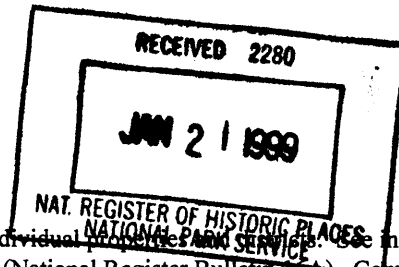


United States Department of Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form



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This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties. Use instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900A). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Mathey Building  
other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number	126 West Main Street	N/A	not for publication
city or town	Lena	N/A	vicinity
state Wisconsin	code WI	county Oconto	code 083 zip code 54139

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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. I recommend that this property be considered significant \_ nationally \_ statewide  locally. ( \_ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Alicia L. Coetz  
Signature of certifying official/Title  
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer-WI

12/29/98  
Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property \_ meets \_ does not meet the National Register criteria.  
( \_ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

Mathey Building

Oconto

Wisconsin

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*

*2/18/99*

*EB*

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(check as many boxes as  
as apply)

private

public-local

public-State

public-Federal

**Category of Property**  
(Check only one box)

building(s)

district

structure

site

object

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

contributing      noncontributing

1                      0 buildings

   sites

   structures

   objects

1                      0 total

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

None

**Number of contributing resources  
is previously listed in the National Register**

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE: Specialty Store

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

VACANT/NOT IN USE

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions)

OTHER

**Materials**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Foundation CONCRETE

walls CONCRETE

roof ASPHALT

other WOOD

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 1  
Mathey Building, Lena, Oconto County, Wisconsin.

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**Introduction:**

The Mathey Building is a commercial vernacular structure of ornamental concrete block construction located in the northeast Wisconsin village of Lena, in Oconto County. Constructed in 1916, the Mathey Building is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places due to its architectural significance as a fine manifestation of the use of ornamental concrete block in the design and construction of an early-twentieth century commercial vernacular building. All of the building's exterior features, with the exception of window sash, doors, the storefront, and a thin pressed metal cornice, are constructed entirely of precast ornamental concrete. The building is highly intact, with the exception of the storefront area, which has been altered in a manner common to architecturally significant historic commercial buildings of this era.

**Physical Context:**

The Mathey Building is located near the center of the small, central business district of the village of Lena, which had a 1990 population of 590.<sup>1</sup> The building faces Main Street on its south, a parking lot to the west, and alleys at its east facade and at the extreme rear of the complex. The extant commercial district is dominated by the intersection of Highway 141 and Main Street, approximately one-half block east of the Mathey Building; the central business district is roughly bounded approximately one and one-half block west of the Mathey Building by rail lines and buildings associated with the former Chicago & Northwestern right-of-way. The building stock of the central business district consists of one- and two-story, predominately brick and frame structures, many of which have been extensively altered with applied synthetic siding and other changes. There are also several vacant lots in the central business district representing buildings that were destroyed by fire or demolished during the twentieth century.

Lena is located in the southeastern area of the historic Cutover region of northeastern Wisconsin. Due to the relatively early date of the depletion of usable timber in this vicinity, the region surrounding Lena became dominated by wheat and later dairy farming during the last quarter of the nineteenth century; as a result Lena developed during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a goods and services center for the surrounding region, as well as a center for agriculture-related industries, most particularly creameries and cheese factories.

**General Features:**

The Mathey Building is a single-storefront, two-bay, two-story building of ornamental concrete block construction. The building has one-over-one double-hung windows in wood sash, which are paired at the second story of the south-facing facade and placed singly elsewhere on the building, and a slightly sloped flat roof behind parapets on the south, east and west sides. The rear half of the primary block has a slightly stepped-down parapet with identical detailing, as discussed below. The building has four one-story additions to the rear of the primary block, which are arranged in a row directly behind one another; one of these is original to the building, while at least one of the remaining three is non-historic.

The primary block's upper reaches are defined by a thin, pressed-metal cornice with slight molded egg-and-dart design which extends around the three parapet sides. The parapet containing the datestone, as described below, projects from this cornice at the center of the south-facing facade. The pressed metal cornice rests upon a single row of nearly square ornamental concrete blocks approximately the same height as the cornice;

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<sup>1</sup> Wisconsin Blue Book [Madison: Wisconsin Legislative Reference Bureau], 1994, 738.

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Section 7 Page 2

Mathey Building, Lena, Oconto County, Wisconsin.

each block bears an image of a circular wreath in relief. The windows of the second and first stories of the primary block are all set under concrete lintels bearing a repeated trefoil motif in relief on a concave panel forming the lower portion of the lintel and immediately adjoining the window sash. Each window also rests upon a plain, smooth concrete sill. A smooth concrete band extends along both the east and west sides of the primary block immediately above the basement windows, which are partially below-ground at present due to the grading of the site and are boarded closed.

The primary block of the building is constructed of elaborately-designed pressed concrete blocks. Most of the blocks are rectangular and approximately eighteen inches long; each block face appears to consist of one large square block, one small square block, and three rectangular blocks of varying length. All of these features have rock-faced texture and are demarcated by lines in the block designed to resemble beaded mortar. Some large plain blocks and some smaller blocks resembling only the largest portion of the block described above appear to have been used in limited areas, particularly around the storefront. The specific features of each facade are described in greater detail below.

