

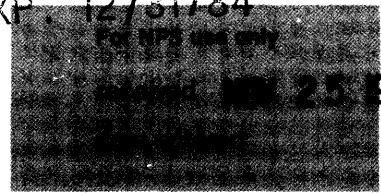
OMB NO. 1024-0018

EXP. 12/31/84

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

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 J.W. Benn Building (Medford Post Office)

and/or common Gruener's Bakery

2. Location

street & number 202-204 South Main Street not for publication

city, town Medford vicinity of Congressional District

state Wisconsin code 55 county Taylor code 119

3. Classification

<b>Category</b>	<b>Ownership</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Present Use</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name George Gruener

street & number 207 East Clark

city, town Medford vicinity of \_\_\_\_\_ state Wisconsin 54451

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Taylor County Courthouse

street & number 224 South Second Street

city, town Medford state Wisconsin 54451

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

Wisconsin Inventory of  
title Historic Places

has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1976  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records State Historical Society of Wisconsin

city, town Madison state Wisconsin 53706

## 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Facing south, the two-story cream-brick J.W. Benn building, with a concrete and dirt-floored full basement and a sloping, flat roof, has a limestone facade, which is designed in the classical Beaux-Arts style. This building is flanked to the east by the August Benn building and to the west by a parallel pedestrian alley leading to a public stairway known as the "Angel Flight," which joins the residential and commercial parts of Medford. The long rectangular building, like the neighboring buildings on the north side of South Main Street, is set against the town's hillside.

The finely detailed front facade, made of smooth-faced limestone is the single architectural element which expresses Beaux-Arts Classicism. The two-story building is clearly articulated in a symmetrical composition which begins on the rusticated first story. A pair of entries is placed on either side of the large central rectangular storefront window. The right entry leads into the first-floor offices. Both doorways are identical: the original rectangular glazed door, capped by a semi-circular transom window, is framed by a pair of three-quarter engaged Ionic columns on pedestals which support an entablature. This relatively simple entablature consists of an architrave with ogee molding, a dentil frieze, and an ogee molded cornice. Above each transom window between the capitals, a festoon of leaves, ribbons and flowers stand in relief, while a glass globe light is set above each door in the soffit of the architrave.

The smooth-faced coursed second-floor facade exhibits three evenly-spaced rectangular windows, whose sills are formed by the cornice of the same length. However, the two outside cornices are each supported by a pair of foliated brackets.

Ornamentation and detailing in a richer Beaux-Arts Classical manner is reserved for the second-floor entablature and parapet wall. A continuous bead and reel molding introduces the dentil frieze that features prominently the projecting nameplate of J.W. Benn; this is supported on seven small and simple brackets and decorated to each side by acanthus scrolls. Above the dentil frieze, an elaborate and pronounced cornice is supported by ten brackets with acanthus scrolls. Above this cornice a second frieze, or parapet wall, is left plain except for the central projecting panel decorated with a coupled festoon of bellflower and ribbons. Finally, this frieze is capped by a bead and reel molding. Although rich in classical detailing and composed of many individual elements, the Beaux-Arts Classical facade of the J.W. Benn building is kept strictly ordered and symmetrical by a subordination of every part to the larger overall design.

A small one-story cement block addition has been built at the rear (north) of the building, where the remainder of the lot extends up the hill. The building's upper floor, formerly rooming quarters, is presently occupied by law and dental offices. The north and west walls, of cream brick, are pierced by numerous windows of different sizes, some of which are coupled. All window openings are capped with relieving arches and many contain their original glass. The rear wall exhibits only three double sash windows due to the lower floor addition.

(continued)

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National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

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J.W. Benn Building, Medford, Taylor County, Wisconsin  
Continuation sheet

Item number 7

Page 1

The upper floor is reached through the front eastern stairway that ascends straight to the second-floor rectangular hallway from which one enters the six offices or one bathroom. The oak wainscoting and single Mission style bannister, the maple moldings and doors with original opaque glass, and the rectangular skylight, are all intact. A fire-door, at the top of the stairs on the east wall, connects the building to its neighbor, the August Benn block.

Except for the post office counters and postal boxes that are now gone, the first floor still retains most of its original interior with some modifications made to accomodate a subsequent tavern and bakery. Although painted, the original tall oak wainscoting is intact and complemented by a white marble baseboard and a pressed hardstone floor, the outline of which defines the original post office layout. A wooden wall has been added to separate the bakery's kitchen and equipment from the front display area that is cluttered with glass cases and furniture. The ceiling shows recent water damage.

