

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY  
RECEIVED JUL 9 1979  
DATE ENTERED SEP 4 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  
Columbus City Hall

AND/OR COMMON  
Columbus City Hall

**LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER  
105 North Dickason St. \_\_NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN  
Columbus CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

STATE  
Wisconsin 53925 VICINITY OF 2nd

CODE  
55 COUNTY Columbia CODE 021

**CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input 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 type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

**OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME  
City of Columbus c/o Albert H. Abrams, City Clerk

STREET & NUMBER  
105 North Dickason

CITY, TOWN  
Columbus STATE Wisconsin 53925

VICINITY OF

**LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.  
Columbus City Hall

STREET & NUMBER  
105 North Dickason

CITY, TOWN  
Columbus STATE Wisconsin 53925

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE  
Wisconsin Inventory of Historic Places

DATE  
1974 \_\_FEDERAL  STATE \_\_COUNTY \_\_LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS  
State Historical Society of Wisconsin

CITY, TOWN  
Madison STATE Wisconsin 53706

# 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" 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

Exterior: The Columbus City Hall was constructed of Watertown cream brick over a ground foundation of rockfaced Waukesha stone, with a metal deck roof (1). The detached, rectangular building is 40'x97'. It has two full stories, a third story balcony overlooking a second floor Auditorium Theater, a full attic and half basement. The sides of the deck roof are curved at the southeast corner, as the whole corner is curved to form the base of a bell and clock tower. The clock, which was bought with a \$1,000.00 donation of Mrs. R. W. Chadbourn (2), has four lighted faces and is covered by a pyramidal tower covered by a four sided pyramidal roof. The southwest corner is topped by the base of what was once a square fire-bell tower. It was removed when the Fire Department moved from there to a new building in 1948 and took its bell along. The one major structural alteration was made at that time. Originally, the Fire Department was located in the back part of the building, with large doors opening at ground level on the south side. The Police Station and jail was located on the back north side and had its own entrance. When the Fire Department moved its trucks to a new location the doors were turned into windows, the floor raised to the level of the rest of the first floor and matching cream-colored foundation stone and brick added under the new windows.

Two keystone arches of Doylestown quarried red sandstone (3) cover a no longer used recessed entrance with double oak doors on the south side of the building and a grouping of three long windows. All of the lintels and window sills are of the red sandstone as well as a large Roman arch above a grouping of three short windows over the large recessed front entrance on the east, which has four large oak doors. Brick corbelling entrances the cornice of the building and parapet walls with plaques reading "City Hall" decorates the south and east facades. The front and both sides of the building each have two chimneys and one in the center back make a total of seven. They were obviously once used for stove heat in the Auditorium, but were replaced by hot water radiators at an undetermined time, and many of the chimney holes sealed off. Except for the alteration to the Fire Department quarters, and a new roof in 1977, no significant structural changes have been made.

Interior: The first floor has the offices of the Mayor, City Clerk and Treasurer on the south side, and three rooms which double as first, second and third ward voting places on the north. One is the Council Chamber which is also used as a branch Columbia County Courtroom. Large double doors open between all three rooms to make one long hall. The whole back of the building is now being used by the Police Department.

A wide oak stairway at the front leads to the second floor auditorium and others to the third floor balcony and attic. Outside open fire-escapes reach from the attic, balcony and auditorium back to the ground on the northeast side, and from the auditorium front in the north center and the stage on the northwest side. Another escape reaches from the balcony to auditorium side doors on the north side, but was removed from there down when James Street was widened in 1955, and never replaced since the auditorium was not being used then. At the very back of the building a stairway runs from the south side door up to back center stage where two large trap-doors open to reveal it. Placed between two brick walls, the steps are at each side and the center has a heavy wooden slide up which theater trunks and large pieces of furniture were hauled. A large iron ring imbedded in a brick chimney at its top supported a winch used for the purpose.

(continued)

# NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

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### Description (continued)

Another trap-door reveals a large auxiliary water tank under the stage, left from the days the Fire Department was located below it. A chute used for drying hoses still runs through a corner of a dressing room and on into the attic. Another chute from the clock tower down through the second floor was used for the clock weights before it was electrified. The auditorium, which has not been used in forty years, has lost some of its ceiling plaster due to a roof leak which was repaired in 1977. Hand painted scenery and stage curtain which Columbus businessmen had commissioned Edward W. Smith of Milwaukee to do in 1892 (4) were destroyed in the mid-1960's by an unsympathetic City Council. However, original stencilled designs still decorate the walls and beamed ceiling, the original attached wooden seats with iron arm rests and legs in foliate designs and the original woodwork remain. On the walls backstage there remain many signatures of Columbus residents who worked, performed and graduated here. In 1976 and 1977 a group of 74 concerned citizens volunteered over 1200 hours restoring the first floor of the City Hall. Dark paint was removed to uncover carved white oak wainscoting, woodwork and stair railings. Hard wood floors were sanded and rooms and blinds painted. Four large murals of early Columbus scenes and industries were painted for the first floor corridor walls. In 1978 the Council decided to sandblast the brick walls and paint the wood trim on the exterior.

A large iron fountain which had drinking sections for people, horses, and low down, for dogs originally stood in front of the building, but was sacrificed in the WWII scrap drive.

