

10/26/82

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only  
received OCT 26 1982  
date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic T. C. Smith House

and/or common The Cobb House

2. Location

street & number 865 Main Street \_\_\_\_\_ not for publication

city, town Lake Geneva \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity of \_\_\_\_\_ congressional district \_\_\_\_\_

state WI code 55 county Walworth code 127

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 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"/> religious
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Maureen Marks

street & number 865 Main Street

city, town Lake Geneva \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity of \_\_\_\_\_ state Wisconsin 53147

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Walworth County Courthouse

street & number Courthouse Square

city, town Elkhorn \_\_\_\_\_ state Wisconsin 53121

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Wisconsin Inventory of Historic Places has this property been determined eligible? \_\_\_\_\_ yes  no

date 1974 \_\_\_\_\_ federal  state \_\_\_\_\_ county \_\_\_\_\_ local

depository for survey records State Historical Society of Wisconsin 816 State Street

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
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		date _____

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

Located at the fringe of Lake Geneva's commercial area, the T. C. Smith House today retains its character as a vernacular interpretation of Victorian architectural styles. The exterior blends Greek Revival and Italianate elements. The house's interior is particularly noteworthy: the remarkably preserved first floor rooms contain decorative details expressing the spirit of the High Victorian Italianate style.

The clapboard-sided two-story building is basically rectangular in plan. A one-and-one-half story kitchen wing is at the rear, and a one-story bay protrudes from the east facade. Pediments break the hipped roof on each facade. A large portico supported by four piers frames the central entry, which has double doors, pilasters, and a rectangular overlight. Most windows are two-over-two double-hung sash. These Greek Revival elements, however, are tempered by Italianate accents including window trim, the bay, and bracketing over a side porch and under the cornices.

The present porch was added in 1943. The original porch is reported to have stretched around two sides of the house,<sup>1</sup> but no historical photograph survives. Ornate brackets fitting beneath the cornices are currently being repaired, as are shutters for all windows.

The house's interior has undergone little change since its construction. On the first floor a central hall opens to a living room, library, and a family dining room to the east and to a parlor and a formal dining room to the west. These rooms are large. The living room, parlor, and the formal dining room each measure 18' x 20' and have 11' ceilings. The rear wing houses the kitchen, a laundry room, and the servants' quarters. The second floor contains four bedrooms and a bathroom.

Period features include a parquet floor with inlaid Greek key (hall), two carved marble fireplaces (parlor and living room), pocket doors (parlor, library, and living room), and a kitchen floor laid with maple and walnut flooring in alternating sequence. Doors, cabinets, and trim throughout the first floor are wood-grained. Graining applied direct to the plaster walls simulates birch wainscoting capped with marble mouldings in the hall and staircase. The black walnut staircase has a turned balustrade and an intricately carved newel post.

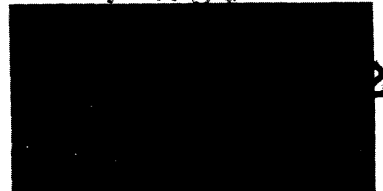
Five miniature paintings, each approximately 3" x 4", are found on paneling and plaster walls. These oil paintings depict figures and landscape scenes representative of the pastoral character of the Lake Geneva surroundings. Several additional geometric and foliate designs decorate paneling and built-in cabinetry on the first floor.

The T. C. Smith House is located on a major thoroughfare at the fringe of Lake Geneva's business district. While there are other 19th-century dwellings in the vicinity, pressure for commercial uses constitutes some threat to the house. In fact, a recent appraisal established the value of the land as three times greater than that of the building.<sup>2</sup>

(Continued...)

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7. DESCRIPTION

With the exception of an ornate cast-iron fence surrounding the property, the historical landscape has failed to survive. Recent site work has added modern aggregate concrete pavement around the house. There is a small, older barn on the property. This common, board-and-batten building is being converted to commercial use. No significance is claimed for either the landscaping or the outbuilding.

Restoration is in process. Heavy accumulations of paint were removed from the exterior with a chemical stripper. Clapboard siding was repaired/replaced as necessary. It is noteworthy that details were respected in this phase of the restoration; original cut nails were used to re-attach the siding. The new paint scheme is reminiscent of Victorian-Italianate (c. 1880's) schemes, both in colors selected and in the coloration pattern. The base is now stained brick red, while trim and accents are set off in brown, ochre, and mustard. Brackets and shutters remain to be repaired to complete the exterior.

Interior restorative work is of high quality. Period wallpapers have been applied in the parlor and the formal dining room. Marble flooring and a sink have been rejuvenated in the second-floor bath. Wainscoting in the kitchen has been grained to simulate quarter-sawn oak.

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NOTES:

1. "Cobb's Stately Pillared Home Retains its Original Elegance," The Regional News (Lake Geneva), July 17, 1975.
2. Appraisal report on 865 Main Street, Lake Geneva, prepared May 9, 1980 by Gustav Dreyer, M.A.I. Copy in possession of property's owner.

## 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Association with significant person

**Specific dates** 1879/1880<sup>1</sup> (Built) **Builder/Architect** Unknown

1880-1888 (Association with significant person)

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The T. C. Smith House has long been valued by Lake Geneva residents as a prominent reminder of the time when the town took its present shape. The home of one of the town's pioneer businessmen, the T. C. Smith House retains the elegance of its original design. Its remarkably preserved interior is a unique example of the High Victorian decorative arts.

