

1388

**United States Department of Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See 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

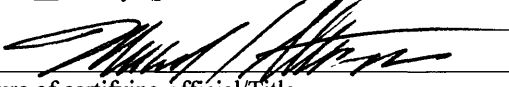
historic name Brandon Village Hall and Library
other names/site number Ellis Block

2. Location

street & number	117 East Main Street	N/A	not for publication
city or town	Brandon	N/A	vicinity
state Wisconsin	code WI	county Fond du Lac	code 039
			zip code 53919

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.)


Signature of certifying official/Title

11/21/07
Date

State Historic Preservation Officer - Wisconsin

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

Brandon Village Hall and Library

County Fond du Lac

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

1.9.08

for

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(check as many boxes 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	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.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources is previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

GOVERNMENT/city hall

EDUCATION/library

COMMERCE/TRADE/specialty Store

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

EDUCATION/library

RECREATION & CULTURE/museum

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Late Victorian

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

Foundation stone

walls brick

roof asphalt

other wood

Narrative Description

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

Brandon Village Hall and Library
Name of Property

County Fond du Lac
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)

Education

Politics/Government

Period of Significance

1897-1957

Significant Dates

1897, 1913

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Hutter, Joseph (builder)

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

Name of Property

County and State

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:

X State Historic Preservation Office

- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property less than one acre

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

1 16 356460 4843780
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	Carol Lohry Cartwright, Consultant	date	October 13, 2006
organization	Prepared for the Brandon Public Library	telephone	262-473-6820
street & number	W7646 Hackett Rd.	zip code	53190
city or town	Whitewater	state	WI

Brandon Village hall and Library
Name of Property

County Fond du Lac
County and State

Wisconsin

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.)

name/title	Deborah Stark, Village Clerk	date	October 13, 2006
organization	Village of Brandon	telephone	920-346-5415
street&number	P. O. Box 385	zip code	53919
city or town	Brandon	state	WI

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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Section 1 Page 1

Brandon Village Hall and Library
Brandon, Fond du Lac County, WI

DESCRIPTION

The Brandon Village Hall and Library was constructed for use as a commercial building in downtown Brandon, a small village located in western Fond du Lac County, a large county in east-central Wisconsin. Brandon's downtown is intersected by State Highway 44, an important secondary highway connecting communities in east-central Wisconsin with northern Wisconsin. State Highway 44 is designated as Main Street as it runs through Brandon and it is the most important street in the village.

Downtown Brandon consists of about one and one-half blocks of primarily historic commercial buildings. Dominating the downtown is the multi-storefront Foster Block, which sits on the north side of Main Street, just to the east of the former village hall. The Foster Block was historically occupied by numerous retail businesses, but the storefronts have been enclosed and converted into apartments. Two buildings attached to the west side of the Foster Block have retained storefronts, but one has a significantly remodeled modern brick front. The rest of Brandon's downtown is largely composed of nineteenth and twentieth century one story retail buildings, most of which still house commercial businesses.

The Brandon Village Hall and Public Library sits on a long and narrow parcel between the large Foster Block on the east and a residential parcel with a house that has been converted into a business. Also on the parcel and directly behind the building is the current village hall and fire station, built in the twentieth century. This newer building is not included in this nomination and the boundary has been defined to exclude it. The result is a very tight boundary around the historic building.

The topography of the building's site is flat and because it is a downtown building with a very tight boundary, it is not landscaped. In front of the Brandon Village Hall and Public Library is a sidewalk that runs from the curb and gutter to the building's main elevation. There is a step that runs the entire width of the main elevation and leads to the entrances into the building. The main entrance step has been widened to create a sloping handicapped accessible ramp that leads into the library. A modern wrought-iron railing sits along the edge of this ramp.

A narrow asphalt-paved alley separates the Brandon Village Hall and Public Library and the other buildings of the north side Main Street streetscape. The west elevation of the Brandon Village Hall and Public Library sits right next to the lawn of the neighboring property. Climbing up the west elevation of the building is some "volunteer" vegetation that obscures some of the wall surface. The historic village hall abuts the newer village hall at the northwest corner, and the rest of the parcel is paved for a driveway and parking area.

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Brandon Village Hall and Library
Brandon, Fond du Lac County, WI

Exterior

The Brandon Village Hall and Public Library is a two-story building constructed in 1894, known originally as the Ellis Block. The building is classified in Wisconsin as Commercial Vernacular in style or form. Its window and cornice details suggest the late Italianate style of commercial architecture, but its details are not elaborately stylistic. The building has a low-pitched gable roof topped with a frame-constructed bell tower added in 1897. The walls are constructed of tan colored bricks made in Oshkosh, a larger city just northeast of Brandon. Each elevation will be described below.

The main elevation rises to form a parapet above the roof in a very narrow variation of a "boomtown" front. Framing the wall are two long brick piers that run up to the parapet. The parapet, itself, is decorated with several rows of brick corbelling that simulate a bracketed cornice with a row of dentils. A row of sawtooth brick corbelling makes up the storefront cornice between the two floors. There are three symmetrically placed openings in the second story that are decorated with raised segmentally-arched hoodmoldings and filled with modern, recently added, single light sashes.