**Primary (south-facing) facade:**

As described above, the south-facing facade consists of a single storefront and two second-story bays, each having paired windows. The storefront is flanked to the east by a single pedestrian doorway, described below. The facade is surmounted by a triangular projecting parapet capped with the pressed metal coping found on the remainder of the building cornice; the interior area of the parapet appears to be faced with a rough-textured concrete skim coat. In the center of the triangle is set a rectangular concrete datestone with slightly stylized numerals and a simple raised frame. This parapet rests on the egg-and-dart molding described previously.

The area between the cornice and the second-story windows is unadorned except for a rectangular concrete namestone centered over the windows. This marker bears the name "MATHEY" in large block letters. The second-story windows are unaltered and, with the exception of being paired, match the description given previously of sash, lintel and sill characteristics. The first floor area consists of a three-section, glazed storefront with aluminum covering the transom area and aluminum-clad piers between the glazing sections. This storefront is a replacement postdating 1960; the original design included a central recessed doorway flanked by display windows and surmounted by an awning and transom light.<sup>2</sup> A shallow ledge extends toward the street from the base of the storefront; this has a concrete upper surface and is faced with concrete blocks identical to those described previously as general features of the building. The storefront is adjoined to the south by a pedestrian doorway behind which is the staircase leading to the second floor apartments. The door is surmounted by an original fixed transom light under an ornamental concrete lintel identical to those described above as general features; the door itself is a non-historic replacement. The facade terminates at the basement level on either side of the storefront and door in wide,

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<sup>2</sup> Photograph in time capsule display, 1960, Lena Village Hall chambers.

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Section 7 Page 3 Mathey Building, Lena, Oconto County, Wisconsin

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smooth concrete blocks.

**East-facing facade:**

The east-facing facade is also highly intact, having four evenly-spaced, single, one-over-one, double-hung windows at the second floor level, with lintel and sill identical to those previously described as general features. The interior staircases are marked by two smaller windows, which consist of fixed, single-pane, wood sash with lintel and sill identical to those described previously. The northernmost window of this type has been obscured by plywood. A single first-floor window identical to those at the second story on this facade is sited between the two staircase windows and is aligned with the second-story window above; the rear of the primary block is marked by a pedestrian door identical to that described previously on the south-facing facade, with two exceptions: this door has its original wood panel door, and the transom light has been obscured.

The first of the four additions to the rear of this building is original to the structure, and thus will be described with the primary block. This small addition, one story in height and approximately twenty feet in length and set back from the plane of the primary block, has a pressed-metal cornice and wreath block frieze identical to those described previously on the main block. Initially used for storage, this addition had two windows identical to those described previously; the lintels of these windows are still visible. At an unknown date shortly after the building's construction, the lower portion of this addition received a shallow addition whose facade aligned with that of the primary block. This addition, which may have been built in two stages, was constructed of a combination of the elaborate multi-part blocks described previously as a general characteristic of the building and of plain, rock-faced blocks of the same size. With the exception of this alteration, which is not readily visible from the street, this facade is highly intact.

**West-facing facade:**

The Mathey Building's west-facing facade has undergone somewhat more alterations than the primary and east-facing facades; these alterations, however, do not significantly impact the building's architectural significance resulting from its method of construction. The second story of the primary block at this facade has five windows; the second from southernmost of these is covered with plywood. The southernmost and second-from-northernmost are original and identical in all respects to the second-floor windows described at the east-facing facade; the remaining two windows, however, have been altered. The central window opening, which was historically twice the width of the others on this bay, has a single fixed sash that is slightly shorter than the original window opening as evidenced by the location of the sill. However, the space between the window and the sill has been infilled with concrete block that closely matches that of the balance of the building; as a result it appears likely that this alteration was made at or shortly following the time of construction. The northernmost window has also been foreshortened in an identical manner; this sash, however, has also been replaced with non-historic glazing.

The southerly half of the first story of this facade has been obscured by a non-historic shed-roofed addition that protects the entry to the store at this facade created after the alteration of the storefront, as described previously. This addition will be removed during the renovation currently in

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Mathey Building, Lena, Oconto County, Wisconsin.

progress and discussed below. The rear of the primary block of this facade is marked by two half-length windows, both of which are obscured by plywood.

The west-facing facade of the original one-story addition is flush with the facade of the primary block; this facade also has the cornice and frieze details described previously. This facade had one pedestrian doorway, which is now covered with plywood, and two windows in surrounds identical to but smaller than those described previously. The lintels of these windows are evident; however, the window space is infilled with concrete block identical to that cited previously as a general feature of the building, and they appear to be unbroken with the surrounding blocks. As a result, it is difficult to determine conclusively that these windows represent a non-original alteration. Small, non-historic glass block windows are set into the lower reaches of these presumed historic window openings. Although this facade has undergone alterations, the changes made are of a relatively minor nature and made to a secondary facade; as a result they do not significantly impact the building's overall integrity.

**Rear additions:**

As cited previously, the Mathey Building has three small, one-story additions to the rear of the property; all three are utilitarian, of different construction than the portions of the building described above, and do not contribute to the Mathey building's significance as a fine example of early twentieth century ornamental concrete block construction. The southernmost addition, which adjoins the original one-story addition described above, is of mid-twentieth century construction<sup>3</sup> and has smooth concrete block walls with a tile coping along a flat roof. There is a pair of small, fixed utilitarian multi-pane windows on both the west- and east-facing facades of this addition. The remaining two additions are both faced with pressed-metal siding at their west-facing facades and non-historic vertical board siding at their east-facing facades. The southernmost of these two is front-gabled; it has several ventilators along the west-facing facade and one on the roof and a pedestrian door and small casement window on the east-facing facade. The northernmost addition has a shed roof that slopes from north to south, commencing approximately two feet above the ridge of the adjoining addition's gable; this addition has a single pedestrian door and small ventilator on its west-facing facade, a pedestrian door and casement window under a shallow incised porch at the east-facing facade, and a small hinged loading door with ventilator in the upper portion of the raised shed roof area. The rear of this final addition is also faced with pressed metal siding. As noted previously, these additions do not impact the Mathey Building's architectural significance.

