

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

PHO 676 152

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RECEIVED MAR 29 1979  
DATE ENTERED MAY 14 1979

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC Tester and Polin General Merchandise Store  
AND/OR COMMON Riverside Gallery

**LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER 215 North Main Street  
CITY, TOWN Alma VICINITY OF Third  
STATE Wisconsin CODE 55 COUNTY Buffalo CODE 011

**CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL
			<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY
			<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
			<input type="checkbox"/> PARK
			<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
			<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
			<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
			<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

**OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME John T. & Joan H. Runions ✓  
STREET & NUMBER 215 North Main Street  
CITY, TOWN Alma VICINITY OF Wisconsin STATE 54610

**LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Buffalo County Courthouse  
STREET & NUMBER 407 2nd Street South  
CITY, TOWN Alma STATE Wisconsin 54610

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE Wisconsin Inventory of Historic Places  
DATE 1977  
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS State Historical Society of Wisconsin  
CITY, TOWN Madison STATE Wisconsin 53706

# 7 DESCRIPTION

## CONDITION

EXCELLENT

GOOD

FAIR

DETERIORATED

RUINS

UNEXPOSED

## CHECK ONE

UNALTERED

ALTERED

## CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE

MOVED DATE \_\_\_\_\_

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### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Old Post Office building is a two-and-a-half story red brick building. When it was built in 1861, there was one main room on the first floor, a basement, and bedrooms opened off a main hallway on the second floor. Five semicircular arched windows with full arches dominate the first floor facade while 6/6 double-hung sash windows with segmental arches correspond on the second story. These window types are also on the sides of the building.

Early in the history of the building one of the first-floor windows was expanded to provide a front door. A small smoke house was built adjacent to the main block at this time. In 1881, a major addition was made to the rear of the building. This added two smaller rooms to the main floor, more bedrooms to the second story, and the lattice work porch on the side of the addition.

Between 1894 and 1900 the oriel window on the south side was constructed. When the Post Office leased the building in 1928 it altered the windows on the sides of the building: two of the seven windows on the north side and three of the 10 windows on the south side were squared and bars were added while one window on each side was blocked up completely. In 1932, the dormer on the front of the house was added, and a shed was attached to the smoke house. Also at that time, the third floor was divided into rooms. In the late 1950's the ground level porch was removed because it lay within the highway right of way. Pillars supporting the balcony were replaced with diagonal braces at that time.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD		AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW				
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)		
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		association with		
				locally important		
				personage		

SPECIFIC DATES 1861

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Tester & Polin General Merchandise Store is significant to the history of the Alma area as a representative building from the city's short lived boom period and as a focus of the commercial life of the area during that time. During the years of prosperity and growth following the settlement of Alma, this building housed two mercantile firms which served Alma and river commercial interests as well as Alma's hinterland. The people who owned and operated these businesses played important roles in the development of both Alma and northern Buffalo County.

In 1861, Gottlieb Iberg erected this brick building to serve as both dwelling house and dry goods store. John A. Tester and Peter Polin purchased the building in 1866. They continued and expanded Iberg's establishment. Tester and Polin were driving forces in the development of Alma. Their store served as a focal point of early Alma's bustling commercial life, and consequently was an important meeting place. During this period Alma was the entrepot for northern Buffalo County, it also served an important booming and logdriving center at nearby Beef Slough, and, before Minnesota-side cities became ascendant because of the railroad, it was an important river port. "The late Lyman J. Clafin, one of the first settlers... called them [Tester and Polin] the fathers of the upper part of the country, without whom the settlement would have languished and have been crippled for many years."<sup>1</sup> Peter Polin was the county treasurer and post master while John Tester served as the deputy county treasurer and in 1883 was elected to the state assembly. Martin Polin, brother of Peter, purchased the business and became the first mayor of the newly chartered city of Alma in 1885.

The dry goods store is characteristic of the red brick construction of several of the early buildings of Alma, a typical upper Mississippi River town. Because it was built quickly in anticipation of Alma's boom, the form of the building was dictated more by its projected function rather than by pretention to style. Although unsophisticated, the vernacular style of the building is simple and graceful; it achieves harmony and is aesthetically pleasing. The building has been altered over the years but it retains its fundamental integrity.

Since the turn of the century the building has been employed as a post office, city library, dentist office, restaurant, antique shop and retail store. Presently, the building is occupied by an art gallery, frame and antique shop. The owners also have an artist studio and make their home in six of the second floor rooms. They are interested in obtaining a grant.

### Footnote

<sup>1</sup>L. Kessinger, History of Buffalo County (Alma, Wis.: Buffalo County Press, 1888), p.612.

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Biographical History of La Crosse, Trempealeau and Buffalo Counties, Chicago, 1892.  
 Curtis-Wedge, Franklin. History of Buffalo and Peppin Counties, Winona, Minn., 1911.  
 Havighurst, Walter. Voices of the River. New York, 1964.  
 Kessinger, L. History of Buffalo County. Alma, Wis., 1888.  
 Sanborn-Perri. Insurance Maps. Alma, Wisconsin 1889-1931.

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY .22 acre

QUADRANGLE NAME Alma, Wis. - Minn.

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:24000

UTM REFERENCES

A 15 586320 49081400

B               

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C               

D               

E               

F               

G               

H               

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

north 47 feet of Lot #4 and all of lot #5 in Block #7 of original plat

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Patricia A. Marks, Preservation Assistant

ORGANIZATION

State Historical Society of Wisconsin

DATE

12/19/78

STREET & NUMBER

816 State Street

TELEPHONE

608-262-2970

CITY OR TOWN

Madison

STATE

Wisconsin 53706

# 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL     

STATE     

LOCAL X

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

*Richard Harney*

TITLE Director, State Historical Society of Wisconsin

DATE

3/22/79

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

5.14.79

ATTEST:

*Charles W. King*  
 KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

5.11.79

*Lucy B. Franklin*  
 CHIEF OF REGISTRATION