The storefront has had some alterations from its original appearance, but still retains the original placement of openings and many historic details. Historic photographs show that the original storefront had four openings. At the west end, there was an entrance leading up to the second floor. It was filled with a four-panel wood door topped with a transom. This entrance is extant but the wood door has been replaced with a modern steel and glass door and the transom enclosed with a raised wooden panel.

The storefront, itself, sits to the east of the second floor entrance and consists of a slightly off-centered main entrance flanked by slightly asymmetrical display windows with enclosed transoms and paneled bulkheads. The show windows are flanked by brick piers. The storefront entrance is extant and retains its transom, but there is a modern steel and glass entry door. East of the entrance is a fairly original display window opening that probably had a glazed transom, but has been enclosed with a raised wood panel that matches the raised wood panel of the bulkhead below the window.

West of the storefront entrance is a display window with an enclosed transom and bulkhead that matches the show window east of the entrance. On the historic photograph, this window appears to have originally been a large entrance into the storefront, which was a harness shop from the time the building was constructed in 1894 to around its conversion to a library in 1913. One photograph shows

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that this entrance was probably enclosed with a large utilitarian wood door or doors, and had a glazed transom.

The east elevation of the building is relatively plain. There are two segmentally-arched openings in the second story that are filled with modern single-light sashes. Two openings below these windows have been enclosed with brick; and a third, larger, opening closer to the main elevation has been filled with a pair of modern single-light sashes. The opening is segmentally-arched and the arch is partially filled in to accommodate these windows, which were recently added.

The west elevation of the building is similar to the east elevation, except it has no lower story windows. The second story has two segmentally-arched openings filled with recently added modern single-light sashes. There are three more symmetrical segmentally-arched openings on the second story of the rear elevation that are filled with recently added modern single-light sashes.

The first story of the rear elevation has one large opening that has been partially enclosed. This large opening was added in 1897 for the historic Brandon fire department when most of the building was converted into a village hall. After the fire department moved to the newer building next door, the space was converted into a village garage and the opening was covered with a garage door. In 1973, when the library expanded into this area, the opening was partially enclosed and converted into a handicapped accessible entrance. Recently, this area has been covered with vertical vinyl siding and the entrance is covered with a modern steel door. A large flat header, probably added in 1897, when the entrance was first cut into the wall, is extant over this opening.

Bell Tower

The bell tower was placed on the roof of the building in 1897, when most of the Ellis Block was converted to a village hall and fire station. The tower has a narrow pent roof topped with a weather vane. The wide overhanging eaves of the tower are "supported" by scroll brackets at the corners. The structure around the bell consists of vertical corner posts with attached horizontal board along with vertical boards that run from the base to the roof. The structure sits on an enclosed base covered with clapboards. It was recently painted and is a local symbol of Brandon.

The inscription on the bell reads, "E. W. Vanduzen Company, Cincinnati Buckeye Bell Foundry." George W. Coffin founded the Buckeye Bell Foundry in Cincinnati in 1837. In 1866, E. W. Vanduzen became a partner with Coffin in 1866, and the Vanduzen name remained with the company until its

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Brandon Village Hall and Library
Brandon, Fond du Lac County, WI

demise in 1950. The date on the bell reads 1893 or 1898, but since the bell tower was built in 1897, it is likely that the date is 1893, and may be a patent date.¹

Interior

First Floor

The first floor of the Village Hall and Library is filled with a large room used for the Brandon Public Library and an enclosed staircase along the west wall that leads to the second floor. Originally, the building was constructed as a combination commercial building and cold storage locker. The front of the current library space was the site of a harness shop, the only commercial business located in the building during its history. But, it is not clear whether the entire first floor was used for the harness shop originally, or if some of the space was used for the cold storage business, primarily located on the second floor. In 1897, when the village of Brandon purchased the building, a wall was built to separate the rear section of the first floor, where the fire department was located, from the front section, which remained a harness shop until around the time the space was converted into a library in 1913.

The interior of this space, today, has been modernized several times for the library, the most significant remodelings occurring in 1913, 1975, and the late 1990s. The layout of the building is typical of a small library. Bookshelves dominate the walls and much of the interior spaces. One of these bookshelves is an original oak unit from the 1913 library. A small reading area sits near the main entrance, and around the middle of the library, there is a small, modern, main desk for the librarians, and several computer stations. The rear of the space contains bookshelves and a small kitchen area.

The interior finishes of the library consist of a dropped modern acoustical ceiling with fluorescent light panels, a combination of modern wallboard and older plaster walls, and carpeting covering the floor. The floor is probably a narrow wood floor similar to an exposed part on the second floor. Most interior doors are modern and have modern thin "ranch" style trim. The kitchenette features a small bank of modern cabinets with a sink.