**Interior:**

At the time of this writing, the Mathey Building is undergoing conversion to apartments in accordance with the requirements of the federal and Wisconsin investment tax credit programs applying to income-producing Certified Historic Structures. This nomination is prepared in order to satisfy all federal and state requirements for this program. Prior to beginning construction, the first

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<sup>3</sup> There are no Sanborn Fire Insurance maps or other potential sources of documentation of building additions for Lena; as a result determining dates of construction of additions is not possible.

NPS Form 10-900-a  
(Rev. 8-86)  
Wisconsin Word Processing Format  
(Approved 1/92)

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Mathey Building, Lena, Oconto County, Wisconsin.

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floor of the Mathey Building housed a grocery store and its necessary warehouse areas, which were housed in the rear three additions. The grocery store space included the property's original walk-in safe, stenciled with the name of the original occupant, but had no other visible historic features. The second floor of the Mathey Building is occupied by two apartments, which are original to the building and have predominately original window and door frames, as well as the original staircase and banister leading from the street level to the second floor landing.

**Conclusion:**

The Mathey Building is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under National Register Criterion C as a fine example of the use of ornamental concrete block construction for a commercial vernacular building. The building's character-defining features, particularly the concrete block construction and the ornamentation of the primary facade, lintels and cornice, are highly intact and excellently represent the construction method and materials for which the building is nominated. The alterations to the storefront, while extensive, are of a manner common to architecturally-significant historic commercial buildings and do not significantly impact the building's integrity. The balance of the alterations consist of relatively minor changes to the side facades and rear additions; these also do not adversely impact the building's integrity or architectural significance. The Mathey Building, therefore, retains sufficient integrity to be considered eligible for the National Register of Historic Places due to its architectural significance as a fine example of ornamental concrete block construction, as discussed in Section 8, below.

Mathey Building  
Name of Property

Oconto  
County and State

Wisconsin

### 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)

ARCHITECTURE

#### Period of Significance

1916

#### Significant Dates

1916

#### Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked)

N/A

#### Cultural Affiliation

N/A

#### Architect/Builder

N.C. Netzer Construction Co.

#### Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)



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Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 1 Mathey Building, Lena, Oconto County, Wisconsin.

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**Introduction:**

The Mathey Building is located in the central business district of the village of Lena in northeastern Wisconsin's Oconto County. Built in 1916, the Mathey Building is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under National Register Criterion C as a fine example of the use of ornamental concrete block construction in a commercial vernacular building. The Mathey Building is constructed of pressed-face concrete blocks. This method of construction was used during the early twentieth century and was designed to resemble ashlar stone construction. In addition to the ashlar faced blocks, other blocks used in the construction of the Mathey Building are ornamental in character. These include blocks bearing a wreath imprint, as well as name and date stones of the same material. The character-defining features of this structure are highly intact, with the only notable alterations having occurred at the extreme rear of the building and the storefront, which was not constructed of ornamental concrete block. Although the few historic records available for the village of Lena indicate that ornamental concrete block commercial structures were relatively common in Lena during the period of historic significance, few such buildings are extant today; most appear to have been demolished or have been completely obscured by non-historic materials. The one remaining commercial structure, much smaller than the Mathey building and almost entirely utilitarian in appearance, and the two identified residential structures in the village having similar construction provide some context for the evaluation of the Mathey Building, but do not detract from the building's eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places as the best remaining example of ornamental concrete block construction.

**Historical Background: Village of Lena:**

The settlement which became the village of Lena developed initially in the late 1870s as a small concentration of French-Canadians on the banks of a nearby creek. In 1882, however, the extension of the Chicago & Northwestern Railway along the present rail right-of-way near the center of Lena precipitated both increased immigration to the area and the gradual shifting of the community's nucleus to the location of the present village.<sup>4</sup> Early settlement of the community consisted of significant populations of Yankee, French, and Bohemian immigrants, the latter two groups often coming to the Lena area secondarily after initially arriving in Kewaunee and Manitowoc counties to the southeast. Following the establishment of a post office at the settlement in 1879, the community received the name of Lena from George R. Hall, postmaster at the city of Oconto; Hall is reputed to have named the new post office for his fiancée, Lena McCartney.<sup>5</sup> Development surged in the early 1880s, with the construction of the first hotels, churches and commercial buildings.

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<sup>4</sup> "Village of Lena," Oconto County Centennial 1848-1948 [Oconto: n.p.], 1948, [p. 16].

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Bicentennial Recollections of Oconto County [Oconto: R. Hall Abstract Company], 1976, p. 162.

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Section 8 Page 2

Mathey Building, Lena, Oconto County, Wisconsin.

