 816 State Street

telephone 608/ 262-4769

city or town Madison,

state WI zip code 53706

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MILLS, SIMEON HOUSE, Madison, Dane County, WI

on Madison's first Board of Education starting in 1856. He was also was a member on the Board of Trustees for the State Hospital for the Insane (1860-1877) and one of the University's first regents.. Mills was also active in the development of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

Simeon Mills is a name synonymous with Madison's developing business community. Realizing the future potential of the Madison area, Mills became involved in real estate speculation early on and was able to amass a modest fortune in his lifetime and direct much of the early development of the village. He was the first president of the Bank of Madison and also the first president of the Madison Mutual Insurance Company. Mills also served on the board of the Madison Gas, Light & Coke Co.<sup>3</sup> In 1844 he was a partner in Madison's first newspaper, the ARGUS. Mills was greatly involved in the developing railroad industry in southeastern Wisconsin. He was not only president of the Madison and Portage Railroad (1862) but also director of the Beloit and Madison line. Both lines were essential to the early development of Madison as an important regional trade center and secured for the city a assured role as a business, industrial and financial center in the south-central region of the state.<sup>4</sup>

Simeon Mills was one of Madison's most prominent, active, and trusted citizens in the 19th century. He was able to contribute to the growth of a village, in which he was one of its first citizens and important entrepreneurs, into one of Wisconsin's most important cities. His civic and business activities were a tremendous asset to the establishment of the city of Madison. Along with other early influential citizens, Mills must assuredly be recognized as having had great input in steering the early course of city development.

2709 Sommers Street is the last remaining residence of four that Simeon Mills owned in his lifetime. He originally planned to build his main residence on this then country estate which now lies in the urban area of east Madison. Built in 1863, the house that Mills referred to as "Elmside" became locally known as "Mills Folly" for being located so distant from the then center of the small community and in 1867, Mills began construction of another house at the corner of Monona Avenue and West Doty Street (Where the City-County Building is presently located). The Mills family resided in Elmside for five years before selling it. The Mills family also owned a city residence at the same time as Elmside at the corner of Main and Monona Avenue (now demolished).

Later owners and occupants of the house included J.W. Hudson who was a prominent industrialist and real estate promoter in Madison, and Sam Miller, a nationally known opera and theater promoter.

**Architecture**

The Simeon Mills House is an excellent example of Italianate architecture as described in Wisconsin's Cultural Resource Management Plan vol. 2. The Italianate style is evidenced by irregular proportions that are topped with wide eaves and a graceful low pitched gable roof. The use of brackets and overscaled cornice returns further accentuates the Italianate motif.

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The Italianate style of the Simeon Mills House is reflective of the period of rapid growth in Madison in the mid-19th century. This style was popular with the wealthier businessmen and civic leaders in the city and was a prevalent at mid-century. Several outstanding Italianate style houses are extant in Madison including the Old Executive Mansion (NRHP 4-11-73) and the James B. Bowen House (NRHP 3-1-82). The Langdon Street Historic District (NRHP 6-26-86) contains several examples of houses in the Italianate style. The Mills residence is also worthy of note as a fine example of local stone construction. The locally available sandstone utilized in the Mills house was quite popular as a building material for use in commercial blocks, churches and affluent residential designs during Madison's early boom years in the 1850s and 60s. The Mills House is representative of the best in that well executed masonry construction tradition in the community.