There is one door that leads into a closet that has some historic features that probably date from the original or pre-library period of the building. This door has four raised panels with a trim surround of fluted boards connected at the top by two different blocks. One block has a bull's eye pattern while the other block has a raised leaf pattern. It is probable that the trim, and perhaps the door itself, may have

¹ "Index to Chimes by Vanduzen," The Guild of Carillonners in North America web site, www.gcna.org.

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been salvaged from other areas of the building. Both the door and trim have a painted grained finish, and the door has simple period hardware.

Second Floor

The second floor was originally the location of the cold storage locker, then converted for use as the Brandon village hall and fire department. It is now the location of the Brandon Historical Society. This floor can be reached by way of the enclosed staircase running along the west side of the building, and by another enclosed staircase at the northwest corner of the building that was added in the late 1990s. When the second staircase was added, a modern wall was installed at the back of the second floor space that created a small landing at the top of the stairs. A modern version of a "period" balustrade, with spool and spindle posts, spans this landing. The landing and upper part of the staircase has features that match the large historical society room behind the modern entrance in the rear wall.

The second story is divided into a large meeting room and a separate office, created as two meeting rooms/band practice room in 1897, when the building was converted into a village hall. The large room is now used for historical society displays, meetings, and society work. The room has very thick walls, presumably filled with cork or some other insulating material, making the window wells very deep. There are a mixture of historic and modern finishes in the room, including a modern acoustical paneled ceiling with fluorescent light panels, modern carpeting, and plaster exterior walls with a third of the walls covered with painted wainscoting.

The trim around exterior windows, as well as the double wood paneled door that is the entrance into the old village office, is fluted and connected by rectangular blocks with bull's eye trim. It is typical of trim found in many buildings of the late nineteenth century. Because this trim sits around the entry into the old village office, constructed in 1897, and around the exterior windows, it is probable that the window trim was also added in 1897, along with the wainscoting. Cold storage rooms would have been utilitarian spaces filled with large amounts of ice and straw or sawdust, along with unprocessed farmers' produce. It is likely that the decoration in the room would not have been added until it was converted into meeting room space. The closet in the northeast corner of the meeting room retains all of the room's historic features, including a narrow board wood floor and the original ceiling.

The old village office space was originally a smaller meeting room that was converted into an office some time in the twentieth century. Its current decoration suggests the mid-twentieth century. The entry doors are made up of two large recessed panels and while they are painted and trimmed on the

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meeting room side, on the village office side, they are dark-stained and trimmed with simple, dark-stained, flat wood moldings. An entrance in the west wall of the office leads to the staircase on the west side of the building; and its two-panel door is similar to the office entry doors with dark-stained trim that is also repeated around the windows of the south wall.

The walls of the office area are plastered but the wainscoting consists of single, dark-stained, recessed panels, unlike the traditional wainscoting seen in the large meeting room. The ceiling of the office is made up of the same acoustical panels as the meeting room and there is carpeting covering the wood floor. Along the east wall of the office is a bank of large built-in cabinets, also from the mid-twentieth century, and at the center of the room is a mid-twentieth century counter with built-in cabinets under a Formica-style top. This room is currently used for storage.

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SIGNIFICANCE²

The Brandon Village Hall and Library is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under criterion A. It is significant for local history in the areas of Education and Government because the activities held in this building were, over a long period of time, associated with the important growth and development of Brandon's local government and with one of its important educational institutions, the public library. Beginning as a commercial building, the Ellis Block, it soon became the location of the Brandon village government and its fire department. In the early twentieth century, the building became the location of the Brandon Public Library, one of the most important public educational institutions in the village. During the twentieth century, this building was the most important government building in the village, housing the village offices and the library, two historic institutions at the center community life in Brandon. The period of significance begins in 1897, when the building was acquired for use as the village hall, and extends to 1957, the end of the historic period.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Brandon History Review

Brandon is a village in the Town of Metomen, Fond du Lac County, Wisconsin, settled by Yankee immigrants in 1844-1846. The Town of Metomen was officially organized in 1846 and included the later-established Towns of Alto and Waupun. Although R. W. Pride built a structure in the location of Brandon in 1849, there were no significant improvements in the village until 1855, the year before a rail line was built. The rail line was the Milwaukee and Horicon Railroad, which was later merged into the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul Railroad (Milwaukee Road).³

The railroad line spurred development in what was known as "Bungtown." William Lockin, a pioneer who owned a large tract of land, changed this rather unflattering name to Brandon in honor of several settlers who came from Brandon, Vermont. Lockin laid out Brandon's original plat in 1855, and shortly afterward, several buildings were constructed, including a small hotel and general store that

² This footnote relates to the dates indicated in the Section 8 form. The date of construction of the building is from a newspaper search of *The Brandon Times*, January-June, 1894; 7 October 1897, 27 March 1913; and "Index to Chimes by Vanduzen," The Guild of Carillonneurs in North America web site, www.gna.org.

³ *History of Fond du Lac County, Wisconsin*, Chicago: Western Historical Company, 1880, pp. 755-756; Maurice McKenna, ed., *Fond du Lac County Wisconsin Past and Present*, Chicago: S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1912, pp. 262, 264-266; "Fifty Years of Growth in Brandon," *Brandon Times*, 2 February 1899, p. 2.