Although initial settlement was driven by logging concerns, industrial logging in the Lena area of Oconto County appears to have been discontinued at a relatively early date for this region of northeast Wisconsin. The vicinity of the Little River, which begins approximately three and one-half miles northeast of the village of Lena and extends south near the eastern border of the Town of Lena, in which the village is located, was extensively logged until 1871; the area's timber was badly damaged by the Peshtigo Fire of that year, which destroyed much of the timber and many of the small settlements of this region of Wisconsin.<sup>6</sup> As a result, although the earliest settlers may have engaged in relatively small-scale logging, probably harvesting pine that was still standing or salvageable in the years immediately following the fire, significant logging appears to have moved several miles north of Lena by the time of the community's formal development. As a result, Lena emerged primarily as a supply and support center for the vicinity's farmers, who began to move into the area due to the railroad's arrival and the sale of cut-over and burnt-over lands by the federal government and logging firms. As in much of northeast Wisconsin, initial farming efforts focused on subsistence crops and wheat, some varieties of which could still be grown profitably in the region following the crop's demise in the southern portions of the state; many such farmers supplemented farm incomes with cash gained from winter work in the active pineries to the north.<sup>7</sup> Although located near the southeastern limits of what is commonly known as the Northern Wisconsin Cutover, an area infamous for extremely poor farming conditions, the Lena vicinity appears to have enjoyed soil and climate conditions more amenable to farming than may be found farther to the north.

During the first two decades of the twentieth century, the majority of the Lena vicinity's farmers underwent the transition to dairy production, an evolution which was being promoted by state and private farmers' publications of the time and which generally appeared to offer greater potential for profits than did wheat or other crop farming. As a result of this encouragement and the standardization and popularization of silo technology during the period, the Lena area became a predominately dairy-producing region by the mid-twentieth century, by which time the early creameries and cheese factories common to late-nineteenth and early twentieth century northeast Wisconsin had been supplanted by large and modern cheese factories such as that belonging to the Frigo Brothers Cheese Corporation.<sup>8</sup>

As a result of the relative prosperity of the area's farming community, the Lena commercial district also experienced significant growth in goods and services provided during the early twentieth century. By 1909, with a population of 500, Lena offered many of the basic commercial amenities needed in farming areas, including a steam-powered roller mill, a planing mill, two cheese factories,

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<sup>6</sup> W.A. Holt, A Wisconsin Lumberman Looks Backward. [n.p.], [ca. 1938], p. 59.

<sup>7</sup> "Village of Lena", *op cit*.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid*, 17.

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Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 3 Mathey Building, Lena, Oconto County, Wisconsin

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two hardware and agricultural implement dealers, nine taverns and five general stores.<sup>9</sup> The community was incorporated as a village in 1921;<sup>10</sup> however, the village's commercial base began to decline in the mid-twentieth century due to increasing competition from stores in the larger communities of Oconto Falls, Oconto and Green Bay, made more accessible to Lena area customers by auto transport and improved highways. By the end of the twentieth century, Lena's role as an agricultural industry and supply center has been partially supplanted by a role as a bedroom community for the area's larger cities.

**Historical Background: Mathey Building:**

As previously indicated, few primary or secondary accounts pertaining to specific developments in the city of Lena exist in publically-available sources. No street or telephone directories prior to 1961, and no Sanborn Fire Insurance maps, are known to have been published for Lena, and very few historic photographs or written accounts are known to exist. The following account of the Mathey building and of the Netzer concrete block concern are compiled from the most reliable of the available sources.

Anton Mathey came to Lena from Trenary, Michigan, and established himself as a Lena general store proprietor by 1909, and potentially as early as 1908.<sup>11</sup> Although the business's initial location may not be conclusively determined, Mathey appears to have become established in a one-story frame commercial building on the site of the present building by 1915.<sup>12</sup> In March 1916, Mathey announced plans for a new two-story building to be constructed of concrete block, which would be built on the site of his present building. The older building would be moved to the rear of the parcel and, as the announcement claimed, "business will be conducted as usual until the new store is ready."<sup>13</sup> By late June, a foundation one block north of the store site had been completed and the old building moved to that location for continuing use in carrying on the general store trade during the new building's construction. By late August, the new structure was being touted by the local newspaper as "one of the most modern and best equipped of any building of its kind in the county."<sup>14</sup> One month later, Mathey was offering a "Big Showing of Ladies' Coats, Suits and Skirts" in his new

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<sup>9</sup> Polk's Wisconsin State Gazeteer & Business Directory, [Chicago: R.L.Polk & Co.] 1909, p. 528.

<sup>10</sup> State of Wisconsin Blue Book 1993-94 [Madison: Wisconsin Legislative Bureau], p. 738.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*; Oconto County Reporter [Oconto: Reinhart & Gilkey] October 19, 1916, p. 5.

<sup>12</sup> Photograph in "Lena" file, collections of the Oconto County Historical Society, [uncatalogued], dated "ca. 1915."

<sup>13</sup> Oconto County Reporter, *op cit.*, March 16, 1916, p. 5 col.2.

<sup>14</sup> Oconto County Reporter, *op cit.*, August 31, 1916, p.5 col. 3.

building;<sup>15</sup> the store's grand opening was held on November 1, with an attendance of about 600 people, a coffee demonstrator, and souvenirs.<sup>16</sup>

Like most small-town general store proprietors of that era, Mathey carried the most diverse range of goods possible in his small store, a limitation which precipitated the new building's construction. As became increasingly common for rural general stores during this era of growing rural prosperity and disposable income, Mathey's store attempted to accommodate both his customers' most prosaic needs and their desire to be in fashion with regard to their dress and their household goods. This increasingly awkward combination may have also resulted from the heightened expectations of rural residents, who had become familiar with luxury goods through the new department stores in the larger cities and through mail-order catalogs. Prior to construction of the new building, Mathey's store carried "General Merchandise, Dry Goods, Ladies' and Gents' Furnishings, Hats and Shoes and Rubbers, Hosiery and a complete line of Groceries;" Mathey also offered to "buy and sell Butter and Eggs, Veal and Poultry, and other Farm Produce the year round for cash, or in trade."<sup>17</sup> Two small advertisements during this period also illustrate this juxtaposition: one announces the arrival of "a fine assortment of plaid and striped silks in our new fall stock which has just arrived," while another on the same page invites farmers to "call in and have us demonstrate the new type churn we now have in stock."<sup>18</sup> One of the new features of Mathey's store following the new building's construction was the "Little Paris Shop," advertised shortly after the building's grand opening, as offering "a nice line of Christmas Jewelry" and "Lavallieres and all kinds of articles in Jewelry ranging in price from 25¢ to \$3.00."<sup>19</sup>