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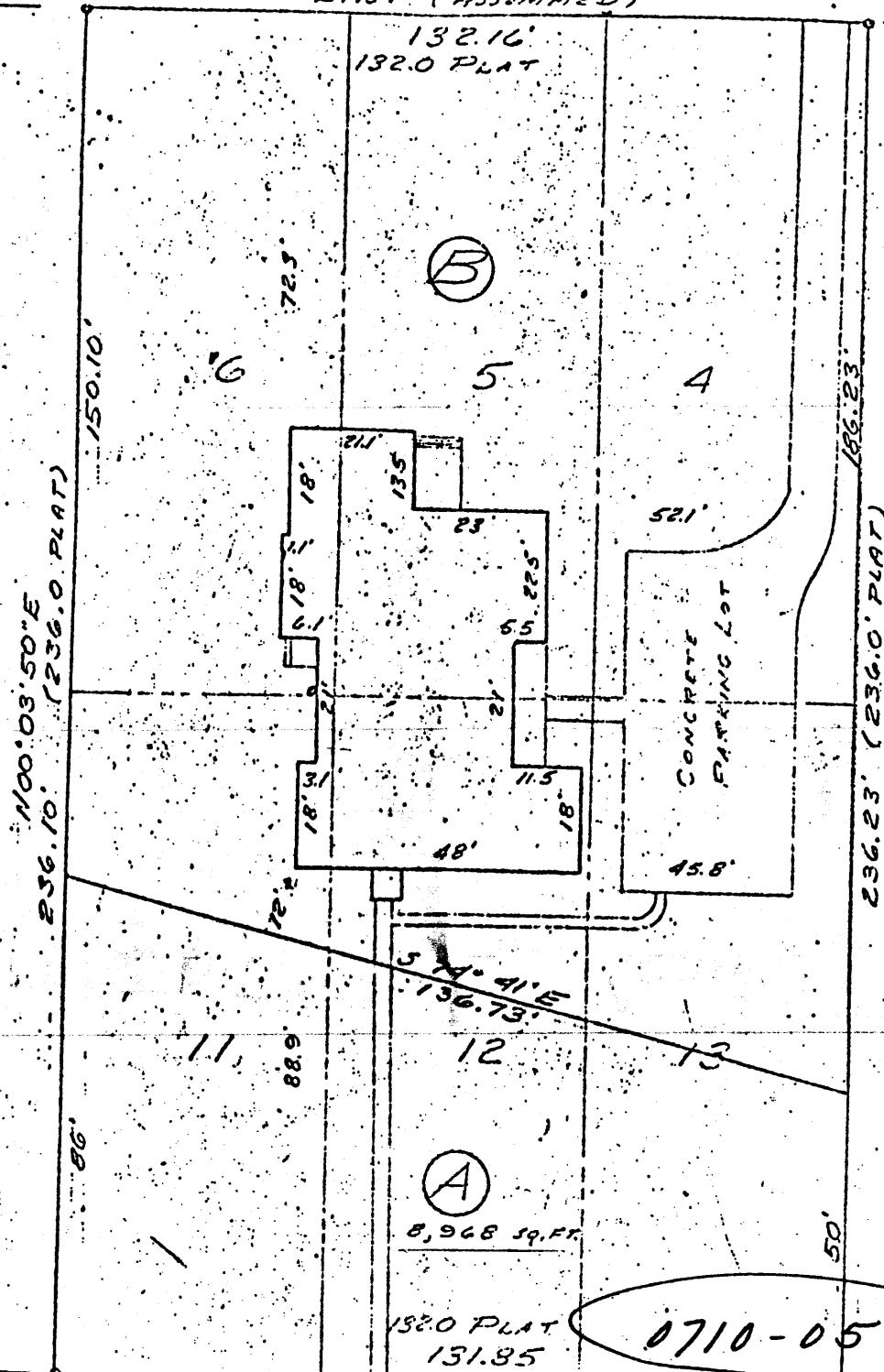
<sup>1</sup>History of Dane County, Biographical and Genealogical. Western Historical Association, Madison, Wisconsin, 1906, p. 125.

<sup>2</sup>"Magazine of Western History," vol. 6, No. 1, May 1887. Williams Publishing Co. Cleveland, Ohio, p. 18.

<sup>3</sup>Capital Times: Madison, Feb. 8, 1967. "For 58 Years Mills had a Finger in all the Pies of Pioneer Madison."

<sup>4</sup>Mollenhof, David V. Madison, A History of the Formative Years. Kendall/Hunt Publishing Co., Dubuque, Iowa, 1982, p. 104.

JUNIOR'S AVENUE  
2709  
EAST (ASSUMED)



PARCEL "A" PART OF LOTS 11, 12, 13 OF BLOCK 2, SAM R. MILLER'S SUBDIVISION OF ELMSIDE, CITY OF MADISON, DANE CO., WISCONSIN, TO-WIT: BEGINNING AT THE SOUTHEAST CORNER OF SAID LOT 13; THENCE N89°56'40"W, 131.85 FEET; THENCE N00°03'50"E, 86.00 FEET; THENCE S74°41'E, 136.73 FEET; THENCE S00°08'20"W, 50.00 FEET TO THE POINT OF BEGINNING.

PARCEL "B" LOTS 4, 5, 6, 11, 12, 13, OF BLOCK 2, SAM R. MILLER'S SUBDIVISION OF ELMSIDE, CITY OF MADISON, DANE CO., WISCONSIN, EXCEPT THAT PART OF SAID LOTS 11, 12, AND 13 DESCRIBED IN PARCEL "A" ABOVE.