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also had a small meeting hall. Other buildings, including a grist mill, another hotel, more stores, and several residences followed. Interestingly, a residence was built on the site of this building in 1856 (it burned in 1888). The rapid growth of the original plat resulted in additions to the plat and more houses were built in Brandon. By the later nineteenth century, Brandon had grown into a thriving small village.⁴

The Yankee settlers brought to Brandon their cultural institutions. A Congregational Church was formed in 1857, and, in 1861, the Methodist Church was moved from the north part of the Town of Metomen to Brandon. A Masonic Lodge was formed in 1863, and the Odd Fellows Lodge formed in 1864. A public school was established in 1856 and, in 1864, a two story school with four rooms was constructed. German immigration to the area was represented by German Lutheran and German Methodist churches established in the 1870s.⁵

In 1878, Brandon officially organized as a village and remains under that form of government today. During the late nineteenth century, the village grew slowly. No significant industry grew up in the community despite its railroad link, and the village remained largely dependent on its commercial economy for survival. In 1912, a review of the businesses in the community paints a picture of Brandon as it had been during the late nineteenth century and as it would remain for much of the twentieth century, that of a community largely reliant on the local farm trade. The businesses of the time included the typical: general, hardware, drug, and grocery stores; along with blacksmiths, harness makers, and a bank. Brandon's farm economy base included a small flour mill, a small sawmill, grain elevators, a lumberyard, farm implement shops, and a creamery. The Ellis Block was constructed for the farm economy as well, originally built as a cold storage building meant to store farm produce.⁶

Sanborn-Perris Fire Insurance Maps show little change in Brandon's downtown between 1900 and 1924. The maps indicate that most of the commercial district was housed in what is now the 100 Block of Main Street with another small section of buildings along Commercial Street. The most important commercial building in the downtown was the two-story Foster Block, a multi-storefront building taking up most of the north side of Main Street. In 1900, the south side of Main Street was taken up by a group of mostly two-story frame buildings. By 1924, these buildings had been replaced by one-story brick blocks; more substantial buildings, but actually smaller in size.⁷

⁴ "Fifty Years of Growth."

⁵ *History of Fond du Lac County*, p. 756; McKenna, pp. 264-266.

⁶ *History of Fond du Lac County*, p. 756; McKenna, pp. 266.

⁷ Sanborn-Perris Fire Insurance Maps for Brandon, Wisconsin, 1900, 1908, 1914, 1924, on file in the Archives of the Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin.

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This configuration of Brandon's downtown has remained until today. After the Great Depression and World War II, Brandon remained a stable community, one still based on agriculture, but in the later twentieth century, the downtown, like many small town downtowns, began to decline when the development of shopping malls and "big box" discount stores in large towns drew shoppers away from small businesses in Brandon. An example of this change in downtown Brandon is the conversion of the Foster Block from storefronts to residential housing.

Despite these changes, Brandon's downtown retains some important community businesses and this building: the former village hall and fire department, the library, and, currently, the local historical society. The historic Brandon Village Hall and Library, although not the largest building in the downtown, was its most important; for much of the twentieth century, it was the most important public building in town. The local community has such a great interest in and fondness for this building that the funds were quickly raised for the completion of this nomination.

Ellis Block

The Ellis Block had its genesis with Charles R. Ellis, one of Brandon's most prominent nineteenth century businessmen. Ellis was the son of George R. and Mary E. Lawrence Ellis, who ran a successful farm near Rochester, New York. The Ellis' had two sons, John and Charles. Charles was born sometime in the early 1850s, around the same time that George Ellis purchased some land in Dodge County with the intent on moving west. Unfortunately, George died shortly afterward and only his wife and sons came to Wisconsin. Soon after her arrival, Mary Ellis married Stephen Moul, a local farmer; later, the family moved to Waupun, just southeast of Brandon.⁸

Charles R. Ellis grew up in the Waupun area and graduated from Waupun High School. He learned telegraphy and worked at this profession in several communities, including Brandon, before completing an apprenticeship as a tinner, or hardware fabricator. After working in hardware stores in other communities, Ellis returned to Brandon in 1881 and opened his own hardware store. Ellis remained in Brandon and expanded his business interests beyond the hardware store. One of these businesses resulted in this cold storage and commercial building. He had no children from his two

⁸*Portrait and Biographical Album for Fond du Lac County Wisconsin*. Chicago: Acme Publishing Company, 1889, pp. 711-712.