Mathey also appears likely to have carried some stock of agricultural implements prior to construction, a valuable business that was substantially expanded following the new building's inauguration by moving the agricultural implements operation into an adjoining frame building [non-extant]. Within a few years of the construction of the new building, Mathey became an implement dealer for International Harvester, with his brother Marvin operating the quasi-independent implement dealership. By approximately the 1930s both businesses were being operated by Mathey's sons and their wives, who divided the operation functionally without establishing any known formal arrangements. Peter and Agatha Mathey operated the general store, which continued to function in virtually the same manner, while John and Stella Mathey operated the implement dealership. The open lot fronting the implement dealership building also became the

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<sup>15</sup> Oconto County Reporter, *op cit.*, September 28, 1916, p.5 col. 7 and 8.

<sup>16</sup> Oconto County Reporter, *op cit.*, November 9, 1916, p.5 col. 3.

<sup>17</sup> Oconto County Reporter, *op cit.*, October 19, 1916, p. 5.

<sup>18</sup> Oconto County Reporter, *op cit.*, August 17, 1916, p. 5 col. 1 and 2.

<sup>19</sup> Oconto County Reporter, *op cit.*, November 23, 1916, p. 5, col. 7&8.

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Section 8 Page 5 Mathey Building, Lena, Oconto County, Wisconsin.

site of a popular farmers' and stock market held every month.<sup>20</sup> Both businesses persisted until 1963, after which time the Matheys disposed of both concerns and the Mathey Building became a grocery store, a use which continued until 1997.

**Historical Background: Netzer Concrete Block Construction Company:**

Although N.C. Netzer was a prominent Lena businessmen during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, little is conclusively known about Netzer's concrete block endeavor. It is known that concrete block construction was one of several of Netzer's business interests, which also included a general store, roller mill, land speculation and farming. Netzer was born in 1857 in Cooperstown, Wisconsin, and emigrated to the Lena area in the early 1880s.<sup>21</sup> Having spent several years in logging by that point, Netzer appears to have been well established in Lena from an early date; he is generally credited with the construction of several of Lena's earliest commercial buildings, including a tavern, the first hotel building, and the first general store.<sup>22</sup> By 1898, Netzer had established the Lena Roller Mills, located next to the railroad tracks near the center of Lena, and offering in conjunction "Feed, General Merchandise, Farm Machinery, Wagons, Buggies, and Sleighs."<sup>23</sup> Between 1900 and 1920 Netzer was variously identified as the proprietor of a grocery, a general store, an agricultural implements dealership, and the mill;<sup>24</sup> it is likely that all of these businesses were being pursued concurrently out of the mill buildings or in buildings near the mill site. Netzer also engaged in land acquisition and sales; by 1912 Netzer had two farms to his name in the Town of Lena, totaling 240 acres, and a smaller parcel adjacent to the village's first plat had become Netzer's Subdivision.<sup>25</sup>

Netzer's concrete yard was located on a forty-acre parcel one mile north of the Village of Lena; Netzer acquired this parcel, and apparently started the concrete block construction business, between 1905 and 1912.<sup>26</sup> By 1912, two buildings had been constructed on the site [both non-extant]

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<sup>20</sup> Interview with Dale Netzer, nephew of Peter Mathey, March 5, 1998.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Dale Netzer, grandson of N.C. Netzer, March 5, 1998.

<sup>22</sup> "Village of Lena", *op cit.*

<sup>23</sup> Caldwell & Porter's Abstract Atlas of Oconto County [Oconto: Caldwell & Porter], 1898, n.p.

<sup>24</sup> Polk's Wisconsin State Gazeteer & Business Directory, *op cit.*, 1909.

<sup>25</sup> Standard Atlas of Oconto County, Wisconsin [Chicago: George A. Ogle & Co.] 1912, p. 9.

<sup>26</sup> Plat Book of Oconto County [Rockford, Illinois: Hunter & Van Vakenburgh], 1905, n.p.; Standard Atlas of Oconto County, Wisconsin, *op cit.*

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and the property had become identified as a "Cement Yard."<sup>27</sup> In a 1909 biography, Netzer is identified as manufacturing a "cement product, consisting of double-staggered air space cement building blocks, silo blocks, tombstones, monuments, burial vaults, sewer pipes, tiles, bricks, window and door caps, baluster posts, and concrete sidewalks, in which he employs eighteen men."<sup>28</sup>