## 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/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

**Specific dates** 1912<sup>3</sup> **Builder/Architect** Unknown

### Statement of Significance (In one paragraph)

The John W. Benn building (1912) is architecturally significant as a locally rare example of the Beaux-Arts style of architecture. Located in the center of Medford's commercial area on the north side of South Main Street, the John W. Benn block represents this county seat's only building designed purely in the Beaux-Arts Classical style.

### Architecture

The John W. Benn building was constructed as Medford's Post Office and stood proudly to represent the only example of architecture designed in the Beaux-Arts style. Built in 1912 when this style was used nationwide to embellish many public structures, the Benn building is a rare, unusually fine, and well preserved example of this style. Public buildings such as libraries, museums, schools, or post offices in the Beaux-Arts Classical style expressed a community's permanence and high self-esteem. As the county seat in a relatively sparsely populated region of north central Wisconsin, Medford at the turn of the century was by definition a symbol of governmental order and civic importance to both state and Taylor County residents.

In its correctness and adherence to architectural principles that guide the application of the Classical Orders, proportions, and symmetrical facade elements, the Benn block in Medford represents on a local level one of the finer Beaux-Arts Classical public buildings in Wisconsin

For two decades after the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, Beaux-Arts Classicism bestowed the importance of either wealthy business interests or civic pride. Often grand in scale and formal in composition, this style suited well the sense of dignity and leadership that would have been felt by the residents of Medford, the Taylor County seat. Clearly the John W. Benn building's location at the major downtown intersection is significant, yet its architectural expression perhaps more strongly indicated the prominence attached to the Post Office. The Benn building's strictly symmetrical facade, rusticated first floor, pairs of Ionic columns which mark the doorways, rich vocabulary of classical ornament, and finely detailed entablature combine for an expression of leadership, order, dignity and civic pride.

### Historical Background

Although it has since been used for a tavern and a bakery, the John W. Benn building owes its historical interest to its function as the Medford Post Office and its association with a locally recognized citizen, Postmaster John W. Benn (1876-1955), for whom the building is named. The combined commercial and residential block was erected by Postmaster Benn to be used as the Medford Post Office, a purpose fulfilled from its completion in 1912

(continued)

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

Medford Area Historical Album (1874 - 1974) (Medford, 1974)

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property less than 1.0

Quadrangle name Medford, WI (7.5')

Quadrangle scale 1: 24,000

UMT References

A 

1	5	7	0	8	8	6	0	5	0	0	1	4	2	0
Zone			Easting				Northing							

B 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

C 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

D 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

E 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

F 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

G 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

H 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

### Verbal boundary description and justification

The nominated property is described thusly: north 25' of Lot 11, Block "B", of McCartney and Whelen Addition to the City of Medford Original Plat, Medford, WI.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state \_\_\_\_\_ code \_\_\_\_\_ county N/A code \_\_\_\_\_

state \_\_\_\_\_ code \_\_\_\_\_ county \_\_\_\_\_ code \_\_\_\_\_

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Steve Sennott

organization Northwest Regional Planning Commission date 4/5/83

street & number 302 Walnut Street telephone 715/635-2197

city or town Spooner state 54801

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

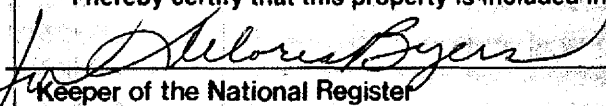
The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

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 

title Director, Historic Preservation Division, SHSW date Nov. 21, 1983

For NPS use only	
I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register	
	Entered in the National Register date <u>12/22/83</u>
Keeper of the National Register	
Attest:	date
Chief of Registration	

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Inventory—Nomination Form**

J.W. Benn Building, Medford, Taylor County, Wisconsin

Continuation sheet

Item number 8

Page 1

For NPS use only

received

date entered

until the time when the larger and currently used Post Office was opened in 1938. The building was completed during Benn's term as Medford postmaster, which began on January 26, 1909 and ended on November 29, 1913, when he was replaced by President Wilson's appointee.<sup>1</sup> Aware of the local importance attached to the county seat's post office and to his position as postmaster, John Benn selected an appropriate architectural style that expressed the public function of this building.

John W. Benn was born September 19, 1876 in Germany and came to Medford with his family in 1884 at the age of seven years. After his appointment to the postal service had ended, Benn served in another public office as Register of Deeds. He died in Wausau in 1955.<sup>2</sup>

Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Medford Area Historical Album (1874-1974), (Medford, 1974) p. 179.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Steve Sennott from Margarite Putnam, niece of John W. Benn, dated October 4, 1982.

<sup>3</sup> Medford Area Historical Album (1874-1974), (Medford, 1974) p. 179.