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marriages. He was known at his death for having built the first “modern” Queen Anne style house in Brandon and for the cold storage building that had been converted to the city hall and library.⁹ The business deal that resulted in the construction of the Ellis Block was “big” news in Brandon. In January of 1894, the *Brandon Times* reported that Charles Ellis had purchased a 33 foot lot from F. R. Foster. The newspaper announced that Ellis would be constructing a “cold storage plant” of solid brick. The paper went on to note that a “cold storage is an institution we have needed here.”¹⁰

The construction of the new building on Main Street, especially one that might boost the farm economy of the community, was followed closely in the newspaper. An unusual start in the middle of winter was noted just the next week, and the following week, the newspaper printed a copy of a notice from the *Fond du Lac Commonwealth* that contractor Joseph Hutter of that city was to construct the building. In February, the paper mentioned that Ellis was receiving his brick for the building from Oshkosh, and in March, it was reported that the foundation of the old building on this site (burned in 1888) was being removed in preparation for the new building foundation.¹¹

By the end of April, 1894, the framework on the Ellis Block had been completed and, by the end of May, the masons had finished the brickwork. It was also announced that Charles Ellis was hauling ice for the new building. In the June 7, 1894 edition of the *Brandon Times*, Charles Ellis announced that he was now open for cold storage business. He stated he would pay “the highest market price paid in cash for butter and eggs. [And] will also take butter and eggs from our merchants for storage.” Three weeks later, the *Brandon Times* noted that the cold storage building was in “full running order,” and urged merchants and others to take advantage of this business.¹²

It was not announced in the newspaper that the Ellis Block also had a harness shop on the first floor of the building. But, historic photographs and Sanborn-Perris Fire Insurance Maps show that this shop must have been installed shortly after construction was completed. While the harness shop thrived, the cold storage business was apparently a failure, since after only three years, Ellis sold the building to the village of Brandon to be converted into a village hall and fire department.

Village Hall

⁹ *Ibid.*, “Ellis Was Active in Business Life Here Years Ago,” *Brandon Times*, 21 December 1939; article on file in the Brandon Public Library, Brandon, Wisconsin.

¹⁰ *Brandon Times*, 4 January 1894, p. 4.

¹¹ *Brandon Times*, 11 January 1894, p. 4; 18 January 1894, 1 February 1894, p. 4; 8 March 1894, p. 4.

¹² *Brandon Times*, 26 April, 1894, p. 4; 31 May 1894, p. 4; 7 June 1894, p. 4; 28 June 1894, p. 4.

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In October of 1897, *The Brandon Times* reported that the Ellis Block was being renovated for the village hall. The rear of the first floor (behind the harness shop) was being converted into the engine room for the fire department, which necessitated the construction of a large door in the rear wall. The second floor would be divided into two rooms, a smaller room for meetings (probably the office area) and a larger room for other government activities and practice space for the local band.¹³

The newspaper also reported that the village was considering putting a bell on the building. The article humorously commented that it was not sure what this bell could be used for, but one suggestion was that it be used to “call the village daddies to morning and evening prayers.” Another suggestion was a “curfew bell and the clerks in the stores would not object to an eight o’clock bell every evening that would give the signal to turn out the light and close the doors of the places of business.” Despite the humor some saw in putting a bell on the new village hall, a bell was, indeed, erected on the building.¹⁴

Sanborn-Perris Fire Insurance maps for Brandon for 1900 and 1908 show that the first floor of the building was divided in half, the engine room for the fire department in the rear and the harness shop in the front. The second story was indicated as a “band room.” In 1914, the map shows the same uses except that in the front of the building, the harness shop had been replaced by a library, reflecting the change that had been made to the building in 1913 when Brandon’s library was established.¹⁵

Like many communities, a local women’s club was largely responsible for the founding of the library. In Brandon, it was the Thursday Club, organized in 1899 to promote social and intellectual culture. In 1904, the club became part of the nation-wide organization of Federated Women’s Clubs and added history, drama, music, literature, and current events to their intellectual activities. Promoting intellectual and civic activities in Brandon resulted in the club’s effort to form a public library.¹⁶

The *Brandon Times* reported that by December of 1912, the Thursday Club and other library supporters has convinced the village board to provide space in the first floor of the old Ellis Block, now the village hall, for the library. The village also agreed to fix up the room, adding shelves and a new entry door; and to furnish the space with a stove, gas fixtures, light and fuel without cost to the library. Quickly, the library was underway, and in March of 1913, the *Brandon Times* reported that the

¹³ “Village Hall,” *Brandon Times*, 7 October 1897, p. 1.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Sanborn-Perris Fire Insurance Maps for Brandon, Wisconsin, 1900, 1908, 1914; on file in the Archives of the Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin.

¹⁶ “Promoted Library,” *Brandon Times*, 27 September 1962, article on file in the Brandon Public Library, Brandon, Wisconsin.

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library was “fast filling up with books and periodicals. . .[and that] the state organizer is here to get the library in shape.” The diversity of the area was shown in the languages of the books the library housed: English, German, and Dutch. A natural science collection of birds, animals, insects, and minerals was also donated to the library.¹⁷

On March 27, 1913, the library officially opened and hours for patrons were posted as Monday, Wednesday, and Saturday afternoons and evenings. Elsie Weinstock was the first librarian and for many years the Thursday Club continued to add books and materials to the library. The Sanborn-Perris map of 1924 finally identified the building as the fire department, library, and “city” (village) hall. It is possible that by this time, the small meeting room on the second floor had been fitted up as an office for the village, thus bringing the name change on the map.¹⁸