Although Netzer apparently never incorporated or created any formalized organization for the concrete block construction concern, he is widely remembered by local residents as the contractor of most, if not all, of the concrete block buildings in the Lena vicinity, including the Mathey Store. Ornamental concrete block construction is also commonly referred to as "Netzer Block" in the Lena vicinity, a term which indicates both the concern's relatively prolific construction and its apparent monopoly of the market. Netzer is reputed to have employed groups of workers both at the cement yard, where the blocks were made, and at the construction sites, where prepared materials would be assembled according to prepared designs.<sup>29</sup> As evidenced by extant buildings attributed to the Netzer concern, Netzer's block-making equipment appears to have been purchased from Sears, Roebuck & Co., as many of the blocks bear ornamental designs illustrated in Sears catalogs of the period.<sup>30</sup> Although it is likely that commercial buildings such as the Mathey Building were designed by a foreman or other supervisor, it is possible that some of the houses attributed to Netzer reflect Sears designs as well. Netzer's concrete block business is believed to have continued in some form into the early 1930s; after Netzer's death in 1934 the business appears to have been discontinued.<sup>31</sup>

**Ornamental Concrete Block Construction:**

The Mathey Building is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C as a fine example of the use of ornamental concrete block in the construction of a commercial vernacular building. As such, the building embodies the distinctive characteristics of a method of construction, as defined under National Register Criterion C. The Mathey building employs a combination of several types of ornamental concrete block designs, thus representing a fully developed vernacular manifestation of this building material, frequently used in Northeast Wisconsin between approximately 1905 and 1930. .

Although concrete and concrete-like materials had been used sporadically and on extremely limited bases in portions of the eighteenth and nineteenth century United States, use of concrete as a primary building construction material began to develop in earnest following the invention of a

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<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Oconto County Enterprise, 13 July 1909.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Dale Netzer, *op cit.*

<sup>30</sup> Pamela H. Simpson, "Blocks Like Rocks." Building Renovation , Spring 1995, p. 53.

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Dale Netzer, *op cit.*

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cast-iron machine for making hollow concrete blocks at the turn of the century, with the first patent for such a machine being granted to Harmon S. Palmer in 1900.<sup>32</sup> Palmer's machine, as well as those marketed subsequently, employed a metal mold box with a hinged door operated by a lever. The concrete block maker simply shoveled the concrete mixture into the box, tamped down the contents, pulled a lever or set of levers and removed a wet but cohesive concrete block, which could then be laid out to dry and cure before use. The cement mixture used included Portland cement, gravel or coarse sand aggregate, and a small amount of water, providing a relatively dry and heavy mixture which relied on the coarse aggregate for most of its compressive strength. The type of aggregate used depended on what was naturally available at the location, with glacial deposit and even river sand and pebbles used where such materials proved easiest to access; cement yard sites were frequently selected because of the presence of such materials on the property. This versatility accounted for much of concrete block's early proliferation, since only the equipment and the Portland cement must be purchased, the rest of the materials deriving from what was naturally available on the chosen site for the cement yard.

According to one account, two men working in concert could make 80 to 100 blocks per day.<sup>33</sup> Although ornamental concrete blocks were by no means a mass-produced item in the modern sense of the term, the speed and low cost of their production, as well as the durability of the finished product, conspired to make the new concrete block machines a desirable alternative to traditional masonry. Additionally, since concrete blocks were relatively large, they were in many respects easier to lay than brick; concrete blocks' standardized dimensions also made both construction and estimation of the amount of materials needed easier than with stone of any type or dimension. Concrete blocks were also highly fireproof and required little maintenance, factors which also proved highly desirable to rural people, for whom fire was a constant threat and for whom lumber and timber, with their high maintenance requirements, were frequently the primary affordable building material.

Although Palmer began mass-producing and marketing his block-making machines by 1902, in less than five years numerous competitors flooded the market with similar machines. As one author noted in 1906, only four years after the block-making machine's introduction, "more than a thousand individuals [are] engaged in their manufacture."<sup>34</sup> One of the most prominent sources of concrete block-making equipment was the Sears, Roebuck Co., which capitalized upon its economies of scale and extensive catalog base among rural consumers to provide thousands of high-quality, lower-priced machines during the two decades following the ornamental concrete block's invention.

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<sup>32</sup> Simpson, *op cit.*, p. 49.

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> S.B. Newbury, "Hollow Concrete Block Construction in the United States." Concrete and Constructional Engineering, Vol.1 no.2, May 1906, [n.p.]

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Beginning with one model, offered in 1905 for just under one hundred dollars,<sup>35</sup> by the spring of 1908 the Sears catalog devoted eight pages to concrete block-making machines and hardware.<sup>36</sup> By 1917, purchasers of "The Wizard" concrete block-making machine paid only \$57.50; they could also choose from one of six standard rock-face designs, one of which was identical to that found on the Mathey Building, and at least six ornamental designs, one of which was identical to the wreath blocks found on the Mathey Building.<sup>37</sup> Blocks with differing designs were created by removable and interchangeable face plates, over which a finer mixture of Portland cement and a fine aggregate would be ladled and tamped before adding the coarser mixture making up the balance of the block. Specialized block-making machines were also available to make round and half-round columns, rectangular piers, classical-style bases and capitals for columns, and lattice for obscuring the underside of a residential porch; in 1908 buyers could obtain a complete concrete porch set for under sixty dollars, with choice of two styles of capital molds.<sup>38</sup> Other specialized modifications allowed for smaller blocks to be made in the standard-size machine, while additional machines could provide blocks for bay windows, gables, and silo segments.