# 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 checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-1935	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY) center of civic activity	
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION			

SPECIFIC DATES 1891-1892 (1-4) BUILDER/ARCHITECT T. D. Allen, Minneapolis (10)

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Since it was built in 1892 the Columbus City Hall has been an imposing landmark which towers above its neighbors. Its four faced clock can be seen and heard many blocks away. It is located on the corner of Dickason Boulevard, named for Major Elbert Dickason, the man who first settled, founded and named Columbus and West James Street, named for Gov. James T. Lewis, the third of Wisconsin's Civil War Governors, whose first home still stands five blocks away. It attracts attention from architects who come from all over the world to view the last building of the late, famous Louis H. Sullivan, the Farmers and Merchants Union Bank, diagonally across the corner. The building and its auditorium have served as a nexus of community life for many years.

History: For the last 86 years all City government has been conducted from the City Hall. When it opened in 1892 there were quarters for both the Police Department with jail, and the Fire Department equipment. In 1948 the Fire Department moved to a new building and the floor of its ground level garage was raised to the level of the other rooms to become Water and Light Department offices (5). In 1964 the Water and Light Department moved to a new building and the whole first floor rear section was taken over by the Police Department where it remains today (6).

In 1892 the Columbus Library was moved to the City Hall by librarian Nellie Loomis from the third floor of the Griswald building where it had been started in the mid-1880's. It remained until November 1, 1912 when it moved to a Carnegie funded library building directly across West James Street (7).

From 1892 to 1936 the second floor auditorium was the site of most of the cultural and educational events in the area. Its stage was used by public and parochial schools from Columbus and surrounding small towns as well as a local County Teachers College for class plays, operettas, concerts and graduation exercises. It was used as a moving picture theater until the Rudalt Theater was built in 1917 (8). Traveling theater troupes and local Little Theater groups presented frequent entertainment there. In 1936 the Auditorium was closed to local public school functions in a successful effort to raise money for a new High School gymnasium by including an adjoining stage in the plans (9). At that time stories were circulated that the building was being condemned for use, but no record of condemnation proceedings has ever been found. Nevertheless, the auditorium use dwindled because of the rumors and it has deteriorated ever since. In 1968 the current City Council came perilously close to demolishing the whole building to use the site for a modern municipal complex. By 1976 a new sympathetic Mayor had appointed officers in the newly formed Restoration Committee mentioned elsewhere. To date they have cleaned up the auditorium and are trying to raise money for its restoration to a useable state.

(continued)

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

See sheet attached

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY .09 acre

QUADRANGLE NAME Columbus, Wisconsin

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:62500

UTM REFERENCES

A 16 336600 4800050

B               

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C               

D               

E               

F               

G               

H               

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION Lots 4 and 5 in Block 3 of the original plat of the village of Columbus.

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

## 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Susan Stare, Chairman

ORGANIZATION

City Hall Restoration Committee

DATE

December, 1978

STREET & NUMBER

711 W. James Street

TELEPHONE

414/623-5030

CITY OR TOWN

Columbus

STATE

Wisconsin 53925

## 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 Henry*

TITLE

Director, State Historical of Wisconsin

DATE

5/22/79

FOR NPS USE ONLY

HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

*Arthur Cecil Shull*

DATE

9-4-79

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

ATTEST: *Anna Jane Saxe*

DATE

9-4-79

CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

*Regional Coordinator*

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Significance (continued)

Throughout the years various City Hall rooms have been used as meeting places for many organizations, including Boy and Girl Scouts. Various church and women's groups have held money-raising sales there, and indoor art shows sponsored by the Columbus Art Association have taken place in the building.

The Senior Citizen's Drop-in Center is in the third ward room and once a week a Health and Social Services agent holds office hours. Every two weeks a blood pressure clinic for the elderly is held there and a Social Security Agent and Welfare Agent for food stamps visit. Twice a month the Columbia County Branch Court is held in the Council room, and once a month immunization shots are given there. Before Selective Service was terminated, an Army Recruitment Officer held regular hours there.

Architecture

Designed by T.D. Allen of Minneapolis, the Columbus City Hall is a representative example of a late Victorian civic building. Its design incorporates the solid Romanesque details often seen in public buildings of its era-- the heavy horseshoe arches picked out in red sandstone, the corner towers and the parapet walls delineated by corbelled buttresses. Unlike the Merrill City Hall designed by the same architect and already listed on the NRHP, the Columbus City Hall has suffered few unsympathetic alterations. Its virtually unchanged appearance on the interior and exterior is significant. Situated on a major street in downtown Columbus, it is the most monumental and imposing 19th century structure remaining in the community.

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9. Major Bibliographical References:

1. The Columbus Republican, November 21, 1891.
2. The Columbus Republican, February 27, 1892.
3. The Columbus Republican, November 21, 1891.
4. The Columbus Republican, December 10, 1892.
5. Interview with former Water & Light employee, Mrs. Fern Yohn, on November 30, 1978.
6. Interview with former Water & Light employee, Mrs. Fern Yohn, on December 6, 1978.
7. Interview with former Chief Librarian, Mrs. Margaret Bell Lee, on November 30, 1978.
8. Interview with Mr. H. J. Altschwager, Jr., son of Rudalt Theater builder and owner, December 7, 1978.
9. 1935 interview with the late Hon. J. L. Albright, then School Board President and an uncle of interviewer.
10. Report on Council Meeting, October 13, 1891 from the Columbus Republican, October 17, 1891.

11. Form Prepared By:

Katherine E. Hundt, Architectural Historian

State Historical Society of Wisconsin

April, 1979

816 State Street

414/262-2970

Madison, Wisconsin 53706