Although there may have been some updating of the library facility between 1913 and 1960, the first documented remodeling effort took place in 1961. During library week in April, the Brandon library celebrated in newly remodeled and redecorated quarters. The *Brandon Times* called the building a “Brandon Landmark,” and remarked that the building was now “attractive and well kept on the inside.”¹⁹

In 1973, the library, which until this time still only occupied the front half of the first floor, underwent a major remodeling and expansion. Beginning in May of that year and completed in October, the library expanded into the rear of the first floor, which, by that time, was not being used for the fire department but as a village garage. The rear wall was removed, doubling the size of the library and a new physical plant was installed. The large entrance in the rear wall, placed there when the fire department used the building, was made a handicapped-accessible entrance into the library. The remodeling also added a bathroom, new work areas, modern woodwork, lowered ceilings, and additional shelving and other library features.²⁰

In 2001, the village hall moved to a new location right behind this building, and the second floor of the historic Brandon Village Hall and Library became the location of the Brandon Historical Society. Few physical alterations were made to accommodate that change, and the village office area has not been

¹⁷ “Brandon to Have a Free Public Library,” *Brandon Times*, 5 December 1912, p. 4; “Village Board Proceedings,” *Brandon Times*, 12 December 1912, p. 5; “Library Notes,” *Brandon Times*, 13 March 1913, p. 4.

¹⁸ *Brandon Times*, 27 March 1913, p. 4; “Promoted Library;” Sanborn-Perris Map for Brandon, Wisconsin, 1924, on file in the Archives of the Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin.

¹⁹ “This Brandon Landmark,” *Brandon Times*, 4 May 1961, p. 3.

²⁰ “Brandon Library Holds Open House,” *Waupun Leader News*, 31 October 1973, p. 8.

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remodeled. More recently, the enclosed staircase was added at the rear of the library floor for a new entrance to the second floor, and new windows replaced old sashes in the building without significant alteration of the openings. The handicapped entrance has been covered with vinyl siding and a new, modern door, as well. But, despite these alterations, the bulk of the Brandon Village Hall and Library has retained its historic features, including the old bell and tower added almost 100 years ago. In fact, it is one of the most, if not the most, well-preserved building in downtown Brandon.²¹

Area of Significance: Education

The Brandon Village Hall and Library is significant for local history in the area of education because of its long-term and continuing use as a public library, the only public library location in the village. Next to the local schools, the library was the most important facility for educating the public. In fact, in the area of adult education, the Brandon Library was the most important facility. As a small community with no institutions of higher learning, the library was the main location for adult education. Even today, when automobile travel between neighboring communities is common, the local library still is an important location for adults to access both written and digital information when they cannot or do not wish to travel out of town.

Brandon's educational institutions began when the first public school began operating in 1856. By 1864, the community had a two-story, four room school building. By 1912, this old building had been replaced with a "modern" structure that also included a high school program. Only a year later, Brandon also had a new public library to complement the small village's educational facilities. Its history was typical of the histories of many other public libraries in the state.²²

According to Wisconsin's *Cultural Resource Management Plan*, the rapid growth of public libraries occurred primarily between 1898 and 1919. Before that time, public libraries were rare, especially in small towns, even though the Wisconsin Legislature passed the Wisconsin Public Library Act in 1872, an act that allowed villages and cities to tax to support a public library. Most communities were probably just too "young" to get enough public support for taxation to establish a public "frill" like a library. In larger communities, some private libraries opened their collections to the public or groups started "reading rooms," but these were often short-lived operations and not true free public libraries.²³

²¹ Information from Tylor Loest, Assistant Librarian, Brandon Public Library, Brandon, Wisconsin.

²² McKenna, p. 265.

²³ Barbara Wyatt, ed., *Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin, Vol. 3*, Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1986, Education, p. 5-1.

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During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, though, this attitude changed and due to a combination of philanthropy, volunteerism, and community support public libraries were formed in most communities. In most communities, local civic organizations took the lead in establishing libraries. The most common of these were the local women's clubs.²⁴

The Wisconsin Free Library Commission, established by law in 1895, assisted women's clubs, other civic organizations, and library associations, in lobbying their communities for a free public library. Many early libraries were established in public or commercial buildings, and then later moved to a separate building. To construct these buildings, some communities were fortunate that local wealthy citizens provided large donations, resulting in named libraries around the state. Other communities were successful in expanding libraries in already-existing public buildings, such as city halls. Both of these efforts usually required some commitment on the part of the village or city government for operating funds.²⁵

The most important person in library building construction was Andrew Carnegie. His foundation funded the construction of 64 libraries in Wisconsin, and there are many library buildings with plaques or cornices above the main entrance engraved with "Carnegie Library." Carnegie had a minimum funding requirement and local communities had to raise funds or have a government commitment to maintenance funding before the foundation would release the library grant. In most cases, local governments agreed to support on-going library costs. Carnegie grants generally went to larger communities due to the minimum funding requirement.²⁶

By 1920, at the end of the boom in library formation and building construction, most communities in Wisconsin had either a Carnegie-funded library, a local philanthropist-funded library, or a library operating in a local public or commercial building. In the case of Brandon, the previous historical background section details how a group of local volunteers, particularly the local women's club, pushed for the library. Like many communities, it was established in an existing public hall with the help and support of the local government, in these case, the Village of Brandon.