The ability to create blocks with quasi-stone detailing and derivative classical motifs appears to have significantly enhanced the popularity of ornamental concrete block during the first two decades of the twentieth century, despite the disapproval of most architects of the era. Since the cost of production of an ornamented block was only increased over the cost of a plain block by the initial cost of the face plate, which could be reused hundreds of times, ornamentation was available at relatively low cost. The material proliferated among the general public despite the fact that such blocks would not be visually mistaken for real stone, brick or carved detailing, and, in some architects' opinions, constituted a "cheap and vulgar imitation" of natural materials.<sup>39</sup> Although some individuals, particular farmers, bought concrete block-making machines for their own use, the availability of these machines and the low cost of operation encouraged numerous rural and small-town entrepreneurs to engage in building houses, stores and utilitarian outbuildings for others. Most buildings constructed of ornamental concrete block, as a result, represented vernacular or builder's interpretations of residential and commercial building forms and styles, although plan books such as Stickley's 1909 Craftsman Homes and some Sears home catalogs did provide designs for concrete block residential structures.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Simpson, *op cit.*, p. 50.

<sup>36</sup> J. Randall Cotton, "Ornamental Concrete Block Houses." Old House Journal, Vol. XII No. 8 (October 1984), p. 180.

<sup>37</sup> Simpson, *op cit.*, p. 53.

<sup>38</sup> "Ask OHJ." Old House Journal, March/April 1994, p. 24; Cotton, *op cit.*, p. 182.

<sup>39</sup> Quoted in Simpson, *op cit.*, p. 51

<sup>40</sup> Cotton, *op cit.*, p. 180.



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Highly popular for all types of modest buildings in the 1910s, during the 1920s concrete block use on houses and commercial buildings nationwide appears to have declined, although the number of utilitarian structures, such as garages, steadily increased.<sup>41</sup> By the early 1930s, however, the use of ornamental concrete block was in steady decline, due to the dual pressures of the Depression's dearth of new construction and the introduction of new design standards and new technology. In 1917, F.J. Straub patented the cinder block, a concrete product made with a lightweight aggregate and proving both fireproof and capable of having nails driven into it.<sup>42</sup> Since the earlier ornamental concrete blocks weighed over 150 pounds each, causing numerous problems in the erection of walls made from this material, the prospect of blocks that could be readily lifted by an individual was a significant technological improvement. By 1926, Straub's company made over 70 million cinderblocks per year; by the following decade numerous competitors were manufacturing and marketing similarly light, durable products.<sup>43</sup> Also in the 1930s, the technology of producing concrete blocks underwent a significant evolution, resulting in increasing quantitative capacity to make blocks, but also eliminating the ornamental aspects of the product. Block-making machines that automatically vibrated eliminated the hand-tamping that had previously occupied much of the production process time; at the same time, such machines could make more than one block simultaneously with a minimum of human intervention. However, as one architectural historian articulates the resulting progression:

The 'backyard' phase of concrete block construction was over by the end of the 1930s. In its place was a fully automated and expanding industry. The same factors that had given rise to the early production of concrete block -- standardization, cost-cutting, practicality -- meant that ornamental forms were no longer needed. The automated system was geared to producing the plainface block we know today.<sup>44</sup>

The evolution from ornamental to plainfaced block also stemmed from the combination of limited commercial construction and the rise of the precepts of modernism in building design during the 1930s. With few stores and houses being constructed, demand for the older materials faded, while many of those building types that did experience growth during the 1930s, such as gas stations, eschewed the older-looking ornamental motif in favor of Streamlined and International Style designs, to which the new plainfaced blocks were well suited. As a result, by the beginning of the building boom following World War II, the once-popular ornamental concrete block had been entirely replaced in new construction of all types by plainfaced concrete block and other newer materials.

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<sup>41</sup> *ibid.*, p. 181.

<sup>42</sup> Simpson, *op cit.*, p. 53.

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *ibid.*

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Mathey Building, Lena, Oconto County, Wisconsin.

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As may be seen, ornamental concrete block construction represents both a construction material and aesthetic popular in the early twentieth century and a significant technological development in the history of synthetic building materials. Widely popular and widely used during a period of substantial population and material wealth growth, particularly in small towns and rural areas, ornamental concrete block provided one of the first low-cost, maintenance-free, fireproof materials available to the general public. Due to these characteristics and the ability to incorporate applied ornament into the design, ornamental concrete block became a material of choice for homes, commercial buildings and utilitarian structures throughout the first two decades of the twentieth century. Additionally, the technology and materials employed in the creation of ornamental concrete blocks directly led to the creation of the modern cinderblock and the automated machinery which made the cinderblock a standard and ubiquitous material in the construction of all types of buildings during the mid- and late-twentieth century.

**Context:**

The Mathey Building is the most elaborate commercial concrete block building in the Village of Lena, and is one of only four known extant buildings in the village constructed of this material. During the period of the Mathey Building's construction, several ornamental concrete block buildings were constructed in Lena; historic photographs indicate several one- and two-story buildings, some with elaborate ornamentation, standing in the village during that time.<sup>45</sup> However, almost all of these appear to have been demolished or entirely obscured by non-historic additions. Only one other extant commercial building in the village of Lena is constructed of ornamental concrete block; this building, located at 213 West Main Street, is a one-story front-gabled building with a wood parapet facade. This building's front, or northernmost portion, is constructed of ashlar-designed blocks similar to those found on the Mathey Building; the rear portion of the building is constructed of rock-faced and plain-faced blocks. The building has no other ornamental details. As a result, the building at 213 W. Main Street may be seen to provide the only direct context for the Mathey Building as an architecturally significant ornamental concrete block commercial building; the building at 213 W. Main Street represents a smaller, simpler and less ornamented example of such construction and thus does not affect the Mathey Building's eligibility.

