

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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**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

Dousman Hotel

AND/OR COMMON

Dousman House

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER

Fisher Street at River Road

\_\_ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Prairie du Chien

\_\_ VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Third

STATE

Wisconsin

CODE

55

COUNTY

Crawford

CODE

023

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

**CATEGORY**

- DISTRICT
- BUILDING(S)
- STRUCTURE
- SITE
- OBJECT

**OWNERSHIP**

- PUBLIC
- PRIVATE

BOTH

**PUBLIC ACQUISITION**

- IN PROCESS
- BEING CONSIDERED

**STATUS**

- OCCUPIED
- UNOCCUPIED
- WORK IN PROGRESS
- ACCESSIBLE
- YES: RESTRICTED
- YES: UNRESTRICTED
- NO

**PRESENT USE**

- AGRICULTURE
- COMMERICAL
- EDUCATIONAL
- ENTERTAINMENT
- GOVERNMENT
- INDUSTRIAL
- MILITARY
- MUSEUM
- PARK
- PRIVATE RESIDENCE
- RELIGIOUS
- SCIENTIFIC
- TRANSPORTATION
- OTHER: (Storage)

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

Rybarczyk Brothers Gas Company (608) 326-6616

STREET & NUMBER

N. Water Street

CITY, TOWN

Prairie du Chien

\_\_ VICINITY OF

Wisconsin

STATE

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Crawford County Register of Deeds

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Prairie du Chien

Wisconsin

STATE

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

none known

DATE

\_\_ FEDERAL \_\_ STATE \_\_ COUNTY \_\_ LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

# 7 DESCRIPTION

## CONDITION

EXCELLENT  
 GOOD  
 FAIR  
 DETERIORATED  
 RUINS  
 UNEXPOSED

## CHECK ONE

UNALTERED  
 ALTERED (major)

## CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE  
 MOVED DATE \_\_\_\_\_

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

The 1864-65 Dousman House was a three-story building of buff-colored brick, with a wide central pavilion under a wide central gable. Mid-Victorian in style, the building has a definite vertical accent in the raised basement, high stories tall cupola and many big windows. All the windows and doors were outlined with half-circle moldings in brick and stone sills. The cornice line was accentuated by wide eaves supported by large brackets. A low entablature band in a contrasting color outlined the semi-circular trim of the windows and the peak of the wide gable.

Large quoins lined the corners of the building and the sides of the central pavilion. The entrance porch stretched across the entire central block of the first story, with a door and staircase at both ends. The large square cupola had a flat roof with cross-gables and three tall, slender, round-topped openings on each side.

The extant building today can barely be seen on some sides amid all the additions which surround it. The basic rectangular brick structure is there, but on many sides hidden by almost a dozen additions which sometimes reach above the second story. The corner quoins and the many tall, arched windows with brick trim (nearly all bricked over or covered with metal or vinyl) are the only decorative features visible. The roofline is basically the same, but the cupola is gone--replaced by a wooden addition to the roof. Also gone are the heavy cornice, and entablature decorations as well as the front porch.

The interior of the old hotel has been almost entirely gutted, although a few of the original 51 guest rooms may remain. The former first story and basement are now the concrete-lined slaughter house and cooler. One account described the rendering plant, built within the old hotel, as three stories, 32 by 32 feet. One rather graphic c. 1949 description of the extent of the remodeling of the building noted that the old hotel barroom and storeroom in the northwest basement was the boning room, and the grand old dining room space was part of a large cooler, chilling carloads of meat.

Since the meatpacking firm left in 1952, the building has been empty or used for storage of equipment, and has just further deteriorated.

# 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 type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES

1864-c. 1925

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Now much altered and deteriorated, the Dousman House was the largest, most luxurious, and last-built of the several large hotels in Prairie du Chien during the 19th century to house travelers, immigrants and businessmen while the town was an important steamboat and railroad terminus.

The Milwaukee and Mississippi Railroad company, which first completed their line to Prairie du Chien in 1857, began construction of the grand hotel in 1864. Situated facing the Mississippi River, on the bank of St. Feriole Island, and right next to the new train depot, the Dousman House was soon successful as the most convenient, as well as the most grand, of the towns hotels, and became a famous stop on the Upper Mississippi. The three-story brick hotel, with 51 guest rooms and a large dining room, was completed at the end of the Civil War at a cost of approximately \$50,000. It was named in honor of Colonel Hercules Louis Dousman I, the most prominent citizen of Prairie du Chien, long-time fur agent, steamboat owner and supporter of the railroads, whose estate was located about one-quarter mile north of the hotel. The Dousman hotel was operated as a hotel until about 1925. The building was unused for about a decade, until May 1937 when William D. Carroll purchased the hotel from the Wanamingo Ferry Company and converted it to a meat packing plant for the short-lived Carroll Packing Co. In April 1939 Carroll leased the plant to Armour Packing Company of Chicago. The owner built a three-story, 32 by 32 foot rendering plant inside and around the old hotel, and the plant began operation in March 1940.

The Oscar Meyer Company bought the plant and operated it 1946-52. Afterwards the structure was owned by a bank in Iowa City for some years. In the last decade a local gas company has owned it and uses it for equipment storage.

The original 1959 Historic Sites Survey report of potential landmarks in Prairie du Chien stated only that the Dousman House "would require extensive restoration." The owners have never indicated any interest in the national historic landmark program. The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, which owns several nearby structures and the adjoining property, for some time considered purchasing and restoring the old hotel. However, so much of the building has been lost, so many of the additions are so large and substantial, that the restoration estimate of nearly \$2 million was prohibitive.

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 2

For a number of years the NPS regional representative reported biennially on the deplorable condition of the site--which has been in essentially the same condition since more than a decade before the national historic landmark study was made. August 25, 1975 the Mid-West Regional Director sent a cover memo to the Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation calling attention to the biennial report of Grant Peterson which recommended possible revocation of the Dousman Hotel's landmark status. Mr. Peterson wrote August 15, 1975:

"The Dousman Hotel has now deteriorated to the point where I believe consideration should be given to its removal from the National Register of Historic Places. Alteration of the building's interior and numerous additions to the structure have further altered its historic integrity."

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 9 PAGE 1

Budahl, Lee "Architecture in Prairie du Chien Before 1900," unpublished master's thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1967.

Newspaper article in The Courier, Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, September 15, 1952.

Short report on history of Dousman Hotel prepared by railroad employees, Prairie du Chien resident, and former Dousman House employee c. 1946.

Information provided by Don Munson, Ray Sivesind and Rick Dexter of State Historical Society of Wisconsin Staff; and Grant Peterson, NPS, Chicago Field Office.

Comprehensive Development Plan for Historic St. Feriole Island prepared for State Historical Society of Wisconsin by Department of Administration, Bureau of Facilities Management, April 1971.