The Brandon Library probably never applied for a Carnegie grant due to the minimum financial requirement, and a wealthy citizen did not donate money for a building. But, the space available in the village hall was sufficient for a small town library, so a separate building was probably not considered. In the 1970s, when the library was in dire need of expansion, the renovation in 1973 doubled its size

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 5-2.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 5-2—5-3.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 5-3—5-4.

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and illustrated that the citizens of Brandon fully supported maintaining their small local library. In 1912-13, forward-thinking citizens of Brandon established an important adult educational institution, an institution that was well supported throughout the twentieth century. Brandon's citizens knew the value of a public library in the community throughout its historic period of significance.

The Brandon Village Hall and Library is locally historically significant because it has housed the free public library since 1913. As the historical background indicates, it was founded in a manner that was similar to other libraries in Wisconsin, by volunteer action from a group of civic-minded women who gained the support of the community and the village government. As such, it was an important event in the history of the community and in the history of the community's efforts to provide local educational facilities for the public. Throughout the period of significance, the library grew and developed, continuing to upgrade this important educational facility. During the early twentieth century, the Thursday club consistently added materials to the library's collections, bringing the book inventory to almost 2,000 by 1942. A major expansion in 1973 doubled the size of the facility and through public and private funding and grants to libraries, the library now has 10,000 books and audio-visual materials available to patrons and computers that can access a broad range of information for those who do not have access to this technology.

Although the library interior has been remodeled and the expansion of the library occurred outside of the period of significance, the open space of the original library has been retained, along with a period shelf that reflects the original furnishings. The storefront has most of its historic features from the 1913 library renovation of the building. Aspects of the harness shop, like the large entry, were removed, and its current appearance reflects the library more than its original business.

Conclusion

The Ellis Block is locally significant under criterion A of the National Register of Historic Places because it has been the only historic location for the Brandon Public Library, one of the most important educational institutions in the community. The founding of the library was an important historical community event, and the growth of the library during the historic period illustrates the importance local citizens placed on this educational facility. Despite its small size, the library has endured, expanded, and become a cherished institution in Brandon. It has been, since 1913, a community center of learning and a source of all types of educational materials for Brandon's citizens. For these reasons, it is well deserving of listing in the National Register.

Area of Significance: Government

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The Brandon Village Hall and Library is significant for local history in the area of government, because it was the long-time home of Brandon's village government and fire department. Establishing a single location for a village hall and fire department was an important historical event in Brandon, and the activities held in the building during the historic period represent the growth and development of the village government during much of the village's existence, having been founded in 1878, fewer than 20 years earlier. From two largely unfurnished rooms in 1897, to a modern village office and meeting room in the twentieth century, the Brandon Village Hall and Library has been the site of numerous important village government events. One of these events has been the growth of the local fire department, from a small engine room in the rear of the first floor to the point when the space was no longer large enough to house a modern fire department.

According to the Wisconsin's *Cultural Resource Management Plan*, there are four units of local government in the state: counties, towns, villages, and cities. All of these units of government have a separate entity, may level taxes, may spend revenue, and may acquire property. Villages and cities are incorporated as municipalities and are different from the other two types of local government primarily because they provide local government in concentrated areas that bring with it special needs and circumstances. Villages and cities are formed when residents of a concentrated area wish to perform their own services separate from town or county government.²⁷

Villages are organized under a separate set of rules as written in Wisconsin state statutes. These statutes differ from cities primarily because villages typically are smaller and require less government than cities. The government body of a village is the board of trustees, or village board. The board chooses a president who remains a trustee and votes at meetings, but also is delegated responsibility for presiding over meetings and signing official documents. Other village officers include a clerk, treasurer, assessor, and constable that may be elected or voted into office as the village determines.²⁸

As the information in the Historical Background of this document states, Brandon began to develop in the mid-1850s and for about 20 years, it remained an unincorporated village under town government. In 1878, the citizens requested a village charter, and since that time, Brandon has been under the village form of local government. It is unclear where the village board met prior to the acquisition of the Ellis Block in 1897, but since the original "village hall" in the building consisted only of one large

²⁷ Barbara Wyatt, ed., *Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin, Vol. 1*, Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Government, pp. 9-1, 9-5.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 9-11—9-12.

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and one small room, it is likely that the village board conducted business in a public hall or building, probably in downtown Brandon.