Architecture. Though it was to be overshadowed by the high style villas built around Geneva Lake by Chicago's wealthy later, at the time of its construction the T. C. Smith House was considered "the very handsomest place in the village."<sup>2</sup> A review of surveys made in Lake Geneva over the past several years indicates that the house is a good representative of the vernacular interpretation of revival styles favored by midwestern builders in the mid-to-late nineteenth century.

Art. The miniature landscape paintings which decorate the public rooms of the T. C. Smith House constitute a rare example of the late-Victorian decorative arts as expressed by the locally prominent artist John Bullock. A native of England, Bullock settled in Lake Geneva in 1872. Bullock operated a photography studio there, but he is best remembered for his landscapes. These serve as a visual record of the natural beauties of the resort community in the late-nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup>

Bullock's work remains treasured by the community. Individual paintings are held by several area residents; a collection is on permanent display at the Lake Geneva Municipal Building. Bullock may have been commissioned to decorate other area mansions. We know he decorated the ballroom of the steamer Lucius Newberry which operated on Lake Geneva from 1875 to its sinking in 1891. But knowledgeable Lake Genevans know of no building other than the T. C. Smith House in which Bullock's work survives as an integral part of the decoration.<sup>4</sup>

Association with significant person. Timothy Clark Smith was born in December, 1817, in Cortland County, New York. He migrated to Milwaukee in 1842 where he was engaged in the retail dry goods business. He arrived in Lake Geneva in 1844, eight years after original settlement of the village. There Smith opened a general merchandise store in partnership with N. S. Donaldson, his former employer. In 1851, Smith became sole proprietor of the store and in 1865 began specializing in hardware.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to his hardware business, Smith was involved in several real estate transactions which were to shape the growing town's development in the later decades of the nineteenth century. Smith was one of the organizers of the State Line and Union Railroad Company which, after several aborted attempts, arranged Lake Geneva's link to the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad in 1871, thereby opening the town to the resort and tourist trade which was to become Lake Geneva's hallmark.<sup>6</sup> At the time of Smith's death in 1888, he was the longest-established businessman in Lake Geneva.<sup>7</sup>

(Continued...)

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

- History of Walworth County, Wisconsin. Chicago: Western Historical Company, 1882.  
James Simmons, Annals of Lake Geneva 1835-1897. Lake Geneva: The Herald Publishing Company, 1897.  
 Albert Clayton Beckwith, History of Walworth County, Wisconsin. Two volumes; Indianapolis: B.F. Bowen and Company, 1912.

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property less than one acre

Quadrangle name Lake Geneva, Wis.

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

### UMT References

A 

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4	7	1	6	3	0	0
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 Zone Easting Northing

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### Verbal boundary description and justification

Lots Seven (7) and Eight (8), except the East One (1) foot of Lot Eight (8), in Block Twenty-six (26) in the Original Plat of the Village, now City, of Lake Geneva, being a part of Section Thirty-six (36) in Township Two (2) North, Range Seventeen (17) East,

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries in the City of Lake Geneva.

state	code	county	code

state	code	county	code

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title John D. Rolling, Historical Consultant

organization The Alexander Company date August 1982

street & number 403 West Washington Avenue telephone (608) 257-7506

city or town Madison state Wisconsin 53703

## 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 Richard Murray

title Director, State Historical Society of Wisconsin date 10/19/82

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

Entered in the  
National Register

date 11/30/82

William Byers  
Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

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8. SIGNIFICANCE STATEMENT.

As befit his prominence in Lake Geneva's commercial life, Smith was also involved in local public affairs. He served as the village postmaster from 1853 to 1861 and as village president in 1869.<sup>8</sup>

Built in 1879/1880 to replace Smith's earlier house on the same site, the T. C. Smith House remained in the ownership of Smith's descendants (the Cobb family--name acquired through marriage) until 1980. It is today one of the most visible survivors from the period of the town's fluorescence.<sup>9</sup>

NOTES:

1. References to the construction of the T. C. Smith House appear in the following editions of The Geneva Lake Herald: September 19, 1879; October 31, 1879; November 21, 1879; May 7, 1880; May 14, 1880; June 11, 1880.
2. The Geneva Lake Herald, May 7, 1880.
3. On Bullock, see History of Walworth County, Wisconsin (Chicago: Western Historical Company, 1882), p. 889; Portrait and Biographical Record of Walworth and Jefferson Counties, Wisconsin, Containing Biographical Sketches of Prominent and Representative Citizens of the County (Chicago: Lake City Publishing, 1894), p. 163.
4. Interview with Alice Denison Hackett, May 6, 1982.
5. Biographical material on Timothy Clark Smith is from History of Walworth County (1882), pp. 897-898, 911; James Simmons, Annals of Lake Geneva 1835-1897 (Lake Geneva: The Herald Publishing Company, 1897), pp. 93-94, 113, 137, 140, 189; Albert Clayton Beckwith, History of Walworth County, Wisconsin (2 vols.; Indianapolis: B. F. Bowen and Company, 1912), I, pp. 190, 345.
6. Beckwith, I, p. 190.
7. Obituary for T. C. Smith in The Lake Geneva Herald, December 28, 1888.
8. Simmons, p. 69; Beckwith, I, pp. 345-346.
9. For continued local interest in the preservation of the T. C. Smith House see "Cobb's Stately Pillared Home Retains Its Original Elegance," The Regional News (Lake Geneva), July 17, 1975 and Alice Hackett, Heritage Walks (Lake Geneva: The Committee of Heritage Walks, 1976), p. 27.