The two remaining ornamental concrete block buildings extant in the village of Lena are both residential structures, and thus represent a significantly different manifestation of ornamental concrete block construction than does the Mathey Building. One, located at 124 W. Main Street, is a two-story cube with large pyramidal gablet and full porch. The house is constructed of rock-faced concrete blocks, with a single row of wreath-motif blocks identical to those found on the Mathey Building at the base of the gablet. The porch was enclosed with poured concrete and three-over-one windows, probably within two decades following its construction, and received a non-historic Colonial Revival door surround in more recent years. The other residential structure is an American Foursquare located at 524 W. Main Street; this building is also constructed of rock-faced blocks and has a line of the identical wreath-motif blocks encircling the building immediately under

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<sup>45</sup> D. Netzer historic photograph collection, copies on display at Farmer's Bank, Lena.

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the eaves. The porch of this house has also been enclosed and is covered with non-historic siding. Although both houses may be considered to provide some context for the evaluation of the Mathey Building's eligibility as an architecturally significant example of the use of ornamental concrete block construction, both buildings represent a significantly and substantially different building form than the Mathey Building, and thus do not affect the eligibility of the Mathey building as an example of the use of this building material and method on commercial building forms.

**Conclusion:**

The Mathey Building is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under National Register Criterion C as a fine local example of a commercial building constructed of ornamental concrete block. As such, the Mathey building represents a building material and method which flourished during the early twentieth century, providing a relatively quick and inexpensive means of construction, particularly in small towns and rural areas, and leading to the development of technology necessary for the production of one of the primary building materials of the mid-and late twentieth century. The Mathey Building represents the largest and most elaborate ornamental concrete block building extant in the village of Lena, and is one of only two extant commercial buildings in the village constructed of this material. As a result of its integrity, its context, and the significance of the building method and material embodied in its construction, the Mathey Building is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

**Archeological Potential:**

There is no known evidence of prehistoric or early historic habitation of the Lena village site; the settlement developed on this site only following the construction of the railroad at this location in 1882. The Mathey building site has been used for commercial purposes since approximately the turn of the century; the building's construction is likely to have severely disturbed any older archeological materials.

Mathey Building  
Name of Property

Oconto  
County and State

Wisconsin

### 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:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

Oconto Co. Hist. Society

### 10. Geographical Data

Acree of Property Less Than One Acre

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 1/6 4/1/7B/5/0 4/9/7/7/8/5/0  
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	Della Rucker	date	3/24/98
organization	Rucker Historical Research	telephone	920 432-7044
street & number	PO Box 204	city or town	Green Bay
city or town	Green Bay	state	Wisconsin
		zip code	54305

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Major Bibliographical References:

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Interview with Dale Netzer, nephew of Peter Mathey and grandson of N.C. Netzer, March 5, 1998.

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Boundary Description:

The nominated property is defined as follows:

Lot 5, Block 1, Plat of Maple Valley, Oconto County.

Boundary Justification:

The above boundaries incorporate the entire parcel legally associated with the nominated property and incorporate the lands historically associated with the building's industrial functions. The boundaries as cited exclude properties to the north and west that have no historic association with the property's historic function, and exclude a house currently owned by the same persons which is not directly associated with the property being nominated.

Mathey Building

Oconto

Wisconsin

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.)

<b>name/title</b>	Lyle Gerondale	<b>date</b>	3/24/98
<b>organization</b>	N/A	<b>telephone</b>	920 829-6354
<b>street&amp;number</b>	PO Box 126	<b>zip code</b>	54139
<b>city or town</b>	Lena	<b>state</b>	Wisconsin

**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.

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**Photo #1 of 10**

MATHEY BUILDING  
Lena, Oconto County  
Photo by D.G. Rucker, October 17, 1997  
Negative at State Historical Society of Wisconsin  
View looking north.

**Photo #2 of 10**

MATHEY BUILDING  
Lena, Oconto County  
Photo by D.G. Rucker, October 17, 1997  
Negative at State Historical Society of Wisconsin  
View looking northwest.

**Photo #3 of 10**

MATHEY BUILDING  
Lena, Oconto County  
Photo by D.G. Rucker, October 17, 1997  
Negative at State Historical Society of Wisconsin  
View looking northwest.

**Photo #4 of 10**

MATHEY BUILDING  
Lena, Oconto County  
Photo by D.G. Rucker, October 17, 1997  
Negative at State Historical Society of Wisconsin  
View looking east.

**Photo #5 of 10**

MATHEY BUILDING  
Lena, Oconto County  
Photo by D.G. Rucker, October 17, 1997  
Negative at State Historical Society of Wisconsin  
View looking northeast.

**Photo #6 of 10**

MATHEY BUILDING  
Lena, Oconto County  
Photo by D.G. Rucker, October 17, 1997  
Negative at State Historical Society of Wisconsin  
View looking south.



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**Photo #7 of 10**

MATHEY BUILDING

Lena, Oconto County

Photo by D.G. Rucker, October 17, 1997

Negative at State Historical Society of Wisconsin

Detail, east-facing facade.

**Photo #8 of 10**

MATHEY BUILDING

Lena, Oconto County

Photo by D.G. Rucker, October 17, 1997

Negative at State Historical Society of Wisconsin

Detail, east-facing facade.

**Photo #9 of 10**

MATHEY BUILDING

Lena, Oconto County

Photo by D.G. Rucker, October 17, 1997

Negative at State Historical Society of Wisconsin

Detail, interior stairway.

**Photo #10 of 10**

MATHEY BUILDING

Lena, Oconto County

Photo by D.G. Rucker, October 17, 1997

Negative at State Historical Society of Wisconsin

Detail, second floor .