In 1897, village government was simple; all that was necessary was a meeting place and, probably, a shelf for records, and a voting location. Through the historic period of the building, Brandon's village government grew until it was necessary to turn the smaller room in the Brandon Village Hall and Library into an office. The fire department was also a small organization in 1897. According to the 1900 and 1908 Sanborn-Perris Fire Insurance Maps, the fire department consisted of one hand engine, a hose cart, and 500 feet of two inch hose. In 1914, the fire department had the same equipment, but had also added a ladder cart. In 1924, the Sanborn map does not note the fire equipment in the building, but the department was probably mechanized at this point with a motorized fire truck.²⁹

The Brandon Village Hall and Library is historically significant at the local level because it is the most important building associated with village government and the fire department in Brandon. It was a significant event and a source of pride when village residents acquired a "village hall." Even though the harness shop operated in the building until 1913, having a combined village hall and fire department meant that Brandon was a large enough community to support such a facility. The bell tower was a significant addition to the building, marking it as a public building. The addition of the library in 1913 identified it as the village's primary public building. During the historic period, important local government events continued to occur in the building as it remained the center of the community's civic life.

The integrity of this building is high, particularly in the space where village government was located. The second floor of the Brandon Village Hall and Library has the same floor plan as in 1897, when it was renovated for village hall use. The smaller room, once a small meeting room, was converted in the mid-twentieth century for a village office and those features are extant. The large meeting and activity room remains largely as it was in 1897, with late nineteenth century trim around the walls and openings. Most importantly, the exterior appearance of the building retains most of its features from the original building, including the bell tower and original bell, an often-used symbol of the community.

Conclusion

²⁹ Sanborn-Perris Maps for Brandon.

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The Brandon Village Hall and Library is historically significant for local government because it was used as Brandon's village hall throughout the historic period. In 1897, with two rooms on the second floor for village government and one half of the first floor for the fire department, the Brandon Village Hall and Library became the most important location for local government activities, a designation it retained until 2001. During the historic period, the village government grew and developed, as did the fire department. This growth and development was significant in the history of Brandon and the events that took place in this building make it an important historic landmark in the city related to local government. The bell still sits atop this building, a reminder of its long-time historic use as a village hall.

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BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The boundary of this property is a rectangle that is as follows. The west half of the east half of Lots 6 and 7 of Block 14, Original Plat, except for the rear boundary, which is a line 16 inches from the north wall of the building, running east-west between the east and west lot lines as described above.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

This building has been located on the parts of these lots in the Original Plat in downtown Brandon since 1894. Because a newer building was constructed only 31 and one-half inches from the north wall of this building, the rear boundary had to be drawn in a way that would eliminate this non-contributing element from the historic site. Because of the close nature of the two buildings, it was determined the take about one-half of the distance between each building and draw a rear boundary. The result is a boundary that includes the historic downtown building while leaving out non-contributing elements.

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The following information is the same for all photographs:

Brandon Village Hall and Library, Brandon, Fond du Lac County, Wisconsin.
Photos by Carol Cartwright, June 2006.
Negatives on file at the Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin.

1 of 11: Site view, showing the north side of Main Street, view from the southeast.

2 of 11: Site view, from the southeast.

3 of 11: Main (south) and east elevations, also showing alley, view from the southeast.

4 of 11: East and north (rear) elevations, also showing other building on the lot, view from the northeast.

5 of 11: Interior, library, showing reference desk and looking toward rear entrance.

6 of 11: Interior, library, looking toward main entrance.

7 of 11: Rear staircase from second floor.

8 of 11: Second floor, large meeting room of historical society (former large meeting room of village hall), looking toward rear of the room.

9 of 11: Second floor, large meeting room, looking toward old village hall office.

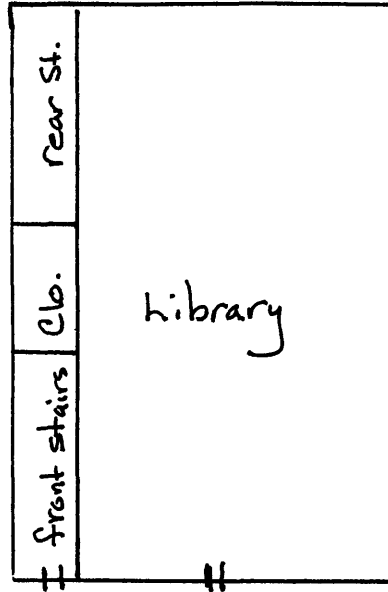
10 of 11: Second floor, exterior window showing large window wells constructed for original cold storage plant.

11 of 11: Second floor, old village hall office area.

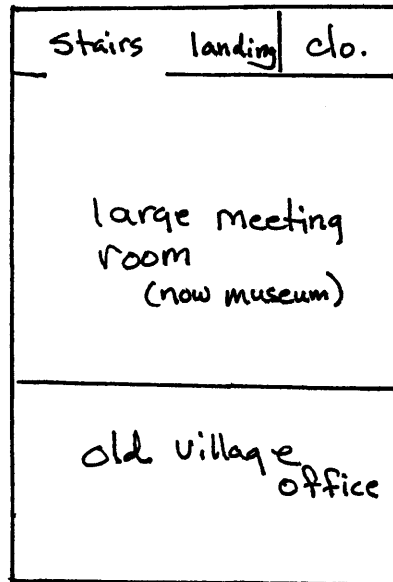
BRANDON VILLAGE HALL AND LIBRARY
Brandon, Fond du Lac County, WI
Floor Plans



Not to Scale



1st Floor



2nd floor